UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS AND COMPLEX DYNAMICS OF MUTUAL AID

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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Abstract

Understanding the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid

Richard James White

In recent years, there has been a great deal of interest and commitment from both academic and wider policy-making circles in the meso and micro-levels of production and exchange in society. To this end, theoretical and empirical research has led to a more penetrative understanding of the cultural and social embeddedness of economic spaces. By bringing into focus the informal economic sphere, this in turn has placed activities conducted through mutual aid firmly under the academic and policy-making spotlight.

From an academic perspective however, it is clear that comparatively little is known about mutual aid, though significant progress has been made on mapping its more quantitative dimensions, such as its extent, character, social embeddedness and the key barriers that obstruct greater participation. This particular focus has exposed many prejudices about exchange in society, not least by providing evidence that mutual aid is far from a marginal or residual realm of daily life in advanced economies, and has resulted in the emergence of mutual aid as both a legitimate and serious focus for research to explore.

Through an in-depth case study of two urban areas in Leicester (England), the robustness of contemporary research will be tested by highlighting existing geographies of mutual aid. More fundamentally though, the discussion will depart from this into relatively uncharted territories by embracing the next significant phase of research on mutual aid. This involves engaging with a deeper and more qualitative understanding of the complex dynamics which underpin the geographies of mutual aid, and are themselves engaged through the process of mutual aid.

By focusing on the social dynamics of mutual aid; the internal dynamics of mutual aid; the notion of space, place and mutual aid; and the question as to why mutual aid is so pervasive in the advanced economies, a more complicated and dynamic understanding of mutual aid in advanced economies emerges.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to a great many people but most especially to those who supported me throughout my PhD, and never doubted that this thesis would finally see the light of day.

My deepest thanks are extended to Professor Danny Burns and Dr. Angus Cameron. Both individually and collectively they have helped lay much of the foundation that the research has taken its strength and inspiration from, especially over the last twelve months. However, I would like to reserve a special mention for Professor Colin Williams. Colin's role in my on-going academic development from an undergraduate to a doctoral student cannot be underestimated, least of all by myself. I have been extremely fortunate to have benefited time and again from his extensive knowledge, advice, enthusiasm and leadership on a wide range of issues. For that I will be forever grateful. Indeed, though I believe that this thesis builds constructively upon many of Colin's own arguments, I also hope that it reflects the encouragement that he has given me to find my own academic voice, and make that voice heard clearly through the research I have engaged with.

Finally, a personal message for Rachel and Matilda Grace: this thesis is undoubtedly a testament to the unconditional love and happiness that you have both brought to my world. I look forward - very much - to climbing many future Everests (both academic and non-academic) with you both by my side.

Dedication

This PhD is dedicated to the memory of Irene Galloway (1913 - 2003)

Though you constantly regretted never having had the opportunity to be better educated, you will always be the best teacher that your grandsons could have wished for. I hope that by becoming a Doctor I have achieved something which you would have been as proud of as I am myself.

Frontispiece

"Wherever I saw animal life in abundance, as, for instance, on the lakes where scores of species and millions of individuals came together to rear their progeny; in the colonies of rodents; in the migrations of birds which took place at that time on a truly American scale along the Usuri; and specially in a migration of fallow-deer which I witnessed on the Amur, and during which scores of thousands of these intelligent animals came together from an immense territory, flying before the coming deep snow, in order to cross the Amur where it is narrowest -- in all these scenes of animal life which passed before my eyes, I saw Mutual Aid and Mutual Support carried on to an extent which made me suspect in it a feature of the greatest importance for the maintenance of life, the preservation of each species, and its further evolution."

Piotr Kropotkin, (1902: 13) Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Reciprocity (should be seen as) neither a primitive isolate nor the atom of society, but its badge." (Gudeman, 2001:92)

"Confronted by dissatisfaction in their formal employment, many people see self-help and mutual aid as a source of work satisfaction, pleasure and means of individualising the products of consumer society for their own purposes." (Burns et. al. 2004: 47)

Introduction

Mutual aid is considered to be one of the most definitive and influential characteristics of human society and, moreover, a "powerful factor in securing evolutionary survival" (Hewetson, 1998: 1). Reciprocity underpins both our moral foundations, and dominates the social relationships and economic institutions in society to such an extent that without it our society would be different beyond recognition. Yet, despite its dominance - or indeed *because of it* - mutual aid is rarely reflected upon in any conscious or sustained manner. This is certainly true at the level of the individual. How often do people take time to appreciate the breadth and depth of social relations that they rely on (e.g. perhaps in a material, social, and/ or emotional capacity) or of other people who rely on them for help? An appreciation of these social relations is usually only made when these relations are absent! Within these social relationships, where and how exactly does mutual aid 'fit' into the picture?

Asking these questions, and placing mutual aid at the forefront of enquiry (making the invisible *visible*) it becomes apparent that little is known about mutual aid. What in-depth research that has examined mutual aid, far from throwing up any conclusive or definitive answers, invariably unearths yet deeper and more searching questions. To illustrate, much research has opened up insights related to the quantifiable geographies of mutual aid (such as extent and character, social embeddedness, rationales for participation and barriers to participation). What it has not revealed, certainly not in any cohesive or explicit depth, is the process of mutual aid that ultimately underpins these geographies.

As a result of the specific focus on the specific 'ends' of mutual aid as they appear at different levels in society, questions which focus on the 'means' that have created these have, broadly speaking, yet to be asked. It is the overall concern of this thesis to force back the existing boundaries of knowledge further, by looking beyond these surface geographies of mutual aid, and addressing a selection of the more immediate, 'core' questions that concern the process of mutual aid at the level of the individual, and the complex dynamics that underpin mutual aid in society.

1.1. Contextualising the thesis

Contemporary research focused on examining mutual aid has strongly argued that the nature of unpaid informal exchange is poorly understood both within the social sciences (e.g. Evans et al. 2004; Williams et al. 2001a) and also in official policy and practice (e.g. Burns et al. 2004; Williams, 2003a). This is striking given the argument that mutual aid is a fundamental pillar of the society we live in. Significantly, the lack of understanding regarding this informal sphere is not due to any insurmountable empirical and ontological difficulties; far from it. Rather the poverty of any sustained insight is attributable to the lack of research (with notable exceptions) that has focused on understanding mutual aid. The research that has been conducted has tended to construct mutual aid through its specific *geographies*, notably their 'extent'; 'character'; 'social embeddedness'; 'rationales' given by those who participate; and the 'barriers to participation' that prevent individuals from engaging more in group-based activities and one-to-one reciprocity.

Importantly, much theoretical and empirical research focused on the geographies of mutual aid has been motivated to influence mainstream economic and political circles. These range, for example, from highlighting the prevailing local and regional participatory cultures of mutual aid that exist within and between 'urban' and 'rural communities', 'deprived' and 'affluent' communities; high-income and low-income households; no-earner and multiple earner households. In each of these instances research has explored the key spatial, ethnic, gender, and kinship dimensions of mutual aid (see Pahl, 1984; Burns, et al. 2004; Williams, 2001a,b; 2002a,b; 2003a,b; 2004; Williams and White, 2002, 2003; Williams et al 2001a; Williams and Windebank, 1998; 1999; 2000; 2001a; 2002a,b; 2003a-c).

Collectively, this categorical construction of mutual aid has been instrumental in promoting alternative, empirically based, rigorous findings promoting the un-commodified areas of production and exchange, and thus leading a sustained critique on the logic of capitalism

more generally. In doing so, this has also called into question a wider range of current government policies including: (i) harnessing social capital by developing mutual aid and reciprocity via government work and welfare initiatives (Williams, 2001a); (ii) more general policies focused on tackling social exclusion and promoting social cohesion in deprived, excluded urban communities (e.g. Burns and Taylor, 1998; Williams and Windebank, 2000); (iii) developing community involvement (Williams, 2003); (iv) as part of a wider range of government policy and practices across the advanced economies focused on the restorative powers of the social economy (see Amin et al, 2002), and (v) also as part of the prevailing oppressive political climate that seeks to eradicate the informal economy in general (e.g. Commission of the European Communities, 1998; Grabiner, 2000; ILO, 1994; Hasseldine and Zhuhong, 1999).

1.1.1. Moving through the geographies of mutual aid into new territories.

The argument here is that research focused on the geographies of mutual aid has promoted only one, albeit crucial, dimension of reciprocity. Without losing sight of this, the intention is to look through these geographies to understand the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid that are embedded within.

For example, when individuals take a conscious step back to reflect on their social relationships, and how they are engaged via reciprocal acts then there is no doubt a realisation that turning to others for help, or being asked by others for their help, is not something reserved exclusively for exceptional circumstances. Answering 'why' they called upon their brother/ friend/ neighbour though is more difficult to answer. This is not surprising as it is the argument throughout this thesis that informal social networks that become 'active' through reciprocity, do so due to an incredibly complex process of interaction, related not only on the individuals involved, but also the specific context and environment these social actors find themselves. And it is the intent to reveal this deep complexity, these dynamic tensions that are engaged through the process of mutual aid between household and the wider social networks within other households, which drives this thesis.

1.2. Aims and objectives of the thesis

Given the arguments made so far, the overriding collective objective of the thesis is to understand the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid that underpin the geographies

of mutual aid. To achieve this, the aims and the objectives of the thesis are split into two sections, with the first section being seen largely as a prelude to the second.

Given the fact that there is still comparatively little empirical evidence available on the geographical dimension of mutual aid, the first section seeks to challenge the robustness of existing research, by evaluating the current geographies of mutual aid within, and between, two deprived and affluent localities. Section I addresses specific areas to highlight three main areas and how they relate to previous research. The first looks at '*the current extent and character of mutual aid both within and between deprived and affluent neighbourhoods*'; the second at '*the social embeddedness of mutual aid*'; while the third highlights the '*barriers to participation in mutual aid*'.

This overview of the geographies of mutual aid is much more introductory and far less nuanced then the aims and objectives in Section II. Section II aims for a far more penetrative insight of mutual aid by focusing on the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid. To achieve this there are four key areas of enquiry:

1. To investigate the process and complex social dynamics at work in mutual aid.

- *The complexity of social relationships*. For example, is one-to-one aid unmediated? Are relationships far more nuanced than previous research implies? 'Who organises mutual aid'? What are the differences in attitudes toward social relations? To what extent does going into other people's houses act as lubrication for mutual aid? Does reciprocity itself change the nature of a relationship? What are the implications of friendships and relationships developing/ failing due to mutual aid? What about those excluded?

- *How is mutual aid mediated by human stages of life/ social circumstances*? In seeking answers to account for the uneven nature of mutual aid, the aims are to contextualise mutual aid as part of the dynamic relationships that plug the household into their wider social community. And indeed look at the complexity of the household itself. How, for example, is mutual aid catalysed by the composition of the household; by children; by the disabled; by old age; by poor health?

- *What are the taboo areas that surround mutuality*? To conclude this discussion of what are essentially social processes and social dynamics of mutual aid, the questioned is as to what are common social taboos that surround mutuality (such as 'being a burden'; 'false

expectations'; 'inappropriate gestures'; 'going into other people's houses'; taking advantage; tasks poorly conducted; and the exchange itself (unpaid/ gifts/ money-as gift). How do these disable or catalyze relationships that engage mutual aid?

2. To investigate the complex dynamics within the spectrum of mutual aid.

- *What are the dynamics that make mutual aid work?* For example, why would it seem that reciprocity takes something else to lubricate it, to legitimise it, such as giving gifts? Is the gift the crucial part of the process in paid mutual aid, what difference does it make, if any? When are gifts seen as acceptable, and when are they seen to be a threat?

- *What are the dynamics that exist between informal mutual aid and formal mutual aid*? How does formal volunteering catalyze more informal social networks?

- *What are the dynamics that exist between paid and unpaid mutual aid*? Is there a relationship between paid and unpaid mutual aid? What dictates when paid mutual aid should be the basis of exchange, rather than unpaid reciprocity?

- *What are the wider dynamics that are engaged between mutual aid and the informal coping strategies more generally*? For example, what are the dynamics present between mutual aid and (a) self-provisioning (b) paid informal work?

3. To investigate the relationship between space, place and mutual aid

- *How does space and place influence mutual aid*? For example, does the spatial layout of a population impact on bringing households in a community together? How do the dominant social norms and expectations held within place influence social attitudes and expectations? How is mutual aid and support catalysed by a crisis in the locality? Are having spaces with which to meet others important in a locality?

4. To investigate what sustains mutual aid and why?

- *Why is mutual aid so pervasive?* Why do individuals ask others for help, or are willing to help others via mutual aid? What is the process that makes individuals feel connected: is it the reciprocal nature of humans as social beings? Do the social aspects of reciprocity

account for the pervasiveness of mutual aid? And why is mutual aid so pervasive in some areas and not in others?

1.3. Structure of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 looks at the literal definition of mutual aid, before focusing on the competing arguments surrounding mutual aid as a factor of social evolution. This leads into a discussion of mutual aid as defined within alternate economic spaces. Here several sub-categories within mutual aid are introduced. The chapter then looks at empirical research pertaining to the categories of mutual aid (such as its extent and character, the rationales for participation, and the barriers to participation) before interpreting the way mutual aid has been harnessed in society.

The focus on reciprocal relationships in society brings the concept of social capital to the fore in Chapter 3. Here the key facets and social components which underpin social capital are dissected and examined, including notions of trust and reciprocity; homophilous and heterophilous interactions; closure and density in social ties; strength of weak ties and strong ties; bridging bonding and linking forms of social capital. An insight of social capital 'in the community' is then made, followed by a discussion on the ways in which social capital has been measured. This brings to light research findings orientated around social capital in the context of the UK. The chapter concludes by a discussion on harnessing social capital.

Having introduced paid mutual aid (the giving of gifts for work undertaken) in Chapter 2, Chapter 4 highlights the role and function that gifts have played vis a vis social exchange in society. The chapter discuss the significance and implications of gift-giving for maintaining and extending social networks. Motivations surrounding gift-giving are then highlighted. To conclude this chapter, negative aspects of gift-giving are discussed.

Chapter 5 completes the literature review, focusing on mutual aid - as place based reciprocity – in the context of space, and place. Having defined space, place and locality, and drawing on several illustrations which demonstrate 'positive' and 'negative' spatial-related aspects of localities, the chapter concludes by outlining the aims and objectives of the thesis.

Chapter 6 focuses on the research methodology and the case study areas used. To justify the use of a structured interview employed within two socio-economically contrasting urban

wards, the chapter discusses other potential methodologies and why they were rejected. The chapter then focuses on the strengths of the structured interview, and elaborates on (a) the questionnaire (b) the two case study areas, West Knighton and Saffron (c) the sampling procedure.

Chapters 7 to 9 all focus on Section I of the aims and the objectives, which, broadly speaking, looks to (a) test the robustness of previous research into mutual aid and (b) to offer insight which a qualitative analysis of mutual aid focused on understanding the process and dynamics of mutual aid can get to grips with. More specifically, Chapter 7 focuses on the extent and character of mutual aid; Chapter 8 focuses on the social embeddedness of mutual aid and; while Chapter 9 focuses on the barriers to engagement in mutual aid.

Chapters 10 to 13 all focus on Section II of the aims and objectives, which, broadly speaking, concentrates on understanding the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid. Chapter 10 investigates the complex social dynamics of mutual aid. Chapter 11 focuses on the complex dynamics within and between mutual aid and the informal economic sphere more generally. Chapter 12 focuses on mutual aid in the context of space and place. Chapter 13 questions why mutual aid is so pervasive?

Chapter 14 brings the thesis full circle by drawing together some of the main conclusions and implications that the research has brought to light. More specifically, after reviewing the findings of the geographies of mutual aid and the complex social dynamics engaged through the process of mutual aid, attention is paid to the implications that the research has for both the policy making community and economic geography.

Chapter 2

Mutual Aid

> "In the practice of mutual aid, which we can trace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we thus find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conception; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support – not mutual struggle – has had the leading part. In its wide extension, even at the present time, we also see the best guarantee of a still loftier evolution of our race." (Kropotkin, 1901: 234)

> "Be warned that if you wish, as I do, to build a society in which individuals cooperate generally and unselfishly towards a common good, you can expect little help from biological nature. Let us try to teach generosity and altruism, because we are born selfish. Let us understand what our own selfish genes are up to, because then we may then at least have the chance to upset their designs, something that no other species has ever aspired to." (Dawkins, 1989: 3)

Introduction

Mutual aid has been identified in the meso-level and individual level of social capital (Halpern, 2003). To explain in greater detail 'what' mutual aid is, 'why' it occurs and 'what' it represents, however, is more problematic. Problematic, because any penetrative, definitive answers will inevitably be fashioned from a range of complex subjects and emotions that encompass both immediate and wider social networks and, the host of emotive considerations within these that consider social norms, sanctions, notions of trust, reciprocity, love, care, inclusion, exclusion, altruism, volunteering, expectations, perceptions, experiences, and moreover appreciate how each and all of these factors are hurled together into a fluid, complex, and dynamic social melting pot that underpins mutual aid in society. To successfully address such an exhausting list is daunting but by no means impossible. In seeking to make (great) theoretical and empirical insights into mutual aid the immediate question relates to "how" best to progress. Naturally this necessitates an awareness of where past research has come from, and the implications that have accompanied it. In some small, yet significant ways, this is exactly what this and the next few chapters will look to answer.

The principle aim of Chapter 2 is to focus and reflect on the immediate environment of mutual aid. Initially approaching the debates surrounding mutual aid from a wide angle, the

chapter begins by discussing mutual aid as a factor of human evolution. This will not only allow an insight into the historical dialogue that surrounds mutual aid, by bringing together a range of radical opinions on the subject to come to the fore, but will also explain how and why mutual aid has been effectively made invisible from academic thought and public policy for so long (principally being a casualty of the undiluted economic lens of capitalism). Having considered mutual aid on the margins of (economic) exchange in society, this chapter considers its resurrection or re-instatement into the heart of social and economic exchange by virtue of research that has been undertaken in alternative economic spaces. This academic development has been prominent in economic geography in particular and the social sciences in general, leading to a most significant conclusion within society: mutual aid in the third millennium *matters*.

The heart of the chapter is concerned with highlighting mutual aid in the context of the informal economy, considering both its definition and relationship to self-provisioning and paid informal work. Within the definition of mutual aid as, '*unpaid work provided for and by friends, neighbours or other members of one's community either on an individual basis or through more organised collective groups and societies*', together with the spectrum of mutual aid (informal reciprocity, formal volunteering, paid and unpaid) will be forthcoming. Against this background, the final section of the chapter focuses on the empirical research that has made significant progress toward unpacking the *geographies* of mutual aid, namely the 'extent and character', the rationales for participation, and the barriers to participation.

2.1. Mutual aid: a sum of its parts

Mutual aid implies *social* living. Given this, the incentive to understand mutual aid *better* is explicit. On one level, a deeper insight into mutual aid would have implications for understanding the very nature of human (social) evolution, and thus all that has arisen from this – which is immense. As John Hewetson (1998: 6) argues: "sociability has a pre-human origin, and mutual aid lies at the root of all social institutions".

Seeking an uncomplicated, general definition of mutual aid can be had by adopting a detached, literal interpretation of mutual aid as being the definitive sum of its parts. Thus, the term "mutual" derives from the Latin mūtuus, meaning "reciprocal". The verb "aid" derives from the Latin adjūtāre and implies support, help or assistance (see Collins English Dictionary, 2000). Thus, collectively, at its most basic and uncomplicated level 'mutual aid' suggests a basic reciprocal relationship which takes place between individuals; individuals

who can offer as well as receive mutually desired resources. Interpreted as a sum of its parts, the term 'mutual aid' evokes immediate widespread appeal, and is employed in an almost exclusively positive, emotive, and constructive capacity. Mutual aid – helping and being helped by others in society – is unquestionably *a good thing*.

2.2. Mutual aid: a factor of evolution

A fiercely contested debate in the biological and social sciences revolves around mutual aid and human evolution. On one side are those who allow a pivotal role for mutual aid and co-operation in the theory of human development, which necessarily stand at odds with those who argue that the greatest triumphs of *Homo sapiens* are founded on more selfish, egotistically driven competition. When one looks at mutual aid as a factor of evolution, with respect to economics, then to side with those who champion the co-operative theory of evolution, is to assume a marginalised position, which flies in the face of the common orthodox reading of human development. This orthodox reading was aggressively established through the influential pens of Darwin's contemporaries, especially Thomas Malthus (1820) and Thomas Huxley (1888). Their championing of the egotist model of development viewed Darwinism as unbridled competition which ultimately favoured only the best fitted in society to survive and flourish. Such a competitive interpretation then, as now, is embodied by the dominant capitalist ideology in economics. The alternative reading of human evolution was that of mutual aid, which gained both maturity and momentum through the influential work of Kropotkin in the 20th century and from social economics in general. In outlining this broad debate between social economics (cooperation) and capitalism (egotism) it is hoped that a valuable insight into the historical debate surrounding mutual aid will be forthcoming.

2.2.1. Co-operation and mutual aid: a social economic perspective

Social economics places great emphasis on mutual aid as a principal driver of (human) evolution and survival (e.g. Eckersley, 1987; Barrett and McIntosh, 1991; Dobson, 1993; Lutz, 1999; Burns et al, 2004). The central argument is that mutual aid (i.e. reciprocity in society) acts as a powerful means of achieving shared goals, that would be far more difficult (perhaps impossible) to achieve should the individual(s) have chosen to operate independently, using only his or her (relatively limited) resources. Such a mutually inclusive

relationship, it is argued, has not only been powerful in terms of human development, but *vital*. As Burns, et al (2004: 10) suggest:

> "One of the strongest arguments for community self-help in general and mutual aid more particularly, is that reciprocity is fundamental to human development. Whatever the 'nature' of people (individualistic, altruistic or otherwise) they undoubtedly live in relationship to each other. They are interdependent and both their survival and their happiness depend on that interdependence."

The argument that mutual aid has been instrumental in social evolution has strong roots, embedded in and epitomised through, for example, the 19th century work of the grandfather of social economics, Jean Charles Leonard Simonde de Sismondi (1803, 1815, and 1819). This particular view of evolution, in promoting the view of a 'common good' or common goal stands in direct contrast to an economics based on individualist liberalism, which has been given further voice and direction over the last 150 years by a range of progressive thinkers including Thomas Carlyle (1849), John Stuart Mill (1844, 1848) John Ruskin (1876) and John Hobson (1896, 1922). But it was Sismondi who, in trying to understand the driving force behind exchange in society, first began to unshackle the capitalist logic of profit motivation and the competitive personal quest for material wealth, replacing it with the notion of '*les bein des peuples*' (see Lutz, 1999). The conclusion that was reached then, and now, is one that Hart (1993: 14) illustrates succinctly: "Mutual aid, rather than money, power, status and self-indulgence, must be accepted as the basic Law of Life."

The Russian socio-biologist Piotr Kropotkin championed the 'case for mutual aid' most defiantly at the dawn of the 20th century, summing up the contrasts between the ideology of social co-operation versus economic competition in his highly influential work, "Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution" published in 1902. Again, the argument was made that mutual aid, and not naked self-interest, is at the heart of evolution among sentient beings:

> "Competition is not the rule either in the animal world or in mankind...Better conditions are created by the elimination of competition by means of mutual aid and mutual support." (1902: 72)

which led Kropotkin (1902: 73) to cry:

> "Don't compete! – competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it! Therefore combine – practise mutual aid! That is the surest means for giving to each and all to the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral...That is what Nature teaches us; and that is what all those animals which have attained the highest position in the respective classes have done. That is also what man – the

> most primitive man – has been doing; and that is why man has reached the position upon which we stand now." (1902: 73)

The emphasis and role that Kropotkin gave to mutual aid in society is something that has been reinforced by an emerging, complex literature surrounding social capital, which will be discussed in length in Chapter 3. Crucially, it is this interpretation which has been stifled by capitalism's hegemonic position and influence in society. Having turned attention first toward this competitive perspective, *survival of the fittest* in its rawest sense, it will then be demonstrated how the marginalisation of mutual aid within economic thought has influenced the definition by which mutual aid will be referred to in this thesis.

2.2.2. Competition and mutual aid: a capitalist perspective

The dominant ideology of economic thought over the last two hundred years has been capitalism, a competitive economics constructed on the unwavering belief in the ability of laissez-faire economic to lead society (e.g. Smith, 1776; Ricardo, 1817; Keynes, 1936). This one-dimensional, linear view of the inevitability of capitalist economics reflects a "capitalocentric discourse" (Gibson-Graham (1996: 41) whose totalitarian nature threatens to spell the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992). Within the context of human evolution, orthodox laissez-faire economics champions the meta-narrative perspective, viewing exchange in society as predominantly mechanistic, atomistic, quantitative, abstract, predictable, and, crucially in this context, one that emphasises individualism and competition in society. This has had severe repercussions for mutual aid and the social embeddedness of exchange in society. As Hutchinson and Mellor (2004: 2) argue, money in contemporary market societies is rarely acknowledged as a social phenomenon in economic analyses, as "abstract economic theory based on modelling does not study the social fabric which houses economic activity."

The radicalism of formal economics, which effectively negated the individual as a social being, thus created the creature 'Homo Oekonomicus', one whose activities are understood solely in (its) desire to possess wealth; who is neither motivated by altruism, moral obligation nor custom, but instead by naked self-interest and greed (see Lutz, 1999, Chapter 3). The implication is that pure reciprocity between people is at best a fantasy, there being no nexus between people other than naked self-interest and callous profit motivation. It is an appeal which finds some comfort in the words of evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1989: 2), where even the seemingly altruistic gesture is actually a selfish one:

> "A predominant quality to be expected in a successful (individuals) gene is ruthless selfishness. This gene selfishness will usually give rise to selfishness in individual behaviour. However...there are special circumstances in which a gene can achieve its own selfish goals best by fostering a limited form of altruism at the level of individual animals. ..Much as we might wish to believe otherwise, universal love and the welfare of the species as a whole are concepts that simply do not make evolutionary sense."

Thus when looking through the economic spectacles of capitalism to weigh up individual competition versus mutual co-operation, the former triumphs so completely that:

> "The commodity may be valued by the user for its intrinsic use value, but to the seller it is unequivocally a means to and end, to the achievement of the external goal of making a profit, and if it is unlikely to make a profit it will not be offered for sale." (Sayer, 1997: 23)

In this interpretation contrasting social-economic and the capitalist-economic interpretation of mutual aid are incompatible and irreconcilable to the other. As Hewetson (1998: 7) observes: "Acceptance of the principal of mutual aid demands the rejection of capitalist society and vice versa." However, this view itself does not capture the alternative perspective, which allows a grey area to exist between the two approaches, namely that self-interest (and self-gain) does not necessarily and inevitably result in selfish behaviour in society at large. Samuel Smiles (1866), for example, considers the ideal of 'The True Gentlemen', and makes a strong case for an overlapping boundary between self-help and mutual aid. Essentially, for Smiles, the spirit of self-help can also be interpreted as the root of genuine growth in the individual. Hence the True Gentlemen is that person who goes beyond the shallow exposition of 'economic man', and recognises (among other things) that, "Riches and ease...are not necessary for man's highest culture" (Smiles, 1866: 12) while adhering to the instruction, "Improve thyself" (ibid) at all times. The true value of putting oneself first then, is not just to improve one's standing, but is also reflected positively in 'the human good'. As Smiles (1866: 222) observes:

> "There is, indeed, an essence of immortality in the life of man, even in this world. No individual in the universe stands alone; he is a component part of a system of mutual dependencies; and by his several acts he either increases or diminishes the sum of human good now and for ever."

When all is said and done though, any perceived communality between self-interest and collective interest has remained absent in formal economics. Ultimately, mutual aid, within the hegemonic capitalist narrative, has been effectively suppressed from mainstream view,

and consequently, has been neglected in much theoretical thought and empirical research: literally out of sight, out of mind.

To understand the historically marginalised status of mutual aid in economic exchange is vital to understand the manner in with mutual aid has subsequently been promoted to the forefront of economic thought in various academic and political circles. In the context of formal economics mutual aid has been marginalised to the alternate, or 'informal' economic sphere – and it is a discussion of informal economic spaces that a working definition of mutual aid will be forthcoming.

2.3. Understanding mutual aid as an alternate economic space

The research that has focused explicitly on unpacking the wider informal economy in the advanced economies, has only gained momentum within economic geography and the social sciences in general over the last twenty years (e.g. Carruthers and Babb 2000; Leonard, 1994; Pahl, 1984; Renooy, 1990; Thrift, 2001; Williams, 2001; Young and Wilmott, 1975). Given this, it is foolish to assume that existing theoretical and empirical research focused on mutual aid should be able to tell *the whole story*. The world of mutual aid is essentially, relatively uncharted and unknown territory. What inroads have been made though have defined mutual aid in relation to the wider contemporary economic hierarchy.

To re-cap, the primacy of capitalist economic discourse left little or no space for those economic activities that lie outside its narrow formal framework of understanding. Thus, to all intents and purposes, mutual aid became:

> "Reduced to...another shadowy zone, often hard to see for lack of adequate historical documents, lying underneath the market economy; this is that elementary basic activity which went on everywhere and the volume of which is truly fantastic...a layer covering the earth." (Braudel, 1985: 630)

Attempts to shed light on this zone has been made by widening the economic lens to incorporate exchange that lies beyond capitalist activities, and specifically examining those involving the non-market production of exchange of goods and services. Mutual aid is one branch of a broad alternative economic tree that has its roots embedded in a variety of alternative approaches. Within economic geography, for example, these include feminist campaigns to recognise the value of unpaid work (for example, Benston, 1969, England, 1996; Katz and Monk, 1993; Himmelweit, 1995; McDowell, 1983; Oakley, 1974); research

focused on unpacking the nature of monetary exchange to rework the social nature of the economic (for example, Crang, 1996; Crewe and Gregson, 1998; Lee, 1996, 1997, 1999 2000); the highlighting of non-traditional, neglected, sites of consumption such as garage sales (Soiffer and Hermann, 1987); car boot sales (Gregson and Crewe, 2002, 2003) charity shops (Crewe et al. 2001; Williams and Paddock, 2003) and local currencies (e.g. Cahn, 2000; Lee 1996; North, 1999; Williams et al., 2001).

Not only have these alternate readings of the mainstream economic had the significant cumulative effect of making visible previously invisible social and economic spaces, they have also collectively demonstrated the very real extent that relationships and exchange within society are not motivated simply through economic rationales, and that, actually, acts of mutual aid and reciprocity are very much in evidence in advanced capitalist economies. Indeed, mutual aid is one of the 'non-profit sectors' that Amin et al (2002: vii) believes should:

> "...no longer (be) seen as a residual and poor cousin to the state or the market or a sphere of charity and social or moral repair. Instead, it is imagined as a mainstay of future social organisation in both the developed and developing world, set to co-exist within the welfare state, meet social needs in hard-pressed communities, constitute a new economic circuit of jobs and enterprises in a market composed of socially useful goods and services, empower the socially excluded by combining training and skills formation with capacity and confidence building, and create a space for humane, co-operative, sustainable and 'alternative' forms of social and economic organisation."

This context is important, because mutual aid has been largely defined, highlighted and understood within the informal economic sphere, and it is to this sphere which we turn to now.

2.3.1. Informal economic activities and mutual aid

The informal economy/ sector/ sphere (here after considered as 'sphere') is defined as involving: "the paid production and sale of goods and services that are unregistered by, or hidden from the state for tax and social security purposes, or both, but are legal in all other respects" (Williams 2001a: 730). Given Pahl et al's (1985: 251) assertion that, "The social relations in which the work is embedded can be analytically separated", three useful typologies that have been introduced to helpfully differentiate informal economic activities. These are, 'mutual aid', 'self-provisioning', and 'paid informal work' (e.g. Burns et al 2004; Field and Hedges, 1984; Gershuny, 1979; Gregory and Windebank, 2000; Jensen et al,

1995; Leonard, 1998; Lynn and Davis Smith, 1992; Pahl, 1984; Renooy 1990; Williams and Windebank, 2000). Colin Williams and Jan Windebank (2002: 3) have defined mutual aid as:

> "Unpaid help provided for and by friends, neighbours or other members of one's community either on an individual basis or through more organised collective groups and societies."

Pahl et al. (1985: 251) also cautioned that, "Distinctions between spheres of work should not, of course, be interpreted too rigidly". Crucially, the definition not only appropriately considers what mutual aid represents on its own terms, but, crucially, what it is not, namely self-provisioning:

> "This considers unpaid household work undertaken by household members for themselves or for other members of their household." (Williams and Windebank, 2002: 3)

or 'paid informal work':

> "This covers all of the paid production and sale of goods and services that are unregistered by or hidden from the state for tax, social security and/ or labour law purposes but which are legal in all other respects. "(ibid)

And it is this traditional working definition of mutual aid acts that has acted as an influential signpost to subsequent research to indicate what activities are examples of mutual aid, and which are not. Expanding on this definition of mutual aid, Bulmer (1989: 252) considers the space that mutual aid occupies as an, "intermediary structure", one that is beyond the realm of household relations but more familiar to us than the impersonal institutions in the wider society. As a form of social capital (elaborated in Chapter 3) mutual aid is the 'glue' that links people together in wider societal structures.

Reconciling the theoretical definition of mutual aid with the social reality of exchange, and observing the range of activities that can be considered, mutual aid is indeed a broad church. To illustrate, Figure 2.1. highlights a range of examples of mutual aid provided for and by friends, neighbours or other members of one's community *on* an informal, individual basis over a period of less than twenty-four hours.

Figure 2.1. Examples of mutual aid experienced by the author on Tuesday 2 August 2005

"At 8.00am (in order to beat the rush-hour) I was given a lift to work by a friend who works in the same city; a favour which I will no doubt reciprocate at a later date, as I have done before. For lunch I played squash with a friend (who had booked the court on my behalf) and in between games we discussed the latest repairs and parts needed to restore the car he bought last year (a project I've been helping out with for several months). Then, having spent an afternoon largely alone, I left work and returned home (dropped off outside the door by a work colleague!).

My wife had been busily preparing dinner and doing the million and one tasks that are needed to maintain the house and family on the domestic front. However, having popped out to town mid-morning, she hadn't been in to collect a parcel which had arrived. *Parcelforce* left a note to say that the parcel had been left with the next-door-neighbour "Miss M." at No.15, who had signed for it on our behalf. So, after dinner, I walked across to collect the package and to thank her. However, Miss. M – who is elderly and rather frail – also asked if it wouldn't be too much trouble for me (while I was there) to help her move a few chairs from the kitchen into her dining room (she's entertaining her family at the weekend).

Having done that, and asked if she needed anything, I returned home with the parcel in one hand, and an armful of hand-picked rhubarb and a full bag of apples in the other (a gift from Miss. M. from her allotment for my wife, as a thank-you to her for pruning some bushes and clearing some weeds in her garden the previous weekend)."

2.3.2. Formal mutual aid and informal mutual aid

However, 'mutual aid' also represents more organised collective groups and societies (e.g. Field and Hedges, 1984; Davis Smith, 1998) than any sweeping definition of mutual aid, is problematical for adequately representing the heterogeneous nature of activities that are found within mutual aid. One constructive attempt to discriminate within and between tasks engaged through mutual aid has focused on identifying the more formal organisations at one end of the spectrum to more informal acts of one-to-one aid at the other. Formal mutual aid refers to unpaid work which has been conducted under the umbrella of organisations, groups or associations (e.g. Coulthard et al., 2002; Prime et al., 2002; Williams and Windebank, 2000). Meanwhile, 'informal' unpaid mutual aid is usually conducted on a one-to-one basis. Thus under such a framework, the examples of mutual aid given in the first paragraph in Figure 2.1. would be examples of 'informal' mutual aid, as they did not involve any formal, organised, volunteering in either the capacity of supplier or receiver.

Burns et al (2004), in illustrating types of community self-help (community-self help being used to denote all informal activities that take place within communities) introduce additional sub-categories to mutual aid. Here, mutual aid is broken down further to highlight reciprocity between family and non-family relations. Furthermore, their breakdown of mutual aid also introduces one important added dimension, that of 'paid mutual aid' (see Table 2.1)

Table 2.1. Types of mutual aid

Mutual aid	**Unpaid**	One-to-one kinship reciprocity
		One-to-one reciprocity between friends and neighbours
		Organised mutual aid
		Community volunteering
	Paid	Autonomous

Source: Extract from Burns et al. (2004: 29) Table 1.1: Types of community self-help

2.3.3. Paid mutual aid

What is meant by paid, or monetized, mutual aid? Recent empirical research considering the informal economic activities in general, but focused on paid informal work and mutual aid in particular, has led to the necessary step of extending the definition of mutual aid beyond considering strictly *unpaid* work undertaken by household members for members of other households, whether on an informal or formal basis (e.g. Williams and Windebank, 2003b).

Examining the completed nature of social exchange in the informal sphere has brought to light socially orientated spaces of production and consumption which have traditionally been associated with being a purely exploitative, profit-motivated sphere of exchange, and thus labelled as "paid informal work". But more detailed investigation has undermined and fragmented this distinction, by revealing a layer of activity in which exchange was not embedded in the profit motive (and thus unable to be claimed adequately as paid informal work) but that did involve either money or gift-in-lieu of money being exchanged or part-exchanged for work undertaken (hence mutual aid defined as 'unpaid' work, was equally inappropriate to capture and represent the relations of exchange properly). As Williams and Windebank (2001a: 190) suggest:

> "It should be noted that conducting work for formal or informal firms is not always for unadulterated economic reasons. For example, an unemployed interviewee living in a lower-income neighbourhood worked in a small specialist shop on a Saturday for £3.00 per hour 'cash-in-hand'. Although the money was useful, her

> principle rationale was that she both enjoyed meeting the customers and getting tips from people who had the same specialist interests as herself and at the same time, she was learning about the trade in order to set up her own mail-order business."

Such insights carry with them many implications, and provide another example of how mutual aid is very much the part of an emerging discourse. Here, the notion of monetized or paid mutual aid dissolves any absolute boundaries between (in this case) paid informal work and mutual aid, and, by capturing a type of exchange, the nature of which is clearly neither unpaid work in the pure sense as involving like-for-like reciprocity, nor is not reducible to the concept of paid informal work (see Ungerson, 1995).

Similarly, referring again to Figure 2.1., the final paragraph provides a straightforward example of paid mutual aid where, in this case, some goods (rhubarb/ apples) were given as a gift to directly acknowledge – and hence legitimise - the work undertaken in the householders' garden the previous week. The profit value of the goods is not the principal motivation to either supplier or receiver, its value rests in its symbolism, made as a gesture of thanks, while also allowing something *physical* or tangible to be exchanged to both acknowledge and legitimise the help received by another. A deep understanding of the dynamic that paid mutual aid gives to reciprocity though is something which is very much needed, most especially a deeper insight into the environment and motivations which facilitate this coping strategy, and will be provided in Chapter 11.

As this largely theoretically weighted introduction to mutual aid hopes to impress upon the reader, the complex dynamics involving (a) spectrum of mutual aid (b) mutual aid in the informal economic sphere (c) mutual aid in the economy more widely, are only just now beginning to be recognised and investigated. Thus, there are few absolute points with which one can be certain that mutual aid we come to identify now, will satisfactorily accommodate the emerging dialogue which will engage mutual aid in the future. Indeed should the changes continue to affect the definition of mutual aid then this may radically shift the radical way research is conducted and analysed. This could potentially spiral: as the focus of activities considered by mutual aid changes, the definition of mutual changes, and so on and so forth. Similarly, it is the increasingly theoretical complexity that emerges *within* mutual aid (for example, the degree of overlap and fluidity that operates both within and between different forms of mutual aid) that has begun to attract attention.

2.4. Empirical research focused on mutual aid

To understand the question of how and why empirical research has come to investigate mutual aid in the way that it has, one must turn the clock back twenty years. In 1984, R.E Pahl focused on understanding the divisions of labour within a local population on the Isle of Sheppey, The rationales he gave in the pilot study included the following:

> "I am interested to find out how people get by in a number of specific circumstances... I want to know how the ordinary routines of life and the sexual divisions of labour within the domestic unit may be changing, as a result of the growth of a wide range of economic activities outside the formal economy... It is now possible for people to get by without necessarily engaging in formal employment. A man can own his own tools – power drills, chain saws, welding equipment; he can control much of his own time whether or not he is formally employed... (Pahl, 1984: 9-10)

What followed was an excellent, engaging and challenging account of work outside employment. Significantly though, for understanding mutual aid, one of its most penetrating influences was seen in the fact that subsequent research adopted many of the categories Pahl employed to differentiate informal economic activities (including domestic self-provisioning, informal labour and formal provision). This was based on the understanding that:

> "Work can be understood only in relation to the specific social relations in which it is embedded. Specific people in specific circumstances in specific sets of social relations can be described precisely in terms of whether they are engaged in work or play. The word 'work' cannot be defined out of context: that, indeed, is the conclusions and answer to the question (of whether all social activity is work)." (Pahl, 1984: 128)

Subsequent questions focused on the 'quantifiable' elements of mutual aid in society (from 'who conducted the task', 'with whom', 'what tasks were undertaken', 'why were they undertaken', 'what prevents participation' to comparisons between and within affluent and deprived households and so on) are directly descended from Pahl's seminal work, and it is this approach which has come to frame much of the modern understanding as to what mutual aid is. Thus there is a considerable amount of empirical data at hand which has allowed valuable insights into key facets of mutual aid such as: 'the extent of mutual aid', the 'character' the 'rationales for participation in mutual aid' and the 'barriers to participation'. These findings will be addressed in turn.

2.4.1. Extent and character of mutual aid

Addressing the findings related to the extent of mutual aid in the UK, two mutually exclusive narratives persist in contemporary discourse. One suggests that the most deprived neighbourhoods, lacking the necessary resources, will engage little - if at all - in mutual aid (e.g. Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). The other narrative perceives the character and extent of mutual aid as being an important survival strategy in the coping practices of those households marginalised from employment generally: i.e. the lowest-income population groups (e.g. Gutmann, 1978)

When investigating how a range of domestic tasks were conducted using informal mutual aid by households in the British city of Southampton, Williams and Windebank (2000) found that only 3.4 per cent of households carried out work through unpaid exchanges between friends, relatives and neighbours. Within this figure 70 per cent of all unpaid mutual aid was conducted by relatives, and only 26 per cent by friend and neighbours. In the same study, only 3.1 per cent used formal mutual aid as a coping strategy. Such characteristics support the argument that the extent and character of mutual aid is socially and spatially unevenly distributed in the UK. Importantly, these variations in the extent and character of mutual aid are evident not only on local and regional levels, but also on national levels too. For example, research conducted on national surveys has found that northern populations typically possess different, more informal, cultures of community engagement than southern regions (e.g. Williams, 2003a). This finding becomes significant in several ways. First, it suggests that the geographies of mutual aid are both complex and uneven, and can vary considerably not only across social groups but also across space as well. The significance of this 'reality' is increased when a cursory glance at the current U.K. government's policy approach toward cultivating the community sector is made, one which almost exclusively focuses on promoting formal mutual aid while neglecting one-to-one acts of reciprocity (e.g. Home Office, 1999).

Focusing on the character of informal mutual aid, findings have shown that one-to-one reciprocity has tended to be undertaken by women rather than men, the elderly rather than the young, longer-standing residents rather than incomers, higher- rather than lower-income households and multiple-earner rather than no-earner households, (see Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1999; Williams et al., 2001). Mutual aid is also highly skewed toward kin rather than non-kin relations, which is attributed to an 'inner-outer' logic affecting social relations as highlighted in Section 2.4.2.

Regarding formal mutual aid, several studies have concluded that it is mostly affluent groups who join and participate. For example, Williams et al. (2001) focusing on five rural communities, noted that 75 per cent of higher-income households participated in formal organisations, compared with just 21 per cent of lower-income households! There is also an important classification surrounding the type of support received which needs to be made – namely whether the support was materially, or socially orientated. For example, Williams et al. (2001: 25) claimed that in rural areas:

> "Just 16.5 per cent of (rural) households claimed to have received any form of material support from such community-based groups (i.e. formal mutual aid), but 93.8 per cent of households asserted that they had received emotional or social support through such a group or association (e.g., the church, a sports club)"

Overall, the extent and character of mutual aid indicates that far from being a marginalised, irrelevant, dimension of exchange in society, this informal sector is (quantitatively) highly relevant to people's everyday material coping strategies.

2.4.2. Rationales for participation

A great deal of evidence suggests that rationales for participation in mutual aid are highly reflective of the local conditions (e.g. type and nature of task) and the people involved. Rationales are highly influenced by "who" the work is to be undertaken for. For example, where kinship is involved, rationales for participating in unpaid mutual aid are commonly linked to sociability and redistribution. Sociability, in the sense of 'helping family and close friends', is something which a person is most comfortable with, in the sense that if the individual felt they needed help then they would be most likely to turn to these groups in return. This is the crux of the social capital interpretation of the homophily or 'like-me' principle which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Unpacking the key rationales given by those choosing to engage in mutual aid has revealed what Williams (2002b: 15) calls an active "inner-outer" logic in deciding who to help/ be helped by. To illustrate, when focusing on informal reciprocity, the vast majority of individuals show a distinct preference toward helping their 'inner' kinship circles (family), rather than their outer circle of non-kin relations (friends, neighbours). Thus, where friends and neighbours were involved then mutual aid, as a means of completing material tasks, was

usually conducted only as a last resort. Where exchange took place beyond kin relations, undertaking mutual aid has been interpreted more generally as the outcome of economic essentialism and not cultural choice (e.g. White, 2000). This reluctance to engage with non-kin relations was identified on several levels. For example, households went to extreme lengths to avoid being seen by others (however well-meaning the acts of the giver are) as a charity case or, vice versa, to be seen by others as a burden. Williams and White (2002: 169) conclude that:

> "Receiving unpaid help is a last resort. Most people in most circumstances avoid using unpaid help and only do so when they cannot do the job themselves and when they cannot afford to pay somebody. If at all possible, they prefer to pay. Payment allows one to avoid "owing others a favour" and having an obligation "hanging over you" to reciprocate. It also prevents social relations from running sour if a favour is not returned."

Other redistributive rationales involving one-to-one reciprocity, included those cited by (retired) individuals who were "time rich" and would willingly help out "time-poor" family members who they felt had less time or energy to undertake a variety of jobs (especially regarding child-care) (see Williams, et al 2001).

Given this social differentiation regarding mutual aid, when undertaken beyond the family network, research has indicated that there is a distinct preference for money or gifts to be involved (e.g. Williams and Windebank, 2003). In this respect, given that people have a preference for avoiding unpaid favours between friends and neighbours and other non-kin relations, then a system which additionally introduces some form of payment or tally-system has been repeatedly called for. Local Exchange and Trading Schemes (e.g. North 1996; Williams et al. 2001b), Time Banks (Boyle, 1999; Cahn, 2000) and Employee Mutuals (Leadbeater and Martin, 1998) to name three bottom-up initiatives have been put forward as possible solutions.

Investigating the rationales for participation in formal community-groups, the vast majority cited social and not material reasons (Williams et al. 2001a). Joining provided the opportunity for interaction with others so that one could 'catch up on the gossip', 'network' and seek advice, information and knowledge. The conclusion has been therefore that community-based organisations (sports clubs, rambling groups, tennis clubs, village history societies and the like) as a whole are spaces where individuals can build and maintain social networks and seek social support, but, crucially, are not spaces where individuals' give/ receive material support.

2.4.3. Barriers to participation in mutual aid

Empirical research undertaken in urban and rural communities, both affluent and deprived, has identified several common barriers to participation. These include 'a lack of social network capital'; 'lack of time capital'; 'lack of human capital'; 'lack of economic capital'; 'institutional barriers' and mutual aid itself: each will be discussed in turn here.

First, the type and nature of social networks have been shown to act as a barrier to participation, especially in light of the preference to use kinship relations to get tasks undertaken on an unpaid basis. The evidence suggests two main reasons for this, and cautions against assuming that a household's lack of mutual aid between friends and neighbours inevitably suggests limited social networks in the wider community. Rather the findings show that it is the type of individuals that a household can access (i.e. what skills do they possess), and what levels of trust and familiarity exist between households and their social relations that facilitates or disables mutual aid. Typically, but not always, there are higher levels of trust and familiarity between family members, and again this will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

Second, a lack of time is another key barrier cited for the absence of mutual aid, as many households expend a great deal of their time, effort, and resources in formal employment (Ehrenreich, 2002). In this way less time is spent invested in the informal social environment, that of the neighbourhood and local community. This is especially relevant for those who compose the new underclass of poverty in British society. This group consists largely of a population that are the focus for New Labour's New Deal policies to get people back into work, under the belief that employment will inevitably lead to a more socially inclusive society. However, initiatives such as the New Deal have seen a proliferation of the exploitative 'fringe' jobs (temporary, low-paid, long-hours), giving this route into employment highly negative connotations for strategies such as mutual aid by contributing to the demise of the focus on locality and household. A demise which fundamentally has not been adequately compensated by a marked improvement (inclusion) in either the social sphere, or through increasing personal income levels. In fact the lack of time to invest in the local community has restricted both the opportunities consolidation of existing social networks, and the ability to invest toward building new social ones. And so through this, a vicious circle affecting the capacity of the reciprocity harnessed through deep, extensive and resource-heavy social networks to provide support for household ensues.

Third, the perceived absence of human capital, both in terms of skills and quality of health, has been cited as a barrier to harnessing unpaid mutual aid. On one level, the implication has been made that if more households could draw upon a greater variety of practical and domestic skills, then this would increase the likelihood that they would be asked by others to help out (or offer their skills in the first place to help out others). Similarly, for those who have been affected by poor health or disability, their ability to help others – physically – is highly compromised. On the other hand, when it comes to getting jobs done themselves (that they need an able bodied person to do if possible), then the perception that they would be a burden on others unless they paid for the task to be carried out, and thus an overriding barrier that prevents them from engaging in (greater levels) of mutual aid.

Fourth, a lack of money has been shown to be a major barrier to participation in mutual aid. This has been understood In terms of material acquisition: a lack of spending power often means that households lack the necessary range of goods and equipment - ranging from garden equipment (lawn mowers, spades, cutting equipment) to more domestic appliances (ladders, hoovers, paint strippers etc) which are frequently (and by implication more readily) lent out/ borrowed to and from other non-kin households, neighbours and friends. Insufficient finances also compromise a household's ability in other ways, for example, to be able to (a) own a car or (b) should they own a car, offer to give friends and neighbours lifts to various destinations (shop, dentist, doctors, place of work, or train station for example). Similarly, the vicious circle implicit in the negative scenario of 'a lack of money' forces the household to invest more hours into looking for a better job, or getting another job to help 'make ends meet', is once again a key factor in terms of explaining a comparative lack of mutual aid in household coping strategies.

Fifth, institutional barriers have been mentioned as a common deterrent by some households who would wish to help others out more. Principally this barrier emerges through the very real fear among unemployed individuals that they would be (mistakenly) reported to the social security authorities for working whilst claiming benefit, (see Cook, 1997; Deane and Melrose, 1996; Jordan et al., 1992). Thus the irony is that for those who engage in work principally through an overriding feeling of altruism or reciprocity fear the same persecution as those who engage in paid informal work! Similarly, the people absent from work on health grounds, experience a real fear of being seen to attempt to help others in (light) manual work, despite they themselves feeling able to offer their help in certain situations: anything from helping carry a ladder for a neighbour, to helping a friend fix their car. Hence changes in the way the government approaches mutual aid (especially from the perspective of those on benefits) is frequently called for.

Finally, based on the rationales for not participating in mutual aid, the suggestion is that unpaid mutual aid itself is disadvantageous as a coping strategy due to the absence of a recognised like-for-like medium of exchange (money/ gift), coupled with the fact that the levels of trust and familiarity determine the nature of exchange between supplier/ receiver. Where trust is low in a community for example, the very real fear that a favour will not be returned, or that recipient households are effectively putting themselves in the uncomfortable position of "owing" someone else a favour. Similarly, the social stigmas surrounding formal mutual aid, (and receiving one-way volunteerism) is also disadvantageous. For example, households would go to extreme lengths to avoid being seen by others (however well-meaning the acts of the supplier are) as a charity case or, vice versa, to be seen by others as a burden. However, research has also frequently emphasised – in the context of social relations - that fears are not born by experience, and therefore it is this gulf between the perception and the reality of the situation that is the primary obstacle. For those that have taken that one step further, the consequences of doing so have often been pleasantly enlightening. One illustration of this came from an elderly resident interviewed in a deprived rural community:

> "It might sound silly but it took me a long time to get used to asking somebody else to do a repair for me. I've got a heart complaint and I shouldn't do certain things, and I used to think – well that needs doing and I just used to do it - but it's no problem to actually ask people." (Williams, et al. 2001a: 38)

All these barriers are significant, both individually and collectively, as it is also consistently shown that, given the opportunity, a majority of people would like to 'do more' for other people (e.g. Williams et al. 2001a).

2.5. Harnessing mutual aid: cultures of community involvement

Empirical research has also begun to investigate the contrasting cultures of community involvement, and used these findings to critique current government policy focused on harnessing mutual aid. It is worth commenting on the findings in some detail not least as it brings into focus (a) the contrast in attitudes found within communities across England and (b) the relationship that informal mutual aid has with formal mutual aid. Though the findings toward prevailing government discourse on mutual aid will be reiterated to some extent in the equivalent section in Chapter 6, the focus on social capital deliberately embraces a wider subject area than just mutual aid, hence the decision to retain two dedicated sections.

The New Labour government, originally forged under the then Blair-Clinton orthodoxy, adheres closely to a 'new politics of welfare', driven by a political philosophy referred to as the Third Way. The Third Way focuses on: the responsibilities of individuals; the need for strong civic cultures based on "active and willing participation in collective activities" (Amin et al., 2002: 23); the ideal of inclusive society through strong communities; and to achieve this draws on family values, self-help, voluntary associations and civic responsibilities. As Jordan (1998: 2) illustrating the three features of the new politics of welfare remarked:

> "A stronger element (than moral authority) is the appeal to values drawn from the family, the association and the traditional community – to reciprocity, responsibility and mutuality and all the obligations these imply."

Given this outlook, unsurprisingly, volunteering has long been an area which has attracted the interest of policy makers. Policy makers have for example, perceived harnessing mutual aid as an additional tool to promote social inclusion (ONS, 2001), and to complement employment insertion approaches, which has been a key feature of the New Labour government since it's election in 1997 (e.g. Chanan, 1999; DETR, 1998, DSS, 1999; Williams 2001a). Similarly, the question of communities being increasingly 'self-sufficient' with respect to providing for their own material and social needs, has promoted the area of social capital and thus mutual aid under a policy-making spotlight, to both compensate and complement the welfare state. That the wider economic-political climate can have a massive impact on mutual aid via changes to the local economic and social structures is without question. In this way, outside influence wield an enormous power and responsibility and can enable or disable local economic activities. As Pietilä (1997: 122-123) argues:

> "Welfare does not depend only on money allocation from above. It depends as well on how much scope homes, small communities and neighbourhoods have for enlivening and enhancing the basic human functions – co-operation for the common good, mutual self-help and responsibility for caring for each other – that have been almost suffocated by an "efficient" society geared towards competition and economic growth."

