

**Social capital, social exclusion and understandings
of community in an urban and a rural context**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with lay perceptions and experiences of place of residence and community in the specific contexts of an urban and a rural environment. The starting point for the research was the growth of interest in the 1990s in the concept of social capital as a possible mechanism linking the social characteristics of a community with inequalities in health. This fuelled theoretical debate about the nature of social capital and methodological questions concerning the meaning and validity of proposed indicators. Four issues were of particular concern to this study: debates about social capital as an individual or collective resource; the applicability of social capital to geographical communities; claims that social capital operated as a public good benefiting even the most socially isolated individuals; and the problems of measuring community level characteristics on the basis of individual level data. A central interest was in the impact of personal context on interviewee accounts of the same place. The study comprised of in-depth interviews involving 69 women and men living in two localities in North Kent: a village and an urban ward that had been a village within the lifetime of older residents. The study design allowed for comparison of interviewee accounts of the same locality and between accounts of the two localities. The research findings confirmed the significance of place of residence to interviewees as a physical and social environment, a representation of 'society', and an extension of and contributor to personal identity. Interviewees exhibited sophisticated understanding of social changes affecting the locality and complex internalised social rules governing relations with neighbours and asking for help. Community involvement and leadership were undermined by negative attitudes towards those who were 'too involved' or self-promoting. The research raised questions about the validity of common indicators of social capital and supported individual and structural understandings of that concept rather than one based on collective norms and values. Finally, the occurrence of individual and collective stories in interviewees' accounts provided rich insights into reflexive and cultural dimensions of community.

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PART I

SOCIAL CAPITAL, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND THE PROBLEM OF 'COMMUNITY'

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is concerned with what individuals think and say both about the place where they live and other people who live there, and, conversely, what that place and those people say about them. The research began as a study of social capital and specifically the relationship between a person's circumstances and the social resources they can access within the locality where they live. It developed into a study of lay accounts of place and community in the specific contexts of an urban and a rural environment. Those accounts extended beyond the elements usually associated with the concept of social capital to include issues of identity, experiences of social exclusion and normative ideas of community, neighbourliness and parenting.

The study was qualitative, based on in-depth interviews with men and women in particular circumstances living in two localities – one urban, the other rural – in north Kent. As such, it was concerned with nuances of meaning, perception, understanding and presentation. It cannot provide quantitative evidence on, for example, the extent of involvement in community affairs among the locality populations but it can say something about how interviewees justified non-involvement and the effects for the individual of taking a leading role. Social capital proved a useful starting-point for the exploration of social aspects of place but only that. The data challenged the stability of interpretation of key indicators of social capital and the adequacy of that concept as an overarching framework for understanding experiences and expectations of 'community' within a geographical locality.

This chapter begins in section 1.2 with a brief overview of the theoretical debates around social capital and the development of research and policy interest in the concept. This is followed in section 1.3 with a discussion of specific areas of theoretical and methodological weakness that the research aimed to address.

Section 1.4 provides an outline of the thesis and the chapter concludes with a note on terminology.

1.2 Social capital as a concept, research subject and policy tool

The theoretical starting point for this study was the growth of interest in the 1990s in possible associations between the characteristics of a community and inequalities in health. The concept of 'social capital' as defined by the political scientist Robert Putnam (Putnam 1993a, 1995, 2000) was identified as a possible pathway between aspects of a social environment and health outcomes for the individual. This was taken forward in the UK by the Health Education Authority using Department of Health monies to fund a substantial programme of qualitative and quantitative research exploring the concept and associations (Health Education Authority 2000). Analyses based on survey data predominated in the UK and elsewhere notwithstanding the accumulation of theoretical and methodological critiques and a small body of qualitative research demonstrating the significance of cultural and other context-specific dimensions (for example, Morrow 2000; Campbell and McLean 2002. See also Foley and Edwards 1999). The concept of social capital has also been applied to areas of social policy besides health including education, economic performance, employment, crime and deviancy, community regeneration and political and civic engagement.

Measurement of social capital has tended to focus on five elements: community identity, civic engagement, trust, reciprocal support, and social networks (Kawachi and Kennedy 1997; Campbell *et al* 1999; Blaxter and Poland 2002; Green and Fletcher 2003). Theoretical critiques (for example Portes 1998; Foley and Edwards 1999; Fine 2001) have generally favoured alternative conceptualisations, notably those of Bourdieu (1980a, 1986) and Coleman (1988, 1994). However, empirical research and associated policy interest have continued to focus on measures of trust, reciprocity and involvement in community and voluntary associations which are components of Putnam's rather than alternative conceptualisations of social capital.

The concept of social capital, and in particular Putnam's version, has been attacked from many angles. This literature is reviewed in Chapter 2. At the heart of the debate lies disagreement over four aspects. The first is whether social capital captures anything new or different compared with existing understanding of social networks and social support. The second division is over whether social capital should be regarded as the characteristic or resource of a collective or of individuals. The third area of controversy concerns how far social capital is an unmitigated public good or, conversely, a phenomenon with positive and negative dimensions. Fourthly, much of the empirical work and policy interest has focused on the effects of or insufficiency in social capital amongst disadvantaged groups and communities. Although welcomed by some commentators as offering the opportunity to transform relations of power (Woolcock and Narayan 2000; Ong *et al* 2000), others from the political left have drawn attention to the possibility that social capital would be used to justify further retrenchment of statutory provision (Devine and Roberts 2003). Parallels have also been drawn with earlier work (such as Murray 1990, 2000) blaming cultures of poverty for a wide range of social problems.

The Health Education Authority's interest in social capital was not at first replicated in wider Government policy in the UK. Neither the Acheson report on inequalities in health (Acheson 1998) nor early White Papers on health or neighbourhood renewal (Department of Health 1999; Social Exclusion Unit 1998) mentioned the concept. The focus of policy initiatives in these areas was on building community capacity rather than facilitating networks and associations. Something of a sea change seems to have occurred between 2000 and 2002 with a surge of interest in social capital within Government and among associated policy forums (for example, Social Exclusion Unit 2000, Performance Innovation Unit 2002; Nash 2002). Three factors might explain this change. The first was the publication of Putnam's long-awaited book, *Bowling Alone* (2000), accompanied by wide publicity and a speaking tour of North America and Europe that included dialogues with Government ministers, policy-makers and academics. The second was the centrality of paid employment to the New Labour Government's strategy on social exclusion and the known significance of diverse

social networks for the individual search for employment (Granovetter 1995). Thirdly, the later 1990s saw a revival of policy interest in community influenced both by a communitarian agenda (Etzioni 1995, 1997) and wider debates concerning the limits and limitations of state intervention and the necessity of moving towards more diffuse forms of governance (Daly 2003). As will be argued in Chapter 3, 'community' has come to represent – in policy terms - a means of devolving accountability from central government and statutory agencies. Communities are deemed best placed to curb antisocial and deviant behaviour through the reestablishment of 'communal values' and supportive punitive measures such as curfews and restraining orders. Communal values are assumed to promote law keeping, good neighbourliness and civic participation although the opposite might also occur. Social capital as conceptualised by Putnam is the means of establishing such norms and also the consequence.

1.3 Theoretical and methodological weaknesses

The theoretical and methodological limitations of Putnam's conceptualisation of social capital and the complexity of applying this or other approaches to communities of place are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. There are, however, two issues of particular pertinence to this research that are worth noting from the outset. The first is the claim that social capital operates as a public good benefiting all who live in a community irrespective of personal circumstances. This is illustrated in the following quotation from an empirical research paper exploring the association between social capital, income inequality and increased mortality:

"The aspect of social capital that makes it a public good is its property of nonexcludability: that is, its benefits are available to all living within a particular community, and access to it cannot be restricted. Hence, a socially isolated individual could potentially benefit from living in a neighbourhood rich in social capital.[..] Measurement of social capital at the ecological level captures something distinct, over and above the measurement of individual social connections." (Kawachi et al 1997: 1496)

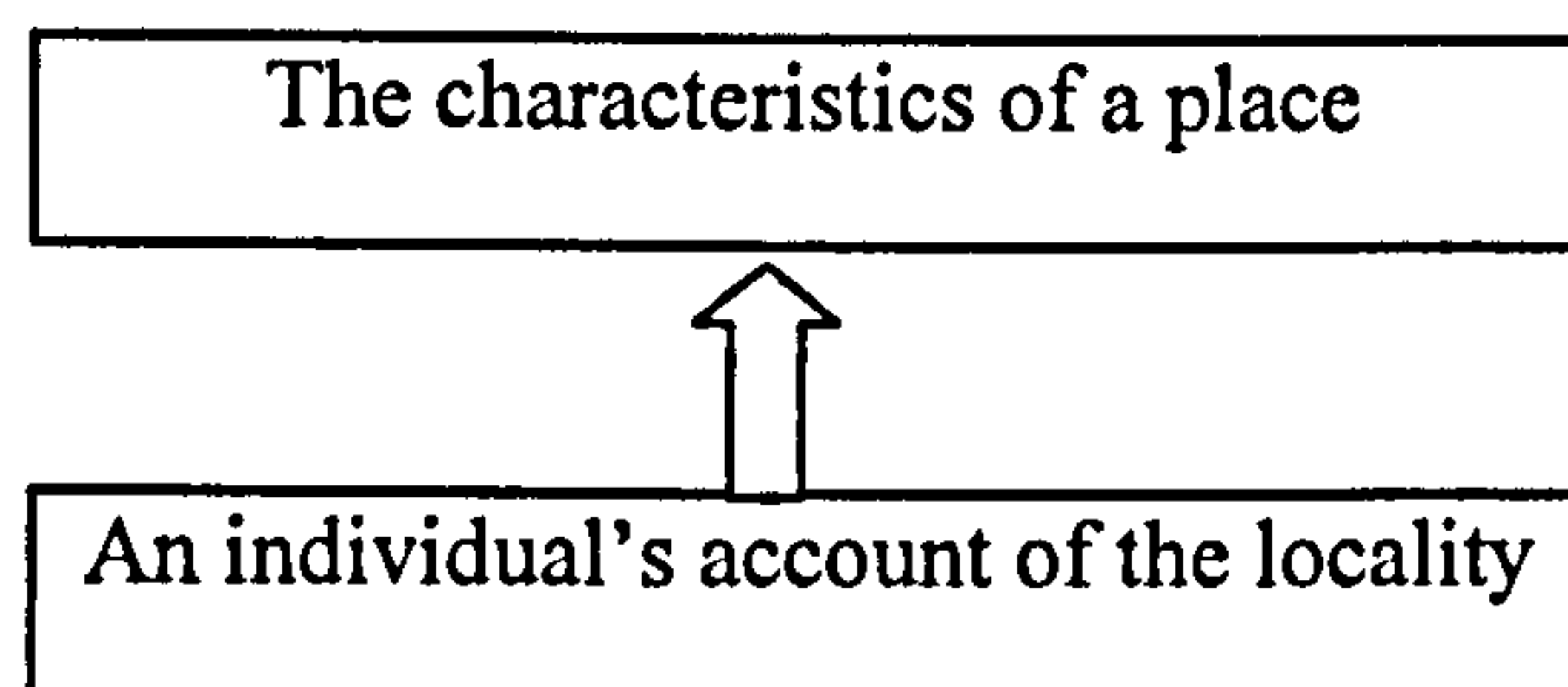
Although this is perhaps an extreme example, the assumption that the benefits of generalised social capital will override social exclusion is inherently unsociological. It ignores an extensive literature exploring the complexity of social exclusion (an evolving debate culminating in, for example, Hills *et al* 2002) and the significance of notions of 'otherness' to the creation and maintenance of collective identity (Jenkins 2004). This simplistic approach is particularly inadequate when applied to the assumed coincidence of community with a geographically defined locality. Whilst certain aspects of place such as clean air or low crime rates may be universally experienced, although even in these instances low income tends to increase vulnerability (Huby 1998), most features of social interaction involve both choice and opportunity. A wealth of research has demonstrated the cumulative nature of social disadvantage whether the starting point is poverty, unemployment, experiences of racism, or social isolation.

Recent literature on social capital has tried to overcome this conceptual weakness by privileging bridging social capital over bonding social capital (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Setting aside the question of what social capital is supposed to achieve and the forms of association best suited to varying purposes, it seems obvious that social networks and norms of trust are at least as likely to exclude the already disadvantaged as they are to protect them. Social exclusion cannot be discounted or resolved so easily. In contrast, more sociological conceptualisations of social capital that view this as the property of individuals (Bourdieu) or of socially bounded groups (Coleman) recognise that processes of bonding, bridging and excluding are intrinsic to group identity and the protection of group interests. From a neo-Marxist standpoint, such as that of Bourdieu, the interests of elite groups and individuals include the continuation of unequal access to other forms of capital.

A second area of methodological concern is related to the problem of measuring community level characteristics on the basis of individual level data. The limitations of such an approach are well known and form part of the methodological critique of social capital (for example, Lochner *et al* 1999; Van

Deth 2003) and yet this problematic relationship is present in almost all the survey-based data on which quantitative analyses of social capital have depended to date. It is represented pictorially in Figure 1 below in which the individual's account is treated as knowledge about the place where they live.

Figure 1: A simplistic understanding of the relationship between an individual account and the characteristics of a place

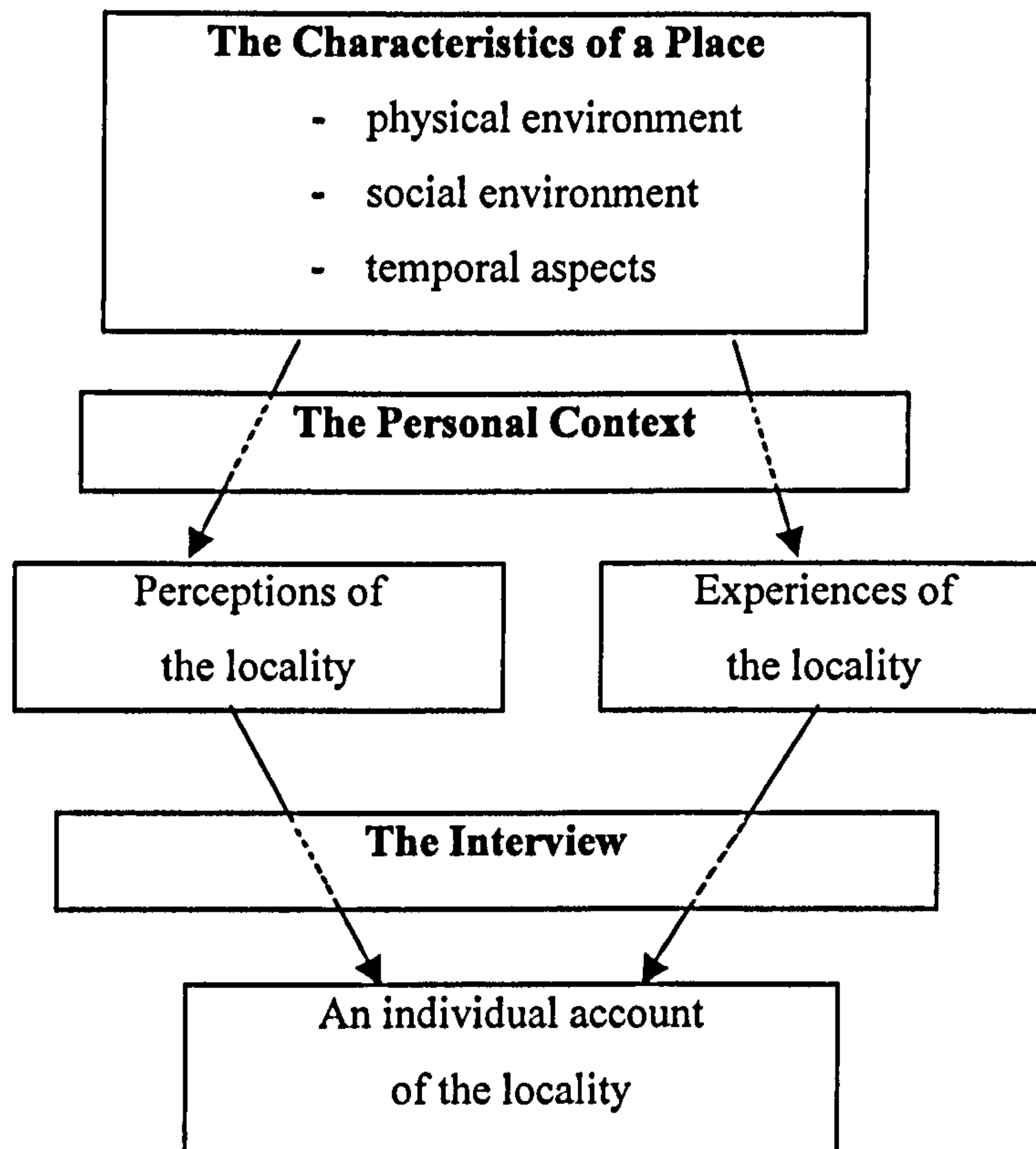


Exploratory research to develop questions on social capital for the 2000/1 General Household Survey (Earthy *et al* 2000) found that supposedly stable concepts such as trust, reciprocity and even neighbourhood had varied meanings according to the characteristics of the local area, the interviewees' own circumstances and attitudes, and question wording. This highlights the significance of context in its widest sense and suggests a relatively unexplored reservoir of lay beliefs about place and community (see also Blaxter 2001). Speakers at an informal workshop questioning social capital held in May 2000 at the London School of Economics (Morrow 2001a) outlined the case for further research to develop a more theoretically sophisticated and contextual understanding of the concept. Qualitative research, including the Health Education Authority / Health Development Agency programme (Swann and Morgan 2002), has since filled some of those gaps. This study seeks to contribute further to that pool of knowledge.

The assumption that individuals living in the same place will have and report similar experiences of 'community' ignores the complex interaction between characteristics of a place and the attitudes and experiences of the individual providing the account. Figure 2 below presents an alternative model for this

relationship by distinguishing between three elements or levels of context. These are indicated by bold type. The dotted lines of the arrows through 'personal context' and 'the interview' denote a filtering and transforming process.

Figure 2: The impact of context on accounts of place



The first level of context is the locality itself, which is both a physical place and a social environment. These aspects continually interact and change over time. Situating this research in two localities – one urban and the other rural but with similar socio-economic profiles – provided a way of comparing interviewee accounts within a stable context of place and between contrasting contexts.

The second level of context is personal to the individual whose perceptions and experiences of that place are likely to be mitigated by a variety of factors pertaining to their social position and circumstances, personal attitudes and values, and accumulated experiences. One aim of this research was to explore in

a qualitative way the differentiated impact of personal context on interviewees' accounts of the same locality and also to compare the accounts of different places given by interviewees in similar situations. Since social support is considered a key element in all conceptualisations of social capital, the interview sample was purposively designed to capture life situations associated with a need for help thus allowing exploration of the 'public good' claims made about social capital. A more detailed explanation of the study design and sampling strategy is provided in Chapter 4.

The third level of context is the research interview itself. This is often treated as data-neutral despite the emotive content of most measures of social capital and the known sensitivity of residents to an area's reputation. At this level, context includes elements of presentation and performance in interviewees' accounts and the co-authorship of a shared narrative between researcher and respondent. One feature of the interview data generated in this study was that interviewees frequently told stories about salient moments in their lives or to illustrate aspects of place or community. In surveying the available literature on narratives of place, I was unable to find a satisfactory approach to incorporating such stories within a specifically sociological analysis. However, the literature on patient narratives of chronic illness and in particular the analytical framework proposed by Bury (2001) provided a useful model for understanding the nature and role of stories within individual accounts and as indicative of common experiences and a collective culture. These issues are discussed in Chapter 7.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured in a fairly standard way. Chapters 2 and 3 set out the theoretical, empirical and social policy background to the research. The focus of Chapter 2 is on social capital and social exclusion. The discussion covers the conceptual development of each, common critiques, empirical applications, and different theoretical treatments of the association between the two. Chapter 3 widens the discussion to consider the gulf between sociological understandings of community as applied to a geographical locality and policy discourses and expectations. The significance of community as a rhetorical and symbolic device

is also explored.

Having established the background to the study, Chapter 4 presents the research aims and methods including the selection of research localities, the recruitment of interviewees, ethical issues and the process of analysis. More general methodological issues connected to qualitative research and specifically qualitative interviews and case studies based on localities are also discussed.

Chapters 5 to 7 present the research findings. Chapter 5 focuses on differences in the size of neighbourhood that had social meaning for interviewees, relations with neighbours, and experiences and expectations of social support. The chapter argues that differentiated understandings and meanings of these key aspects of social capital render the often simplistic treatment of these in surveys problematic. Chapter 6 is concerned with the interaction between aspects of the locality as a physical and social environment and the individual's sense of self. This provided the context within which interviewees talked about involvement and non-involvement in civic and community affairs and experiences of social exclusion. This leads on to a discussion about the significance of physical presence and social status for individuals' perceptions of the place where they live. As described above, Chapter 7 presents an analysis of the stories told by interviewees, often about idealised or failing community.

The theoretical, methodological and empirical strands of the thesis are brought together in the concluding chapter, Chapter 8.

1.5 A note on terminology

At the outset of this study, I was cautious to avoid use of the word 'community' because of its normative connotations and contested meaning. Instead, I opted for the more neutral term 'locality' to refer to a small geographical area. Even that is laden with meaning, suggesting both a recognisable identity and fixed knowable boundaries. With interviewees, I used the name of the locality or vague phrases such as 'round here'. Interviewees themselves never used the word 'locality' and only a minority referred to 'community', usually in the sense of community spirit

present or absent. With some exceptions, interviewees talked about lost community in terms of sociability and safety rather than oppressive or insular tendencies. This accords with Bauman's insightful treatment of the concept (Bauman 2001).

In writing this thesis, I have retained use of 'locality' to refer to a geographical place and, most commonly, a location in which the research was situated. I have, however, also allowed 'community' to creep back into the discussion. I have used that term as a noun to denote the social environment of the locality and as an adjective to signify collective activities concerned with that social environment. In neither instance am I implying that this social environment is of a particular nature (i.e. '*gemeinschaft*') (Tönnies 1957) although such associations were present throughout the data irrespective of the terminology used.

Chapter 2

Social capital and social exclusion

2.1 Introduction

It has become commonplace in reviews of social capital to comment on the rapid expansion in associated literature over the past twenty years (for example Fine 2001, Harper 2001, Field 2003). Academic treatment of social capital has spanned several disciplines including sociology, political science, economics, social policy and development studies. Such diverse interest has been accompanied by passionate debate over its definition, application and usefulness. Social capital has attracted enthusiasts and detractors from across the political spectrum, in part because of the vagueness of its definition and corresponding adaptability (Campbell 2001). The World Bank website, which currently boasts of '900 new abstracts' (World Bank Group 2004), has provided a useful tracking device for this vast literature although it is likely that the association has contributed to suspicion of the concept in some quarters.

The literature has moved on considerably since the publication in 1993 of Robert Putnam's well-known study of the influence of civic engagement on political stability and economic prosperity in north and south Italy (Putnam 1993a). Early debates focused on whether the concept covered new theoretical ground, negative aspects of the kinds of social relations that produced or exhibited high levels of social capital, and methodological circularity in the way that positive outcomes at a societal level were cited as proof both of the existence of social capital and its beneficial effects (Portes 1998). More recent empirical literature has diverged between qualitative studies that address the meaning and experience of social capital for particular sub-groups (for example Morrow 2000, 2001c; Sixsmith and Boneham 2002; Campbell and McLean 2002) and quantitative research focused on measurement tools, statistical associations and the mechanisms that link social capital with desired social outcomes (for example O'Brien *et al* 2004, Liukkonen *et al* 2004, Ziersch *et al* 2005).

This chapter presents an overview of the conceptual history of social capital and relevant critiques, empirical work and policy applications. Given the size of the literature, the review focuses on aspects of most relevance to the consideration of social capital when applied to a geographical locality. The chapter also includes a discussion of the concept of social exclusion which is central both to the 'dark side' of social capital and, more broadly, to the creation and maintenance of collective identities.

The review begins in section 2.2 with the different conceptualisations of social capital proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam and subsequent theoretical developments. This is followed in section 2.3 with a consideration of how the concept has been operationalised in empirical studies. Section 2.4 examines diverse treatments and discourses of social exclusion and explores the conceptual links between social capital and social exclusion. The chapter ends with a summary.

2.2 The concept of social capital

The essence of social capital - namely that involvement in networks has potentially beneficial effects for the individual and the group - is not a new idea in sociology. Durkheim's exploration of 'organic solidarity' included recognition of the importance of social affiliations to groups as an antidote to 'anomie' (Durkheim 1893). The focus for Marx was on differences between the solidarity evident amongst the bourgeoisie produced by convergent class interests and the weaker solidarity exhibited by the oppressed proletariat. Contemporary analyses of what Portes has termed 'the positive consequences of sociability' (Portes 1998: 2) depart from classical ideas in two ways. The first is to treat social capital as a source of advancement akin to other forms of capital. The second development is the evolution and application of the concept to meet specific questions of social policy rather than broader social observation.