How therefore is mutual aid perceived as being the means to achieve the specific goals which policy makers desire? Williams (2003a) argues that the current UK Government policy approach is fully in keeping with other governments in the advanced economies (see Merrett, 2001; Perotin, 2001; Salamon, 2001) as it seeks to encourage the involvement of people in their community through promoting community based groups or formal mutual aid,

while neglecting the cultivation of one-to-one reciprocity or informal mutual aid, (see also Field and Hedges, 1984; Davis Smith, 1998; Ruston, 2003). The logic behind such an approach is that the UK government interprets mutual aid through imposing a 'ladder' metaphor (Arnstein, 1969), where formal mutual aid in this interpretation expresses a more mature and desired participatory culture, while acts of good neighbourliness represent immature cultures of engagement. This point has been made explicit by the Home Office (1999: 30):

> "Few people go straight from a situation of no involvement to one of active engagement with their neighbourhood. Knowingly or not, most are on a 'ladder of involvement', with simple acts of good neighbourliness at one end and a regular commitment with a formal voluntary or statuary organisation, or a position of community leadership at the other.

Thus informal community involvement – found at the bottom of the ladder – is viewed as 'simple', wholly inferior to its formal organised counterpart.

The logic behind such an approach is as follows. Firstly, the cultivation of community-based groups is seen to be instrumental in developing the strength of weak ties in social relations (i.e. between people who do not know each other well), which itself is seen to be the best way to foster community involvement (Williams, 2003). These dynamics will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter on social capital. Secondly, promoting formal community association can be seen to be a pragmatic post hoc rationalisation: it is a 'known quantity' of policymakers, therefore is much more straightforward to implement then one-to-one aid. Thirdly, there are vested interests at stake. For example, the voluntary sector has a strong history, and consequently has an influential voice in society (see MacGillivray et al. 2001) which would be fiercely resistant to alternate developmental efforts being concentrated elsewhere. This commitment to preserving the status quo is also reinforced by the fact that informal mutual aid has neither the history nor the equivalent voice to champion its corner with official decision makers. This serves to exacerbate the fact that there is little knowledge available on this area – and thus little or no grasp as to how best it should be tackled by policy. Fourthly, the impression of collective involvement is something which formal mutual aid has in common with the historical roots of New Labour (see Williams, 2003). Thus, if mutual aid is read according to the individualist 'self-help' manner associated with Smiles (1866) for example, then this serves as another reason as to why the former is favoured over the latter. But this begs the question as what the wider effects of such an approach are?

The hierarchical ladder, biased entirely towards formal mutual aid has far-reaching implications, many of which it is argued severely impinge upon a household's preferred cultures of community participation. For example, using data from the 2000 General Household Survey, Williams (2003a) observed that the extent and character of community involvement varies both locally and regionally. The implications of this are considerable. Any blanket, rigid policy approach that fails to recognise the complexity of community engagement, and only promotes one type of mutual aid (formal) cannot possibly address such diversity-within-the-community adequately. This is a conclusion shared by Amin et al. (2002: 49) who argue that:

> "The capacities that need to be built, the networks that need to be connected and the forms of empowerment relevant to particular communities will necessarily depend on prevailing conditions and structures... it can only (operate) within the constraints of context."

The main findings of Williams' (2003a) research are that only thirteen per cent of respondents had been involved in a local organisation with responsibilities over a three year period: and a further eight per cent had been involved without responsibilities. On the other hand, albeit over in a much shorter time period, 74 per cent had done a favour for neighbours and 72 per cent had received a favour from a neighbour. It appears, therefore, that the national culture of community involvement was currently more extensively orientated towards participation in informal than formal community involvement.

Using these figures, Williams (2003a: 532) goes on to strongly note that the government's current approach finds a degree of favour only with existing attitudes toward mutual aid in London and the South East, as well as more affluent wards generally. But formal volunteering is thoroughly alien to other cultures! He argues:

> "Such a hierarchical policy approach ends up denigrating as simple the cultures of community involvement in...northern regions and deprived wards"

The suggestion then, is that 'a conceptual shift' is required to move away from the rigid hierarchical conception of mutual aid toward a spatially variegated policy approach which would be responsive to the plurality of participatory cultures in the UK.

One obvious way that the conceptual shift deemed necessary could be achieved, would be to interpret mutual aid as a spectrum of types – as this chapter has - rather than a hierarchical model. Such an approach would – theoretically – give no greater emphasis in

the policy making community to formal mutual aid than it would informal acts of one-to-one reciprocity. In this revised understanding mutual aid could successfully be promoted according to the familiarity and preference of the existing regional cultures of participation. In theory then this would promote rather than hinder the virtuous connotations of community that policy maker's desire to harness.

2.6. Gaps in knowledge and understanding: the need to understand the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid

Having summarised the main lines of investigation into mutual aid, it is argued that these have made great strides in establishing a categorical dimension of this informal coping strategy, built on solid quantitative foundations. This focus has been a consequence not only to try and build upon existing lines of enquiry (e.g. from Pahl, 1984) but also because the aim has been to establish mutual aid – and informal economic activities more generally - as quantitatively significant in a more broad critique in the social sciences on the dominant thesis of commodification. Thus the fact that mutual aid is interpreted as neither a marginal nor irrelevant, coping strategy in advanced economies acts allows the logic of commodification and the dominance of laissez-faire economics to be challenged head on (e.g. Williams, 2002c). Yet, the decision to focus specifically on these categories of mutual aid fails to really go beyond this and explain *in any detail* about the complex dynamics which are engaged through the process mutual aid in a particular community or communities. From a distance it would seem that the research undertaken thus far has had the worthy effect of creating a detailed outline of mutual aid: but it is an outline which future research needs to get under the skin of, to go beyond the initial impression and investigate what lies beneath this exterior. This ambition, to reach a deeper level of understanding, by getting to grips with the dynamic complexities of mutual aid will be strongly reflected in the aims and objectives outlined in Chapter 5, section 5.5.

2.7. Conclusions

This chapter has illustrated what is known and understood about mutual aid, through isolating its two terms of reference; looking at how mutual aid has been interpreted in radically different ways by the dominant competing theories of evolution; seeing how mutual aid has come to the forefront of enquiry largely though economic terms of reference (i.e. within the informal economic sphere). This term of reference is especially important to

acknowledge, as all the main lines of research over the recent years have constructed a picture of mutual aid by critiquing it against the hegemonic language of the formal, capitalist, economy. The spectrum of mutual aid activities has largely been defined in relation to current social policies, and with the need to justify and prove their visibility as significant informal coping strategies in this period of late capitalism.

Hence, we find much evidence, through the geographies of mutual aid, which individually and collectively have been primed to blow huge holes into prevailing myths and assumptions, not least that mutual aid is a marginal activity, one seemingly impotent in the face of the relentless juggernaut of commodification and laissez-faire economics. That this has been achieved lays down a solid foundation for future research to build on, in that it not only legitimises further attempts to study mutual aid, but also promote its relevance as a potential new model of social provision for the twenty-first century.

The question now surrounds the ability to open up a new, complementary line of enquiry and dimension to the existing work on mutual aid. It seems apparent that the empirical research highlighted in this chapter (in discussing the extent, character, social embeddedness, rationales, and barriers to participation) has focused on the quantifiable and 'end' appearance of mutual aid as it appears in society. Yet there is a dialogue which in many ways precedes this – 'Why *is* mutual aid?" The findings have provided many tantalising glimpses of how, where, when and why mutual aid works, but has failed to provide any penetrative answers. Essentially, it is the overarching theme of this thesis to try and address this gap, and go beneath and before the work that has already been carried out. Focusing on mutual aid and reciprocity in society, it is apparent that any intention of looking at the process and dynamics of mutual aid has rich and fertile resources to mine in the surrounding dialogues. These include the discussion focused on the complexity of social relationships in society, to the role and nature of gift-giving and exchange, to the interaction between localities on reciprocity. It is to the first of these literature, that of social capital, which this thesis now turns its attention toward.

Chapter 3

Social Capital

"Those, who liked one another so well as to joyn into Society, cannot be but supposed to have some Acquaintance and Friendship together, and some Trust one in another" John Locke, Second Treatise of Government

Introduction

Within the context of social capital, mutual aid specifically affects the meso- and micro-levels of production and exchange that arises out of, and helps constitute, social networks and norms from which trust may derive (see Williams and Windebank, 2001a). Mutual aid thus becomes one example of the "networks of solidarity" that Latouche (1993: 127) refers to, that are engaged through reciprocal relationship between individuals in society. While Chapter 2 concentrated extensively on mutual aid, this chapter aims to take the broader social perspective into consideration by focusing on the influential theories of social capital, itself a relatively recent and popular development in both research and sociological theory (Halpern, 2003). One of the key dimensions that social capital brings to any dialogue involving mutual aid is that social capital acts as a continuum between micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of analysis (Shuller et al. 2000).Thus, social capital fosters an understanding of how and in what ways an individual 'plugs into' his or her wider social structure, and suggests causal influences and circumstances (agency and structural) to explain how and why some individuals are more successful and indeed disposed than others in commanding greater and more productive (reciprocal) social networks. A point raised by Coleman (1988: 98) when arguing that "a given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actors may be useless or even harmful for others." Thus, by reaching out toward the complexities of social networks, social norms, reciprocity, trust, familiarity, accessing resources, and engaging them largely on their own terms, it is hoped that a deeper and more penetrative insight into the dynamics within mutual aid may be engaged and brought to light.

The chapter begins by illustrating social capital as a theory of social structure and action, by paying close attention to the contributions of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam and Lin. The key components of social capital are then presented, looking in particular at the role of trust and reciprocity. Following this, the dynamic complexity of social networks in the community

are highlighted, focusing on (i) homophilous and heterophilous interactions, (ii) the question of closure or density in social relations and social networks, (iii) Granovetter's strength of weak ties, strength of strong ties (iv) bridging, bonding, and linking forms of social capital (v) structural holes. A selection of the positive *and* negative sides of social capital, from a theoretical perspective, will then be outlined. The next section focus on ways in which social capital has been measured, illustrating Putnam's central composite index of social capital and Spellerberg's framework for the measurement of social capital. The penultimate section looks at social capital in the United Kingdom, highlighting the matrix of social capital which has been employed by various government departments, and some of the main findings that these have produced. The final section looks at ways in which social capital has been harnessed in society.

3.1. What is social capital?

Andrew Greeley (1997: 593) believes social capital to be a "brilliant and potentially useful" concept and yet one of the most misused and abused terms in the social sciences. Nan Lin (2001: 26) agrees, warning that if social capital is divorced from its roots in individual interactions and networking (i.e. is discussed as a collective or public good) it:

> "Becomes merely another trendy term to employ or deploy in the broad context of improving or building social integration and solidarity."

Hence, it is important to get to grips with what is meant by this "simultaneously economic, sociological and political concept" Szreter (2000: 57) called 'social capital' and how it should be interpreted and employed. To critically address these initial theoretical issues an emphasis is placed on highlighting the seminal perspectives of its early disseminators, Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam.

For Pierre Bourdieu, who first used the term in the 1970s, social capital is composed of social obligations and connections, and is considered to be:

> "The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition." (1985: 248)

Social capital is firmly established within Bourdieu's 'trinity' of the dominant forms of capital – alongside 'the cultural' and 'the economic' (Bourdieu, 1984):

> "For Bourdieu, social capital is not reducible to economic or cultural capital, nor is it independent of them, acting as a multiplier for the other two forms while being created and maintained by the conversion of economic and cultural capital in the unceasing effort of sociability." (Schuller et al, 2000: 5)

Lin (2001) argues that Bourdieu primarily sees social capital as a collective asset by virtue of an individual's connections and access to resources within a group, one which has clear boundaries, obligations of exchange and mutual recognition. And it is this 'collective asset' which is the key to understanding the principal differences between social capital and, say, human capital. As Burt (1997: 339) argues:

> "Social capital can be distinguished in its etiology and consequences from human capital. With respect to etiology, social capital is a quality created between people, whereas human capital is a quality of individuals. With respect to consequences, social capital...while human capital refers to individual ability, social capital refers to opportunity"

Another influential authority on early theories of social capital was the late James Coleman. Employing a rational actor framework, Coleman sees social capital as bridging the gap between sociology and economics and:

> "Is defined by its function not just as a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements all in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures and they facilitate certain actions of actors... Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain goals that in its absence would not be possible.... Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or in physical implements of production" (1988: 98)

In later research Coleman, somewhat more succinctly, defines social capital as being:

> "A variety of entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain action of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure (1990: 302)

Thus in Coleman's understanding, "social capital (becomes) the resources, real or potential, gained from relationships" (Lin, 2001: 23) and can exist in a multitude of forms, from organisations to more extended families, in wider communities or other loosely bounded social systems, such as relationships involving non-kinship relations, neighbours, friends-of-a-friend and so on. Importantly, Coleman's social capital is defined by its function; that is when social structure (which always consists of relationships) becomes, "appropriable by an actor for effective use in the furtherance of her interests" (Sandefur and Laumann, 1998: 483). Within this interpretation, the emphasis is placed firmly on the nature of social

relations, and how they are constituted: in other words those precise processes which establish obligations, collective expectations and trustworthiness, enhance norms and so on.

One of the most widely cited authors in relation to social capital is Robert Putnam. Putnam (1996: 56) offered the following definition of social capital:

> "By 'social capital' I mean features of social life – networks, norms, and trust – that enable participators to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives'

It is this trinity – network, norms and trust – that will be focused on in detail later. The emphasis on active participation in society in Putnam's definition is crucial to understanding his theories of social capital and the empirical research he undertook in Italy (regional government) and the United States (see Section 3.5). Focusing on active participation, or 'civic community' allowed him to analyse differential forms of participation, thus being able to identify (comparative) levels of social capital, and comment on whether social capital within an area had declined or increased over time. Another notable theoretical analysis of social capital which merits attention has been that offered by Burt (1990: 619) who suggested that social capital should be defined as, "friends, colleagues, and more general contacts though whom you receive opportunities to use your financial and human capital." His concept of "structural holes" within social networks will be addressed in Section 3.3.5.

Attempting to articulate some 'common ground' or consensus in the literature on social capita, Alejandro Portes (1998: 6) argues that the common ground is that social capital:

> "Stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures."

Significantly, it is this placement of social capital as situated in (strategic) social relations, rather than individuals, which offers much to the focus on mutual aid. Lin (2002: 25) defines this view of social capital operationally as, "the resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors for action." And importantly, this perspective highlights the role of the individual and his or herself being fully aware of the presence of such resources within their relationships and social resources:

> "There may be ties and relationships that do not appear in ego's cognitive map and thus not in her or his awareness of their existence. Only when the individual is aware of their presence, and of what resources they possess or can access (these ties have their networks as well) can the individual capitalize such ties and resources. A systematic presentation of this conceptualization will begin in the next chapter." (Lin, 2002: 25)

The emphasis on ties and relationships necessarily invites a deeper analysis: what are the building blocks that enable or disable social capital on the meso and micro-level in particular?

3.2. Key components of social capital

In the preceding section several key behavioural dimensions were highlighted as underpinning social capital. It is particularly important to address these, not least in order to suggest reasons as to why mutual aid is not only important within society, but equally why it persists in the uneven way that it does. Thus attention here is drawn to the role of the trust and reciprocity in the context of social capital, before illustrating the differential impacts of social capital affect networks in society through discussion of bonding and bridging forms of social capital, structural holes.

3.2.1. Trust and reciprocity

> "A group within which there is extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust is able to accomplish much more than a comparable group without that trustworthiness and trust" (Coleman, 1988: 101)

Lane Kenworthy (1997) argues that though Putnam never clearly defines trust, it is trust that he primarily refers to when he talks about co-operation arising through social capital. Foddy et al, (1999) define trust as an expectation of beneficial treatment from others in uncertain or risky situation, but there is no clear accepted notion of what 'trust' is beyond a certain reliance and confidence in another. Where present in a relationship, trust can be its strongest or weakest link, manifesting itself in a variety of ways between people/ groups known to each other. Cross cultural differences in relationship-trust have been well documented (e.g. Halpern, 2003; Yuki et al. 2005). By virtue of its unpredictable, subjective nature (being neither unconditional nor context-free) trust can bring individuals/ groups even closer together, strengthening the social bonds between them or, when lost or absent, can weaken and fatally undermine social bonds.

Importantly, from a social capital perspective, trust is crucial to facilitate successful reciprocal exchange in society. Reciprocity is here defined as:

> "A motivation to repay generous or helpful actions of another by adopting actions that are generous or helpful to the other person... thus positively reciprocal behaviour is conditional kindness that is distinct from the unconditional kindness motivated by altruism." (Cox, 2004: 262-263)

Trust, being initially an 'unknown' commodity between strangers, or people who don't know each other very well (i.e. the implication being *not well enough to trust them*) the logical conclusion is that 'getting to know someone' (through social interaction and re-interaction, or by virtue of being in a certain group environment) is likely to influence levels of trust positively between and within that individual or group (Kenworthy, 1997) and help engender "sturdy norms of reciprocity: I'll do this for you now, in the expectation that down the road you or someone else will return the favour" (Putnam, 1993b: 36-37). As Sahlins, (1972: 196) suggests, it is natural that kinship-based networks favour reciprocal arrangements:

> "Reciprocity is inclined toward the generalized pole by close kinship, toward the negative extreme in proportion to kinship distance"

Addressing the notion of trust embedded in wider social norms, Portes (1998: 9) considers it vital that conversations focused on trust should pay attention to, and not neglect to incorporate the wider environment that lies beyond, yet paradoxically within, the individual and their social networks. Hence:

> "Trust exists...precisely because obligations are enforceable, not through recourse to law or violence but through the power of the community"

However, any straightforward diagnosis relies on a somewhat superficial interpretation of trust, and, in not recognising its complexity, is problematic. For example, in the context age-old chicken-and-the-egg conundrum: which comes first, trust and then reciprocity or reciprocity and then trust? It would appear that though trust and reciprocity are seen to go hand in hand, there could be no reciprocity if there wasn't a degree of trust present in the first place. Or as Pahl (2000: 63) comments: "Without trust, friendships will fail." This reality is discussed in depth in Pahl's book "On Friendship" (2000) ultimately leading to the conclusion that:

> Individuals, out of their own volition, work out how they should behave with their friends. At the heart of this ideal is the notion of trust. It is axiomatic that friends do not betray each other, and hence personal trust has a moral quality..." (pg. 61)

> The inevitable uncertainties of interpersonal interactions have to be overcome through trust. This implies that trust must lie at the heart of true communicative friendship in the contemporary world. There are no rules and contracts to bind us

> to our closest friends: we simply have to trust them. The closer we are to our friends, the more we are able to trust them." (pg. 63)

But how *much* trust is 'enough' to satisfy reciprocity, and ensure it is repeated? When may not enough trust being offered between one to another cause offence to the one who feels they are not trusted enough? Pilluta's (2003: 448) empirical study of the Trust Game (see Berg et. al. 1995) highlights the dilemma faced:

> "Because trust involves risk...it is wise for trustors to take relatively small risks initially, increasing their risks as a relationship develops. Trusted parties however, may view caution on the part of trustors sceptically, wondering why they have not been trusted more. Trusted parties may view small initial acts of trust negatively, or may not recognise them as 'trusting acts' at all. Either reaction reduces the likelihood of reciprocity."

It should also be recognised that trust between individuals does not always and necessarily lead to reciprocity. Acknowledging this is critical when it comes, for example, to understanding Putnam's emphasis on participation in society as an indicator of social capital:

> "(Putnam) acknowledges that people may have high trust levels and yet be socially inactive or even antisocial. Conversely, people may have good reasons to be untrusting and yet make a major contribution to building social capital, for example through civic projects in areas of high criminality." (Shuller et al. 2000: 11)

Yet human beings - if their social relations are to be most constructive and rewarding - need to be able to trust others (Luhmann, 1979; Barber, 1983; Misztal 1996). In recent years research focused on economic gain in exchange (such as Game Theory (Cox, 2003), 'prisoner's dilemma' and 'repeated play prisoner's dilemma', 'money allocation game' (Yuki et al (2005)) have led mainstream economists to realise that human behaviour very often deviates from the homo economicus assumption (for example humans are self-interested and seek to maximise their monetary pay-offs) by exhibiting emotional dispositions such as trust and reciprocity (e.g. Berg et al. 1995; Bolton and Ockenfels, 2000; Chaudhuri et al. 2002). This conclusion is recognised by Putnam (1993: 89):

> "Fabrics of trust enable the civic community more easily to surmount what economists call 'opportunism,' in which shared interests are unrealized because each individual, acting in wary isolation, has an incentive to defect from collective action"

3.3. The dynamic complexity of social networks: it's not what you know but who you know

Focusing on the social dynamic quality of social networks draws attention to how complex and fluid they are within the social structure. The only common factor they seem to possess is that all are the product of the infinite variety of ways in which individuals engage and interact, and re-engage and re-interact with one another to gain access to the others resources. Lin (2002: 38) attributes this to their being little, if any, formality in delineating positions and rules and in allocating authority to participant:

> "In social networks, fluidity characterizes the occupants, positions, resources, and rules and procedures. Mutual agreement...dictates the actors' participation and interaction, and defines the boundaries and locations of participants'.

What is of interest in terms of the focus on micro-level one-to-one reciprocity, is how these networks present themselves, the reasons why this may be so, and the manner in which these networks interchange, and enable or disable participation depending on the nature and circumstances involved. To this end, section 3.3. focuses on homophilous and heterophilous interactions, considers the argument for closure or density in social relations, highlights the differential types of social networks by discussing the strength of weak ties, strength of strong ties, as well as bridging, bonding and linking forms of social capital, and structural holes.

3.3.1. Homophilous and heterophilous interactions

Focusing on social interaction, the principle of homophily or like-me hypothesis considers "social interactions tend to take place among individuals with similar lifestyles and socioeconomic interests" (Lin, 2002: 39). The principle implies a positive relationship between individuals with similar resources and the amount of their interaction. At the other end of the spectrum are the heterophilous interactions, which describe relations between individuals with dissimilar resources (e.g. resource-rich compared to resource-poor). Homophily interactions through reciprocal relationships prevail by virtue of the emphasis on occupying a common ground, by virtue of the individuals involved being much more socially equal, thus benefiting not only from a common space with which to interact but one which also demands less effort to maintain. Also by involving actors with access to similar resources, the individuals therein pose less of a threat in terms of the resource rich individual having less concern that their resources may be at risk. Having such common interests

involved also encourages empathy and concern, which are two natural and influential motivations to encourage action. On the subject of heterophilous interaction, Lin (2002: 47) explains:

> "Heterophilous interactions demand more...as the interacting partners, aware of the inequality in differential command over resources that can be brought to bear, need to assess each other's willingness to engage in exchange. The resource-poorer partner needs to be concerned about alter's intention or ability to appropriate resources from them. And the resource-richer partner needs to consider whether alters can reciprocate with resources meaningful to their already rich repertoire of resources."

The greater effort and cost born by heterophilous interaction means that they are the exception to the rule, the normative tendency being for individuals of similar resources to engage each other. However, it does expose the simplicity of definitions of social capital favoured by the Office and National Statistics and the Office for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) who, by defining social capital as "networks together with shared norms, values, and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups" (ONS, 2004a: 1) fail to grasp the wider relationships that have little shared norms, values or understanding.

By focusing on the 'aggregate' of 'potential resources' Bourdieu believed that the wider the (social) networks and connections that an individual possesses the greater the volume of amount of capital that that individual would have access to. Taking the individual as the centre, their potential stock of social capital in the community consists of the relationships which they identify and engage with, and, with regard to how these relationships tie the individual into a larger social space. Focusing on social capital, it is the emphasis on this grounding into the links with other patterns of relations which have merited much discussion. None more so than Mark Granovetter's (1973) concepts of 'weak ties' and 'strong ties'.

3.3.2. Closure or density in social relations and social networks

Interpreting social capital as both an individual (relational-level) and a collective good (macro perspective), has led to the discussion revolving around the expected requirement that there is either closure or density in social relations and social networks. Typically, in a group or network, members are assumed to have both solidarity and a clear identity which excludes outsiders Thus this exclusivity maintains and reproduces the solidarity of the group or network, enhancing trust, norms, authorities sanctions and so on (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman,

1990). One illustration of this comes by virtue of the tight-knit social relations which connect the family, and which also ties them to close social relationships outside the family. Thus relations between parents and their children, and wider social networks come together to form a dense social structure of norms, facilitating extensive trust and obligations within wider networks, or what Coleman (1997) refers to as 'intergenerational closure'. His focus on multiplex relations (rather than simplex relations) that occur when parents and their children meet and interact with others on a regular basis (for example, fellow parents at school, fellow neighbours, fellow workers etc.), produce expectations towards each other and develop internally and externally imposed norms, provide particularly strong closure in social networks. For Portes (1998: 6)

> "Closure means the existence of sufficient ties between a certain number of people to guarantee the observation of norms. For example, the possibility of malfeasance within the tightly knit community of Jewish diamond traders in New York City is minimized by the dense ties among its members and the ready threat of ostracism against violators. The existence of such a strong norm is then appropriable by all members of the community, facilitating transaction without recourse to cumbersome legal contracts. " (Portes, 1998: 6)

Hence Coleman (1997: 90) warns that:

> "For families that have moved often, the social relations that constitute social capital are broken at each move. Whatever the degree of intergenerational closure available to others in the community, it is not available to parents in mobile communities."

Yet, in light of findings about the positioning of social relationships focused around the strength of weak and strong ties, bridging, bonding and linking networks, structural holes and the like, the requirement of such a 'closed' interpretation does seems unnecessarily restricted (see Lin, 2002) and out of touch with the fluid nature of social networks. By virtue of this the closure of networks though perhaps real over a period of time are not, cannot afford to be permanent.

3.3.3. Strength of weak ties, strength of strong ties.

Focusing on job search success, Granovetter (1973) coined the term "strength of weak ties" used to define the type of social ties which bind an individual to his/her environment, and their potential stock of social capital. Weak ties considered those range of social contacts that were less familiar to the individual. Perhaps they were work acquaintances, or friends-of-friends, people who, crucially, had access to wider social circles, and thus (for

Granovetter) would hold better – or at least different – information to the job searcher than would those individuals more immediate and familiar to them, who were no doubt tied into the same circles of interest. Thus, 'strong ties' following the homophily principle in that the term is used to describe members of the same social circles, characterised by "intensity, intimacy, frequency of contacts, acknowledged obligations and provision of reciprocal services" (Lin, 2002: 67).

3.3.4. Bridging, bonding and linking forms of social capital

Whereas linking forms of social capital describes connections with people in positions of power and is characterised by relations between those within a hierarchy where there are differing levels of power (ONS, 2004a) it is bridging and bonding forms of social capital which have the most to offer for mutual aid. In Bowling Alone (2000: 19) Putnam places great emphasis on the tension and trade-offs between 'bridging' (inclusive) and 'bonding' (exclusive) forms of social capital, viewing the former as invaluable or getting ahead, and the latter as good for getting by:

> "Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological super glue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD40."

Schuller et al. (2000: 10) define the two forms of social capital as follows:

> "Bonding social capital refers to the links between like-minded people, or the reinforcement of homogeneity. It builds strong ties, but can also result in a higher wall excluding those who do not qualify.
>
> Bridging social capital, by contrast, refers to the building of connections between heterogeneous groups; these are likely to be more fragile, but are likely also to foster social inclusion."

It is a distinction well worth highlighting in the context of the spectrum of mutual aid, with repeated informal reciprocal acts between family members and close friends being typically, though not exclusively, highlighted as an exemplar of bonding types of social capital, whereas bridging social capital referring to relations with distant friends, associates and colleagues. Fukuyama (2001: 11) speculates that a perceived decline in social capital in modern day society (between people who don't know each other well) is due to the introverted nature which arises in bonding ties, due to modern excessive individualism which leads to a "preoccupation with one's private life and family, and an unwillingness to engage in public affairs."

Bridging networks of social capital have enjoyed the most interest to policy-makers, if only because the rewards are greater (on a communal level). This is because bridging social capital works on a horizontal social level by getting people together who don't know each other well, usually from different walks of life, thereby (potentially) extending the shadow of social capital across a wider area of society. Significantly, attempts to harness bridging forms of social capital have been through the promotion of self-sustaining voluntary groups and associations (see Section 3.7).

As a means of identifying the two forms of social capital in a community, the following questions were published by the New Economics Foundation (see Figure 3.1.)

Figure 3.1. Questions focused on bonding and bridging types of social capital

Bonding Questions	Bridging Questions
1. Are you an active member in a local organisation or club? 2. Does your community feel like home? 3. Is there a good community spirit where you live? 4. Can most people be trusted? 5. In the last six months have you helped out a neighbour? 6. Do you shop, work and socialise in the neighbourhood? 7. Do you know someone nearby that you can ask for help?	1. Are you happy and able to make use of parks and open spaces? 2. Do you feel happy to go out at night? 3. Are you active in local affairs? 4. Are there local focal points in your community (like community centres) where you can meet other residents? 5. Did you participate in voluntary work last year? 6. Do you have opportunities to learn about other people's cultures: - by meeting people in your area? -through schools, courses, or training?
Source: Walker et.al 2000, Appendix 2	

3.3.5. Structural holes

Ronald Burt (1997: 340) addresses the homogenous, highly localized, opinions and behaviour which are nurtured within groups as opposed to between groups, and suggests that a 'structural hole' exists between the two.

> "The disconnected people stand on opposite sides of a hole in social structure. The structural hole is an opportunity to broker the flow of information between people and control the form of projects that bring together people from opposite sides of the hole."

Typically individuals within one group may well be aware of another group, but they are so embedded and tied up with their own activities that they have little time (not to mention inclination) to attend to the activities of individuals in the different groups. However, for those who do cross the structural hole, the rewards are generous (Burt, 2004). People who successfully interact with other groups are presented with alternative ways of thinking and behaving, which is deemed a *good* thing, in that it bestows comparative advantages over individuals who are unable to stand near (and straddle) holes in a social structure. Crucially, for Burt (2000: 351) "Social capital exists where people have an advantage because of their location in a social structure" and thus people whose networks bridge the structural holes between groups, thereby leading to greater homogeneity *between* rather than within groups, have the social capital of brokerage. In other words in this interpretation, an individual actor's social capital is a by-product of how their relationships fit into the larger pattern of relationships within their social structure.

3.4. Social capital in the community

In focusing specifically on social capital in the community, it is sensible to provide a definition of community. The term community has been widely used and applied, which has inevitably led to some dispute as to what exactly 'community' means or has come to mean. Schmalenbach (1961) saw community as something which was more than the sum of an active, existing social network, an idea which Bell and Newby (1976) term '*communion*'. However, Ron Johnston (2001: 101) believes that an individual:

> "...belongs to a community, but may only be conscious of that when it is threatened. Thus a community does not involve emotional ties, which characterize communion: a community may stimulate such experiences, providing the context within which they can develop, but all communities are not necessarily in communion."

Understanding the nature of community from an economic perspective (and crucial when considering the social aspects of exchange) Torgerson (2001: 477) argues that:

> "Community is a place of human scale where economic relationships have no status as a separate domain, but are themselves part of a larger ensemble of relationships rooted in a common ethos. Economic relationships do not constitute a mechanism that rules the community, but are themselves guided by principles constituting the community."

Focusing on social capital in the community, and subscribing strongly to Lin's argument (2002, Chapter 2), it must be made clear that social capital (and hence applicable to mutual aid) is a *relational* asset which is grounded in *individual* interactions and networking *within* a (or) the community. So, though social capital can be both an individual and/or a collective resource (e.g. at the group level) this is not the same as discussing social capital as one would a collective or public goods (e.g. trust, norms and so on). Hence the title is deliberate: what we are discussing here is primarily the social capital *in* the community which is not the same as discussing the social capital *of* the community. Equally important is that by retaining a focus on structures and not content, social capital is neither good nor bad in itself (see Paterson (2000). Thus when discussing social capital in the community it is important to acknowledge the positive *and* negative sides, which hold consequences both internally (for members of the social network) and externally (for society at large): sociability cuts both ways (Sandefur and Laumann, 1998). Jordan (2000:5) observes:

> ""There is no inclusion without exclusion. Groups and collectivities form to share the costs and benefits of co-operation among members; but this is only possible if non-members are excluded."

Crucially, this 'dark' side of social capital is often overlooked or ignored, with social capital being perceived, certainly evident in the political lexicon, as a private and public good

> "As a label for the positive effects of sociability, social capital has, in my view, a place in theory and research provided that its different sources and effects are recognised *and that their downsides are examined with equal attention*." (Portes, 1998: 22)

Empirical research conducted on social capital has focused on understanding a host of social outcomes: social inequality and educational achievement (Hoffer et al, 1985; Putnam, 2000); improved levels of economic progress and prosperity (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993, 2000); better levels of health (Cattell, 2001; Cooper et al. 1999; Green et al. 2002; Putnam, 2000; Whitley and Prince, 2004); improved longevity (Putnam, 2000); levels of civic engagement (Putnam, 1996, 2000); improved child welfare and lower rates of child abuse

(Cote and Healy, 2001); lower crime rates (Halpern, 1999). The cumulative effect of this research generally is that the well-connected in society are most likely to be "housed, healthy, hired, and happy" (Woolcock, 2001: 12)

Figure 3.2. Three important characteristics of social capital in the community

1. A given form of social capital may provide one or more benefits. Three important benefits are information, influence and control, and social solidarity. 2. A given form of social capital may confer benefits useful for a single goal of an actor, or the productive capacity of a form of social capital may generalize to aid in the attainment of many kinds of goals. That is, forms of social capital vary in the *effective specificity* of the benefits they confer. 3. At the same time that a form of social capital may confer benefits useful for one or more purposes, it can confer liabilities as well. A form of social capital acquired to aid in one type of action may hinder other actions; thus, forms of social capital may be said to have a *valence*, contingent upon the goals which the actor wishes to attain.
Sanderfur and Laumann, (1998: 483)

Similarly, Portes (1998: 9-10) also highlights three basic functions of social capital in the community, "as (a) a source of social control (e.g. that social capital created by tight community networks and useful to authoritative bodies such as parents, teachers and the police); (b) as a source of family and kinship support (e.g. where intact two-parent families generally have more of this form of social capital than do single-parent families); (c) as a source of benefits through extra-familial networks.

3.5. Negative social capital

As suggested, the notion of a dark-side of social capital is something which is frequently overlooked. However it is a fact that is important to acknowledge: and a brief summary of the main examples of negative capital, oft repeated in the comprehensive (that is to say, balanced) texts on social capital, will be considered here. Portes (1998: 15) emphasizes four negative consequences of social capital:

1. Exclusion of outsiders
2. Excess claims on group members
3. Restrictions on individual freedom
4. Downward levelling norms.

Schuller et al (2000: 31) add to this negative instance of social capital, by focusing on instances where "trust levels are high within efficiently functioning networks which would nevertheless be generally regarded as socially undesirable". American examples of this would include criminal organisations (such as the Mafia) or racist organisations (such as the KKK), though Shuller et al (ibid) also highlight terrorists who gain access to vital information from others:

> "The most pointed case (a discussion of Putnam's Bowling Alone had preceded the dialogue on negative social capital) being Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma bomber who did indeed go bowling with his associates and apparently used these occasions to develop the knowledge which led to the deaths of 168 innocent people."

Schuller et al (ibid) also add to this the fact that, "Putnam now acknowledges that social capital can have its 'dark side'

Ultimately, there is certainly a need to embrace a more differentiated understanding of social capital (Putnam, 2000: Ch. 22). Perhaps the best way forward to approach mutual aid is to avoid seeing it as something which is either an intrinsically negative or intrinsically positive social phenomenon. This is the approach that Woolcock (1998, 2001), in critiquing the binary nature that much of the debate on social capital advocates. Rather, social capital is asymmetrical: to form an opinion it is necessary to look at the dynamic tension between the different formations of social capital, and deduce how particular forms of social capital confer advantages (benefits) and/ or disadvantages in any given context.

3.6. Measuring social capital

For Lin (2002: 28) "Social capital could and should be measurable". Equally, Coleman (1990: 305) believed that the current value of social capital lies:

> "Primarily in its usefulness for qualitative analyses of social systems and for those quantitative analyses that employ qualitative indicators".

Social capital has generally been measured by asking questions of individuals and aggregating their replies (ONS, 2001). It is such an approach with which Lin (2001) warns against, when highlighting the dangers of aggregating replies, which are ignorant of context of the individual's social capital. In this way measurements of social capital become less

than the sum of their parts. In analysing social capital across the United States, Putnam (2000) drew upon fourteen indicators of formal and informal community networks and social trust which are "sufficiently inter-correlated that they appear to tap a single underlying dimension." These are listed in Figure 3.3., with particular attention drawn to numbers 3 'measures of community voluntarism' 4 'measures of informal sociability' and 5 'measures of social trust' with respect to thinking about social capital and mutual aid.

Figure 3.3. Robert Putnam's (2000) central composite index of social capital.

1 Measures of community organizational life:

- percentage served on committee of some local organization in the last year
- percentage served as officer of some club or organization in the last year.
- civic and social organizations per 1000 population
- mean number of club meetings attended in last year
- mean number of group memberships

2 Measure of engagement in public affairs

- turnout in presidential elections, 1998 and 1992; and
- percentage attending public meeting on town or school affairs in last year

3 Measures of community voluntarism:

- number of non-profit organizations per 1000 population
- mean number of times worked on community project last year; and
- mean number of times did volunteer work last year;

4 Measures of informal sociability:

- agree that 'I spend a lot of time visiting friends'; and
- mean number of times entertained at home last year

5 Measures of social trust:

- agree that 'Most people can be trusted'; and
- agree that 'Most people are honest'.

Source: Schuller et al (2000: 12)

However, it is this focus on the level of participation in society (e.g. membership of voluntary organisations, churches or political parties) which has been the most common measures of social capital. Cote and Healy (2000) suggested that the key dimensions (networks, values and norms) should be comprehensively included as measurements of social capital, with

reference to the cultural context in which the behaviour or attitudes are being measured. It is a focus on social trust in particular, as a simple, quick and dirty measure (Halpern, 1999) which has been popular on a international level (Cote and Healy, 2001. However, and this is a theme brought very much to the fore in Chapter 5, there is also the question as whether trust should be measured as an individual characteristic, one to be moved from place to place as people migrate, or whether it is induced by the physical and social environment of a neighbourhood (see Green et al. 2000).

Focusing on New Zealand, Spellerberg (1997: 50) proposed a comprehensive framework – including both formal and informal institutions - for the measurement of social capital, which focused on both attitudinal data (i.e. peoples sense of identify, sense of belonging) and also to understand the social networks by comparing what is done and who does it. This explicitly, and helpfully, positions the social networks engaged by mutual aid (from communities/ organisations and clubs to networks of neighbours friends, and family) within the overriding framework of measuring social capital (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.4. Spellerberg's proposed framework for the measurement of social capital

Population Groups	Attitudes/ values	Participation in social networks
		Formal institutions
Sex	Identity /belonging	Courts
Age	Belief System	Parliament
Ethnicity	Values and goals	Local Government
Birthplace	Fears	Education
Family	Attitudes	Church
Health status	History	Market Place
Education	Confidence	Unions
Labour Force	Trust	Communities/ organisations
Income	Satisfaction with life	Clubs and societies
Occupation	Expectations	Networks of neighbours, friends etc.
Industry		Families
Regions		
		Informal groups

Impact and Influences

3.7. Social capital in the UK

Within the UK, over the last five years, The Office of National Statistics (ONS), Home Office, Department of Health, and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) have all carried out research to measure and analyse the impact of various aspects of social capital, with questions focused around five themes (namely participation, social engagement, commitment; control, self-efficacy; perception of community level structures or characteristics; social interaction, social networks, social support and trust, reciprocity, social cohesion). Unpaid work and voluntary activity is measured by the ONS using the Household Satellite Account. In 2000-2001 the General Household Survey included a social capital module for the Health Development Agency, and the UK Time Use Survey (2000) has enabled co-presence analysis. DfES has included social capital questions on the National Adult Learning Survey (2001) as has the Department of Health in the Health Survey for England (2000).

With the inclusion of a module on 'social capital: support and involvement' the 2002 General Household Survey (GHS) was one of the first national surveys designed to measure social capital. The ONS survey matrix has subsequently built on the GHS survey to include the British Crime Survey, British Election Survey, British Household Panel Survey, British Social Attitudes, Citizen Audit Questionnaire, Communal Establishments Survey, English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, English House Condition Survey, Health Monitoring Survey, Health and Lifestyles Survey, Health Survey for England, Home Office Citizenship Survey, National Adult Learning Survey, Scottish Household Survey, Survey of English Housing, and the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey. The UK Time Use Survey (TUS) by analysing the dairies that people have completed about how they spend their time has also offered a way of measuring social capital (some key findings from here will be highlighted in Section 3.7.). Focusing on the principal research on social capital undertaken from the GHS, the ONS (2004) reported the following findings:

Civic Engagement:

- In 2000-2001, 73 per cent of people in Great Britain believed that neighbours in their area looked out for each other, and 87 per cent enjoyed living in their local area.

- 59 per cent of people felt that communities could influence decisions, but only 26 per cent felt that they personally could influence decisions in the area. Only 18 per cent felt 'civically engaged'.

Neighbourliness:

- 46 per cent said that they knew most or many people in their neighbourhood, while more than half (58 per cent) felt they could trust most or many people in their neighbourhood

Social Networks

- 66 per cent had a 'satisfactory friendship network'. That is they saw or spoke to friends at least once a week and had a close friend living nearby. Just over 52 per cent had a 'satisfactory relative's network'. Twenty per cent had neither

Social support

- 58 per cent of respondents had at least five people they could turn to in a serious personal crisis, 18 per cent had less than three people they could turn to. One in fifty (2 per cent) said they had nobody to turn to.

Perceptions of the local area

- The speed or volume of traffic and parking in residential streets were the items most likely to be seen as a problem.

- Many had a positive view of the local facilities; 77 per cent felt that rubbish collection was good or very good and 71 per cent rated local health surveys as good or very good.

3.8. Harnessing social capital

As highlighted in the previous chapter when discussing the cultures of community involvement, the argument has been that mainstream policy has tended to follow the 'macro-level' route of developing the present range of community-based groups rather than the 'micro-level' route of facilitating one-to-one reciprocity. Though such an approach has been criticised for neglecting the preference of lower income households (e.g. Williams, 2003; Burns, Williams and Windebank, 2004), this is not to say that formal volunteering *in itself* has not been successful in harnessing social capital at an informal reciprocal level. The reasons for this are varied, but it is the structured nature of the relationship which Greeley (1997: 590-1) believes important: "Probably attending church with others and belonging to organizations with them creates structured relationships which facilitate (informal) volunteering" while Lin (2002: 38) considers the fact that:

> "Since individual actors may be embedded in hierarchical structures and other networks, they bring to bear resources embedded in the positions of these hierarchies as well. These resources lie beyond the focus resource that might have been the initial reason for interacting. For example, individual actors may interact because of their shared interest in gun control or abortion issues, but they also bring to the interacting context their other personal and positional resources, such as their jobs and authority positions, wealth, and affiliations with religious

> institutions and political parties, as well as the networks *and resources of their spouses, relatives, friends and fellow workers.*"

Hard empirical evidence (e.g. Putnam, 1993a: chapter 5) has consistently also shown that active involvement in formal organisations fosters a space which allows anonymity between members to be overcome; encourages both trust and reciprocity; develops wider social networks; and thus becomes a key means of fostering social capital in society.

> "Participation in voluntary activities...builds social capital by fostering personal interaction. Repeated interaction facilitates communication and amplifies information about the trustworthiness of others. It also helps to engender "the sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity: I'll do this for you now, in the expectation that down the road you or someone else will return the favour" (Putnam, 1993b: 36-37)" (Kenworthy, 1997: 650)

Putnam's (2000) central argument is that volunteering contributed significantly toward promoting and enhancing mutual recognition, fostering collective norms and trust in democratic societies. This led to the far reaching empirical findings recorded in "Bowling Alone" (named in light of his findings that in American between 1980 to 1993 league bowling declined by 40 per cent while the number of individual bowlers rose by ten per cent). Subsequent research focused on measuring mutual aid (as seen in 3.5) has been influenced toward the relationship between degrees of participation and association as being indicative of the extent of social capital in a particular community, hence the more opportunities to promote formal volunteering, the more opportunities to increase social capital, and to bask in the reflected glories of the positive consequence of social capital. Yet Putnam (1995: 5) also suggests the need to discriminate between what he refers to as "secondary formal associations" with "tertiary association" in any conversation about formal (civic) organisations, and is worth quoting at length:

> "New mass-membership organizations are plainly of great political importance. From the point of view of social connectedness, however, they are sufficiently different from classic "secondary associations" that we need to invent a new label – perhaps "tertiary associations". For the vast majority of their members, the only act of membership consists in writing a check for dues or perhaps occasionally reading a newsletter. Few ever attend any meetings of such organizations, and most are unlikely ever (knowingly) to encounter any other member. The bond between any two members of the Sierra Club (a national environmental organization) is less like the bond between any two members of a gardening club and more like the bond between any two Red Sox fans (or perhaps any two devoted Honda owners): they root for the same team and they share some of the same interests, but they are unaware of each other's existence. Their ties, in short, are common symbols, common leader and perhaps common ideals, but not to one another. The theory of social capital argues that associational membership should, for example, increase social trust, but this prediction is much less straightforward with regard to memberships in tertiary associations. From the

> point of view of social connectedness, the Environmental Defence Fund and a bowling league are just not in the same category."

That the critique of harnessing formal organisations only as a means of producing social capital, has arisen as a consequence of *directly focusing* on the micro-level scale of one-to-one reciprocity is also highly relevant, for three reasons. First it offers a warning not to assume or take for granted the role that micro-level exchange plays in creating social capital. Second, that any approach which interprets formal volunteering as the *best way* in terms of harnessing social capital is not only flawed (in that it overestimates the importance of volunteering in day-to-day life) but also that it threatens to exacerbate the differences between groups in society (e.g. lower and higher income groups) rather than reconcile them. Focusing on the results of the UK 2000 Time Survey, and looking in particular at three aspects of social capital - time spent volunteering (formal participation), time spent helping others or providing care (informal involvement) and social time with friends and family (informal sociality) - Ruston (2003: 1) concluded that:

- Volunteering, helping and socialising tasks take up a relatively small part of the average day of all adults – 4 minutes are spent volunteering, 8 minutes helping others and 44 minutes socialising as a main activity.

- People aged 45 and over are more likely than any other age group to volunteer or help other people.

- Of those who report socialising, men tend to have more uninterrupted time than women.

- Volunteers, helpers and socialisers spend more time than the population overall with others in the community.

- During week days, women have less 'free time' than men, yet still spend slightly more time socialising and helping.

- On any given day, around half of people do no volunteering, helping or socialising. This tends to be more common for employed people on weekdays and for men at weekends.

Finally, the research has also constructively offered ways to develop one-to-one reciprocity, focused on working with the prevailing attitudes for those whom participation formal volunteering is neither the desired nor preferred option.

Based on these findings, it is reiterated that future ways to harness social capital therefore should not solely rely on the macro route of formal volunteering, but should take into account

initiatives such as Local Economic and Trading Schemes (Williams et. al 2000), Employee Mutuals (Leadbetter and Martin, 1997) and Time Banks (Boyle, 1999).

3.9. Conclusion

One of the main aims of this chapter on social capital, "that simultaneously economic, sociological and political concept (Szreter, 2000: 57) was to illustrate the rich depth and complexity of social networks in the hope that a greater understanding of some of the dynamics which underpin mutual aid could be appreciated. In many ways the decisions made by the individual, and captured neatly in the geographies of mutual aid are neatly divorced from the embeddedness of the wider context of the social relations in which they are made. The decision-making framework is seen to reside in the individual, when actually, it would be truer to say that the locus of power resides in the networks which connect the individual with their wider relations. As Mendell (2003: 2) argues:

> "It is our social, indeed our dialogical nature that governs our lives as individuals, that determines how we identify ourselves in the context of and with others, as well as our membership in social groups."

Thus to return to the observation made in the opening paragraph – mutual aid is not an expression of individuality but rather a network of solidarity. And yet this network of solidarity is far from evenly distributed and accessible to all in society: there are a great many winners and losers when one looks at the meso, micro and macro levels of production and exchange harnessed through their embedded social relationship(s).

Fundamentally, one of the key strengths of social capital theory is its ability to draw attention simultaneously to these different structural levels. Hence any insight targeted on a micro-level (one-to-one reciprocal exchanges) must be acutely aware of the wider structural environment which potentially impact greatly on the nature of social networks, So too an understanding must be made explicit that existing networks of social capital are temporal and of any fixed quality or quantity over a period of time. Social capital has to be continuously maintained, being:

> "The product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term." (Bourdieu, 1977: 52)

If social capital was seen as a means of entering the very foundations of mutual aid, then likewise the heart of social capital was laid bare through the discussion of trust and reciprocity. The debate about the precise relationship between trust and reciprocity at best an inexact science, nevertheless suggested that mutual aid has a role to play in creating the constructive seeds from which social capital could flourish. Again though there are no absolute hard and fast rules which one can play by in the world of social interaction. What may well work in certain situations to harness trust and reciprocity may fail abysmally in another. This is not a concession that nothing is possible, and that harnessing social capital is more luck than anything, but it is simply to acknowledge that every situation has its own unique baggage which will affect its ability to develop social networks and reciprocal exchange.

Academics have attempted to make sense of the multi-dimensional nature of this complexity of interaction between individuals through generalising findings. Hence, with respect to the work on mutual aid which identifies an "inner-outer" pattern of aid, the reasons behind this are suggested by the principle of homophily and heterophilous interactions suggested in section 3.3.1. and also by Granovetter's (1973) strength of weak ties, strength of strong ties in section 3.3.3; and in bonding, bridging and linking networks of social capital in section 3.3.4.

A relationship that exists both in and outside the individual's social capital brings into the equation the notion of community and place. Coleman's work on closure or density in social relations suggests a relationship which transcends the immediate interaction between individuals, one which carries with it a sense of networks, trust, social norms and sanctions which exist *in situ*. Thus it is suggested that the complexity of social networks in explaining the process and dynamic of mutual aid can only go so far: it becomes the paradox neatly suggested by Torgerson (2001: 477):

> "... relationships do not constitute a mechanism that rules the community, but are themselves guided by principles constituting the community."

The discussion of community emphasises the point that social capital is not so much and individual asset, but a relational one, and it also suggests that one should not be so quick to promote social capital as only possessing inevitably intrinsically beneficial qualities within society. Rather, social capital, also has negative implications, which one should be aware of, which include the exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedom and downward levelling norms.

The purpose of focusing on research into social capital and its relevance for empirical research on mutual aid is largely self-evident, not least as the interest in social capital has resulted in an increasing number of contributions intent on adopting the view that 'the social' and 'the economic' are inextricably intertwined (e.g. Granovetter and Swedburg, 1992; Barnes, 1995; Thrift and Olds, 1996). The research conducted at both the meso (formal volunteering) and micro-levels of exchange both hold implications for future research on mutual aid, and community participation. That social capital has become such a mainstream concept in the corridors of the policy making community is again a testament to its importance within contemporary society in the advanced economies. Such a foundation of research focused on unpaid and voluntary work , through the quantifying of such indicators as civic engagement, neighbourliness, social networks, social support and perceptions of the local area, does offer a constructive line of enquiry for future empirical research to take notice of. However, marrying the findings of research conducted from the perspective of mutual aid with the means of harnessing social capital from the policy makers perspective suggests that there is still much work which needs to be undertaken. There is definite need to focus on the determinants of social capital rather than just its impacts (Routledge and von Amsberg (2003). Indeed the ONS (2001: 3-4) echoed this in the conclusion to one report, though with an emphasis on qualitative research to complement the quantitative analysis observing that:

> "There was a call for more qualitative research concerning social capital to explore capacity potential, values/ norms and individual attributes, and their interaction with social capital... and carry out qualitative research to examine motivations/ perception of trust"

The complementary ties that have been made explicit between mutual aid with social capital theory carry on seamlessly into the following chapter, though the focus is on the process of social, specifically *reciprocal* exchange within society. Portes (1998: 8) made the crucial observation that:

> The final source of social capital finds its classical roots in Durkheim's ([1893] 1933) theory of social integration and the sanctioning capacity of group rituals. As in the case of reciprocity exchanges, the motivation of donors of socially mediated gifts is instrumental, but in this case, the expectation of repayment is not based on knowledge of the recipient, but on the insertion of both actors in a common social structure."

Hence, this a significant dimension of social capital, and far from being an additional extra, promises that an understanding of this exchange will significantly aid an understanding of

the dynamic within mutual aid, specifically paid mutual aid, which has had little attention in academic discourse and in the social sciences in particular.

Chapter 4

The Exchange of Gifts

"Now if the gift, *if there is any*, would no doubt be related to economy. One cannot treat the gift, this goes without saying, without treating this relation to economy, even to the money economy. But is not the gift, if there is any, also that which interrupts economy? That which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange...If there is gift, the *given* of the gift (*that which* one gives, *that which* is given, the gift as given thing or act of donation) must not come back to giving (let us not already say to the subject, to the donor). It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure." Derrida (1992: 7)

"A gift is like a tennis ball with an elastic band attached to it. The owner of the ball may lose possession of it for a time, but the ball will spring back to its owner if the elastic band is given a jerk." Gregory (1980: 640)

Introduction

The spectrum of mutual aid outlined in Table 2.1. introduced the concept of paid or monetized mutual aid. The notion of giving and receiving gifts to legitimise certain tasks undertaken by friends, family or neighbours was then highlighted in the discussion highlighting the rationales for participation in mutual aid. Specifically, gifts (which under certain circumstances also included money) allowed individuals to effectively avoid the taboo of one-way relations, and thus not being perceived by others as a charity case, or being in the potentially awkward position of owing other people (non-kin relations especially) a favour. This chapter aims to insert this gift-relationship seen in mutual aid within the wider literature of gift-giving in contemporary exchange. By focusing heavily on the social anthropological tradition, and its call to look beyond the narrow view of exchange in society that it is always rational and profit-motivated, the chapter focuses on the wider nature of gifts in contemporary exchange. The specific aims of the chapter are to illustrate some of the more prominent roles that gifts have played within society; discuss the implications that gift-giving has on wider social relationships, social networks, and class structures; examine several key motivations that underpin the gift and in doing so highlighting moral goals, social relations, the need to avoid one-way reciprocity, and the ability to demonstrate wealth, power and prestige). The final section addresses certain negative connotations of gift-giving.

4.1. The gift economy in contemporary exchange

The majority of *homo sapiens* can no doubt reflect upon a personal example where they have either received or given a gift, and the main reasons why they receive or give a gift. Perhaps the gift was given as thanks for helping out (e.g. you received a bottle of wine form a neighbour for looking after their cat while they were away on holiday); or for more traditional, and annually celebrated occasions such as a birthday or Christmas; or at (other special) occasions such as weddings and funerals. However this expression within society is not some modern phenomenon: anthropologists have long established that gift and gift-giving have played prominent roles within exchange in the earliest of societies, and indeed formed the foundation of some of the most basic structures in society. For the purposes of discussing paid mutual aid this argument is important: popular social exchange through gifts is not some contemporary capitalist inspired phenomenon. But this is not to say that the modern gift economy is immune to the influence of capitalism on some level. Certainly one can think about the 'commercial racket' at Christmas time to see an example where gift-giving has been commercially driven.

Gift-giving is a popular and important dimension of social anthropology, with research interests focusing among such aspects as, the spirit of the gift, the principle of reciprocity, the relationship between gifts and commodities and so on. In doing so, the social anthropological tradition has consistently offered a stern critique to any view, dominant or otherwise, that exchange in society is always rational and profit motivated (e.g. Davis, 1992; Lee, 2000; Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1954; Zelizer, 1994, Yan, 1996). This is evident in discussions which revolve around the notion of giving in exchange. As Lin (2001: 146) observes:

> "From early on, anthropologists have paid attention to the relational aspect of exchanges and have argued strongly that many of these patterns are not based on economic or rational calculations. For example, Radcliffe-Brown (1952) described the exchanges among the Andaman Islanders as "a moral one – to bring about a friendly feeling between the two persons who participate" (p. 471). Malinowski (1922) drew sharp distinctions between economic exchange and social exchange (ceremonial exchange) in his analysis of Kula exchanges in the Trobriand Islands and suggested that "the real reward (of exchanges) lies in the prestige, power, and privileges which his position confers upon him." (p.61) Levi-Strauss (1949) cited studies by Mauss, Firth, and other anthropologists in his argument that exchanges, including economic transactions, are "vehicles and instruments for realities of another order: influence, power, sympathy, status, emotion" and stated that it is the exchange which counts and not the things exchanged" (Levi-Strauss 1969, p 139)".

Through research, a number of modern social anthropologists have argued that contemporary exchanges in the advanced economies are less infused with social meaning and less symbolic than those present in traditional 'less-advanced' economies (e.g.; Mauss, 1954; Polayni, 1944; Lewis, 1989). Indeed this is a commonly held view, as Granovetter (1985: 482) illustrates:

> "It has long been the majority view among sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and historians that (economic) behaviour was heavily embedded in social relations in pre-market societies but became more autonomous with modernization. This view sees the economy as an increasingly separate, differentiated sphere in modern society, with economic transactions defined no longer by the social or kinship obligations of those transactions but by the rational calculations of individual gain. (Indeed) it is sometimes argued that the traditional situation is reversed: instead of economic life being submerged in social relations, these relations become an epiphenomenon of the market."

However, the giving of gifts in contemporary exchange cannot be not be interpreted either as a distortion, a manifestation of imperfection which can be ignored, or alternatively, trivialised by stating that only small quantities persist (e.g. Berking, 1998; Thrift and Olds, 1996). Undoubtedly the gift economy exists as a part of, not apart from, the wider economic environment. For example, Mary Douglas's (1990: xviii) reading of Mauss (1954) suggests gift economy operates within a cause and effect relationship with capitalism:

> "The gift cycle echoes Adam Smith's invisible hand: gift complements market as far as it operates where the latter is absent. Like the market, it supplies each individual with personal incentives for collaborating in the pattern of exchanges. Gifts are given in the context of public drama, with nothing secret about them... (Indeed) the gift economy is more visible than the market. Just by being visible, the resultant distribution of goods and services is more readily subject to public scrutiny and judgements of fairness than are the results of market exchange."

Hence, when discussing the gift in contemporary exchange, it is important that one does not unnaturally divorce this exchange from the wider capitalist economy. However, the gift-economy is defined by rules and customs which may differ significantly from the market economy, as Derrida (1992: 7) observed:

> "If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain *aneconomic*. Not that it remains foreign to the circle, buy it must *keep* a relation of foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of familiar foreignness."

Indeed, much anthropological critique of the 'gift' shows how the conventions of the market place are suspended and replaced by quite different conventions absent from overly neo-classical readings of the economic. Hyde (1979:9) for example argues:

> "A market exchange has an equilibrium or stasis: you pay to balance the scale. But when you give a gift there is momentum, and the weight shifts from body to body."

This insight is something that Marcel Mauss (1954: 98) alludes to in the conclusion to his most famous essay, "The Gift". Within this, Mauss illustrated the complex web of exchange and obligation involved in the act of giving, drawing on rich evidence from Europe (Scandinavia), Polynesia, Melanesia, to the American Northwest. He concluded:

> "It is our western societies who have recently made man an 'economic animal'. But we are not yet all creatures of this genus. Among the masses and elites in our society purely irrational expenditure is commonly practiced. It is still characteristic of a few of our fossilized remnants of our aristocracy. Homo oeconomicus is not behind us, but lies ahead..."

What is suggested here, and given extra emphasis through contemporary research conducted on mutual aid, and work beyond employment, is that it is far too simplistic to argue that gift-exchange is completely subservient to hegemony of formal exchange, certainly to the extent that Granovetter (1985) has implied.

4.2. Types of gift

What is a gift though? Mauss (1954: 6-7) apparently argues that almost anything has the potential to be a status of 'gift', as long as it is given voluntarily:

> "What they (individuals/ collectives) exchange is not solely property and wealth, moveable and immovable goods, and things economically useful. In particular, such exchanges are acts of politeness: banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs...These total services and counter-services are committed to in a somewhat voluntary form (as) presents and gifts."

In the context of mutual aid, items which have been given and received as gifts for work undertaken have covered a wide spectrum, but usually involve what may be considered regular common place items, such as a box of chocolates, bottle of wine, garden plants, to a stick of rock from the seaside (see White, 2000). But ultimately, what decides or transforms

the object into 'the gift' is the way in which it is perceived and offered: As Yan (1996: 2) observed:

> "Throughout the first week of the festival (New Year in a Chinese village), the villagers were busy visiting one another, and I soon noticed that everyone carried a small basket or bag filled with home-made steamed buns. I was surprised to learn that these buns were "gifts" (*liwu*) to be exchanged among the villagers. In Beijing, I had thought of a gift as something unusual and lovely – a cute toy, beautiful cloth, or a box of candy. How could these steamed buns be considered gifts? They were just ordinary food. And why did everyone give and receive the same kind of gift? I asked my mother, and she, who had no more rural experience than I, told me that this was the practice in rural areas."

But beyond this gifts are generally assumed to involve something other than money being given between individuals, however as the next section argues, this perception fails to acknowledge the symbolic dimensions which can be imposed on money, and transform it into a genuine bona fide gift.

4.2.1. Money as a gift

One of the more interesting, and certainly challenging, facets of gift-giving comes when the 'gift' itself has not just monetary value, but is actually the currency used to otherwise 'buy' people, products, goods, and services. There is a seemingly taken-for-granted distinction that money, when exchanged for work undertaken, is somehow radically different than if the recipient of the work had given a 'gift' in another guise, such is the social meanings and interpretations associated with 'money'. In arguing against the dogma of the intrinsic value of money, Zelizer (1998: 1) argued:

> "We've assumed, as have most social thinkers for the past 100 years... that there are two basic truths about money. First, that money is strictly a matter of rational calculation and second that money depersonalises all interaction... In ordinary everyday conversation, people convey similar views that 'a dollar is a dollar is a dollar', that money corrupts and you shouldn't bring money into friendships or the friendship will fly away."

Yet money is not a natural phenomenon, but is itself a social construct, just as the economy it represents is also socially constructed. Hutchinson and Mellor (2004: 16) note that, "Economies are not universal systems of forces, they are social structures made up of real people trying to live meaningful lives." To an extent, money can be whatever you want it to be – it has no fixed or absolute points of reference. In other words it can be manipulated into

something which is not corruptive and certainly not alienating: money can easily become a gift stripped of any overt 'economic' values which would otherwise be construed as 'buying' the time or resources of those whom it was given to, as if their 'gesture' (in the context of mutual aid) was available to sell. In the remarkable and wide-ranging discussion of the social, psychological and philosophical aspects of money, Georg Simmel (2004: 156) comments that, "Money has acquired the value it possesses" which is something Zelizer (1998: 1-2) reinforces:

> "If you look at people's practices and see how money works in social life, you see people transforming money rather than being transformed by it. So rather than letting it destroy social ties, people are incorporating money into kinship ties and friendships and all kinds of social relations. What is surprising is how creative people have been in making distinctions among kinds of monies that serve or fit these social relations."

A sort of third way between money as a gift, and objects as gifts are those of tokens (literally the token gesture). The very notion of gift-tokens, and book-tokens, are examples of where a 'gift' straddles the boundary between gesture and financial reward in a reciprocal relationship. An understanding of the dynamic between gifts involving money and other gifts will be made in Chapter 10, Section 10.8.6.

4.3. Significance of gifts in reciprocal relationships

> We know too that the returns we make should equal, or better still exceed what we have ourselves received. For, as our traditional religious lores assures us, it is more blessed to give than to receive." (Lewis, 1994: 199)

There are many implications that the giving and receiving of gifts have for social relationships. Many implications are highly subjective, arbitrary, and imprecisely defined according to the fact that they rest on delicately posed cultural conventions which are highly manipulated by the prevailing local and personal environment. Relating to mutual aid, the giving of a token gift in response to a task being undertaken represents a highly personal acknowledgement exchange between the giver and the receiver. In this way, it is the successful acceptance of the gift, which legitimises the exchange involved, and encourages a common ground between individuals to be found. Gift-giving is one way which can lubricate reciprocity by effectively attracting and tying-in individuals who know each other less well from the wider community, and over time encourage more informal bonds of reciprocity (by promoting trust and familiarity between the actors) to emerge.

4.3.1. Social networks

In theory, the giving of gifts is voluntary. However this notion is disputed quite ferociously (e.g. Mauss, 1954). Mary Douglas's (1990: viiii-x) draws attention to this argument that there are no such thing as free gifts by observing:

> "What is wrong with the so-called free gift is the donor's intention to be exempt from return gifts coming from the recipient. Refusing requital puts the act of giving outside any mutual ties. Once given, the free gift entails no further claims from the recipient...A gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction."

Gifts are seen to be accompanied by three central obligations: to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. Following this argument, from the perspective of social networks, then the giving and receiving of gifts is effective in terms of both extending and consolidating these networks (and in the process acting as a social lubricant for mutual aid). Acknowledging the traditional anthropological understanding of reciprocity as being the primary building block of community, and the neoclassical economists view of dyadic ties that evolve from social interests, Gudeman (2001: 81) suggests that:

> "...providing gifts and enacting reciprocity are tactical acts that extend the base to persons outside a community. As tokens of apportionment and forays in expanding a community's borders, they are a secondary processes. Not a rule but a process, reciprocity is one way of groping with uncertainty at the limits of a community: offering a gift probes, defends, secures, and expands the borders of community."

Lewis (1994: 197) reinforces this observation, that by exchanging gifts or presents individuals desiring to create new (wider) relationships can (if accepted) effectively, "...establish the unquestioning mutualism characteristic of morally binding social ties." Using the language familiar to the social capital theorists, the giving of gifts can both help bring individuals (or tie in) into networks where they were previously not known (bridging networks of social capital) as well as, by nature of their momentum (expecting a return) bind people close together who know each other well (bonding networks of social capital). As Yan (1996: 1) argues:

> "It has been widely recognised that gift giving is one of the most important models of social exchange in human societies. The obligatory give-and-take maintains, strengthens, and creates various social bonds – be they co-operative, competitive, or antagonistic."

A further important consideration is that though a gift may ultimately be given or received on a one-to-one basis (e.g. as thanks for work undertaken) and hence encourage a closer, deeper bonding between the individuals concerned, gifts also send out an effective, and highly visible signal to the wider social relations. To illustrate this, should a household receive a box of expensive chocolates from a neighbour for looking after their house, and a visiting friend is invited to have one of these chocolates, then it would not be out of the ordinary for the friends to ask where the chocolates (or flowers or whatever) came from. Thus, through the gift, there is a connection, an identification and association that the friend will go away about an individual (neighbour) whom they have never met.

Ultimately, Levi-Strauss (1969: 139) argued that exchanges are "vehicles and instruments for realities of another order: influence, power, sympathy, status, emotion" and stated that "it is the exchange which counts and not the things exchanged". In this sense, it is the spirit of the giving which is more important than the physical nature that the gift takes. And this acts as a powerful motivation behind giving gifts to bring social ties together, in a mutually acceptable manner:

4.3.2. Class Structure

Those who are included in reciprocal voluntary cycles of gift exchange are also necessarily defined by those who are excluded. The momentum activated with gifts-giving, may become a powerful, and highly visible, way of consolidating and reinforcing the dominant 'in' social groups (see Mauss, 1954). For example, in her foreword to The Gift, Douglas (1990) cited the social paths of Polynesian gifts which revealed and reinforced a stable, hierarchical structure. This pattern was reproduced many times in many places elsewhere, from American Indians, and Australian hunters, to Roman, Germanic, and other Indo-European cultures to such an extent that Douglas (1990: xii) concluded that one of the common basic principles in gift exchange is that:

> "Gift cycles engage persons in permanent commitments that articulate the dominant institutions."

Referring again to an ethnographic account by Yan, (1996: 2-3) commenting on a Chinese village New Year celebrations, the localised ritual that a gift had for inserting the individual into the dominant social norms of a particular community, and perpetuating those norms:

> "When I witnessed my uncle (my father's brother) and aunt (my uncle's wife) receiving a guest (and his gift), I became even more confused. The visitor, who was my aunt's sister's son, first kowtowed to my aunt and uncle; he then offered up a basket to them, telling them that it was a gift from his family and it brought all best wishes to my aunt and uncle. When the two men began talking and drinking, I followed my aunt to the kitchen and discovered that under the red cloth cover were two bottles of wine on top of several steamed buns. My aunt took one bottle of wine and half the buns out of the basket, and then, strangely enough, she put a dozen of her own recently steamed buns in the gift container. Perhaps noticing my curious expression, my aunt told me that on such occasions one usually took only half the gift and offered some additional goods to the gift giver. "You can't let your guest return home with an empty basket", she said. Later, when the guest was leaving, my aunt returned the basket to him while thanking him for his nice gift. The guest in turn complimented my aunt on her gift, telling her that she should have taken the other bottle of wine and the rest of the steamed buns. My aunt replied, "We have received your good feelings conveyed by the gift and we are very happy. Please take the rest back to your family." They argued back and forth for a while and repeatedly expressed gratitude to each other before the guest finally went home."

To extend gifts and giving beyond the favoured/ immediate networks, in this view, is something which is less common, by virtue of it being less natural, and certainly less impulsive.

4.4. Motivations

This section considers three additional important rationales behind the giving of gifts, that have not been mentioned so far: the first being the moral imperative; the second is that of avoiding one-way social relations; and the third as a sign of wealth, power and prestige.

4.4.1. A moral imperative

What are the main motivations that underpin the exchange of gifts? Thus far it has been argued that gifts (can be) an effective means of enhancing social ties, of gaining trust, favour and familiarity between individuals (and potentially within their wider social networks), and preserving the status quo in terms of class structures:

> "Through gift giving social bonds are created, individuals are joined, sharing with each other the back and forth of the social power that is associated with the gifts exchanged. It places the individual into a structure of 'total services'. (Kosalka, 1999: 5)

Lewis (1994) also adds that the exchange of gifts act as a means of sustaining attenuated social relationships, in which distance threatens to sever. In studying the rules of generosity in the Andaman Islands, Mauss (1954) felt that the gift and presents exchanged did not serve the same purpose as commerce and exchange would do in formal relationships. *Rather the motivation was a moral one.* By giving one is giving oneself, with the intention of fostering friendly relations between the individuals in question. Thus if the gift failed to achieve this, everything that rested upon it has failed.

4.4.2. Avoiding one-way social relations

As highlighted in Section 2.4.2. regarding mutual aid (especially beyond kinship exchange), there was found to be a general wariness on the part of both suppliers and receivers about engaging in such activity on an unpaid basis. Equally, there was a widespread reluctance to be seen as a 'charity case' with people avoiding one-way social relations at all costs (Kempson, 1996). Charity becomes 'wounding' for they who are forced to accept it (Mauss, 1954). Hence, the recognition that one-way giving was socially unacceptable prevented people from offering unpaid help to others in such a manner. Williams et al. (2004: 107) argued that there were only four circumstances where unpaid reciprocal exchanges between friends and neighbours such exchanges occurred in these rural areas:

> "When it was felt to be unacceptable to pay somebody" (e.g., when they lent you a hammer)
>
> "When it was felt inappropriate to pay them (e.g., when a colleague from work did you a favour);
>
> "When payment was impossible" (e.g., when somebody refused to be paid because they wanted an unpaid favour from you at a later date) and
>
> "When the social relations mitigated against payment" (e.g., when the recipient could not afford to pay and thus had no choice but to offer a favour in return).

Instead, the widespread preference was for money or gifts to be involved in transactions. The rationale behind this was that, when money or gifts were exchanged, one could avoid having any obligation 'hanging over you' to reciprocate favours but, at the same time, the wheels were being oiled for the maintenance or creation of closer relations without being

'duty bound'. A gift was also advantageous in that it allowed an individual to give something tangible and constructive back in recognition of the help received; a visible sign of their gratitude and thanks.

Undoubtedly money as payment for the work undertaken would avoid one-way social relations. But, unless the relations involved accept the need to receive/ accept money as a 'gift' then the insertion of money into the equation for a job undertaken is, potentially, highly problematical (and discussed in Chapter 10, Section 10.8.6.). In an ambiguous social field, money is problematical not least as it stands a greater risk of being rejected, than say if a bottle of wine, or other such 'gift' was involved. A gift is preferred over money not least as it stands a better chance of being accepted in the spirit in which it was intended. There is less danger in the signs being misread, which may occur, for example, if the recipient left feeling uncomfortable because they had accepted money, when they had not intended to have done the task for any financial reward.

Ultimately a gift, as a means of avoiding one-way social relations assumes the form of (an object) which is hard for the recipient to refuse. Therefore it needs to be seen as an appropriate way of expressing thanks or gratitude, or of giving something back to another (where the individual couldn't reciprocate (for example, health reasons or lack of necessary skills) or the nature of the job meant it difficult to reciprocate. In this way, gift-vouchers or tokens are yet another alternative way to circumvent the unadulterated 'cash-in-hand' scenario, while still being a means to an end which the recipient has complete control over.

4.4.3. Sign of wealth, power, prestige

Kosalka (1999: 6) argues that the giving of a gift is senseless if it did not take on the meaning of an acquisition. Hence, "Giving must become acquiring of power... thus paradoxically, by giving one is in fact gaining in prestige and societal power and status." This is reinforced by Bergquist and Ljungberg (2001), who argue that the giver gets power from giving.

Giving gifts is certainly a conspicuous sign of wealth, a sign that an individual is both willing, and can afford *to give*. Hence, in certain situations, it can spiral into a mode of competitive consumption (as in the Potlatch system discussed later). But even in a more controlled environment, gifts have the effect of painting a wider picture of the giver to the receiver as a

consequence of their actions. Such a point is made by Georges Bataille (1967: 65) in 'La Part Maudite' (The Accursed Share volume 1):

> "(As) an article of exchange...the *gift* that one made of it was a sign of glory, and the object itself had a radiance of glory. By giving one exhibited one's wealth and one's good fortune (one's power)."

This is tied into the argument that the reciprocal nature of gift-giving reinforces class structure, and is undertaken by people of similar, common backgrounds. In this way the gift is recognised as being valuable in the (context) community in which it is present, and thus has an associated status for the individual(s) who provide the gift in the eyes of the immediate community.

4.5. Negative effects of gift-giving

As with social capital, the (flow of) gifts have a negative side, which is often overlooked, yet vital to comprehend. The negative effects promoted by giving gifts are something which Mauss repeatedly stresses:

> "To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond and alliance and commonality." (1954: 17)

> "The unreciprocated gift still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it." (1954: 83)

For those locked into the obligation to give, to receive, and to reciprocate, the destructive element of the gift – followed to its natural conclusion - has been well documented, and makes for fascinating reading. Of these perhaps the Potlatch system is the best known: The Potlatch (potlatch means 'giving') of the Indians of the north-west coast of America and Canada offers an interesting perspective on how systems of gift-exchange alter their wider environment (Codere, 1950; Lewis, 1994; Piddocke, 1968. Bataille (1967) referred to it as the gift of rivalry: the paradox of gift reduced to the acquisition of a power. Essentially, the Potlatch emphasises the competitive (and destructive) element of gift giving. Having received gifts - usually after a feast or party - the recipients of these gifts were then expected to return the compliment, and would lose the competition for honour if they did not return more than they had received. As Lewis (1994) points out, viciously competitive Potlatches inevitably ended in the bankruptcy of the unsuccessful candidate. Douglas (1990) observes

that potlatch is the product of a total system of giving, with the emphasis on a total display of luxury and excess.

But beyond the potlatch system, and coming back to the environment under which mutual aid is conducted, there is great potential for the giving of a gift to be woefully inadequate or over-the-top in proportion for the work undertaken. Though gift-giving can help forge social bonds, the chances of getting it wrong are significantly increased when the social actors involved do not know each other very well (and therefore would be unable to personalise the gift). All things being equal, should the gift not match the time, effort, and energy that has been invested into the task then the likelihood is that the supplier of the work is likely to think twice before committing themselves in future. Should the gift be over the top then Highfield (2004: 1) – referring specifically to Christmas gifts, but highly applicable to this illustration - observes that an emotional debt occurs:

> "(Adults) can embarrass each other by the generosity of the present and so (often quite deliberately) incur a debt. Feeling emotionally in debt is uncomfortable, particularly for the guilt- prone. Better to err on under- rather than over-payment."

Ultimately, one of the main problems of giving and receiving gifts to legitimise informal work undertaken is that there are no hard, fast rules to play by, and few opportunities for trial and error to occur.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter, it is hoped, has illustrated the very central position that gift-giving has had in exchange, past and present. At its best, gift-giving provides a constructive means of legitimising exchange undertaken through mutual aid within society. Where successful, gift giving has the ability to connect people who do not know each other well, thereby extend existing social ties, yet also maintaining, strengthening, and binding social networks between people who do know each other well. Gift-giving has long been a part of community identity, or ritual, and a key way of forming unity and identity between and within groups. In many ways identity the exchange of gifts is a sign of wealth, power and prestige, which helps reinforce the dominant established structural hierarchies over time.

With explicit regard to gift-giving as a means of reciprocation for tasks undertaken through paid mutual aid, there is a great deal to learn. Judging by previous research, what is clear is that giving gifts does allow individuals a valuable option to circumvent the taboos associated

with one-way social relations, and as such legitimises mutual aid. This is a crucial point to take notice of. Given this argument, future research conducted on mutual aid would do well to establish just how significant is paid mutual aid is different localities. Indeed how and in what ways would paid mutual aid vary? As a necessary complement to this question, the other obvious areas to address relate to the rationales underpinning paid mutual aid. For example, how and why do people decide who to exchange with, and who not to exchange with through paid mutual aid. Indeed, what are the factors underpinning the decision making process with regard to the question of 'what' to exchange? And finally, what are the *dynamics* at work that bridge unpaid and paid mutual aid?

Chapter 5

Space, Place, Locality

> "Geographers have been largely successful in explaining socio-spatial processes due to their openness to theory over the past few decades. In achieving this success, however, geographers have lost sight of the complexity of their object of study." (Archer, 1993: 498)

> "Dominant locales structure people's life paths in space and time, place constraints on their interaction possibilities, provide the main arenas of interaction (and thus are sites of conflict), provide the activity structure of daily routines, are major sites of socialization process, and so on." Peet (1998: 150)

Introduction

Previous research into the geographies of mutual aid has been predominantly situated within specific geographical neighbourhoods. Yet, despite this, there has rarely been an explicit dialogue that has emerged which looks at how and in what ways space and place may influence these geographies of mutual aid. Beyond the general socio-spatial demographics that have been identified in neighbourhoods in which the resident populations' experiences of mutual aid have invariably been aggregated, locality has been conspicuous only by its absence. Thus under such a dichotomous framework, conclusions related to mutual aid and social exchange *in geographical neighbourhoods* appear unnecessarily dis-engaged and detached from the places in which they are situated in. The central argument in this chapter is that space invites a further means of analysis to identify and understand the (often highly localised) process and complex dynamics of mutual aid.

Over the last thirty years there have been vocal calls within human geography to ensure that space is (re)inserted and present within geographical enquiry. The focus on a reconstituted regional geography, evident through structuration theory (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, Giddens, 1979, 1981, Bourdieu, 1977) for example, placed great emphasis on re-discovering, re-embracing and re-inserting the importance of space in human society. Almost fifteen years ago, Henry Lefebvre (1991: 412) noted:

> "It is impossible, in fact, to avoid the conclusion that space is assuming an increasingly important role in supposedly "modern" societies, and that if this role is not already preponderant it very soon will be."

With relevance to studies focused on the micro-levels of social exchange in society, Lefebvre (1991: 404) drew the notable conclusion that: "Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. Their underpinning is spatial..."

Coming from a similar perspective, the geographer Richard Peet (1998: 149) observed:

> "The social activities in a region (which, Thrift (1983) says, *is lived through*, and not in) takes place as a continuous "discourse" rooted in shared material-situations, within cultures having both limiting and active capabilities."

Certainly, to fully explore the dynamics of mutual aid, then it appears vital to include a "discourse" that includes the surrounding spatial environment within which mutual aid is situated.

The chapter attempts to make 'locality' visible when discussing the dynamics of mutual aid. To do this, the chapter focuses on the wider literature involving the concepts of locality, place and space and the relationships between them; asks why locality matters and why locality is relevant for research involving mutual aid (focusing on three particular aspects: 'layout', 'history of place' and the impact of a 'crisis). From this a conclusion showing how locality, in enabling/ disabling social capital networks (e.g. levels of awareness of others, form common bonds in a community, can facilitate, consolidate and encourage reciprocal networks to form) and general perceptions of community can influence levels of mutual aid.

5.1. Defining place, space, and locality

Before taking a more in-depth look at the literature surrounding locality studies, and addressing how these can help contribute to a discussion on mutual aid, it is worth defining the main – highly interrelated and keenly contested - concepts which will be used, beginning with place, space and locality.

5.1.1. Place and space

From the very start it is important to understand that though place and space are closely linked, place is *not* the same as space, is *not* reducible to space, and thus each should be viewed as interchangeable with the other. So what is meant by the reference 'place'? Gieryn

(2000: 464) considers place as having *a geographic location*, "a place is a unique spot in the universe"; *a material form*, "it is a complication of things or objects at some particular spot in the universe...place are worked by people. We make places"; and *an investment with meaning and value*, "places are doubly constructed; most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined".

In contrast, 'space' is an altogether more abstract concept than place. As Gieryn (2000: 465) observes:

> "Space is what place becomes when the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are sucked out. Put positively, place is space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations."

In this way spaces *become* place (or place to *become* space) as a consequence of the specific material forms and cultural interpretations present or absent. Yi-Fu Tuan (1974: 6) introduced the concept of 'humanized space' to account for the transition from space (unknown/ alien) to place (colonized/ inhabited/ settled).

> "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value...The ideas 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place."

Put simplistically, there is a continuum present, which has space at one end and place at the other. Thus when humans invest meaning and experience in space, then space is transformed into place. Cresswell (2004: 11) elaborates on this, arguing that:

> "Neighbourhoods, villages, towns and cities are easily referred to as places... But place is also a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world. When we look at the world as a world of places we see different things. *We see attachments and connections between people and place. We see worlds of meaning and experience.*"

Or, as Castree et al (2004: 65) argue, "places are where people live...Place gives meaning to people, and people give meaning to place."

5.1.2. Locality

There is general lack of consensus about the technical meaning of locality within human geography. In lay terms, Painter (2001: 456) defines locality as "a place or region of sub-national, spatial scale." A more elaborate definition of locality, rather than being inferred through what locality was concerned with, has come from Peet (1998: 150) suggested a locale to be:

> "A region (which) provides the constraints and opportunities for action, the base for what is known about the world, and the materials for changing it."

Within human geography in the 1980s, it was argued that an understanding of spatial variations in social, political and economic change was important to assist in explain the marked restructuring of economies and their spatial structures, (e.g. Urry, 1981; Massey, 1984). In this context, Painter (2001: 456) highlighted the then contemporary substantive research programmes which heeded this argument, and funded research to look at the impact of restructuring on particular places or regions. Hence:

> "A key concern of these 'locality studies' was to collect detailed empirical evidence to assist the identification of the nature, causes, and consequences of spatial differentiation in processes of change."

Doreen Massey was a dominant voice in stimulating discussion on locality theory, arguing for example that:

> "Localities are not simply space spatial areas you can easily draw a line around... (rather they should be) defined in terms of the sets of social relations or processes in question." (1991: 267)

Commenting on the relationship explicit link between locality research and critical realism, Painter (2001: 457) argued that "localities may become casually powerful social objects in their own right, with effects on wider processes". And it is this intense sense of social relations, embedded in localities, and the powerful transformative impacts that these potentially can have on wider processes that led Cooke (1989: 296) to explicitly fuse the concept of locality with that of citizenship. This led him to the conclusion:

> "Localities are not simply places or even communities: they are the sum of social energy and agency resulting from the clustering of diverse individuals, groups and social interests in space."

Among certain academic quarters however, there is real fear that interpreting locality as causally powerful objects marks a return to spatial fetishism. The concept is too loaded, and too contentious. Painter (2001) draws this conclusion by reference to the scepticism of Duncan and Savage (1989: 192), who argue that the spatial variation in social processes rarely present themselves as unique locality effects. Hence, they prefer instead to talk not of locality but of spatial variation:

> "Most of the time, instead of writing about "locality" researchers should more simply talk about "case study areas", "towns", "labour market areas", or just "areas", "places" and "spatial variations".

5.2. Does space, place and locality matter?

When faced with such concepts as 'the placelessness of place' (Relph, 1976); the 'transcendence of place' (Coleman 1993); 'topicide: the annihilation of place' (Porteous, 1998) then this begs the question: does locality, place or space matter? Is there such a reality as an *authentic* place in this postmodern world faced by the juggernaut of globalisation, where 'space of flows' replace 'space of place' (Castells, 1996; Duncan and Duncan, 1992; Soja, 1985)? Dicken (2001: 458-459) suggests that a nihilistic reading arguing that place does not matter, or not longer matters, is a flawed one, not least as assertions that this is true tend to be (wilfully) neglectful of:

> "The nature of social processes, all of which are inherently spatially structured and, most importantly, embedded in place... At the most basic level, all (human) activities are 'grounded' in specific places."

There is a suggestion that many sociologically based studies, while not ignorant of place in their investigations, have seldom labelled or signposted their interest in place. In otherwords, place is implicit in research, rather than *explicit* (e.g. Gieryn, 2000). This argument has much relevance for the critique on previous research on mutual aid, highlighted in the introduction to this chapter. Both Urry (1981) and Massey (1984, 1991) have argued for the importance of understanding spatial variations in social, political and economic change, which is echoed by Gieryn (2000: 465) "Social processes (difference, power, inequality, collective action) happen through the material forms that we design, build, use, and protect."

On one important level, focusing on locality forces the question as to whether it is the 'spaces' or the 'people' that should be the focus for empirical analysis and the policy-making community. The normative setting for research on social capital/ mutual aid, as highlighted in

Chapters 2 and 3, has been to gauge certain responses at the level of the individual, ranging from socio-economic characteristics (such as age, income, household composition, length of residence) and perceptions of the community (levels of trust, familiarity with neighbours) to addressing levels of activity in both informal mutual aid (what tasks are undertaken, how often, involving whom) and formal mutual aid (participation in voluntary organisations and associations). Subsequently these answers are aggregated and then applied at the neighbourhood level. Conclusions may then be drawn to say that "Neighbourhood X has 'high' levels of social capital" whereas "Neighbourhood Y has 'low' levels of social capital" or "Neighbourhood Y has low levels of volunteering and one-to-one reciprocity, however neighbourhood Y has high levels of volunteering and high levels of one-to-one reciprocity" and so on.

But this one-way relationship, by allowing no role for the uniqueness of space, place and locality, is potentially highly unsatisfactory in allowing the whole picture to come to the fore when investigating mutual aid. To illustrate, say population "x" shares an *identical* social-economic background with population "y". Looking at map, population "x" is located in a ward in the south-east of a city, whereas population "y" is located in the north-west sector. Now despite all things being equal (in terms of tangible socio-economic characteristics) the findings were that the individuals within population "x" engaged in far higher levels of mutual aid, and had far higher levels of trust and awareness of their neighbourhood. How could this be explained properly, without reference to the specifics of space and place? Any response which failed to take into account the geographical embeddedness of mutual aid would surely be unable to compose an answer which takes all factors in hand.

This leads us back to the earlier question: that of places or people. As Subraminian et al. (2003: 34-35) consider:

> "Whether we should target 'people' or 'places' is an emerging policy debate that has implications for the way we design interventions to build social capital. For example, if neighborhoods (sic) vary even after accounting for key individual factors, then there is a strong case to directly focus on places (such as improving the social and physical infrastructural facilities or undertaking desegregation measures). On the other hand, a lack of evidence for a contextual effect would tilt the policies towards developing interventions that are essentially 'people-mediated (such as investing in education, generating employment opportunities)."

5.3. Key aspects of space and place

5.3.1. Spatial layout

Previous research has indicated that people hold a strong visual sense of community which is bounded by strong spatial signposts (e.g. Castells et al, 2004)). So for example an individual's sense of community may extend to 'the top of my street', or 'my next-door neighbours and the people opposite', or 'all those that live in the west end of this council estate'. These often referred to as 'bounded horizons'.

The spatial layout of a locality is undoubtedly deeply significant in enabling/ disabling social capital between individuals. For example, those households who live in a cul-de-sac, generally have a highly visual awareness of, and identify with, the other households in that area. And it is this community identity which Portes, (1998: 8) considers to be, "a powerful motivational force", which can be the foundation to actually going out into this 'spatial community', having had the opportunity to remotely associate oneself with (to this point) anonymous neighbours. The close spatial distribution of cul-de-sacs also heightens awareness of other neighbours movements: 'Is their car in or out? 'I've just seen lights go on upstairs, must mean that they've just got back', 'They've left their bedroom windows closed for three days – are they on holiday, are they unwell?' and so on.

These informal, routine experiences overcome anonymity and, rather than fragment social networks, not only encourage them to grow but consolidate them as well. This is certainly more likely to happen then in a spatial location where interaction is infrequent and isolated (for example) being at the end house of a single-terrace street, with only industrial buildings opposite.

5.3.2. History

A 'specific history' is an interesting dimension to add to mutual aid, in that history of place implies a specific way – or expectation - of doing things, particular to that place. Thus how is mutual aid 'locked' into a process of (expectation normality) which is strongly influenced by a particular history? Is this a source of continued strength, or, source of weakness? And how is this 'knowledge' articulated successfully? How are these norms or expectations interpreted by residents moving into the area? In what way? Indeed is there any sense of

history and expectation in an area: is the history one of community or anonymity. And how, in what ways, over time, do localities preserve the existing status quo? Or transcend it?

5.3.3. Crisis

What happens to a locality which is under threat and faced with a crisis situation? Do people stay anonymous (see Figure 5.1) or come together, united in a common cause (Figure 5.2)? How do people come together, in what ways? A particular network may evolve naturally or may be socially constructed for a particular shared focus or interest regarding a resource (e.g. protection of the environment)

Figure 5.1. Ongoing crisis in a locality, Leicester

'THE YOBS RULE OUR ESTATE'

Gangs of teenage hooligans have turned life into a waking nightmare for residents of an estate. People living in Elizabeth Court, Wigston, said abuse, vandalism, threats and intimidation have become a daily ordeal. They claimed the estate was being ruled by drunken yobs who hang around in groups of up to 20. Police are investigating several incidents in recent weeks, including arson, vandalism, assault and anti-social behaviour. One woman said she was too frightened to return home after arsonists set fire to the front of her flat in June.

The most recent incident, at the weekend, involved youths wrecking a car. Tenants are now demanding action from the police and Oadby and Wigston Borough Council to put an end to their suffering. Pamela Sadler, 51, has lived in Elizabeth Court for three years. She said: "I'm on anti-depressants because of this. You can't walk down the street without being verbally abused."

Residents said the problem is worse at weekends when crowds of youths hang around drinking, taking drugs and causing trouble. Mrs Sadler said: "The police are always around here for different things but it's just got to the point where something more has got to be done. My grandchildren used to be able to play outside when they came to visit but they can't anymore."

They said up to half a dozen younger tenants and their associates were responsible for the trouble. Rebecca Pegg, council senior housing officer, said complaints were being investigated. Measures being considered include CCTV cameras, court injunctions and evictions. "The recent problems seem to involve the associates of younger tenants congregating outside the flats," she said.

"We've identified about half a dozen people and have had them in for interviews. We will be taking action, of that there is no doubt. In the meantime, we are asking residents to stay in touch with us and keep a record of each incident."

Resident Sheila Jarman said: "This used to be a nice area. I hate the idea of people being evicted but if that is what it comes to, then it has to happen."

Inspector Martin Halse, of Wigston police, said: "We will be working closely with the council and other agencies to try to address some of the issues."

Source: Leicester Mercury 9 August 2005

One can appreciate the way that crisis has caused nations to unite (e.g. the aftermath of the attacks in America on September 11th 2001, the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami in and the earthquake in South Asia in October 2005); but the local flash points which affect only residents in a locality have often played the pivotal role in 'getting people together'. This crisis may take many forms, from a response to houses or a local school being demolished, people being forcibly evicted, to environmental concerns (removal of trees for example along a road). Indeed a perceived absence of strong reaction from within the community (as an antidote to local problems) can leave the crisis unresolved (Figure 5.1): as has been seen in the news recently in the UK, from solidarity in the face of criminals, and drug dealer, to vandals as highlighted in (see Figure 5.2.)

Figure 5.2. Crisis tackled by local residents, West London

COMMUNITY ACTION HELPS DRIVE OUT VANDALS

Residents in a west London suburb who clubbed together to regenerate their local park have been praised by a Government minister. Buildings in Dukes Meadows had become a haven for vandals who broke windows, daubed graffiti and dumped rubbish before locals finally decided they'd had enough.

They set up an organisation of 'friends' and began to restore the park to its former glory. New benches were built, litter collected and graffiti removed. Meanwhile, they drew up a strategy for the long-term regeneration of the area and came up with plans to improve access to the riverside park and renovate play areas. Minister Alun Michael, who is steering a Bill through Parliament aimed at cleaning up public places across the country, said this type of regeneration should be applauded.

"Chiswick residents should be proud of what has been achieved. Vandalism and graffiti is now almost non-existent and the anti-social behaviour that goes with it has been reduced.

"People need to be involved in taking ownership of open spaces in their area and not expect Government or local Government to do it all."

Source: Direct Gov (www.direct.gov.uk) January 25th 2005

A united front in tackling other forms of crime is another response to a social crisis in a spatial locality. The presence of Neighbourhood Watch groups established in a locality are classic examples of how relations have been effectively created with other people (through adversity) through a common cause. Without such groups these people would (potentially) be to the residents merely anonymous citizens who just happened to live in the immediate spatial area.

5.4. Conclusions

This chapter has stressed the need for the notions of space, place, and locality to be recognised for the role that they play in creating or fragmenting social networks, and hence the bonds and ties that underpin discussion of mutual aid. This is something that has been artificially separated and absent from much of the discussion on informal economic activities. Fundamentally, locality should serve not merely as a passive backdrop for a study focused on informal and formal reciprocity. Rather it is a relevant factor in understanding why socially embedded activities occur - often in such a highly localised, fashion: for locality bleeds into the analysis of social networks, just as surely as social networks bleeds into locality.

5.5. Aims and objectives of the thesis

Having surveyed the wider literature surrounding mutual aid, then attention is drawn to the specific aims and objectives of the thesis. To re-cap, the thesis has engaged with the literatures associated with mutual aid; has widened the focus to illustrate the wider social networks that underpin this coping strategy through social capital theory; has looked specifically at the role of the gift in contemporary exchange and how this has affected social networks and mutual aid; and in this chapter has looked at the relevance of space, place and locality for any discussion which concentrates on mutual aid as situated in geographical neighbourhoods. Against this background, and the issues raised therein, the aims and objectives of this thesis intends to go down two complimentary routes, the first essentially concerned with assessing the robustness of previous research conducted on the geographies of mutual aid; the second with understanding the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid.

5.5.1. Section 1: Assessing the empirical research undertaken on mutual aid so far

The first set of aims and objectives recognises that there is still an urgent need for more information to be forthcoming on the geographies of mutual aid:

> "In-depth research is required on the extent, character, motives and barriers to participation in formal and informal community involvement (mutual aid)...This project needs to analyse: whether one-to-one aid is more prevalent than participation in formal associations; who engages in such activities; for what reasons (i.e., to meet material needs or for more social purposes) and what prevents them from engaging in greater levels of such activity." Evans et al. (2004: 34):

Although section 3.6. highlighted several analyses of the spatial data on the varying extent of mutual aid in deprived and affluent areas produced by the UK government's national surveys, these have so far not explored in any great depth the precise spatial variations in the nature of mutual aid. Focusing on Chapter 2, (sections 2.4 and 2.5) demonstrates there have been only a handful of real investigations of any depth into the geographical variations in the extent, nature and social embeddedness of mutual aid. Thus the first broad objective is to test the robustness of existing research, by focusing on the categories, or geographies, of mutual aid in an urban environment. More specifically, within this urban environment these geographies will be focused on two populations in two neighbouring localities, both of contrasting socio-economic backgrounds, with the intention of mirroring previous research which has chosen to focus on socio-economic differences within and between both wards (e.g. Williams et al, 2001a; Williams and Windebank, 2001a). This will perform the dual role of both extending the existing boundary of knowledge, either by reinforcing and consolidating what is already known about mutual aid in contemporary urban society, or by offering a challenge to existing findings in a way which will create new (quantitative and qualitative) insights and implications.

Section I aims to identify the geographies of mutual aid (formal, informal, paid, unpaid), specifically the extent, character, social embeddedness, and the barriers to engagement, in two urban populations of contrasting socio-economic backgrounds (see Box 5.1.). It seeks to achieve this by finding answers relevant to the following aims:

1. To highlight the current extent and character of mutual aid both within and between deprived and affluent neighbourhoods. How much mutual aid is currently taking place in deprived and affluent areas? Is the popular prejudice true that unemployed or lower-income households are more heavily engaged in mutual aid?

2. To highlight the social embeddedness of mutual aid. Do households help out their family, friends, neighbours or other social groups in the community? If so, how and under what circumstances? Which social groups are most likely to use mutual aid as a coping strategy? Are particular household types more likely than others to participate in such activity? What types of work do these different groups engage in?

3. To highlight the barriers to participation in mutual aid. Is there a desire to engage more in group-based organisations or one-to-one reciprocity? If there is then what are the main barriers to participation in mutual aid facing deprived and affluent populations? Is it a lack of money, skills, social networks, access to tools, opportunities, or do other factors come into play? Given previous findings, what circumstances prevent deprived populations from engaging in, and receiving help from, more formal voluntary groups?

Figure 5.3. Summary of the questions asked in Section I related to the geographies of mutual aid.

1.	*Extent*: How do people engage in mutual aid?
2.	*Character*: What is it that is being undertaken?
3.	*Social Embeddedness*: When and with whom do people engage with?
4.	*Barriers*: What are the main barriers to participation?

5.5.2. Section II: Understanding the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid

Section II comes at mutual aid from a different angle. It seeks to open up a different dialogue and different conceptual map of mutual aid by digging beneath the geographies of mutual aid to allow the process and complex dynamics that underpin its 'extent', its 'character', its 'social embeddedness' and the 'barriers to participation' that have been the preserve of other empirical research.

Just as the geographies of mutual aid represent a collected unity of several sub-categories, in order to open up the new territory the thesis aims to understanding the *process and complex dynamics* of mutual aid Section II revolves around four main sections. The first section is directly drawn from the literature discussed on mutual aid and social capital in Chapters 2 and 3; the second section emerges through the discussion on the spectrum of mutual aid as presented in Chapter 2, and also reconciles this with the nature of the gift in reciprocal change highlighted in Chapter 4; the third section is inspired by the discussion in Chapter 5, and in particular the need to address mutual as situated in geographical neighbourhoods; the final section, Section 4, concludes the focus on the process and dynamics of mutual aid by approaching the geography of mutual aid from a suitably different perspective, seeking to understand why mutual aid persists in the 21st century, as opposed to what prevents individuals in participation. The objectives are broadly four-fold:

1. To investigate the process and complex social dynamics of mutual aid.

- *The complexity of social relationships.* Existing research infers that one-to-one aid is largely unmediated, in understanding the complexity of social relationships the aim is ask how accurate this assumption actually is. Similarly, current analysis of mutual aid relies heavily on a simplistic notion of relationships: 'neighbours', 'friends' and 'family'. But does this hierarchy stand up, when examined as part of the complex picture of relationships and inter-relationships, or is it far more nuanced than that? These questions will be explored in the first instance by focusing on the role(s) that mutual aid plays within kin relations and non-kin relations? For the latter, the question is also asked as to what extent is going into other people's houses a lubrication to facilitate mutual aid? Does reciprocity itself change the nature of a relationship, what for example, makes households consider neighbours as 'friends'? Who is given permission to go in and out of people's houses? And what role(s) does mutual aid play in encouraging deeper and stronger non-kin relationships to develop? Equally, what are the implications of friendships and relationships developing/ failing due to mutual aid? What can be said about those who are excluded from a household's coping strategies that revolves around mutual aid? Indeed having explored the role that mutual aid plays in kin and non-kin relations, the aim is then to addresses the issue of 'who organises mutual aid'?

- *How is mutual aid mediated by human stages of life/ social circumstances*? In seeking answers to account for the uneven nature of mutual aid, the aim is to contextualise mutual aid as part of the dynamic relationship that plugs the household into its wider social community. And indeed look at the complexity of the household itself. How, for example, is

mutual aid catalysed by the composition of the household; by children; by the disabled; by old age; by poor health?

- *What are the taboo areas that surround mutuality*? To conclude this discussion of what are essentially social processes and social dynamics of mutual aid, the aim is to address the common social taboos that surround mutuality (such as 'being a burden'; 'false expectations'; 'inappropriate gestures'; 'going into other people's houses'; taking advantage; tasks poorly conducted; and the exchange itself (unpaid/ gifts/ money-as gift).

2. To investigate the complex dynamics within mutual aid.

- *What are the dynamics that make mutual aid work?* For example, why would it seem that reciprocity takes something else to lubricate it, to legitimise it, such as the giving of gifts? Is the gift the crucial part of the process in paid mutual aid? What difference does it make, if any? When are gifts seen as acceptable, and when a threat?

- *What are the dynamics that exist between informal mutual aid and formal mutual aid*? Focusing on the regional cultures of participation literature, the argument is that formal volunteering and informal volunteering have limited spaces for interaction (i.e. informal reciprocity does not lead to formal volunteering, and formal volunteering as a material coping strategy is alien to the preferred coping strategies of deprived/ Northern populations). How does formal volunteering catalyze social networks?

- *What are the dynamics that exist between paid and unpaid mutual aid*? Is there a relationship between paid and unpaid mutual aid? What dictates when paid mutual aid should be the basis of exchange, rather than unpaid reciprocity? Is there a relationship between paid and unpaid mutual aid is fluid, and subject to change over time for example.

- *What are the dynamics that position mutual aid within the informal economic sphere* (i.e. the relationship(s) between mutual aid and (a) self-provisioning (b) paid informal work?

3. To investigate the dynamic relationship between locality and mutual aid.

- In exploring mutual aid further, it is necessary to acknowledge and understand the specificity of the places in which mutual aid is situated. For example, how does the spatial layout of a population impact on bringing individuals in a community together? How do the

dominant social norms and expectations held within a locality influence social relationships and hence mutual aid?

4. To investigate why mutual aid is so pervasive.

- Though previous research has concentrated on the barriers to participation, this circumvents the more immediate question as to why is mutual aid so pervasive in advanced economies; economies supposedly firmly bent on commodification! In this way, the thesis re-routes the questions focussed on identifying the barriers to participation: asking what sustains mutual aid and why. Why do individuals ask for help, or are individuals happy to help others via mutual aid? Why is mutual aid so pervasive in some areas and not in others? Why is mutual aid so pervasive in advanced economies?

Figure 5.4. Summary of the questions asked in Section II related to the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid.

1	To understand the process and complex social dynamics of mutual aid.
2	To understand the complex dynamics within mutual aid.
3	To understand the complex dynamics between mutual aid and locality.
4	To understand the pervasive nature of mutual aid.

What follows now is a discussion of the various research methodologies which have the potential to act as an appropriate means of getting the information and data necessary to investigate the aims and objectives established, and provide meaningful and penetrative answers.

Chapter 6

Examining Mutual Aid

"Methods are not passive strategies. They differently produce, reveal, and enable the display of different kinds of identities." Fine and Weis (1996: 267-268)

"We live in an interview society, in a society whose members seem to believe that interviews generate useful information about lived experiences and it meanings. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 645).

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodology employed, to investigate both the geographies of mutual aid and the complex dynamics of mutual aid that underpin these geographies.

The methodology chosen was structured interviews, employing a combination of closed and open-ended questions to allow interviewees to give greater insights to their answers. The decision to use this particular methodology was influenced by two key factors. One was the comparative strengths of this methodology when compared with other potential methodologies that were considered as possible means of examining mutual aid. The other is that the thesis, being concerned with having a comparable means of analysis with previous research, and taking this research forward meaningfully, needed to be aware of previous research methods used successfully to capture the geographies of mutual aid.

It has been demonstrated that a structured interview can be successful at penetrating the spectrum of mutual aid in terms of the capabilities of a person or household to perform work that they perceive as necessary. Thus, the methodology not only captures the geographies of mutual aid at the household level, but has the further quality of being able to reveal the highly localised personal rationales, perceptions, and experiences of the individual. Having carried out a pilot study in December 2002, the main fieldwork was undertaken between January 2003 and May 2003 in two urban case study areas. The localities were both wards in south Leicester: one an affluent ward (West Knighton) the second a comparatively deprived ward (Saffron).

Chapter 6 begins by contextualising methodological approaches in the wider methodological landscape within human geography. The chapter then focuses on several potential research methodologies (namely time budget studies, participatory action research, focus groups, social network analysis) and in highlighting their respective strengths and weakness, argues why each were ultimately rejected in favour of the final methodology chosen. The second part of the chapter provides a detailed examination of the chosen research methodology, in order to assess its likely impact on the empirical research as a whole. Before concluding, the selection of two wards in which the research was carried out, namely West Knighton and Saffron is addressed, and the final sampling technique used within these localities is outlined.

6.1. Research Methodologies

Colin Robson (2004) talks about a 'real world enquiry', to define research on and with people, outside the safe confines of the laboratory. Aiming to give even a general overview of approaches to social research is a daunting task - such is the range and depth of enquiry methods available to the social scientist in the 21st century. What follows is a more focused look at the changes which have been experienced in human geography in recent times; changes which have led to the current diverse, pluralist spectrum of techniques and methodological approaches.

6.1.1. Human geography: changing methods and techniques over the last fifty years.

Over the last fifty years, human geography has experienced a root-and-branch methodological upheaval, moving away from the "Quantitative Revolution" of the 1950s and 1960s, and with it the anaemic logical positivist philosophical approach that underpinned the then dominant axioms, deductions, models, hypothesis, methods of data collection and evaluation (see Johnston (1975)). The old school of positivist (as separate from quantitative) geography was initially swept aside during the 1970s by a devastating 'radical' critique from the humanistic and Marxist/ structuralist approaches (Wiley, 1998). Essentially, the thrust of these humanistic and Marxist structural approaches was to understand more fully the processes underlying spatial patterns, and getting to grips with the wider social and economic changes: something that the existing range of quantitative methods was ill-equipped and ill suited, to do. As Pratt (1989: 114) observed, quantitative techniques have definite limitations, with their strengths focused around:

> "Organising one type of information, information that needs necessarily to be complemented by a more relational, contextual understanding, as well as more abstract theoretical development"

In contrast humanistic geography gave a distinguished and active role to human awareness, human agency, human consciousness and human creativity, in the decision making process (Tuan, 1974; Buttimer, 1979). Gregory (2000: 361) suggests that humanistic geography:

> "Was always intended as much more than a critical philosophy. Insofar as it was also a rejection of the prevailing geometric paradigm in which men and women were assumed to respond passively to the dictates of universal spatial structures and abstract spatial logics, it was at the same time a claim for what its architects believed to be a 'truly human geography' concerned with the social construction and experience of, space and landscape rather than the spatial confinement of peoples and societies."

Marxist geography, itself a response to the political struggles and uprisings of the late 1960s in Europe, the Americas and Australia, focused on the unequal geographies caused by political and economic processes, (see. Harvey, 1973). Neil Smith (2000: 486) suggests that Marxist geography, "a varied and internally differentiated theoretical and political tradition", can be encapsulated under three headings: *political economic analysis* (that "explains the geography of capitalism as the outcome primarily of political and economic relationships and wider processes within society"); *theories of space* (that "encouraged geographers to see abstract spatial forms and processes separate from the concrete social processes that created them (2000: 487) and the interconnectedness of *nature and society* relations.

The emergence of humanistic, Marxist, approaches alongside feminist, cultural, and postmodernist perspectives was accompanied by a diverse and complicated spectrum of *qualitative* and interpretative techniques, many traditionally associated with anthropology and sociology (e.g. Silverman, 1985; Strauss, 1987). Moving away from the a-theoretical, reductionist ontology:

> "Qualitative or interpretative methods generally operate on the basis that the "natural" order of reality is seen, conceived of and understood in different ways by different groups and individuals... qualitative techniques are essentially descriptions of people's representations and constructions of what is occurring in the world." (Wiley 1998: 408-409)

As a consequence, contemporary geography, sustains a deep and fertile ground of enquiry, which includes ethnography, quantitative behavioural science, phenomenology, action

research, hermeneutics, evaluation research, feminist research, critical social science, historical-comparative research, and theoretical research.