The first contemporary use of the concept of social capital is generally attributed to the economist Glen Loury writing in 1977 about the role of social connections in creating differential access to employment opportunities and job-related

information among youth from minority and non-minority ethnic groups (Loury 1977). This inequality of access provided an explanation for the persistence of income inequalities across ethnic groups. Whilst Loury identified social capital as an element in the development of human capital, he did not link this systematically to other forms of capital or develop the concept in later writing. The development of social capital as a theoretical construct – described by Field as its transformation from a metaphor into a concept (Field 2003: 12) – occurred within sociology in the 1980s with the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and the American sociologist James Coleman taking the concept in very different directions. The political scientist, Robert Putnam, followed in 1993 and 1995 with a formulation that was closer to Coleman than Bourdieu and attracted wider attention than either. Foley and Edwards describe these three as ‘relatively distinct tributaries of social capital theorizing’ (Foley and Edwards 1999: 142). Foley and Edwards themselves offer an alternative conceptualisation, which is discussed with others in the final part of this section.

Social capital as a reflection of class fractions

Bourdieu’s writing on social capital predated that of Coleman and Putnam but was scarcely mentioned by either and has received much less attention in policy-orientated reviews of the concept (for example Performance Review Unit 2002 and Nash 2002). In common with Coleman, Bourdieu’s interest in social capital stemmed from a broader analytical framework covering different forms of capital. However, Bourdieu’s main focus was on cultural capital; a more complex concept than the human capital that interested Coleman (Coleman 1988). Bourdieu’s answer to the fundamental dichotomy between agency and structure that also preoccupied Coleman lay not in social capital *per se* but in the concept of ‘habitus’, defined as an ‘acquired system of generative dispositions’ (Bourdieu 1977: 95), and the interaction between habitus and social fields. Those internalised dispositions were shaped by social structures and acquired through the assimilation of a set of practices and responses. Within Bourdieu’s distinctive understanding of social class, a set of individuals who were the product of the same objective conditions would be endowed with the same habitus. The habitus governed although did not completely determine the actions, reactions and

attitudes of individuals. It provided a sense of what was appropriate and practical in particular circumstances and in the social contexts or fields of action of which society was composed (Thompson 1991: 13-14). Within each social field, the possession of different forms of capital and the habitus of the individual would together determine status. Cultural capital was closely associated with economic capital but could be traded on independently and in some circumstances might make up for lack of money. In times of rapid social change, habitus might lag behind the changing nature of social relations (Bourdieu 1977: 78). Social fields were thus potential scenes of conflict in which different fractions struggled to preserve or challenge the legitimacy of the divisions by which the field was classified (Bourdieu 1991: 242, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 101).

Bourdieu's earliest treatment of social capital appeared in published form in 1980 under the title of 'provisional notes' (Bourdieu 1980). A slightly more detailed exposition appeared in English in 1986 (Bourdieu 1986). In the latter, Bourdieu argued that the distribution of all forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) reflected and perpetuated the inherent power structure of the social world (Bourdieu 1986: 241-2). Practices governing the exchange of non-economic forms of capital were no less self-interested than those present in economic transactions. Social obligations within networks, particularly among those higher up the social hierarchy, served to perpetuate the interests of the group against infringement by others. Bourdieu's main concern was with the social capital possessed by elites and the ways in which this was generated and protected in a social world in which class fraction and class self-interest underlay all forms of social relation.

Social capital was defined by Bourdieu as:

"the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital..." (Bourdieu 1986: 248-9)

Coleman used a similar metaphor of 'credit' to refer to entitlement to collectively owned social capital. However, Bourdieu's conceptualisation differed from that of Coleman in three ways. The first was that the individual's stocks of social capital were influenced by the social capital possessed by those to whom he or she was connected:

"The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected." (Bourdieu 1986: 249)

Secondly, the profits that accrued from membership of a group were, for Bourdieu, the basis of the solidarity that made them possible (Bourdieu 1986: 249) even though profits were not consciously pursued as such. This provided the motivation for continuing social affiliation within elites.

Thirdly, the networks of connection that produced and reproduced access to social capital required 'an endless effort at institution' (Bourdieu 1986: 249). This was the case even in families where the definition of kinship relations might be expected to constitute a connection that would be life-long. Bourdieu emphasised the individual and collective investment strategies that consciously or unconsciously aimed at:

"...establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, i.e., at transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighbourhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights)." (Bourdieu 1986: 249-50)

Repeated exchanges, both symbolic and material, continually reinforced mutual recognition of the group. Those exchanges required a substantial commitment from members not only to participate in those processes but also to acquire the competence needed to recognise and make use of the group's resources. The

greater the amount of social and other capital accessible through such connections, the more productive this investment of effort. For those with inherited social capital, symbolised by 'a great name', all circumstantial relationships could be transformed into lasting connections. All groups favoured homogeneity but this was particularly noticeable among elites who had most to lose from alteration or adulteration of the group's identity. The methods used to protect the group's identity could adapt in response to changes in social institutions. For example, when families ceased to have a deciding role in the choice of a marriage partner, this could still be influenced through the arranging of social meetings with individuals from 'appropriate' backgrounds.

Finally, members of groups often delegated control of the collective social capital to a single or small number of agents who represented the group to the outside world. This would maximise the group's influence and protect its identity but ran the risk that the use made of pooled resources might be detrimental to the individual's own interests. In a similar way, transactions involving social capital generally relied on unspecified obligations. This created the possibility that expectations of reciprocity might be disappointed.

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital was distinct in a number of respects. It located the concept of social capital within an external context of structured social inequality and class struggle and an internalised context of habitus. Whilst, as discussed below, Coleman assumed that rational self-interest would eventually favour the harmonisation of interests, Bourdieu tended towards a conflict approach developed from his anthropological research in Algeria in the 1950s and observation of French political life (Flora 1998: 488). This conflict was in response to changes at the societal as well as individual level:

"The habitus is a set of dispositions, reflexes and forms of behaviour people acquire through acting in society. It reflects the different positions people have in society, for example, whether they are brought up in a middle class environment or in a working class suburb. It is part of how society reproduces itself. But there is also change. Conflict is built into society. People can find their expectations and ways of living are

suddenly out of step with the new social position they find themselves in. This is happening in France. Then the question of social agency and political intervention becomes very important.” (Bourdieu 2000)

Such a context of social change and transformation is highly relevant to this study since, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, the selected research localities had both experienced the closure of major industrial employers and high population mobility. Moreover, postmodernist understandings of identity emphasise the ways in which features of contemporary life challenge an individual's sense of self and social position, derived from the particular social and cultural milieu (or habitus) in which they grew up (Bauman 1997).

Another distinctive feature of Bourdieu's conceptualisation was in distinguishing between the social relationships that allow the individual to lay claim to resources possessed by others and the character, volume and quality of the resources that can be so accessed (Portes 1998: 3-4; Foley and Edwards 1999: 143). Bourdieu also drew attention to socialising or sociability as 'work' that required ceaseless effort and from which there must be sufficient benefits to justify the investment. This brings into sharp focus the question of motivation behind the establishment and maintenance of social networks. It also highlights the fact that actors need to recognise the value of their social networks into order for these to be of benefit as social capital (Morrow 2001c: 56). Finally, Bourdieu makes explicit the role of social connections in maintaining privilege and excluding others deemed different and inferior.

Criticisms of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital have focused on his preoccupation with the social resources accessed by elites, exaggeration of the significance of family, and the specificity of the cultural context from which most of his examples were derived. He also did not consider in any depth how individuals from lower social groups might benefit from their social connections or the potential negative consequences of social capital for those inside rather than outside class-limited social networks. The omission of Bourdieu from policy-orientated reviews of social capital is less likely to stem from the factors

listed above than from his wider critique of capitalism. It is noticeable, for example, that the discussion paper on social capital produced by the Performance Innovation Unit in the Cabinet Office in 2002 emphasised the economic benefits attributed to social capital but not the potential offered by linking social capital to challenge the economic status quo (Performance and Innovation Unit 2002, Woolcock and Narayan 2000).

Social capital as a resource in the creation of human capital

Although the American sociologist James Coleman was similarly interested in the relationship between social capital and other forms of capital, his conceptualisation of social capital was based on a very different theoretical starting point from Bourdieu: that of rational action theory (Becker 1964). Coleman first proposed the concept of social capital in an article in a 1988 issue of the *American Journal of Sociology* as a means of bridging between the paradigms of rational action and social structure when applied to the study of economic activity. He acknowledged the contribution of Granovetter and others who had drawn attention to the effects of characteristics of social organisation and relations, such as “embeddedness” (Granovetter 1985), on the functioning of economic systems but claimed a broader aim of importing the economic principle of rational action into the analysis of social systems without losing the element of social organisation. Social capital was the conceptual tool that would bridge these three areas and solve the question of why individuals, assumed to be always acting in their own interests, co-operated for uncertain mutual gain.

Coleman conceptualised social capital as ‘a resource for action’ residing in the structure of social relations. He contrasted it with other forms of capital which, he argued, lay within the control of the individual actor whether a person or a corporate entity.

“Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible... Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors.” (Coleman 1988: S98)

A later definition identified the kinds of social relations that produced most benefit for the development of human capital:

“(social capital is) the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person” (Coleman 1994: 334)

Within Coleman’s conceptualisation, social capital took many forms including ‘obligations and expectations’, ‘information potential’, ‘norms and effective sanctions’, ‘authority relations’, and ‘appropriable’ and ‘intentional’ forms of social organisation (Coleman 1990). Although criticised for the incoherence of this list (Portes 1998), Coleman’s emphasis on the variability of social capital in different contexts and its dependence on closed social systems for effectiveness constitute probably his most important contributions to the theoretical development.

Coleman argued that individual actors present in social structures or systems characterised by a high degree of trustworthiness and high levels of outstanding obligations would be able to draw on greater reserves of social capital than actors in different circumstances. Within hierarchical structures, such as extended families or political settings, the activation of accumulated obligations could be used to remove obstacles to a desired end with benefits both for the collective and individual. Individuals who had access to networks that provided channels of useful information or were members of communities where prescriptive norms promoted collective interests over those of the individual were similarly well placed. The presence of sanctions required for the formation of certain types of social capital - such as effective norms or the trustworthiness of social structures that allowed obligations and expectations to proliferate - depended on closed social systems. In the case of educational achievement among young people, friendship between the parents of school friends (described by Coleman as ‘multiplex relations’) was a precondition. Social capital was also the means by which a child could benefit from the human capital possessed by his or her parents. The physical absence of adults or dilution of parental attention amounted to structural deficiencies in family social capital but could be partly compensated

for by social capital within the community, as evident in Coleman's empirical research findings concerning lower dropout rates among pupils in religiously based schools. In a similar way, close ties fostered by family, community and religious affiliations among Jewish diamond merchants in New York City accounted for an extraordinary degree of trust in their business dealings (Coleman 1988).

Coleman identified two negative features of social capital. The first, mentioned briefly, was the potentially stifling effect of effective norms on innovation in an area (Coleman 1988: S105). The second feature was the vulnerability of social capital to under-investment since its benefits were more apparent as a public good than of direct benefit to the individual:

"the kinds of social structures that make possible social norms and the sanctions that enforce them do not benefit primarily the person or persons whose efforts would be necessary to bring them about, but benefit all those who are part of such a structure." (Coleman 1988: S116)

This public good aspect to social capital, which differentiated it from other forms of capital, posed problems for a rational action model of human motivation and social relations. Its implication was that social capital was largely created as an unintended by-product of other activities and might as easily be destroyed by accident.

In later writing, Coleman addressed the implications for community social capital of the weakening of family and community bonds and their replacement by national corporate structures notably the state. His suggested response was that corporate organisations should provide incentives to individuals to invest time in family life (Coleman 1993). This reflects an assumption that individuals can be enticed into socially desirable behaviour through incentives that appeal to their self-interest. It also ignores the gendered nature of social capital particularly within family and community settings (Morrow 1999) and reflects an inherently conservative view of the family (Blaxter and Hughes 2001).

One of the main criticisms levelled at Coleman's conceptualisation of social capital is the vagueness created by labelling both social processes (such as group enforcement of norms) and the beneficial consequences of such mechanisms (such as privileged access to information) as 'social capital' (Portes 1998: 5-6). This confusion of cause and outcome is also a feature of Putnam's version of social capital. Secondly, although Coleman's idea of social capital was derived from rational action theory, he failed to explain adequately what motivated members of networks to agree to the demands of others when there was no immediate or direct benefit in return. Thirdly, Coleman's assertion that individual actors do not exercise control over or at least try to influence the social relations that impact on their well being denies the exercise of agency in social relationships. Indeed, the practical examples of social capital in action cited by Coleman could be interpreted either as the product of a system of social relations characterised by common goals and standardised behaviour or the result of the accumulation of purposive actions by many individuals to achieve personal goals.

Coleman, like Bourdieu and especially Putnam, paid little attention to negative features or consequences of social capital other than the following acknowledgement that certain forms of social capital in the 'wrong' context could have detrimental effects on the achievement of desired ends.

"A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others." (Coleman 1988: S98)

However, Coleman did not extend this to a consideration of the potentially detrimental effects for individuals constrained by a network or excluded from it.

The popular policy version: Putnam and social capital

The most commonly quoted definition of social capital in empirical research and policy documents is that expounded by the political scientist Robert Putnam in an early application of the concept to the decline in civic participation in the United States:

“social capital” refers to features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.” (Putnam 1995: 67)

Putnam's original conceptualisation of social capital was in many ways a summary version of Coleman's although located in political theory rather than sociology and placing greater emphasis on 'soft' solutions, such as community and trust, as the explanation for the occurrence of collective action in contradiction of game theory (Putnam 1993a: 167). Putnam's early empirical work concerned the varying success of a new system of regional government introduced in Italy in the 1970s. Putnam concluded from a 20-year study of Italian civic society that strong traditions of civic engagement explained the differential success of the new regional governments:

“These communities did not become civic simply because they were rich. The historical record strongly suggests precisely the opposite: They have become rich because they were civic. The social capital embodied in norms and networks of civic engagement seems to be a precondition for economic development, as well as for effective government.” (Putnam 1993a: 37)

Putnam subsequently applied this approach to a study of the breakdown in the social fabric of contemporary North American society (1993b, 1995, 1996). His analysis of a wide range of indicators of civic disengagement beginning in the 1960s culminated in the thesis that this was due to generational change (the generation born in the 1920s being unusually civic minded) and the combined impact of home-based entertainment (notably television), urban mobility and sprawl, and two career families.

Putnam departed from Coleman's conceptualisation in identifying community networks, civic engagement, local identity, and norms of trust and reciprocity as essential components of social capital rather than different manifestations of it. He argued that those elements were interconnected. Trust developed out of norms of generalised reciprocity fostered by networks of civic engagement. These

networks also served to amplify information about the trustworthiness of others. In this way social capital became cumulative:

“For a variety of reasons, life is easier in communities blessed with a substantial stock of social capital. In the first place, networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved... At the same time, networks of civic engagement embody past success at collaboration, which can serve as a cultural template for future collaboration. Finally, dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants’ sense of self, developing the ‘I’ into ‘we’, or enhancing the participants’ “taste” for collective benefits.” (Putnam 1995: 67)

For Putnam, the significant feature of networks of civic engagement (such as neighbourhood associations, parent teacher associations, sports clubs, choral societies and co-operatives) was that these comprised of horizontal linkages in which obligations were broadly symmetrical. Networks such as kinship or political associations characterised by vertical relationships would not produce the same norms of trust or collaboration because of the unequal nature of the connections between members. For Putnam, sociability was assumed to favour the development of trust (Putnam 1995: 665) rather than, as Bourdieu might argue, reinforce division and difference.

A fundamental criticism commonly levelled at Putnam’s conceptualisation of social capital has been the confusion between the sources of social capital and the benefits derived from those sources (Portes and Landolt 1996). Any evidence of desirable outcomes has been taken *a priori* as evidence of the existence of social capital. This overlooks both the potentially negative effects of dense networks, discussed further below, and the distinction made by Bourdieu between the ability to access resources through social connections and the nature of the resources thus available. Various writers have pointed out that lack of social capital may, like previous arguments concerning social disorganisation and social

pathology amongst the residents of inner-city areas, become the “missing element” in the search for the cause of poverty (Portes 2000: 5). Morrow (1999), in a critique of Coleman and Putnam’s conceptualisations of social capital as applied to children and young people, argued that:

“There is a danger that “social capital” will become part of what might be termed “deficit theory syndrome”, yet another “thing” or “resource” that unsuccessful individuals, families, communities and neighbourhoods lack.” (Morrow 1999: 760)

As a counter-argument to Putnam, Portes (2000) cited empirical studies that demonstrate the presence of social networks and reciprocity in inner city areas and the heavy dependence of residents on these. The problem is thus not lack of social organisation but lack of resources and the insularity of social ties; points made by Bourdieu within a broader theoretical framework.

A second area of criticism concerns the use of individual level data both by Putnam and in subsequent empirical research (for example, Kawachi and Kennedy 1997; Kennedy *et al* 1998) to measure social characteristics of communities, states or even nations. In contrast to Coleman’s conceptualisation, these are open social systems in which the position or attachment of the individual is unclear. The possibility that different individuals will give different reports of the same social environment is overlooked. Other writers (for example Campbell *et al* 1999, Campbell 2001) have similarly emphasised the importance of context and specificity.

A third frequent criticism is that Putnam has focused exclusively on the positive effects of community participation without considering the ‘dark side’ of social capital in terms of the control and oppression of insiders and the exclusion of outsiders (Portes and Landolt 1996). Putnam’s earlier writing did recognise that shared goals might not necessarily be ‘praiseworthy’ (Putnam 1995: 664) and that social capital might serve to reinforce social inequalities:

“We also need to ask about the negative effects of social capital, for like human and physical capital, social capital can be put to bad purposes...”

Social inequalities may be embedded in social capital. Norms and networks that serve some groups may obstruct others, particularly if the norms are discriminatory or the networks socially segregated. Recognising the importance of social capital in sustaining community life does not exempt us from the need to worry about how that community is defined - who is inside and thus benefits from social capital, and who is outside and does not." (Putnam 1993b: 42)

Putnam's more recent work (for example Putnam 2001) does not, however, refer to possible negative effects of social capital and the same is true of many quantitative empirical applications which approach social capital as an unadulterated public good (see for example Kawachi *et al* 1997).

Aside from issues concerning the generality of benefits for the individual from community-level social capital, commentators have also drawn attention to the potentially negative characteristics of dense networks of the kind that, according to Putnam, favour social capital. These characteristics include the exclusion of outsiders, expectations of conformity that stifle innovation and constrain individual freedom, and downward levelling pressures that trap those at the bottom of the social scale. Most often quoted in this respect is Granovetter's discovery that young men were more likely to acquire jobs through weak social ties that stretched beyond their immediate social environment than through the strong ties of kinship or intimate friendship (Granovetter 1973). Burt (1992) drew attention to the importance of a relative absence of ties, labelled 'structural holes', in facilitating individual social mobility. As with Granovetter, Burt based this on the tendency of dense closed networks to convey redundant information whilst weaker ties provide new sources of knowledge. Burt's definition of social capital as "friends, colleagues and more general contacts through whom you receive opportunities to use your financial and human capital" falls somewhere between that of Coleman and Bourdieu (Burt 1992: 9).

Other empirical research has highlighted the elements of reciprocity and exchange involved in transactions around employment. A notable example were

Grieco's studies of the role of kinship ties in recruitment to the Aberdeen fish-processing sector and employment patterns among extended working class families migrating from the East End of London (Grieco 1987). Grieco concluded that whilst weaker ties facilitated access to jobs in employment sectors where labour is in short supply and formal credentials exist for measuring skills, strong ties such as kinship become important in securing work in situations of recession or labour surpluses or where qualities required for the job are less easily measured by formal credentials. This reiterates the significance of context and the importance of distinguishing between the usefulness of different kinds of social connection; a point taken up in the final part of this section.

Putnam's treatment of agency has also been criticised from the perspectives of both sociology and political science. In sociological terms, it is argued that Putnam has over-emphasised the contribution of historical developments, particularly in his study of Italian civic life, and ignored the element of decision in withdrawal from participation in community and civic activities. Political scientists have argued that Putnam's theory focuses too much on societal norms and too little on political factors including the role of the state (Field 2003: 39).

A further criticism of Putnam's version of social capital has focused less on its ascribed properties than on its possible application in support of what critics deem 'undesirable' policy ends. These might include detraction of attention from issues of economic need and inequality, justification for a lack of state action and the retrenchment of welfare, and the encouragement of social divisions based on race or other forms of homogeneity (see, for example, Durlauf 1999). It is fair to say that such criticisms stem more from the vagueness of Putnam's definition than from any deliberate intention to contribute to those policy debates in the ways cited. Moreover, Putnam is careful to describe time pressures in two-career families as only a contributory factor in the decline of social capital in the United States (Putnam 2000). However, he has been attacked by feminist critics for ignoring the effect of gender in, for example, civic participation (Lowndes 2000).

Discussions about the nature of social capital have tended to situate this concept within a social 'space': either a geographical 'community' or a network of shared interests. Little consideration has been given to the reality of such a 'community', the extent to which it operates as a social system, or the effects of wider societal changes on the nature of local social relations. Bourdieu represents something of an exception in respect of offering a particular conceptualisation of social space and of social relations as power relations within that space (Bourdieu 1991). But this approach still does not explicitly incorporate wider phenomena such as urbanisation or population mobility. The problems of treating community as a known or stable entity are discussed in Chapter 3.

Further conceptual developments

Although alternative conceptualisations of social capital to those of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam have been offered from a variety of viewpoints, only two seem to have taken the concept forward in concrete ways. Both build on one or more of the main theoretical approaches already described in this section.

Probably the most significant additional theoretical contribution comes from Woolcock's description of three different forms of social capital (Woolcock 2001). Writing from the perspective of economic development, Woolcock distinguished between: '*bonding social capital*' which is derived from ties with people in similar situations (notably family, friends and neighbours); '*bridging social capital*' which involves links with others in a similar social position but to whom the individual has no close ties; and '*linking social capital*' which comprises of contacts with those in dissimilar positions who are entirely outside the individual's community (Woolcock 2001: 13-14). These different forms of social capital provide different types of assistance. Bonding social capital enables people in disadvantaged situations to 'get by' whilst more disparate networks of bridging social capital may help them to 'get on'. Linking social capital offers the possibility of accessing the resources, in term of political influence and economic capital, of those in more powerful positions. The central argument is that poorer communities are often rich in bonding social capital but poor in bridging social capital and that different combinations of social capital will produce different

outcomes. This emphasis on the resources that can be accessed through networks is reminiscent of Bourdieu although Woolcock gives more credit to Coleman and Putnam for development of the concept. In an article published in the previous year, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) had argued for a 'synergy' approach to social capital as applied to economic development. This would take account of the different levels of social capital, its positive and negative effects, and the relative contributions of social networks and political, legal and institutional environments. This represents a politicisation of social capital and a more complete acknowledgement of the complexity of the relationship between structure and agency.

A second significant theoretical development, although with nothing like the same impact as Woolcock and Narayan, came from Foley and Edwards' attempt to revitalise Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital and operationalise it for research purposes (Foley and Edwards 1999). Within an overall approach that dismissed civic cultural understandings of social capital (and in particular the emphasis on generalised social trust), these authors argued for a 'context-dependent conceptualisation' that gave equal attention to social networks through which an individual or group might access resources and the quantity and quality of the resources available through those connections. The latter included a consideration of the way in which social networks were embedded in a broader system of social stratification. Earlier work had drawn attention to the value of the concept of social capital in its focus on 'meso level social structures' such as family, neighbourhood, voluntary associations and public institutions (Edwards and Foley 1997). The role of individual or collective agency in the decision to make use of social connections and the use made of the social capital thus accessed was also made explicit and problematised as a variable influenced by a range of factors (Foley and Edwards 1999: 168). In common with Woolcock and Narayan, Foley and Edwards have provided a more comprehensive and complex treatment of the interrelationship between structure and agency than earlier theorists and one that is applicable to empirical research.

2.3 Applications of social capital in empirical research

The diversity of theoretical and empirical responses to the concept of social capital in its various theoretical forms has prompted diverse attempts to categorise these (examples include Foley and Edwards 1999, Woolcock and Narayan 2000, Hawe and Shiell 2000, Field 2003). Fitzpatrick (2001) has described four basic positions taken vis-à-vis globalisation, which offer an alternative perspective on the social capital debate. These positions are: 'sponsors' who believe in the concept and are in favour of the phenomenon; 'sceptics' who accept the concept but are ambivalent about whether the effects of globalisation are positive or negative; 'doubters' who deny that globalisation is an appropriate description for the changes observed; and 'hecklers' who suspect the agenda behind the concept (Fitzpatrick 2001: 164).