Given this context what specifically are the 'right' methods to consider for this thesis?

6.1.2. Enquiring into the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid

To re-cap, Section I emphasises the need for a quantitative-based analysis of mutual aid in order to both (a) test the robustness of existing research and (b) to identify broad patterns which could illustrate the more qualitative issues concerning the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid subsequently discussed in Section II.

Given this context, for Section I, starting with a completely blank methodological canvas is neither desired nor necessary. Rather an awareness of past methodological frameworks is fundamental in order for the empirical research undertaken here to address the same issues in a comparable way. However, this is not to say that the past methodology should be taken unquestioningly, but should be subjected to the same critique as any other research methodology at this stage: as a *potential* methodology, one among many. The process of selecting a research adequate for the aims and objectives of the thesis will engage openly in a dialogue with previous research undertaken on mutual aid, not slavishly adhering to it.

6.2. Identifying the most appropriate research methodologies

This section outlines the research methodologies considered for adoption, and indicates why certain methodologies were rejected.

6.2.1. Time budget studies

Time budget studies have proved a highly successful means of both highlighting the importance of self-provisioning within the informal economic sphere, and highlighting the importance of domestic tasks within the advanced economies (see Bittman and Pixley, 1997). Essentially, time budget studies:

> "Analyse whether people perceive their activity as work or leisure and then measure the time they spend engaged in various forms of activity. To do this,

> participants chronicle the number of minutes they spend on their various activities over the course of a day. From this, the time that they spend on formal employment, mutual aid (known as 'informal involvement') and self-provisioning can be calculated."(Evans et al., 2004: 62)

Time budget studies ensured the development of reliable, consistent and accurate ways of measuring self-provisioning (e.g. Gershuny 2000, Murgatroyd and Neuberger 1997, Roy 1991; Gregory and Windebank, 2000). The results of this were instrumental in demonstrating the relative importance of work being completed informally. For example, focusing on the results from the 2000 UK Time Use Survey (TUS), formal employment and study accounted for three hours and twenty-five minutes in a 24-hour day. Household and family care (i.e. self-provisioning) meanwhile accounts for three hours and six minutes. Taking this statistic in addition to volunteering/ helping (i.e. mutual aid) added a further twelve minutes, making three hours and eighteen minutes. Thus, just 50.9 per cent of the UK population's work time was engaged in formal paid employment, with 46.1 per cent accounted by self-provisioning and a further 3 per cent in mutual aid!

However, while time budget studies are extremely good at identifying general trends, and differentiating between broad categories of work, they are largely inadequate when attention is turned toward identifying the micro-level relationships and inter-relationships. As Pahl (1984: 213) concludes:

> "Time budget analysis.... (was) not designed to deal with the complexities and subtleties of informal work. Housework is hard to measure precisely: polishing a floor seems to be self-evidently housework, but if a neighbour comes in with his tool for sanding the floor, is he doing the 'housework'?"

Thus, it is primarily for its weakness in bringing to the surface a more penetrative understanding and insight into the 'subtleties and complexities' of mutual aid that time budget studies were eliminated as a means of enquiry.

6.2.2. Participatory action research

> "The participant observer gathers data by participating in the daily life of the group or organisation he [she] studies. He [she] watches the people he [she] is studying to see in what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He [she] enters into conversation with some or all of the participants in these situations and discovers their interpretations of the events he [she] has discovered (Becker, 1958: 652)

'Participatory research', 'participatory action research' or simply 'action research', "Is primarily distinguishable in terms of its purpose, which is to influence or change some aspect of whatever is the focus of the research." (Robson, 2002: 215). One of the key purposes of action research is the context centred aim to solve real-life problems; a point argued strongly by Greenwood and Levin (2000: 95):

> "We define action research as research in which the validity and value of research results are tested through collaborative insider-professional researcher knowledge generation and application processes *in projects of social change that aim to increase fairness, wellness and self-determination.*"

Under such an agenda the researcher has a variety of roles to simultaneously perform, that of investigator, collaborator and a facilitator. This is due to a combination of:

> "The political nature, the participatory character, the emancipatory elements and the direct, committing and personal involvement of the researcher are at the front of the research activity. " (Sarantakos, 1998: 113)

Robson (2002: 218), assessing the process that action research engages with, suggests eight stages of action research from beginning to end (see Figure 6.1.)

Figure 6.1. Eight stages of action research

1	*Define the inquiry*: What is the issue of concern? What research question are we asking? Who will be involved? Where and when will it happen?
2	*Describe the situation*: What are we required to do here? What are we trying to do here? What thinking underpins what we are doing?
3	*Collect evaluative data and analyse it*: What is happening in this situation now as understood by the various participants? Using research methods, what can we find out about it?
4	*Review the data and look for contradictions*: What contradictions are there between what we would like to happen and what seems to happen?
5	*Tackle a contradiction by introducing change*: By reflecting critically and creatively on the contradictions, what change can we introduce which we think is likely to be beneficial?
6	*Monitor the change*: What happens day-by-day when the change is introduced?
7	*Analyse evaluative data about the change*: What is happening in this situation now – as understood by the various participants – as a result of the changes introduced? Using research methods, what can we find out about it?

8	*Review the change and decide what to do* next: Was the change worthwhile? Are we going to continue it in the future? What are we going to do next? Is this change sufficient?

Source: Robson (2002: 218) Fig. 2: Stages of action research:

It is argued that action participant research (by facilitating close links between researcher and participants) has the potential to harness an exciting additional dimension to *future* studies focused on informal economic spheres more generally (with special significance perhaps for paid informal work). Given the multi-dimensional emphasis of the research on mutual aid, from its focus on social capital (for example, creating and maintaining social networks through one to one aid and/ or volunteering); to the material nature of mutual aid (its role in getting tasks done in deprived populations); and the emphasis on policy making community (for example through the cultures of participation), to generate knowledge and action in support of liberating social change from within (and alongside) the community has a great appeal. As Greenwood and Levin (2000: 96) point out, "action research is context centred."

However the transformative emphasis within action research is something which is not the focus of this particular study at this particular time, and certainly not within the time framework available (see Fullan, 1982). On one level, the aims and objectives, in linking this study with previous research on mutual aid, cannot justify taking such a radical departure in terms of methodology. On another level, the emphasis within Section II is all about exploring the individual rationales more fully, and allowing the individual respondent to take centre stage, in a manner where the researcher (while never absent from the process) is, at best, positioned at the margins of enquiry, far removed from the relationship of 'researcher-as-instrument'.

6.2.3. Focus Groups

A focus group, or group interview, is a qualitative method which involves a collective discussion, and has been regularly employed by social scientists (see Goss, 1996). Fundamentally, they are, "a way of listening to people and learning from them." (Morgan, 1998: 9). Typically, focus groups are used as a follow up to a questionnaire survey, to verify

the researcher's interpretation. Geraldine Pratt (2001: 272) considered focus groups to have several key advantages:

> "The advantage of focus groups over interviews is that they allow meanings to emerge in a less directed way, and they are creative encounters, in which participates share and test their ideas within a group. A researcher doing participatory action research may value the opportunity that focus groups provide for participants to learn from and be supported by each other."

Case study groups have been used to consolidate structured research focused on the geographies of community self-help (mutual aid) in rural areas.

Certainly focus groups would complement informal studies on mutual aid, not least by presenting issues which have relevance at the community level. However, inevitably, focus groups generally explore collective phenomena, not individual ones – and attempts to infer individual phenomena from focus group data are likely to be unfounded. As Robson (2002: 289) concluded:

> "Focus groups tap into a different realm of social reality from that revealed by one-to-one interviews or questionnaire studies. Each of these methods should be selected in terms of its relative appropriateness for the research question concerned, and should not be expected to fulfil objectives for which it is methodologically unsuited."

This is significant, as the central argument underpinning the aims and objectives of this study is that there is still much to be understood about mutual aid from the *perspective of the household*, the individuals-within-a-particular-locality, before the collective testimonies on the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid at the collective level are engaged. Significantly, this restrained focus on illustrating the individual's relationship with mutual aid, which has been so successful in previous studies on the informal economic sphere, is far from guaranteed to be 'heard' within the more formal setting of a focus group – a point that Robson (2002: 285) argues:

> "...the less articulate may not share their views, extreme views may predominate, and bias may be caused by the domination of the group by one or two people...conflicts may arise between personalities. Power struggles may detract from the interview and there may be conflicts of status within the procedure... confidentiality can be a problem between participants when interacting in a group situation."

However, it should be acknowledged that the power struggle harnessed within a group setting is not necessarily absent in a more informal setting. For example, this has been the

experience of Ester Madriz, who reported on the feedback given by a participant in a focus group in 1995. Madriz (2000: 835) was told by the women:

> "I'd rather talk this way, with a group of women... when I am alone with an interviewer, I feel intimidated, scared. And if they call me over the telephone, I never answer their questions. How can I know what they really want or who they are?"

With the goals of the research in mind focus groups are not the best environment for intimate information about the complexity of (for example) social relationships to be forthcoming. The focus on analysing mutual aid through understanding the households' personal relationships with their wider kin and non-kin networks, i.e. why some individuals were favoured to help, why others were overlooked in the community and so on, would potentially place the respondent in a difficult situation, especially should people that were part of that social network or community be present. As Madriz (2000: 848) observed:

> "It is important for researchers to recognize that in some instances other research techniques, such as individual interviews, may be more appropriate for the goals of the research. For instance, in a situation where a researcher needs participants to share very intimate details about their lives, a focus group would not be the most appropriate technique. Furthermore, researchers should avoid the use of focus groups in cases where participants may not feel comfortable with each other...Researchers should also avoid bringing together in a group individuals who have strong disagreements or who are hostile toward each other."

It is argued that the key aims and objectives of this study would play upon the weaknesses not the strengths of a focus group. Finally, the research also intends to generalize the findings with previous research – something that would be impossible to achieve within a focus group setting.

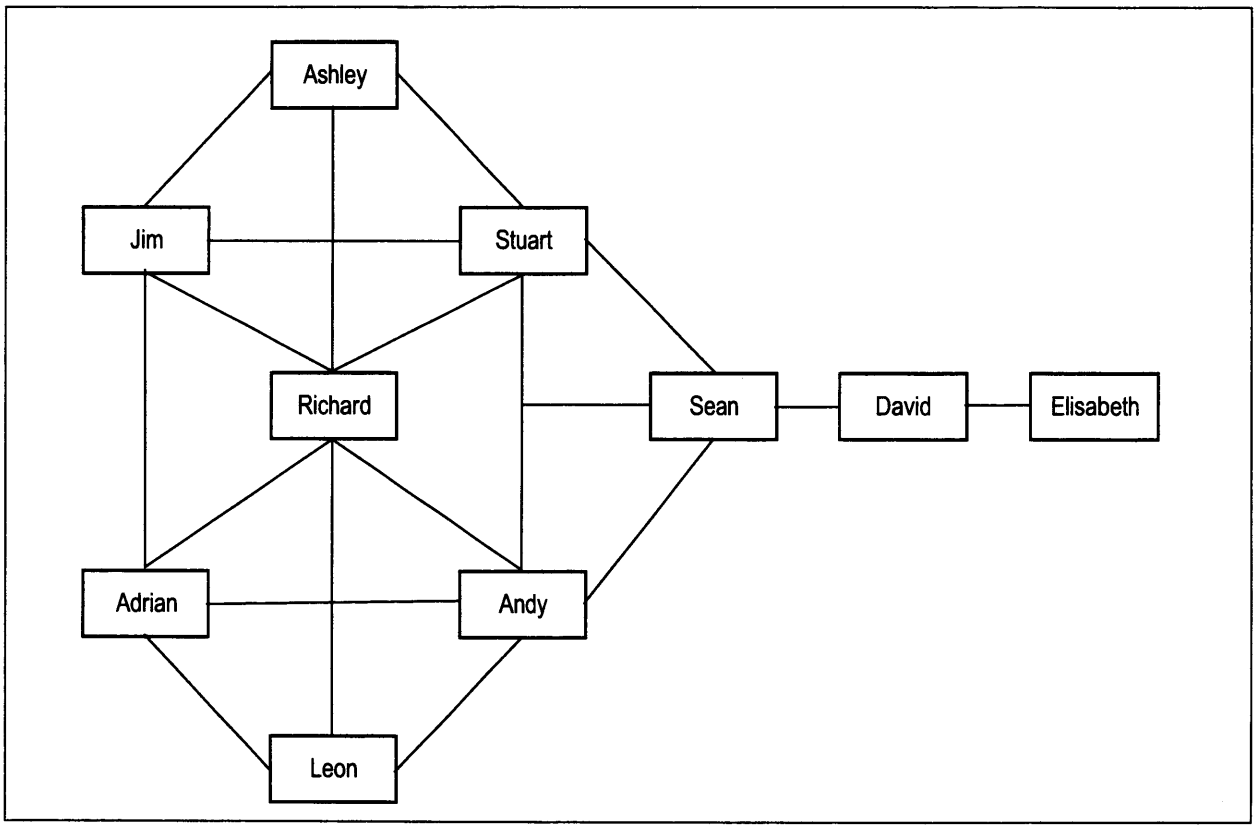
6.2.4. Social Network Analysis

Social networks analysis (or organizational network analysis) studies social networks by mapping and measuring the otherwise normally invisible relationships and flows between information processing entities (organisations, animals, people), which are known as *nodes*. This has many applications. For example, Krebs (2005: 3) listed twenty-five recent uses of social network analysis, which ranged from 'building a grass roots political campaign' and 'revealing key players in an investigative news story' to 'mapping communities of expertise in

various medical fields' and 'discovering emergent communities of interest amongst faculty at various universities'.

Social network analysis is both a visual and mathematical means of locating and analysing actors in a specific network, being able to map out the centrality or marginality of each respective node in the relation to another. Hence social network analysis can be used to determine the relational importance of individuals in a particular social hierarchy, as shown via the 'Kite Network' developed by David Krackhardt (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2. A 'Kite Network'



In this Kite Network, given that two nodes are considered connected if they regularly converse with each other, then Stuart regularly interacts with Sean but not with David. Therefore, though there is no direct link drawn between Stuart and David, Sean and Stuart are closely connected. For Krebs (2005), this Kite network is a useful way of distinguishing between the three most popular individual network measures: 'degree centrality', 'between centrality', and 'closeness centrality'.

There are significant advantages of using this methodology for a study in mutual aid, focused on uncovering the patterning of people's interaction. For example, the immediate

local or communal level, the ability to systematically map the various household interactions with each other – to locate the central actors – and how they connect and draw in other households would be a great asset. Indeed locality theory has been aided by the interest and impact of actor-network theory in the social sciences over the last decade or so, as more explicit links between the relational and networked concepts of locality have been made. For example, the notion of localities as constituted by 'nets' of social relations has been proposed by Massey, (1993) and then Murdoch and Marsden (1995: 370) who strongly argued that:

> "Localities can now be examined as implicated in sets of cross-cutting relations. They have no single pre-given identity but are ties into wider (i.e. non-local) processes in a multitude of differing ways."

However, focusing on the specific needs and context of this research the formal methodological commitments inherent within social network analysis (especially being guided by a formal theory organised in positivist mathematical terms, and its embeddedness in the systematic analysis of empirical data) are exactly what the key aims and objectives seek to go beyond. It is the ability to delve deeper into the surface patterns, and tease the innards of the social structure out which is the fundamental dimension here, hence at this time, the method is rejected.

6.3. Research methodology chosen: interview methodology

Time budget studies, participatory action research, focus groups, and social network were all considered as possible methodology, and, indeed, in different ways hold promise for future investigations on mutual aid. However all were rejected in favour of *structured interviews to be undertaken within two case study areas*. This section aims to outline the main strengths and weaknesses of this methodology, and why it was ultimately favoured as a means to fulfil the objectives outlined in Section 5.5.

Before seeking to justify this methodology per se surely it is worthwhile to ask the question "What is the interview methodology?" At its very basic, an interview is about asking questions and listening to answers with at least two people present. Its simplicity is one of its greatest strengths: it is one of the most powerful methods to try and build an in-depth picture of a fellow human being. Indeed Holstein and Gubrium, (1994: 1) consider it to be a "universal mode of systematic enquiry." Yet, as Fontana and Frey (2000: 645-646) note, interviewing can include a wide variety of forms and uses:

> "The most common form of interviewing involves individual, face-to-dace verbal interchange, but interviewing can also take the form of face-to-face group interchange, mailed or self-administered questionnaires, and telephone surveys. It can be structured, semi structured, or unstructured... It can be used for the purpose of measurement or its scope can be the understanding of an individual or group perspective. An interview can be a one-time brief event – say 5 minutes over the telephone – or it can take place over multiple lengthy sessions, at times spanning days, as in live history interviewing."

What is crucial to the aims and objectives of the thesis is the ability of a methodology to gather information appropriate to facilitating meaningful quantitative and qualitative analysis. In many ways, quantitative statistical analysis (emphasised in previous studies in mutual aid and social capital) can be spurious when answering questions related to causality. But quantitative statistical analysis can be extremely good in identifying patterns which can then be followed up qualitatively. And the interview methodology, given its inherent flexibility, allows the researcher the ability to combine the two together in a way which would be difficult to reproduce in other methodologies. It should also be reflected that this application of the interview methodology is very much in-keeping with a general evolution:

> "The focus of interviews is moving to encompass the *hows* of people's lives (the constructive work involved in producing order in everyday life) as well as the traditional *what's* (the activities of everyday life)." (Fontana and Frey, 2000: 646)

> "Both qualitative and quantitative researchers tend to rely on the interview as the basic method of data gathering, whether the purpose is to obtain rich, in-depth experiential account of an event...in the life of a respondent or to garner a simple point on a scale of 2 to 10 dimensions." (ibid)

Having introduced the interview methodology, the question to ask is "why" is it so relevant to addressing the aims and objectives of this thesis?

6.4. Justifying the interview methodology

It is argued here that, an interview methodology has key strengths that lend themselves naturally to the aims and the objectives of the thesis. For example, considering the emphasis on revealing the depth and complexity of mutual aid in mind qualitative methods:

> "...are best used for problems requiring depth of insight and understanding, especially when dealing with explanatory concepts." Robinson (1998: 409)

Indeed, to support this view, Robinson goes on to quote at length Hakim's (1987: 26) belief that qualitative research involves:

- Seeing through the eyes of..." or taking the subject's perspective;
- Describing the detail of a setting from the perspective of participants
- Understanding actions and meanings in their social context;
- Emphasising time and process;
- Favouring a relatively structured research design

One of the most appealing strengths of an interview methodology is the ability to provide both rich quantitative and qualitative findings through a questionnaire: though this is obviously highly dependent on the nature and quality of the questions asked (closed compared to open-ended; rigid versus flexible), its flexibility gives an important advantage over other potential lines of enquiry. Also a face-to-face interview permits an intimacy which is of great benefit to the researcher, legitimising access into the locality where the respondent is situated (thus allowing a highly visible interpretation not only of some of the issues raised by the individual (e.g. concerning the perception of the neighbourhood)), but also of the householder context (e.g. their immediate environment within the house itself). Hence, theoretically, the interviewer is able to establish a personal mental picture of the respondent in context.

A further significant issue is one of time. Again, theoretically, a questionnaire conducted door-to-door, would take a minimum amount of time to set up and conduct, and the findings still be highly beneficial for the aims in hand. The start-up time for other methodologies, for example, participant observation, to be done properly, potentially carries a massive investment of time and other resources in order for the outsider to 'access the setting' (e.g. Douglas and Rasmussen, 1977; Thompson, 1984); to establish a high level of trust (e.g. Rasmussen, 1989) and establishing rapport (e.g. Thompson, 1984).

Ultimately face-to-face interviews hold three key advantages: taking a minimum amount of time to set up and carry out; allowing personal insights to be made; and allowing a picture of the context.

6.4.1. Previous research into informal economic spheres

As well as the strengths of the methodology, a crucial further justification for using an interview methodology comes from an examination of the previous methodologies adapted

successfully favoured by researchers to investigate mutual aid. One of the most influential academics in this field was Ray Pahl. In his research on the Isle of Sheppey and published in 'Divisions of Labour' (1984), he adopted a truly unique – though attractively accessible - way of capturing the categorically, the domestic divisions of labour, through using an interview methodology focused on the household. It was a methodology which, while aware of other more conventional approaches, went beyond these to establish a way of distinguishing between distinctive divisions of labour, and allowing their complexity to come to light. As Pahl (1984: 213-214) explained:

> "The alternative approach (rather than time-budget/ diaries) is to focus on the labour that is done for households, including whether or not they do it themselves. The practical and pragmatic notion that work is any task that it is possible to pay someone else to do for one evidently embraces all activity. However, with the decline in servants, members of households have to do much of their everyday work for themselves. Friends, relatives, neighbours and the official home help service may do anything from making the bed to washing up for those who are elderly or incapacitated. Not all of these may define doing such tasks as work: clearly the woman in the home help service will do so, but the dutiful son or daughter may be 'helping mum'. Certainly, it gets out of a lot of difficulties to focus, in a non-evaluative way, on the characteristics of those doing specific tasks – whether they are paid and whether they are a friend, relative or representatives of a formal firm or agency. This also enables analysis to be made on the basis of whether work is done by household members or non-household members and hence permits exploration of distinctive divisions of labour: divisions between household members, between some households and other households and between households and the money economy, including the distinction between whether the money is paid formally or informally.

It is an approach which deeply influenced many successive researchers who have sought to engage with, and understand, informal economic spheres (e.g. Williams and Windebank, 2001a-d; Williams et al, 2001a). The methodology to tease out these divisions of labour though came in the form of a structured list of forty-one tasks. Having conducted a pilot study:

> " Claire Wallace and I drew up the list of 41 tasks. (House maintenance, home improvement and decoration, routine housework, domestic production, car maintenance, child care)... All respondents were asked if they had ever done each task on the list and then, in the case of house maintenance and similar tasks, they were asked 'Who did all or most of the work?' In the case of more common domestic tasks, respondents were simply asked who usually does them. Respondents were also asked to name who actually did the task inside the household; outside the household they were asked to say whether or not it was done be a relative, friend or official firm and whether or not it was paid for. (Pahl, 1984: 214-216)

The approach favoured by Pahl has, as stated, been highly influential elsewhere. For example Williams and Windebank (2000; 2001a,b; 2002b,c) have adapted this methodological approach to examine self-help activity in a lower-income inner city neighbourhood; a neighbourhood locally viewed as a 'sink' council estate; and a higher-income suburb. Having argued that structured interviews were preferable to unstructured interviews, because households struggled to remember instances where self help had been used and supplied, they acknowledged the influence of Pahl:

> "When designing the format of the structured interview, the starting point was the task list used nearly twenty years earlier by Pahl (1984) on the Isle of Sheppey. Using a slightly modified version of the common everyday tasks he used, 44 tasks were investigated..." (Williams and Windebank, 2001a: 70)

Research adapting this interview approach has not only been used in urban and rural England (e.g. Pahl, 1984; Williams and Windebank 1999; White 2000; Williams and White, 2003) but also in Europe (e.g. Van Geuns et al. 1987; Renooy, 1990) and North America (e.g., Jensen et al. 1995; Nelson and Smith, 1999). Such an approach has also been advocated by Sen (1995, 1999).

The previous success of this methodology in investigating self-help activity has been a major factor as to why the method was adopted here. What is important to acknowledge is that the thesis seeks to take a radical step forward in its aims and objectives, with regard to understanding the process and complex dynamics of mutual, but it also should not be guilty of overlooking the ways in which we have come to understand mutual aid. Indeed this is neither wanted nor desired especially as Section I of the aims and objectives directly relates to existing lines of enquiry into mutual aid, and thus almost by default the methodology used then should be seriously considered relevant to the future research findings that the thesis hopes to illustrate.

6.4.2. Previous research on social capital

As well as highlighting the success of the interview methodology applied and adapted to mutual aid over the last twenty years, the manner in which more recent government surveys have sought to address social capital also needs to be taken into consideration. Previous research into social capital (highlighted in Section 3.6. and 3.7) has also strengthened the legitimacy of using an interview based methodology would find the results necessary to satisfy the aims and objectives, while maintaining a crucial link with the previous studies on

reciprocity and social networks. To recap, some eighteen surveys were originally identified as including some measurement of social capital which have addressed respondents fear of crime; neighbourhood and the local environment; perceptions of neighbourhood; political citizenship; civic engagement; control; reciprocity; participation; socialisation; trust; support networks; attachment to local area; neighbourhood characteristics in relation to risk on health networks; local involvement; active communities; formal and informal volunteering and so on (ONS, 2001). Crucially, the themes used by these measurements of social capital (including 'participation', 'social engagement'; 'perception of community level structures or characteristics'; 'social interactions', 'social networks', 'social support'; 'trust', 'reciprocity', and 'social cohesion'; can easily be incorporated into an interview methodology, and effortlessly expand the respondent's reality of their use of mutual aid to get domestic tasks done, to one which gets them to reflect on their wider (social) roles and positions in which have access to in their daily lives.

6.4.3. Familiarity

A further advantage in selecting the interview methodology is that it is something which I, as a researcher, am familiar and comfortable with (see White, 2000). As Robinson (1998: 416) observes:

> "For a researcher, determining what is 'appropriate' is generally a trial-and-error process in which experience can provide a significant role."

6.5. The interview methodology

There are many styles of interviews, including face-to-face, retrospective interviews, telephone interviews, post surveys, drop and collect surveys, snowball surveys, that vary in nature from structured and semi-structured to completely unstructured (such as oral histories, and post-modern interviewing). Given that there are many different types of questionnaire surveys that can be applied to a specific research situation:

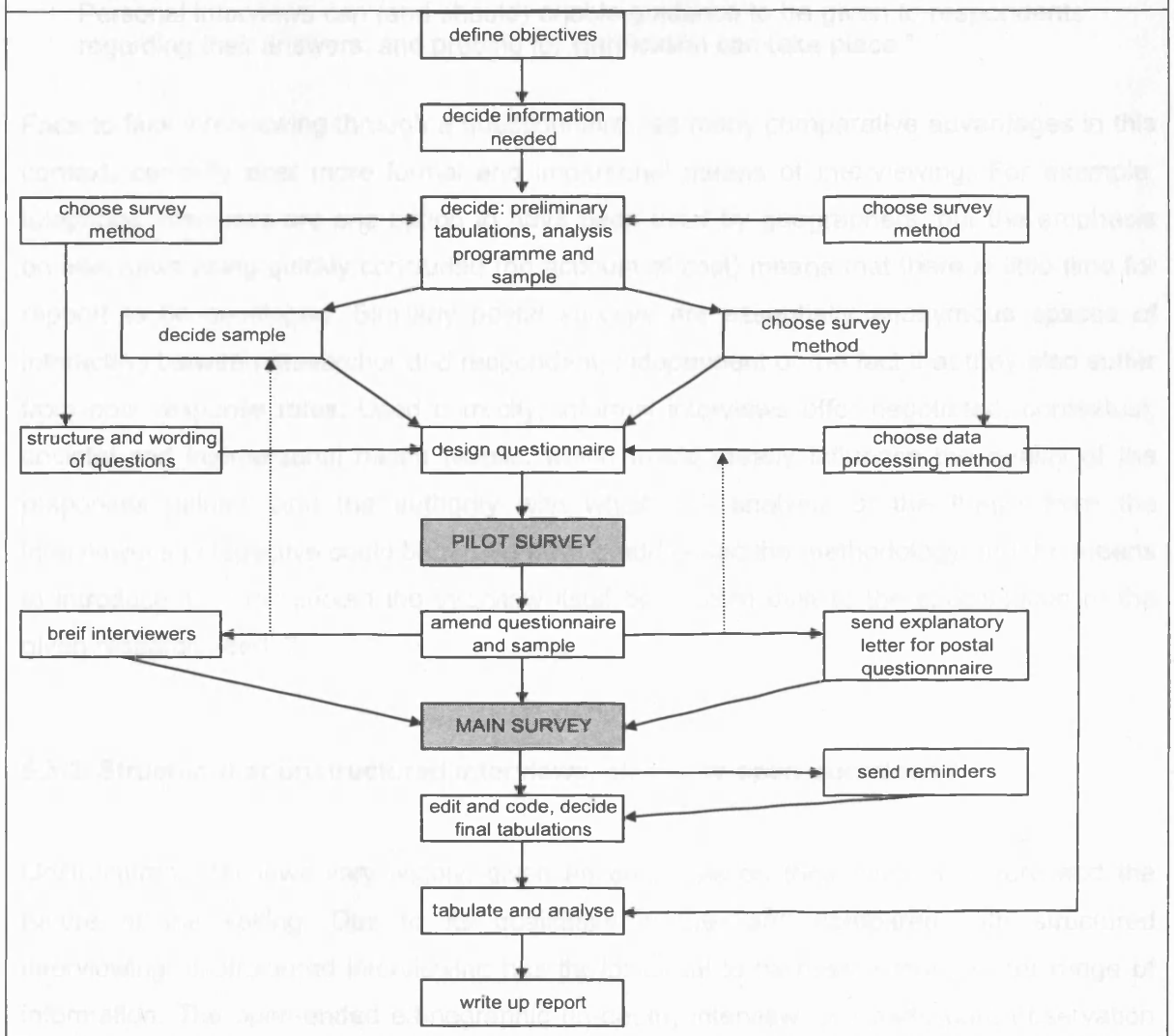
> "Increasingly, the art of designing and implementing questionnaires has become part of the geographer's technical armoury, with due recognition of pitfalls with design and the wording of questions." (Robinson, 1998: 378)

Interviewing, through questionnaire surveys has been a popular means of geographical investigation as a means of providing both qualitative and quantitative information, and formed a major part of behavioural geography in the 1970s. Their popularity is owed not least to the fact that they can be a key means of:

> "...obtaining information from target groups within the population, especially when relatively small numbers of people are being questioned." (Robinson, 1998: 378)

The role of questionnaire surveys in the process of data generation is highlighted in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3. Role of questionnaire surveys in the process of data generation and analysis



Source: Robinson (1998: 379) The Role of Questionnaire Surveys in the Process of Data Generation and Analysis, Figure 12.2

6.5.1 Face-to-face interviewing

Given the aims of addressing the complex dynamics of mutual aid (through tapping into the respondent's experiences, perceptions and realities engaged through the process of mutual aid) the use of face-to-face interviews is considered invaluable to help achieve this end. The use of face-to-face interviewing is something which Robinson (1998: 384-385) - when considering styles of questionnaire - makes the following instructive comments on:

> "Face-to-face interview can vary greatly in content and style, from asking questions that demand very specific short responses to ones that are very informal conversations. The style varies according to the characteristics of the respondents, the research topic and the environment in which the meeting takes place. Whatever the character of the interview, interviewers have to locate respondents and enlist their co-operation by establishing some rapport with them. They also have to elicit answers to questions in a way that the answers can be recorded and the questions presented in a standard form to all respondents. Personal interviews can (and should) enable guidance to be given to respondents regarding their answers, and probing for clarification can take place."

Face-to-face interviewing through a questionnaire has many comparative advantages in this context, certainly over more formal and impersonal means of interviewing. For example, telephone interviews are one option to have been used by geographers, but the emphasis on interviews being quickly concluded (on account of cost) means that there is little time for rapport to be developed. Similarly postal surveys are essentially anonymous spaces of interacting between researcher and respondent, independent of the fact that they also suffer from poor response rates. Used correctly, informal interviews offer negotiated, contextual, societal and interpersonal based results, which would greatly influence the quality of the responses gained, and the authority with which the analysis of the thesis from the interviewer's perspective could begin. So having addressed the methodology and the means to introduce it – how should the interview itself be custom built to the specification of the given research needs?

6.5.2. Structured or unstructured interviews, closed or open questions?

Unstructured interviews vary widely, given an emphasis on their informal nature and the nature of the setting. Due to its qualitative nature, and compared with structured interviewing, unstructured interviewing has the potential to harness a much wider range of information. The open-ended ethnographic (in-depth) interview and participant observation are highly complementary and often go hand in hand (Lofland, 1971). Fontana and Frey

(2000: 654) made an observation concerning the interviewer-respondent interactions promoted within unstructured interviewing, by arguing that its essence establishes a "human-to-human relation with the respondent and (with it) the desire to *understand* rather than to *explain*."

This approach however, though apparently ideally suited to research on mutual aid, has already been attempted, with poor results. As Williams and Windebank (2001a: 70) highlighted:

> "In the preliminary pilot study, unstructured interviews were employed. However, households were found to be unable to recall instances where self-help had been used and supplied. In consequence, a structured interview was employed:"

Structured interviewing, on the other hand is typically composed of a pre-determined series of questions which have a limited set of response categories. In light of the experience by Williams and Windebank, the structured approach has obvious advantages over semi-structured and unstructured interviews. For example, by respondents having to fit their experiences into (usually) closed-ended questions, this allows a high degree of standardisation to be obtained which allows an element of replication to be made between and within population groups (for example).

A weakness of structured interviews, when conducted through closed questions, is that it offers the interviewer little personal scope for variation or improvisation. Answers tend to simplify and stylise the life and thought of individuals. Also, by ensuring that structured interviews leave nothing to chance, there may be occasions where for example, when the interviewee highlights an area previously not considered as relevant or of interest to the topic under focus, and this new insight thus becomes difficult to incorporate into the existing framework. Though this is advantageous when research focuses on the geographies of mutual aid it is more problematical when trying to unravel the complex dynamics of mutual aid that rely heavily on respondents rich, subjective, personal responses.

Given this argument, though open questions are infrequently used in structured interviewing, it was considered that these would be vital to answer aims and objectives in Section II of the aims and objectives desired. Thus, having both concluded that the best line of enquiry would be to employ a face-to-face interview methodology, and selected two appropriate case study areas (see section 6.7), it was felt that in order to be in the best position to design an appropriate interview, and employ questions that would obtain the information required, a pilot study was deemed necessary (see Oppenheim, 1996 and Figure 6.1). During the pilot

study, a tape-recorder was used, to see if it were possible to substitute note-taking, which can be a distracting procedure during an interview.

6.6. Designing and implementing a questionnaire.

The pilot study, with regard to designing and implementing the final questionnaire had five key benefits. First, from the outset, with face-to-face interviews conducted at the household level, the tape-recorder was a big "no-no". Respondents were generally wary about the nature of the sensitive questions, which were only exacerbated by the fear as to who may be listening to the tapes (despite reassurances that they would remain confidential). In light of this the tape-recorder was removed from the interviews, in order not only to promote a higher response rate, but more particularly to encourage an openness and honesty from the respondents to the questions asked of them. The average duration of the interviews during the pilot study was between thirty and forty minutes, though they could quite easily extend to one hour and above.

Second, regarding the question as to the nature of the structure of the interview, following this pilot study, and most definitely in keeping with the experiences of previous research (see Pahl, 1984; White, 2000; Williams and Windebank, 2001a, b) it was reinforced that wholly unstructured or semi-structured interviews were inappropriate. Again the main concern was that respondents had difficulties in recalling instances where mutual aid had been used or supplied.

Third, the judicious combination of open and closed ended questions through a structured interview was found to be very effective. There were several different types of closed format questions employed successfully, ranging from single answer replies; offering multiple boxes in response to a question; using Likert-style formats and respondents being asked to rank order questions according to their preferences (see Appendix 1). However, open ended questions, focusing on the rationales and perceptions that surrounded the tasks undertaken by mutual aid especially, were extremely promising. This approach gave the necessary depth of insight and understanding to the aims of Section II of the thesis, allowing the subject's perspective to take centre stage; understanding the (social) actions and meanings in a wider social context; and emphasising time and process with regard to their current informal coping strategy.

Fourth, with respect to material tasks engaged through mutual aid, it was extremely important to keep the focus and momentum exclusively on jobs that were both appropriate and applicable to the experiences of both populations (see Schofield, 1992). To this end, following the pilot study, a selection of twenty-four tasks was considered appropriate.

Fifth, the pilot study was also essential when it came to completing a final revision of the questions, in order to best ask the right questions relevant to the context and situation of the case study areas, as well as to the aims and objective themselves. As Robinson (1998: 415) observes, getting the right answers is also highly dependent on addressing them in a correct order: not so easy in practice. The general guidelines he provides are that:

> "All interviews should begin with some simple procedures that will create a friendlier environment in which to conduct the interview. In addition to the exchange of pleasantries, this can include a clear explanation of what the interview will entail and its purpose, and reference to ethical considerations (e.g. non-disclosure of an individual's name or personal information and to any procedural matters relating to the interview. It is usual practice to begin an interview with some non-threatening questions to place the respondent at their ease prior to covering more significant information. However, at all times the respondents should be encouraged to supply information in such a way that their version of events or of a given situation is expressed in terms of their own understanding. The 'right questions' will elicit such information whilst getting the respondent to supply the appropriate context and background to their views and experiences...As with the formulation of an appropriate order for questionnaires, questions need to come in an appropriate order so that vital views and information are not withheld."

With this in mind, building on the feedback and observations from the pilot study, the questionnaire itself was broken into six main categories (A-F) each tailored to the local circumstances and contemporary conditions (see Appendix 1).

6.6.1. Section A: background information

In the first section, a range of questions was asked about the socio-economic status and background details of the respondents. This allowed the respondent to gain a degree of familiarity with the situation, and trust, rather than be thrust headlong into answering what amounted to personal questions about precise details concerning their households' coping strategies. Indeed, on frequent occasions it was observed that the questions concerning

mutual aid were the most contentious, and it is the belief of the researcher that without establishing a dialogue prior to these questions, that many more interviews would have been unsuccessful.

The background information consisted mainly of closed questions, identifying the age of the respondent, their gender and ethnicity, how long they had lived at the address, and whether or not they had lived at another address in the same ward. If they had, then they were asked their main reasons for choosing to stay in the immediate area. From their answers it was hoped to build up an impression about what they felt were their main ties to the area (i.e. family, friends) and whether the decision to stay in the area was made from an empowered position, or whether a lack of choice (i.e. financial restrictions) had forced them to stay in the area. Finally, the respondent was asked whether the house they currently lived in was owned or rented, who actually lives in the house at the present time (e.g. wife, husband, children), as well as the current employment status of adults within the household.

6.5.2. Section B: social interaction networks and support

This section was inspired by a selection of themes and sub-themes (such as trust, reciprocity, social cohesion, social interactions, social networks, social support, and perception of community levels structures or characteristics) included in the Social Capital Question Bank (ONS, June 2002).

In particular, this section sought to establish the extent of the household's kinship (family) and non-kinship networks (neighbours, friends), how often they socialised with these groups (using 'likert' attitudinal scales), would the household like to spend more time with these relations, and if so, what main factor or factors prevented the household from interacting with these relations. The next set of questions focused on the perception of community level structures or characteristics. It was felt important to allow the interviewee a chance to build a picture of their relationship or understanding with the locality. Thus questions asked whether they strongly agree/ tend to agree/ neither agree nor disagree/ tend to disagree/ strongly disagree to statements focused on the community such as: "this is a close, tight knit community", "this is a friendly place to live", "this is a place where people look after each other", and "people here trust one another". The final set of questions here again addressed the community, and was concerned with how the individual interacted with their community, (i.e. whether the householder found it easy to settle, did the neighbours keep themselves to

themselves and so on). To try and establish how the householder felt living in West Knighton/ Saffron, where appropriate they were asked how socially this community compared to the previous community they lived in, and whether they considered the people next door as 'friends' or 'neighbours' and why. This last question was important, to show how the trinity of household relations – family, friends, neighbours – may be more fluid in reality than such a hierarchy would suggest.

6.5.3. Section C: mutual aid received.

The format of this section, designed to tackle the geographies of informal mutual aid, takes its inspiration from Pahl's (1984) research on the Isle of Sheppey outlined earlier. It was here that the use of both open and closed ended questions, to facilitate quantitative and quantitative responses was introduced.

This section revolved around the use of a task list highlighting 24 common tasks familiar to urban communities in general, and certainly highly relevant to the experiences of households in Saffron and West Knighton. The 'material' tasks considered are listed in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1. Material tasks investigated in the questionnaire

Nature of the task	Individual tasks
Property maintenance	Outdoor painting; indoor decorating (i.e. wallpapering; plastering) replacing a broken widow; maintenance of appliances; plumbing; electrical work.
Property improvement	Putting in double glazing; house insulation; building an extension/ renovating; putting in central heating; DIY activities (carpentry/ putting up shelves etc.)
Routine housework	Routine housework (washing dishes/ clothes/ cooking meals) cleaning the windows; doing the shopping, moving heavy furniture.

Gardening activities	Sweeping paths, planting seeds/ mowing lawn
Caring activities:	Childminding; pet/animal care; educational activities (tutoring); giving car lifts; looking after property.
Vehicle maintenance	Repairing and maintenance
Miscellaneous	Borrow tools or equipment; any other jobs

To examine the extent to which households use mutual aid as a coping strategy, the interviewee was asked for each task, whether the task had been undertaken during the previous five years/year/month/week/day (depending on the activity). If conducted, first, they were asked in an open-ended manner who conducted the task (a household member, a relative living outside the household, a friend, neighbour, firm, landlord, etc) and the last time that it had been undertaken. Second, to understand their motives to get the work done, they were asked why they chose that particular individual(s) to carry out the work, whether they were the household's first or preferred choice, and if money was not an issue would they have preferred to engage a (formal) professional individual/ firm/ or company to carry out the task? Third, they were asked whether the person had been unpaid, paid or given a gift; and if paid whether it was 'cash-in-hand' or not and how a price had been agreed. Finally, they were asked why they had decided to get the work done using that source of labour so as to enable their motives to be understood.

Attached to each sub-section, and brought into conversation when appropriate during the interview were some open-ended questions that were focused on the general circumstances/ implications that concerned mutual aid. For example, if the supplier was a friend, family or neighbour and not paid then the respondent would be asked for their reasons behind not paying them. They were then asked, "under what circumstances would you consider it appropriate to pay money or give a gift to family, friends, neighbours" not only in order to understand more about the philosophy behind the gift-exchange, but as importantly to interpret whether the exchange of money was always and necessarily dominated by economic rationales i.e. to make money or save money. The respondent was then asked how they would have reacted if the offer of money and gift had been turned down? Essentially, would they have been happy to owe the supplier a favour?

The section concluded with three questions, designed to gain qualitative information addressing the complexity of mutual aid. Each respondent was asked what other jobs/ situation they would have preferred to engage friends, family or neighbours with, and conversely, what did they consider the main disadvantages of asking a relative, friend or neighbour to help. Finally, the respondent was asked to contemplate two scenarios. Firstly, the respondent was asked (a) would they be comfortable asking a neighbour to collect their prescription if they were ill in bed, and (b) if the milkman (for example) called to collect a payment of £5, and the individual at that time had no cash on them, or in the house, would they feel comfortable asking a neighbour if they could borrow £5? (See Appendix I)

At all times, in the interests of gaining richer qualitative information, if the conversation elaborated in greater detail on certain aspects of mutual aid, then the individual would be encouraged to continue where and when it was seen to be appropriate and relevant to the research interests.

6.5.4. Section D: mutual aid supplied

Following on from section C, the provision of mutual aid by household members was examined. Taking the same tasks in turn, they were asked whether they had conducted the tasks for another household (on an unpaid basis, given a gift, received money) within a particular time frame and if so, for whom (e.g. a relation, friend, neighbour, man/woman), who did the work, and in order to understand their motivations, why they had decided to do that task. If the respondent was paid for their time/ skills etc. how was a suitable price arranged (to help distinguish between paid informal work and paid mutual aid). And a question was asked as to whether or not they would have done the same task if they were not going to get paid (i.e. to establish whether money was a pre-requisite for the job to be undertaken), or it was forced upon them (for example, by well meaning family/ friends not taking 'no' for an answer). If the individual was not paid – what was it about the nature of the task, or the individuals involved which was favourable for them agreeing to do the work anyway. Did they have a real choice, or were they obligated in some way to help?

It was not uncommon for respondents to say that they had not done any work recently for other households. Five questions were included to act as a starting point to encourage further depth of insight and understanding of attitudes to mutual aid (see Appendix 1).

In order to uncover the barriers to mutual aid, in terms of supply, the respondents were asked what obstacles prevented them from helping out (a) family (b) friends (c) neighbours complete tasks. A flashcard was produced at this moment based on findings of previous research (e.g. White, 2000; Williams et al., 2001) that suggests that the following nine barriers need to be investigated (see Table 6.2):

Table 6.2. Flashcard: barriers to participation

1. Lack of social contacts (to ask/ to be asked by)
2. Haven't the skills needed (DIY)
3. Poor age/ health
4. Lack the necessary equipment
5. Poor access to transport
6. Family commitments
7. Work commitments
8. Not enough time
9. Fear of being falsely reported

The conclusion to this section, in keeping with the structure of the previous section, reverses the hypothetical scenarios (i.e. would the household fetch a prescription for a neighbour, or lend £5 to a neighbour)?

6.5.5. Section E: formal mutual aid

The penultimate section focused explicitly on formal voluntary aid. A series of open-ended questions were asked regarding whether they belonged to any local formal or informal associations, groups and organisations; whether they had any responsibilities within this group; whether this association, group of people or organisation has provided them with help/support recently; and finally, the nature of that help/support (material, social, emotional).

Attitudes toward voluntary work were addressed by several questions, addressing the main reasons for working with the organisations mentioned; or alternatively "why" they were no longer/ had never been involved in formal volunteering. Depending on their response they

were then asked if they would ever consider becoming involved in formal volunteering if the barriers that they perceived were preventing them from engaging were removed.

6.5.6. Section F: final background Information

Finally, the questionnaire asked for the household's current total gross income (i.e. before tax) – (either on a daily/ weekly/ monthly/ yearly basis). This was placed at the end in order to increase the likelihood that it would be answered, and the question would be seen in the general context of the previous discussions (after the aims of the research had been outlined). A flashcard was used for this purpose so as to increase the response rate that allowed respondents to answer with an 'a', 'b', 'c', etc, which was randomly allocated to different income categories rather than structured hierarchically. Finally, it was impressed on each respondent that their responses were in the strictest of confidence, and every effort would be made to protect the data.

6.7. Problematising the interview methodology

> "Interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets" (Oakley, 1981: 41)

Before discussing the case study as method, it is appropriate to critique the interview methodology. Here attention is paid to the nature of conduct of interviews, and the role of researcher and the research ethics.

From the point of view of the researcher as Converse and Schuman, (1974: 53) argue, "...there is no single interview style that fits every occasion or all respondents". Thus he or she has to be aware that the best interview is not a perfect interview. Also, it should be remembered that the interview itself is not a neutral process, rather a created reality which is influenced by the personal characteristics of the interviewer. As Fontana and Frey, (2000: 663) argue:

> "Ethnographers have realized for quite some time that researchers are not invisible, neutral entities; rather they are part of the interactions they seek to study and influence those interactions"

As has been clear here, when deciding what to include and exclude from a questionnaire methodology, the judgement rests with the researcher, albeit informed by the results of pilot studies. Consequently:

> "The process of construction is perhaps most transparent when researchers generate data via surveys and interviews. Depending upon the technique used to produce such data, there is a degree of social interaction between the researcher and the "object" being researched."

Given the resource limitations and framework of the thesis, interviews were undertaken only once with each individual respondent. Though this 'one-off' approach promised success, there are also benefits which are linked with having serial interviews. These include breaking down more formal barriers so that more informal conversations will develop; allowing a researcher to probe more deeply for reasons for particular actions; allowing better explanations to questions to develop and so on.

From the perspective of the respondent, it is important to be aware of their fallibility in replying to questions asked. For example some may wish to embellish the truth somewhat, to others giving downright misleading information. This may be the consequence of respondents giving prefabricated responses in order to make them appear more respectable/ others less respectable (see Schlackman, 1989).

Inevitably though, both qualitative and quantitative information is socially 'constructed' to some extent by researchers:

> "...insofar as research by human geographers is an interactive and creative process that is never entirely neutral nor objective. Steps may be taken to make research as objective as possible, but researchers bring their own preconceptions and predilections to any investigation, and these affect both data construction and interpretation." (Robinson, 1998: 12)

The researcher, in interpreting interview results, is inevitably both biased and visible in the process. At the level of the interview, there is a power relationship harnessed between researcher and interviewee that one needs to be aware of at all times for the analysis to achieve its potential. It is a mistake to assume an anonymous neutrality when dealing with such a researcher—constructed methodology.

6.8. The case study as a method

Strictly speaking, case studies are not so much a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. Thus having highlighted the interview methodology, its appropriate strengths and limitations, and given a deep insight into the structure of the questionnaire used, the remaining section of this chapter looks at the case study as a method, and the chosen localities in which the field research took place.

Goode and Hatt (1952: 331) defined the case study method as, "a way of organising social data so as to preserve the unitary character of the social object being studied" The case study method has enjoyed great success within the social sciences as a form of enquiry. Pahl (1984: 146) considered the merits of using case studies at great length, and made five key observations on this method of enquiry:

> "First, they may serve as a simple descriptive device, showing how various elements in a situation interrelate. The emphasis here is likely to be on the unique nature of the event or circumstances. Second, such studies, although evidently unique or ideographic, are nevertheless interpreted in terms of general patterns, and it is these generalities that are emphasized and underlined. Third, a case study may be chosen in order to develop theory. Generalizable relations are deliberately sought out, giving such studies a clear heuristic purpose. Then, fourth, case studies may be seen as what has been referred to as 'plausibility probes' – rather like a pilot study before another stage of empirical research is launched. Finally, there are crucial case studies which allow the investigator to disconfirm some hypothesis or argument or perhaps to support it when circumstance may appear to be loaded against it

Significantly, for Mitchell, (1983: 206) the case study "provides the optimum conditions in which the general principles may be shown to manifest themselves even when obscured by confounding side effects". The strength of the case study as a method relies on its applicability within the wider context beyond its immediate control of influence. Thus Mitchell (1983: 203) argues:

> "In reality no case study can be presented in isolation from the corpus of empirical information and theoretical postulates against which it is has significance... The single case becomes significant only when set against the accumulated experience and knowledge that the analyst brings to it. In other words the extent to which generalisation may be made from case studies depends upon the adequacy of underlying theory and the whole corpus of related knowledge of which the case is analysed rather than on the particular instance itself."

Finally, Pahl's (1984: 147) opinion is that "all case studies are related to a specific context, and some account of this context is crucial to enable readers to judge how far the

generalizations that are drawn from case studies, qualified with a ceteris paribus condition, can be accepted as such." What follows is a breakdown of the two locales selected for the case study to both outline a background and context, with which the specificity and uniqueness of the areas can also be drawn into the wider context.

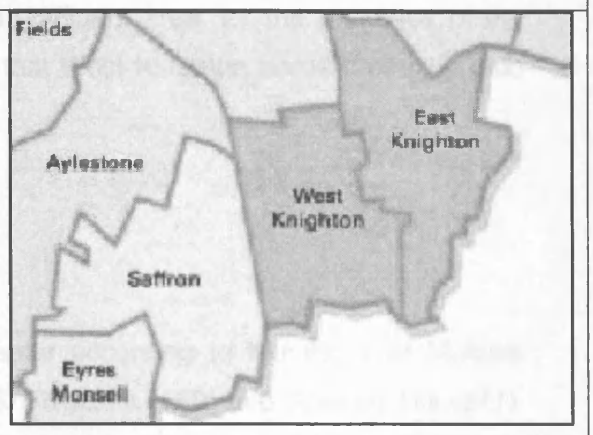
6.8.1 Selecting the two locales for case study

> "Those who own their own homes, own cars, and have children have a potential demand for more tasks than, say, couples without children living in a local authority rented dwelling. Yet again, older people may have a demand for fewer tasks and yet have to have more of them done for them. So income and life-cycle stage are self-evidently important, remembering that income needs to be seen in its cultural context. (Pahl, 1984, 216-217)

One of the central aims of previous research on mutual aid is that, by studying the geographies of mutual aid, it was hoped to see just how different cultures of community involvement emerge through comparing deprived and affluent households. Initial research on this area – conducted in both rural (e.g. Williams et al. 2001a) and urban (e.g. Williams and Windebank, 2000) backgrounds have suggested that formal mutual aid is undertaken by affluent households for primarily social reasons, and that informal mutual aid is more familiar to deprived households, demonstrated in the common coping-strategies used to undertake material tasks. In order to compare meaningful findings with this (and other research in the area) two socially and economically contrasting English wards were chosen for investigation, both in the East Midlands city of Leicester.

In choosing the most affluent and deprived wards in the city a maximum variation sampling technique was used to select the two wards, so as to ensure that both extremes - as far as multiple deprivation is concerned - were well represented (see section 6.5). When selecting the two wards, there was the need to ensure that comparisons were possible between the geographies of mutual aid experienced by the two populations. Thus, as well as the contrasting socio-economic indicators, the spatial location of the two wards played a significant part in making the final decision (Table 6.3). Here, a brief overview of the two areas analysed is provide in turn.

Table 6.3. Profile of the wards of Saffron and West Knighton, Leicester

Leicester Wards: Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000	Neighbouring wards of Saffron and West Knighton
Ranking Among National Wards According to Deprivation Levels In the 10% of most deprived nationally In the next 11-50% of the most deprived nationally In the next 51-100% of the most Deprived nationality	

Multiple Deprivation Indicators 2000 (by Rank)*	Saffron	West Knighton
Index of Multiple Deprivation	383	4787
Income Domain	224	4004
Employment Domain	762	4678
Health Domain	891	4983
Education Domain	297	4588
Housing Domain	820	2632
Child Poverty Index	216	4097

Source Leicester City Council (2002) www.leicester.gov.uk/departments/page.asp?pgid=3395

* Out of 8,414 wards in the UK (1=most deprived)

Source: Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000

6.8.2. The affluent ward: West Knighton

Located on the south-east boundary of Leicestershire, Knighton is the most affluent ward in Leicester, and has long been regarded as the preferred location for a range of professionals wanting convenience for Leicester city centre and the professional quarters, and also for

local high-class shopping and leisure facilities situated in nearby Oadby. In mid-1998, West Knighton had a population of 9300 people, the majority of whom were classified as "white British". Just 5 per cent of the resident population aged 16 or over was on Income Support (compared to 12 per cent in Leicester). Low levels of crime, coupled with a great deal of quality and variety of housing are both desirable qualities present in the area. As such its suitability for selection to fit the requirements for an 'affluent area' for the purposes of the study are obvious. And another interesting facet is that West Knighton borders directly onto the deprived ward selected, Saffron.

6.8.3. The deprived ward: Saffron

Saffron is the fourth most deprived ward in Leicester according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000, behind North Braunstone (rank 57) Wycliffe (150) and Spinney Hill (371). What is interesting about Saffron is that it is a sink estate located on the outskirts of Leicester, surrounded by comparative affluence. The ward to its immediate West Aylestone, is ranked 2343 according to the Indices of Deprivation, 2000, while Knighton, to the east, as indicated, is the most affluent ward in Leicester (Table 6.3). Significantly, there are no other neighbouring wards where the contrast between household deprivation and household affluence is so polarised.

According to Office for National Statistics, in mid 1998 Saffron had a population of some 11,100 people. The 2001 Census of Population showed that within Saffron 12 per cent claim Income Support (compared to an average of only 1 per cent in Leicester); 5 per cent received disability allowance (compared with 3.7 per cent in Leicester) and 39 per cent of the resident population having no academic qualifications. The Land Registry, shows that the average price of a detached house at the time of interviews was £88,389.

Significantly, Saffron has been the subject of several major regeneration initiatives. For example, in 2002 there were several ongoing government initiatives in the ward that were principally designed to address and work through some of the main socio-economic problems (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4. Recent regeneration initiatives focused on Saffron

REGENERATION INITIATIVES	DESCRIPTION
*Single Regeneration Budget Programme (SRB)	Saffron as an SRB4 region qualified for £2 million to help fund social and economic regeneration projects
*Sure Start	"A government scheme that aims to give babies and young children the best possible start in life." In operation in Saffron and five other deprived wards.
*Children's Fund	"This government initiative targets some of Leicester's most vulnerable 5 to 13 year olds". Saffron, along with eight other wards benefited from the £4.8 million investment.
*New Homes	1,500 new homes were built to replace the old Boot Houses at Braunstone and Saffron"
**Health Action Zones (HAZ)	The Annual Report of the Director of Public Health, May 2001 focusing on areas where people's quality of life is most affected by either poor health or disability, identified Saffron among the top 20% of the most deprived wards in England. The HAZ funded an extremely successful community food project in Saffron with members of the community which aimed to improve health and well being, with hands on community training to provide practical support for residents. This ranged from cook'n'eat classes to good practice used to maintain a healthy diet.
* Source: Leicester City Council, 2004	
** Source: Annual Report of the Director of Public Health, 2001	

Perhaps the single highest source (£3 million) of funding for Saffron came via a successful Single Regeneration Bid (SRB), under the banner 'Sustainable Saffron'.

As an aside, and before moving to discuss the sampling procedure, in the time elapsed since this research was carried out, the city of Leicester (radically) changed elements within

its existing ward boundaries for the 2003 local elections. Both Saffron and West Knighton were abolished (see Appendix 2).

6.9. A note on the sampling procedure

Within the case study, Pahl (1984: 147) argues that:

> "In the case of sample surveys, it is possible to make a statistical inference that what may be observed for the sample relates also to the population from which the sample is drawn."

To achieve this, fifty households were interviewed in both West Knighton and Saffron, resulting in 100 households in total. The number of interviews was selected to achieve a greater than 1 per cent sample representation in both wards. Given that the number of houses in Saffron (Council Tax Band, 2001) numbered 4,415 and in West Knighton 3,521, this resulted in a sample of 1.1 per cent for the Saffron, and 1.4 per cent for West Knighton.

In order to make the research as representative as possible, a spatially stratified sampling method was used in both wards (see Rowntree, 2000; Kitchen and Tate, 2000). Such a method has been used successfully in other studies conducted on mutual aid concerning wards of similar sizes (e.g. Williams and Windebank, 2001a). Using the National Grid taken from the Ordnance survey map, and observing the concentration of houses, the streets of Saffron were broken down into roughly eight grids, and those of West Knighton into nine grids. This meant that an average total of 6.25 houses in each grid were needed in Saffron, and 5.5 in West Knighton. This breakdown of both wards was felt necessary in order to ensure that both wards would have some geographic (i.e. north, east, south, west, central) representation. Thus within each grid, the intention was then to select a sampling frame such that every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected (see Kitchen and Tate, 2000). In each ward, every nth dwelling in each street (depending on layout, size, number of houses etc.) was called at, in order to minimise subjectivity, and thus helping to prevent a skewed sample favouring certain tenures, or types of dwelling within the neighbourhood.

The interviews occurred during the daytime on weekdays but also on mid-week evenings and weekends in order to capture, for example, full-time multiple earner households, and thereby maintain a greater representative sample of respondents as was feasibly possible. If

the individual answered but was busy, then I attempted to negotiate a time more convenient for them. If there was no response then I called back once at a later date. If there was still no response, I went to the nth - 1 household, again calling twice. If there was again no response, I moved to the nth +1 household, and so on, in order to preserve the integrity of the sampling technique.

6.10. Characteristics of the sampled populations

In this sub-section the comparative characteristics of the populations within Saffron and West Knighton are reported. The social profile of the respondents, the tenure of the housing, and the socio-economic contrasts outlined in the national statistics are echoed by the sampled populations (Table 6.3). Both West Knighton and Saffron have an overwhelming majority of white respondents, though it should be mentioned that there were eleven households in Saffron where a non-white respondent answered and declined to be interviewed. In West Knighton there were only two such households who declined to be interviewed. A majority of respondents were of working age in both wards. Regarding the tenure of housing stock, all property in West Knighton was privately owned, whereas 22.5 per cent of the housing in Saffron was rented through the council, or rented through a private landlord. In West Knighton the majority of respondents were male, whereas in Saffron they were female (Table 6.5).

Table 6.5. General characteristics of the sampled population: by area

	West Knighton (%)	**Saffron (%)**
Interviews	50	50
Age of respondents (% of respondents surveyed)		
under 18	0.0	0.0
18-35	30.0	50.0
35-60	45.0	27.5
60+	25.0	22.5
Gender (% of households surveyed)		
Male	52.5	40.0
Female	47.5	60.0

Ethnicity (% of households surveyed)		
White	97.5	95.0
Black	0	5.0
Asian	2.5	0
Length of residence (%)		
Less than 12 months	12.5	17.5
12 months – 2 years	10.0	12.5
2 years but less than 3	0.0	12.5
3 years but less than 5	5.0	5.0
5 years but less than 10	5.0	15.0
10 but less than 15	15.0	10.0
15 but less than 20	25.0	2.5
20 but les than 25	7.5	5.0
25 or more years	20.0	20.0
Tenure of housing stock (%)		
Owned	100	77.5
Rented council	0	20.5
Rented private	0	2.5

Comparing the job status of the respondents, the overall household job status and the household income statistics of the two wards again brings sharply into focus the contrasting experiences of the two populations (Table 6.6) reinforcing the interpretation of Saffron as an economically deprived ward, and West Knighton as an area of comparative affluence. Of these, among the most notable statistics are, first, that at the time of the research, only 27.5 per cent of adult respondents were in a full-time occupation in Saffron, compared with 47.5 per cent in West Knighton. Second, only 22.5 per cent of households in Saffron had multiple-earners, with higher percentages recorded for both no-earner (32.5 per cent), and single-earner households (45 per cent). This is in direct contrast to West Knighton where the majority of households are multiple-earners. Third, perhaps the greatest of all the immediate indicators of the economic polarisation as experienced by the two populations, comes through the income status of the households. West Knighton had no 'low income households' (i.e. earning less than £10,430 per annum). It comes as no great surprise to report that the majority of households in West Knighton earn at least £41,000 per annum and 20 per cent earn more than £55,000.

Table 6.6. Employment and income related indicators: by ward

	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Job Status of adults (%)		
Full-time	47.5	27.5
Part time	5.0	12.5
Self employed	5.0	2.5
Unemployed (<year)	2.5	5.0
Unemployed (>year)	0	2.5
Full-time housework	7.5	22.5
Retired	30.0	25.0
Student	2.5	0
Registered disabled	0	2.5
Other	0	0
Household job status (%)		
No-earner	22.5	32.5
Single-earner	22.5	45.0
Multiple-earner	55.0	22.5
Gross household income (gross/ annum)		
0. <£2, 610	0	0
1. £2,610 to £5,210	0	7.5
2. £5,210 to £10,430	0	50.0
3. £10,430 to £15,640	15.0	30.0
4. £15,640 – £20, 860	15.0	7.5
5. £20,860 – £33,800	7.5	5.0
6. £33,800 - £41,000	30.0	0
7. £41, 000 to £55,000	12.5	0
8. £55,000 to £80,000	15.0	0
9. £80,000 +	5.0	0
Household income status (%)		
Low income (1-3)	0	57.5
Middle income (4-6)	37.5	42.5
High income (7-9)	62.5	0

6.11. Conclusion

This chapter has explicitly signposted how and why an interview methodology was chosen. Having done so, the chapter focused on outlining the interview methodology used to show how this could best be employed to achieve the aims and the objectives established in the previous chapter.

A structured questionnaire survey administered by face-to-face interviews was favoured over a range of methodologies including time budget studies, participatory action research, focus groups and social network analysis. The key strengths and comparative advantages of the interview methodology to obtain information from target groups within the population were founded on (a) its ability to provide rich quantitative and qualitative information – thus addressing the data types emphasised in the aims and objective; its ability to produce data that can be analysed by standard procedures; its ability to be conducted quickly, within comparatively low resource input for the quality and depth of the information gained. (b) the past success of previous research undertaken on informal coping strategies (c) the experience of the researcher. The experience of a pilot study conducted within the two case study areas made a valuable contribution in selecting the final structure and type of questions asked within the questionnaire, which was outlined in step by step detail.

Finally, the case study as method was highlighted, as were the two locales selected for the case studies. These were West Knighton, and area of comparative affluence ranked 4787 in the Multiple Deprivation Indices of the year 2000, and its neighbouring ward of Saffron, one of the most deprived wards in Leicester, ranked a lowly 383 on the same Multiple Deprivation Indices.

SECTION I

ASSESSING RESEARCH FOCUSED ON THE GEOGRAPHIES OF MUTUAL AID

Chapter 7

The extent and character of mutual aid

Introduction

The collective aim of Section I of the thesis is to check against existing research into mutual aid in order to either offer support or to challenge the robust nature of previous findings. This chapter analyses the character of mutual aid as (a) group based activity (b) as one-to-one reciprocity and finally (c) as paid mutual aid. It focuses on the extent of mutual aid for both Saffron and West Knighton, and also from the perspective of several key socio-economic groups within the two populations. The quantitative results are principally gained by reporting on the varying types of tasks identified in the last chapter, and whether they have been conducted through mutual aid, and the percentage of households that have engaged in these tasks.

7.1. Extent and character of mutual aid as group-based activity

To reiterate, group-based activity, or formal mutual aid considers work which is conducted through a formal organisation or group and where the individual works free of charge or receives a minor fee for expenses. This definition thus distinguishes it clearly from one-to-one volunteering or informal mutual aid, which:

> "...takes place outside an organisational context and tends to be done on an individual basis, such as helping a neighbour" (Rushton, 2003: 2).

Previous studies have argued that formal mutual aid as a means of meeting material wants and needs, as well as being more familiar to affluent households, than deprived ones, is also more familiar with southern based households, than northern based households (e.g. Williams, 2003a). So, what if anything will these 'midland' based localities add to this finding? Focusing on formal mutual aid in West Knighton, 62.5 per cent of households actively participate in a community based voluntary group. However, in Saffron, the opposite is true, and only 27.5 per cent of respondents have been actively involved in a voluntary group in the last year (Table 7.1). Of great significance though is the observation that these participation rates are not based on the role of formal voluntary groups used as a means of

completing material tasks in West Knighton or Saffron. *Concerning the material tasks investigated, formal mutual aid was entirely absent as a coping strategy.*

Table 7.1. Number of voluntary groups respondents have played an active role within the last 12 months: by ward, earner status and income levels

	Number of Voluntary Groups Joined				
	0 (%)	1 (%)	2-3 (%)	4-5 (%)	6 or more (%)
West Knighton	27.5	30.0	25.0	15.0	2.5
High income	28.0	24.0	32.0	12.0	4.0
Middle income	26.7	40.0	13.3	20.0	0.0
No-earner	22.2	44.4	0.0	33.3	0.0
Single-earner	22.2	44.4	22.2	11.1	0.0
Multiple-earner	31.8	18.2	36.4	9.1	4.5
Saffron	62.5	32.5	5.0	0.0	0.0
Middle income	41.2	52.9	5.9	0.0	0.0
Low income	78.3	17.4	4.3	0.0	0.0
No-earner	86.6	7.7	7.7	0.0	0.0
Single-earner	61.1	38.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Multiple-earner	33.3	55.6	11.1	0.0	0.0

Thus, unlike comparative studies focusing on mutual aid as a group-based activity which have found that households have used formal organisations to perform a small percentage of material tasks (e.g. Williams and Windebank, 2003a), this was not the finding here, for either the deprived or the affluent ward.

The question arises then as to nature of the role formal volunteering plays in both wards, for those who participate. For the majority, group-based-activities were allocated predominantly social and also emotional supporting roles (Tables 7.2 and 7.3). In the final section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to recollect whether they had received/supplied any help through group-based organisations, over the past year. In doing so, voluntary work avoided the same time barriers imposed on material task activities (i.e. daily, weekly, monthly, yearly etc). By extending the period of time in question, it was hoped to widen the

net to incorporate an idea of any material work supplied/ received. Interpreting these sets of questions, in addition to the questions asked of mutual aid generally, allowed the following interpretation of the extent and character of group-based activities in West Knighton and Saffron to be made (see Table 7.2 and Table 7.3).

Table 7.2. Receiving social and/or material help from group-based organisations: West Knighton

West Knighton							
	Overall	High income	Middle income	Low income	No earner	Single earner	Mltple earner
Social/ emotional support (%)	67.5	72.0	60.0	Na	55.6	77.8	68.2
Social/ emotional and material (%)	5.0	0.0	13.3	Na	22.2	0.0	0.0
Neither (%)	27.0	28.0	26.7	Na	22.2	22.2	31.8

Table 7.3. Receiving social and/or material help from group-based organisations: Saffron

Saffron							
	Overall	High income	Middle income	Low income	No earner	Single earner	Mltple earner
Social/ emotional support (%)	37.5	Na	52.9	26.1	23.1	33.3	66.7
Social/ emotional and material (%)	0.0	Na	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Neither (%)	62.5	Na	47.1	73.9	76.9	66.7	33.3

What can be seen from these tables, overwhelmingly, is that group-based organisations are allocated important social and/or emotional roles in the affluent community of West Knighton. Also, where material aid had taken place this was intrinsically linked to social rationales (e.g. giving/ receiving car lifts). However, within the deprived ward of Saffron, over 60 per cent of respondents had received no social, emotional or material support from group-based

organisations. Where households within this deprived ward had received support, it was undertaken purely on a social or emotional basis. Such a finding is made clearly in other research. For example, the conclusion that Williams et al. (2001: 25) draw when focusing on participation levels in rural communities has many parallels here:

> "It must not be assumed that a high level of participation in voluntary groups in the UK...is in any way an indicator of the existence of a support structure for the provision of material aid to lower-income households. The presence of sports clubs, rambling associations and the like in rural areas are the product of attempts by more affluent social groups to create social structures through which they can build and maintain social networks and tend to be used by these groups for precisely that social purpose. Community-based organisations, on the whole, are not sources of material support for relatively low-income households. "

Interpreting the character of formal mutual aid from the main socio-economic variables in West Knighton and Saffron, some interesting conclusions can be made in addition to those made already (see tables, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3). Once more, supporting previous findings, it is those households with the highest income categories in both wards who are most likely to be involved with group-based activity. Again, the role of the formal groups is one seen almost entirely on social and/ or emotional levels.

Putting the 'earner status' of households under the spotlight, in Saffron there is a positive relationship found with those households engaging in voluntary organisations. In other words, more multiple earner household than single-earner household, and single earner households than no earner households are members of a voluntary group. And, appropriate to the old adage 'to them that have shall be given', the same relationship exists when focusing on those who have received help from voluntary groups.

7.2. Extent and character of mutual aid as one-to-one reciprocity

Having concluded that formal groups did not figure within the coping strategies highlighted in either ward to complete the twenty-four material tasks investigated, what role, if any, did informal cultures of participation play? Beyond this, was this informal coping strategy more familiar to the lower-income ward and population groups within Saffron or the higher income groups in the ward of West Knighton?

Focusing on the material tasks identified by the questionnaire, immediately it can be seen that there is a contrast between Saffron and West Knighton concerning the capabilities of the

households to complete these tasks. For example, regarding 'property maintenance', 'property improvement', 'routine housework', 'gardening' and 'caring activities', the more affluent households in West Knighton undertook a higher percent of tasks in these areas than Saffron (Tables 7.4 and 7.5). Overall, 79 per cent of tasks were completed, compared to 70 per cent in Saffron. Such findings indicate that the ability of households to perform necessary tasks is not uniform across space: a conclusion that has also been made previously (e.g. Williams and Windebank, 2003a).

Table 7.4. The extent of mutual aid according to the nature of task: Saffron

Saffron								
	Property Mainten-ance (last 5 years)	Property improvement (last 5 years)	Routine Housework (last week)	All gardening (last year)	Caring Activities (last six months)	Vehicle Mainten -ance (last year)	Other	Total
Tasks done (%)	77.9	32.5	91.3	87.5	62.0	100	100	70.5
Mutual Aid (%)	12.3	32.3	15.8	28.6	43.5	17.5	43.8	25.6

Table 7.5. The extent of mutual aid according to the nature of task: West Knighton

West Knighton								
	Property Mainten-ance (Last 5 years)	Property improvement (Last 5 years)	Routine House-work (Last week)	All gardening (Last year)	Caring Activities (Last six months)	Vehicle Maint-enance (Last year)	Other	Total
Tasks done (%)	94.6	39.0	100.0	100.0	66.5	100.0	100.	79.0
Mutual Aid (%)	3.5	7.7	6.3	20.0	45.1	5.0	48.8	17.5

Addressing the extent of one-to-one reciprocity used to completed tasks, reveals significant contrasts in the coping strategies of both wards. Focusing first on the deprived neighbourhood of Saffron, mutual aid was used to perform 25.6 per cent of the tasks completed - a percentage that considerably exceeds that recorded for the affluent ward of West Knighton, where only 17.5 per cent of jobs were completed through unpaid mutual aid (Table 7.4 and Table 7.5). Comparing this finding (i.e. that deprived populations, despite undertaking less amount of work, engage in higher levels of informal one-to-one aid to complete tasks) with existing research, there are again parallels to be seen (e.g. Williams and Windebank, 2003a).

Taking these contrasting statistics at face value, the implications that they carry are numerous, not least as a critique to the prevailing formal economic discourses, and also with respect to economic geographers understanding of the mutual aid. Firstly, according to formal economist discourse, the informal sector plays, at best, a highly marginalised/ redundant role concerning the completion of material tasks in the daily coping strategies of households. The thesis of commodification meanwhile assumes that the profit motive is (now) inextricably embedded in economic exchange. Any alternative economic space that exists will inevitably succumb to the juggernaut of late capitalism. In other words according to this logic there can be no 'last spaces of resistance'. Yet, in keeping with the observations made regarding the Time Use surveys (e.g. Ruston, 2003), and with mutual aid generally (e.g. Burns et al., 2004; Williams, 2004a) unpaid reciprocal activity forms a significant part of day-to-day coping strategies, and is far from a residual sector. Indeed referring to the high levels of participation rates in both Saffron and West Knighton it could be argued (though acknowledging the small sample population) even more strenuously that mutual aid is crucial to a household's coping strategy, *at greater levels than previous research has suggested* (e.g. Williams, 2002c; Williams et al., 2001; Williams and Windebank, 2003a). As an illustration, Williams and Windebank, (2003) found that exchanges undertaken on an unpaid basis account for just 15.6 per cent of work done in deprived neighbourhoods, and 6.8 per cent in comparatively higher-income neighbourhoods.

Looking at the range and type of activities in which mutual aid is exchanged, brings to attention the fact that certain tasks were far more likely to be undertaken than others. Firstly, almost three-quarters - 72.1 per cent in Saffron and 65.1 per cent in West Knighton - of all mutual aid is concentrated around caring activities (i.e. looking after property and pets, childminding, tutoring) and gardening. Similarly, in the 'other' category, both sets of

households in West Knighton and Saffron were more likely to exchange or 'borrow' various tools on an unpaid reciprocal basis. This, again, supports research carried out elsewhere (Williams, 2002c).

Secondly, the differences between the two wards are most pronounced when it comes to jobs 'within' the home. Within the deprived households of Saffron family, friends, or neighbours are statistically far more likely to be used when trying to get domestic tasks (from routine housework to house maintenance and improvement) completed, than in the more affluent household of West Knighton. This is significant, because the overriding preference for those 'necessary' jobs within the home is to be completed by self-provisioning, and failing that formal or informal paid work, rather than mutual aid (see Williams and Windebank, 2001).

In response to the question as to whether particular household types give and receive unpaid mutual aid more so than others, the levels of mutual aid received are analysed. As Table 7.6 shows, a higher percentage of Saffron's lower-income households receive mutual aid than either the middle or higher-income groups in Saffron or West Knighton. The situation becomes somewhat more complicated when the households are considered according to their earner status. In West Knighton for example, one would expect to find lower amounts of mutual aid received (taking into account previous research which has found that no-earner and lower-income households receive higher amounts of mutual aid (e.g. Williams and Windebank, 1999, 2000). However, multiple earner households, and especially no-earner households, benefit from higher levels of one-to-one aid than the equivalent sub-groups in Saffron.

Table 7.6. Receiving unpaid mutual aid in West Knighton and Saffron: by earner status and income levels.

Ward	Earner status (%)			Income levels (%)		
	Multiple	Single	No	Low	Middle	High
Saffron	12.0	22.8	15.5	31.2	17.6	-
West Knighton	14.6	19.4	23.1	-	13.3	14.0

Regarding the no-earner households, in Knighton, these are predominantly made up of retired individuals. Generally, this group enjoy better levels of health than the equivalent retired population in Saffron. This considered, the households actively look to continue with many activities that they have always been engaged in – but would have done so through means of self-provisioning. What we have here, it is argued, is that with increasing age, comes the associated restrictions placed on the body in relation to physically demanding tasks. In this case householders increasingly decentralise their coping strategies from self-provisioning toward mutual aid.

7.3. Extent and character of paid mutual aid

Paid mutual aid, involving the exchange of money and/or gifts in lieu of money for work completed, has traditionally been considered under the sphere of informal paid work. The mainstream assumption is that this exchange has been motivated solely according to economic rationales (i.e. the profit motive) (see Leyshon and Lee, 2003; Williams and Windebank, 2003a).

Examining firstly the extent of paid mutual aid in the two wards it is interesting to note how both affluent and deprived households engaged in similar amounts. In West Knighton paid mutual aid accounted for 6.9 per cent of jobs undertaken, and 6.4 per cent in Saffron (Table 7.7).

Table 7.7. Levels of unpaid and paid mutual aid: by ward

	Tasks conducted (%)	**Unpaid mutual aid (%)**	**Paid mutual aid (%)**	**Tasks within unpaid MA involving household (%)**	**Tasks within paid MA involving household (%)**
All Households					
West Knighton	79.0	17.5	6.9	19.5	3.8
Saffron	70.5	25.6	6.4	36.4	27.9

It is clear, that the extent of paid mutual aid, far from involving a few token examples, instead plays a significant role as a form of mutual aid in its own right (which echo previous research findings made in urban communities, e.g. Williams and Windebank 2001b).

The highest percentages of paid mutual aid to complete material tasks were found in the sub-populations of West Knighton (Table 7.8). Within this ward, 14.1 per cent of tasks using paid mutual aid were undertaken by middle-income households; and 16.5 per cent in no-earner households. These two percentages exceed all other individual sub-groups considered in the research. Interestingly paid mutual aid has little correlation within the hierarchical earner status between the two wards. Rather, the finding in Saffron is that paid mutual aid was used the most in multiple earner households (9.0 per cent) followed by single earner households (6.4 per cent) and finally no-earner households (4.8 per cent). This trend, however is reversed when compared to earner status of households within West Knighton, with multiple earner households engaging less in paid mutual aid than single, or no-earner households.

Table 7.8. Paid mutual aid: by household income and earner status

	Tasks conducted (%)	**Unpaid mutual aid (%)**	**Paid mutual aid (%)**	**Tasks within unpaid MA involving household (%)**	**Tasks within paid MA involving household (%)**
High-income households					
West Knighton	81.2	17.2	3.1	25.0	0.0
Middle income households					
West Knighton	76.7	17.4	14.1	16.7	12.8
Saffron	75.3	17.6	8.1	29.6	44.0
Low income households					
Saffron	68.1	31.1	4.8	38.5	5.6
Multiple-earner households					
West Knighton	82.8	17.6	3.9	28.6	5.9
Saffron	71.8	16.8	9.0	26.9	28.6

Single-earner households					
West Knighton	79.6	19.2	5.2	12.1	11.1
Saffron	68.9	33.1	6.4	43.0	38.9
No-earner households					
West Knighton	75.9	14.0	16.5	13.0	7.4
Saffron	68.8	22.5	4.8	25.0	9.1

7.4. Conclusion

Beginning to draw some links between mutual aid as (a) group based activity (b) unpaid (c) paid mutual aid it is clear from analysing the extent and character of these activities that a good deal of work in both communities takes place in alternative economic spheres. It is also clear that the extent and character is uneven both from a spatial and socio-economic perspective. These conclusions reinforce, rather than challenge, previous research findings.

Significantly, in relation to material support especially, formal group-based activities are not allocated any significant role within the current informal coping strategies focused on material aid within the households surveyed. In keeping with existing literature on formal and informal local participatory cultures, it would appear that, given the evidence, both these midlands communities have more in common with the informal networks of reciprocity identified in northern England rather than the formal participatory networks of the south (Williams 2003a). Beyond this, it is suggested that voluntary groups (being allocated weak material roles, both in term of supply and receiving) are harnessed by affluent groups for purposes of sociability. This being the case, coupled to the fact that the strengths or raison d'être of formal voluntary groups appears to be defined on social and emotional terms, it would appear that the role allocated by policies that focus on promoting formal volunteering as a means for facilitating community development, encouraging bridging, rather than bonding networks of social capital, and forming a route for marginalised populations into employment, is highly, problematical. This again reinforces previous research focusing on the extent and character of mutual aid.

However, the extent of unpaid or informal mutual aid in Saffron and West Knighton, has considered mutual aid to be *a far more significant coping strategy* in terms of getting material tasks completed than previous research has concluded. This has been witnessed from the

findings within both affluent and deprived households. Therefore this research not only does much to cement the observations made on mutual aid previously; it goes further to suggest that the extent of informal mutual aid certainly has been – if anything – underestimated, and that this form of coping strategy is much more prevalent than previously thought.

Importantly, mapping the extent of paid mutual aid (as distinct from paid informal work) goes a long way to consolidate previous research findings that has undermined the popular perception that all forms of 'payment' with profit-motivated paid informal work. Indeed, here over 16 per cent of no-earner households in the affluent ward of West Knighton used paid mutual aid as a means of getting work completed! More generally both within and between both populations, significant amounts of work are undertaken through this alternate exchange which are neither conducted through self-interest rationales or are saturated with the profit motive (i.e. to make or to save money). By differentiating between the two, an important realm of activity within mutual aid has been brought to the surface, and articulated much more explicitly than previous research.

Chapter 8

The social embeddedness of mutual aid

Introduction

In Chapter 7, through highlighting the extent and character of the cultures of participation in West Knighton and Saffron, many of the findings made did support the conclusions and arguments made by previous research findings. However, it was also suggested that previous research findings have been comparatively conservative estimations of the amount of mutual aid taking place in deprived and affluent localities in England. In this chapter, the emphasis moves to investigate the social embeddedness of mutual aid: "For whom do people conduct work for in mutual aid, what do they do and where do they do it?"

8.1. The social embeddedness of mutual aid as group-based activity

Group-based activity, as highlighted in the previous chapter is allocated predominantly social and emotional roles, rather than material ones. Looking at the social embeddedness of this activity, in both Saffron and West Knighton group-based mutual aid was principally conducted around local social networks, in which the majority of people were familiar with each other. This is unsurprising when one considers that one of the main rationales for participation, as will be highlighted in the following chapter was social – to consolidate and expand upon existing friendship networks.

The groups that people participated in were highly diverse in orientation and outlook, and included faith groups, sports associations, neighbourhood watch, childminding circles, historical societies, education courses, youth groups, environmental groups, and various other hobbies (such as railway enthusiasts, bridge, and poker clubs). Many of these groups were small in terms of size and scale, which was considered both a strength and a weakness by the people involved. On the positive side, they were ideal sites for getting to know people in the locality well (see Chapter 13). However, low membership turnouts, and in many cases an ageing population profile, called into question the sustainability of many groups, and was for some participants an active source of worry. One resident in West

Knighton, who was heavily involved in several church related/ charity projects, bemoaned the fact that it is:

> "Always the same people left to organise the activities, run the groups, and it's always the same ones who attend, no matter what we do. But if we didn't do it then it wouldn't happen. Nobody would take responsibility – and that is a crying shame."

Looking to link these findings with other research conducted on formal mutual aid, it is apparent that many of these trends, profiles, and associated fears with such groups have been observed elsewhere (e.g. Belliveau et. al, 1996; Whiting and Harper, 2003). In other words, the experiences of the population here is by no means unique.

The main conclusion to draw concerning the social embeddedness of these voluntary groups is that each represented a largely homogenous group, largely benefiting people with a common (social) interest, and were not, crucially, seen as a means of helping individuals in the wider locality. This even applied to faith groups, which benefited those who attended, rather than the wider parish in general. Again, such an observation is not surprising (see Greeley, 1997). One of the strengths of formal volunteering is its ability to bring people together who know each other well, more so than those who do not. In terms of social capital, these groups are effective in terms of bonding social networks rather than bridging ones (Belliveau et. al, 1996; Flora, 1998; Granovetter, 1998) as highlighted in Chapter 3.

8.2. The social embeddedness of unpaid mutual aid as one-to-one reciprocity

Analysing the sources of informal mutual aid, upon breaking down the 25.6 per cent of all material work undertaken using unpaid one-to-one reciprocity in Saffron, the finding is that some 44.5 per cent of jobs are undertaken by relatives, 27.2 per cent by friends, and 28.3 per cent by neighbours (Table 8.1). In West Knighton on the other hand, just 19.5 per cent of exchanges take place on an unpaid basis within the family – with 31.6 per cent taking place between 'friends' and 42.9 per cent between 'neighbours'.

Table 8.1 Sources of mutual aid: by ward

Relationship with Household	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Relatives	*19.5*	*44.5*
Male	4.5	23.1
Female	6.0	5.8
Joint	9.0	15.6
Friends	*31.6*	*27.2*
Male	4.5	8.7
Female	8.3	9.2
Joint	18.8	9.2
Neighbours	*42.9*	*28.3*
Male	9.0	5.8
Female	6.0	1.2
Joint	27.8	21.4

To attempt to offer an explanation the difference in the social constitution of mutual aid between West Knighton (predominately non-kin based) and Saffron (predominantly kin-based) it is likely that the relative proximity of friends and relatives had an influential role. As Table 8.2 shows, households in Saffron are far more likely to have kin in the immediate area whom they can potentially receive help from. The overwhelming preference to engage mutual aid with kin relations has been widely documented (see Williams and Windebank, 2001a, 2003a).

Table 8.2. Breakdown of social relations: by area

	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Family in area		
0	42.5	35.0
1-2	35.0	22.5
3-4	12.5	20.0
5 or more	10.0	22.5

Friends in area		
0	7.5	15.0
1-2	15.0	37.5
3-4	27.5	15.0
5 or more	50.0	32.5

Although kinship exchange constitutes the largest source of one-to-one aid in the deprived ward Saffron, and non-kinship exchange in West Knighton (Table 8.1), particular sub-groups within the two wards rely on these sources far more than others. For example, in Saffron no-earner households rely less on family members for help than single households or multiple earner households (see Table 8.3).

Considering the considerable extent of mutual aid (17.5 percent), the greater reliance on non-kin sources of mutual aid in West Knighton perhaps reflects an ability of these particular households to successfully fill the void left by a comparative absence of relatives in the locality (Table 8.2). Within West Knighton, the greatest source of one-to-one reciprocity came from neighbours, irrespective of income levels, or number of household earners (Table 8.5). The immediate 'community' then would seem to be 'supportive', close knit, thus ironically painting a picture which follows the narrative discourse for mutual aid that argues that mutual aid reflects the solidaristic, lower-income working-class populations. Such a perception definitive of the marginality thesis, when considering the wider social relations (friends, neighbours) and focusing on the sub-populations within and between West Knighton and Saffron, would seem to be turned on its head. Rather, it is the affluent population (and sub-groups) that demonstrate a far greater solidarity. Again this finding has been made elsewhere (Williams, 2003a).

Table 8.3. Sources of unpaid mutual aid in Saffron

Relationship with household	Ward	Gross Household income (%)		Number of Earners (%)		
	Saffron	Low Income	Middle Income	No-earner	Single-earner	Multiple-earner
Relatives	*44.5*	*42.7*	*53.7*	*44.2*	*45.2*	*53.8*
Male	23.1	27.4	20.4	23.1	26.9	15.4
Female	5.8	2.6	13.0	0.0	4.3	23.1
Joint	15.6	12.8	20.4	21.2	14.0	15.4
Friends	*27.2*	*31.6*	*11.1*	*21.2*	*32.3*	*11.5*
Male	8.7	11.1	1.9	1.9	11.8	0.0
Female	9.2	11.1	3.7	13.5	8.6	0.0
Joint	9.2	9.4	5.6	5.8	11.8	11.5
Neighbours	*28.3*	*25.6*	*35.2*	*34.6*	*22.6*	*34.6*
Male	5.8	6.0	5.6	1.9	5.4	11.5
Female	1.2	1.7	1.9	3.8	1.1	0.0
Joint	21.4	17.9	27.8	28.8	16.1	23.1

Table 8.4. Sources of unpaid mutual aid in West Knighton

Relationship with household	Ward	Gross Household income (%)		Number of Earners (%)		
	West Knighton	Middle Income	High Income	No-earner	Single-earner	Multiple-earner
Relatives	*19.5*	*20.8*	*29.8*	*21.7*	*15.2*	*28.6*
Male	4.5	8.3	10.7	8.7	9.1	10.4
Female	6.0	4.2	3.6	4.3	0.0	5.2
Joint	9.0	8.3	15.5	8.7	6.1	13.0
Friends	*31.6*	*35.4*	*27.4*	*34.8*	*39.4*	*28.6*
Male	4.5	4.2	8.3	0.0	6.1	9.1
Female	8.3	16.7	3.6	17.4	6.1	5.2
Joint	18.8	14.6	15.5	17.4	27.3	14.3

Neighbours	*42.9*	*43.8*	*42.9*	*43.5*	*45.5*	*42.9*
Male	9.0	8.3	9.5	8.7	9.1	9.1
Female	6.0	0.0	9.5	0.0	0.0	10.4
Joint	27.8	35.4	23.8	34.8	36.4	23.4

Interestingly, it is not those households who are on the lowest incomes who receive the most kinship support. In West Knighton 13.9 per cent of all material aid takes the place via one-to-one informal reciprocity. Focusing on the source of this one-to-one aid, in direct contrast to the experiences in Saffron, the vast bulk of mutual aid comes from neighbours (42.9 per cent) and friends (31.6 per cent), rather than family (19.5 per cent).

When the gender division within one-to-one reciprocity is examined, some interesting findings spring to light. For example, in Saffron the dependency on a man to undertaking a task within unpaid mutual aid comes to the fore, more so than women. This is surprising in some ways, given the 'domestic' unpaid nature of tasks in which the woman's role has traditionally been stronger (see Baxter et al., 1990) and more dominant in this coping strategy. Surprising perhaps, but an explanation of "why" derives its inspiration from the same source as used to explain the possible kinship/ non-kinship dichotomy: the wider social picture. In this case attention should be paid not to the nature of task involved, but to the composition of the household's interviewed.

As Table 8.5 reveals, there are considerable differences in the social make-up of respondents' households between West Knighton and Saffron. From the statistics, it could be presumed that households in Saffron are more fragmentary, and less secure, with only 30 per cent of partners (compared to 90 per cent in West Knighton) entering into marriage, and with it all the implied stability and permanency that such a binding relationship brings with it. However, implied or real, the main point is that beyond this there are vastly significant differences in the orientation of the households themselves. For example only 10 per cent of West Knighton's households are occupied by either a single male (7.5 per cent) or, even more rarely, a female (2 per cent). The reverse is seen in Saffron where 15.0 per cent of households are composed of one male (a further 2.5 per cent single male with children); with 12.5 per cent of households lived in by a single female, and the same figure again repeated for single females with children living at home. Or, more bluntly, a quarter of households interviewed in Saffron were occupied by women without a male partner. The significance of household composition and mutual aid will be discussed in Section 10.7.1.

Table 8.5. Social breakdown of relationships within the household: by ward

	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Single male	7.5	15.0
Female	2.5	12.5
Single male with children	0.0	2.5
Single female with children	0.0	12.5
Unmarried couple	0.0	10.0
Unmarried couple with children	0.0	17.5
Married couple	45.0	10.0
Married couple with children	45.0	20.0

8.3. Social embeddedness of paid mutual aid

Examining the social embeddedness of paid mutual aid as one-to-one reciprocity, it became apparent that though there were notable similarities with unpaid mutual aid, clear differences could be seen as well. One of the most significant of these was the fact that relatives are the preferred source of paid mutual aid in both wards. Indeed, looking at the social relations, again the same hierarchical pattern emerges in both in Saffron and West Knighton, with which relatives are most frequently used, followed by neighbours, and finally friends. In West Knighton a slightly higher percentage of households (46.2 per cent compared with 44.2 per cent) were paid by relatives for work undertaken; in Saffron more households (32.6 per cent compared with 30.8 per cent) were paid in some way by neighbours; and again a slightly higher percentage of households in Saffron (23.3 per cent compared to 23.1 per cent) were paid for work undertaken by their friends (Table 8.6).

Table 8.6 Social embeddedness of paid mutual aid: by ward

Relationship with household	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Relatives	*46.2*	*44.2*
Male	40.4	34.9
Female	0.0	0.0
Joint	5.8	9.3
Friends	*23.1*	*23.3*
Male	5.8	18.6
Female	5.8	0.0
Joint	11.5	4.7
Neighbours	*30.8*	*32.6*
Male	5.8	4.7
Female	0.0	0.0
Joint	25.0	27.9

Such statistics are very interesting, especially in West Knighton where, as demonstrated earlier, non-kin relations were the principle source of unpaid mutual aid. Yet, regarding the social embeddedness of paid mutual aid in West Knighton exchange between kin relations was higher (albeit slightly) than in Saffron! The prevalence of this can be interpreted as a consequence of the redistributive rationales that underpin this activity. Where money is involved, as opposed to the giving of a gift in lieu of money, households preferred to pay family members over 'outsiders' for work undertaken (for a more complete explanation of the rationales underpinning this, see Chapter 11). Again, this finding supports – rather than challenges – previous research (e.g. Williams 2001b, 2003b, Williams and Windebank, 2000).

Indeed, focusing on the sub-population groups, and earner status, the greater prevalence of paid mutual aid between kin in West Knighton (in comparison with unpaid mutual aid) can be largely explained as a consequence of this coping-strategy being employed by no-earner households (Table 8.7 and Table 8.8). In West Knighton 74.1 per cent of these household types paid relatives for work undertaken, compared with 45.5 per cent in Saffron. In Saffron, the majority of no-earner households were most likely to pay friends for work undertaken: in both wards these populations didn't pay neighbours for material, social, or emotional support.

For low-income households, the majority of paid mutual aid - 61.1 per cent - took place between families, and in particular would be most likely to be received by male household members. Neighbours were another strong source of paid mutual aid, 33.3 per cent, with 'friends', at 5.6 per cent, hardly figuring at all. The distribution of paid mutual aid within middle-income households in Saffron was far more equitable than any other sub-population studied. Both relatives and neighbours accounted for 32.0 per cent each of paid mutual aid in this ward, with 'friends' accounting for the highest percentage, 36.0 per cent. In West Knighton on the other hand, neighbours (66.7 per cent) were the highest sources of paid mutual aid, far greater than both 'relatives' (20 per cent) and friends (13.3 per cent). Finally, the higher-income households in West Knighton used paid mutual aid between neighbours (66.7 per cent) far more than relatives (20.0 per cent) and friends (13.3 per cent).

Table 8.7. Sources of paid mutual aid: West Knighton

	West Knighton (%)	**Middle Income (%)**	**High Income (%)**	**No-earner (%)**	**Single-earner (%)**	**Multiple-earner (%)**
Relationship with household						
Relatives	*46.2*	*56.4*	*20.0*	*74.1*	*22.0*	*29.9*
Male	40.4	56.4	0.0	74.1	22.0	5.2
Female	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.5
Joint	5.8	0.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	18.2
Friends	*23.1*	*12.8*	*13.3*	*0.0*	*11.1*	*28.6*
Male	5.8	10.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.1
Female	5.8	2.6	13.3	0.0	11.1	5.2
Joint	11.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3
Neighbours	*30.8*	*30.8*	*66.7*	*25.9*	*66.7*	*42.9*
Male	5.8	7.7	0.0	3.7	22.2	9.1
Female	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.4
Joint	25.0	23.1	66.7	22.2	44.4	23.4

Table 8.8. Sources of paid mutual aid: Saffron

	Saffron (%)	Low Income (%)	Middle Income (%)	No-earner (%)	Single-earner (%)	Multiple-earner (%)
Relationship with household						
Relatives	*44.2*	*61.1*	*32.0*	*45.5*	*50.0*	*28.6*
Male	34.9	55.6	20.0	45.5	38.9	14.3
Female	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Joint	9.3	5.6	12.0	0.0	11.1	14.3
Friends	*23.3*	*5.6*	*36.0*	*0.0*	*38.9*	*28.6*
Male	18.6	5.6	28.0	0.0	38.9	14.3
Female	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Joint	4.7	0.0	8.0	0.0	0.0	14.3
Neighbours	*32.6*	*33.3*	*32.0*	*54.5*	*11.1*	*42.9*
Male	4.7	5.6	4.0	9.1	0.0	7.1
Female	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Joint	27.9	27.8	28.0	45.5	11.1	35.7

Once more, observing the gender division (Table, 8.7 and 8.8) within paid mutual aid, it becomes noticeable that the recipients of paid mutual aid are again highly skewed toward men than women. Reasons for this have been highlighted in the discussion on unpaid mutual aid. However, other studies have shown that paid informal work is much more likely to be undertaken by men than women (e.g. Williams and Windebank 2000, 2001b); and, though not substantiated here, it is women who traditionally undertake greater levels of unpaid mutual aid then men.

8.4. Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the social embeddedness of mutual aid, in order to illustrate who undertakes such work, and who benefits from the work undertaken. The findings here do a great deal to support previous research findings. For example, the social composition of formal organisations is far more homogenous, than the heterogeneous social geographies that informal mutual aid enjoys within both West Knighton and Saffron. Formal groups

function largely as ends in themselves, where people interact with select groups of friends and neighbours on both social and emotional levels, but make no impact on their material lives or the lives of others.

On the more one-to-one basis, Chapter 9 threw up some social patterns which will be paid closer attention to in Chapters 10-14. For example, focusing on the sources of mutual aid, can the notable contrasts between West Knighton and Saffron (Table 8.1) be simply accounted for by proximity to kin relations? How can the differences of paid mutual aid by social relations be explained? Initial evidence though suggests that informal mutual aid, helps consolidate and construct a wider range of social networks, which engage the local community in a more embracing fashion than formal mutual aid by involving family, friends and neighbours (albeit at different levels, in different situations). This finding suggests that, give the right circumstances and ambition, informal mutual aid could play a significant role in harnessing the community to help individual households cope – materially, socially and/ or emotionally, again supporting a conclusion that has been raised elsewhere (e.g. Williams et al, 2001).

Chapter 9

Barriers to engagement in mutual aid

Introduction

The two previous chapters on the extent, character and social embeddedness of mutual aid have reinforced many existing findings on mutual aid. The final geography of mutual aid that this thesis will compare with previous research focuses on the barriers to engagement in mutual aid. However, beyond this, the chapter is also relevant for the aims and objectives in Section II, and specifically the penultimate chapter which very much turns this chapter on its head, asking the question 'what sustains mutual aid and why'. Hence it is hoped that both chapters 9 and then 13 will both individually and collectively paint an accurate picture orientated around the participatory circles of mutual aid, albeit coming at them from the opposite ends of the spectrum.

Again, the chapter discusses the various barriers to mutual aid by considering the (predominantly quantitative) experiences of West Knighton and Saffron relating to mutual aid on two levels, namely (a) as group-based activity and (b) as one-to-one reciprocity.

It is also important to add at the beginning that, regarding one-to-one mutual aid, the finding is that 87 per cent of households in West Knighton wished to do more for others, and 94 per cent in Saffron (this overwhelmingly positive response has been the experience of other research, for example Williams et al, 2001). Both localities suggested that they could not engage in greater levels of informal mutual aid principally due to a lack of social networks, a lack of time and geographical barriers. Regarding formal mutual aid, the key barriers to participation included: 'a conscious decision not to get involved', negative experiences', 'lack of time/little energy', and 'location'. Again these barriers largely match the findings examined previously, and outlined in Chapter 2 (section 2.4.3).

9.1. Barriers to engagement in mutual aid as group-based activity

9.1.1. A lack of desire

The main finding of the research is that, given the choice, there is little desire, especially in the no-earner and low-income households of Saffron, to involve themselves in group-based activities (Table 9.1). If households had greater amounts of time, many residents expressed the desire to engage more with their family, and then other known social contacts such as friends, on an informal basis, than participate in formalised groups. Such a bias toward informal mutual aid has been observed elsewhere. For example, Burns and Taylor (1998: 1) argued:

> "Self-help and mutual aid have always been an important way for individuals to cope with immediate needs, with poverty and social exclusion. In many circumstances and for many needs and activities, using formal services or joining a formal organisation may be a last, rather than a first resort."

Table 9.1. Barriers to participation in formal groups in Saffron: by ward and socio-economic factors

Saffron							
	Ward	High income	Middle income	Low income	No-earner	Single-earner	Multiple-earner
It isn't something that I wish to become involve with	44.0	Na	28.6	50.0	63.6	36.4	0.0
I don't have enough time	36.0	Na	57.1	27.8	18.2	45.5	66.7
I haven't enough energy	0.0	Na	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
I have too many other commitments	4.0	Na	0.0	5.6	9.1	0.0	0.0
I have not had the right opportunity	4.0	Na	0.0	5.6	0.0	9.1	0.0

I have had negative experiences in the past with voluntary groups	8.0	Na	0.0	11.1	9.1	9.1	0.0
The voluntary groups I want to join are too far away	4.0	Na	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3

9.1.2. Negative perceptions and experiences

One of the highest single barriers to participation in the deprived ward of Saffron (8.0 per cent), and the third equal in West Knighton (9.1 per cent) are the negative experiences of households who had been involved (or known of others who had had bad experiences) in some capacity, and whose subsequent attitudes had been formed accordingly. For some households the justification not to participate was built around a keen distrust of the whole 'volunteering' nature of some formal groups.

Table 9.2. Barriers to participation in formal groups in West Knighton: by ward and socio-economic factors

West Knighton						
	Ward	High income	Middle income	No-earner	Single-earner	Multiple-earner
It isn't something that I wish to become involve with	9.1	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3
I don't have enough time	45.5	57.1	25.0	0.0	100.0	42.9
I haven't enough energy	18.2	14.3	25.0	50.0	0.0	14.3
I have too many other commitments	9.1	14.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3

I have not had the right opportunity	9.1	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	14.3
I have had negative experiences in the past with voluntary groups	9.1	0.0	25.0	50.0	0.0	0.0
The voluntary groups I want to join are too far away	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Many lower-income and no-earner households in Saffron, held a common perception that voluntary groups were for 'others', an observation echoed in similar research by Williams et al. (2001). But it is important to note that many of these less-than complimentary attitudes toward group-based organisations have been formed through experience, and are not based on a household's unfounded perceptions. For example, in Saffron, there was also a sense of trying to give these organisations the benefit of the doubt, to "have a go" in order to "see what happens". But having done so, the experience has left bitter memories, with one resident complaining that he felt:

> "...so completely out of place. They made me feel like an outsider, no friendliness or anything really. I left after sticking it out for a couple of weeks."

Other individuals though have become disillusioned with formal groups, citing among other things their strict hierarchies and social posturing as unwelcoming. One retired couple, in an affluent household in Knighton, observed:

> "We don't get involved with voluntary groups, clubs and societies round here. You find that they're more social status symbols: self-fulfilling. We were both in the Health Service until retirement, and you'd like to think that you can give something back at the end of the day. And we'd enjoyed a lot of responsibilities in our work. But in these groups people can get really narrow-minded, power-mad, and the result is the people that want help the most, won't get it! Our daughter joined a local group but found it so petty and cliquey. It was somewhere where you had to hang your coat on the right peg, or woe betide you if you hung it on somebody else's! Needless to say, our daughter soon left."

For many, the end result is that – given the choice – they feel that their time and resources would be far better spent helping other people that they already know in their community.

9.1.3. Lack of time

A further significant barrier preventing participation in formal groups identified here is that of time – or rather the lack of time. Indeed this barrier was cited in 66.7 per cent of multiple-earner households in the deprived households of Saffron. This is to be expected given the increasing amount of time and energy invested in formal employment by these households, who often work long-hours for low pay, and has been widely observed elsewhere (e.g. Archibugi, 2000; Gorz, 1985, 1999; Laville, 1996; Mayo, 1996). Similarly, for employed households, and more affluent groups in West Knighton, the often long commutes to and from work, as well as the work itself, in their opinion, was a major use of their time that directly prevented them from committing to engaging in group-based activities.

9.1.4. Lack of energy

Multiple-earner households assert that they lack the energy to participate in formal groups. This was seen to be both a reflection of the amount of energy they spend working in formal employment, and the amount of time spent completing daily tasks in the household (i.e. self-provisioning). As one full-time housewife in West Knighton said:

> "Clubs, societies, that sort of thing? It's a full-time job getting all the jobs done around here love! And come the evening, or the weekend, the last thing I feel capable of doing is going out. I just need that time to get my energy back, ready for the next week. It never ends! We've thought seriously about getting a full-time cleaner in, but well until that happens then the prospect of doing work in the community just isn't a realistic one."

Such a reaction was in keeping with many (affluent) households in West Knighton, and Saffron.

9.1.5. Transport

Four percent of households in Saffron believed that they were not able to get to the formal groups they would like to attend on a regular basis (Table 9.3). Unreliable personal transport arrangements, expensive public transport were all factors that prevented participation in group-based activities. Another female respondent had been going to help out at a youth group in the city centre (about two miles away) and had gone with a neighbour (a youth group leader) as he had a car and she "didn't mind asking for a lift, as it wasn't out of his

way". But a few months ago this man and his family moved out of Leicester, and now she has no idea how she can regularly get to the youth group. She concluded, "If it comes down to it I'll have no choice but to stop going. I don't want to, but unless something changes drastically I won't have any other choice".

Finally, though the barriers discussed here have been highlighted by the current experiences of the two populations, the respondents were also asked to contemplate a scenario were their particular barriers to participation were no longer there. In this scenario, therefore, the question is 'would the individual look to become involved with group-based activities'. The answers to the question will now be addressed, and they certainly make interesting commentary on the contrasts of opinion between deprived and affluent households, highlighted in Tables 9.3 and 9.4.

Table 9.3. Would you consider joining voluntary groups if your circumstances changed?: West Knighton

West Knighton							
	Ward	High income	Middle income	Low income	No-earner	Single-earner	Multiple-earner
Yes (%)	18.2	28.6	0.0	Na	0.0	0.0	28.6
No (%)	18.2	14.3	25.0	Na	50.0	0.0	14.3
Maybe (%)	63.6	57.1	75.0	Na	50.0	100.0	57.1

Table 9.4. Would you consider joining voluntary groups if your circumstances changed?: Saffron

Saffron							
	Ward	High income	Middle income	Low income	No-earner	Single-earner	Multiple-earner
Yes (%)	8.0	Na	14.3	5.6	9.1	9.1	0.0
No (%)	72.0	Na	57.1	77.8	81.8	63.6	66.7
Maybe (%)	20.0	Na	28.6	16.7	9.1	27.3	33.3

Significantly, only 18.2 per cent of households in the affluent ward of Knighton were of the opinion that, should the barriers that currently prevent their participation were removed, they

would actively involve themselves with voluntary groups. The figure fell to just 8 per cent in the deprived households of Saffron. Thus, some 72 per cent of deprived households, were adamant that they would have nothing to do with group-based activities, regardless of whether their circumstances changed. In other words the barriers to participation in formal mutual aid, for this group, become incidental. The common consensus was that these groups were 'for others' and they saw no reason to change that.

In the more affluent households of Knighton on the other hand, such strong, negative responses were absent – only 18.2 per cent felt that they would never actively look to be involved with formal mutual aid. But the vast majority, 63.3 per cent of affluent households replied in a non-committal fashion, said "maybe", thereby leading the conclusion that given the right circumstances then formal volunteering would for them remain an option that may or may not be taken up when, and if, the barriers were removed.

9.2. Barriers to engagement in mutual aid as one to one reciprocity

When discussing the barriers to engagement in mutual aid as one-to-one reciprocity, it will become apparent that, unlike formal mutual aid, there is an apparent desire to help others, given the right circumstances. Table 9.5 highlights the obstacles in the path of greater participation, and the chapter continues by examining each of these in turn.

Table 9.5. Barriers to engagement in mutual aid as one-to-one reciprocity: by ward

Respondents arguing that:	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
A lack of social networks prevent me from doing more	40.0	42.5
A lack of time prevents me from doing more	15.0	12.5
The role of work in my day-to-day life prevents me from doing more	20.0	0.0
The role of my family in day-to-day life prevents me from doing more	7.5	5.0
I lack the skills to be asked more	10.0	10.0
Wouldn't want to get involved with people round here (perception of locality)	2.5	22.5
I suffer from poor health	0.0	7.5

9.2.1. Social network capital

Building on the arguments in Chapter 3 about social capital networks, the majority of respondents (as far as one-to-one reciprocity was concerned) felt that they did not know a range of people well enough to either ask or be asked to help with material tasks (and equally in the sense of social or emotional support). This was particularly the case in deprived households, especially where the tasks themselves demanded a degree of specialist knowledge to undertake successfully (e.g. plumbing, electricity etc).

Thus the type and range of social networks available to a household, are highly significant depending on the nature of the task undertaken. For unpaid exchange the preference shown here and elsewhere, is for family members, not friends or neighbours to help complete tasks. Hence whether unpaid mutual aid may be used by a household to complete tasks is dependent largely on whom household knows. Thus, to have a wider range of social contacts to call upon for help is advantageous than having only a limited range.

9.2.2. Lack of time

Andrea Levy (2000: 93) remarked that, "there are many rewarding activities that people can engage in once they dispose of more time". A 'lack of time' to commit to others outside of the household, plays an incredibly influential role in shaping the current extent and character of mutual aid in West Knighton and Saffron.