The conceptualisation of social capital most commonly employed in empirical research has been Putnam's. It has been operationalised in both quantitative and qualitative research (Kawachi and Kennedy 1997; Campbell *et al* 1999; Blaxter and Poland 2002; Green and Fletcher 2003) around five components: community identity, civic engagement, trust, reciprocal support, and social networks. The concept has been applied to areas of social life as diverse as civic society (Putnam 1996 and 2000; Hall 1999), health inequalities (Kawachi and Kennedy 1997, Swann and Morgan 2002, Ross *et al* 2004, Ziersch *et al* 2005), crime (Kennedy *et al* 1998, Kawachi *et al* 1999), economic development (Woolcock 1998) and economic success in a free-market global economy (Fukuyama 1996). Applications of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital in empirical research have been rarer, although there are some notable examples such as Morrow 2001 and Gatrell *et al* 2004.

Foley and Edwards' 1999 review of recent articles reporting empirical research on social capital distinguished between political scientific and economic research that approached social capital as a normative value around trust and generalised reciprocity and research from social scientists that understood the concept in social structural terms and focused on social networks. There were also striking differences across disciplines in how social capital had been operationalised

(Foley and Edwards 1999). This looseness of definition meant that for many academic critics the concept of social capital lost even heuristic value (for examples see Portes and Landolt 1996, Portes 1998, Leeder 1998, Durlauf 1999). At the same time, the concept received increasing policy interest across the political spectrum and worldwide, assisted in the latter by its adoption by the World Bank Group. The policy interest in social capital in the UK was initially promoted by the Health Education Authority in respect of inequalities in health but since about 2000 has become linked to social exclusion and community generation. This association is discussed in Chapter 3. More recently, Van Deth (2003), in a review of published empirical research on social capital, noted that conceptual heterogeneity had been accompanied by a surprising degree of operational and empirical consistency. This suggests a new stage of research on social capital, concerned less with the value and meaning of the concept than appropriate survey tools and statistical measures of validity. This is matched by the interest shown by organisations such as the World Bank and the UK Office for National Statistics in producing and promoting standardised research instruments for the measurement of social capital.

2.4 Understanding social exclusion

In common with the concept of social capital, that of social exclusion has proved definitionally elusive and context-dependant. Levitas (1998) has argued that the term is inherently problematic since it represents a primary division in society between an included majority and an excluded minority. The result is an overly homogeneous and consensual image of society in which significant differences among the included majority are overlooked and exclusion appears as a peripheral social problem rather than the most extreme manifestation of endemic social inequalities (Levitas 1998:7). Although the concept of social exclusion can be traced back to Weber, modern usage of the term is generally attributed to France in the 1970s where 'les exclus' were initially those without entitlement to social insurance benefits but later extended to include disaffected youth and isolated individuals. In a cultural context of republicanism and strong civic traditions, the socially excluded challenged the foundations of society (Burchardt *et al* 2002: 2). In a very different cultural context in the United States, the

concept of 'the underclass' has connotations of anti-social behaviour, voluntary withdrawal from paid employment and a dependency culture (Wilson 1987; Murray 1990, 2000).

In the context of the UK, Levitas (1998) identified three discourses of social exclusion presented in the form of ideal types: a 'redistributive discourse' focusing on poverty; a 'moral underclass' discourse focusing on the moral and behavioural failings of the excluded; and a social integrationist discourse concerned with paid work. Each discourse emphasised different elements of social, economic, political, and cultural exclusion, and proposed different causal links between these. Levitas' analysis suggested that at the time of coming into power in 1997, the New Labour Government moved away from a redistributive discourse to an 'inconsistent combination' of moral underclass and social integrationist discourses (Levitas 1998: 28). Using different terminology and taking a more international perspective, Silver has similarly located the use of the concept of social exclusion in different paradigms grounded in different political philosophies (Silver 1994).

Townsend's seminal study of poverty published in 1979 sought to redefine poverty in terms of relative deprivation rather than levels of income required for subsistence. His central argument was that having insufficient resources to participate in the customary life of society or fulfil social expectations constituted poverty:

"Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least are widely encouraged and approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities." (Townsend 1979: 31)

Townsend's view clearly reflects a redistributive discourse within Levitas' classification and has, with others, influenced the adoption by the Office for National Statistics of measures of relative deprivation alongside indicators of absolute poverty. Secondary analyses of British Household Panel Survey data by researchers at the ESRC-funded Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion at the London School of Economics use the following definition of social exclusion, again within a redistributive discourse:

"An individual is socially excluded if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society and (b) he or she does not participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society." (Burchardt *et al* 1999: 230)

The above definition sidesteps the issue of whether voluntary withdrawal from social participation should be regarded as problematic but usefully focuses on 'normal activities' rather than a single aspect of exclusion such as unemployment. Suggested dimensions of social exclusion include exclusion from participation in normal levels of consumption, savings, production, political activity, and social activity (Burchardt *et al* 1999). Although treated as separate entities, Burchardt *et al* stress the complex influence of one dimension of exclusion on other dimensions of activity. The individual's ability to participate in society will be affected by personal characteristics (including health and educational qualifications), events in the individual's life, characteristics of the area in which he or she lives, and social, civil and political institutions in society. The Centre for International Poverty Research at the University of Bristol, of which Townsend is a member, has developed empirical tools for the measurement of social exclusion based on lay accounts of what constitutes normal participation in modern society (Bradshaw *et al* 1998, Gordon *et al* 2000).

Whilst this literature assists in identifying the ideological and practical dimensions of social exclusion, it does not address how individuals perceive and experience exclusion. Specifically it does not explore how social exclusion relates to issues of personal and social identity or is spatially located. The distinction made in social geography between 'place' and 'space' highlights the

additional elements of time and social usage in the way individuals or groups feel excluded from particular spaces in certain circumstances. As demonstrated by Pain *et al* (2000) in a study of the use of leisure spaces by older people in two localities, people's relationship with a physical space is strongly influenced by identities of class, ability and gender and the interrelationships between these factors. Similarly an experience of locality that fails to live up to normative expectations of 'community' has been shown to impinge on personal as well as collective identity (Anderson *et al* 1999, Popay *et al* 2003).

Social exclusion occupies a contradictory position within post-modernist ideas about the fluidity of social life and the fragmented and multi-faceted nature of personal identity. On the one hand it can be argued that social exclusion is less likely because infinite versions of self are possible. Conversely, social exclusion is more likely because of the breakdown of previous sources of certainty based around traditional structural divisions such as social class, gender, ethnicity, life stage and geographical location.

As described earlier, the conceptual relationship between social capital and social exclusion is unclear. Within Bourdieu's conceptualisation, the social connections of elites are used to maintain group identity and effectively exclude those of lower social classes from the privileges enjoyed by the few. Neither Coleman nor Putnam deal specifically with social exclusion although the notion of social capital as a public good implies that it is a solution to social exclusion rather than a cause. In contrast, critiques emphasising the 'downside' of social capital (for example Portes and Landolt 1996) have located this within sociological understanding of the potentially oppressive dimensions of close-knit and closed communities. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed the diverse theoretical understandings and empirical applications of the concept of social capital and cultural and political discourses around social exclusion. One of the weaknesses of most treatments of social capital is the lack of clarity concerning the relationship between social capital (or

connections or resources) and social exclusion. The distinction between different forms of social capital made by Woolcock (2001) identified one pathway by which a socially excluded individual, group or community might improve their social and political position through linking social capital with the more powerful. A sense of the potential of such connections to transform power relations was also noted in one of the Health Development Agency's Social Action Research Projects on social capital (Ong *et al* 2000). More generally, however, the concepts of both social capital and social exclusion have been depoliticised in policy discussions in the UK although the moral undertones of presenting social capital as an explanation of and solution to social exclusion remain. The connection between social capital, social exclusion and 'problem' communities is one of the subjects discussed in the next chapter that focuses on ideas and ideals of community.

Chapter 3

The problem of 'community'

3.1 Introduction

This is the second of two chapters setting out the theoretical and empirical background to this study. It is concerned with the concept of community, which has been variously described as 'an unproblematically good thing' (Nash 2002:1), 'stubbornly missing' (Bauman 2001:144), 'a mode of relating' (Calhoon 1988: 391), and a 'symbolic construction' (Cohen 1985). As commentators have often pointed out, the concept of 'community' has been much contested. Debates have tended to focus on three aspects: disagreements over definition; disagreements over the characteristics of types of community and the effects of wider social forces on these; and disagreements about methodology and specifically issues of validity and the generalisability of findings. This chapter is concerned with the first and second of these areas of contention. Methodological issues associated with the study of communities are addressed in Chapter 4.

Bell and Newby (1976) distinguished three connotations of the concept of 'community' as used by social scientists. The first was as a topographical term for a finite bounded area and was extended to the human settlement living within that bounded territory. The second use of the term was as a summary noun for the social connections and interaction between people living in the same area. This carries with it implications of mutual social involvement and integration as distinct from the more impersonal and fragmented notion of 'society'. A third and more recent use of the term community has been in the sense of communion; a particular type of close human association that is not necessarily connected with a place or local social system but involves shared feelings of personal ties and belonging. Communities of identity are distinguished by a shared characteristic that denotes membership and is sufficiently dominant to render other differences of less significance. With developments in technology and communications come suggestions of 'virtual communities' although the meaning or 'reality' of such interaction is problematic. An important feature of

all three definitions of community is the implication of smallness of scale and an associated intimacy.

As is apparent from the literature on social capital, slippage between different understandings of community is common. A fourth use of the term 'community' also occurs, particularly in social policy debates. This is community as an objective entity capable of independent and co-ordinated expression and action. The 1998 Government White Paper on neighbourhood renewal, for example, attributed the failure of previous initiatives to tackle deprivation partly on a tendency to:

"parachute solutions in from outside, rather than engaging local communities" (Social Exclusion Unit 1998)

Similarly, reviews of policing after the Stephen Lawrence enquiry and media coverage of murders such as that of Damilola Taylor refer to the response of the 'black community' or the 'local community' as a singular viewpoint that is readily accessible. Tony Blair's frequent use of 'community' with a variety of meanings has been observed. Delanty (2003) notes that in a speech to the British Labour Party annual conference in October 2001, the prime minister used the word 'community' seventeen times (Delanty 2003:154). The following extract from a speech about poverty made by Tony Blair in April 2002 shifts between the idea of the nation as a community and poor neighbourhoods as problematic communities:

"When I became Prime Minister, I promised action to tackle the divisions in our community. Divisions which are never starker than when looking at poor neighbourhoods. Communities where crime and drugs are rife, unemployment sky-high and businesses, shops and banks closed down."

Section 3.2 of this chapter traces the theoretical development of the concept of community from early concern with the impact of urbanisation and industrialisation on traditional forms of social association to communities of interest, communication communities, the global community and virtual communities. It is divided into three parts dealing with themes of supposed

characteristics of urban and rural communities; community as a normative and symbolic device; and community in a post-modern world. Section 3.3 explores associations made in recent policy documents between social exclusion, social capital and 'problem' communities and the chapter concludes with a brief summary.

3.2 Sociological concepts of community

Urban and rural communities

The roots of sociological exploration of community lay with speculation by nineteenth century theorists about the scale of change required of society as a social organism in the face of industrialisation, urbanisation, and social and geographical mobility. Tönnies, writing in 1887, famously described the close personal '*gemeinschaft*' social relationships present in homogeneous traditional societies and characterised by spontaneity, affection, and frequency of contact. He compared these with the impersonal '*gesellschaft*' relationships produced by the advanced division of labour. *Gesellschaft* relationships were individualistic, impersonal, calculative, competitive and contractual. Whilst rural populations identified with the place they lived, city-dwellers exhibited no such associations with or affection for a locality (Tönnies 1957).

This bipolar distinction between rural and urban environments was echoed in Durkheim's concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim 1893). Durkheim presented rural and specifically peasant life as based on common experiences that created a unity of values and vision and thus a collective consciousness. Such mechanical solidarity was not possible in the environment of a city since density of population required occupational specialisation and produced diversity of experience. Thus mechanical society precluded dissimilarity but organic solidarity depended on the existence and integration of difference into a collaborative and complex whole. Social relations became instrumental since each person depended on others to provide services required to maintain city life.

The writings of Tönnies, Durkheim and Weber present a comparison between two ideal types: modern industrialised cities and traditional rural societies. This contrast between seemingly separate historical entities was later developed by Wirth and the Chicago School into a critique of modern urban society, discussed below. Popular ideas of a rural idyll are based on a similar view. However, some commentators have argued that this is a simplistic reading of the earlier writings. Cohen (1985) cites passages by Durkheim that suggest he was presenting not features of distinct historical epochs but different and complementary forms of social organisation that might co-exist historically and geographically but reflect different levels of social interaction with different social purposes (Cohen 1985). Within this interpretation, mechanical solidarity represents “*a contrived symbolic expression of likeness - of communality*” that within Cohen’s central theme is “*tantamount to the symbolic construction of boundary*” (Cohen 1985: 25).

Wirth revived and developed the ideas of Tönnies, Durkheim and Weber; most notably in his 1938 essay *Urbanism as a Way of Life* (Wirth 1964). In this, Wirth described the defining characteristics of a city as possessing a large aggregate population, high population density, and heterogeneity of social backgrounds. The latter created a more differentiated framework of social stratification than found in less diverse societies. Diffusion of group loyalties exacerbated by patterns of mobility produced a high turnover in group membership. Specialised work roles also contributed to the production of segmental and impersonal social relationships. In order to cope emotionally with the crowded nature of cities, people developed the capacity to ignore what went on around them. The combination of emotional strain, caused by the social environment and drive for economic efficiency, and the impersonal nature of interactions led to social relations that were based on aversion or calculated gain. Thus urban populations experienced high levels of social isolation despite wide networks of acquaintance.

Empirical exploration of these ideas came from the Chicago School of sociologists who were influenced both by Durkheim’s concept of organic solidarity and social darwinian ideas regarding the role of ecological processes in the development of the city environment. Burgess used information on patterns

of land-use in Chicago in the 1920s to develop an ideal type representation of the modern urban form that demonstrated basic patterns of social segregation in modern cities. The expansion of economic activity and pressure on housing stock created recurring movements of people from one area into another leading to competition between different community groups (Park *et al*, 1967). A second important strand of the Chicago School's work was ethnographic studies of urban groups. Not only did these studies represent the first attempts to use anthropological techniques to explore developed society (Hannerz 1980) but they stemmed from an interest in 'sociation'; a concept developed largely by Simmel (1950). In contrast to definable and consistent structures, such as the state or family, sociation comprised of less conspicuous or tangible social ties. These constituted the informal ordering of social life including aspects such as conventions and moral codes. Such social bonds were considered particularly significant in the modern fragmented city in which family ties and other primary attachments had been eroded by the division of labour. This, together with an interest in social reform, explains the focus of many of the Chicago School's ethnographic studies on the disadvantaged, excluded and transient members of urban society such as taxi-hall dancers, 'hobos', drug addicts, and gang members. The focus on these groups was based on the premise that the existence and nature of social bonding among such socially unattached groups would provide insights into the changing nature of social interaction in modern urban environments (Savage and Warde 1993).

The conceptualisations of urban social life developed by Wirth and the Chicago School have been attacked on both macro-theoretical and empirical grounds. From a neo-Marxist perspective, writers such as Castells (1977) and Saunders (1981) have sought to reorientate urban sociology to concentrate on cities as centres of 'collective consumption'. Vehemently opposed to culturalist or evolutionary accounts of urban development, Castells emphasised the contemporary role of the state in organising consumption. The unequal distribution of such services, he argued, has led to the emergence of protest groups with revolutionary potential. Harvey provided an alternative Marxist analysis of the new 'placeless' urban environment as a rational product of the cyclical movement of economic capital (Harvey 1982, 1989). Governments work

in tandem with accumulated capital to modify the built environment creating suburban or metropolitan areas. Such investment results in conflicts of interest between the bourgeoisie and working classes over issues such traffic control or the cost and availability of housing. As investment in the built environment becomes less profitable, surplus capital moves back into the primary circuit thereby creating further social conflict through disinvestment.

Since the 1950s, empirical community studies in both urban and rural localities have challenged the theoretical dichotomy between the personal and supportive relationships ascribed to rural settings and the impersonal, unsupportive nature of urban society. Studies in deprived inner-city areas have identified close-knit communities or 'urban villages' characterised by neighbourliness, tradition, a strong moral order and a strong sense of community identity. In Young and Wilmott's well-known account of social life in Bethnal Green, kinship ties were found to be the crucial factor linking the individual to the wider community. Such links were absent in the isolated green field site to which some of the former residents of Bethnal Green had moved (Young and Wilmott 1957). Similarly Gans' study of Italian-Americans living in an inner-city working class area of Boston under threat of demolition identified tight social bonds and strong institutional norms although the women played a more central role in this local community than a significant proportion of the men (Gans 1962).

In later work, Gans questioned assumptions that lonely isolated people were particularly a feature of cities or that the city environment was responsible. Policy measures, such as the greater prevalence in urban settings of day-care facilities for people with mental health problems or the siting of social housing on the edge of cities or towns with few amenities, might provide alternative explanations. Gans thus argued that distinctions should be made between the experience of a sub-culture or sub-group and that of the urban environment *per se* (Gans 1968).

Such studies have demonstrated the possibility for traditional *gemeinschaft* social relationships to exist in urban settings. Other writers have emphasised the advantages of city life for fostering particular forms of 'community'. Fischer

(1975), for example, argued that the urban environment allowed minority groups to form community ties in a way that would be impossible in a village or small town. The critical mass of urban populations produced a diversity and strength of subcultures that in turn created urban unconventuality; generating both creative genius and deviance. Similarly, Wellman and others have presented a 'community liberated' model of urban social relations where supportive social networks rather than geographical proximity is deemed critical in creating a virtual community of interest. Social networks extending across a city provide a 'personal community' that is both spatially diffuse and heterogeneous (Wellman *et al* 1988).

Studies in rural areas have likewise challenged romanticised views of rural communities. Social relations in rural settings have been found in practice to be neither necessarily harmonious nor highly integrated (see for example Frankenberg 1957 and Williams 1963). Social class, rather than the rural setting, has often emerged as the dominant factor determining social relations and culture whether this is the observed deferential behaviour of East Anglian farm workers (Newby 1977) or community life in a Yorkshire colliery village (Dennis *et al* 1956). Newby found that the influx of urban dwellers to villages created appreciable social divisions by pushing the poorly paid rural labourers into enclaves in a village or outside it so that they were separated both geographically and socially (Newby 1977, 1979), a situation not unlike the edge of town housing estates described by Gans. Similarly Pahl's study of the Isle of Sheppey demonstrated the effects of industrial restructuring on creating a polarisation between 'work rich' and 'work starved' households in a predominantly rural environment (Pahl 1984). Thus rural settings are far from exempt from the negative effects of industrialisation that concerned Tönnies, Durkheim, and the sociologists of the Chicago School. Pahl's study also serves as a reminder of the problems of defining 'rurality' or 'urban' as uniform entities. This difficulty is reflected in the choice of seventeen possible classifications applicable to rural areas in Great Britain under the ONS Classification of Local and Health Authorities (Williams and Denham 1996). In conceptual terms, Frankenberg's notion of an urban-rural 'continuum' probably still offers the most useful solution to this complexity (Frankenberg 1966).

These debates provide illumination on two issues of particular relevance to this study. The first is as a reminder of the multiple definitions of 'community'. Communities as social entities may transcend geographical boundaries and geographical localities do not necessarily function as communities (Day and Murdoch 1993). These obvious points are largely absent from the literature on social capital. Secondly, a range of empirical work raises questions about the inevitability of difference between urban and rural environments. This is further complicated by the methodological problems associated with developing theories of community on the basis of case studies of unique environments observed as a rule by an outsider over a finite period. As critics of community studies have noted, findings are often not replicated even when a study is repeated in the same place some years later (Crow and Allan 1994). A related problem is that geographical communities rarely constitute complete or closed social systems so that it is uncertain what is being measured. (Stacey 1969).

Normative and symbolic meanings of community

Despite empirical evidence to the contrary, myths of a rural idyll - past if not present - have persisted (Laslett 1965, Newby 1979). Media portrayals of urban and rural life typically focus either on the lonely and impersonal nature of city society or on close-knit communities (urban or rural) that resemble villages. Expectations of respect, support and shared understanding with neighbours are, when disappointed, presented as issues of societal concern demonstrating the demise of 'community spirit'. Crow and Allan explain the persistence of the concept of community in the following way:

"a significant reason why the notion of community does have a salience for people is that it represents a term of social organisation which mediates between the personal and the institutional, between household and familial issues which many feel they have a degree of control over and the large-scale social and economic structures which are dominated by events and processes outside ordinary people's influence." (Crow and Allan 1994: 193)

This explanation does not seem altogether sufficient. Cornwell's descriptions of the differences between the public and private accounts of community provided

by interviewees in her 1984 study of East London provides further insights into the ideological significance of the concept. Interviewees' public accounts of living in the East End in the past frequently presented this as a lost golden age. Yet their private accounts of the same period described jealousies, competition, conflict and violence. Cornwell's attributed this inconsistency partly to the research situation in which interviewees were actively engaged in managing appearances (Goffman 1959, Cornwell 1984:13). The desire to be polite and give a good impression in the unfamiliar situation of being asked questions by a virtual stranger whom the interviewee views as an 'expert' results in a public account that omits aspects of community life considered rude or undesirable. As the researcher becomes better known to the interviewee and the style of conversation switches from questions and answers to story-telling, private accounts emerge. Cornwell also argued that people used romanticised images of the past to express dissatisfaction with aspects of the present reality and to make these tolerable. This is most evident in a context of social upheaval such as the evictions and temporary re-housing that accompanied slum clearance programmes. Interviewees' complained about contemporary selfishness, competitiveness and snobbery, which they contrasted with past 'norms' of good neighbourliness, friendliness and concern for others. Feelings of solidarity included a 'darker side' of intolerance of difference, including racial prejudice. Cornwell's concluded that:

"the real ideological significance of the idea of community in present-day East London lies in its opposition to everything that is new and different and to the possibility of change." (Cornwell 1984: 53)

Cohen's (1985) treatment of 'community' as a symbolic device provides a theoretical framework that makes sense of Cornwell's empirical findings. Influenced by Turner's conceptualisation of 'communitas' as the expression of the social life of society and characterised by transience, liminality and marginality (Turner 1969), Cohen defined community in terms of group awareness established through comparisons with other groups:

"culture - the community as experienced by its members - does not consist in social structure or in 'the doing' of social behaviour. It inheres, rather, in 'the thinking' about it. It is in this sense that we can think about the

community as a symbolic, rather than a structural, construct. In seeking to understand the phenomenon of community we have to regard its constituent social relations as repositories of meaning for its members, not as a set of mechanical linkages. Meaning, of course is ethnographically problematic. It is not susceptible to objective description, but only to interpretation. In this matter we can only aspire to informed speculation.” (Cohen 1985: 98)

Cohen further developed this argument to describe the symbolic meaning of community and specifically sensitivity to the distinctiveness of boundaries and ‘otherness’ as a referent of personal and group identity. As the geographical bases of community boundaries diminish or become indistinct, boundaries are re-established in symbolic terms.

A second strand of theory dealing with the symbolic and cultural dimensions of community comes from Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’; developed as a macro-level explanation for the spread of nationalism in early modern Europe and the attachment felt by individuals for a collective of which they would only ever know a tiny proportion of other members (Anderson 1991). This idea has been applied to a range of communities based on a shared characteristic such as religion, place, gender and science. It has also had a significant influence on more recent theories of community through its emphasis on the role of communications technology in promoting perceptions of solidarity (Anderson’s example is the printing press) and the identification of the constructing and dismantling of imagined communities as a key process in the reproduction of modern and post-modern society (Phillips 2002:600, Bauman 1992).

A third strand of writing associated with normative ideas of community is that of communitarianism. Most strongly associated with Etzioni, the central tenets of communitarianism are the social and cultural significance of geographically defined communities, the support of traditional forms of social relationship such as marriage and the family, and the need to revitalise both communities and social relationships through the re-establishment of an appropriate balance

between rights and obligations (Etzioni 1993, 1995, 1997). Communitarian ideas have, in common with social capital, attracted supporters from the right and left of the political spectrum. Blair and Clinton both used the language of communitarianism in the 1990s to distance themselves from the *laissez-faire* individualism of the new Right and the egalitarianism of the political Left. Fitzpatrick (2001) argues that this 'Third Way' solution has in fact increasingly accommodated a Neo-Liberal agenda that emphasises the rights and obligations of the disadvantaged and carried moral overtones of the 'undeserving poor' (Fitzpatrick 2001:182). Prominent critics of communitarianism have included Habermas (1998) and Touraine (1995) whilst Bauman (2001) has criticised nostalgia for community in contemporary society as a yearning for security that could only be achieved at a high cost to freedom.