Addressing 'work commitment', as mentioned with group-based activity, work conducted in the formal economy takes up an enormous amount of time, energy and commitment in day-to-day life of the majority of households. And certainly the ability of an individual to invest their energies into reciprocal relationships outside of work is highly compromised by their participation in formal work. Thus, the implication is there that without such a focus to formal work, then – with more time on their side – the opportunity to have the choice engage more on an informal level with others would be forthcoming. Essentially, is formal employment the most fulfilling way of meeting the needs of the individual, or the most beneficial for the wider community? Certainly, the blind insertion of individuals into highly peripheral jobs (e.g. exploitative, unfulfilling, and involving long hours for minimal pay) inevitably necessitates a

severe compromise of wants and needs, on behalf of the individual. By removing the time that individuals have to spend in their local community, formal employment outside of the community, encourages a deeply insular social framework to descend, where the short-term survival of the immediate household is placed above all else, to the neglect and detriment of the wider, long-term terms of reference, such as community. Such a framework is part of a vicious circle that undermines informal mutual aid – less available time, equals less time to consolidate and extend social networks, equals increasingly restricted social networks, equal less mutual aid and so on.

9.2.3. Lack of skills

Another significant barrier to participation arises with the need for certain specialist skills as a prerequisite for completing tasks. This is equally applicable whether taken from the perspective of the individuals themselves (their ability to help others) or the ability of households to ask others with the relevant skills for their help (the assumption being the more specialised skills, the fewer people that will be suitable to approach). Addressing the first example, a 'lack of appropriate skills' as a barrier to participation was considered equally by 10 per cent of the population in Saffron, and 10 per cent in West Knighton. Interestingly, this figure was composed entirely from the perspectives of male respondents, who largely considered skills in terms of their ability to do DIY (or related) jobs for others, as opposed to those jobs which are not traditionally seen to be skill-dependent such as looking after property, or domestic jobs fetching some shopping, washing dishes, watering plants.

As far as receiving unpaid mutual aid is concerned, physical skills were perceived to be in short supply by some affluent households within West Knighton. The following argument rang true to other responses echoed in several of West Knighton's households.

> "It is a quiet neighbourhood in these streets. I suppose that there's a lack of people helping each other out because, being what you may call a middle-class area, households are skilled in giving advice on legal or educational issues. Without exception, I know of no electricians, plumbers or carpenters – the manual skills emphasis – around here."

Finally, a lack of skills was particularly felt by the more deprived households, who, restricted by their low-income wage, did not have the luxury of choice to easily pay others to fix the problem, or afford the necessary equipment to undertake the tasks themselves.

9.2.4. Geographical barriers

Saffron's residents had less knowledge of, and a more parochial attitude towards the wider community around them than did the affluent households of West Knighton. This fact is reflected in the barriers to participation in informal mutual aid is inevitable, with 22.5 per cent of all households within Saffron citing their environment as a primary barrier, compared to just 2.5 per cent in West Knighton (Table 9.5).

Table 9.6. Residents' attitudes toward their neighbourhoods: by ward

	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Knowledge of Neighbourhood (% of all households surveyed)		
Know most people	35.0	37.5
Know many people	45.0	17.5
Know only a few people	20.0	45.0

The lack of knowledge about other people bred negativity and uncertainty about the community, with the household unable to give an informed opinion about who could be trusted, and, should another household offer help, exactly what they expected to get from the reciprocal agreement, which is a theme considered in some detail in the following chapter.

9.2.5. Poor health

Finally, 7.5 per cent of the deprived households in Saffron mentioned poor health as the primary barrier preventing them from engaging in greater amounts of mutual aid. Not unexpectedly, poor health was closely linked with age. However, the effect of poor health on levels of mutual aid is not necessarily negative – as discussed in Section 10.7, poor health, in terms of wider relations can also be a catalyst for mutual aid to occur.

9.3. Conclusion

Constructed through a predominately quantitative framework, the chapter has focused on the main barriers that currently prevent households in West Knighton and Saffron from participating in formal and informal mutual aid. It has been highlighted how several common constraints exist for both activities, such as a lack of time, energy, and negative experiences. Other barriers that faced organised groups included location, not having the right opportunity and too many other commitments. For acts of one-to-one reciprocity, limited social networks, lack of skills, poor health and negative attitudes towards the community were the key barriers, especially in the deprived ward of Saffron. These have echoed previous research findings into the barriers of mutual aid.

More broadly, the last three chapters have sought to highlight the geographies of mutual aid within and between the populations and sub-population of West Knighton and Saffron, in order to fulfil the aims and objectives of Section I of the thesis. In doing so, not only has an important insight into mutual aid been gained (not least through its pervasiveness and unevenness in contemporary urban communities), but the findings have also served to challenge the robustness of previous research. In this respect, there are a great many findings which support and reinforce findings made elsewhere. This leads to the next main aim of the thesis: getting to grips with the complex dynamics that underpin the geographies of mutual aid presented here.

SECTION II

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS AND COMPLEX DYNAMICS OF MUTUAL AID

Chapter 10

Investigating the process and complex social dynamics of mutual aid

"Neighbours, everybody needs good Neighbours
Just a friendly wave each morning, helps to make a better day
Neighbours, need to get to know each other
Next door is only a footstep away
Neighbours, everybody needs good Neighbours
With a little understanding, you can find the perfect blend
Neighbours, should be there for one another
That's when good Neighbours become good friends."

(BBC TV, 'Neighbours' theme tune)

"Fixing this car we bought last year, it's a hobby for just about all of the males in our family! My husband, my dad, his dad, husband's brother – and our next door neighbour all muck in together. They do it because they can all contribute something I guess, and they get a lot of enjoyment over it. It's a real social focus!"

Introduction

This chapter attempts to move away from the more tangible, external and quantitative geographies of mutual aid as explored in the previous three chapters, and engage instead with the more complex internal and qualitative *social* dynamics that are both engaged through, and within, mutual aid in Saffron and West Knighton. To achieve this, Chapter 10 focuses on four particular objectives. First, the chapter engages the complexity of the social relationships, seeking to understand, for example, the role that mutual aid plays within kin and non-kin relationships, and in greater depth the implications for friendships and relationships developing and failing due to mutual aid. This opening focus then broadens out into the second objective, which offers a more generic discussion, addressing certain collective processes involving mutual aid, such as 'Who organised mutual aid'?; 'Is one-to-one mutual aid unmediated'? 'To what extent is going into other people's houses a lubricator of mutual aid?' The third objective adds a further layer of depth and complexity to our existing understanding of mutual aid by seeking answers to the question of: 'How is mutual aid catalysed by human stages of life and wider social circumstance?' In particular the emphasis is placed on appreciating mutual aid in the light of household composition, the presence of children, people with disabilities, old age, poor health, mutual aid in a crisis

situation, and how attitudes have changed over time. The fourth and final objective addresses many of the key 'taboo' areas that surround mutuality. Here the spectrum of taboos include: 'being a burden'; the problem of informal relationships; tasks going wrong; being taken advantage of; saying 'no'; and the taboo of giving money (monetized mutual aid)

10.1. The complexity of social relationships: family, friends or neighbours?

Existing theoretical discussions, backed by empirical evidence, which have focused on mutual aid and - more broadly - on social capital, have been invaluable in arguing just how significant our wider social relationships, through the myriad of roles they perform in daily life, are. Focusing here explicitly on the experiences and perceptions of households, through the rationales they use to justify having somebody else complete a task for them (or alternatively undertake tasks for other people), certainly adds great insight and emphasis onto the complex nature of social relationships and how this is embedded in the prevalent attitudes toward mutual aid in West Knighton and Saffron.

What this complexity does is call into question several of the key tenants of mutual aid, including those which have been central to constructing the geographies of mutual aid seen in the previous three chapters, and within wider empirical findings on the area. The example I want to focus on here is that of the traditional hierarchical trinity of social relationships based on notions of trust and familiarity. This hierarchy argues that mutual aid is most likely to take place between family relations, then friends, then neighbours. Yet, when one focuses on the rationales for reciprocal exchange this pigeon-holing of individuals is too simplistic to capture the reality of the situation. Indeed, in this research when observing the sources of mutual aid neither West Knighton (favouring 'Neighbours' then 'Friends' then 'Relatives') nor Saffron (favouring 'Relatives' then 'Neighbours' then 'Friends') matched this expected hierarchy (see Table 8.1).

Referring to the wider environment, by citing the relative proximity of family and kinship networks aside (Table 8.2), may account in some degree for this existing social hierarchy, but it can never hope to address or capture the full picture. Rather, the argument suggested here is that the boundaries of social networks are, in reality, are far more nuanced than they are clean cut. True, the hierarchy of family, friends and neighbours are not so nuanced that they are no longer visible, but to understand the process and dynamics of mutual aid it is these delicate subtleties that come to the fore, and are worthy of consideration. For example, this deep complexity of social relationships became apparent from the start, when the

questionnaire addressed the 'who' completed the tasks, and the respondent was faced with deciding (for non-kin) whether that individual was either a 'friend' or a 'neighbour'. A high percentage of respondents in both wards felt that such an arbitrary distinction was unfair and inaccurate, especially the implication that the people they lived near should be considered as 'neighbours' rather than 'friends'.

Table 10.1 Household views of the people who live next door: by ward

Interpretation of next-door as neighbours or friends?	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Neighbours	75.0	80.0
Friends	25.0	20.0

As Table 10.1 shows, in West Knighton a quarter of individuals referred to the people who lived next door as 'friends' as opposed to 'neighbours'. In Saffron the figure was slightly less at 20 per cent (Table 8.2). The point that is being made here is that degrees of trust and familiarity present within a relationship challenges, on one level, the taken-for-granted-assumption that people next door/ in the immediate locality are inevitably considered by households as 'neighbours' (which implies more a formal geographical relationship) rather than 'friends' (which implies a more informal relationship imbued with trust and familiarity). The protestations of two individuals in particular go a long way to illustrating this argument:

> "We do lots of neighbourly things, we keep an eye out on the street; we hold keys for two houses. So I would like to think that our immediate neighbours are friends as well." (Respondent from West Knighton)

> "She's not just any neighbour, she's my best friend – and the reason why I moved to Knighton." (Respondent from West Knighton)

And, on top of this, this quote from a female resident in West Knighton:

> "The neighbours? I wouldn't consider them my friends, though we are friendly with them."

suggests that even breaking down the duality of 'friends' and or 'neighbours' by focusing on friendship and familiarity between households does not go far enough!

With this in mind, the discussion that follows breaks down social relations into two broad groups (rather than three): kin and non-kin. To all intents and purposes this duality is useful, not least as it will not be allowed to obscure the subtle social nuances, and indeed allows the opportunity to show the problems of findings which insist on formal distinctions between types of social relationships, which constructed by the attitudes shown toward mutual aid can be paradoxical at best.

10.2. Mutual aid and kin relations

In his concept of social capital, Coleman (1991) suggests that families have a primordial organisation, one which owes its origins to relationships established by childbirth. The strengths of these relationships have been seen to have a massive impact on the individual's geographies of mutual aid. So much in fact that research in deprived neighbourhoods led Williams and Windebank (2001a: 109) to confidently summarise that:

> "The old-fashioned idea of tight, self-sufficient communities helping each other out appears to be only marginally relevant to today's deprived neighbourhoods... Outside of kin relations, people do not want to use unpaid community work and only do so when they cannot do the job themselves, afford to pay somebody, or when the social relations involve militate against payment."

Such an uncompromising conclusion is true to the experiences of households within the deprived community of Saffron certainly, more so than West Knighton. The use of family as an important source of mutual aid in Saffron (44 per cent) was not only a consequence that the majority of the households interviewed had a member of their family living in the immediate area, but also because they actively *preferred* to engage their help. Again, when questioned further, the saying 'blood is thicker than water' is an appropriate metaphor here. As two female respondents in Saffron argued:

> "I usually, 99 times out of a 100, ask family first if I want anything before friends. Only in desperate situations would I ask a neighbour. Just because they live next door doesn't mean you know them at all!"
>
> "I'd do unpaid jobs only for family."

The perception that underpins this rationale is a mixed cocktail of trust, familiarity, but also security of kinship ties, that transcends the (inherent?) degree of insecurity or instability

which accompanies relationships with non-kin others. As one young parent in Saffron suggested:

> "I wouldn't ask anybody who I didn't think they would or could return a favour, that's why I always ask family first – you know where you stand!"

Family ties give the impression of permanence and consistency, where members of the (wider) family are more inclined to offer (unconditional) support. As one male respondent in Saffron acknowledged:

> "Again those that help me out are all family, especially my sister, - she helps me out a lot with our youngest son, who's disabled. They help out in many ways, and we'll help them out – one favour for another ideally. It's the way we've always been in our family – honest and supporting. Give of yourself, and then you find that you get the favour back when you need it from your relatives."

Another male respondent in Saffron echoed this openness 'honesty' in kinship relations that becomes apparent in unpaid acts of reciprocity:

> "They do offer money, but I don't accept. They ain't got the money in first place – which is a reason why I help out! Neither have I mind – but it makes sense to get them to do a favour for me in return. I trust them, they trust me, not to sponge and take advantage."

However, the 'they' that this particular respondent refers to includes not only his family but also his "good mates". In this respect, the kinship dimension of mutual aid is not some exclusive category, which operates in a capacity wholly unique to that apparent in non-kinship networks. Individuals, though more inclined to use relatives over friends in order (perhaps) to avoiding the souring of their relationships if a favour was not returned, (in a way which is qualitatively different from the permanent relationships suggested by blood ties), can still incorporate non-kin coping strategies into this 'exclusive' circle given the right environment. The relationships frequently reserved for 'family' in official analysis of mutual aid could also quite justly be extended to the upper echelon of friendships which many individuals can call upon when needed.

Though the link between mutual aid and kinship ties is predominantly recorded as an empowered, positive experience for both supplier and recipient, this is not always the case, and this reality deserves equal attention. For some, the observation highlighted earlier that the respondent made: 'just because they live next door doesn't mean you know them at all', could be an accurate comment for their relationships to their close family.

Perhaps the most poignant example of this came from an elderly gentleman in Saffron:

> I looked after my mother for the last twenty years – never had any help from anyone, no family, no nothing. Yet, the funeral was full – sisters, grandkids...too late then isn't it!"

Hence through the presence or absence of mutual aid, there appears a whole multitude of layers that become apparent when efforts are made to understand the reasoning and perception behind informal coping strategies. Thus what seems like a most solid and permanent social institution – that of family - is in reality far more complicated and multi-dimensional than is often given credit for. Indeed the ability to allow non-kin 'others' to colonise informal coping strategies may prove extremely advantageous, as over reliance on one particular social relation can have severe implications if that particular social network is dislocated. As Fukuyama (1999: 117-118) suggests:

> "Although the breakdown of a family in itself constitutes a loss of social capital, this breakdown may actually lead some family members to greater levels of association with people and groups outside of the family...it is possible that the weakening of bonds within contemporary western families leads to an increase in social ties outside the family.

10.3. Mutual aid and non-kin relations

Macy and Skvoretz (1998: 651) state that the "earliest trust rule is based on social distance – trust neighbors (sic), but not outsiders'. The discussion to date has consistently referred to trust and familiarity as being crucial factors to creating relationships which are likely to engage in one-to-one reciprocity. When undertaken out of choice, it is a combination of these two fundamental ingredients which make mutual aid possible. Indeed far from being 'avoided at all costs' between non-kin relations, it was the experience of respondents in both West Knighton and Saffron that mutual aid actually affirmed in a highly visible and positive fashion the social relationship that underpinned it. As one female resident in West Knighton considered:

> "I had help from a friend - a close friend - to remove some furniture when we (my family) moved house. But it's a reciprocal thing – I'd do the same for him, so that's why I didn't pay him for it. It's a sort of unspoken understanding, both aware that I'd return the favour at some point!

Focusing on the rationales behind mutual aid, the social qualities of familiarity and trust usually went hand in glove, and in this sense, the immediate physical location of individuals (neighbours) was an advantage in allowing repeated social interactions to take place, whether that took place in an informal 'neutral' setting (for example, chatting 'across the fence') to the more regular arrangements as expressed by this female resident in Saffron:

> "I meet the next-door neighbour most often on this side once every week for a meal: he's a dear friend to me. I first got speaking to him when he offered to help mend the fence that separates the houses when I'd been living there for a few months. But on either side, both sets of neighbours would they'd do anything for me to help out, and I'd do anything for them!"

Though the discussion has concentrated on the 'material' capacity of mutual aid – engaging the physical resources of other households' to help complete jobs – the access to information that other possess is again significant and should not be overlooked (for example, see Section 3.3.3. on the strength of weak ties, and Sanderfur and Laumann's three important characteristics of social capital in the community in Figure 3.2). This will also be discussed in the next chapter (looking at the dynamic between mutual aid and paid mutual aid/ formal work). But for the time being, it is the process of engaging in mutual aid on a 'free information' basis which can help cement new relationships, and encourage existing relationships to become more embedded with a particular household/ group of people. This was neatly illustrated by a family who had just moved into Knighton, having lived there for less than six months:

> "Since we moved here, we've had lots of informal help and advice from friends and neighbours, not least in recommending various local builders, electricians and decorators to us. And the people they recommended were absolutely brilliant: you'd pay good money for that advice in life generally!! Indeed the only problem we have had since moving in came from the firm that fitted our kitchen panel floor. And they were hired blind – only after we'd looked through Yellow Pages."

It is this level of trust and honesty among non-kin relations which was far more apparent in the affluent locality of West Knighton than the more insular, kinship orientated networks of Saffron. It was that ability to embrace 'newcomers' into the area by offering help and information which was crucial to developing friendships and thus a virtuous cycle of social capital. Hence, as already suggested, mutual aid is both a way of developing social networks and also a positive reflection of them. Indeed for several respondents it is the *potential* resource that neighbours can bring to existing coping strategies, which becomes important. Just because a household hasn't called upon a neighbour to help, doesn't necessarily mean

that they actively avoid asking them for assistance, rather that the 'right' or 'appropriate' situation hasn't manifested itself. As one resident in West Knighton observed:

> "Well, I have a lot to do with Frank and Mavis over the road, and I'd like to think that they'd help out as neighbours if I needed anything. But, like a lot of people, we prefer to do things ourselves if possible – as they do, I presume. What I'm trying to say is that us not asking them for help is not a reflection of our friendship, but just there hasn't really been a pressing reason to do so."

Essentially, it is the bonds of friendship between households which become the important criteria for mutual aid. If a household has little or no levels of interaction with the people in their immediate spatial locality, then the fact that they are 'neighbours' makes little or no difference. One may as well – as far as mutual aid is concerned – classify anonymous neighbours as 'strangers', who may well come into their own in a crisis situation, but until that day, their presence on the informal landscape of material, social and or emotional support will only be conspicuous by its absence. Friendship, on the other-hand is given extra meaning and status should a household call on another to help out, even if the task is routine and easy. As one male resident in Knighton explained:

> "I keep an eye on after a friends house when she's away – be it shopping, or on holiday, then I'll water the plants, check mail etc. It's nice to be asked. Nothing too intensive. It's a reciprocal thing – a trust thing - what friendship is all about."

A similar interpretation was adopted by a female resident in Saffron:

> I helped friends out a lot. Things like minding their house, have cut down a hedge, cut ivy off a wall. Did it because I could, and I like helping out. It's all on a reciprocal basis – they help me out with small jobs like that."

It is this positive, or virtuous, cause and effect process that mutual aid engages between social relations which the chapter now turns toward.

10.3.1. How do friendships and relationships develop due to the process interaction of mutual aid?

Mutual aid is assigned a central role to the consolidation and development of many friendships and social relationships found within Knighton and Saffron. Importantly though there has to be a basic awareness/ trust/ understanding/ friendship behind the act of reciprocity. There is no inevitability that mutual aid will occur – far from it – as the

geographies of mutual aid bear strong testimony to. Mutual aid, except in extreme or exceptional circumstances, between strangers in a locality is a non-starter. And households which fail to embrace/ be embraced by their community are, in terms of informal coping strategies, largely isolated. One female householder in Saffron made the admission:

> ""I'm a bit sad really! Don't know anyone well enough round here to help out with jobs, and I've lived here more than twenty years!"

While another householder in Knighton, in justifying why he didn't have any informal coping strategies with other households in the areas considered:

> "I don't help anybody because I don't know anybody. The neighbours round here keep themselves very much to themselves."

Yet having argued that the expectation that mutual aid builds on from the general social pillars of trust/ familiarity, it is important also to acknowledge how mutual aid can not only act as a bonding form of social capital, but can also bring people closer together who did not know each other very well before. This fact is implicit in the definition of 'good neighbourliness', that people in a locality do look out for each other, and come to the fore in times of need, or exceptional circumstances. One resident in Knighton highlighted the former in the follow account:

> "A neighbour of ours, her husband died. Well we all rallied around her as you'd expect. I know her well now because of this tragic event, and if she needed a lift anywhere, or wanted to borrow some money, then I'd do it no problem, without feeling awkward or embarrassed."

And this gentlemen, again in Knighton acknowledged the role that the offer of assistance from a neighbour in a time of need had been the launching pad of their subsequent friendship:

> "The next-door neighbour is an electrician. He came round when our lights went out last Christmas, and fixed the problem there and then. I tried to offer him some money, but he politely refused! We speak a lot more – as neighbours – since that incident! "

Some people though are generally more open and trusting than others, and at some level the degree of difference in coping strategies focused on mutual aid must reside in the complex nature and outlook of the individual. Thus, a genuine offer of help from a neighbour is something which can make all the difference in developing a friendly relationship – and

again the relationship took place because of unpaid assistance from one individual to another. The recollection of a retired lady about how she first got to know her next-door-neighbours who she relies on in her informal coping strategy illustrates this scenario perfectly:

> "I help a couple next-door. Two gay fellows – not that it matters. But when they first moved in, he saw me next to my car – and asked if I would like the tyres, oil, water checking. He is so kind. I do things for him and his partner. And he is so grateful – it's lovely to know that you're appreciated! For instance, their microwave went wrong last week, and he arranged somebody to pick it up from my house during the day as he was at work. They returned it here this morning. Life would be a lot more problematical without their help and support..."

This comment brings sharply into focus the cold reality that though a positive social cycle may well be engaged through the process of meeting others through informal reciprocity, there is also a negative side to account for. And with it the possibility that friendships and relationships could be soured through asking others to help, or helping others. This is a very real misgiving for some, and hence a significant barrier to participation. Many of these fears or misgivings will be discussed later in the chapter, when considering the 'taboo' areas of mutual aid, but it is worth noting that the majority of individuals are all too aware of their friendships unravelling, and take precautions to avoid this happening, which impact on the type and nature of mutual aid.

For example, the natures of the tasks that are undertaken through mutual aid are also important to consider in any discussion on the implications of mutual aid developing social relationships. There is a world of difference between asking someone to fix a car engine, or help build an extension and asking them to just keep an eye out for the cat while on holiday, or giving a friend a lift to the station. The pressure and expectation associated with the former tasks, tasks which demand a degree of knowledge and expertise, are such that they are almost certainly generally avoided between non-kin relations (with the exception of 'good or best friends') in favour of these 'small tasks'. Again this is most likely because the risk of failure in the routine typical jobs is comparatively small, hence the 'risk' factor that a social relationship will turn sour is calculated to be low: As Pillutla et al 2003: 448) argue:

> "Trust and reciprocity are intimately related: reciprocation of an initially trusting act can instigate a beneficial cycle of increasing trust and reciprocation. Unreciprocated trust, however, can seriously damage a relationship and weaken its prospects." (Pillutla et al. 2003: 448)

This low-risk strategy is a common one between individuals, not least as it also allows the recipient the opportunity to give back/ return the favour to the supplier in a like-for-like fashion. The tasks which involve mutual aid and non-kin relations can be built on an incremental basis. Some eventually reach higher levels than others, or accelerate friendships at different speeds. Thus as the relationship between individuals moves from a more formal to a more informal basis, and neighbours/ strangers may become 'friends' become 'close friends', then at each stage the nature of the tasks, and the chance that they would be asked to help a household on an informal basis also increases. As there are no certainties or inevitability about this transition, there will always be those who forever keep others at safe-ish distance:

> "It's a struggle to ask neighbours, friends or family, because I don't know any that is capable of doing a decent job (beyond looking out for house).

and perhaps, the majority, who will find a common rule of thumb as articulated by from one of the residents in Saffron:

> "I've always been of the opinion that with technical jobs, then you had better pay a professional. It's all very well for a friend or neighbour to offer to do the work, but what if things go wrong? It's not worth the risk."

A further – key - gambit to avoiding the risk relationships falling apart through unpaid reciprocity is to avoid unpaid reciprocity while still maintaining the social dimension as the key factor at all times. This involves giving or receiving gifts (or at times money) as a thank-you (not as a reward per se) for undertaking the task. This theme will be returned to later, but essentially, by being able to offer something in return for help given alleviates the pressure of expectation to give something in return, while offering something acceptable back to the supplier of mutual aid (in a way that hard cash would most likely offend the would be recipient). And for those jobs which require more expertise, and would be difficult to reciprocate in a like-for-like fashion, then this eases the unfortunate scenario whereby the supplier may feel like they are being taken advantage of (and are thus unlikely to help out in future) or the recipient feels uncomfortable about owing an favour (see Williams and Windebank, 2001a: Chapter 8). As one resident in Saffron said:

> "I've helped friends move house. They've bought me a pint at the pub afterwards. Suppose it puts less pressure on them think that they owe me something... I

> prefer to give something for favours. But ultimately, it's a token gesture, main emphasis is on the social exchange – you don't want to lose good friends."

The giving of gifts allows people to develop informal reciprocity between people who do not necessarily know each other well. Significantly, it is this common goal – for a household to positively consolidate and strengthen their informal reciprocal relationships – that necessitates (in an ideal world) a flexibility of means to achieve thus: i.e. the option of using unpaid mutual aid or paid mutual aid as the situation dictates. This inter-connectedness between the dynamic of both types of mutual aid will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 11.

10.3.2. To what extent is going into other people's houses a lubricator of mutual aid? Who is given permission to go in and out of people's houses?

An insight to the answer of whether or not going into other people's houses is a lubricator of mutual aid to this question has already been established. For the majority, being invited into other people's houses is a fair indicator of the depth of friendship, familiarity and trust that exists in the relationship between the householder and guest. The remark below coming from a resident in Saffron, is that there is an expectation that close (non-kin) relationships is consolidated by being allowed to go into another's house, the absence of which is seen reflect the relatively superficial nature of (a particular) relationships in a locality:

> "It's not friendly enough round here. You wouldn't go into each others houses, like you may once have. It's all changed for the worse as far as Saffron is concerned."

And certainly, being invited into another's house is to place oneself in a relaxed, informal environment, one that is qualitatively different from the more formal backdrop, such as chatting over the neighbours fence, or meeting in a more organised and neutral capacity, such as the setting of a formal voluntary group, organisation or society. But given this degree of informality, and the more intimate personal and political inner environment of the home, means that only a relatively privileged few friendships can access freely: in terms of mutual aid going into another's household is an exception where non-kinship exchange is concerned rather than the rule.

Respondents in both West Knighton and Saffron were keen to suggest that their involvement with other friends and neighbours did not go as far as to 'going in each others houses'. Thus the world of informal reciprocity was mostly conducted beyond this domain. A typical

example of this protestation came from a male respondent and a female respondent respectively, from Saffron. They argued:

> I don't really do many things for neighbours – I mean you keep an eye out on their homes if you ask them to, but never sort of "in your house types" round here. I certainly wouldn't welcome people coming round here, having a nosey, and suggesting what jobs need doing! "
>
> "Some friends came to visit a few months after I moved, all said that they never guessed it would look so good round here. I said that I like it. Good neighbours make an awful lot of difference. Not as in neighbours who are in your home all the time – but those who give you support when needed. When somebody new moves (here) I'll go out to them and welcome them "hope you have a nice time here" that sort of thing."

Though this argument was prevalent in and between the majority of respondents in both wards, and is intrinsically linked to the degree of informality of the relationships in situ, the question of who gains access to another's household environment also highlighted a general difference between the affluent ward and the deprived ward. In West Knighton, new respondents talked about neighbours coming round to their houses to introduce themselves, and being quite open, friendly and 'neighbourly'. Thus, in their mind, this presented (those) neighbours immediately as potential friends, which was both settling and reassuring to the new residents. Two anecdotes relating to this, given by two families from households at opposite ends of West Knighton, stand out in particular:

> "Everyone owns big houses round here. The expectation is that people will come back go to and stay inside their houses. But it's not like that at all round here. The neighbours have been amazing to us since we moved in – so lovely. We had four or sets of neighbours coming round, some brought plants, flowers, or a bottle of wine. And they all said that if we ever needed anything, just to ask! We came down from Newcastle – which is renowned for being friendly - but here, well it's all that and more."
>
> and
>
> "When we first came here, the neighbours were really friendly. They just popped round a week or two after we've moved, to say hello, and offer to be of any assistance should we need any help. That made a great impression on us, and I really thought that was lost in this day and age. Almost something that you thought had died out – neighbours looking out for each other, and making newcomers feel welcome. It was especially important really as a lot of households round here are at work most hours. It was probably a month later when we next saw Dave and Carol out and about. But because they'd introduced themselves, we felt confident enough to ask them round to dinner one evening. And now, about three years later, were all the best of friends."

The 'private' space that the home offers is most definitely fiercely protected by the household, and as such where mutual aid in the community is concerned operates very much a closed-door policy to neighbours, then family and good friends. As will be highlighted later, the household space is very much a 'taboo' area when considering mutual aid. Indeed the only mutual aid that takes place when the family is not around tends to be limited to neighbours keeping an eye out on the property; having a key in case of emergencies, or needing to go in on an infrequent basis. As two householders in West Knighton observed:

> I keep an eye on after a friends house when she's away. If she's away for a while on holiday for example, then she leaves me a key, gives me the burglar alarm code, and then go round to water the plants etc. Nothing too intensive. It's a reciprocal thing – a trust thing - what friendship and being good neighbours is all about."

> "Look out for others, like you're neighbours see if they're OK, but only when you see them out and about, or don't see them for a while and wonder where they are. But not "in your home" type.

Highlighting the complex attitudes of 'going in other people's houses', and the implications that this may or may not have comes these observations, the first from a female respondent in Saffron, the second from a household in West Knighton

> "The fellow next door, he has a lot of tools. Good DIY man. He lends me anything. It saves me having to buy them for myself, especially those you only need very occasionally. I think it's a good way of getting to know someone without letting them get too close. I mean you wouldn't want to have a neighbour forever in your personal space doing this that, the other, would you. Not like they're family or anything!?"

> "Sometimes people can come across as too helpful. And it gets a bit much. There is a fine line – between being helpful and over doing it. Thankfully, most times things are OK...but I value my independence more than anything else."

10.4. Outsiders and mutual aid

Mutual aid with 'outsiders', (i.e. strangers) has been seen to be a complete "no-no", one of the ultimate taboos. And, to a greater extent thus is indeed true to the experiences of the respondents in West Knighton and Saffron. As highlighted in Chapter 3, when discussing the negative side of social capital, it was seen how positive 'inclusive' social circles by definition

create 'exclusive' circles by those who are not part of that particular group. Being excluded from social circles is also seen to go hand in hand with attitudes towards mutual aid in the wider community. This view from a respondent in Saffron articulated this despair born from bitter experience.

> "If you're not in with the in-crowd round here, you'll get no help, no information."

Alienated from wider non-kinship networks, the individual in a particular community becomes unknown to the community, and the community unknown to him or herself. In many ways mutual aid is a highly parochial coping strategy when the household exercises a degree of choice. It is a highly visible reflection of who is closely linked with whom, and thus becomes an effective maintainer of the dominant social hierarchy that a household has access to/ or is excluded from. Mutual aid is one of the more visible fundamental signs of 'acceptance' of another – and as such if an individual does not trust the other (perhaps the latter's intentions) then a reciprocal relationship (given the choice) is just not going to happen. In this respect, mutual aid before the social relations is very much putting the cart before the horse. This is certainly illustrated by the worries of one single mother in Saffron:

> "You don't want to be seen to push yourself on anybody. I'm always careful not to ask friends to do too much. Also one neighbour keeps knocking on the door, seeing if I want anything. But he gives me the creeps to be perfectly honest...so I try and keep my distance."

Of a different note is the fact that a percentage of the respondents when questioned about their coping strategies (and asked to reflect more generally on those excluded from their 'inner social circles' within their wider community) considered the problem to be as much the 'outsiders' as themselves. A typical example of this came from one cul-de-sac in West Knighton. The respondent organised a large garden party for many of the immediate residents. Having identified those households who he did invite, he signalled out another house, which he admitted he knew very little about. When asked 'why', he responded:

> "That family there are devout Muslims. They don't mix with us – mainly because they don't drink, and I assume they don't share the same interests."

This fairly honest, matter-of-fact conclusion was again based on perception and not a little prejudice. Again, it reinforces the point that it is a case that individuals are judged as it were 'by their cover', and that it is these immediate signs of difference or 'exceptions to the established norm' in a community which are major barriers for social integration for some,

and thus until this status quo is altered, results in a permanent exclusion from the dominant informal coping strategies in place.

Finally, there was a tendency to romanticize the past when the question of mutual aid was brought up. In other words the 'outsider' has not always found themselves in such a marginal or peripheral position. Hence the loss of 'inclusive' networks is seen to be a reflection of others and their (selfish/ mercenary) attitudes, rather than the fault of the individual themselves per se. Two poignant illustrations of this came from respondents (the first in West Knighton, the second in Saffron) who genuinely saw themselves as anonymous to other families:

> "We didn't grow up in an area like this – we came from a village, where our family lived in the centre of the village. When we first moved from there, but still living in the West County, the village we went into was great. Everybody was really helpful, but not intrusive. But it's very different here. People nod, but there is no real genuine friendliness. The youngsters round here are less friendly than the older people. Families grow up like this nowadays. They're not used to being quite so open."
>
> "In this age, you can't rely on anybody else – try and do whatever you can for yourself. Once upon a time people did used to muck in – but now, no one's going lend ya a hand unless you pay 'em. All money, money, money. The days are finished where people would help each other out. I wouldn't do anything now for most folk without them paying me for my time. I'm serious – it's £30 an hour, same as they try an charge me!"

10.5. Who organises mutual aid?

One of the key themes emerging through this qualitative construction of mutual aid is that mutual aid is the consequence of an emergent dialogue; a dialogue which does not necessarily involve only the eventual supplier/ receiver of mutual aid, but, as will be discussed in Section 10.6., may also be the result of third party intervention. The key to answering the question of who organises mutual aid, is to acknowledge that the roles assumed through reciprocal exchange are not exploitative, in the sense of a dualistic dominated versus dominator relationship, but rather is one of constructive partnership – where all parties involve have a say in how, when, where and why the exchange is to be conducted. It is this approach which characterises much of the organisation of mutual aid between families and people who know each other very well. As one couple in West Knighton argued:

> "It's about striking a balance. We have our four grandson's around on the odd weekend, nights. It's not too over the top – it's easy to get too involved. But we are here if needed."

Social relationships thrive on the ability of all concerned to see the situation from the point of view of the other vested interests involved: mutual aid is no different. And given the complex dynamics of mutual aid, the competing (at some level) expectations and potential banana skins that can accompany mutual aid mean that those who initiate mutual aid (in terms of needing a job doing) have to weigh up all the myriad of possibilities involved form the suppliers point of view. As one lady in Saffron observes:

> "My son is pretty adept at plumbing and electricity. He's not a skilled craftsmen, but he enjoys fixing problems, and I obviously prefer him because well, if can fix it saves me messing around looking for someone else! I'll pay for the materials, if he needs them. I suppose in return – he comes for his meals every other Sunday - though this is something I do regardless. It just means that I'm not worried about taking his time, and know-how, and giving him nothing...he won't hear of me giving him money..."

If mutual aid is initiated by the supplier, as will be discussed below, then the organisation – should the offer of help for example be accepted – again must take into account the needs, wants, and expectations of all concerned, should the exchange be successfully completed. Being too insistent, overly helpful in the wrong way can give off completely the wrong signals and impression on another individual – especially where the relationship may be open to misinterpretation (e.g. the individual's involved do not know each other very well). Numerous examples of this occur throughout the chapter, where one household's offer of help has either not been followed up, or come across in a 'taboo' fashion. Indeed the final answer to 'who organises mutual aid' is to focus on the specific relationships and environment involved, in order to contain an accurate answer. Broadly speaking, with the complex negotiation process which ultimately underpins social capital, and therefore reciprocity, means that a simple answer is never likely to be the most satisfying one, and that is certainly true here.

10.6. Is one-to-one mutual aid unmediated?

In studies on mutual aid to date, the dominant assumption of one-to-one reciprocity is that it is involves one person interacting with another, without the presence of a third party. This reality is implicit through the structural nature of the questionnaire, with regard to sources of labour, through questions such as "who undertook the work", "for whom", and "why were they asked?" This assumption however is far too simplistic to capture the dynamic realities of mutual aid, in which the process and discussion of mutual aid is often mediated by third party groups. Lin (2002: 44) provides an excellent insight into this when arguing that:

> "Often mutual aid activates chains of multiple actors. Social capital includes the resources accessed through indirect ties. These sources of direct ties represent a relatively small portion of the individual's social capital. Often social capital activates chains of multiple actors. In order to gain access to a certain resource (e.g. find someone with the skills to fix a washing machine) the individual may go to someone who does not possess those skills but who may know someone who does. In this case, the initial contact's social networks become resources for ego. Thus social capital does not come merely through direct connections or simple dyadic relationships. Both direct and indirect action can afford access to resources."

Crucially however, in these multiple actor chains, the concepts of trust and familiarity are allowed to play a crucial role. Indeed they have to play a crucial role, else the exchange (in an empowered sense) will not take place. To take place a relatively high degree of trust and familiarity must be present in the immediate relations involved in the immediate face-to-face discussion. Thus family members and good friends/ trusted parties are key facilitators of a considerable percentage of mutual aid. As Yuki et al. (2005: 50) observe:

> "Individuals may trust others if they know (or believe) that they are directly or indirectly connected to each other through mutual friendships or acquaintances..."

This more complicated account of the mediation involved through mutual aid was certainly visible in Saffron and West Knighton. All the following responses have two common qualifications: that the information is obtained through a trusted source (often a member of the family) and that the supplier is known personally by the mediator.

> My son and son-in-law always do jobs round the house for me if necessary. If they can't do it then I'd ask them if they knew someone who could, or get a friend to recommend someone. I would trust them to get somebody in who would be right... If not then I'd wait until they were available. (West Knighton respondent)

> "My husband helps out with my dad, and my brother a lot. Things like fixing the car, and decorating with my dad. If we're asked to help, then we'd hopefully be able to do it. We wouldn't expect money from family." (West Knighton respondent)

The following quotes were taken from respondents in Saffron: again while emphasising the mediated roles engaged by mutual aid, also suggest the advantage of knowing people who make a living in a trade!

> "My brother works for a plumbing company...well if I have a friend who needs something fixing I'd let him know. He helped plumb in a new shower for my best friend last month, and is always happy to help out if he can, and it doesn't take too long! (Saffron resident)

> "I've a lot of friends in the trade, so I've asked them when I needed an electrician if they can recommend someone. I trust with mates with my life, so whoever they recommend I have no reason to doubt that they'd be good. I'd feel much happier than having to find names out for myself."

These examples have all considered access to rather specialist types of knowledge or expertise. But for many of the more routine or mundane activities, it is the more physical aspect which prevents householders from doing the job themselves. In this way, getting extra 'hands' in to help with perhaps one-off tasks is all that is needed. Several examples of this 'physically' orientated mutual aid were given in the deprived ward of Saffron:

> "If you can get friends to help out it saves money. Also word of mouth can be really important round here. For example, my mum told a friend at work that my fence had been literally blown down in the gales last week. Well, at the weekend, my mum, her friend and that women's husband (!) came round yesterday, and I supposed he helped fixed it, but we all helped out. I was so grateful to them! " (Saffron resident)

> "I wanted help to move some furniture. I asked a neighbour cos' I know next door and she knew someone one three doors down who would help." (Saffron resident)

As a final point, there is a dynamic relationship in operation between social networks and mediated/ unmediated mutual aid engaged over time. Thus though an individual was introduced to a household through a relative or friend to help out in the first instance, given the right situation/ context/ environment, that hitherto anonymous individual, assuming the task is completed to the satisfaction of all, becomes a 'known' quantity. Hence a relationship which originally was engaged through a common third party now continues in an unmediated fashion, directly through supplier and receiver.

> "My best friend's brother is an electrician– and he'll come round to do odd things if I ask. He won't accept money from me, never has, but I manage to invite him out for a drink in the local. It's all part of showing your gratitude...and he's never asked me to help him out, probably because he knows where he can get the jobs done best! And it's through him I also came to know a lot of people in the trade. And I'll pay them cash-in-hand – about 40-50% off the cost price. But with this friend's brother, I get him because I trust him, know that he'll do a good job. *And though I suppose on one level I still look at him as my best friend's brother, to all intents and purposes he's become a mate as good as any I have at the moment.*"

10.7. The household, stages of life, and wider social dynamics in a community: their impact on the process and complexity of mutual aid

This penultimate section focuses on the process and social dynamic of mutual aid as observed in a dominant, yet unequal, wider social context. How is mutual aid influenced, catalyzed, by a household's composition; by having children; having a disability; getting older; suffering from poor health; or being engaged in a 'crisis' situation? The sub-categories are predominantly approached from the over-riding experiences of the respondents in both Saffron and West Knighton. However, in all cases, there are both positive and negative connotations for mutual aid whether gauged from the perspective of supplier and/ or receiver.

10.7.1. Household composition and mutual aid

The composition of a household is an important explanatory factor regarding the uneven nature of tasks completed and thus levels of mutual aid witnessed in and between mutual aid in West Knighton and Saffron.

Table 10.2. Household composition: by ward

Household composition	Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Single male	7.5	15.0
Female	2.5	12.5
Single male with children	0	2.5
Single female with children	0	12.5
Unmarried couple	0	10.0
Unmarried couple with children	0	17.5
Married couple	45.0	10.0
Married couple with children	45.0	20.0

10.7.1.2. Single parent households

Illustrating the differential nature of the tasks completed, one thing that was apparent through the findings is that there is a traditional gendered division of labour very much in place within these households studied. Hence single parent (usually female) households did struggle at times to get certain (physical, or handy-man) male orientated tasks completed easily. Hence unable to maintain specific jobs (including moving furniture, DIY, gardening etc.) through self-provisioning, single parent households often sought not just the help of other family, (and then friends or neighbours), but 'male' kin or non-kin relations specifically. Providing examples of this situation are the responses of three single mothers in the inner "Saff" estate in Saffron:

> "My friend's husband helped take out the cooker...and get the new one in. He wouldn't accept any money. For jobs I can't manage by myself – she'll have a word with him, and he has always – thankfully – helped out. You don't often realise what a difference it makes having a man about the house!"

> "I have several brothers in the neighbourhood who are always popping in seeing if there's owt I need doing. I probably could get more jobs done that I ask them to do myself, but you find that you've all your time taken up with the kids! So I'd love to spend some quality time doing things in the garden, or putting up shelves, or painting the kitchen (which has just been finished), but I haven't the time nor the expertise. It's something that my brothers have always been good at!"

> "I had a problem with a few things – the lawnmower had finally bust, I had a faulty socket upstairs, the tap under the sink was leaking. My friend got her husband to come round and fix the mower the other week, and last week my brother-in-law came round and fixed the tap and socket. Makes life a lot easier I can tell you. Now I just need a handsome man to come and mow the lawn! (laughs)"

Moving away from any gender dimension, and perhaps of most significance is the fact that many single-parent households felt at a distinct disadvantage in that they only had a few friends in the area, and no extended family households. This is a familiar consequence of single-parent families, and one prevalent in commentaries on social capital, as argued by Portes (1998: 12):

> "Social capital tends to be lower for children in single-parent families because they lack the benefit of a second at home parent and because they tend to change residences more often, leading to fewer ties to other adults in the community."

This was a very troubling dilemma for one single parent household in Saffron in particular who felt both isolated and vulnerable given recent family changes in circumstance:

> "My eldest son brought me to live round here, cos he lived here. Then he left- I don't' know anybody to ask for help... and I find it very difficult. Most of my other family live in Nottingham"

10.7.1.2. Two parent households

In contrast to single parent households, two-parent households were not only more likely (or certainly more easily) to be able to complete daily tasks, but also had the distinct advantage of being able to have a wider range of other social relations to call upon should they need support or assistance via mutual aid, or other informal coping strategies.

10.7.2. Children and mutual aid

Addressing the question as to how much mutual aid is catalysed by children, the broad answer to that would be children are important sources of social capital, and thus have a positive presence with regard to higher levels of mutual aid, than undoubtedly would otherwise have been. As Whiting and Harper (2003: 3) argue:

> "Existing research on social capital wrongly portrays young people solely as consumers of social capital rather than producers because, using Morrow's (2003: 12) argument this fails to account for the ways that young people: "socialise in friendship networks, participate in local activities, generate their own connections and make links for their parents.""

For a number of the respondents interviewed, children provided a valid and valuable reason for bringing different set of families closer together, through repeated social interaction whether in or our of the school environment, or at local formally organised youth groups or sports associations. The school runs were again symbolic of the informal relationships that parents enjoyed. As one mother in West Knighton observed:

> "Our children are both at school. Other parents have kindly picked up our children, if myself or my husband can't make it (for whatever reason) on time. They'll usually take them round to their house. We always do the same for them and their kids...very ad hoc basis. We would never have known any of these people if it weren't for the kids: that's what we've immediately got in common. I've definitely made some good friends since becoming a parent!

The other more formal spectrum of mutual aid was also mentioned in relation to conversation about the school and children. One school in particular in Saffron had a reputation for bullying, and it for this reason that parents whose children had been subject to bullying, decided to get together purposefully and get their views across through formal channels available. As one father said:

> "I decided that the best thing to do would be to join the parent committee. There were several reasons, and I've belonged to several successful campaigns. For example, I fought for the school to get a uniform in place, now I'm trying to raise the funds for it. It's the satisfaction of seeing things done properly. Seeing people treated right. My own son was bullied at school (thankfully not recently) – and I couldn't do anything to influence the school's policy on this. Now, if it happened again, I would like to think I could."

One further example of the positive effect that children had on facilitating relationships between adults came again from one resident in Saffron. She said:

> "You always try and look out for others. For example, the other day there were these two really young children walking to school on the own...well, I told the crossing lady. Their mother is from Thailand? I went up to her, and told her that I didn't' think it was safe – and that if she asked I'd take her kids to school with mine tomorrow."

10.7.3. Having a disability

Being physically disabled has a potential (though not inevitably) obvious impact on the type and range of jobs a household can undertake. A number of respondents from both Saffron and West Knighton mentioned how they have various friends who are disabled, and who they give support to through getting tasks completed in and around their friends' house. In many of these cases the disabled individual became known to the household by virtue of them being neighbours, and in this way did not include participation in any formal voluntary capacity with individuals who had disabilities.

> "A lady who used to live at number 9 – now in a disabled bungalow. She has a sweet dog from the rescue centre, who I take out for walks with our own dogs. And general things, I'd collect any things she wants. I help, I always have done where I can. My father was the same. "

The one individual in Saffron that was interviewed who was registered disabled talked in great length about the many friends and neighbours who came regularly to the house to see if any jobs needed doing, or anything needed to be fetched from the shops and so on. She would like to have thought that these people would have been friendly with her because of who she was, not because they felt sorry for her and her situation:

> "I have so many friends in this area. And I wouldn't be able to get by half as easily without them. But I like to think that they get something back from me – it's not just a take, take, take, give, give, give relationships. It is a reciprocal one, just that if they do a little job here and there for me, well I like to think that I am a good listener, a confident, and can give some advice to them in that capacity. You might not see me climbing up ladders or tiling some walls, but I have a lot to offer my friends in different ways. So, yes there isn't any doubt that without this disability I would be able to do more jobs round the house for myself, but the friendships I have go way deeper than people just coming round to do things for me."

10.7.4. Old age

In the experiences of retired households in Saffron, only 65 per cent of the tasks questioned had been completed, in contrast to the 76 per cent of tasks completed in West Knighton. Getting older does, for many mean less physical strength/ mobility, and makes getting household tasks completed by themselves much more of an ordeal. Hence the pressure to extend coping strategies to incorporate the additional resources of wider social network, be

they other family members or friends and neighbours becomes much more prevalent in day to day life.

Table 10.3. Tasks conducted in retired households: by ward

	Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Tasks conducted	76.0	64.6
Tasks conducted through unpaid MA	14.4	21.0
Unpaid MA Involving Household	(4.8)	(19.2)
Tasks conducted through paid MA	19.2	6.5
Paid MA Involving Household	(7.1)	(0.0)

As will be discussed in the next chapter though, when focusing on the active role of the household when tasks are undertaken, having people help out is not the same as making the household redundant and removed from the picture. In this case almost twenty per cent of retired households in Saffron participate in completing the tasks undertaken through mutual aid, which is itself a fair indicator that a considerable number of households need additional help, rather than are totally reliant on outsiders in their informal coping strategy. Of significance here though is as much the testimony of the 'suppliers' of mutual aid to elderly people, family, friends and or neighbours.

The urge to help out others in need is again a key feature of humankind, as a social animal, and is much in keeping with Kropotkin's earlier observations about mutual as a driving force of evolution, and related observations as discussed in the opening chapter. The idea of helping out an elderly neighbour, for example, is something that is deeply engraved in the ideology of 'being a good neighbour'. This relationship can manifest itself both from a distance, as in the case of this male respondent from Saffron:

> "When I'm clearing out my rubbish – I always check on the neighbours. They're quite elderly, and I often take stuff down to the tip for them. They are always grateful – but it's not a money thing is it. Nor would I want it to be. Just do it because I know it helps."

or be in a relatively hands-on capacity, as is the reality for these households in West Knighton:

> "My wife helps out an elderly lady – fetching her pension, collecting her laundry. She does it because she's a kind soul – always has put other people first. I worry sometimes that she over does it; but she won't have it any other way!"
>
> "I visit an 82 year old neighbour, whose been very poorly – lots of problems... she loves my visiting. There is a lot of pressure involved, but I don't balk at that – do it because I enjoy it. She has a group of 'personal people' to help her out. If I wasn't doing so much, I may think about joining a (voluntary) group to help others...but this is so personal, it means so much more."

Again it is notable that these two examples of 'hands-on' mutual aid from two residents came from West Knighton. Referring to Table 10.3. more retired households in West Knighton than Saffron paid others in some capacity for the tasks undertaken. Often the main reasons for doing so are a combination of the following (a) the household could not participate (b) the nature of the task was such that it was difficult to reciprocate/ required specialist knowledge/ was a 'big job' (c) demanded a considerable (repeated) effort on behalf of the supplier. And the payment is, somewhat paradoxically, a way of preserving an informal *socially*-orientated relationship rather than formalising it (as would be the case if the rationales were akin to paid informal work).

As a final observation, as with all the other sub-categories highlighted here, elderly individuals can act as key catalyst for mutual aid in terms of both receiver (focused on so far) but also as supplier. As supplier of mutual aid, retired households often have the luxury of time to be able to invest more of themselves in their immediate and wider social networks. For example, mutual aid from the older generation to the younger is commonly observed in the family relationships, with grandparents baby-sitting or child-minding their nieces and nephews. And also mutual aid, as discussed in the penultimate chapter, does offer an important way of keeping families and neighbours together – so that in this case as the generation gap (in a family) increases, mutual aid can provide a crucial way of tying these ends together through social interaction through reciprocity.

10.7.5. Poor health and mutual aid

As with retired households, the broad assumptions in place are that poor health would lead to a decrease in the ability of an individual or household to get tasks completed either for themselves or for others, and hence increase pressure to work with alternative coping strategies much more reliant on the resources of wider social networks (i.e. beyond the

household). Again, the experiences of the respondents in both West Knighton and (though less so) in Saffron is that, when somebody is in need of help or otherwise, then the community – witnessed both through the altruistic gesture but more especially through mutual aid - comes into its own (see Table 10.4.)

Table 10.4. Respondents attitude toward the community: by ward

Place where people try and help each other out?	Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Strongly agree	17.5	7.5
Tend to agree	42.5	22.5
Neither agree nor disagree	35.0	40.0
Tend to disagree	5.0	22.5
Strongly disagree	0	7.5

In the context of poor health, this comment from a respondent in Saffron illustrates wider dominant attitudes well:

> "I helped out the next-door neighbour for a while, not too much, but things like going shopping for her when she was ill. We want to be able to help if we can. There's too little of that nowadays!"

For those whom poor health is a long-term problem, then the reliance on others putting themselves out can be a crucial difference to the quality of life. As one resident (with very poor eyesight) in Saffron said:

> "I can't drive anymore – and my neighbours without fail drive me to the supermarket each week. Where would I be without them? I will never underestimate what they have done for me over recent years. And at every opportunity I try to give something back in whatever capacity I can. I'm always in if the postman wants to leave something for them, or I look after their house and pets when they're on holiday. And of course we always talk a lot, and they usually come round for a morning cup of coffee at the weekend. "

10.7.6. Crisis

It is important to acknowledge how mutual aid is catalyzed by a crisis scenario which affects (be in a physical and or mental capacity) an individual and their household, and their ability to undertake jobs. Looking at the responses from every respondent in West Knighton and Saffron (Table 10.5) it is quite clear that, for the vast majority, people would seek the help of

other neighbours/ help other neighbours in this crisis situation (i.e. the individual is temporality housebound and unable to get to the chemist themselves).

Table 10.5. Collecting a prescription

	Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
If ill in bed would you feel comfortable asking a neighbour to fetch a prescription?		
Yes	75.0	60.0
No	20.0	37.5
Unsure	5.0	2.5
No answer		
Would you collect a prescription on behalf of a neighbour if they asked you to?		
Yes	100	92.5
No	0	0
Unsure	0	7.5

More specific examples of a 'crisis' situation catalyzing mutual aid in the neighbourhood were given in both West Knighton and Saffron. This particular flow of mutual aid may just last for the duration of the crisis (i.e. short-term) as was the case for the following recipients of mutual aid:

> "When I was ill, my friends and family rallied round superbly. My husband works all day, and for example, they'd drop the children off at school, pick them up at the end of the day. It's was essential to have had them do that – otherwise we would have been really struggling." (Knighton female)

and

> "When I was in hospital at the start of 2004 – friends sent cards. And my closest friends came round to see me, did little jobs for me. One even went to my house - - she had the keys I hasten to add - and did the housework (like dusting/ hoovering) and bought my shopping ready for when I came home. I didn't ask her – but it was so kind. Naturally, I'd do the same for them anytime."