'Community' in a post modern world

Theories addressing the emergence of new forms of 'community' in post-modern society have emphasised their fluidity, mobility (Urry 2001) and the role of communications technologies of various kinds in reconstituting social relations on a new footing (Castells 1997). Other commentators have cautioned against exaggerating the extent of change to social relations brought about by new technologies such as the internet, arguing instead that these facilitate communication with existing social networks rather than necessarily providing access to a new social world (Calhoun 1988, Delanty 2003).

3.3 Policy responses to social exclusion, social capital and 'problem communities'

The recent surge in policy interest in community and social capital, accompanied by a new wave of community studies (for example Nash and Christie 2003, Mumford and Power 2003), has stemmed from a number of factors. The first is the continuing influence of a communitarian emphasis on responsibilities over rights which is evident in Government rhetoric and policies in the areas of housing, regeneration, social security, criminal justice and education (Heron 2001). The second factor is a policy orientation towards reviving failing communities through support for the efforts of communities themselves

(‘partnership working’) rather than direct intervention by the state at national or local level. Thirdly, a favoured solution to socially excluded individuals and ‘problem communities’ is the route of paid employment, as evident in the New Deal programmes.

The concept of social capital fits Government priorities in two ways. Firstly, bridging social capital provides a means by which disadvantaged individuals and communities can, theoretically, access employment opportunities and other resources. Secondly, the aspects of social capital concerned with the establishment and maintenance of collective norms might be harnessed to the moral revival aspects of the communitarian agenda. The Social Exclusion Unit’s consultation document ‘National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal’ published in 2000 highlighted the links between unemployment and a decline in social capital through a proliferation of other social problems. This suggests an essential understanding of social capital as social cohesion:

“The cycle of decline for a neighbourhood almost always starts with a lack of work. This generates other social problems – crime, drugs, low educational attainment and poor health – all of which reinforce one another and speed local decline. The ‘social capital’ of local communities is undermined.” (Social Exclusion Unit 2000: 23)

In a speech to the Women’s Institute in June 2000, Blair brought together a communitarian view of community revival with a social integrationist approach to social exclusion as the solution to the challenges of a changing world:

“My argument to you today is that the renewal of community is the answer to the challenges of a changing world. The way we do it is to combine the old with the new, traditional British values of responsibility and respect for others; with a new agenda of opportunity for all in a changing world.”
(Blair, 2000:1)

Putnam’s conceptualisation of social capital offered the means to achieve both renewal and access to opportunity. The irony is that the Women’s Institute audience, the epitome of the kind of social association whose decline Putnam has

recorded in such detail (Putnam 2000), responded to this overtly political speech with slow hand clapping.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has explored different theoretical treatments of the concept of 'community' and offered a framework for understanding the relationship between the concepts of social capital, social exclusion and community renewal in the policy of the present UK Government. This, combined with the discussion of social capital and social exclusion set out in Chapter 2, comprise the theoretical context for the study whose findings form the basis for this thesis. Chapter 4, which follows, presents the research methods and methodology.

PART II

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 4

The research methods and methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methods used in the research and discusses methodological issues that arose during the study and in developing this thesis. Section 4.2 describes the research aims and provides a summary of the methods employed. This is followed in section 4.3 with a more theoretical discussion of methodological aspects including the value of a qualitative approach, the nature of data generated through in-depth interviews, and the value and limitations of a case study approach based on geographical locality. The criteria used to select the two research localities are outlined in section 4.4, together with a description of the characteristics of each. The conduct of the interviews is discussed in section 4.5 including the recruitment of interviewees, sample characteristics, the interview guide, ethical issues and my perceptions of researcher impact. The penultimate section of the chapter (section 4.6) describes the process of analysis and the ways in which treatment of the data as a multi-layered account has framed the findings. The chapter concludes with a summary assessment of the methods used. This paves the way for the analytical focus of Chapters 5 to 7 and the discussion in Chapter 8.

4.2 Research aims and methods

Underlying research questions

As outlined in Chapter 1 and discussed more fully in Chapter 2, this research originated from an unease concerning the treatment of social capital as an undifferentiated public good accessible to even the most socially isolated. I wanted to examine this assumption by exploring how people in situations associated with social isolation and the need for practical assistance accessed help outside immediate family and pre-existing friends. I also wanted to explore how this might vary between different stages of the life cycle and between men and women. I identified three life situations that I believed might illuminate these

issues. These situations were unemployment amongst teenagers, lone parenting, and a chronic disabling health condition.

A second methodological concern was the assumption inherent in much quantitative research that people living in the same place will have and report similar experiences of 'community'. This ignores the complex interaction between the characteristics of a place and the personal situation and accumulated experiences of individuals living there. It also treats the context of the interview as data-neutral and overlooks the sensitivity of common measures of social capital and aspects such as an area's reputation.

Thirdly, I wanted to explore the significance people themselves attach to neighbourhood and ideas of 'community'. I would then compare this with the academic literature and policy assumptions discussed in Chapter 3.

A fourth and final area of interest developed during the fieldwork and strengthened during analysis. This concerned the narrative nature of accounts of place. Interviewees often told stories and these seemed to serve a variety of interpretative and explanatory purposes. There were instances of several interviewees telling me about the same past event, which seemed to have acquired a collective symbolic significance. I became curious about the types of stories told, why the interviewee chose to tell that story at that point in the interview, and what it was about people's experiences and expectations of 'community' that elicited this form of talk.

Study aims

The specific aims for the study were as follows:

- a) to explore the ways in which women and men living in the same urban or rural locality experience aspects of social capital, social support and social exclusion;
- b) to explore the networks and social resources available to and used by women and men in the situation of being an unemployed teenager, a lone parent and/or having a chronic disabling health condition;

- c) to explore the ways in which the rural or urban nature of a locality affects the experiences and perceptions of those living there;
- d) to develop an understanding of how place, life situation, social structures and social resources interact in the lives of those interviewed;
- e) to consider the adequacy of current research tools for measuring social capital and social exclusion;
- f) to explore lay understandings of 'community'.

The relative importance of different aims changed as the research progressed. Aim e) has become less relevant since the publication of the Office for National Statistics' harmonised question set for social capital (Green and Fletcher 2003) although I believe that the findings remain of interest. I will return to these aims in the discussion in Chapter 8.

Ontological and epistemological positions

It was clear from the outset that the kinds of questions I wanted to explore required an in-depth approach that would capture as much contextual information as possible. This suggested qualitative rather than quantitative methods. This choice was reinforced by my ontological orientation towards a symbolic interactionist position that treats people's experiences, perceptions and understanding as meaningful and offering valuable insights into the lived experience of society (Becker 2001), including society encountered in one's neighbourhood. This holds true even when accounts are contradictory. I have also found social constructionist and post-modernist viewpoints helpful when considering the interaction between place and self notwithstanding the controversies surrounding the application of either to policy areas (Burningham and Cooper 1999, Taylor-Gooby 1994). It is inevitably a delicate balance between giving due acknowledgement to the situational nature of accounts and avoiding relativism.

Epistemologically, I approach research interviews of all kinds as forms of social exchange in which data is generated through the interaction between the researcher and interviewee. This is particularly true of the co-authoring of narratives during in-depth interviews but applies to other research methods where

a researcher is involved as questioner or audience and to all forms of analysis. Whilst I have not particularly focused the analysis on the nature of those interactions, I have sought to be reflexive throughout the research process and will return to the theme of researcher impact at the end of section 4.5.

Summary of the research design

The research was designed as a comparative study situated in two localities in north Kent. One locality was urban and equivalent to an electoral ward in size. The other was rural and comprised of a single village. Both localities scored highly on measures of socio-economic disadvantage.

The main research method was 49 interview occasions involving 69 men and women from the two localities (details given on pages 72-73). The sampling strategy aimed to maximise representation of people in the situations of:

- teenage unemployment
- lone parenting
- having a chronic and disabling health condition.

Interview data was supplemented by documentary information about the two localities and field notes. The fieldwork and interviews took place between June 2000 and December 2001. The research methods are discussed in more depth in sections 4.4 to 4.6 of this chapter.

4.3 Methodological considerations

The characteristics of a qualitative approach

As is often noted, qualitative approaches to social research encompass a wide range of research methods and analytical techniques. Materials as varied as documents, visual images, interview transcripts, and field notes of participant and non-participant observation are used as data. Analytical approaches include grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Strauss and Corbin 1994), 'transcendental realism' (Miles and Huberman 1994), narrative analysis (Labov 1972, Riessman 1993, Lieblich *et al* 1998), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), conversation analysis (Sacks 1992, Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998) and discourse

analysis (Gilbert and Mulkey 1984, Potter and Wetherell 1987). Within sociology, qualitative research is strongly associated with the interpretivist tradition but also draws on developments in other disciplines including anthropology, linguistics, psychology, human geography and oral history. As Mason (2002) points out, this range of philosophical underpinnings and methodological practices is accompanied by different ideas about the nature of the social world and the epistemological limits of empirical research. Punch (1998) refers to these as alternative paradigms embracing positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism, with sub-categories in each.

Despite the array of approaches described as qualitative research, some common elements can be identified. Qualitative research is generally associated with a rejection of positivist models of society and accompanying reliance on surveys as the main research method. Although debates over issues such as validity demonstrate underlying sensitivity to comparisons with the physical sciences, qualitative researchers are usually more concerned with exploring experience and meaning than ascertaining social 'facts'. The social world that qualitative research addresses is complex and multi-layered. A qualitative approach might explore aspects such as how people experience and make sense of society or specific phenomena such as discrimination or illness, the pathways that lead to particular actions, or the production of social rules and norms.

The way in which theory is developed and used also differs between quantitative and qualitative approaches. In qualitative research, theory is most often generated inductively. Particular instances or concepts are identified in the data and abstract theory develops out of exploring the interrelationships between these. Quantitative research largely employs deductive reasoning whereby research is used to modify or refute hypotheses that have already been generated through existing knowledge or supposition. This division is not entirely clear-cut since as Punch (1998) argues there is still a need in qualitative research for the verification of existing theory.

As described earlier, qualitative research makes use of varied types of data and employs equally diverse analytical tools. A common characteristic of qualitative

research is its flexibility and orientation towards research in 'natural' social contexts in contrast to standardised questionnaires or experimental research. This lays qualitative research open to charges of researcher bias: by being present in the research setting, through the non-random selection of subjects and data, or in the subjective nature of observation and analysis. These criticisms are discussed further overleaf.

Qualitative researchers have also questioned the power relationship between the researcher and the researched, arguing that the exchange of information should be two-way and research should become a more participatory act at all stages. Feminist social researchers in the 1980s were particularly vocal on this point. Oakley (1981) argued that all research was inherently political and the standard treatment of interviewees exploitative. For researchers who were feminists this amounted to compliance with the subordination of women in patriarchal capitalist societies. Oakley advocated an alternative approach whereby the interviewer would answer questions when asked, reformulate their role from obtaining the information required by the research into one of facilitating the interviewee to tell her story, and be guided by a tenet of 'no intimacy without reciprocity' (Oakley 1981: 49; see also Finch 1993). However, such assumptions of automatic solidarity between women by virtue of gender have been attacked as minimising other differences between researchers and interviewees in terms of social class, ethnicity, sexuality and other characteristics (Seale 1999). The association between a feminist stance and particular forms of research remains a live issue (Letherby 2004, Oakley 2004). Debates over the relationship between the researcher and researched highlight the need to consider ethical issues in a broader sense than criteria such as anonymity, confidentiality and protection from harm.

The general characteristics of qualitative research described above – diversity of approaches and tools, emphasis on context, expectations of complexity, flexibility in the generation of data, an inductive approach to theory and a non-hierarchical attitude towards the participants – provide a good fit with the aims of this study and my ontological and epistemological positions. However, this also renders the research open to criticisms commonly levelled at qualitative research.

Probably the most fundamental of these is the question of validity, discussed below. This is followed by a consideration of the generalisability of community studies and the treatment of interview transcripts as data.

Establishing validity and reliability

The extent to which qualitative research methods are capable of producing 'valid' findings of general application has been much debated, as has the meaning of validity outside a quantitative paradigm (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Atheide and Johnson 1994, Seale 1999). Lacking the features used to safeguard and demonstrate validity in quantitative research (such as probability based sampling strategies, sample size, standardised research tools, minimal researcher input and statistical estimates of error), qualitative researchers have long asserted that an interpretivist approach will generate more 'accurate' data than quantitative methods through the avoidance of false correlations and inclusion of greater complexity (LeCompte and Goetz 1982, Miles and Huberman 1994, Becker 2001). Termed by some 'postpositivism' (Seale 1999: 22), this position shares many of the assumptions and concerns of positivist research. These include the existence of a social reality that can be accessed given appropriate research tools and the treatment of validity and reliability as stable criteria that should be applied consistently across social research.

The parameters of this debate have been challenged by what Denzin and Lincoln have termed a 'double crisis' in qualitative research (1994). These authors cite postmodernist arguments concerning the fragmented nature of society and the existence of multiple selves and 'realities' and argue that these render objective empirical study and generalisation both impossible and pointless. At the same time 'scientific' approaches and concepts had become discredited through social constructionist analyses of practices within the physical sciences.

For branches of qualitative research such as ethnomethodology that are concerned with the form rather than content of social interaction, this debate is largely irrelevant since the focus is on internal reality. Similarly for sociologists working from a post-modernist position, validity will always be subjective. Denzin himself has adopted the position that writing is itself a form of

representation and ethnographic accounts will always be allegorical. What matters is that the written account should provide sufficient detail for 'interpretive sufficiency' so that the individual reader can form his or her own critical consciousness (Denzin 1997: 283-4).

Most recent social research methods textbooks adopt a pragmatic approach towards this debate (for example Hammersley 1992, Coffey and Atkinson 1996, Mason 2002, Seale 1999, Silverman 2001). The frequency of calls for greater rigour and transparency in the conduct and presentation of qualitative research suggests that Denzin and Lincoln's designation of a 'crisis' may not be an exaggeration. It may also reflect a desire to differentiate academic social research from market research.

Mason (2002) argues that qualitative research should demonstrate intellectual rigor, active reflexivity on the part of the researcher, the production of social explanations that have resonance beyond the particular study, and adherence to ethical practice. Seale (1999: 45) supports Lincoln and Guba (1985)'s notion of an 'audit trail' that allows the reader to critically follow a study's procedures and assumptions. This has similarities with Denzin's idea of 'interpretive sufficiency' mentioned above (Denzin 1997). Triangulation (Denzin 1970) and member validation are other aspects of research design that are frequently cited as increasing or safeguarding validity. Silverman (2001), however, argues that the focus when assessing rigour in qualitative research should be on analytical methods rather than external validation devices. He identifies analytical induction, the constant comparison method, deviant case analysis, comprehensive data treatment and the inclusion of numerical data to quantify the frequency of occurrences as essential components of qualitative analysis (Silverman 2001: 236).

In many ways the debate over validity and reliability remains unresolved or perhaps irresolvable except in pragmatic terms of providing a detailed, transparent and reflexive account of the research process. In a community study, some details may need to be withheld in order to protect the anonymity of location and participants.

Studies of community

Several features of the debates about what constitutes validity for qualitative research are repeated in discussions concerning the extent to which case studies can and should generate findings that are of general application. These include varied philosophical responses to a positivist model of inquiry, an emphasis on transparency and the recognition that tacit understanding acquired during research is inevitably transformed by the act of representation or narrative.

A compilation of papers from a conference held in 2000 illustrates these themes (Gomm *et al* 2000). For Stake (2000), case studies offered the possibility of 'naturalistic generalisation'. The detailed account of the particular added to existing experience and understanding in the same way that people use experience to build up expectations of what may happen rather than predictions of what will (Stake 2000: 24). In contrast, Lincoln and Guba (2000) disputed the rationale that posited generalisation as the goal of empirical inquiry but nevertheless identified the value of case studies in producing working hypotheses for comparison with similar cases. Donmoyer (2000) emphasised the usefulness of identifying differences between cases. All these viewpoints stressed the importance of presenting 'thick' descriptions to allow comparison. They also steered clear of claiming that case studies in isolation can generate theory for general application.

This same issues concerning generalisability have haunted community studies since their heyday in the 1950s and 1960s (Frankenberg 1966). An additional problem is the fact that communities are rarely bounded entities in the way that schools or other institutions may be. Margaret Stacey described this phenomenon in these terms:

"A complete social system in which all institutions are present and inter-related is an ideal type. In practice all social systems are partial in the sense that not all sub-systems are present, or not all are interconnected if present, or both. Empirically, in any one geographically defined locality, the likelihood is that there will either be no local social system, or some kind of partial local social system." (Stacey 1969: 140)

Payne (1996) identified other problems with community studies. One of these was the tendency in research accounts to focus on the positive rather than negative features of community life. He phrased this as ‘why are people so nice?’ Other issues concerned the extent of real access achieved and the adequacy of coverage of all aspects of community life:

“Problems common to most sociological endeavours manifest themselves in a more extreme form when combined with the spatial and logistic peculiarities of communities. Whilst it is generally true that all researchers struggle to gain full access and to collect sufficient data in the time available, the problem is exacerbated in a community study.”
(Payne 1996: 30)

Payne argued that such obstacles increased the uncertainty in deciding whether a research finding applied to ‘all’ communities. He concluded that the value of community studies depended less on their generalisability than in their effect on sociology as a discipline by highlighting new issues of concern to lay people, demonstrating the variability of local subcultures and bringing academics into contact with social life in the round.

These criticisms of community studies resonate with my own experiences during this study. I became aware early on in the fieldwork that my research notes would not amount to a full ethnographic study of either locality however much time I spent at public meetings, community events and groups, and chatting informally to people I met. One obstacle was that I had decided for various reasons not to live in either locality during the fieldwork phase; a decision I later regretted. This meant that I probably missed much in terms of informal association and although I developed a superficial understanding of local social relationships, at least in the rural locality, this was heavily influenced by what I was told rather than observed. Unsurprisingly I found it easier to access some groups (such as women with young children) than others (teenagers) and relied on gatekeepers to locate interviewees in some categories. As I will describe in Chapter 6, distinctions between old and new villagers found in earlier community studies such as Strathern’s study of Elmdon in the 1960s (Strathern 1981) were still present in the rural locality in 2001 although in a different form. The

possibility therefore of my becoming fully integrated into village life in the space of six to twelve months was clearly untenable. There were other barriers to integration in the urban locality, notably a larger population and more fragmented social connections.

Despite these limitations, I remain convinced of the value of situating the research in specific localities both for the reasons identified by Payne (1996) and those outlined in section 4.2. Whilst I might not have acquired a full knowledge or understanding of the locality through ethnographical methods, my observations and attendance at local events did inform the way I approached the interviews and assisted in the recruitment of interviewees. I will return to the issue of generalisability in Chapter 8.

Qualitative interviews as data

The final methodological issue to be discussed before moving on the conduct of the research itself is the treatment of interview transcripts as data. The decision to use semi-structured and unstructured interviews as the main research tool seemed natural given my interest in individuals' experiences and perceptions of their locality. There are, however, two problems with this assumption.

The first problem is represented by Silverman's criticism of the over-reliance in qualitative research on interviews as a research tool (Silverman 2001). He associates this with the observation that we live in an 'interview society' (Atkinson and Silverman 1997) in which interviews appear to offer real insights into subjective experience. The preoccupation of 'emotionalist' researchers with the establishment of rapport through in-depth interviews stems from their central goal of accessing 'authentic' lived experience; a key component of which is emotion. This approach has been criticised by positivists on the grounds of subjectivity and bias, and by social constructionists for failing to distinguish between the expression of emotion and its reality (Gubrium and Holstein 1997).

A second problem is how to deal analytically with the role of the researcher in qualitative interviews. This is illustrated by the following exchange that occurred in an early interview with a female resident (UF7) in the urban locality:

JANE: It's not too bad. It has its moments.

S.E.: Does it?

JANE: When we first moved in it was terrible, very rough and ready.

Moved in here September 25th '92.

S.E.: What sorts of things were happening?

JANE: Fights....

From the point of view of interview technique, the exchange seems reasonable. The researcher is expressing interest and inviting more information without asking leading questions. An alternative analysis, however, would note that the narrative unfolds in stages with Jane pausing after each phrase to check that what she is saying is relevant and interesting before proceeding. Verbal ('does it?') and no doubt non-verbal encouragement from the listener moves the narrative on. A different exchange might have produced a different account. The story that followed this initial exchange is discussed in Chapter 7.

Social constructionists offer an alternative approach to understanding interview data to either positivism or emotionalism. They treat interviewer and interviewee as active participants in the production of a shared account (Holstein and Gubrium 1997). However, they do not go as far as ethnomethodologists in focusing exclusively on the co-production of talk. Rather, social constructionists attempt to explore interviews as both topic and resource; how meaning is constructed and how what is being said relates to people's everyday lives (Silverman 2001).

Similar debates occur within narrative analysis. Lieblich *et al* (1998) distinguish between modes of analysis that examine the story as a whole and those which focus on the occurrence of specific categories, and between a concern with content and an interest in form. This produces four possible approaches: holistic-content, holistic-form, categorical-content, categorical-form (Lieblich *et al* 1998: 13). Labov's seminal work identifying the structural elements of a core narrative (Labov 1972) is an example of the holistic-form mode. Riessman's application of a poetic structural approach to narratives of divorce (Riessman 1990a, 1993) is more difficult to place extending as it does from an interest in the form and

language to the political context in which the narrative arises. Different approaches to narrative also deal with the interaction between teller and listener in different ways.

As I became immersed in the process of analysis and struck by the narrative nature of interviewees' accounts, it became evident that I would need to adopt something of a social constructionist position and explore both what the interviewees were saying and how they said it. This applied to the factual content of the interviews and to the use of stories.

4.4 Selection of the research localities

Criteria for selection

The process of selecting the two research localities took approximately three months (from April to June 2000) and involved visits to the Kings' Fund library and libraries in Kent to access background information and reports and strategy documents from statutory agencies. This produced a short list of possible localities. I then talked to contacts in the general area and visited the short listed wards.

My eventual selection was influenced by four considerations:

- (i) the economic circumstances and social history of the localities;
- (ii) characteristics that were 'typical' in some way of urban or rural environments;
- (iii) an identity that had meaning to those living there;
- (iv) accessibility for me as researcher.

These criteria fit reasonably well with the mixture of theoretical and practical considerations advocated by Miles and Huberman (Miles and Huberman 1994 discussed in Curtis *et al* 2000).

One of the criteria used to select the two localities was a context of economic disadvantage and social change or uncertainty. This was based on the supposition that higher income provides a social buffer in a variety of ways. It allows people greater choice in where they live and the ability to move when a neighbourhood

fails to provide what they want. Income gives an option of obtaining practical help through payment rather than depending on the good will of family and neighbours. It is also well documented that lower income areas are disproportionately affected by crime, traffic, pollution and other factors detrimental to environment (Curtis and Rees Jones 1998, Huby 1998).

The decision to situate the research in Kent stemmed partly from my familiarity with the county having lived there for most of my life. The main reason, however, for choosing Kent was that it offered greater economic diversity than other areas to which I could feasibly commute. Whilst Kent serves as a commuter belt for London, the size of the county and its extensive coast line have historically led to the development of industrial areas and a rural economy that are largely unconnected with the capital. Deprivation indicators published in 1996 suggested that, among counties in the south-east, Kent had the highest level of deprivation in many categories and was exceeded only by East Sussex in others (Kent County Council 1996).

Two main documentary sources were used to assist in selection of the research localities. The first was the application of the ONS Classification of Local Authority Districts and Health Authorities to data from the 1991 Census (Williams and Denham 1996). The second was a report by Kent County Council based on the Department of Environment Index of Local Conditions (Kent County Council 1996).

The ONS classification system provides a multi-level approach to classifying and grouping geographical areas on the basis of characteristics such as population density, dominant employment types, and indicators of deprivation. It is intended to identify broadly similar areas that may be geographically distant and to track changes in area types over time. Using the ONS classifications, Kent divides economically into three areas. The greatest concentration of prosperity is in west Kent. The east and southeast of the county mainly comprise of seaside resorts, retirement locations and a mixture of agriculture and redundant industry, notably the East Kent coalfields. North Kent presents a more mixed economy based around expanding urban centres. The ONS classification suggests that districts in

the east and southeast of Kent typically have an older and ageing population, an employment sector geared towards finance and service industries, and above-average scores for unemployment, lone parents, lone carers, and households without cars. Districts in north Kent are described as being nearer the national average with more mixed patterns of employment and above-average indicators of both deprivation and prosperity. The urban centres in which my eventual urban locality was situated are classified as 'New and Expanding Towns' characterised by a younger population, higher levels of female employment, and greater prosperity. Yet these include areas of decline and deprivation within an overall environment of change.