But for others, the immediate gesture of help in an emergency has developed into a long-term commitment, as in the following example, given by a male respondent in Saffron:

> My wife does a lot of shopping for a neighbour. She first got to know this neighbour I guess when her husband died, which is a while ago - we hadn't known them before. Since then she's been in a terrible state all things considered. But my wife would do anything to help someone who needs it – especially someone like this woman, who's a neighbour."

But one should not assume that even if an individual within a household is unwell, and the offer of help is forthcoming from others, that this will be welcomed or accepted by the household. This was certainly the experience of one couple in West Knighton, who wanted to help their neighbour more, but felt frustrated that their advances were (politely) turned down:

> "The lady next door recently had a stroke. Her husband was round here in seconds – we're both nurses. We helped her until an ambulance arrived. It's difficult to explain; we would like to help them out much more, but the husband is a very private – very independent. We tried to help out more – asked him if we could do any shopping for them. But he always said, "No thanks. We're OK"

This case also illustrates how mutual aid is very much a negotiated process, in this case very much according to the husband of the recipient household. In an emergency or crisis situation the husband wanted assistance from his neighbours. But once that crisis or danger has been removed, then rather than seek to consolidate that level of help, the husband has kept these particular neighbours at a distance, further than the latter would ideally be happy with.

10.8. Important taboos that surround mutual aid

Having focused on understanding the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid from the a social perspective, achieved by looking at: the complexities of social relationships (kin and non-kin); who organises mutual aid; the mediated role of others; and focusing on other socially orientated sub-categories and their impact on mutual aid; the remainder of this chapter will consider the 'taboo' areas that surround mutual aid. This section has much to offer Chapter 13, which considers the question of what sustains mutual aid and why. However, it is included here to bring this chapter to a conclusion, precisely because it exposes the social weakness, or difficulties, that have accompanied the question of mutuality for the respondents of West Knighton and Saffron. It is this necessary, indeed vital social aspect of mutual aid which needs to be given due attention, rather than merely focus on the constructive aspects or dimensions. Here attention is drawn to ten different – though

not exclusive – taboos which have been raised by respondents. These range from aspects of the relationships involved with reciprocal exchange itself: (the feeling of being a burden; false expectations; inappropriate gestures; taking advantage of aid; being able to say no; to the tasks (the unsatisfactory job); and the nature of mutual aid itself (unpaid; gift; money as gift).

10.8.1. Being a burden

The fear of being interpreted as a burden in the eyes of family, friends or neighbours (there was little discrimination between types of relations in this case) was very real for some respondents. Rather than feel guilty of putting upon others, respondents would either pay for somebody else to get the work done, or struggle to do it themselves. As one respondent in Saffron felt:

> I was having to go to the hospital once a week for about three months last year. I don't drive, and it was really difficult sometimes to get a lift from my brother who lives nearby. Normally end up getting a taxi – which I could scarce afford. But I thought that friends and neighbours would probably be too busy, and I wouldn't want to intrude!"

To emphasise the point that this 'taboo' was not confined to non-kin relations, but affected family members as well, comes this response from a gentleman in West Knighton:

> "Sometimes you feel as if you're putting on them, though they had not said as much. All my nearest family work full-time, they have their own lives."

Significantly, this and many other 'taboos' discussed here are fears based on negative perceptions, rather than grounded in reality. And it is this fear of what others may or may not think which discourages individuals to seek further help from others/ help others out.

10.8.2. Informal relationships: misreading the signs/ inappropriate gestures

One of the themes touched upon in this chapter, is that mutual aid (to be successful) is conditional on occupying a negotiated space, one agreed on between those receiving aid and support, and those giving aid and support. Thus, being a negotiated space, has the

potential to be misread and/ or misinterpreted, as is highlighted here by a resident in West Knighton:

> "I had a tree stump which I wanted getting out. Asked a neighbour, who'd often in passing said not to hesitate to ask if there was anything I needed doing, if he may be able to help me do it one weekend? He immediately said that he'd do it – for £40! No chance!! It's still there now, 18 months later. Haven't had the inclination to speak with him since. "

Naturally, the better an individual knows someone then the greater likelihood that things will go right first time, hence a greater incentive between the individual that mutual aid would take place successfully. This is certainly a taboo area in mutual aid for – when things go wrong – these can have significant implications for the social relations involved. Hence the default setting for mutual aid, all things being equal, is to favour those who know each other well – hence less change of causing offence:

> "We have a neighbour who looks after pets while were on holiday. Bring back a gift for them to say thanks. But we're always conscious about being careful not to overdo it. Wouldn't want to embarrass them or anything. "

Misreading the signs, offering inappropriate gestures are all very real potential hazards when negotiating what type of mutual aid is the most acceptable: unpaid, or paid (gift or money) for example. These dynamic tensions within and between mutual aid is given full consideration in the next chapter. An example of this came from the following response given by a woman in Saffron:

> "A friend was having her kitchen extended. I helped her out, and she gave me some money. But it would have been absolutely fine if she hadn't offered. In fact it felt a bit funny receiving it from her – I was a bit put out if I'm honest. But she just preferred to, and I would have made the situation awkward if I had insisted on refusing it."

Ultimately though the pressure and (unknown) expectations from the outset do militate against mutual aid being undertaken, especially between people who do not know each other well. For exchange to be conducted through mutual there is no correct rigid guide to follow of 'what to do' or 'what not to do', and this is a real 'taboo' strongly associated by residents of both affluent and deprived households alike.

10.8.3. When tasks go wrong

One of the reasons why less complicated tasks are generally avoided when people help each other out is down to the fear that the task may not be completed to the satisfaction of the recipient. For example, Tables 7.4 and 7.5 showed a distinct lack of mutual aid being sought to attempt household maintenance or household improvement jobs. Again the taboo is strong enough to prevent people from taking (unnecessary) risks as far as their social relationships are concerned, rather than chancing themselves to see if they can get it right (where the situation is not an emergency one).

The danger of allowing oneself to overcome this taboo, and against better judgment perhaps is something which as been a really negative experience for a handful of respondents. Typical illustrations of these experiences came from one female respondent in Saffron:

> "Next-door offered to fix a problem with the plumbing – he didn't ask for any money – but the job he did was rubbish! Had to hire out a firm, which cost the earth, and they had to put right his 'solution' as well! But what can you do, he offered to help me, and it's difficult to complain in that situation – I thought he knew what he was taking about! Know to be far more cautious in future!

And another household in Saffron:

> "The neighbour said that he'd fix my step for us. Thought that was really nice of him. But then he charged me £20! That was not six months ago, and the step is broken again, exactly the same as it was. Wish I'd done it myself.

To complicate matters further (though not unexpectedly when discussing taboos) there is generally much more forgiveness at hand for family members over non-family members. Recipients would know that a family member has tried to engage in the task in good faith, rather than say looking to impress, or agreeing to something they were wholly unable to carry out. A succinct example of this came from a household in West Knighton:

> "I suppose the real problem is when you do things on an informal basis, is if someone bodges it up. All friendly banter with family – you can rip into them, and they will take it in good spirit. But other people – it's probably best to say no in the first place. Just not worth the risk of falling out over it."

One of the inescapable complexities of mutual aid more generally is the one rule for one (family and closest friends) and one role for everybody else: this particular taboo is of course no exception and on the contrary is highly dependent/ specific according to the individuals

involved, the task involved, and the immediate options available to both supplier and receiver.

10.8.4. Being taken advantage of

The fear of generosity being exploited, and the supplier 'used' unfairly by others, was a concrete example given by some respondents. As such it exists as a concrete example of a breakdown of expectation/ negotiated space as mentioned previously. For example respondents were quick to point out that if they were asked *to help out* then it was on that basis that they would engage, not 'to do all the work for the other household. Again, this comes through the discussion on the active role of the household in the next chapter – one which has been continually neglected in existing research findings. Mutual aid (especially *unpaid* mutual aid) is, after all supposed to be fundamentally reciprocal in nature, and being undertaken largely in a voluntary capacity (over obligation) is non-exploitative. These two examples, both taken from respondents in Saffron, highlight this taboo extremely well:

> "I don't mind doing things for nothing as long as it's reciprocal. If they're milking it, then I probably won't help out. Or if I went to help out, say dig over the garden, and they just sat there not pulling their weight, then I'd feel a tad pissed off."

> "It's about doing your fair share really. Reciprocal – I look after various friend's children, have them stay for nights – and they do likewise. I've had people who take, take, take, and don't give enough back if anything at all. And I don't like being taken advantage of – nobody does. And you don't want to make a scene about it. If they're not aware well, I'm not about to tell them. Just back off, don't invest as much. If they get the hint, well, that's great. But you'd certainly be wary about offering yourself every time they ask – I'm nobody's mug!"

For one woman in Saffron, the implications for the individual who she felt was taking advantage of her were severe. And this is again the danger of relationships falling apart due to people putting themselves in a vulnerable position where they can be let down/ or let others down themselves:

> "I used to be very friendly with a neighbour at my last address. And I was always willing to look after her dog when she went on holiday, it was no trouble, I've always had a dog myself. But when I wanted her to look after mine, she turned round and said something like, "Oh! No, I never look after dogs!" So the next time she rang and asked me to look after her dog for a fortnight, I said I would on condition that she'd promise to do something in return for me. "Oh! Course I will, she said – anything." Well, I'd like you to collect me from the airport in November, you will be OK for that won't you? "Well...er...I'll phone you soon." I knew she'd do the dirty on me. Sure enough she phoned a week before, "Ever so sorry but

> we...um...we can't collect you – it's a friend's 80th birthday, and we have to be there over the same weekend.
>
> So I just put the phone down, and though she rang back immediately, I didn't answer. Doing something where you need others to give as much of themselves can spoil a friendship. If someone promises, I will always hold them to it – as I hold myself to my promises. I will never have her dog again."

Yet another example of a friendship going sour as a consequence of feeling exploited by helping others came from a man in West Knighton:

> "I used to give a (pregnant) friend a lift to work at end of the day. But she never offered to pay petrol. I mean I don't think that was really the point – the money – it was just that she never even asked. And then it was just – to me – seemed like I was expected to pick her up, drop her off. Never have I felt so taken for granted. Well, it became a sore point quickly, and I don't really see much of her now.

10.8.5. Saying "no"

The question was asked of each respondent whether they felt that they would be able to say no to another individual if they felt that that individual (or household) were beginning to impose on their time too much (see Table 10.5).

Table 10.6. Being able to say "no": by ward

Would you be able to tell others if you felt they were imposing on your time?	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Yes easily	25.0	27.5
Yes	27.5	22.5
Not Sure	15.0	7.5
Only in an extreme situation	20.0	25.0
No	12.5	17.5

Only around 25 per cent of respondents in both West Knighton and Saffron felt that they would easily say yes, and for almost half the respondents in both wards saying 'no' would be far less easy. It is the impact of distancing oneself, taking a step back, from an existing social reciprocal situation which had become an imposition that people were reluctant to have to go through. The potential awkwardness of the situation is captured by the following female respondents in West Knighton:

> "I used to help look after a neighbour's house, but it got too much – too much responsibility, so I had to say no. Difficult – you feel like you're letting them down, not a nice position to be in."

> "I used to look after neighbours house. But they increasingly go away, and it became too much of a responsibility for me, took too much time, so I had to say no. I don't think they really appreciated where I was coming from, which made me feel like the bad guy. "

And the negative implications of saying no to somebody can actually be far worse in reality than anticipated:

> "By far the biggest trouble that I've had, and I never want to go through again, is saying no to somebody: it's just not worth it. They don't talk to you anymore! I got to know a woman, 11 years ago, in my first house in Saffron. Thought she was OK. She asked if she could lend some money. I was a bit wary, but you have to trust people don't you? Then I found out she'd spent it down the Bingo. Then she'd ask all the time for me to do various jobs round the house. You would just have to say no – but she made it very difficult for me after that – trying to undermine other friendships I had with people she knew."

As saying 'no' is for many such a (potentially) problematic and taboo area, then the preference and alternate coping strategy to combat this ever occurring in the first place is favoured. This may mean the household seeking means to impersonalise the exchange (to a degree) and hence distancing oneself within the traditionally reciprocal relationship through payment or gifts; not engage at all; or/ and adopting a highly conservative strategy when dealing with other social relations – far better to say 'no' in the first place, then to say 'yes', and regret it later.

10.8.6. Giving and receiving money

This final section considers the social taboos as they affect the different types of mutual aid (to be discussed in the following chapter), and more specifically the taboo of giving/ receiving money. Many of the taboos highlighted thus far have involved mainly unpaid reciprocity, or involving the giving of gifts in order to legitimise the exchange in a mutually convenient and acceptable manner to the parties involved. But when money is the medium of exchange within mutual aid – i.e. for non profit motivated rationales - between individuals, there is something different and problematic that is inserted into the equation. As one household in West Knighton put it:

> "Money is a very separate issue – never borrowed money from friends, and never lend money...chances are they'll forget to owe you it back. It could cause a lot of resentment and problems."

Which echoes this respondent's observation in Saffron:

> "Not a chance to get involved with others where money is involved. I would never ask to borrow from neighbours, however small. I never have asked anybody for money, and I never will. The jobs I ask with help are not usually related to money.

One of the questions asked of respondents was "Would you feel comfortable borrowing/ lending £5 from a neighbour. Table 10.6. shows the responses to this.

Table 10.7. Attitudes toward money: by ward

Would you feel comfortable asking a neighbour to borrow £5?	**West Knighton %**	**Saffron %**
Yes definitely	10.0	5.0
Yes	12.5	12.5
Unsure	7.5	7.5
No	30.0	42.5
Definitely not	40.0	32.5
Would you lend £5 to a neighbour if they asked to borrow £5		
Yes definitely	82.5	42.5
Yes	7.5	27.5
Not sure	5.0	15.0
No	5.0	7.5
Definitely not	0	7.5

The results of this are quite striking. For example in West Knighton whereas 70 per cent of respondents would not feel comfortable asking a neighbour to borrow a small sum of money, 90 per cent of respondents would be willing to lend the same amount of money. Even fewer households in Saffron (17.5 per cent) would feel comfortable in borrowing money, and are more conservative when it comes to the question of lending money.

The 'right' environment to give and receive money will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 11, however given the responses here it is definitely a highly contentious factor which polarises attitudes within and between social relations. In an ideal world, for many,

and especially between non-kin relations, the offer of money is something which is felt can undermine or upset the balance of the social exchange with which mutual aid is embedded within. Hence, money is frequently rejected as 'payment', whereas a gift in lieu of money would be more likely to be accepted – and the intention (one not to make or save money) between the social relations is thus preserved. As one female respondent in West Knighton observed:

> "Sometimes, you prefer to give something – else you feel like you owe something, but you don't know what – and I feel awkward in that situation. That's only ever happened with neighbours and friends, not close ones, or family. But sometimes they don't want money – they'll absolutely refuse. And I have to say I do the same to them sometimes. But, instead I may buy them a present – flowers, chocolates, or something they can't really say no to."

Money is generally a 'taboo' area within a community as well, as respondent's associated borrowing money from non-kin relations as something largely to be avoided. The preference would be to defer the payment until the household could get the money together, or borrow money from a family member if possible. Generally speaking, between non-kin relations/ people who did not know each other well, respondents feared that they would be seen (judged) by the wider community as being a charity case, of being poor, and of being unable to provide for themselves. On the other hand, households would be willing to lend money to other households in an emergency not least as all these negative taboos associated with borrowing money would never be called into question. There is a world of difference between the taboos of being a borrower and those of a lender where the community at large may be involved.

10.9. Conclusion

This chapter has explored a range of complex social dynamics which are engaged through the process of mutual aid. Adopting a sweeping perspective on the social hierarchies and relationships, there are indeed 'inner-outer' rationales that discriminate kin from and non-kin relations when engaging through mutual aid. Broadly too, the informality of mutual aid reflects the informality of the social relations involved, which themselves are highly influenced by levels of trust and familiarity between participants. However, the findings also stressed that social relationships are far more nuanced than previous research has suggested. This is important to understand as simplifying complex relations into convenient stereotypes; constructing relationships into pre-ordained groups (e.g. family, friends, neighbours); ignoring the mediated nature of mutual aid; not being aware of the relationship

within wider community; to give here just four examples will fail to adequately address the diverse social dynamics that are engaged on a reciprocal level. Yet it is only by coming to terms with, and focusing on, these subtleties that a penetrative argument that seeks to understand the geographies of mutual aid can be made.

Chapter 11

The complex dynamics within the spectrum of mutual aid

Introduction

Whereas Chapter 10 concentrated on unpacking the complex *social* dynamics embedded in mutual aid, this chapter focuses on the spectrum of mutual aid (unpaid and paid/ formal and informal), in order to illustrate the complex internal dynamics that make mutual aid work. The chapter begins by concentrating on the circumstances where individuals feel either comfortable or uncomfortable asking others (or being asked by others) to undertake domestic tasks through either unpaid mutual aid or paid mutual aid: (which involve gifts or money as gift being exchanged). Here it will be shown how and why unpaid reciprocity can be lubricated and legitimised by the exchange of gifts between households. The chapter then considers the relationship between formal and informal types of mutual aid, showing again their social dynamic in which the group-based organisations can (over time) catalyse more informal networks, and hence facilitate one-to-one reciprocity whether paid or unpaid. Moving beyond the internal tensions that are engaged in the process of mutual aid, the chapter concludes by broadening the focus to focus on the informal economic sphere in general, and examine the dynamics between both mutual aid and self-provisioning, and mutual aid and paid informal work.

11.1. Unpaid mutual aid and paid mutual aid

As highlighted in Section 2.3.3. paid mutual aid is, unlike paid informal work, very much a form of non-market production and exchange, which can be seen through the rationales for participation and the embeddedness of the social relations engaged though the exchange process. Chapter 7 (Table 7.7) indicated that the levels of unpaid and paid mutual aid are significant both in West Knighton (17.5 per cent and 6.9 per cent respectively) and Saffron (25.6 per cent and 6.4 per cent respectively), and when the rationales surrounding these coping strategies are examined, a significant relationship between the two emerges. A 'cause and effect' relationship has been noted in previous research, through the suggestion that paid mutual aid allowed households to avoid the prospect of helping others on an

unpaid basis. For example, focusing on deprived urban communities, Williams and Windebank (2001a: 107) noted that:

> "Unpaid non-kinship exchange occurred only where it was felt to be unacceptable, inappropriate or impossible to do anything different."

Given this context, paid mutual aid:

> "...was by far the preferred option. Exchanging money meant that one could avoid having any obligation 'hanging over you' to reciprocate favours but as the same time, the wheels have been oiled for maintenance or creation of closer relations through exchange without being 'duty bound'."

This particular rationale for justifying paid mutual aid between non-kin relations was also popular in both West Knighton and Saffron, which (as Table 8.6 indicates) collectively engaged friends and neighbours more so than relatives. Again, as suggested in the last chapter, this social differentiation has a great deal to do with the informality of the relationship, which is closely linked to the relative levels of trust and familiarity between the social relations involved. Thus, where family and very close friends are involved (i.e. trust and familiarity are at their most highest) the pressure associated with conducting tasks through unpaid mutual aid, (i.e. the potential for relationships turning sour as a consequence), is comparatively low. This argument is supported through considering in what circumstances people would feel comfortable undertaking domestic jobs without being paid. As one household in West Knighton said:

> "Not paying someone has got nothing to do with money or lifestyle. My sister's husband helps out with DIY things because he has the skills. It's all reciprocal for family – you do it out of love."

This sentiment was echoed by two separate respondents in Saffron:

> "We look after our grandchildren a lot – our daughter works full time. It's never a problem – we enjoy having them. We wouldn't want any money – we do it for love, not money!"

> "It's always been reciprocal for family; give them favours without a doubt."

Pressure does exist however, where the relationships between potential supplier and receiver of mutual aid are perhaps less well known, and thus socially weaker - and more

formal. In this case, the negative connotations associated with unpaid mutual aid place that much greater pressure on the relationship.

> "With other people (i.e. outside my family) you always feel you owe something and you're not paying it back. I prefer to give a gift if possible and they don't want money."

Without the option of paid mutual aid, to facilitate an alternative scenario of exchange (albeit one with the same ends as unpaid mutual aid namely to lubricate their social relationships) then it is likely that either mutual aid would not take place, or would do so through necessity, and thus from a disempowered position – with all the negative implications that this implies. Thus paid mutual aid acts as a 'pressure release' to avoid conducting exchange based on unpaid reciprocity.

In allowing exchange to go ahead in a fashion mutually acceptable to the social relations involved then paid mutual aid, in social capital terms, could be said to work on the 'weak ties' of social capital, bringing people together who don't know each other well, as opposed to unpaid reciprocity, which cements already strong (and close) social ties. This in turn calls into focus the fluidity of social relationships, and how, through the process of mutual aid, different types of mutual aid can come to the fore or, alternatively, go into the background. As one household in West Knighton observed:

> "Well when I first moved to West Knighton, one of the neighbours helped move some rubble in the front of my garden. I gave him a voucher to spend at the local gardening centre to say thank you. That was about, oh! 9 years ago now. And if I'd paid him for everything thing he's done for me since, the let's just say I'd be very poor now! When you first get to know somebody you want to make the right impression. I didn't want anyone to think I was a charity case – the old woman who can't cope – nor did I want to take somebody else's help for granted. I'm 75 now, and without Andy and Naomi next door I would be lost. But it would seem inappropriate giving them a gift for everything they do. I try and help out myself as best I can, if they need anything from the shops, or I look after their pets while on holiday. And I wouldn't want anything other for doing so, apart from their great friendship."

In other words, a formal acquaintance which was assisted - in some influential capacity - through paid mutual aid, developed into an informal relationship based on informal unpaid reciprocity.

Another highly significant yet 'hidden' reality, which contributes an extra layer of complexity to the dynamic relationship between unpaid and paid mutual aid, becomes apparent when

acknowledging the 'gesture' behind paid mutual aid, and how the intention to give a gift or money for work undertaken can act as the critical factor to facilitate mutual aid and developing social relations. Naturally, as discussed in Chapter 4 (see section 4.4.1) the gift is seen not just in terms of the thing (object) that is being exchanged, but that it is infused with the spirit with which it is given. Here, the rationale of this male respondent in West Knighton sums this up well:

> "We give gifts out – like a bottle of wine to neighbours to show our appreciation – not the value of the gifts that are important, just the sentiment, the thanks behind them."

However, the gesture of offering to conduct the task through paid mutual aid can legitimise unpaid mutual aid, without a material gift being exchanged. To illustrate:

> "My husband gives lifts regularly to a neighbour who needs to be at the hospital. He has been offered to be paid, pay for the petrol, but he always politely refuses. He just enjoys helping someone who really would be stuck without it. But the fact that Paul offers to give something is nice – means that my husband doesn't feel taken for granted."

Such a situation may or may not be ideal from the perspective of the neighbour. Section 11.1.1 discusses how respondents will first offer money to avoid unpaid mutual aid, and then if not accepted another type of gift will be offered (which is harder to refuse). This is yet another illustration of the complex nuances that are harnessed through the negotiation process that underpin the geographies of mutual aid highlighted in Section I. Far from being rigid and inflexible, the current geographies of mutual aid (and especially the balance between paid and unpaid mutual aid) highlighted in West Knighton and Saffron could have been radically different if certain alternative outcomes offered in the end process of negotiation between supplier and receiver had been adopted. Evidence for this is seen in Table 11.1., which highlights two alternative scenarios that are relevant to the experiences of the vast majority of all respondents regarding mutual aid.

Table 11.1 Alternative scenarios in the negotiation process between supplier and receiver: by ward

	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Have you ever refused money/gift for doing work?		
Yes: refused money and gift	52.5	47.5
Yes: refused gift	7.5	2.5
Yes: refused money	35.0	37.5
Never refused	2.5	7.5
Never arisen	2.5	5.0
Have you ever been forced to take a gift (including money) from other people?		
Yes: (family and friends)	15.0	10.0
Yes: (family	7.5	12.5
Yes: (friends)	30.0	12.5
No	7.5	22.5
Yes: (neighbour)	12.5	15.0
Yes: (neighbour and friends)	7.5	15.0
Yes: (neighbours and family and friends)	20.0	12.5

Only 2.5 per cent of respondents in West Knighton and 7.5 per cent in Saffron have admitted always accepting the offer of a gift to undertake work when offered. Indeed in West Knighton, 95 per cent of mutual aid could have been conducted under a different scenario if money and/ or gifts had been accepted for work undertaken. Similarly, from the perspective of being forced to take money or a gift from social relations, 92.5 per cent of exchange in West Knighton (77.5 per cent in Saffron) could have been affected should the respondent have refused ultimately to receive a gift. But the overall point being made here is that unpaid mutual aid can be legitimised by not receiving a gift, but simply by having the individual go as far as making the offer to give something in return.

11.2. Gifts and 'money as gift'

A considerable amount of exchange that avoids unpaid reciprocity, but takes place instead through paid mutual aid, is due to the ability of households to come to a compromised understanding as to how best to offer or receive paid mutual aid in a mutually appropriate and acceptable way. Importantly, the process of negotiating, as suggested in the last section, is far from straightforward. As Table 11.1 indicates, there is much more involved than just being offered money and accepting it without any fuss. Focusing on the circumstances that individuals feel is appropriate for giving gift for work undertaken really highlights the dynamic within paid mutual aid, and the complex relationship between money and gift became apparent.

Given previous research (as Section 4.4.2. noted) one of the fundamental conclusions was that:

> "Unpaid aid took place when payment was impossible (e.g. when somebody refused to be paid because they wanted an unpaid favour from you at a later date) (Williams and Windebank, 2001a: 107)

This suggests that the recipient of mutual aid had offered money to the supplier, but as this medium of exchange was refused, unpaid mutual aid was the only inevitable outcome. Yet this view is highly simplistic when seen in the context of the strategies and counter-strategies present in West Knighton and Saffron, involving two different rationales:

1. To maintain or create close social relations without being duty bound or.
2. To redistribute money or gifts.

11.2.1. Gifts given to maintain social relations.

Regarding social relations, an insight into the dynamic between gift and money is reflected in the comparatively higher number of individuals who have refused money, preferring another type of gift. In certain situations (i.e. for the task involved, or the relations involved) respondents were far more hesitant to accept money from non-kin relations where they didn't feel it appropriate, as these examples suggested:

> "My husband (self-employed) did some decorating for a neighbour: only took a couple of hours. He did it mainly because he knew him – he doesn't do odd jobs for anybody – unless they're family. He did get some money - but the neighbour

> insisted: my husband said he would have done it anyway, but felt he had to accept it."

> "I like to do some carpentry in my spare time. I like making things, giving them to friends. One time I made a small cupboard for a neighbour – which took a bit longer than usual. But I did it cos' I enjoyed it, and knew they were looking for a new cupboard. But they insisted on giving me some money for it, which was something they wanted to do, but it didn't make a difference really to me."

Yet one appropriate way forward was to accept the offer. In this way, rather than risk offending the individual giving the money, by rejecting the money (and their sincere gesture), the supplier of mutual aid acknowledged the sentiment behind the gift, while also – importantly - reinforcing the fact to the household giving the money that they had not undertaken the task to make money (i.e. that it was not undertaken for profit-motivated rationales). Where there is common ground through understanding the reasons as to why money has been offered, and why it has been accepted, then this consolidates the social relations involved in a positive manner. The situation is neatly summarised by the experiences of this church-going couple in West Knighton:

A considerable number of jobs we've done for friend and neighbours, where we didn't expect or want to be paid. But you feel that they will be upset if you protest too much, so you come to an agreement for a price. We normally give the money to charity (missionary box).

However, money as a medium of exchange within paid mutual aid is, overall, far more problematical than other forms of gifts. Quite often to get others to accept money as well as the potential recipient acknowledge the spirit in which it was offered, the giver has to be dogmatic; something along these lines:

> "I'd pay friends and family for bigger jobs, even if they don't ask for it or want it – and I won't take no for an answer!"

Another strategy, to keep all concerned happy (and with less chance of offending or being offended) is to instruct that the money is merely used as a vehicle to facilitate a different end, thereby demonstrating immediately that the task was not done to save money or to make money. An excellent illustration of this came from this gentleman in Saffron:

> "For small jobs, when you've asked someone to give their time – especially if they're a friend, I just prefer to give them something; even if it's only a £5 – I'll just say 'have a drink on me Gerry, or Paul, or whoever'. I mean, I'm 82 now, so there ain't much opportunity for me to help them out. And I don't want them to think I'm putting on them – always taking, never giving. So I'll give 'em something to say thanks."

And this young man, also in Saffron:

> "I pay friends in beer. Have a lot of friends in the trade – so I use them a lot. But we help each other out – and prefer to say thanks by helping them out if needed, and/ or buying them a beer. They wouldn't accept cash. I certainly wouldn't!

This approach is also evident where kinship members are involved:

> "Our son does various odds and ends when he's around. He feels as if he's doing something to help us – and we really appreciate a hand. Normally, there's no money involved. But if it's a bigger job – he cut a tree down for us last year – then we may slip him a twenty-quid note. He tries to refuse, but we were very insistent, at the end we told him to treat himself to a few extra drinks, as a reward."

A further blurring of the boundaries between money and gift (though coming from the same rationale) can be seen in the use of 'gift vouchers'. This option is undoubtedly a modern one, as the ability to give gift vouchers is something that is a relatively recent phenomenon. Again, it has the advantage of giving something which can be used in a monetary sense, but is not loaded with the same ambiguity regarding profit-motivated rationales, and thus open to the same levels of misinterpretation, and hence rejection. This experience of gift vouchers also brings into the equation yet another complex dynamic between unpaid mutual aid and paid mutual aid. At face value, many tasks conducted through unpaid reciprocity appear to have been negotiated in a straightforward manner. For example a person does some occasional tasks for a neighbour, for which he (or she) isn't given a gift or money, and the reciprocity is one which is more social than anything else. However, again this is to make the mistake of assuming that, all things being equal, this reciprocity will continue as is. But what happens when mutual aid (even if involving exactly the same task(s) and exactly the same actors) accumulates over time? In certain situations what lubricates and legitimises these apparently unpaid reciprocal acts to an extent, *is in-fact paid mutual aid.* This insight was certainly apparent in West Knighton from the perspective of the recipient of a gift-voucher:

> "I look after an old lady, anything from taking her to the bank every week, to dressing and bathing– I used to be a full-time care worker – and going to the vet for her cat's pills. She doesn't pay me – I wouldn't hear of it. But she does give me a £10 Marks and Spencer's card each Christmas. It's a present, a gift, how can I refuse. "

And one who supplied a gift- voucher (from a household in Saffron):

> "I have a friend who comes around once a fortnight to see if I need anything doing. He's been a tremendous help to me since I lost my husband. It wouldn't be appropriate to offer him money or give him a gift for everything he does. He would never accept anyway, and I'd just feel silly. But I make sure that I get him a voucher each Christmas and for his birthday from one of the local high-street shops, to give him something to treat himself with. Of course, I'm sure it wouldn't matter from his point of view if he just got a card from me on these occasions, but it makes me feel better that I can give something back. And of course, with it being such special occasions as well it's a great opportunity to do so: he couldn't really say no, could he?"

These examples of trying to make money more socially acceptable between friends for work undertaken (as a means to an end, not as end in themselves) are integral to the rationales outlined here. Overall though, respondents are very much aware and appreciative of the problematic nature associated with both giving money as a gift, and receiving money as a gift. Therefore, the alternate strategy is to avoid 'money' as the medium of exchange, but to give a different gift instead, which is less ambiguous and less loaded with formal economic rationales.

This approach is both a central and an explicit strategy when respondents justify why they offer gifts instead of money. It is the greater likelihood that a general gift will be accepted/ prove harder to reject, which makes it so attractive to give between social relations. As these following insights demonstrate:

> "Sometimes, you prefer to give something – else you feel like you owe something, but you don't know what – and I feel awkward in that situation. That's only ever happened with neighbours and friends, not close ones, or family. But sometimes they don't want money – they'll absolutely refuse. And I have to say I do the same to them sometimes. But, instead I may buy them a present – flowers, chocolates, or something they can't really say no to." (Saffron resident)

> "We gave our neighbours a set of house keys when we went away on holiday. We trusted them implicitly, and it was peace of mind to know that they were there if needed. In fact the burglar alarm did go off. The neighbours with the keys called the police, and two more households went to have a look around in the meantime. Thankfully it was a false alarm – but it was so reassuring for us to know that the neighbours would be pro-active like that. You would pay good money to have that peace of mind. We brought the couple who had the keys a bottle of wine back to say 'thank you'. Which they didn't expect – but we insisted, as it seemed the most appropriate thing to do in the circumstances!"

> "If it's a job that needs skills then I'll get someone in – a firm or whatever. But for things like DIY or moving furniture I ask the younger neighbours next door to help, if they wouldn't mind. I usually give them a little something, not money though, to say thanks. It's a token of our appreciation; these little jobs really help us out at our age."

11.2.2. Gifts and the redistributive rationale

An important underlying reason for giving gifts was the redistributive rationale. Again, this moves the discussion further away from the less complicated arguments of previous research that considered paid mutual aid as the favoured informal coping strategy used to avoid owing *non-kin* relations a favour, or being seen as a charity case. On the contrary, paid mutual aid within an overriding re-distributive rationale was an important and popular means of exchange within kin relationships. At the household level, mutual aid was used as a legitimate vehicle to allow family to maintain their social networks, but also to distribute money (typically) within their extended family networks in a socially acceptable manner. This rationale is commonly employed by older relatives using paid mutual aid to redistribute wealth to younger relatives (for example between a grandparent and their grandchildren. This is illustrated below:

> "Well, when it comes of washing the car in the summer, we normally pay our grandchildren Matilda and Daisy to do it! It gives them a little bit of pocket money, though we all help out. It's quite enjoyable really, and we have a laugh at the same time and its something that we can all do together." (West Knighton)

In these example, paid mutual aid then acts as a legitimate vehicle to give some extra money to other members of the family, vis a vis jobs which either could be done by the family (self-provisioning) as in the car wash example; are not necessary (as in the example of the son-in-law); or could be done in an acceptable fashion through unpaid mutual aid.

11.3. Formal volunteering and informal reciprocity

> "It is worth noting that some people carry out community self-help activities as a result in their involvement in formal groups. People who are members of religious groups for example often support each other, but their support is direct and anonymous" Burns et al. (2004: 42).

Having given further insight into the complicated relationships engaged between unpaid mutual aid and paid mutual (and within paid mutual) the other objective was to comment on the relationship between formal volunteering and informal mutual aid. More generally low levels of formal volunteering to complete material tasks have been highlighted elsewhere (e.g. Williams 2002a-c, 2003a), but this coping strategy was entirely absent in West Knighton and Saffron to undertake household tasks (see Chapter 7, section 7.1). Rather,

respondents had only received help from group-based activities did on social and/ or emotional levels (67.5 per cent in West Knighton, 37.5 per cent in Saffron). Though formal volunteering was not used directly as an informal coping strategy for domestic tasks, it is argued that it had a significant influence in maintaining a key space for introducing and consolidating a wide range of social relationships that then went on to develop to an extent that resulted in mutual aid being undertaken.

In West Knighton, unlike Saffron, the presence of faith groups where individuals could meet, and regularly interact with other households in their community was mentioned on several occasions. These three observations highlight this evolution process of interactions along the following lines: formal introduction *plus* regular interaction *equals* informal exchange:

> "It was fairly easy to get involved in this community – if I remember rightly. I got involved through going to the local church – met quite a few neighbours that way."
>
> "The church here gives a great opportunity to meet new people, and I suppose belonging to the groups is part of the Christian ethos – helping others."
>
> "Many of my friends are at the local church – so we meet regularly. Indeed those who I would turn to the most when I need help, are the friends that I met through the church."

On a more general level, the attendance of individuals with local church groups, and the positive effects on social capital and more informal relations have been documented elsewhere. As Greeley (1997: 590-591) observed:

> "Probably attending church with others and belonging to organizations with them creates relationships that facilitate (informal) volunteering."

Membership of a formal group also gives a common background from which individuals can identify with. This is important in light of the tendency for social relations to develop using the principle of homophily (like-me) introduced in Chapter 3 (3.3.1). Brewer, (1981) and Buchan et al., (2002) observed that shared category membership becomes a basis of depersonalised trust, which causes a psychological shift from the personal to the collective level of identity. One of the best examples of this, common to both wards, came in the form of Neighbourhood Watch. As one householder in Saffron mentioned:

> "The Neighbourhood Watch thing - I go to meetings once a month. Suppose we all benefit from it. But it's a social thing more than anything – good way of meeting people, meeting neighbours, especially any new ones."

The homogenous social backgrounds which flourished within these and other formal groups (see 8.1) in the case study areas, increased the likelihood that participants could move forward, over time, to informalise their social relationships within the group. Baby circles are an excellent example of this. As one young mother in Saffron observes:

> "I used to keep myself to myself, then I went with a friend to a formal group to get some more skills – and give of my own. I love working with children, not everybody can say that! From my work in a crèche, when I had a baby, I got the confidence and experience to set up a baby-sitting group, it's been great – I've met people that live literally round the corner who I never dreamed of speaking to before! A lot of us are great friends now. We always offer each other support, not just with the children, but generally – we'll always look to help out if we can."

This anecdote also highlights the fact that formal volunteering can also work on enhancing and developing the skills that individuals possess. By belonging to something that an individual gets a great deal of satisfaction from, the confidence that this gives to that individual can encourage them to come out and embrace others around them. This particular woman has gone from having little confidence, little responsibility, to having a great formal experience, which has led to her forming her own organised group, and ultimately developing an informal network of support from other (mothers) in her community.

11.4. The dynamics between mutual aid and other informal coping strategies:

The latter half of the chapter moves beyond the sub-categories of mutual aid to consider how the process of mutual aid affects the other informal economic activities, namely self-provisioning and paid informal work (for definitions see Chapter 2, section 2.3.1.)

11.4.1 Mutual aid and self-provisioning

Chapter 7 drew attention to the active participatory role of the household involved in mutual aid when domestic tasks were undertaken (see Table 7.7). For example, considering unpaid mutual aid, the household was involved in helping complete 19.5 per cent of tasks in West Knighton, and 36.4 per cent in Saffron. Focusing on paid mutual aid, just 3.8 per cent of households were involved in West Knighton, whereas 27.9 per cent of households in Saffron helped complete the task in question.

Significantly, previous studies on unpaid community exchange have failed to observe, let alone comment on the active role of the household. This failure to do so has implied that the household adopts (at best) a neutral position when friends, family, and or neighbours undertake tasks. But, as these figures suggest, such a detached interpretation is highly misleading: rather the household can be very much part of the process. Self-provisioning and mutual aids overlap and merge in a complementary and constructive way.

One of the reasons why a household would assume an active role involves the nature of the task being undertaken. The most straightforward of examples, can be seen in those instances where the task is physically intensive (perhaps moving a heavy piece of furniture or garden item) and it is too much to tackle for the resources of the household itself, so that outside help is sought. What is needed, in this case, is no more than an 'additional' pair of pair hands to help out.

Further examples involving the nature of the task, where the household would be active, were those which assumed little expertise or knowledge, and which lent themselves well to multiple roles being adopted to get the task completed. In other words 'socially enabling' tasks ranging from decorating, moving house, and DIY work to gardening, vehicle maintenance were given as examples by households within West Knighton and Saffron. These were tasks which, should a household have paid for, they would otherwise be absent from the process. But, as will be discussed in Chapter 13, it is the social interaction between the individuals involved that mutual aid can facilitate, and it is for this reason that households can seek the help of others.

Having the active mutual overlap between the household and other relations, while never negating, reduces the pressures associated with one-way volunteerism, or owing others a favour (two of the key taboos of mutual aid) *to the same degree* as if family, friends or neighbours had undertaken the work solely by themselves. As one resident in Saffron mentioned:

> "I bought a new lino and needed help to put it down into the kitchen. It would have been a real pain to have to do that myself, so I asked my neighbour and another friend to help out. It didn't take too long, and well it wasn't so much about me stepping back and letting them get on with it. I'm grateful to their help, but if I hadn't felt comfortable asking them or it wasn't such a demanding task then I would have done it myself instead. As it happened we did it in no time at all as I said, and then went to the pub after – my round of course!"

From the perspective of the supplier of mutual aid, this dynamic synthesis of the input of both themselves and the recipient household is the reason why they agree to help out. There are several examples that highlight this social collaboration of unpaid community exchange, which is epitomised in the rationale: "I was just helping out a mate." This is a far cry from agreeing to 'do all the work on behalf of a mate'. Thus, their consent to engage in the task comes with the understanding that they won't have to complete it themselves. Again, if the expectation and the reality of the situation are at odds then it may have highly negative implications for the social relations involved. This is captured perfectly be the following quote, from a recent graduate in the ward of Saffron:

> "I helped a friend and his wife dig over their garden...yeah! They mucked in as much as I did. I mean if I was doing all the work and they were sat there drinking cocktails...well that would just be taking the mick! And I certainly wouldn't volunteer myself again: I ain't no ones doormat!"

Do household members play any role in completing tasks when they involve other people outside the household on an unpaid basis? In what situation are they passive and alternatively active? In what situations may the non-participation of the household be seen to be acceptable/ unacceptable from the point of view of the supplier of mutual aid? What implications does this have for encouraging/ discouraging mutual aid from developing in future?

11.4.2. Mutual aid and paid informal work

Should mutual aid be held to its most popular definition within the informal sphere, that of *unpaid work*, then the activities conducted under mutual aid appear to be a world apart from the concept of paid informal work, which is almost universally associated with the exploitative 'cash-in-hand' and 'off the books' work within the 'black' economy. But the recent empirical research has broken down these absolute barriers by identifying 'paid mutual aid', or 'autonomous' paid informal work a realm which has common elements of both mutual aid and paid informal work. As Williams and Windebank (2001a: 5) explained:

"Paid informal exchange can be both market and non-market work. When the rationales for people participating in such activity are considered along with the social relations with which it is embedded, although some paid informal exchange is very much akin to market-led

exchange, a good deal is based on non-market motivations and social relatives... and is mostly for friends, relatives and neighbours"

With this fragmentation of absolute boundaries, there comes with it great difficulty in confidently asserting where paid informal work, 'cash-in-hand' ends and where autonomous informal exchange between certain individuals begins. There are many examples of this in Saffron and West Knighton, which give some insight into the complexity of informal exchange from the household level:

> "I get my son-in-law to do a few jobs in the house, or in the garden. Over the last five or so years he's been made redundant four or five time. Now he's setting up his own work as a gardener – charging £5 an hour. But you can't live on that, let alone pay and maintain the equipment he needs (lawnmower). So I pay him, what you might say, over the odds. I get the jobs done, and he gets the money to help him out a bit." (Saffron resident)
>
> "Our son-in-law is a car mechanic. We'd go to him with any problems with the car, and we'd give him some cash. His own business is struggling at the moment, so we can help out like this. It would be a genuine problem though, but in this situation, we wouldn't expect or want him to do it for nothing, though he has tried." (West Knighton resident)

Given this, when one concentrates on the relationship between paid informal work and paid mutual aid and the rationales involved then, as with formal mutual aid and informal mutual aid, a constructive, positive and dynamic relationship emerges. On one level, it has been the experience (as this respondent from Knighton indicates) that an act of mutual aid can thereafter lead to more opportunities for both paid informal work and formal work in a locality:

> "Our son is a general handyman – he replaced a window for us last year. And we'd ask him first because he has the skills, and it's convenient to get him to do it. He did it last summer, but wouldn't accept any money for the job. But we always recommend him to our friends and neighbours. You try and send some business his way if you can. It makes us feel better – that we've made a difference - when he phones and say's "Oh! Yeah, I'm round at no.10's this weekend, doing some decorating for them - they said you recommended me. Thanks"

It was a common observation, especially in the affluent locality of West Knighton, that paid informal work has also catalyzed social networks effectively, especially in the first instance where people otherwise do not know each other well. There was a definite feeling that paid informal work allowed a formal relationship with clear boundaries (person x, paying person y to do a (professional) job) allowed individuals to get to know each other without the social

pressures associated with unpaid mutual aid for example. Over time, in some cases, this getting to know the individual on a more personal level, through paid mutual aid led to a more relaxed, informality in the relationship. As this respondent in Saffron observed:

> "It's all about balance and understanding really. My husband's got to know loads of people around the estate, because he's a plumber. Now he's retired he doesn't do it for the money, not for some people anyway, he just wants to help out if he can: he's more time than he knows what to do with! Actually, now that I think about it, the first job he did here was for our next door but one neighbour, sorting out a broken tap. They've gave him some money for that, but now we're always helping each other out. We've got to know them very well, over the years and it's all reciprocal now."

11.5 Conclusion

Chapter 11 has begun to unpack the complex dynamics that are present within the sub-categories of mutual aid, and between other informal activities more generally. Many of these dynamics are highly complementary, allowing the cloth of mutual aid to be cut accordingly to best fit the social relations involved. This is vital, in that mutual aid doesn't impose itself on the relationship (unless in extreme circumstances) but rather the social relationship dictate the type and nature of mutual aid. This ability to accommodate a diverse range of social and structural factor is undoubtedly one of the strengths of mutual aid, and without question would be far less appealing as an informal coping strategy.

The chapter has also stressed the factor of time – in that the geographies of mutual aid identified in this study are far from fixed and permanent within either community. One of the important findings has been to demonstrate that mutual aid helps lubricate, legitimise and consequently develop social relationships (and hence notions of trust and reciprocity). And this changing emphasis presents new opportunities and constraints to engage with others on a reciprocal basis.

These structural dynamics, coupled with the social dynamics investigated in the previous chapter, explicitly portray a far more intense and complicated interpretation of mutual aid than has been forthcoming in previous research. But this intensity and complexity is necessary, in that it offers deeper insights and explanations as to why mutual aid is so pervasive and uneven in urban populations, and between and within deprived and affluent sub-populations.

Chapter 12

Space, place and mutual aid

> "Space is amorphous and intangible and not an entity that can be directly described and analysed. Yet, however we feel or explain space, there is nearly always some associated sense or concept of place. In general it seems that space provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places." (Relph, 1976: 8)

> "Households and individuals who adopt different practices and strategies for getting by must do so in a specific context. The way in which all work is done is substantially determined by the opportunities available in a relatively restricted milieu..." (Pahl, 1984: 144)

Introduction

The aims and objectives of this thesis have culminated in (a) highlighting the central geographies of mutual aid present in two localities, and (b) approached these geographies from different angles in order to examine a range of complex dynamics, engaged through the process of mutual aid, that underpin these geographies. In particular Chapter 10 unpacked the contrasting social attitudes and approaches within the rationales behind mutual aid, as well as focusing on the wider social circumstances which either encouraged (or discouraged) the type and quality of relationships necessary for mutual aid to take place successfully. Chapter 11 focused on bringing to light the dynamic relations that operate within the spectrum of mutual aid, specifically between different sub-categories of mutual aid that help legitimise and/or lubricated the type of informal reciprocity in the two localities. This chapter however argues that role of place and space need to be grasped if the current geographies of mutual aid (place-based reciprocity) are to be properly understood.

Saffron and West Knighton are two distinct spatial regions each providing key spatial constraints and opportunities for the populations to engage through mutual aid. Far from being a neutral and blank canvas, the physical boundaries of space can greatly influence the type(s) and nature(s) of social interaction, and hence the specific types of geographies of mutual aid that arise not only between populations, but within populations also. Space is an important identity marker, one which may effectively divide or unite groups of people and inevitably impacts on their individual geographies of mutual aid. This will be demonstrated by

illustrating key aspects of the spatial layouts within the two localities. For example, at the heart of Saffron the presence of a large swathe of social housing forms an excellent spatial signpost that has effectively divided the population into two: those who live within "The Saff" on the one side, and those who live outside it on the other.

Having considered the unique physical dynamic that 'space' plays within the geographies of mutual aid, the chapter focuses on Saffron and West Knighton as 'places'. How do respondents refer to and identify with others in their localities? How do respondents experience the social norms that reside within the spaces they move into (i.e. when space in terms of the wider locality becomes place)? Through highlighting a wide variety of (contrasting) rationales each based on perceptions, prejudices, and experiences of the place they live, an important dimension will be added to this story, one that will ultimately help to explain and account for the wider dynamics that underpin the uneven nature of mutual aid identified within Saffron and Knighton.

12.1. Mutual aid and space

When respondents talked about Saffron or West Knighton, it was extremely rare for them to refer to either ward as a coherent whole. Rather, a process of fragmentation and deconstruction of this spatial whole was undertaken, especially when considering the concept of 'community' and Saffron or West Knighton as 'places to live'. As Morrow (2002: 23) argues, the community is rather not based on the wider perspective, but on narrower 'communities of interest' based around:

> "...school, town centre and streets, friends and relatives houses and sometimes two homes rather than an easily identifiable geographical location."

The process of this spatial fragmentation, one which establishes the furrows upon which social relationships *in situ* (i.e. friends and neighbours) are likely to be seeded will be discussed explicitly in the dialogue surrounding 'place'. What is the concern of this section here is to say that there is spatial fragmentation built into the urban fabric of these localities, which influence greatly the attitudes and perceptions of those who live there.

12.1.1. "The Saff"

At the heart of the ward in Saffron lies a considerable amount of social housing. The spatial layout of these properties though is significant, as they are hemmed in the south side by the A563 (Attlee Way) which has a common border with the ward more generally, and also on the west side, by Saffron Lane (B5366). Saffron Lane runs almost directly though the centre of the ward, effectively dissecting the ward in two. This is something which is unique to Saffron, and not present within West Knighton.

The effect of this in Saffron though cannot be underestimated, as Saffron Lane effectively divides the ward into two spatial areas: East Saffron and West Saffron. And on top of that the social housing which is so predominant in East Saffron exacerbates the spatial differences within the ward. It is the combination of readily identifiable social housing, and a spatially divided ward which lends itself well to popular reference of "The Saff!", which referred to those people living in East Saffron in the council houses.

For those living outside of the boundaries of East Saffron, any trouble which was frequently attributed to Saffron, was firmly blamed on the people living in "The Saff." The spatial differences were frequently cited as means of explanation. For example, one respondent whose house literally facing Saffron Lane, gesticulated to the council houses opposite and said:

> "All those joyriders and robbers you read about they come from The Saff. When people mention Saffron and trouble then all they mean are those dossers that live across Saffron Lane over there. There's "us" that live this side, and "them" that live at the other. And you'll be hard pushed to find anyone here who mixes with people there. Never the twain shall meet as far as I'm concerned. Well, except for when those little s**** come across here and thieve around here. It wants levelling down brick by brick and building again in my opinion."

Though extremely hostile, a generally negative perception of "The Saff" from those who did not live there was forthcoming from respondents in Saffron. The discussion though is not concerned with accuracy of these statements, but rather to use them highlight the diversity of the people who lived in "The Saff". This is necessary to undermine the tendency when discussing established 'wards', for this to be hidden and lumped together into one homogenous group, a group created by the spatial orientation and fragmentation of the locality itself. To end this passage on a more positive note, and bring the discussion of "The Saff" full circle, it is worth looking at the perception of the area from those living in East Saffron.

Several households that were interviewed within "The Saff" while in no way endorsing themselves as a homogenous collection of people, did make reference to this spatial differentiation. One respondent said:

> "Well, there are a lot of families that all choose to live and stay on The Saff if they can. We know that this area has a really bad reputation, but just look around you – it's hardly Beirut is it? It's not a case of not mixing with other people across the Saffron Lane; I mean who does that anyway? How many people walk the streets around where they live, and then go "oh! gosh that's a big road" I shan't cross that!" It's just stupid. It's just using the Saffron Lane as a convenient excuse for stereotyping the place and people that live there."

12.1.2. Spatial layout

As highlighted in Chapter 5 (section 5.3.1.) the spatial layout of the two localities to act as a visible signpost that defined social boundaries was much evident on a more micro-scale within both West Knighton and Saffron. Respondents highlighted both the layout of streets and the type of houses present (e.g. detached, semi-detached, bungalow, terraced) were extremely influential in encouraging certain types of 'inclusive' social networks to form. The best example of how a street layout was thought to foster trust and familiarity between households was the cul-de-sac. Respondents living in both West Knighton and Saffron, when talking about what they considered to be their community, used the cul-de-sac as being the common bond between the households that they knew about, and those they did not. As one respondent in Saffron observed:

> I know all my neighbours in this road. Three or four years ago this cul-de-sac was more like a small village. We had a sort of 'language of curtains' I suppose you could call it. You knew when people were in, or out. And if you hadn't seen anyone for a few days, then it would be appropriate to call round, see if all was well."

A number of residents who now lived in a cul-de-sac also believed that the comparatively better levels of community spirit and awareness of others than they experienced now, from their last place of residence, was due to cul-de-sac itself. As two different households in West Knighton illustrated:

> "I moved here with my family from another estate in Leicester about 4 years ago now. It was a pretty nondescript place; everybody had big houses, big gardens, and kept themselves to themselves. You could probably be dead for several weeks before anybody would have noticed, and even then beyond the neighbours

> I'm not sure if people would notice at all. But here, there's smaller gardens at the front, you can see who's in or who's out. If there's any suspicious looking types then you can keep a close eye on them, make sure that nothing untoward goes on. I'd have absolute confidence that if old Anthony in No. 7 – he must be at least 90 – wasn't up at the usual time (you can set you're clock by him – 8.30 his curtains are drawn each morning without fail) then that same morning one of the neighbours would just knock on the door, see if he's OK."

> "Think people feel safer round here, can identify more with each other because it's a cul-de-sac. A high proportion are professional people – or retired. But it was easy to settle, neighbours give Christmas cards to each other, people will speak in passing."

However, less one should assume that to promote social capital universally, all that needs to be done is for every street to be turned into one big cul-de-sac, this positive association between this type of spatial layout and a social feel-good-factors was not universal. One householder in Saffron complained that:

> "To be honest it's like living in a goldfish bowl. You have next to no privacy, it's really stifling. I'm all for neighbours taking an interest in each other, but here you just can't escape from it. Take this moment, if you look out of the window now you can see that there's someone in those three houses, but over there they're at work, and Bob is out there mowing his lawn. I feel so claustrophobic. You begin to resent it, I do. But if you keep yourself to yourself then you feel that you're not playing your part. You feel like an outsider. But the people that I want to socialise with, then given the choice, wouldn't be my neighbours!"

And indeed, the experience of moving into an already established cul-de-sac was quite daunting for some households. Again, this is best highlighted by quoting in full one male respondent's observations:

> "My wife and I moved here about six months ago. It's been quite difficult really because everyone knows everyone else, pretty well it seems. If you're living in a normal street, then it may well be the same – as you'd expect, and given time you'd settle in and be as familiar with other neighbours as they are when you're the newcomer. But here it's that bit more intense – that bit more in your face. A neighbour said that there was a house having a bonfire night celebration, and that all the neighbours were invited – did we want to come? But we just didn't feel that unless the host had invited us personally that we should go – be awkward. But with hindsight it seems like the wrong thing to have said – six months later and we still haven't tapped in the 'inner group' yet!"