The ONS classification system is necessarily generalised and based on census data that was nine years old when I began the research. Nevertheless, it is useful in highlighting a dichotomy between a context of economic growth and a characteristically young population in north Kent, and economic stability or stagnation and an older and ageing population in east/south-east Kent. My inclination on theoretical grounds was to situate the research in a context of economic change rather than stability. This inclination was reinforced by the practical consideration of the additional travelling time to east Kent. A third factor was that the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at the London School of Economics was already carrying out a longitudinal study in Thanet - the most deprived area of east Kent - as part of the ESRC-funded 12 Areas Study (Glennerster *et al* 1999). I did not wish to jeopardise my chances of interviews by recruiting in the same area nor run the risk of over-researching Thanet or a part of its population.

In developing a more detailed picture of deprivation at district and ward level, I used information from *People in need: a guide to deprivation in Kent* published by Kent County Council in 1996. This again relied mainly on data from the 1991 Census and used chi-square as a measure of deprivation against a national average despite that statistic's known sensitivity to sample size. Another problem is that ward level data is insufficiently detailed for rural localities since a number of villages combine to form a single ward and extremes in income may be masked. Despite these limitations, I found the indicator sets useful in

distinguishing between different types of deprivation and measuring the extent of deprivation among particular vulnerable population groups. They also highlighted the fact that far fewer rural wards had above-average scores for deprivation compared with urban wards.

These indicators of overall deprivation were used to compile short-lists of urban and rural wards in north Kent. I then visited the short-listed wards to look for features that might render the locality 'atypical' of an urban or rural environment. I discounted urban wards that comprised of isolated edge-of-town council estates whose only local facilities were purpose built for the estate. I also discounted 'rural' wards that were so close to an urban settlement that it was difficult to distinguish the boundary between the two. This was clearly a subjective process but it did assist in clarifying my existing assumptions about how the rural or urban nature of a locality might be significant for the nature of local social interaction. Density of population, geographical isolation, and types of employment emerged as three features of rural or urban environments that might fundamentally affect opportunities for acquaintance and the types of social relations that develop in a locality.

A final consideration in selecting the research localities was the extent to which the locality had an identity that meant something to those living there. This was a criterion used in four studies of neighbourhood published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Anderson *et al* 1999, Cattell and Evans 1999, Silburn *et al* 1999, Wood and Vamplew 1999. See also Ross *et al* 2004). Whilst it could be argued that lack of such an identity is a feature of post-modern urban environments, I was concerned not to prejudice the urban-rural comparison by choosing an urban locality that had no natural identity other than as an administrative unit for electoral purposes. An unplanned consequence of this decision was that the identity of the urban locality eventually selected stemmed from its origins as a village: a true 'urban village' although not in the sense used by Gans (1962). The change from a rural to urban environment in that locality had occurred during the lifetime of older residents and emerged as a significant theme in some interview accounts.

The characteristics of the two localities

In describing the characteristics of the two localities, I am faced with a conflict between providing a thick description for the purposes of transparency and protecting anonymity. One of the assurances to interviewees and informants, conveyed verbally and in the consent form at Appendix G, was that the identity of the two localities would not be disclosed.

The urban locality

The urban locality had an adult population of approximately 5000 residents. It was in the top twelve most deprived wards in Kent (Kent County Council 1996) with particularly high scores for economic deprivation, educational deprivation, and deprivation among older residents. The housing stock was mixed in age and tenure, having developed over the previous 150 years in response to changing employment patterns. Social housing had been built in waves in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s as the needs of the local population grew. House prices in the urban locality were lower than in other parts of the urban area, which was itself an area of low cost housing compared with much of Kent. The closure in 1984 of a major heavy industry (situated outside the locality) decimated male employment in the urban area in which the locality was situated although service industry jobs had grown subsequently. Interviewees were sensitive to the locality's negative reputation for crime and other social problems.

A busy main road ran through the centre of the ward, which was further divided by steep inclines on either side of this thoroughfare. The village identity was confined to a row of shops and a pub at the end of the ward furthest from the town centre. Communal facilities in the locality comprised of a single church and church hall, a community centre in another part of the ward, a library, a post office, four pubs and a Co-op club, one primary care practice, and a large piece of wasteland that was been transformed into a community park with a children's playground. At the time of fieldwork, 14 of the 60 commercial premises on the main road were boarded up. There was a primary school and secondary school within the ward, a housing facility for homeless young people and a nursing home. A redundant hospital site was being redeveloped for housing and new housing had recently opened on the site of the old bus station.

Although the locality had a distinct identity, interviewees had differing views on where one of its boundaries fell. This was linked to whether they felt a housing estate on the edge of the locality should be included or not. Interviewees from the estate in question said that it fell within the locality (which in fact it did in terms of ward and parish boundaries) whilst those who lived elsewhere in the ward tended to exclude it. The personal significance of a place's reputation for the people living there is discussed in Chapter 6.

The rural locality

The ward in which the rural locality was located was in the top five most deprived rural wards in Kent (although in the top 75 for all wards) with a particularly high score for economic deprivation. The locality had an adult population of approximately 1000. It was geographically remote, approximately 15 miles from the nearest urban centres and served by a one road. The surrounding countryside was a mixture of agricultural and industrial usage. Agriculture no longer provided much employment for residents of the village and a major heavy industrial site that had led to a trebling of the village population in the mid-1950s closed in 1982. A railway line that serviced the industrial site and was available for use by the villagers closed shortly afterwards. This was followed by the closure of a second local industry employer in the late 1980s. At the time of research there were approximately 580 houses in the village of mixed age and tenure. The layout of the locality resembled a triangle with the main road into the village branching out into two roads. Most of the housing was located in side roads between the two. House prices in the village were cheap for north Kent. The particular nature of the surrounding area meant that no building could take place beyond the village boundaries.

Communal facilities in the village comprised of a church, a village hall, visits from a mobile library, a post office, one pub, a primary care practice, and a large area of common land with a children's playground. A second pub had been pulled down for redevelopment as housing and a social club had also recently closed. There were three general stores, a butcher's and a fish and chip shop. The village had its own primary school but children had to travel nine miles to the nearest secondary school.

The locality had a distinct identity and there was no disagreement between interviewees concerning its boundaries. Interviewees did, however, have different perceptions of the village's reputation. One informant who worked in the village in a professional capacity told me that low housing costs and local authority housing policy had brought urban 'gangland' families into the village with an associated increase in violence and drug-related problems. Other residents described it as an oasis against such problems in wider society. There were also different opinions concerning the proximity, measured in driving time, of the nearest urban centres and how this reflected on the desirability of the location.

Similarities between the two localities

Despite the many differences between the two localities, they shared some common features. Most notable was a history of industrial growth followed by decline and closure. Heavy industry had brought employment and an expansion in housing and population to both localities. When these industries were subsequently closed down the populations did not decline significantly but had to travel further for work. Both localities scored relatively highly on indicators of economic disadvantage. A second shared characteristic was that house prices in both localities were cheap for the wider area and this contributed to population mobility. Interviewees in both places complained about projects to build more housing on derelict land. Residents of both places felt that social housing in their neighbourhood was used as a dumping ground by the local authority to accommodate people who had no family links with the locality and brought social problems with them. Thirdly, the populations of both places were predominantly white although there was a small Asian population in the urban locality and Kosovan and other refugees. Both localities had Romany associations although these were rarely mentioned in local histories or local authority policy documents. Finally, as discussed earlier, the urban locality had been a village within the lifetime of older residents. Although never as physically isolated as the rural locality, this history nevertheless provided something of a shared repertoire when describing change.

Getting to know the localities

Although this was not a full ethnographic study, I spent a considerable amount of time becoming familiar with the physical layout of the localities, mapping the location of shops and community amenities, and attending public events, meetings and community groups. I was present in one or other locality on an average of three days per week during the fieldwork stage of the research, although this varied depending on where I was in the cycle of recruitment and interviews, and other commitments.

I attended regular meetings of community groups (mainly parents and toddlers groups, over 60s clubs and church services), ad-hoc meetings mainly concerned with neighbourhood watch or tenants' association matters, and a public open-air event in each locality. I also visited an unemployment support centre, a specialist housing facility for young people and a multiple sclerosis support group. An anonymised list of organisations and individuals contacted is at Appendix A.

I generally attended meetings with the prior knowledge and agreement of the organiser(s). Where this was not possible, I introduced myself afterwards. I also explained why I was there to anyone to whom I talked. Nevertheless, there was an element of covertness in my conduct since I tried to be as unnoticeable as possible. I usually sat at the back, took minimal notes and played no active role. I used those occasions to observe social interactions, become acquainted with local issues that I could follow up in interviews and recruit interviewees. An unanticipated consequence was that on two occasions I witnessed an exchange that was later described to me by interviewees in different ways. This gave me an insight into the creation of narrative.

Foot and mouth disease

Fieldwork in the urban locality began in June 2000 and ended in December 2001 with a break from August 2001 to November 2001. I had originally intended to begin fieldwork in the rural locality in March 2001 so that I would be able to incorporate any new themes from the rural setting in the remaining urban interviews. However, the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in England in February 2001 brought this timetable into question. The dilemma became

material in the second week of March when cases of foot and mouth disease were found on a farm in North Kent. Television coverage emphasised its isolated location:

“It’s very, very isolated. There are no surrounding cases in Sussex or Surrey and yet somehow or other it’s arrived on the farm and what the farmer is saying, he’s had no contact with Northumberland where the outbreak is suspected as starting from and this therefore must have been wind borne. It’s come direct from Essex from the abattoir there, borne on the wind.” (BBC television news, March 2001)

The MAFF website confirmed that the affected farm was in the rural locality of this study. A second farm bordering the locality was later affected. As a result I decided to delay fieldwork in the rural locality until the end of the outbreak. My assessment was that I would be unwelcome on farms and possibly in the village at this time and there was a remote but real possibility that I (or my car) could spread infection. The tone and imagery contained in the media coverage of the outbreak no doubt influenced my perceptions of the risks.

Fieldwork eventually commenced in the rural locality in June 2001 and finished at the end of December 2001. A consequence of this delay was that the sample of rural interviewees was smaller than intended. Interviewees’ descriptions of the foot and mouth outbreak are discussed in Chapter 7.

4.5 The Interviews

Life situation and gender

This research is based on the premise that how an individual experiences and perceives the place where they live is likely to be affected by a wide range of factors. These factors may include their age, life stage, gender, domestic situation, whether they are parents, their health, employment history, economic resources, the history of the individual’s residence in the neighbourhood, the location of kin, relations with kin, relations with neighbours and the nature of the person’s social networks. Cattell’s typology of social networks in two housing estates in East London (Cattell 2001) provides a good illustration of this complexity.

In view of debates concerning social capital as an individual resource or public good, I chose in this study to concentrate on three situations likely to be associated with a need for practical help or information. My assumption was that such assistance might not always be available within the individual's immediate social circle and this would test looser community bonds. Theoretical and policy considerations influenced the choice of teenage unemployment, lone parenting, and a chronic disabling health condition as the three situations for comparison.

The use of social networks to secure employment has long been of sociological and economic interest (Granovetter 1973, Grieco 1987) and remains a central theme in the current UK Government's approach to social exclusion and social capital (Levitas 1998, Performance and Innovation Unit 2002). The requirement may be for information, personal recommendation or a combination of the two.

Government policy on lone parenting has tended to be directed either towards encouraging entry into paid employment, to reduce economic hardship and reliance on state benefits, or towards improving parenting skills to reduce juvenile delinquency and break a cycle of cross-generational deprivation. Much less attention has been paid to practical and emotional support outside working hours or what in other circumstances would be termed respite care.

The choice of chronic disabling illness as the third life situation of interest was based partly on the richness of the academic literature in this field. The maintenance, disruption or transformation of social networks during ill health and the onset of disability has been highlighted as a core element in biographical disruption and reconstruction (Bury 1982, Charmaz 1987, Carricaburu and Pierret 1995). Similarly, analyses of illness narratives (Williams 1984, Bury 2001) offer a potentially useful model for understanding narratives of community malaise. An additional factor was that the three situations chosen, although not mutually exclusive, are most commonly associated with different life stages.

A further dimension for comparison was that of gender. Studies suggest that men and women tend to access social support in different ways but the implications for access to or possession of social capital are uncertain. Sixsmith and Boneham (2002), for example, argue that men are often excluded from community spaces

in which social capital is manifest and this contributes to their isolation from health enhancing social networks. This argument runs counter to feminist critiques of gendered power relations within society (Walby 1990) and other work emphasising the health costs as well as benefits of involvement in close social networks (Blaxter and Poland 2002).

Types of interview

It was intended that interviewees would mainly be interviewed alone in order to focus on the individual's views and experiences and to protect confidentiality. However it was anticipated that some people might prefer to be interviewed with a friend or family member and this possibility was offered in the information leaflet for the research (see Appendix B). It was hoped that this might encourage young people in particular to be interviewed. Shared interviews also offered the analytical possibility of exploring how collective accounts of place and community emerge through exchanges between participants. This resulted in a range of interview types taking place on 49 occasions with 69 people contributing. Details are given below.

Interviews with a single interviewee

As set out in Table 1 below, the majority of interviews (32 out of a total of 49 interviews) involved a single adult interviewee. Pre-school aged children were present during eight of these interviews.

Table 1: Type of Interview (n=49)

	single interviewee	interviewee plus gatekeeper	couple	family	2 friends	3 friends	4 friends	large group
Urban (n=29)	18	2	4	1	2	1	1	-
Rural (n=20)	14	-	2	-	1	2	-	1
Total	32	2	6	1	3	3	1	1

Interviews that included a gatekeeper

In two interviews in the urban locality, a gatekeeper remained present during the interview but said little. The interviewees were men aged 75 and 87 respectively who knew the gatekeeper well through his research on local history and they appeared reassured by his presence. I was myself grateful for his intervention during one of the interviews when the interviewee seemed very tired and I was uncertain whether to continue. It is unlikely that I would have achieved either interview without the gatekeeper and his presence seemed to be the condition attached to this assistance. His verbal contributions were minimal.

Interviews with couples

On six occasions (four in the urban locality and two in the rural locality), I interviewed a married couple together. For two of these interviews (both in the urban locality), the contacts came through another interviewee and I felt it would be useful to the research to interview both husband and wife. These interviews involved sections of conversation with each partner by themselves and a joint conversation. On the other four occasions I had arranged to interview one partner and the other was brought into the conversation by the interviewee.

Family interview

One interview (in the urban locality) involved a couple and their son and daughter who had both left school but were still living in the family home. I had arranged to interview the husband but was aware that his wife had a disabling health condition and would therefore be a suitable interviewee on that or another occasion. I was invited into the front room where the family was watching television and the clear expectation was that everybody would be involved in the conversation. The interview turned out to be particularly illuminating because of the interactive nature of the data.

Interviews with friends

Two interviews (one in each locality) involved two women who were friends and had noticed the reference in the leaflet to the possibility of joint interviews. A further four interviews were held with groups of three or four friends. Three of these interviews involved young people aged 15 to 21 (2 groups of young men

and one mixed group) and on two of these occasions an adult gatekeeper was also present. The fourth interview involved a woman in her 80s who received two visitors during the interview. These visitors were drawn into the conversation by the interviewee culminating in a three-way exchange. Ironically, the original interviewee had described to me earlier how socially isolated she felt.

Group interview

I also facilitated something approaching a focus group in the rural locality involving approximately 15 female members of an Over 60s Club. I had been invited to attend the club's weekly meeting to explain the research and I hoped to recruit people for individual interviews. However, the members seemed keen to talk about the community that afternoon and agreed for the conversation to be tape-recorded. The discussion was somewhat disjointed since it was combined with routine club business including scratch cards, a birthday presentation and planning future events. My tape-recording equipment was not really adequate for the circumstances and the recording failed to capture all contributions. However, as with the family interview, the interaction between members was very illuminating.

Recruitment of interviewees

Two main methods were used to recruit interviewees. The first was to approach individuals at community activities and events that I attended. This produced 38 out of the 69 interviewees. The second method was snowball sampling, which produced eleven interviewees in each locality. A further six interviewees were present in the household at the time of an arranged interview with a family member or friend, and three interviewees were recruited through miscellaneous means. Table 2 overleaf provides a summary of interviewees by recruitment method and locality.

Organised activities proved very useful for meeting parents, particularly mothers, and fairly useful for recruiting people with a chronic disabling health condition but of no assistance in recruiting young people. This was not surprising since there were no community activities in either locality aimed specifically at older

teenagers and I had little success approaching young people directly without the introduction of a gatekeeper known to the young people. I did not feel that recruitment of previous pupils through secondary schools was appropriate for various reasons. The only unemployed support centre in the area served all age groups and did not have any regular attendees from either of the research localities. Visits to a housing facility in the urban locality proved more successful and I recruited seven of the nine urban interviewees aged 15-21 from that setting. It was even more difficult to recruit teenage interviewees in the rural locality although I had some assistance from an adult interviewee who was involved in informal youth work.

Table 2: Interviewees by method of recruitment (n=69)

	tenants or residents meeting	public event	parent & toddler group	church	housing facility	introduced by 3 rd party	present in household at time	other
Urban	2	1	9	6	7	11	3	3
Rural	-	5	4	4	-	11	3	-
Total	2	6	13	10	7	22	6	3

** Note: the recruitment methods included in 'other' were: S.E. approached interviewee in the street, interviewee contacted S.E. after picking up a research leaflet and S.E. contacted the interviewee after seeing a notice in the public library about a memorial plaque.*

I contacted a range of support groups for people with disabilities and lone parents (listed at Appendix A) and either attended a meeting or circulated an information leaflet or letter (copies at Appendices B and C) through a regular mailing. These tended to serve a wide geographical area and I was unable to find out how many, if any, members lived in the research localities. No interviewees were recruited through this method and the only person to respond lived outside the localities. A consequence of this lack of success with recruitment through support groups was that all the interviewees with a disabling health condition were recruited through

the same community based methods as other interviewees. This was in many ways more appropriate conceptually and possibly ethically.

Approaching people directly in the street or at outside facilities such as play areas had some value in eliciting factual information about the locality but only produced one interviewee. I had some concerns about this as a recruitment method, which it seemed were shared by those I approached. In contrast, I recruited five interviewees at a summer fete in the rural locality.

The proportion of interviewees recruited through a church was higher than the likely level of church attendance in either locality. The two churches concerned had all-age congregations that included interviewees in the three situations of research interest. Church members also proved more willing to be interviewed than people encountered in other settings (with the exception of a Sure Start type group in the urban locality) and more helpful in suggesting other contacts. In the case of parents from the Sure Start type group, the willingness to participate seemed to be associated with appreciation of the support received from that initiative. More generally, the interview sample was biased towards people who were sufficiently community-minded to participate although the extent of involvement in community activities (discussed in Chapter 6) was varied. A few interviewees made explicit references to connection between agreeing to be interviewed and other forms of voluntary work, as is illustrated in the following exchange with two female interviewees (UF8 and UF9) living in the urban locality:

DAWN: We [women] just say 'yes' to whatever we're asked.

{NATALIE: For this thing! (LAUGHS)}

{S.E.: Which is why...

DAWN: Which is why you're here today! (LAUGHS) Yeah exactly. 'Cos I told him [husband] last night what I was doing and he went 'oh where did you meet her?' 'Well she come into mother and toddler and was asking people.' He went 'and you said yes'. I said 'well I don't mind'.

Interviewees were often reticent about suggesting others who might be willing to be interviewed and when they did, this was often someone whom they regarded as an expert on community or the history of the locality, which in turn compounded the problem of sample bias described above. Those interviewees who were prepared to suggest others (n=5 in the urban locality and n=3 in the rural locality) often suggested several contacts. The effect was that the snowball element of the sample came from limited networks.

There were three main differences in the process of interviewee recruitment in the two localities. The first was that there were more community groups and activities taking place in the urban locality, reflecting the larger population and greater number of community buildings. Secondly, I had more success approaching potential interviewees at public events in the rural locality than in the urban locality. Thirdly, I felt an even greater need to be circumspect about the identity of interviewees in the rural locality than in the urban locality because of its smaller size and more close-knit social environment.

Characteristics of the sample

A full list of interviewees is available at Appendix E. The capital letters in the interviewee reference number represent the locality and their gender. Sixty-four out of the 69 interviewees lived in one of the two research localities. Four urban interviewees (UF7, UM14 and the married couple UF20 and UM20) and one rural interviewee (RM9) lived outside the locality although they had strong social links with the locality. In each case, the interviewee seemed to offer an interesting perspective that justified their inclusion.

Tables 3 and 4 overleaf provide information on the gender and age profile of the interviewees. Differences in the domestic situation, parental status and employment status of interviewees are also discussed, with the supporting tables located at Appendix F. The purpose of this information is to provide an overview of the sample characteristics and allow comparison between the sets of interviewees in each locality. The participants from the Over-60s club discussion held in the rural locality have been omitted since I did not record members' ages or other details of their personal circumstances.

in the rural locality. The second difference was that there were no adult interviewees currently living alone with dependent children in the rural locality in comparison with four interviewees in the urban locality.

Table B at Appendix F provides an overview of the sample by parental status. The main difference in parental status amongst the two groups of interviewees was that a greater proportion of the urban interviewees had a child of pre-school age. The dependent children of rural interviewees were mainly of primary school age. This difference did not seem to affect the way urban and rural parents talked about aspects of the locality that were relevant to their children.

The employment status of interviewees (Table C at Appendix F) was gendered in expected ways with 16 out of a total of 36 female interviewees providing full time care for dependent children or combining childcare with part time employment. Rural female interviewees in this situation were more likely to be working part time compared with their urban counterparts but this mainly reflected the age of their youngest child. Only one male interviewee (living in the urban locality) was involved in full time childcare and only one female interviewee (also in the urban locality) was in full time employment compared with six males across the sample who were working full time. Three female interviewees were not working because of a disabling health condition and eight were retired and these were evenly divided between the localities. Six of the male interviewees (two urban and four rural) were not working because of disability and thirteen (ten in the urban locality and three in the rural one) were retired. A total of ten interviewees were in full time education and there were no major differences in the gender of interviewees who were students. Thus the majority of interviewees in both localities were not employed full time and the reasons for this were gendered. Male interviewees who were not working were mainly either disabled or retired whilst female interviewees not in full time employment were either looking after children or retired.

The complexity of categories

The breakdown of interviewee characteristics described above stemmed both from the sampling approach adopted at the outset of the study and developments

during fieldwork. The most salient question is the extent to which the sample as a whole and subsets of interviewees in each locality were sufficient to support the analytical aims of the research.

A decision to extend the category of 'unemployed young people' to include all young people was made early in the fieldwork when it became clear that young people who had left school and were not working were either being channelled into youth training schemes of various kinds or would be very difficult to locate, particularly in the urban locality. The theoretical interest underpinning this research was not so much in the division between employment and unemployment than in situations of social isolation and/or marginalisation within a locality. All thirteen young people interviewed were marginalised in different ways even though all except one was in full time education (actually or nominally). This marginalisation came from experiences of homelessness, bullying, truancy, use of illicit drugs and labelling as deviant.

Table 5 overleaf provides a breakdown of the interview sample by the three situations of research interest (youth, lone parents and a disabling health condition). Two additional categories were added as fieldwork progressed: parents of dependent children who lived with a partner and older people without a disabling health condition. The inclusion of interviewees in these situations developed partly because of problems recruiting sufficient numbers of interviewees to the original sub-groups and partly on theoretical grounds as it became clear that the aspects of interest in the original life situations were experienced more broadly. The remaining categories of lay 'expert' and 'other' mainly resulted from the process of snowball recruitment and my willingness to interview couples if preferred.

The extension of the category of lone parents to include parents with dependent children who were living with a partner (whether or not the partner was the biological parent of the children) resulted partly from difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of lone mothers in the rural locality or lone fathers in either locality. It also became clear that those female interviewees with young children who had partners and the single house husband interviewed were sole parents for

much of the time because of the working hours of their partners. Although their financial circumstances were generally better than the lone parents, none was in a position to pay for regular childcare and thus any childcare required during the day had to be sourced in similar ways to lone parents. Two of the female interviewees (one in each locality) currently with partners had been lone mothers for an extended period in the past and mainly talked from that perspective.

Table 5: Interviewees by groups of research interest (n=71 - see note c)

	Young person	Lone parent (a)	Parent with partner (a)	Person with a chronic disabling health condition	Older person without a disabling health condition	Lay 'expert'	Other
URBAN							
Men	6	1	2	6	4	1	2
Women	4	3	5	3	2	3	-
Total	10	4	7	9	6	4	2
RURAL							
Men	3	-(b)	2 ^{(b)(c)}	4 ^(c)	1	2	1
Women	-	-	8	3	2	-	3
Total	3	-	10	7	3	2	4
TOTAL	13	4	17	16	9	6	6

Notes:

- (a) 'Parent' denotes the parent of a child aged 0 to 18
- (b) A male interviewee in the rural locality who was separated from his wife and had custody of a child but was still living in the same house as her has not been included as a lone parent
- (c) 2 male interviewees in the rural locality were parents and had a long term disabling health condition. They appear in both columns.