When one looks at the different type of spatial layouts, if cul-de-sac's are at one end then the opposite extreme, are the singular, linear street layout. Several streets interviewed in West Knighton matched this description, where the household interviewed was spatially isolated: with no houses opposite (just a playing field) and no immediate neighbours occupying the houses on either side.

> "We don't help anybody else, no neighbours anyway. I mean it's where we live now - that's the problem. As I'm sure you can see there's not many houses to get to know round here – just a few trees opposite! In the last place, which was only a few minutes walk away, we knew everybody there. Everybody would know their neighbour – even if it was just for a friendly "Hello? How's things". And you took it for granted, that there would always be people who would look out for you. But as there are not that many houses where we live now then, well, you'd be stuck if you needed help in a hurry!"

Toward the north of Saffron, the spatial layout is dominated by traditional terrace housing, and grid-iron streets. In the context of knowledge of others, again the particular 'street' formed a key symbol within people's identification of their wider community:

> "Oh! round here I know all the neighbours. This road is a close community; other people support each other well"

This close-knit street layout did encourage a *general* awareness of other neighbours, in that respondents knew of many of the people in their street (or at least their end of the street) even if they didn't know them well. As one respondent in Saffron said:

> "I guess that a lot of people know their immediate neighbours. But here you generally know who your neighbours are in this street. You might not have ever spoken to them, but you pass them in the street often enough – or bump into them in the corner shop - and you have a certain recognition. They're not strangers."

In West Knighton, on the other hand, the spatial environment, certainly in the heart of the ward, was much more relaxed (lots of large, detached and semi-detached houses) with houses set back from the streets. Contemplating this current spatial layout with a previous one, one respondent pointed out that:

> "Well, you get to see the neighbours if they're out in the garden, if I'm out at the same time, I'll try and have a word with them. Such a contrast when I used to live in flats in Evington (another ward in Leicester). There you had no opportunity to get to know anyone else. You could be there for years and unless you had the odd occasion where you bumped into other people in the corridor or lift, you wouldn't know anybody."

Johnston, (2001b: 776) argued that, "Space per se is contentless and only important when given status by human agents." However, regarding the question of whether space has the ability to catalyse or retard those social networks which encourage the particular types of mutual aid embedded in the two localities, then such an observation is misleading. For, constructed from the respondent's own words, it is obvious that space does indeed play an

important and significantly under-rated role when considering the dynamics of mutual aid in a locality.

12.2. Mutual aid and place

What happens when the discussion of West Knighton and Saffron turns from interpreting them as physical 'spaces', to places, and illustrated how they are popularly interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined by the two populations? Through highlighting the contrasting attitudes by residents toward Saffron and West Knighton, then a discussion focused on how place is created (looking at perceptions of place from those who live there, and those who do not; crisis situations, and the role of formal institutions.)

12.3. Constructing place

When asked as to their opinions on a range of questions related to place, and the environment they live in, a variety of responses was forthcoming. The focus here is mainly on highlighting the general contrast between West Knighton and Saffron, and seeking to account for some of these differences by noting how respondents come to construct their place. In particular what reasons associated with place can explain the friendlier, embracive interpretations of respondents of West Knighton over Saffron, especially when considering that these wards are neighbouring? Why do fifty percent of the respondents in Saffron believe that Saffron is neither close nor tight knit? Why might almost two-thirds of respondent in Saffron believe that people do not trust each other, compared with the 70 per cent of respondents in West Knighton who do believe that people trust each other? (Table 12.1)

Table 12.1. Different opinions on West Knighton and Saffron

Opinions on the places you live.	West Knighton (%)	Saffron (%)
Knowledge of Neighbourhood (% of all households surveyed)		
Know most people	35.0	37.5
Know many people	45.0	17.5
Know only a few people	20.0	45.0
Close and tight knit area?		
Strongly agree	10.0	10.0
Tend to agree	57.5	30.0
Neither agree nor disagree	17.5	10.0
Tend to disagree	12.5	17.5
Strongly disagree	2.5	32.5
Friendly place to live?		
Strongly agree	25.0	15.0
Tend to agree	52.5	45.0
Neither agree nor disagree	17.5	25.0
Tend to disagree	5.0	15.0
Strongly disagree	0	0
People look out for each other?		
Strongly agree	17.5	7.5
Tend to agree	47.5	35.0
Neither agree nor disagree	25.0	37.5
Tend to disagree	10.0	15.0
Strongly disagree	0	5.0
People trust each other?		
Strongly agree	20.0	10.0
Tend to agree	50.0	25.0
Neither agree nor disagree?	25.0	35.0
Tend to disagree	5.0	22.5

12.3.1. Perceptions from the outside

Within their own house, the resident household has almost a carte blanche opportunity to create a closed-environment to live without listening to any preconceived advice, ideas, perceptions, prejudices, falsehoods, from other people beyond that particular household. When the individual steps from his or her home though, and out into their wider physical environment, the 'place' that they create is rarely one which is completely of their own experience or perception, and independent of other people's thoughts and opinions.

The chapter has already demonstrated how physical space can be personalised and given identify through naming: the obvious example of this being "The Saff". Indeed several respondents mentioned that when they had mooted the idea to friends and family that when they were thinking of moving to Saffron, they had warned them against it. As these respondents argued:

> "Saffron, unfortunately, has a reputation that precedes it. As my friend said, you pick up the newspaper and the only news that you read about round here is negative – crime, vandalism, joy-riding, that sort of thing."

> "You never hear anyone say anything good about Saffron. Nothing good goes into it, nothing good comes out from it. The only advice you get is to 'watch your back'"

The stereotyping of a place by other people (or media) acts as a powerful signal (real or imagined) which automatically establishes a certain bias and prejudice in the mind of the individual. In stark contrast to the blanket negative labelling of 'Saffron' though, West Knighton had a much more positive appraisal, with respondents saying that they'd heard nothing bad about it before they moved here. Indeed for one couple it had been consistently recommended to them by friends who already lived in Leicester:

> "When we moved to Leicester, we had a friend who lived in Stoneycroft. He said that this area – West Knighton – especially was a great environment to bring up a family. It was quiet, people were friendly, and there was never any trouble that he knew of. We could have ended up anywhere to be fair, but we followed his advice – and it's been a wise choice."

Hence, given the source of information, the expectation of a new resident, based on these positive accounts, is far more likely to be higher in West Knighton than the equivalent expectations of those moving to Saffron. It is argued later, when looking at the perception of other people in their community, that these defining circumstances play a major role in the

contrasting aggregated social outlook that characterises Saffron (inward looking) and West Knighton (outward looking).

12.3.2. Perceptions from the inside

For those living in Saffron or West Knighton, the experience of doing so has either confirmed or – especially in Saffron – undermined the wider stereotypes of the area. But they also introduced new lines of social schisms which were influential in filtering out certain households and including others. There were many examples of how the experience of living in a locality matched the expectations. Many respondents in West Knighton said how happy they'd been with the area, and how neighbours had been welcoming and accommodating:

> "It was great from day 1 really. We are lucky in this area as that lot of families have kids of the same age as our two. So they got to know each other, and we got to know their families. But you just get the sense that people are quite friendly, do look out for each other – and that is what really attracted us to moving here in the first place."

But in Saffron, some respondents experiences of the place from the inside was as far removed as possible from the negativity that was perpetuated from the outside by other people and media sources. Two illustrations capture this perfectly. The first is from a retired female respondent:

> "It was my family who told me not to move here, but I dug my heels in. And this part of Saffron is lovely. People speak to each other in a friendly way, always seeing if you need a hand with anything. And when my family visited they were amazed! Their faces were quite a picture. The nice house I live in and the quiet neighbourhood were the last things they expected."

And the second from a respondent in "The Staff""

> "I bet someone told you that you'd have your wallet nicked in five seconds as soon as you came round here. That's what I was told anyway. I have to say I was a real recluse when it came to meeting people because I expected the worst of them. But I feel so stupid now having lived with not one bit of trouble or anything over the last five years. The people here are the salt of the earth. And it's true – people make place, and I wouldn't swap this place for anywhere!

The construction of place from a combination of personal experience together with information and advice from others in the locality also consolidated and extended established social norms and networks. This following example, from one female

respondent, also highlights the explicit reference to space which defines this 'inclusive group' who had recently moved with her partner to West Knighton noted that:

> "My neighbour told me that the nickname of this street is Pill Hill on account of there being so many medical doctors. My husband's a doctor, and it was good to know that there was such a common background. Everybody helps each other if they need to."

In certain areas of Saffron, there was the sense of a much more cohesive identify built around the location of family members, over and above the immediate neighbourhood. This was felt to be an incredible barrier for those who weren't blood relations.

> "I didn't fit in to begin with, because I wasn't a Jones or a Smith. I felt quite alienated really, as in some way, shape or form this entire street is related bar me! It's difficult, but once you get friendly with one, then it's like having a passport to acceptability – and people round here are much more likely to give you the time of day."

But it is this initial experience, of how neighbours behave toward each other, of what the done thing is, which informs a lasting impression on households. There is a palpable sense of conformity, or trying to 'fit in' where possible, and follow the status quo that is apparent (on a social level) through the way people interact with each other. This observation links back perfectly to the discussion in Chapter 10 which considered how mutual aid and social interaction was displayed by others. Hence, if newcomers received a welcoming response, in some cases this included neighbours giving a gift, or just a "If you need anything give us a shout!" which immediately displayed what was particularly acceptable for a that particular area. It was an effective way of consolidating the past and passing it on to the present. For the example given, this promoted a more collective, virtuous cycle (and in West Knighton would be one much more likely to match the expectation of the place). But for those who felt marginalised in their immediate locality, then this coloured their perception at large. Two good examples of this came from first, Saffron, and second, West Knighton:

> "People don't care. They simply don't care. Nobody's ever said so much as a hello since I moved in. And at first it really bugged me – but now well it doesn't bother me, I've got friends elsewhere. But it's like that in Saffron all over in my opinion. It's a grey place full of strangers."

> "I imagine that people do get on well, and go in each other's houses that sort of thing. But not round here. I've got to know a couple of people enough to say hello, but it was probably months – no joke – before my wife and I talked to one of our neighbours. I think it's because people just prefer to keep themselves to themselves. And that is pretty much the norm around here."

The responses and arguments highlighted here are certainly not unique to the experiences of respondents within West Knighton and Saffron. But it is this social fragmentation, these different levels of parochial attitudes which include some people by virtue of excluding others, that seep into the wider personal attitudes demonstrated within a particular locality. And, as residents come and go, there are still a range of incredibly powerful and dominant social norms and expectations which have become invested and re-invested in place to such a large extent, that they 'represent' the past, present, and future of that place which is greater than the sum of the people who live there. Recognising that these norms and expectations, coupled with experience, can have a liberating or oppressive effect within the 'place' that the individual associates with, and hence impact, on their subsequent relationships as a household in that particular place, can help get closer to the actual geographies of mutual aid more completely than any stale demographics could hope to.

12.4. Crisis

When something threatened the status quo in Saffron and West Knighton, this was cited as an example of how this energised social networks in a particular place, and how in this way place served as the common identity, background, and thus promoted a common cause. This argument is not viewed on an individual basis (though there were accounts of individual households rallying round neighbours who were threatened with eviction) but from affecting the collective notion of place. The best examples of a crisis which, by threatening place, catalysed social networks came in West Knighton and Saffron. The first involved threats to chop down some trees which lined several streets.

> "People round here were outraged! One of the reasons that I moved here was because it looked so different from the other streets – the trees are good to look out on, and it makes the area so much better. It sounds silly, but you have affection for them, and you think that they'll still be there long after you've gone. Anyway, there was no way we were just going to sit back and take it. I went round with a petition to sign to stop them chopping the trees. It was the first time I'd spoke to many people in the street, but I felt that the majority would gladly be involved. And they were, and I think it's brought the place closer together really. We're at a deadlock situation with the council at present."

Another example of a crisis bringing people closer together, and networking with each other came from Saffron. The crisis was explained by one elderly resident:

> "It was last Christmas I believe. My house - and at least five other houses in this area - over the space of two weeks were all burgled. It was a real blow, and people realised that they weren't safe – when someone's after your possessions then they'll find a way. But it was really upsetting, all the neighbours were angry that this could have happened, and the timing of it really made it seem worse."

Given this 'threat', rather than passively sitting back, and becoming more withdrawn and afraid, it actually galvanised a sense of community that the gentlemen had never seen in the 60 years he'd lived there for.

> "I think it was Mr and Mrs. Barmby-Porrit who came up with the Neighbourhood Watch group idea, they went to get some information about, and we had a few meetings. But it wasn't two or three people; literally everyone in this street came and signed up. And in a few months, the place was unrecognisable, because I don't know people had something in common more so than just living here. It all seemed much more friendly and supportive then before. I feel safer as an individual, and if this nasty business hadn't have happened, then I doubt whether anything would have changed. At least some good's come of it."

The third and final example of an event (rather than a crisis) which affected place and acted as a catalyst for lasting change, came in response to the Queen's Jubilee, 2002. This is mentioned to balance the fact that an event for change may not necessarily be a negative one. The Queen's Jubilee offered an excuse for communities more broadly to 'come together' in a show of solidarity and support. Again, in West Knighton, where this was mentioned, it was the positive impact that it has on the place itself which was noted:

> "I was so sceptical when the idea went up about a street party. I mean it's one thing having an informal do at Christmas or something with a few neighbours, but on this level – I thought it'd never happen. But I was wrong, and everybody had a great time. It was a real collective effort making anything from banners, and balloons, to putting up some stalls and serving food. The colour and decoration was superb. It just went to show that people just needed a reason to do something like this – the will was there. It's brought us all so much closer as a street since for sure."

12.5 Places to meet

The presence of places to meet played an important role of meeting places in terms of fostering a sense of identify and role within a particular place. Of all of the examples mentioned, the local schools for, many were, the heart of their social interactions, either directly through fellow parents and teachers, or through the children and their friends. As one female respondent living in Saffron said:

> "In the last place they closed down our local primary school. It was devastating, we did all we could but it went ahead. Their next school was quite a distance from us, and we drove the kids there – I just never got over just how important it was for me to walk the kids, meet people, and talk to people. You don't know what you had till it's gone. And since we've moved here, I've walked the children to school each day, made new friends, and it's been great."

In the context of mutual aid more generally, not only were children mentioned as catalysts for participation, but so were more formal based groups. Formal groups that are established and run within a community offered a fantastic space to meet. Again, the popularity of groups and associations in West Knighton was in no small part to them being related to the community. West Knighton was a place with numerous clubs, groups and associations – which ranged from faith based groups to sports clubs, to environmental groups focused on the area, and an historical society which specialised the history of West Knighton and south Leicester more generally. In contrasting the two localities, though the many opportunities that formal groups had for (like-minded) individuals living in a particular place to get together in situ and interact within the boundaries of Saffron, were noticeably absent from Saffron.

Beyond formal groups though, respondents again frequently mentioned other places where they would socialise, or bump into others on a regular basis, in a community. These ranged from public houses:

> "We're a bit of a drinking and socialising bunch round here. When you go out as a group then it's really the local pub that you'd meet up at." (Saffron resident)

to other conveniences such as shops, doctor's surgery, pharmacists, dry cleaners, laundrettes, betting shop and so on.

12.6. Conclusion

The chapter began by focusing on the contrasting spatial environments of West Knighton and Saffron as 'space', and indicated how these have influenced the attitudes and relationships for the people who live there. In then discussing West Knighton and Saffron in terms of 'place' (humanized space) this demonstrated how places are very much socially constructed, a product of myriad human practices, that give meaning to people who live there, just as they give meaning to place. Both space and place come together in unique ways, creating a highly localised framework of (social) opportunities and constraints for the

population that lives there. Over time, this leads to the creation of embedded, complex layered histories which influence the (social) attitudes and perceptions of the local population.

In acknowledging the place based nature of reciprocity, and focusing on the distinctive social attitudes and outlooks that have been framed by 'West Knighton' and 'Saffron', this chapter has shown that the geography of space and place is anything but an optional extra in understanding the geographies of mutual aid and the complex dynamics that underpin them. As Barnes (1989: 301) observed: "By denying context, the play of difference as embodied in place is squashed flat."

Chapter 13

Why is mutual aid so pervasive?

Introduction

Chapter 13 addresses the question as to why mutual aid is so pervasive: why do people ask for help, or are willing to help out others? The fundamental answer to this, it will be argued, is closely aligned to those arguments given by Piotr Kropotkin as highlighted at the very beginning of the thesis. Essentially, mutual aid is so pervasive because it is deeply embedded in the nature of humans as social beings. Mutual aid allows the individual to express a deep sense of sociability, on many different levels in society, to achieve many different goals. Reciprocity is a fundamental means of allowing individuals to belong, to feel wanted, and needed. Once again, the chapter uses the rationales, perceptions, outlooks and experiences of the respondents in West Knighton and Saffron to support this argument.

The chapter is broken down into four main sections. The first begins by asking whether mutual aid is pervasive? The second draws on several key areas to explain why mutual aid persists. The third looks at why mutual aid is so pervasive in advanced economies. The fourth seeks explanations for the unevenness of mutual aid in advanced economies.

13.1 Is mutual aid pervasive?

To answer the question from a quantitative perspective, the geographies of mutual aid in Saffron and Knighton (gauged from the population and sub-population highlighted) have lent considerable support to a burgeoning literature in contemporary research which has argued that, far from being a marginal or residual sphere of activity, mutual aid - alongside informal economic activities more generally - occupies an increasingly central role, in the day-to-day coping strategies of individuals.

Importantly this conclusion should also be taken in context with the discussion on the barriers to participation in Chapter 9: there it was highlighted that the vast majority of respondents (87 per cent in West Knighton and 94 per cent in Saffron), wished to do more to

help others, given the right circumstances and opportunities. So given these two fronts, which reflect the actual and the potential pervasiveness of mutual aid in these localities, then the thesis has demonstrated quite conclusively that mutual aid in the context given is pervasive.

13.2. Why does mutual aid persist?

Having investigated the complex dynamics that are engaged through the process of mutual aid, it is a wonder that mutual aid takes place at all! For mutual aid, reciprocity between people is a highly complicated and difficult route to take. As the last three chapters have clearly shown, mutual aid is by no means an easy or presentable option to take. Rather mutual aid is an outcome which is fundamentally built upon the ability of individuals to come together constructively, having successfully negotiated the myriad of highly fluid, complex and stressful range of factors and resources that are inevitable come to the fore in social life (on a simple level balancing emotions, wants, need, expectations, trust, familiarity on the one-to-one level; with the nature of reciprocity (paid, unpaid, formal, informal) and the relations involved). Given the risks that have been highlighted, in the sense that the reciprocal arrangement may be unsuccessful, could fail, and undermine the relationship with the other person, then there are great pressures at work not to engage with other people. So why does it happen? The argument made here is that it is because mutual aid is deeply embedded in who we - as deeply social beings - are.

13.2.1. Social nature of mutual aid

People engage in mutual aid and justify their engagement based on a whole host of reasons that override any negative connotations, many of which have been outlined already. However, a fundamental aspect of why mutual aid persists is the social nature of reciprocity. This social nature is an influential factor in mutual aid taking place in the way that it does. For example, doing jobs for other people, be they family, friends and neighbours allows those involved to spend more time in the company of people they like, get to know people better, or consolidate existing relationships. The following quotes epitomise this attitude. The first comes from a female respondent in Saffron:

> "Occasionally we'll go to our daughter's house, ask if there is anything we can do. I helped her plant some shrubs this summer in the garden. I do it because I enjoyed spending the time with her, and it's a good way to stay in touch. I don't

> want to come across all the time pestering – this way I can do something constructive for her and my son-in-law. But it's not the work that I get the buzz out of; it's just spending some quality time with my family."

The second from a male respondent in West Knighton:

> "Well if you can help out friends or family in anyway, then you'll put yourself out every time. They probably wouldn't ask you if they didn't think you'd be able to help, and well you can call them for a favour if you need it back - it's all reciprocal. Obviously, as well, you can catch up – do something constructive. It separates those who you would ask from those who you wouldn't."

And this final one, from a female respondent, also in West Knighton:

> My dad helped my husband re-wire the house last year. We treated him (my dad!) to a meal out to say thanks – but he would have quite happily done it for nothing. He loves helping out if he can, and always reminds me that "no job too small". He's done so many things in the house since we moved in."

Embedded within these rationales in these three quotes is another incredibly powerful motivator to engage with others through mutual aid: that of belonging. For example, reading between the lines, when using mutual aid (as the female form Saffron suggested) to say that she did not want to come across as overly interfering, only half completes this reciprocal circle. The other half is constructed around the fact that people *want* to be asked to help – they want to be of use by others, they want to *belong*: and mutual aid gives another opportunity to make this possible.

13.2.2. Sense of belonging

Focusing on the sense of belonging, one of the most entertaining quotes came from a household in Saffron - and perfectly captured one of the many intrinsic paradoxes of mutual aid:

> "Sometimes you feel a bit cheeky asking family, or a friend all the time. But if you don't ask, leave it, then they'll have a moan at you for not asking them to help out. Can't win!"

Ultimately there is a pervasive sense that individuals *want* to be asked to help by other people if they can, and would only be too willing to do so given the right circumstances. Again, the emphasis on 'the right circumstances' does mean that the usual complex

dynamics within mutual aid would not be miraculously suspended just because anybody asked another to help. But this need to feel wanted, to be a part of something, resonates deeply within the individual, and inspires a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure. This can be seen irrespective of the type of relations – being evident on the kinship, as these following quotes indicate, and also involving non-kin relations:

> "I hadn't seen my daughter since she moved out of West Knighton about 6 months ago. We talk on the phone and stuff, but not actually met up. She phoned about 2 weeks ago it would have been, asking if I could lend a hand out with some decorating she was thinking of doing. I leapt at the chance, naturally. I'd spent the last - however long - thinking that she didn't need her old dad anymore. And it was great to catch up with her, see what she'd been up to and everything while I was there" (male respondent, West Knighton)

Such positive feelings of belonging that were associated with helping a family member via mutual aid (directly or indirectly), were commonly held:

> "My son is pretty adept at plumbing and electricity – he likes helping me out. I'll pay for materials, but it'd be no good me saying to him I'll give you some money for doing that - he wouldn't accept it! But I do manage to have him round to dinner every other Sunday, which makes me feel like I can do something, however little, for him in return. Most mothers don't get the chance to spoil their sons when they leave home, and it's great that he wants to spend some time here." (Saffron respondent)

Such a rationale for engaging in mutual aid was also dominant within non-kin relations, as this respondent argued:

> "Doing jobs for friends? Well there are friends that you'd ask and some you wouldn't. It all goes down to just how good a friend they are I suppose. But I'd be pretty cheesed off if somebody that I consider a best friend went to get off another mate before asking me, if it was something important. I'd think that they wouldn't think I was good enough, and I'd take it personally."

The feeling of belonging that people felt through engaging with others on social, emotional levels, and through the materiality of the tasks involved, was obviously extremely motivating. However, in the course of the interviews, this feeling of belonging, and not just that, but also a sense of others looking out for you, was brought to the fore in many poignant ways. Many people had high levels of association between the people they had know and the reciprocal acts that they used to engage in with them. When circumstances change (perhaps a friend moves away, or a neighbour dies) then the sense of loss is all the more palpable. This is demonstrated both in context of those who used to receive help from another, and someone who used to give it, in the following insights:

> "George always used to pop over for a cup of tea and a chat each week. He'd always be asking if I needed any help, and there were various things that he helped me out with – especially anything that involved ladders or lifting! Every time I look at the windows upstairs, I remember how George used to do them. Now they're filthy as I haven't gotten round to getting a window cleaner since he died. I miss him as a person, and a friend, but you just didn't realise how nice it was to have someone keep an eye on you, make sure you were ok." (elderly female respondent, West Knighton)

> "Well I always, regular as clockwork, used to see my friend Louise every Tuesday. She was disabled, and could get on by pretty well. But I enjoyed helping out if I could, spending time chatting and passing the time away. And I could always chat and make a cup of tea, put some pots away – perhaps mop the floor or something if she wanted. It was all pretty small stuff to me. Well, she passed away quite unexpectedly a couple of years ago. And I still walk past that house on my way to work (volunteer in a charity shop) and feel such a loss. It sounds silly but when she died, then a bit of me did too. It's difficult to explain." (female respondent, Saffron)

This loss of belonging through mutual aid, related to changing circumstances also demonstrated how the balance of power in the relationship could change.

> "Well when you're a father it's natural to look out for your kids. And I loved helping them out and being a part of their lives since they left home. But since the stoke (two years ago) I've barely got out of the house. I mean, they come and visit me all the time – and I love that, don't get me wrong – but you're dependent on them helping out, not on you helping them. You see? Just wish I could do something more for them." (male respondent, West Knighton).

The motivations highlighted so far to explain the pervasive nature of mutual aid, the social nature and sense of belonging, are very powerful. As many of the quotes suggest, it is not possible to try and isolate one motivation and set it alongside another. The real strength is that all of these attitudes, perception and experiences work collectively to motivate the individual to engage with other people. These motivations are not quantifiable and if one is to understand them fully then they must be preserved in the circumstances that they represent as much as possible.

13.2.3. Natural

So far the chapter has drawn on more established social networks as evidence for why mutual aid takes place. However, it is worth remembering that the spontaneous, and random

acts of helping others plays an instrumental role in defining who we are, and the pervasiveness of mutual aid in the society we live in. To help other people, where through the altruistic gesture, or in a reciprocal fashion comes naturally: it is an important part of what makes human. There are countless examples of these impulsive acts in society, but these two were drawn from the localities studies. The first was from an elderly gentlemen in Saffron:

> "I'd slipped just outside my house last year. Luckily for me my neighbour had seen me fall, and came to help me. But she just couldn't pick me up. Well, this chap was passing by and he saw me fall too, and came across to help. And between the two of them, they got me back on me feet, and helped me inside. I didn't know the chap from Adam, but I was really grateful for his help." (elderly gentlemen, Saffron)

The second, from a women in Saffron:

> "I'd heard a lot about a particular fellow on the Estate, people had told me to avoid him as he was trouble, and a drunk. One morning I saw him literally outside the house crying! If I'd have gone with me head and what others had told me well I'd have just kept out of it. But I couldn't watch someone who obviously was hurting. So I talked to him, and he was really nice. And we've become good friends since then, and really helped each other out in many ways."

And these examples, among most of those given in this thesis, demonstrate just how natural and instinctive helping other is.

13.3. Explaining the unevenness of mutual aid

If the argument here is true – that the core motivations for engaging in mutual aid are natural and instinctive (bound up in the need to belong, to be part of a social group, the ability to emphasise with others and assist) then the other question that needs to be asked, is how come this universal nature expresses itself in such a uneven and seemingly parochial way in society?

The insight to this question has already been mentioned in the introduction: mutual aid is by no means an easy or presentable option to take. But to follow the line of least resistance in this way, and not engage with others is one that few prefer to take. This is because the benefits of engaging with others and being a part of a 'network of solidarity' can be far more persuasive than any obstacles that may have to be first negotiated. The unevenness of mutual aid is fundamentally a consequence of inexhaustible range of factors that form the

complex dynamics engaged in the process of mutual aid. For example, human beings are complex and complicated creatures, are rarely predicable, and the unique resource and attitudes that each possess have a fantastic impact on how they perceive themselves, and more importantly others they interact with. If the desire to help others is seen to be a natural and intrinsic part of our nature, then this is equally true of other, darker traits, such as jealously, mistrust, suspicion, resentment, and so on.

The individual is fundamentally a mass of swirling and competing elements which are both influenced by perception, experiences and attitudes of / and to others. It is very rare for an individual to treat all others in an equal fashion. Rather, the majority of individuals discriminate ruthlessly with the people they meet, and it is this process of discrimination and social fragmentation which has a massive influence in the capacity with which people will reciprocate with other, if indeed at all. A point that Minkoff (1997: 615) illustrates:

"Patterns within group sociability and solidarity still follow racial and class lines, reflecting very real cleavages in the political-economic system"

It has also been emphasised that the pervasiveness of mutual aid from the perspective of the individual is dynamic and fluid. This is the quality which defines the nature of social capital and reciprocity, and hence the uneven nature of mutual aid in society.

13.3. Why is mutual aid so pervasive in the advanced economies?

It is also important not to lose sight of the fact that this thesis has discussed mutual aid in an advanced economy. Given the history of mutual aid (seen through the lenses of the formal economic for example) and it's traditionally marginalised status with respect to exchange in society, then its pervasiveness has truly radical implications. As Willams (2004: 1) suggests:

> "Until now, the widely held view that the market is reaching ever further into every crevice of daily life has led many to conclude that there is 'no alternative' to a commodified world...However, a large non-market realm has been identified that for the past four decades, if anything, has grown rather than diminished relative to the market sphere, thus raising doubts about whether the market is so victorious, colonizing and all-powerful as many previously assumed. By allowing capitalist imperatives to colonize our imagination, it appears that adherents to the commodification thesis have obfuscated the economic plurality that characterizes

> western economies and closed off the future of work to anything other than a Commodified world." (Williams, 2004: 1)

But while stressing the importance of mutual aid in the advanced economy, this is not to say that mutual aid has remained detached or immune to the commodification of capitalism. There are scattered examples throughout the chapters which indicate how and in what ways people have fused the sentiment of mutual aid yet are still influenced by the wider capitalist environment. For example, at one level, with respect to giving lifts, and in particular driving to school, one can see how the car has affected the way people interact with each other, distancing people and creating less opportunities for individuals to socialise. All of these have impacts on mutual aid. As one respondent in West Knighton observed:

> "Well I drive my kids to school. We all do – I wouldn't be happy letting them go alone. If there was someone who I knew well, who walked to school, then I may suggest we take alternate days to walk in (when I'm not at work). But until then, they'll be picked up and dropped off at the school gate."

On another level, the impact of gift-giving has no doubt been influenced by market exchange. As Chapter 4 argued, the exchange of gifts has been going on in some capacity in all cultures, since the very earliest of times. But when one looks at type and nature of the gifts that are exchanged in the modern society, then the impact of commodification, can be evident (see Offer, 1997). This was mentioned in West Knighton in relation to party-bags!

> "Well there are gifts and then there are *gifts*. I mean all you thought about party-bags when I was a kid was coming home with a token bag of 'goodies'. But my son went to his friends house and they put all sort in there – must have been about £5 to £10 of stuff (even some toys) in each bag! It's not the money thing I know, but I'm dreading having them round here, I just couldn't afford to give out something like that.

And on a third level there is the exchange of money itself as a gift. The dominant rationales related to exchange involving money are profit-motivated, to make or to save money. But the presence of money being given as gift, and transforming the values associated with capitalist logics into something which can lubricate reciprocal relationships, is a fantastic example of how people can influence and manipulate the nature and type of exchange from one sphere (economic formal) to another (social informal).

All of these factors combine to again play testament of the ability of mutual aid to retain its pervasiveness – albeit expressed in unique and uneven ways – in the face of the capitalist juggernaut. It is this dynamic quality, this pure essence which is not something which is

tangible or solid, and hence is something within society which is almost impossible to 'commodify'.

13.5. Conclusion

Beyond doubt, given the evidence here, mutual aid does play an extremely important role in the day to day lives of individuals within Saffron and West Knighton. Using the rationales and experiences of the populations to formulate answers, the social nature of mutual aid, the sense of belonging, the naturalness of reciprocal exchange and looking out for others all come to the fore. The uneven nature of mutual aid was attributed to it being grounded on a negotiated social space. This negotiated space is something which, as highlighted in Chapters 10, 11 and 12, is a highly complicated and complex phenomenon, and reflects the complexity of the dominant social and spatial relationships that are engaged. Finally, the pervasive nature of mutual aid in advanced economies is something which again is, in the context of the formal economic trajectory, extremely difficult to rationalise. It is argued here that the strength of mutual aid is its ability to incorporate elements of capitalist society, while rejecting the values and assumptions that go with it. So whilst on one level the types of gift that are exchanged may be influenced by the wider capitalist environment, this takes on (when successful) a new meaning and presence through mutual aid. Certainly when money is used as a gift via mutual aid, then it truly transcends the conventional ways in which it is used in the formal economy, and revels in a different (sociological) dimension. As Oscar Ewald (1908: 268) commented: "Money is the relation of relations."

Chapter 14

Understanding the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid: conclusions

Introduction

This thesis has focused on exploring, and better understanding, the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid. The key empirical findings that have arisen have offered a greater depth of insight into what actually underpins and constitutes mutual aid. Similarly, the findings have gone a long way toward highlighting the incredibly complex qualitative dynamics that are constantly being engaged and re-engaged beneath the apparently unassuming surface geographies of mutual aid: surface geographies which existing research has placed (too) much emphasis on. Thus, it is hoped that these new arguments used to illustrate and place the geographies of mutual aid will engage an enlightened thought mentality , not least when it comes to answering the question: "What do we need to think about, when thinking about mutual aid?"

This final chapter, will begin by making several short conclusions related to the empirical findings involving both to 'the geographies of mutual aid' and 'the process and complex dynamics of mutual aid'. Having done this the chapter attempts to form an answer to the question of government policy: what key issues should be thought about when thinking of mutual aid and future government policy?

Beyond the policy debate, and keeping within more academically orientated circles, the chapter concludes with reference to economic geography. The argument here is that the findings on mutual aid as an informal economic activity can contribute fully to any discussion that may be had on 're-thinking the economic'. The call here is for economic geographers in particular to start exploring new and different ways toward looking at exchange in society, and use these new insights to mount a robust challenge to the dominant formal values that currently quantify and qualify exchange in society.

14.1. The geographies of mutual aid

Though the geographies of mutual aid were included primarily to check the robustness of previous research, as well as to allow an additional means of contextualising the complex dynamics of mutual aid, some of the broader findings made are interesting in their own right.

First and foremost, the extent of mutual aid undertaken in both localities reinforces previous findings that mutual aid is a significant way for households to complete tasks beyond the sphere of formal employment. Indeed, when breaking down this informal coping strategy into two sub-categories, to highlight 'unpaid reciprocity' and 'paid mutual aid', the percentage of work seen to be conducted in these two groups exceeded the percentages recorded elsewhere, in other urban populations. This reinforces previous quantitative findings that formal volunteering was only used in a social and emotional capacity; it was not used by either affluent or deprived households to get jobs done.

Although the small sampling range employed in the research should be taken into consideration (certainly when viewed at the ward level), there remains a real suggestion that previous research may have underestimated, as opposed to overestimated, the extent of mutual aid in both affluent and deprived localities. Certainly, given this quantitative insight, it would be of merit to undertaken a more in-depth and comprehensive research agenda on the geographies of mutual aid in these two localities, not least in order to check the robustness of these findings.

14.2. Understanding the complex dynamics of mutual aid

The complex dynamics of mutual aid are *incredibly* complex and *incredibly* dynamic. The thesis has sought to understand these complex dynamics from four different perspectives: focusing on the social relationships that are engaged through the process of mutual aid; focusing on the dynamic aspect within mutual aid; placing mutual aid in the context of it's embeddedness in specific localities – and how space and place play influential roles; and addressing the question as to why mutual aid is so pervasive.

It is the inability to tease out and lay down these aspects as independent elements of mutual aid that comes to the fore. Mutual aid is the end result of a fantastic range of elements and ingredients which manifest themselves (at the social level) in a multitude of competing and complementary ways. In this way it would be foolish to attempt to 'understand' mutual aid by

prioritising and favouring one particular aspect or dimension over the other. To do so would only enable the researcher to drill down *so far*. Essentially, one cannot begin to understand the structural dynamics of mutual aid without understanding the social dynamic, for example one cannot understand the structural social without understanding the locality dynamic.

In relation to the geographies of mutual aid, focusing on the complex dynamics that underpins them enables the researcher to reach far closer to understanding these geographies than any socio-economic or spatial indicators could possibly hope for. It is simply naive to assume any different. Yes, there is obviously some overlap and complementary aspects from both research agendas, but socio-economic explanations will never get close to understanding and explaining what and how mutual is, while it remains (necessarily) impotent in the face of engaging with the process of mutual aid.

Similarly, regardless of the 'means' to analyse them, the questions that one comes armed with can in themselves make for more penetrative and insightful answers. For example, the thesis in asking "why" mutual aid persists, rather than 'what are the barriers to participation' very much put the horse before the cart. In many ways, the aims and objectives of the thesis ask the most immediate and simple-framed questions, and as is often the case it is these lines of enquiry which, in the long run, can be the most illuminating and effective.

14.3. Policy making community

Given our understanding, what are the implications to develop a progressive, inclusive society? Given the empirical findings of this thesis, mutual aid has the capacity to provide a foundation for a future society neither centred on the market or the state. In this respect, the findings add further weight to increasingly vocal arguments that such dominant human institutions (market/ state) are not the best means of developing the future evolution of *Homo sapiens*. Rather, it is mutual aid and self-help which have played so central a role in our evolution past *and present*. As Burns (2004:1) observed:

> "Across vast swathes of the terrain marked out for the state, it is providing little more than residual services – often ineffectively. In short not only is there a strong moral, social and economic case for self-help, it is substantially what we are doing already."

Burns (ibid) went on to highlight three key roles for mutual aid, believing it could act as a springboard for people into the mainstream, as a complement to the mainstream to enable people to survive when they had low wages, and as an alternative.

However, rather than focus here on the more utopian vision for society, which harnessing mutual aid in such radical, liberating and sustained fashion would imply, the implications for policy development here are mainly focused on the incremental policy path.

14.3.1. Access all areas

Focusing on the complex dynamics engaged in the process of mutual aid has emphasised the need for any future approach focused on harnessing mutual aid to recognise and respect this complexity. For example, policies focused on promoting one particular typology of mutual aid over another (e.g. formal volunteering over informal reciprocity), or addressing initiatives designed to tackle the barriers to participation, can only go so far. Indeed by not grasping the dynamics of mutual aid then the consequences of this may have considerable direct and indirect repercussions elsewhere. This has been noted when trying to parachute one policy from one area and try and reproduce it in another.

> "Any outside intervention must manage "a delicate balancing act if...mutuality is to be encouraged without being incorporated or suppressed." (Burns and Taylor, 1998: 27)

As Pahl (2000: 60-61) observes with respect to the context with which any initiatives are deployed that affect community:

> "Any attempt to pluck 'community' and personal relations out of specific contexts is an exercise fraught with difficulties and pitfalls. Any suggestion that there have been qualitative or quantitative changes in the texture and style of relationships must assume that it is possible to compare like with like. However, different social structures, cultures and contexts cannot be put on a continuum in such a way!"

Thus when approaching the subject of mutual aid, it is important that the policy making community is aware of the wider picture, and concentrates on 'the bigger view' as much as promoting 'specialist' tools which are designed for specific (quantitative) aspects of mutual aid. Instead government policy needs to be aware of the many repercussions that their policies and initiatives have on the day-to-day lives of individuals, be they employment orientated, skills orientated, those which affect spatial changes, via planning policies and

urban design, public transport polices (in light of the vast increase in car usage for example) or regeneration policies.

Regeneration policies at the community level do indeed hold much promise for bringing people closer together in a constructive space, and therefore encourage networks drawn to mutual aid to develop. However this is a highly difficult strategy to implement in reality. As Minkoff (1997: 615) notes:

> "Certainly face-to-face interactions, local institutions, and embedded social relations promote integration, participation, and some degree of concern for one's neighbors (sic). Even more certainly, to the extent that such interactions cut across and link otherwise homogenous segments of society be they organised along racial, class, ethnic, or other status lines – the public good would seem to be better served. We know, however, that such actual bridging social relations are exceptional and difficult to maintain."

One of the fundamental social pillars, which are necessary grounds for mutual aid to take place regularly, is that of trust. The evidence from the focus on social capital more generally, but also in the social dynamics that underpin mutual aid, is that where trust exists then people are much more willing to exchange on a reciprocal basis. This is one of the key points that Lin (2001: 139) emphasises when suggesting practical ways on how to promote social capital in a community:

> "Cultivate actors through education and acculturation to internalize collective obligations and rewards; (2) engage in mass campaigns promoting the identification of the actors with the attractiveness of shared resources and the collectivity."

But even the notion of a 'mass campaign' has the implication that it is losing sight of the everyday places which harness the goals that Lin, for example, emphasises. A more simple solution stands the best chance of success. For example, if the government provided spaces for people to meet and interact (parks, buildings, drop in centres, community cafes, crèches etc) this would provide the community with opportunities for regular socialising, coffee mornings, fetes, trips and community events.

Ultimately, there is a symbiotic relationship that could exist between mutual aid and government in advanced economies. For example formal policies cannot just *do* mutual aid: any such approach is bound to be disastrous. There is a balance than can be made; the key is to find the most appropriate level to work with, and not against the complex dynamics of mutual aid. One of the best ways of doing this would be to always retain an understanding of

the individual, and their needs: if an appropriate allocation of resources can be made then the spin-offs for society as a whole are likely to far outweigh the investment itself.

14.5 Economic geography

In unpacking the glorious (social) complexity and richness of mutual aid in our so-called advanced economy, this has further deconstructed the mainstream unified and universalised view of 'the economy', and has shown instead how understanding alternative economic spaces has radical implications for rethinking 'the economic object' (Gibson-Graham, 1996).

It is hoped that this research will become part of a wider academic literature intent on 'rethinking the economic', adding fresh impetus and informed insight into the on-going debate about what constitutes 'the economic', not only in economic geography but also in the social sciences more generally. Without question, economic geographers need to revisit these alternate terrains, by asking different questions, seeking to engage with different socio-economic realities, and in doing so uncover new and fertile grounds for debate. By adopting a different approach i.e. engaging with mutual aid through understanding what mutual aid 'is', rather than through the geographies of mutual aid, this thesis has effectively demonstrated how the mainstream understanding can be challenged as a consequence of how and where economic geographers choose to look.

The research presented here calls for an urgent agenda to be pursued, one that will allow a new discourse focused on exchange, production and consumption in society to emerge. There is a great need for this to be a discourse of enlightened engagement that is radically removed from that moulded in the orthodox formal economist tradition. It will view exchange in society through a different ideology, speak in a different language, and qualify and quantify through different values and measurements.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire 2004

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A1.Estimated Age of Respondent

Under 18	18-35	35-60	60+

A2. Gender

Male	Female

A3. Ethnicity

White	Black	Asian	Indian	Pakistani	Chinese	Bangladesh

A4. Length of Residence: How long have you lived at this address for?

1	Less than 12 months	
2	12 months but less than 2 years	
3	2 years but less than 3 years	
4	3 years but less than 5 years	
5	5 years but less than 10 years	
6	10 years but less than 15 years	
7	15 years but less than 20 years	
8	20 years but less than 25 years	
9	25 years or more	

A5. Have you lived at another address in this neighbourhood?

Not	Yes - moved once	Moved twice	Move three times	

A5b. What were the main reasons for choosing to stay/ come to this neighbourhood?

A6. Do you own or rent your home?

Own (mortgage)	Rent COUNCIL	Rent PRIVATELY	Furnished	Unfurnished

A7. Who lives in this house with you?

FAMILY MEMBER	ASSIGNED LETTER	MALE/ FEMALE	Estimate of Age
Respondent:			

A8. What are the householder's current roles in employment?

	JOB	A	B	C	D	E
1	Full-time paid employment					
2	Part-time paid employment					
3	Self-employed					
4	Unemployed (< year)					
5	Unemployed (> year					
6	Full-time housework					
7	Retired					
8	Student					
9	Registered disabled, incapacity benefit, etc					
10	Other (e.g. Widowed)					

B. ABOUT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: Social Interaction, Networks and Support

Family, Friends, Neighbours

B1. How many (a) family (b) close friends live within a 15-20 minute walk or 5-10 minute drive?

	0	1-2	3-4	5 or more
Family				
Friends				

B2. How often do you meet with the following?

	Frequently Once or twice a week	Occasionally Once or twice a month	Infrequently Only when I need something	Seldom Mainly speak on the phone	Hardly Ever
Family					
Friends					
Neighbours					

B3. What factors prevent you from meeting up with family, friends or neighbours more often? Or do you see them as often as you like?

(FLASHCARD A)

		FAMILY	FRIENDS	NEIGHB'RS
1	They live too far away			
2	I see them as often as I want			
3	Can't afford to			
4	Lack of time due to family commitments			
5	Lack of time due to work commitments			
6	No vehicle			
7	Poor public transport			
8	Health problems			
9	Disability			
10	Age			
11	Fear of burglary or vandalism			
12	Fear of personal attack			
13	Too far away			
14	None of these			
15	OTHER			

PERCEPTION OF COMMUNITY LEVEL STRUCTURES OR CHARACTERISTICS

B4 Would you say that you know:

1	Most people in your neighbourhood	
2	Many of the people in your neighbourhood	
3	Only a few people in your neighbourhood	

B5 What are your opinions on the following statements (FLASHCARD B)

		SA	TTA	NAND	TTD	SD
1	This is a close, tight knit community					
2	This is a friendly place to live					
3	This is a place where local people look after each other					
4	Most people who live in this area trust one another					

B6 In your opinion, over the last few years, has the neighbourhood has become closer together as a community, or drifted further apart? Why do you think this is?

B7 How did you get involved in the community when you first moved here? Did you have to be 'pro-active' or did they neighbours introduce themselves to you? Do you think that a Neighbourhood Watch does make/ would make any difference to a sense of community here?

B8 Socially, how does this area compare to the last neighbourhood you lived in?

B9 Thinking about the people next-door. Do you consider them primarily as friends or as neighbours? Why?

C. FOCUS ON MUTUAL AID: RECEIVED

C1 How would you get the following tasks done (Within the household/ Contact a professional (Firm/ self-employed)/ Relative, Friend, or Neighbour?) (CARD C)

(a) HOUSEHOLD MAINTENANCE (Last 5 years)

	Including: painting, wallpapering, replacing a broken window, fixing the roof. plumbing, and electrical work
Who would do the work? If a firm, how did you find out about them? How long did the job take to complete?	
Were they your preferred choice? What were the main reasons for asking them to do the job? If not a firm, and money was no object would you have preferred to hire out a firm to do the work?	
How were they paid? How did you agree on the price?	
If a friend, family, neighbour helped – why were they paid/ not paid.	
Under what circumstances do you prefer to pay or give a gift to a (f/f/n)?	
How would you feel if they had refused the offer of money/gift? Would you have been happy to owe them a favour?	

b) HOME IMPROVEMENT

	Including: building an extension, odd DIY jobs, moving furniture
Who would do the work? If a firm, how did you find out about them? How long did the job take to complete?	
Were they your preferred choice? What were the main reasons for asking them to do the job? If not a firm and money was no object would you have preferred to hire out a firm to do the work?	

How were they paid? How did you agree on the price?	
If a friend, family, neighbour helped – why were they paid/ not paid.	
Under what circumstances do you prefer to pay or give a gift to a (f/f/n)?	
How would you feel if they had refused the offer of money/gift? Would you have been happy to owe them a favour?	

c) ROUTINE HOUSEWORK (Typical week)

	Including: housework, cleaning the windows, fetching the shopping, washing clothes, moving heavy furniture
Who would do the work? If a firm, how did you find out about them? How long did the job take to complete?	
Were they your preferred choice? What were the main reasons for asking them to do the job? If not a firm and money was no object would you have preferred to hire out a firm to do the work?	
How were they paid? How did you agree on the price?	
If a friend, family, neighbour helped – why were they paid/ not paid.	
Under what circumstances do you prefer to pay or give a gift to a (f/f/n)?	
How would you feel if they had refused the offer of money/gift? Would you have been happy to owe them a favour?	

d) GARDENING

	Including: gardening, mowing the lawn, sweeping paths
Who would do the work? If a firm, how did you find out about them? How long did the job take to complete?	
Were they your preferred choice? What were the main reasons for asking them to do the job? If not a firm and money was no object would you have preferred to hire out a firm to do the work?	
How were they paid? How did you agree on the price?	
If a friend, family, neighbour helped – why were they paid/ not paid.	
Under what circumstances do you prefer to pay or give a gift to a (f/f/n)?	
How would you feel if they had refused the offer of money/gift? Would you have been happy to owe them a favour?	

e) OTHER ACTIVITIES

	Includes: looking after property and pets, child-minding, tutoring
Who would do the work? If a firm, how did you find out about them? How long did the job take to complete?	
Were they your preferred choice? What were the main reasons for asking them to do the job? If not a firm and money was no object would you have preferred to hire out a firm to do the work?	

How were they paid? How did you agree on the price?	
If a friend, family, neighbour helped – why were they paid/ not paid.	
Under what circumstances do you prefer to pay or give a gift to a (f/f/n)?	
How would you feel if they had refused the offer of money/gift? Would you have been happy to owe them a favour?	

f) VEHICLES

	Includes (maintaining and repairing the car/ motorbike)
Who would do the work? If a firm, How did you find out about them? How long did the job take to complete?	
Were they your preferred choice? What were the main reasons for asking them to do the job? If not a firm and money was no object would you have preferred to hire out a firm to do the work?	
How were they paid? How did you agree on the price?	
If a friend, family, neighbour helped – why were they paid/ not paid.	
Under what circumstances do you prefer to pay or give a gift to a (f/f/n)?	
How would you feel if they had refused the offer of money/gift? Would you have been happy to owe them a favour?	

g) TOOLS

Have you borrowed any tools to help with jobs? What kind? Who from? What would you have done if they didn't have the tools you needed	

C2 Besides the activities already mentioned, are there any other jobs that any member of another household has done for this household

	What was the job?
Who did the work? How did you find out about them? How long did the job take to do?	
Were they your preferred choice? What were the main reasons for asking them to do the job? If money was no object would you prefer to get hire a firm to do the work?	
How were they paid? How did you agree on the price?	
If a friend, family, neighbour helped – why did you consider it appropriate to paid/ not paid them?	
Under what circumstances do you prefer to pay or give a gift to a (f/f/n)?	
How would you feel if they refused the offer of money/gift?	

C3 Are there any other tasks that you would like to do by getting a relative, friend or neighbour involved. What are the main disadvantages when you think about asking a relative, friend or neighbour to help?

Family	

Friend	
Neighbour	

C4 Suppose that you were in bed ill and needed someone to go to the chemist to collect your prescription/ while they were doing their shopping. Would you be comfortable asking a neighbour to do this?

YES/ NO	Reasons:

C5 Now suppose a milkman called for payment. The bill was £5 but you had no cash. How comfortable would you be asking a neighbour if you could borrow £5?

YES/ NO	Reasons:

D. MUTUAL AID: SUPPLIED

D1. Can you tell me whether anybody from this household has helped complete any tasks in another household family, friend, neighbour, household not known to you (someone recommended you to help) (SHOW FLASHCARD D)

PROPERTY MAINTENANCE: outdoor painting; indoor decorating (i.e. wallpapering; plastering) replacing a broken widow; maintenance of appliances; plumbing; electrical work.

PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT: putting in double glazing; house insulation; building an extension/ renovating; putting in central heating; DIY activities (carpentry/ putting up shelves etc.)

ROUTINE HOUSEWORK: routine housework (washing dishes/ clothes/ cooking meals) cleaning the windows; doing the shopping, moving heavy furniture.

GARDENING ACTIVITIES: (sweeping paths, planting seeds/ mowing lawn)

CARING ACTIVITIES: childminding; pet/animal care; educational activities (tutoring); giving car lifts; looking after property.

VEHICLE MAINTENANCE: repairing and maintenance

MISCELLANEOUS: borrow tools or equipment; any other jobs

Example: (the following boxes were repeated ten times)

JOB INVOLVED	
Who did you do the work for?	
Were you paid (cash or cheque) or given a gift to do the work?	
How did you arrange a suitable price?	
If paid, did you charge them less than they would have been expected to pay if they	

went to a professional contractor?	
If paid, would you have done the work if you weren't paid?	
If not paid, why did you agree to do the work?	

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT SUPPLYING MA

D2	Under what circumstances would you feel comfortable doing a job for a neighbour or general friend without being paid to do it?	
D3	Have there been any occasions where you have refused to accept money or a gift for helping out family, friend or neighbour?	
D4	Have there been any occasions when the person has insisted on giving you some money/ gift for your help even though you would have been quite happy to do it for free?	
D5	Would you be able to tell somebody if you felt that they were beginning to take advantage of your own time/ skill/ expertise?	

D6 Would you like to be asked to help more often by family, friends, neighbours? What factors prevent you from being able to help more? FLASHCARD E

D7 Suppose that a neighbour were in bed ill and asked you to go to the chemist to collect their prescription while you were doing their shopping. Would you be comfortable if a neighbour asked you to do this?

YES/ NO	Reasons:

D8 Suppose a neighbour needed £5 to pay the milkman, but had no money on them. How comfortable would you be if the neighbour asked if they could borrow £5?

YES/ NO	Reasons:

E. ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOCUSED ON FORMAL VOLUNTARY WORK

FLASHCARD F

E1 Have you been a member of any of these or other voluntary organisations over the past year?

Which Ones	
How Introduced	
Responsibilities	
Time taken up	

E2 What are your main reasons for working with these organisations? (FLASHCARD G)

E3 If you are no longer, or never have been involved in voluntary work, what prevent you?

E4 Would you ever consider getting involved with any (other) of these organisations in the circumstances change? Reasons?

E5 Have you ever received any help from any voluntary or charity organisation? What kind?

F. FINAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

FLASHCARD G
1. What is your household's total gross (before tax) income?
2. Would you be interested in answering a follow-up questionnaire, in a few weeks time?

Name	
Address	

Appendix 2

The ward boundaries in Leicester adopted for the 2003 elections

Ward	Notes
Abbey	From Abbey Park up to Stocking Farm and Mowmacre Hill
Aylestone	
Beaumont Leys	
Belgrave	The northern half of the Belgrave area
Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields	Including most of Braunstone
Castle	City centre, Southfields, Clarendon Park
Charnwood	Northfields, around Charnwood Street
Coleman	Crown Hills and North Evington, around Coleman Road
Evington	
Eyres Monsell	
Fosse	
Freeman	Knighton Fields and the Saffron estate
Humberstone and Hamilton	Including Nether Hall
Knighton	
Latimer	The southern half of the Belgrave area
New Parks	Braunstone Frith
Rushey Mead	
Spinney Hill	Including parts of Highfields and Evington Valley, and the St. Matthew's estate
Stoneygate	Including parts of Highfields
Thurncourt	Thurnby Lodge, around Thurncourt Drive
Westcotes	
Western park 2	
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leicester_City_Council	

Prior to this there had been 28 wards, each electing two members. Wards that had existed and been abolished were Crown Hills, East Knighton, Mowmacre, North Braunstone, Rowley Fields, Saffron, St. Augustine's , West Humberstone, West Knighton and Wycliffe. (Leicester City Council, 2005)

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