A number of interviewees fell into more than one category or had done so over their lifespan and therefore talked about neighbourhood from a mixture of viewpoints. Fifty out of the 69 interviewees were or had been parents (see Table B in Appendix F) and some were grandparents. The prevalence of experiences of parenting was one reason why children and childhood occupied such a central place in interviewees' accounts of place (described in Chapter 6).

Using a chronic disabling health condition as a primary category proved problematic since the level of disability varied between and within conditions and was in any case subordinated in interviewees' accounts to other categories such as parent or (former) worker. Thus a category treated as primary within the sampling strategy was at odds with the interviewee's own perception and presentation of self. The inclusion of older people without a disabling health condition in the interview sample was partly accidental through their presence at interviews with disabled partners or contact via snowball recruitment. However, it soon became apparent that the accounts of place given by older interviewees were significantly different from those of younger interviewees and the recruitment of older people with or without a disabling health condition became a deliberate part of the sampling approach.

Six interviewees were suggested by others (or in one instance by the interviewee herself) as being lay experts on the locality or issues of community. They were mainly interviewed at an early stage of the fieldwork in each locality when they contributed to the process of familiarisation. The interviews have been included in the main dataset because of the insights provided both on aspects of civic engagement and other issues. The final group of interviewees categorised as 'other' had a mixture of characteristics. They tended to be present at interviews arranged with a family member in another category or were suggested by others.

The central aim of this research was to explore the relationship between a person's life situation and their perceptions and experiences of the place where they live. The selection of particular life situations as examples and the subsequent extension of those categories for the reasons described above were important stages in developing an analytical understanding of that relationship.

The content and conduct of interviews

Interviewees were given a leaflet about the research (Appendix B) when an interview was arranged or to help them decide whether they wanted to participate. I also carried with me a signed letter from my supervisors confirming the research (copy at Appendix D) although in fact I never had occasion to produce it. Assurances about anonymity, confidentiality and the interviewee's freedom to stop the interview at any stage were given at the beginning of the interview and any questions answered. Interviewees were given the consent form (Appendix G) at the outset but were told that they would only be asked to sign it at the end of the conversation and could withhold signature and therefore consent if they wished. The consent form included permission for tape-recording and the possible inclusion of anonymised quotes in future publications. No interviewee withdrew from the interview or refused to sign the consent form although one interviewee did not want the conversation to be recorded.

Copies of the interview guides for the three original interviewee categories are at Appendix H. The guides were developed from the literature on social capital and community and covered concepts and experiences of neighbourhood, expectations and experiences of 'community', civic involvement, social networks and aspects of change. The guides were piloted in six interviews in the urban locality and minor changes made. These interviews have been included in the main dataset. As the fieldwork developed, the interviews extended beyond the topics set out in the guide to explore additional themes and became increasingly unstructured as a result. Issues of social exclusion and the telling of stories were two features of the data that emerged spontaneously in conversation rather than being prompted through questions.

All except four interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The reason for the non-taping of one interview has already been explained. A pilot interview in the urban locality was not recorded because the interviewees (suggested by another interviewee) did not fit the original categories. However, notes were taken. The tape-recording of two further interviews failed completely or partially due to technical errors. On one of these occasions, the interviewee's child had switched off the microphone.

Ethical issues

The research was designed and conducted in compliance with the British Sociological Association's *Statement of Ethical Practice* (1996) and the Ethical Guidelines published by the Social Research Association in 2002.

Every attempt was made to ensure that interviewees were in a position to give informed consent and by deliberately delaying the signing of the consent form until the end of the interview, I felt interviewees retained some control over the process. The assurances about anonymity and confidentiality given at the time of interview were matched by my behaviour in the field. For example, I took care not to park outside interviewees' homes and responded vaguely when interviewees, particularly in the rural locality, suggested other people for interview who I had in fact already interviewed. All names of people and places referred to in this thesis have been changed and other identifying features altered or omitted to protect anonymity. I was aware of a responsibility to use interviewees' time appropriately and the possibility that highly sensitive issues might occur during the conversation. I carried with me details of local support services for situations such as domestic violence and also paid some regard to my own safety.

Despite these efforts to comply with published ethical standards and my own ideas of what constitutes ethical research, there was one incident and three more general issues (described below) about which I have some concern. The specific incident concerned parental permission. The general issues were to do with the reality of informed consent, anonymity and researcher neutrality.

As shown in Table 5, it proved difficult to recruit young people for interview in the rural locality. I therefore asked an interviewee who acted as an unpaid youth worker if he would help. He suggested that we go for a walk to see who was about and we located three young men who agreed to be interviewed and expected, as the gatekeeper did, to do so immediately. I conducted the interview in the empty waiting area of the doctor's surgery in the presence of the gatekeeper (RM4) and background presence of the surgery receptionist. The young men (RM5, RM6 and RM7) looked about seventeen years old but it

transpired that two of the interviewees were aged 15 and the third was 16. I explained the research in the usual way and they signed consent forms but I did not have parental consent and it is uncertain how far RM4 could be said to be acting in loco parentis. A complicating factor was that the three were truant from school, although their version was that neither the school nor their parents cared. I felt that it was unlikely they would agree to be interviewed if parental consent was a requirement. Neither the BSA nor SRA ethical guidelines specifically address the age at which young people can be said to give informed consent for research. The criterion generally used in health care and counselling is the 'Gillick test', derived from the House of Lords ruling of 1985 and reflected in Department of Health guidelines on the provision of contraceptive advice to under-16s (Department of Health 2004). This focuses on whether a young person has sufficient understanding to make an informed decision (Baginski 2004). The two interviewees who were aged 15 were, I believe, as capable of making an informed decision to participate in the research as the 16 year old or other interviewees and I have therefore included data from that interview in the analysis.

A more general issue is that whilst, as far as I am aware, interviewees understood the purpose of the interview in the terms stated, most would have had little idea of the process of analysis and how their provision of a 'factual' account might be deconstructed in other ways. I was not in a position to enlighten them since I was myself uncertain of the directions the analysis might take. In keeping with most qualitative research, these interviewees probably said more than they intended or realised and I did not send transcripts to them to edit or approve. Although I am confident that the analytical process has been robust, I am unsure how individual interviewees would respond to the findings.

The second general area of concern is that of protecting anonymity of place and persons in a community study of this type. There is an inherent conflict between anonymity and the requirement to provide sufficient detail to convey context and demonstrate validity. The resulting compromise is inevitably unsatisfactory to some degree. Despite the disguising and alteration of identifying details, I remain uneasy that it may be possible for an outsider to deduce the identity of the two

localities or for residents in the rural locality or members of sub-communities in the urban locality to identify other interviewees. Yet further removal of detail would render the findings without context. The reference to foot and mouth disease is a case in point. Its occurrence was significant for the timing of fieldwork and as a recent collective experience and yet it serves as an identifier of the rural locality.

The third area of ethical concern is the extent to which the researcher can ever remain a fully neutral observer in the field. This has been much discussed in both anthropological and sociological literature, a classic example being Lofland and Lofland (1995). The relevance of this issue for my own research became apparent early on at a public event I attended in the urban locality:

“I was standing on the path by the hedgehog seat looking over at the play area and saw two boys aged about 10 or 11 sitting on the steps of the amphitheatre trying to pull out the upright wooden beams at the side of the step. They were sitting down and straining their legs against it and then pushing it back like wobbling a loose tooth. There were women standing above them on the hill looking out and other women by the children’s area sitting watching younger children and chatting with their back to the boys. I didn’t intervene because of the distance, my desire to remain distanced and observe, and the fact that if they stopped they would presumably resume at the next opportunity. [...] When I was talking to (local authority regeneration officer), she looked up and noticed that the wooden beams were now lying on the ground. She said that they, the builders, should have buried them in concrete much further down because this was chalk soil and liable to move. Also why didn’t an adult see them and stop them? Georgia (UF1) said that they lay all this on and the kids still choose to break something. I helped [list of people] carry the beams down the hill to hide them in bushes by the gate. I regretted that I had not intervened and felt I should on another occasion. Not very objective.” (Field notes, Saturday 1st July 2000)

I justified my decision not to intervene to stop the boys vandalising the play area in research terms but nevertheless felt guilty, particularly when the organisers of

I justified my decision not to intervene to stop the boys vandalising the play area in research terms but nevertheless felt guilty, particularly when the organisers of the event were upset by its occurrence. My feelings of guilt are evident in my staying behind to help clear up. This was also an opportunity to chat but I was aware that if my non-intervention had been noticed, my reception might have been different. On balance, the decision not to intervene was probably correct in research terms. I continued throughout the fieldwork to think about the circumstances in which I would feel morally bound to relinquish the role of neutral observer.

Researcher effects

In quantitative research, researcher effects are either considered avoidable, through survey design and interviewer training, or treated as negligible. Qualitative research, in contrast, recognises that the researcher will have an impact, however careful he or she is to appear and act in a neutral manner. However, identifying the nature and extent of these effects is more difficult particularly in one's own research.

My own approach during fieldwork was to adopt much of the common sense advice offered by Lofland and Lofland (1995). My aim was to be inconspicuous in appearance and friendly and unassuming in manner. I found that decisions about what to wear when attending community events or conducting interviews was a useful indication of my evolving perceptions about the localities, especially as this varied in subtle ways between the two places. An interviewee's description (discussed on page 193) of the 'skanky' mums and the trendy ones at a particular parents and toddlers group mirrored my own perceptions of that environment. The best strategy seemed to aim for something in between. This awareness of how others might assess me has resonance with Backett's realisation during a study of the health beliefs of middle class families in Edinburgh that she had become concerned about how healthy she appeared to participants and resolved to lose weight and exercise more (Backett 1992). One contact referred to my research as 'Sarah's project': a phrase that initially grated since it did not seem to represent the enormity of the task I felt I was undertaking. Fortunately I said nothing and in fact this seemed to fit well with

unhygienic state of the hallways and lifts was raised. This led to a protracted discussion over whether the housing association should evict the residents responsible and then clear up the mess, or clean up the mess immediately and change its allocation policy to exclude such residents (at least from their block). At this point, the chair asked for my opinion as someone who was interested in community. My response was that it was difficult to know what to do and I was really there to listen. The reaction to this seemed to be one of acceptance, perhaps on the grounds that if they did not know how to stop it, an outsider with no useful connections certainly would not.

There were some ways in which my gender, age and approach seemed to facilitate the research especially when attending children's events or recruiting female interviewees. Female interviewees with children frequently asked if I had children and seemed to feel sympathy for the fact that I was childless, although I gave them no reason to do so. This put them in a position of advantage which I felt was helpful. Some settings, notably the pubs in both localities, were male-dominated. I found the atmosphere there hostile and did not persevere since their usefulness for interviewee recruitment was uncertain. This was one example of the way in which the conduct of this study was gendered. Ramsey (1996) has questioned whether the difficulties associated with gender in researching some male-dominated settings render the research too costly to the researcher.

Common assumptions for my presence at community events seemed to be either that I was a journalist or thinking of moving to the area and looking at local facilities. I was often asked why I had chosen that particular locality for the research and offered an explanation that emphasised my personal associations with Kent and the fact that the locality had a distinct identity and a long history. I did not mention socio-economic factors or the locality's reputation although almost all interviewees talked about the latter during the interview. I was also asked about the area I lived in and my reply was different in the two localities. To urban interviewees, I would say something like 'it's a bit like round here, there are good and bad things about it' and to rural interviewees 'it's alright but I'd rather live in the country'. Both statements were true but also had a function of directing the conversation back to the interviewee's own locality. The

deliberate framing of where I came from to emphasise points of similarity with the interviewee's own locality occasionally backfired as in the following example where my agreement was taken as evidence of societal change:

JACK: Where you were brought up, has that changed since you were a child?

S.E.: Yeah, I think it has.

JACK: I think it's generally changed. (Jack, UM3, aged 50s)

The example above illustrates the way in an interview account is the product of the social interaction on a specific occasion between the interviewee and researcher (and any others present). In analysing the data, I have tried to identify instances where my questions or responses influenced this interaction unduly and have taken account of this in analysis. The main type of exchange when this occurred was when interviewees' described either experiences of social isolation (often expressed in terms of being the sort of person who only has one or two close friends) or guilt about lack of involvement in community activities. Lofland and Lofland's description of a researcher's sympathy leading to an impulse to help (Lofland and Lofland 1995: 51) was in my case expressed in a desire to make the interviewee feel better. In the following exchange with a very isolated young mother (RF1) in the rural locality, my attempt to normalise her non-attendance at community meetings was factually correct at that point in the fieldwork but clearly overstepped the boundaries of neutral. This was the most extreme example in the data.

KAREN: I don't go to them [community meetings] either. (LAUGHS) They're usually on in the evenings and, erm, say my husband gets home from work, we're tired and you just, you know, you just don't wanna go out anyway.

S.E.: I've talked to loads of people and I haven't met anyone who goes to any of these meetings.

KAREN: Oh then I'm in the majority!

4.6 Analysis

Transcription

The tape recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. I carried out most of the transcription myself although, due to pressure of time, I paid a contact living in another part of the country to transcribe eight of the interviews. She had no association with either locality and knew only the interviewee's first name. I checked and amended her transcripts against the recordings.

Coding and analysis

In keeping with standard practice in dealing with qualitative data, coding and analysis proceeded in tandem. I coded the initial pilot interviews manually and then switched to the use of the Q.S.R. NUD*IST 4.0 software programme for coding the main dataset. I had chosen the programme for its simplicity of use and stability in dealing with large datasets. Although straightforward to use, I found some aspects of its operation frustrating, particularly the inability in that version of the software to print out copies of the transcripts showing coding. I also disliked spending so much time looking at the data on screen and much preferred dealing with paper transcripts and memos. In the end I reverted to manual coding and cross-referencing which seemed to work better. One risk of abandoning the use of software is that there may be some loss in comprehensiveness. I periodically tried to quantify the incidence of particular themes (and noted where they were absent) as a way of combating this. My experience of using Q.S.R. NUD*IST for this study does not mean that I would not consider using computer software in future research particularly if working with other researchers where standardisation of coding would be crucial.

The coding and associated analysis went through a series of stages. I began with what Mason has termed 'literal indexing categories' (Mason 2002: 154) as a way of understanding the dataset as an entirety. I then looked for segments of data where interviewees described aspects of locality that are commonly used as indicators of collective social capital, such as neighbourliness, social support and civic engagement. I also sought to understand the varied meanings for interviewees of constituent terms such as 'area', 'neighbourhood', 'village',

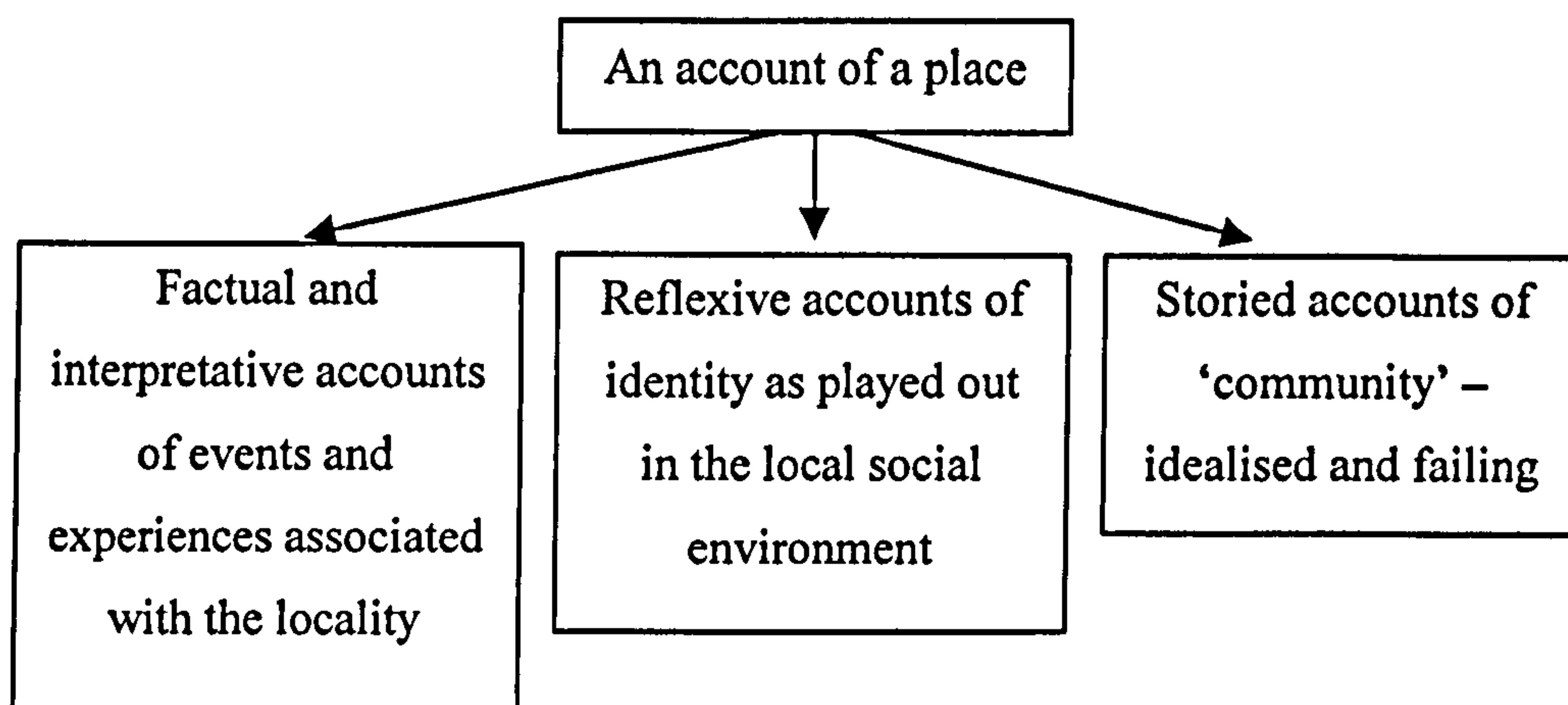
'support' and 'privacy'. This process was inductive, comparative and iterative notwithstanding my familiarity with the conceptual framework that has developed around social capital. As the analysis developed, I returned to earlier transcripts to compare findings and recode. I also looked for deviant cases that did not fit the emerging theory. The findings from this stage of analysis are mainly presented in Chapter 5.

Having explored the data for insights on interviewees' understandings and experiences that were relevant to social capital, I tried to set that concept aside and ask more fundamental questions about what was important to interviewees about the place where they lived, what was less important, and how they understood the local social environment and their relationship to it. This in turn led me to consider how interviewees were presenting themselves and the locality in the context of the interview. In setting aside the concept of social capital, I was able to access more interpretative and reflexive dimensions of the data. These findings are mainly presented in Chapter 6.

The multi-stage analysis described above left one feature of the data unexplored. This was the telling of stories in interviewee's accounts. This required a rather different analytical approach informed by the literature on narrative research (notably Riessman 1990b and Lieblich *et al* 1998) and case studies in the areas of illness narratives (such as Williams 1984 and Bury 2001) and narratives of place (Popay 2000, Brown 2001). The location of the stories at particular points in the interview and their contribution to the unfolding account was as significant as cross-interview comparisons of form and content. The three main questions underlying the analysis were: 'why is the interviewee telling this story at this point in the account?', 'what does this story reveal about the interviewee's perceptions of place and community?' and 'what is it about place and ideas of community that produce this kind of talk?' The analysis of interviewees' stories is presented in Chapter 7.

Figure 3 overleaf provides a summary of the three elements found in interviewees' accounts of their locality.

Figure 3: The constituents of accounts of place



4.7 Summary

This chapter has presented the study's aims and methods and discussed a range of methodological issues. Arguments have been put forward for the value of a qualitative and case study approach to exploring the relationship between life situation and accounts of place notwithstanding the known complexities and limitations of community studies. The process by which the original interviewee categories were extended during fieldwork has been described, together with the characteristics of the resulting interviewee sample and the localities in which they lived.

One of the most challenging aspects of this research was disentangling an interviewee's account from the interview context in which it occurred and finding an appropriate analytical balance between the information-giving and performance aspects of conversation. The following comment from an interviewee, Mabel (RF7, aged 70s), living in the rural locality demonstrated that interviewees might be similarly aware of this complexity. It occurred at the end of the interview. Mabel's opening apology probably reflects a realisation that she had been more negative about some features of village life (specifically poor maintenance of open spaces) than she intended:

"Sorry. Still everybody's got their own little natter haven't they? [signs consent form] There was no problem was there?"

Mabel's reference to 'own little natter' is a way of dismissing or at least diminishing the significance of her complaints. It also emphasizes that accounts of place come from individuals with their own perceptions and ways of talking. The phrase '*There was no problem was there?*' can be understood as referring either to the tape-recording or to whether her 'performance' matched up to my expectations and requirements. Interviewees' 'natter', in all its forms, is the subject matter of the next three chapters.

PART III

THE CHANGING FACE OF COMMUNITY': LAY ACCOUNTS OF AN URBAN AND A RURAL VILLAGE

Overview

The three chapters that follow present the main findings from the research. In keeping with an inductive approach to theory development, a detailed discussion of how these findings relate to existing literature is postponed until Part 4. The division of analytical themes between the chapters is based on the three constituents of accounts of place presented at the end of Chapter 4: factual and interpretative accounts of events and experiences; reflexive accounts of social identity in the local social environment; and storied accounts of idealised and failing community.

Chapter 5 focuses on the perceptions and experiences of interviewees in relation to certain key aspects of social capital in an urban and rural context. It explores the significance and meaning of neighbourhood, relations with neighbours, and experiences and expectations of social support. The analysis treats the data as factual, interpretative and symbolic.

More reflexive elements of interviewees' accounts are discussed in Chapter 6 which explores the centrality of children and childhood to accounts of place, involvement and non-involvement in civic and community affairs, and perceptions and experiences of social exclusion. Two threads running through the analysis are the significance of place for an individual's sense of self and the complexity of the interaction between personal biography and the social history of a locality.

Chapter 7 presents an analysis of the stories told by interviewees about themselves and the locality. Such stories are often illustrative of the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 but also provide additional insights into interviewees' ideas of idealised or failing community.

Chapter 5

Experiences of community: social capital in an urban and a rural context

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of three presenting analysis of the interview data. As described in Chapter 4, the study design allowed for three types of comparison. The first was a comparison of the two localities: urban and rural. The second was a comparison of accounts of the same place given by women and men at different stages of life, and with varying personal circumstances. The third type of comparison occurred within individual interviews as respondents traced their experiences of a place over the course of their life, and social history became entwined with personal biography. The analytical themes presented in this chapter are mainly derived from the first and second forms of comparison. At this level of analysis the data are treated as factual descriptions, notwithstanding discrepancies within and between accounts. This approach is closest to what I believe the interviewees understood as the purpose of the interview. The two chapters that follow present a more reflexive analysis.

I have not attempted to replicate the network-focused approach employed usefully elsewhere (for instance Wellman 1988 and Cattell 2001) but focus instead on lay experiences and understanding of certain aspects of social capital. The Government Social Capital Working Group's definition of social capital - *'networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups'* (Healy and Côté 2001) - is the starting point for this analysis although alternative conceptualisations of social capital will be considered briefly at the end of the chapter and more fully in the discussion in Chapter 8.

The analysis begins in section 5.2 with a discussion of the size of area that had social meaning for interviewees living in the two localities. This provided a frame of reference for all discussion of place and community. Section 5.3 considers the significance and complexity of relations with neighbours, including

the concepts of knowing and trusting, and section 5.4 explores interviewees' experiences and expectations of support. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the match between interviewees' accounts of their locality and the conceptualisation of neighbourhood, community, social networks and social support in the social capital literature. Civic engagement and obstacles to bridging social capital are included in the discussion of self and place in Chapter 6.

5.2 The meaning of 'neighbourhood'

Earlier research, used to develop questions on social capital for the 2000/1 General Household Survey (Earthy *et al* 2000), suggested that people living in urban settings applied terms such as 'neighbourhood' to areas of varying size depending on the context. Interviewees in that research tended to use facilities across an area equivalent in size to (although not necessarily synonymous with) a Local Authority district or larger and often identified superficially with that broad area particularly if they had grown up there. However the level of area that held significant *social* meaning for interviewees was considerably smaller, comprising either the immediate neighbourhood or the road in which they lived. The GHS research was small in scope and confined to urban areas. Nevertheless it raised questions about the meaning and usefulness of measures of neighbourliness based on indicators such as how many people a respondent knows or trusts in their 'neighbourhood'. The findings from this study expand on that earlier observation.

'Neighbourhood' in an urban context

Relations with neighbours living in the same road or block of flats was the most significant gauge of local 'community' for most of the urban interviewees, whether this meant general sociability or more specific manifestations such as help or trust. When asked, for example, whether people 'round here' were friendly, urban interviewees almost always applied this to immediate neighbours. Characteristics of other parts of the locality were important for urban interviewees but in functional ways. Concerns about safety, traffic, crime or vandalism tended to relate to facilities that an interviewee used or to routes they

regularly took. The general appearance and reputation of the neighbourhood was also important and, as will be described in Chapter 6, interviewees felt it necessary to explain how that reputation was either mistaken or caused by the behaviour of deviant others. However most urban interviewees did not seem to expect to know or be connected to fellow residents – other than family or close friends - living beyond their own road. This would indicate a far more limited idea of ‘community’ than is assumed in current policy literature.

The data indicated three circumstances that contradicted this general finding. Interviewees who were members of an extended family network, involved in community organisations or a specific project, or who had lived in the locality when it was a village tended to conceptualise neighbourhood in broader terms. These findings are elaborated below.

Family networks and concepts of neighbourhood

The effect of family networks on notions of neighbourhood was most apparent in the 1960s social housing estate referred to on page 67 and on a smaller estate of owner occupier housing in another part of the urban locality. Interviewees who had grown up on those estates and had a continuing family presence there seemed to have more extensive local networks of acquaintance than other interviewees despite high levels of mobility in both neighbourhoods. Questions about neighbourliness tended to be applied to the whole estate rather than the few houses or flats on each side of their own. Family networks existed in other parts of the locality but it was less clear from the data whether the same influence on ideas of ‘neighbourhood’ occurred outside the two estates.

Interviewees on the respective estates had different views about whether the presence of family networks had a positive or negative effect on the local social environment. Natalie (UF9) and Dawn (UF8), two mothers in their 20s who had been friends since childhood, attributed the friendliness of the owner-occupier estate to the tendency of successive generations to return to live there:

NATALIE: It is a nice estate to live on because people do keep coming back like I did.

DAWN: There's a lot of people that grew up here that have now bought houses. There's more than I would think of anywhere that I've ever come across before really. Your [Natalie's] mum and dad live along there and she [Natalie] lives up there. So it is nice.

In contrast, a young man who had grown up on the social housing estate equated the urban locality with family networks which he argued led to the escalation of disputes:

"the thing with (urban locality) is it's families. That's all it is. 'My family this', 'my family that', 'I've got an older brother who will come and do you.' If you're gonna have a row it should be one on one, there is no families. Now that's what I prefer, see. That's what this is getting like gradually." (Gary, UM9, aged 18)

Newcomers to the two areas were aware of family connections but remained largely outside those networks:

"Occasionally people said hello in the street. A couple opposite used to say hello when we saw each other and ask how each other were. But not initially, not straight away. It took like maybe six months or something before people started speaking to us. So we didn't have, [weren't] invited into each other's homes or like some of them are down there anyway." (Andrew, UM15, aged mid-30s, house-husband following redundancy)

This form of exclusion was most keenly experienced when the interviewee felt intimidated by the behaviour of others, even young children. One woman who had moved to the locality from a social housing estate on its border put it in these terms:

"As much as community is community on the X estate, it's not being part of it is difficult. You know, you see kids outside your front door and the only thing that goes through your mind is your car's insured. I mean they're sat on your car or they're leaning against your gate and rather than turn round and say 'excuse me, can you move? This isn't your

property', you just think 'we're insured.' You know, because it's not worth the recriminations if you go out and say anything." (Michelle, UF13, aged early 30s, parent)

Being on the outside of family networks did not mean that interviewees remained unaffected by family disputes. A female interviewee who lived just outside the urban locality but was a member of the church there had encountered problems with members of one of the extended families referred to by Gary and present on the estate described by Michelle:

"There's a family who live just across the green there. A very well known family in the area and, er, they're always having family disputes. There's two parts of the family, they're all sort of inter-married and that, cousins and children etcetera. And there's fights and there's drugs out there and windows been put through and I got threatened, me and (daughter) being here on our own." (Jane, UF7, aged 40s, disabled by rheumatoid arthritis)

Although Jane conceptualised neighbourhood in terms of her immediate neighbours, its social character was the product of networks extending across the urban research locality and beyond. This is an illustration of Stacey's observation about the partiality of local social systems (Stacey 1969).

Community action and local networks

The second circumstance associated with a wider concept of 'neighbourhood' occurred when involvement in community organisations or a specific project had propelled urban interviewees into developing networks with local people who had previously been strangers.

The most notable example in the urban locality was an initiative to turn waste ground into a communal space through Lottery funding for millennium greens. The initiator was Georgia (UF1), a woman in her late 20s who had been a lone mother for ten years although recently remarried. Prior to the millennium green project, Georgia's social contacts had been restricted to immediate neighbours

and existing friends although she emphasised that her willingness to walk long distances enabled her to access a wide area. Involvement in the project had made her something of a local celebrity:

S.E.: Has it changed how many people you know locally?

GEORGIA: Oh tell me about it! [...] They (primary school aged children) sort of like say 'ooh didn't you come into my school and do a talk?' and stuff and they come and tell me what's happening up at the park and things and yeah there's definitely a respect level from them. The twelve year olds to sixteen year olds some of them will approach me while others will just chatter about me behind my back but I did go through a big phase of being called 'Millennium Woman' and everything. If I went past, they'd go 'Oye! Millennium Woman! Alright?' [...] And the mums, I get a lot of nods from them as well and there was one cliquy type of group of mums. Even one of them actually acknowledges me and I've never spoken to her so yeah I'm definitely well known, definitely well known."

One feature of this extract is the way that Georgia moves from a question about knowing people to an answer framed around being known and winning respect. This fundamental relationship between identity and place is the theme of Chapter 6.

Another interviewee, Steve, who lived on the social housing estate mentioned in the previous section had become disillusioned after a long history of community involvement:

"I don't have anything to do with it. Before I did. Everybody knew me and 'all right Steve' and all this lot. Now they just, you know. That's it, fair enough." (Steve, UM11, aged 50s, made redundant because of disability)

Despite his disillusionment, Steve's withdrawal from community involvement and the accompanying networks remained partial:

"I mean, just last week, kids from round erm X, the next court down, 'oh Uncle Steve'. I says 'yeah, what's the matter?' 'There's a load of drugs needles up here'. (Steve, UM11, aged 50s)

This raises an interesting question about the continuing effects of a past history of community involvement on how people perceive and relate to their neighbourhood.

Memories of a village

The third group of urban interviewees for whom 'neighbourhood' extended beyond their own road were older residents who had grown up in the urban locality or moved to it when it was still sufficiently separate from the town to retain something of a village identity. One man who came from a family with a long association with the locality and had lived there all his life began the interview in this way:

"How do you want to start? Well, (urban locality) is a village as I've said. Well, it was. I always call it and a lot of old people say 'are you going down the village?' and, you know, things like that." (Dennis, UM22, aged 87)

Other older interviewees made similar efforts to ensure that I appreciated the locality's rural past. In the above quotation, Dennis shifts between two meanings of 'village'. The first is as a particular form of human settlement, the second to denote the row of shops and a public house that had once been the main street of the former village. Interviewees of all ages living in that part of the urban locality referred to 'the village' in the second sense. That stretch of road still provided something of a focal point although overshadowed by the shops available in the town centre and three supermarkets within a short car ride. For older interviewees like Dennis the first meaning of 'village' was by far the more significant. Their memories of the village of the past served as their reference point both for the geographical boundaries of the locality and norms of social interaction and

behaviour. They were nostalgic for a time when they said everyone knew everyone else and much of the post-war housing developments had been fields. The overlapping of personal biography onto the social history of the locality had resulted in an increasing divergence between these older people's expectations and experiences of neighbourhood. The density and mobility of the local population had grown as they had themselves aged and their ability to expand or even maintain social links had diminished with disability, caring responsibilities and bereavement. An additional factor was the steady reduction of their generation through death.

One interviewee who had lived in the locality all his life emphasised the importance of continuity to 'knowing' people:

"I don't know many of the others because they've moved in and out since I've been here, forty seven years. They've come and go. But me next door neighbour they've been here since I've been here. I knew his mother. His mother has passed on like." (Bill, UM2, aged 82, disabled by rheumatoid arthritis)

I will return to the nature of social relations between neighbours in section 5.3.

'Community' in a rural context

In contrast to the tendency among urban interviewees to relate questions about the social character of the neighbourhood to immediate neighbours or the road in which they lived, interviewees from the rural locality talked about the whole village as a social entity. This was true both of people who had lived there for many years and more recent arrivals. The husband of a couple who had recently returned to live in the village after a gap of thirty-three years explained their welcome in these terms:

"People from the far end of the village that you don't normally see and they say 'oh hallo Graham, I heard you was back in the village' and you know. Because a lot of them were children when I left and now they're

older with families and the families know me." (Graham, RM1, aged 60s, retired)

Another male interviewee who had lived in the village for 15 years explained the prevalence of gossip as natural interest in the lives of people you knew personally:

"It's probably just because people are more interested really. I suppose because they know each other. You know, in a town situation, you wouldn't know someone. So, why should you be concerned that their poor old mum's just passed away? Well you're concerned, but you're not... she's just a stranger sort of thing. But in a village situation if you know the person then you think 'ah, that's a shame'." (Barry, RM2, early 50s, disabled by multiple sclerosis)

Newcomers to the village spoke about the interest shown in them when they first arrived and understood this as coming from the village as a collective rather than solely immediate neighbours as occurred in the urban locality. This interest was interpreted in a variety of ways. Some interviewees such as Graham and his wife Theresa presented it as proof of the superior quality of community life in the village. Others were more wary. A young mother with four children who had moved to the village two years earlier had initially enjoyed and then been disappointed by the attention she received:

"when I first moved in, you got people come up and talk to me and I thought 'this is nice'. Only to find out who I am and where I've been and things like that. They don't really speak to me now. I'm old news now, so you know. They didn't want to make friends, just find out. Being nosy."
(Karen, RF1, aged 30s, parent)

These alternative experiences of community do not occur randomly but are located in aspects of an individual biography; specifically the interviewee's social standing, gender, and expectations built on previous experiences. Graham and his family had originally moved to the village in the late 1950s to work at the local major industry. They left ten years later when his work moved to London and

commuting became too time-consuming. They already had two children when they came to the village and another two were born during the time they lived there. Their work and domestic lives were centred on the village and ran parallel to those of many others who moved there in the 1950s and 1960s and were still living in the village when Graham and Theresa returned in 2000.

In contrast, Karen and her family were placed by the Local Authority in social housing in the village after a failed business venture and a period in accommodation in a violent area. She had had a friend in the village whom she knew from the place where they previously lived but this woman had since moved away and they had lost contact. She had no other close friends in the village. Karen's husband worked long hours away from the locality and their social life was orientated towards their previous place of residence. Despite the differences in their situations, Karen and Graham shared a perception of the village as an integrated social environment (whether united or deeply divided). For someone in Karen's position, one risk of living in such an environment was that saying or doing the wrong thing could have unpredictable repercussions:

"[They're] falling out all the time in the village and the next day they're friends again and you don't know who to trust some of the time." (Karen, RF1, aged 30s, parent)

Other women who had been born in the village or lived there longer than Karen expressed a similar reluctance to getting too involved in other people's lives because of the danger of being blamed or excluded by the wider community. Notions of 'otherness' were interwoven throughout the accounts of rural interviewees and three interviewees (two men and a woman) described recent incidents of physical intimidation.

Whilst processes of exclusion and intimidation were undoubtedly also present in the urban locality, interviewees' descriptions suggested that these were specific to a setting (such as outside the interviewee's house, at a parents and toddlers group or outside the school gate) rather than experienced more generally. For most urban interviewees the geographically restricted and fragmented nature of

'community' created fragmented experiences and expectations of both social support and social exclusion. For all rural interviewees and those urban interviewees in the specific circumstances described earlier, community occurred within a definable geographical area that was larger than a road or block of flats.

The differences in the frames of reference used by urban and rural interviewees in discussing social aspects of their neighbourhood were undoubtedly partly the result of population size and density. The adult population of the urban locality as measured by the electoral roll was four and a half times that of the rural locality with a greater likelihood of unregistered voters in the urban locality. Geographical characteristics of the two localities (outlined on pages 66-68 of Chapter 4) may also have contributed to their social environment with the rural locality occupying a smaller and more compact physical space and one that was not divided by a main road or inclines. The relative isolation of the village from other centres made it more likely that residents would shop and look for entertainment within its confines although car ownership (discussed below) was an important factor in this respect. I was not able to find comparative data on population mobility in the two localities although interviewees in both places commonly mentioned this as one of the main causes of decline in 'community' – whether this applied to their own road or a larger area. It is likely that people such as Graham and Theresa who expected the village to be a community were still in the majority in the rural locality despite complaints among established residents that newcomers did not understand or contribute to village life. However, this study was not designed to establish this empirically and it would be a useful line of enquiry in future research. In contrast, urban interviewees such as Dennis (UM22) whose reference point for community was the village of their youth were a minority, both numerically and in terms of social status and impact.

Car ownership and the boundaries of 'local'

Another factor that affected how interviewees in both localities understood the concept of 'local' was car ownership. Urban interviewees with access to a car used supermarkets, shops and leisure facilities over a much wider area than those

without private transport. This tended to create a more favourable view of 'local' facilities than that held by interviewees who were reliant on public transport:

"Here on the doorstep you've got the [names 3 public parks within Local Authority boundaries]. It's all within five minutes, ten minutes away. [..] You've got so much more to offer for children round here, it's unbelievable." (Andrew, UM15, aged mid-30s, 'house husband', car owner)

"Do I get out of (locality) much? Not really. Town centre's the furthest place I go." (Caz, UF17, aged early 20s, lone parent, non-driver)

It is well known that car ownership serves as a proxy indicator of income (Townsend 1979) and places that Andrew and his son regularly visited may have been inaccessible to Caz as much because of cost as distance. Two single mothers interviewed in the urban locality prided themselves and their children on being willing to walk some distance to access facilities. They measured this respectively by time (25 minutes) and distance (two miles). However these were exceptions and for most urban interviewees, ten minutes spent walking, driving or on a bus seemed to represent the boundaries of 'local'.

Car ownership also determined the ease with which rural interviewees could access facilities and services outside the village and was in some ways more significant because of the greater distances involved and the infrequency and inconvenient timing of the bus service. A shopping trip to town by bus would take all day because of the time of the return service and villagers spending an evening in town would have to get a cab home. Car-owners held divergent views on how long it took to drive to the nearest main town (with estimates varying from 20 to 40 minutes) and whether this constituted 'convenient'. Much discussion centred on the dangerous nature of the main road and/or the fact that the distance seemed and indeed became shorter if you were familiar with the route. I was regularly asked for affirmation of both views. The layout of roads meant that none of the neighbouring villages was particularly accessible on foot and in any case these had no better facilities than the research village. This

isolation combined with the small and therefore generally walkable area occupied by the village and the coincidence of its boundaries with a change in landscape from houses to open space contributed to a consensus that 'local' meant 'within the village'. Geographical distance was understood as the price to be paid for the benefits of rural life and some consequences (such as paying higher prices for groceries in village shops) were accepted more readily than others (unsocial behaviour attributed to boredom among young people). The loss of any facility, for example the recent closure of a pub and a social club, was commented on with regret whether or not the interviewee had actually used them.

Where rural interviewees differed was in their views of what services and facilities should be available in the village and the quality of those that were there. This was often linked to discussion of the proper balance between what should be provided by the Council or unspecified others and what the villagers should themselves generate: a theme that did not occur in the urban data. In interviews with established female villagers, this tended to lead onto the issue of 'urban' newcomers who expected everything to be done for them but were not prepared to join in.

5.3 Neighbours

The significance of neighbours

The quality of social relations with neighbours was important to all interviewees, both as a reflection of community (or its absence) and as a source of actual or potential help. There was, however, a perceptible difference in the prominence given to the subject of neighbours in accounts of the two localities. Interviewees also varied in their perceptions of the association between the behaviour of neighbours and the wider social environment.

As outlined above, most urban interviewees measured community in terms of friendliness amongst people living in their own road or block. Neighbours were therefore highly significant as the primary gauge of 'community'. Examples of good neighbours tended to be contrasted with the apathy and self-centredness of general 'others' whilst bad neighbours were treated as typical of general society.

The social environment of the locality outside the interviewee's immediate road was treated as synonymous with society in general. Urban interviewees with more extensive local networks tended to talk much less about immediate neighbours except to illustrate a facet (positive or negative) of the estate or locality. Similarly most rural interviewees spoke less about neighbours than the majority of urban interviewees and tended to focus on good neighbourliness as a symptom of village community. The exception in the rural locality was four female interviewees whose general isolation was alleviated by the friendliness or support of a particular neighbour. In this last instance, open friendly relations with a neighbour were presented as atypical of the generally impenetrable cliques that these interviewees perceived as characteristic of the village.

The significance of neighbours as a gauge of community is illustrated in the following quotation from a middle-aged woman living in the urban locality. The road name has been changed to preserve anonymity.

"I think that when we lived in Sussex Road it was a bit better because we had a neighbour next door and she, cos her son was just about a year and a half older than my son and so of course they grew up quite a lot together and they played together and so consequently I used to talk to her over the fence in the garden when I put the washing out and that sort of thing. Quite a lot. [..] But not round here. I haven't found it so much round here. Especially as quite a lot of new ones have moved into the road and very often they don't want to know. They wouldn't offer if they saw you struggling, they wouldn't offer." (Betty, UF4, aged early 50s, disabled by back problems)

The presence of a next-door neighbour in a similar situation to herself gave Betty a very different perception of neighbourliness in Sussex Road compared with her current road even though these were only a few streets apart. Neither matched up to Betty's ideals of community ('it was a bit better') but there was sufficient interaction to create a relationship. This interaction took place by coincidence (when she and her neighbour happened to be out in their gardens at the same time) and was made possible by the presence of a fence that was low enough to

talk over but maintained a physical barrier and a clear division of space. The experience was located in a particular stage in Betty's life when she had young children and was more mobile than at the time of interview. With increasing disability, her requirements of neighbours had changed (she would have welcomed help carrying shopping) but no such help was offered and she did not ask for it. Betty attributed the decline in sociability in her current road to a high turnover of residents and the arrival of new, younger people who are less community-minded (*'very often they don't want to know'*) but she also felt this was indicative of trends in society:

"But even people you do know, I mean like the neighbours, they don't often say, like years ago they'd ask you to have a cup of tea and that sort of thing but there's none of that." (Betty, UF4, aged early 50s, disabled)

The various themes present in Betty's account - neighbours as a representation of community and society, the impact of personal life stage and health on relations with neighbours, the place of physical barriers in managed sociability, the value of offered help, the meaning of 'knowing' people, the effects of resident mobility on neighbourliness, disappointed ideas of community - occurred across the interview data.

The highly contextual nature of accounts of neighbourliness and therefore community is illustrated by comparing Betty's description of Sussex Road with that of another female interviewee:

"I used to live on Sussex Road and I was very friendly with a lady like next door and the lady across the road but nobody else. Nobody else in the road. So it weren't quite as close knitted down there." (Natalie, UF9, aged 20s, parent)

Betty and Natalie's experiences of living in Sussex Road were separated by a gap of about fifteen years but occurred at a similar life stage; that of having young children. The two accounts place a different meaning on the experience of being friendly with a next-door neighbour. For Betty, it is sufficient to indicate a better but not adequate level of community. For Natalie, the salient point is the fact that

she only knew two people in the road. As described earlier, Natalie's views of neighbourhood were influenced by the presence of family on the estate she moved back to from Sussex Road. The key difference between these two accounts is not so much chronological as located in the context of the women's lives.

References to relations with neighbours as a gauge of community were rare in the rural data for the reasons outlined earlier, namely that rural interviewees tended to apply questions about neighbourliness to the village as a whole. When rural interviewees did talk about neighbours in this way, it was to emphasise the superior nature of that relationship in the context of a village:

"And we had elderly neighbours. They were lovely. And when I was putting up new fences, we just didn't need the fences. Our kids went in their house and they just wandered around wherever they wanted."

(Chris, RM3, aged 30s, disabled by multiple sclerosis, parent)

Whilst most urban interviewees knew few people in the immediate locality, almost all female urban interviewees described a close reciprocal relationship with at least one near neighbour. The following description from June, a woman who lived alone in a terraced house and worked full-time, was typical:

"I mean Sally [previous next door neighbour] and I, Sally who's moved, I mean were very, very, sort of, you know, good friends. And one or two of the others. I mean I see next door and next door the other side and I still go and have coffee with Phyllis. But that's about sort of where it ends. [S.E.: And does it go across the road?] Erm er no. I mean I know the people across the road by sight. But not to be sort of friends and pop in and, you know, ask favours and things like that. No, not across the road."

(June, UF14, late 40s)

June's hesitation before applying the category 'friend' to Sally, a neighbour, reflected an understanding that seemed to be common among interviewees that these categories were separate. Neighbours who were also friends were those you spent time with socially, in each other's houses rather than on the neutral ground

of the street, and from whom you could ask favours. This was the type of interaction that Betty equated with true community and had not experienced in either her current or previous house. The actual and symbolic distance represented by 'across the road' was highly significant in interviewees' accounts, particularly in the urban locality. Although June's road was only the width of three cars, this was sufficient to restrict social relations to a visual acquaintance.

As stated earlier, there was much less talk about neighbours in the rural data although some interviewees spoke in similar ways to June of friendship with a particular neighbour. One of the four female interviewees in the rural locality mentioned earlier was Linda (RF16), a woman in her late 40s who had lived by herself in the village for 17 years and was disabled by multiple sclerosis. Until the recent arrival of a single mother to live next door, Linda had felt there was nobody in the village she could ask for help, either for herself or in coping with illness in her family and bereavement. In common with most references in the data to receiving help, Linda emphasised the reciprocal nature of the relationship:

*S.E.: What about if you're not very well and you want something done?
Are there people, would you ask neighbours?*

LINDA: Erm, well until my new my neighbour next-door I've got now, I didn't have any help from anyone whatsoever. But she's great. I mean she's got three kids, she's got to look after three kids and she's wonderful. And, sort of last Christmas I spent totally on my own and she's invited me to spend Christmas with her. And she's great, and the kids love I baby-sit for them and she says 'they absolutely adore you because you're not, you don't give in to them'.

The above extract also illustrates the representational and interpretative work that took place as people talked about the sensitive subject of social support.

The young people interviewed tended to talk much more about friends than neighbours. For those still living at home or when talking about their childhood, 'neighbours' signified the adults in a household rather than their offspring. The

ways in which the young people talked about relations between adult neighbours as a reflection of community were similar to other interviewees. However, none talked about neighbours as a source of help to themselves. Two interviewees in the urban locality (UM12 and UF11, both aged 18) presented a nostalgic picture of neighbourliness in the place they had lived before moving (separately) to the urban locality:

AIDAN: Where I used to live all neighbours spoke to each other, got on well with each other.

NICOLA: Helped people out. Yeah it was a community.

AIDAN: Yeah it was a community like. Yeah.

Betty's 18-year old daughter, Rachel (UF5), was similarly nostalgic about an older neighbour for whom she had been a substitute granddaughter:

RACHEL: We used to have an elderly gentleman across the road and mum used to sort of like be a carer for him and that. But he's died now. [..]

BETTY: Yeah cos he didn't have any family he used to sort of say and he'd treat her like a granddaughter and she'd spend a lot of time over there didn't you? Do your homework.

This was the only instance of a young interviewee talking about a family-like relationship with a neighbour. Several older adults talked in a positive way about family-like relations with neighbours' children. A characteristic of such accounts was the symbolism of open access, evident in Chris' reference quoted earlier to the lack of need for fences. Jane, also quoted earlier, had become friendly with one of the daughters of the family who had threatened her:

"And the younger girl comes across and rings her boyfriend. Her mum doesn't know, she's twelve. I don't even know what Deedee's real name is, always called her Deedee. She sometimes comes in cos I gave a lot of (two daughters') clothes that they'd grown out of and just wanted to get rid of. I said to her 'would your mum mind?'" (Jane, UF7, aged 40s, disabled by rheumatoid arthritis)

There is an element of subversion in Jane's willingness to let the girl use her phone to talk to a boyfriend of whom her mother was unaware. This contrasts with her earlier caution in checking that the girl's mother would not object to the offer of clothes. The reference to not knowing the girl's proper name illustrates that what a person knows about a neighbour is partial and depends on the context in which acquaintance develops.

It is not entirely clear from the data whether there was a gender difference in how men and women thought of their neighbours. The sampling approach used meant that many of the male interviewees were disabled or retired or both so spent more time at home than would be the case if they were in fulltime paid employment. Several were involved in community organisations or projects that gave them a different perspective on community. There is some indication that the men were less inclined than women to look to neighbours for help, preferring wherever possible to rely on family for personal tasks and friends for help with DIY type projects. The desire for independence and privacy was illustrated in the following exchange with Bill (UM2, aged 82, disabled by rheumatoid arthritis):

S.E.: Do people help each other out?

BILL: Never. I've always got me children to help me, see, anything I want. I've got four children.

S.E.: You don't really need neighbours then [to help]?

BILL: No no. Anything I want I've only got to ask one of the children.[..] They'll do anything for me, yeah.

S.E.: And I guess that keeps it private?

BILL: That's right. That's right yeah. It's all in the family.

There are reasons to be cautious in taking this analysis further since more of the female interviewees, particularly mothers, required assistance that was not readily available from other sources. When male interviewees found themselves in need of help and temporarily or permanently without family support, they did turn to neighbours:

"I've fallen over a few times and the neighbours come round and pick me up, off the ground. It's sixty per cent MS and forty per cent Guinness

normally! And er, yeah I mean they're all pretty good. You don't like to pester them too much but sometimes you have to." (Barry, RM2, early 50s, disabled by multiple sclerosis)

Reciprocity was emphasised in male and female accounts of help even when, as in the following instance, the interviewee was not in a position to replicate:

"I said to him yesterday 'are you going down the shop George?' 'Yes,' he said 'er I've just come back'. But he was going to go down there again and he said 'what d'you want?' I said 'well I've got a letter ere to pay some money like you know' and I said 'I would like you to post this if you're going down.' He about turned and went straight down and done it and came back and still went down after he'd done that. Now that's a friend when you need help. He's often taken me to hospital. You know I find if you help him and then vice versa sort of thing you know. That's how I see it." (Joe, UM21, aged 75, disabled by arthritis)

This preparedness to help (Crow *et al* 2002) is more in keeping with generalised reciprocity than the one-to-one exchanges evident in female descriptions of relations with neighbours who had become friends. The issue of reciprocity is explored further in section 5.4.

The complexity of knowing and trusting

Surveys of social capital commonly include questions about the proportion of people in the neighbourhood that respondents know and trust. The 2000 General Household Survey found that 46 per cent of respondents knew most or many people in their neighbourhood and 58 per cent felt that they could trust most or many people in their neighbourhood. Disadvantaged groups were generally more likely to know their neighbours and speak to them daily but less likely to trust their neighbours or have a reciprocal relationship with them (Coulthard *et al* 2002). As discussed earlier, the data from this study indicate that 'neighbourhood' had different meanings for interviewees depending on the nature of the locality and their social networks. The concepts of 'knowing' and 'trusting' were equally complex.

Interviewees applied fine gradations to whether and how well they 'knew' neighbours. One single mother living in the urban locality distinguished between knowing a neighbour by sight and knowing their name:

"I've got quite good neighbours so, like I say, I know a lot of them by sight but a lot of them I knew by name have sort of moved and other people have moved in, you know, so a lot of them I don't know." (Clare, UF18, aged early 30s, lone parent)

For Clare, to know a neighbour by sight did not amount to knowing them in any meaningful way. Other interviewees used the phrase 'say hallo to' to imply a similar superficial sociability that was conducted on neutral territory, outside people's homes, and occurred spontaneously and sporadically. This form of knowing did not extend into trust or the potential for mutual help.

Another single mother in the urban locality, Caz, restricted her definition of 'knowing' fellow residents to two neighbours. One was a next-door neighbour whom Caz described as very supportive and the other was a woman living across the road whom Caz perceived as hostile:

"The lady across the road I'm not too mmm keen on. [S.E.: In what way?] Well she, she's the type that looks down on people and she thinks she's better than us because erm her husband's got a car and her husband's got a job. [..] I'd open the door and she'd look and sort of. She's only like a couple of years older than me. I'm early twenties. She's got to be late twenties, early thirties and it's just 'oh look at you'. And, and I was like 'no, well I don't want to be involved with you either. I won't talk to you.' But she's the only one I know. We've had a lot of people moving in and out." (Caz, UF17, aged early 20s, lone parent)

Caz's attribution of self-importance and hostility to the woman across the road occurred within an acquaintance that was entirely visual and carried out at a distance. It may have owed as much to Caz's perception of self and accumulated experiences of living in the locality as to real antagonism. Nevertheless, as in

Jane's account of dealing with a threatening neighbour, the road presented a barrier that was both actual and symbolic.

Two of the urban interviewees presented idealised versions of community that were based on alternative layouts of housing. One of these was a man who had lived in a block of flats on the social housing estate for five years and was trying to mobilise a tenants' association:

"I should think that of those that have been here for a few months [..], most residents here would have had an average of two or three friends out of a block. Put that in a street and I think the story would be a lot different, a lot different. I mean you visualise you're going from here out. Who are you likely to see even if you use the stairs? Going in the lift there might be someone on the fourth floor whatever gets into the lift at the same time. But other than that, actually going in and out the door you've got very little chance to sort of meet anyone in a real sense. Whereas if you're on a street, if you have to walk or drive and that means that you're on view to each other more." (Sam, UM5, aged early 70s)

The phrase 'on view' indicates a concern as much with safety and deterring vandalism as with increasing sociability. Many of the urban interviewees lived in terraced housing on the kind of street described by Sam. Most had no more than two or three friends among neighbours and several had fewer.

The layout of housing was not mentioned in this way by rural interviewees although the size of the village was considered fundamental to social relations. One interviewee who had worked in the larger village ('X') where the secondary school was located compared the quality of 'knowing' neighbours in the two places:

"To me X had a village community anyway cos I knew a lot of people although I still think in X you don't necessarily know your neighbours, you know like you do here." (Liz, RF8, mid 30s, parent)

It is difficult to judge the validity of this assertion from the data. It was certainly true that interviewees in the rural locality tended to know more people by sight and name than in the urban locality. This was related to the size of population and other factors described on page 105. Many but not all rural interviewees talked about a level of sociability that involved going into each other's homes but this applied to those neighbours who had become friends rather than all neighbours. Interviewees in particular sub-groups (notably teenage males and mothers who were relative newcomers to the village) talked about being known but not included. This resonates with the divergent trends in knowing and trusting among disadvantaged groups found in the 2000 General Household Survey module on social capital.

Urban interviewees who said that that they knew few people in their road gave two main reasons for this. The most commonly cited reason was the high turnover of residents. The second explanation involved the issue of trust. Glaeser's model of social capital formation (Glaeser 2001) is based on the premise that individuals are more inclined to invest in social capital when they are likely to reside in a neighbourhood for some time. The model identifies younger people as being more likely to invest in social capital than older people, and home ownership and neighbourhood homogeneity also favouring social capital investment. Although I have reservations about such an instrumental approach to social capital, interviewees in both localities did describe moving into a new home as a critical time for becoming acquainted with neighbours. This was particularly the case when the move coincided with partial or complete withdrawal from the workforce to look after children or through forced or voluntary retirement:

"When I bought this house I was working in London so I didn't see that many people. But it was when I was pregnant with her, I had a lot of trouble and that was when other people with children round here noticed that I was home all day and sort of started chatting if they saw me out. And that was when I started to know all the neighbours and gradually over the last four years they've all sort of moved away. So now we're reduced to a very few that I actually know well up here. [...] You just

don't know the new people. [S.E.: Why do you think that is?] Several of them are young so of course they're out at work all day. When they get in, they probably don't want people knocking on their door." (Clare, UF18, aged early 30s, lone parent)

Clare's account is based on two assumptions. The first is that it is primarily the responsibility of established residents to identify and welcome newcomers and the second that acquaintance will develop through encounters outside people's houses. This social process breaks down when employment, disability or disinclination take newcomers and/or established residents out of the shared space of the street. A proactive remedy is to knock on someone's door but this risks intrusion and rejection. The fabled American tradition of neighbours delivering a homemade pie to welcome newcomers would transgress the delimited sociability described here.

The allocation of responsibility for sociability between established and new residents was less clear-cut in most accounts. More common was the observation that younger people were less community-minded than older residents:

"The older ones up the road are alright, are better but of course a lot of them have moved off or died and you've got a lot of younger ones with young families and they're not so [friendly]." (Betty, UF4, aged early 50s, disabled by back problems)

In the accounts of established rural interviewees, the category of 'urban' was added to discourses around younger newcomers.

The observation that younger residents were less friendly runs counter to Glaeser's finding that investment in social capital declines with age. Several explanations might be offered. The first is that the relatively low cost of owner-occupier housing in both localities attracted first time buyers who would move on within a relatively short time to gain more accommodation or a 'better' area or if the relationship broke up. Eleven of the urban interviewees and five rural interviewees had lived in the locality for less than five years. Five urban and four

rural interviewees mentioned the low price of houses as the main reason for moving to the locality although the desirability of a rural environment was an accompanying factor for rural interviewees, especially for those with children. A significant difference between the localities was that a second move in the urban context would generally take individuals out of the social networks surrounding their first home whilst a move within the village would keep them in that environment. In the urban context in particular making the effort to get to know neighbours might seem pointless if you are going to be moving within a short period. There is in fact no evidence of this attitude in the data although rational action theory (Becker 1964) would not necessarily treat this absence as decisive.

A second form of explanation for the perceived unsociability of younger residents would lie in the kinds of lifestyle and attitudinal factors discussed in the social capital literature (for example Putnam 1996 and 2000). Certainly several middle-aged and older interviewees subscribed to that view:

“But things have changed and that they are a bit more sort of, erm, self-centring on their families.” (Jack, UM3, aged early 50s)

The factors that seem to be particularly significant from these data are those that take individuals away from the locality such as work, existing networks with family and friends, car ownership and the use of distant shopping and leisure facilities. The themes of community presence and absence will be developed further in the course of this thesis.

There are two further explanations for the perceived unsociability of younger residents that merit consideration. One concerns the distancing of responsibility for neighbour relations from self onto others. The other explanation centres on issues of trust. As mentioned earlier, the question of responsibility for initiating and maintaining communal sociability was unclear in interviewees' accounts. None talked about the process or stage at which you ceased being a newcomer and became one of the established residents. There seemed instead to be an intermediate phase, as expressed in Betty's account, of being neither older/established nor younger/new. Unfortunately I did not probe how the

unfriendliness of younger residents manifested itself or the efforts made by the interviewee to develop acquaintance with neighbours, whether as an established resident or a newcomer. Newer residents talked about encountering 'cliqueyness' or instances of friendliness. Underlying both viewpoints was a tendency to attribute patterns of neighbour relations to the actions of others. Interviewees only became reflexive when discussing the maintenance of boundaries and the protection of privacy; subjects addressed in the last part of this section.

The transience of neighbours was regarded as especially problematic when it involved local social housing. The following quote expressed a sentiment hinted at by many interviewees who had lived in either locality for five or more years. The speaker had herself moved into council housing in the village in 1957 when her husband started work at the local industry:

"Everybody knew everybody and everybody was so happy together you know. It seems terrible to think that this is what has come out of it. But now you see if anybody leaves the council houses, well they're X housing society houses now. If anybody leaves, you see it's somebody really rough class that comes out here now." (Elsa, RF4, aged 85, disabled by arthritis)

Distrust or fear of local people was clearly a barrier to getting to know them better. The young woman, Caz, quoted earlier had lived in the urban locality all her life. In the interview, she initially blamed high turnover for the fact that she knew few of her neighbours but later talked about deliberately avoiding neighbours because of the high incidence of drug use and other social problems.

"You keep yourself to yourself and it's quiet." (Caz, UF17, aged early 20s, lone parent)

Rural interviewees had more varied views on the trustworthiness of local people. One woman who had lived in the village for 28 years presented a very positive view of village life:

"I mean I find it still a very pretty and safe place where you can still leave your front door open. You know you can do that. Go into town,

leave the door open.” (Joanne, RF15, aged mid 40s, parent, living with husband and four children)

In contrast, Elsa was adamant that leaving your door unlocked when you were out was a feature of the village in the past but it was no longer safe to do so:

“We could walk out of the house and just close the door. Not lock the door or anything and you could come back and nobody would have come in or anything. But now you daren’t go outside the door without locking up.” (Elsa, RF4, aged 85, living alone)

Elsa’s view was echoed by participants in the focus group with members of the over-60s club. It is worth emphasising that these comments apply to locking the door when the house is empty. Elsa herself left her back door unlocked during the day if she was in the house and neighbours or friends could come in by going round the side of the house. As far as I am aware, none of the urban interviewees allowed open access to their homes in that way. Joanne’s door was locked when I arrived for the interview, as were the front doors of other rural interviewees.

Elsa attributed the reduction in trust to changes in norms of behaviour in the village rather than wider society. Potential burglars were not passing strangers but other residents. Of most concern to people of her generation were the groups of young people who hung around outside at night:

“There’s other older people won’t come out of their house at night. [..] Their doors are locked and all. Alright I do lock mine too but er lots other old people like me will not come out. Before we all used to go out of a night. Not now.” (Elsa, RF4, aged 85)

The identity of those to be mistrusted or feared varied according to the age and situation of the interviewee. For older people such as Elsa, it was teenagers or children who were perceived as most threatening. For female interviewees, distrust was focused on male strangers who posed a physical threat or other women who posed an emotional threat because they might let you down or use you:

"You are suspicious of absolutely everyone especially living on your own... If anyone helps you, you think 'oh what are they after?' You know, instead of them genuinely helping you out. Shame cos nine times out of ten they've done it to help you and don't want nothing." (Clare, UF18, aged early 30s, lone parent)

"The trouble is I'm too trustworthy with people. Well I have been in the past and it's made me a bit dubious now trusting people in case they've got an unfortunate motive." (Karen, RF1, aged 30s, parent)

Karen's comment illustrates one of the problems in using trust as even a proxy indicator of social capital, which is Putnam's recent position (Putnam 2000: 45). Trust is situated not only in current social circumstances but also in the accumulated experiences of a lifetime.

A second problem with trust as a measure of community is the fluidity in people's perceptions of 'society'. Male interviewees, both young and older, were aware that they were on occasions the object of others' mistrust, not necessarily because of their own behaviour but based on stereotypes.

"I think it's what has been addressed on telly. You know society itself. [...] The other day I tried to help a lady with a buggy off the bus and she had a baby and that, she you know she's very 'who are you?' sort of thing. [...] They're aware in case I might be a mugger or something. It's that aware because police are telling you make sure your handbags, be aware of when you go out and I think more people are sort of in that way. You know 'is he trust worthy?'" (Jack, UM3, aged 50s)

"A lot of people like come down to [...] the village and that and they do like little robberies on cars and that and we get all the blame for it. It's just not right." (Adam, RM6, aged 15)

The complexity of interviewees' understanding of what it meant to 'know' and 'trust' people living near them challenges the treatment of these concepts in

survey research as single dimensional. Context is crucial; both in terms of the frame of reference underlying interviewees' notions and expectations of community and the accumulated experiences of their lives.

Managing sociability

Earlier in this chapter, it was noted that an interviewee, June, hesitated before applying the term 'friend' to a neighbour. As has been observed in other research, one difficulty inherent in neighbour relations is balancing cordiality with the preservation of privacy. Unavoidable physical proximity needs to be accompanied by something of a social and emotional distance. A recent study by Crow *et al* (2002) highlighted the skilled nature of accomplishing a 'friendly distance' and the uncertainty involved in knowing how best to behave. The authors criticised the stereotyping of neighbours as interfering 'busybodies' or detached 'nobodies', arguing instead that the majority of residents in the community they studied occupied a middle ground between these extremes. They concluded that the busybody/nobody dichotomy might be the product of encapsulated and fragmented communities respectively and that more attention should be paid to communities that fit neither description. The limited nature of neighbour relations described by urban interviewees in this study suggests that the urban locality may have been more fragmented than the one studied by Crow *et al*. Certainly criticism of inadequate behaviour by neighbours focused on indifference and apathy in the urban locality. In the rural locality, the data were more mixed with criticisms of both nosiness and indifference, sometimes within the same account.

The balancing act depicted by Crow *et al* was described in the following terms by a rural interviewee who, as noted earlier, was forced occasionally by his health condition to ask neighbours for help:

“Personally I think the best neighbour is someone who's not, who's there when you require them. But you don't want them round and pestering you and you just want them to be like we are to them if you like: a neighbour. I don't think you, well you don't want someone that's aloof. And you

don't want someone who's erm well too friendly I suppose really."
(Barry, RM2, early 50s, disabled by multiple sclerosis)

For interviewees such as Barry, the consequence of getting the balance wrong was to lose either privacy or access to help. Reciprocity – actual or intended – was a common strategy for maintaining independence. In the urban locality, reciprocal help was usually directed at individual neighbours whilst in the rural locality it might be more generalised. One of Barry's strategies was to allow village children to ride on the back of his electric wheelchair:

"I mean most of the kids in the village, I let them have a go on my scooter or they jump on the back. And er they've been doing that for ten years nearly. So some of those that were ten are now eighteen and, you know, they're still 'alright Barry?' I don't know half of their names but it doesn't matter" (Barry, RM2, early 50s)

Interviewees' descriptions of idealised communities of the past emphasised unrestricted sociability, unlocked doors, open access and mutual trust:

"We always used to have the back door open. And the rent man knew where to get his money if you weren't in. The coal man knew where his money was. [...] You trusted people, didn't you? But now, I mean, you really can't trust anybody, can you, to come into your home?" (Jane, UF7, aged 40s, disabled by rheumatoid arthritis)

"It was a time when you could leave doors open. Our back door actually was never closed. There's a vast difference. " (Dennis, UM22, aged 87)

In contrast, descriptions of interviewees' own relations with neighbours made frequent reference to boundaries and barriers, both physical and social. Conversations were held in the street or over fences, gates were shut and doors were not knocked on. Transgression of these boundaries signified intrusion or intimidation:

"I used to talk to her over the fence in the garden" (Betty, UF4, early 50s)

"they're leaning against your gate" (Michelle, UF13, early 30s)

"you can still leave your front door open" (Joanne, RF15, mid-40s)

"you daren't go outside the door without locking up" (Elsa, RF4, aged 85)

Interviewees' accounts contained two other versions of idealised community beside that of free access. One version represented the privacy end of the spectrum, described most clearly by an urban interviewee (UM14) in his early 20s who was a widower with two young children. His concept of neighbourliness was a restricted acquaintance that took place entirely in the road and involved almost no conversation or involvement in the lives of others:

IAN: It's a very quiet little close I live in. I mean we see them to say hallo to and that but we don't you know go round their houses or anything like that. It's not that sort of 'hallo how you doing?'

S.E.: Keep themselves to themselves a bit?

IAN: Yeah. I think we all do. It's the way we all like it I think.

Ian's liking for the road he lived in was based on it being 'quiet' and what he perceived as a mutual preference for limited sociability. I did not interview anyone else from the same road so am unable to test the validity of the latter assumption. Ian's emphasis on privacy was located in his personal biography. When his wife was alive, they had lived in an area of the East End of London where she had extended family networks:

IAN: Family wise they we tend to class family as mum, dad, sisters where they class the family as mum, dad, granddad, uncles, aunts, cousins, second cousins and they all live together, live in each other's houses and that. Coming back to the neighbours thing. Over here it's 'hallo, see you later' Over there they'd be 'oh come in and we'll have some dinner together'. It's like you see on the telly like everyone knows each other. Everyone's always in and out of each other's houses and that.

S.E.: Which way do you prefer?

IAN: I prefer this way. I couldn't get on with it over there.

S.E.: No?

IAN: That's why I moved back over. I couldn't get on with it. You see I'd come home from work sort of nine o'clock at night and we'd have a house full of cousins and nieces and nephews but they didn't know anything different. They were all right with it. It's [all] the same over there.

Ian's comparison of his wife's family with television portrayals of community is interesting. It is a way of imparting the nature of the relationships visually as well as verbally. For Ian, this level of contact transgressed the boundaries of the domestic sphere because it took place indoors, went beyond simply conversation to include meals, and spilled over into their time as a couple. He excused his in-laws' behaviour on the grounds that they *'didn't know anything different'* but this implies there is a better way of managing sociability. The absence of privacy included a threat to his right to know first about events of deep personal significance to his wife and himself:

"My wife come out of the doctor's surgery and I think the whole town knew that she was pregnant before I did." (Ian, UM14, aged early 20s, widower)

Following his wife's death, Ian had taken his children out of the sphere of her family except when visiting. He had also kept a distance with his own family and friends by moving to an area where he had few contacts. He had thus chosen privacy and self-sufficiency over the availability of childcare and other help. This is the most extreme representation of concern for privacy found in the data.

One interviewee suggested a hybrid version of idealised community based around the idea of a cul-de-sac:

"I want the small cul-de-sac, Paul wants the cul-de-sac. We want a detached property so that we don't have to worry about listening to other neighbours or they don't have to listen to us. We don't want to cut

ourselves off but we just, we're not independent either. We just feel we don't want to encroach on anybody else's space and vice versa."
(Michelle, UF13, aged early 30s, parent)

This mixed ideal of community is probably nearest to what most of the interviewees in both localities wanted from neighbourliness although individual accounts were located across the spectrum. A detached house in a cul-de-sac provides an interesting metaphor for the meeting of individualisation and communification as discussed by Crow *et al* (2002), building on Warde (1994). In the absence of such structural arrangements, interviewees in this study were faced with the complicated task of managing sociability with neighbours in other ways.

5.7 Getting help

Social support is a central theme of the literature on social capital and community. The first part of this section presents examples of interviewees' varying experiences of local support. This is followed by an analysis of interviewees' main sources of help. The third part of the section addresses interviewees' understanding of reciprocity and the section concludes by considering the emphasis placed by interviewees on latent neighbourliness.

Experiences of communal support

As has been argued in earlier chapters, the concept of social capital as applied to geographical communities raises many questions. The two that are of concern here are 'What is social capital *for*?' and, assuming that it is a collective characteristic or resource, 'How equitable is the distribution of its benefits?' These questions touch on the heart of the debate over whether social capital is a shared or individual resource.

As described earlier, interviewees in the rural locality related to the village as a meaningful social entity. Several interviewees talked about networks of support that were disseminated throughout the village rather than limited to immediate

neighbours or close friends. These accounts tended to emphasise how different this was from urban environments:

"It's amazing really. And they'll do anything for you. You know you're not left out on a limb but you find that, if you was in trouble, they would be there for you. Whereas in town, you don't get that feeling." (Theresa, RF3, early 60s, disabled through diabetes)

Joanne, quoted earlier in connection with trust, had an equally favourable view of the support she had received during four years as a single parent:

"I was married here and got divorced and I was on my own with three of the children and fortunately I got a lot of support from friends. My marriage broke down and friends would check I was okay. 'Did I need anything?' And then when I met Brian, got married again [..] and everyone was so pleased, you know. Everyone come to the wedding." (Joanne, RF15, aged mid 40s, parent)

Although Joanne is talking about friends in this extract, elsewhere in the interview she uses 'the village' and 'friends' interchangeably:

"The village have been very, very kind. Very helpful. If something goes wrong in your life, they will help you. Like last week I had the flu. People ring you. They come and help you out, take your child to school. Very very good like that." (Joanne, RF15)

The phrase 'something going wrong in your life' was a reference to a car accident the previous year in which her son had been hurt and two other boys from the village were killed. Stories about this incident are discussed in Chapter 7. Another feature of Joanne's description of help is that it is proactive and anticipates likely need. She is not placed in the position of having to ask for help, only to acquiesce to the offer. The difference between offered and asked-for help was significant to interviewees.

Testimonies such as those of Theresa and Joanne would suggest a high level of social capital in the rural locality. Yet other interviewees spoke of receiving no

support during times of need that would have been apparent to others. Elsa's husband had developed Alzheimer's disease eleven years previously and she said that she had received no support from anyone except her children:

"I looked after [him] for eight years. And then I put him in, I had to put him into a home because I couldn't keep up following on because he had this idea that he wanted to walk, walk, walk. And I, see, have severe arthritis so that was it." (Elsa, RF4, aged 85)

Similarly, as quoted earlier, Linda who was disabled through MS had lived in the village for twenty-four years and had only received help in the past year:

"I didn't have any help from anyone whatsoever" (Linda, RF16, aged late 40s)

It is difficult to pin down reasons for this stark variation in interviewees' experiences of support in the rural locality. Elsa had lived in the village for the longest (44 years) but she and Theresa had both moved to the village in the 1950s when their husbands had started work at the local industry and they already had young children. Both looked back at that time as a golden age of community. Where their accounts differed was that Elsa felt the village had deteriorated markedly since that time whereas Theresa, returning in 2000 after a gap of more than thirty years, found little change. This fundamental difference in perception coloured the whole of their respective accounts. Although both disabled, the two women's personal circumstances were different. Elsa was a widow and lived alone although two of her children still lived in the village. She valued privacy and self-sufficiency within the family (*"We sort of keep among ourselves, you know?"*) and felt herself to be different from other villagers in key respects including political affiliation. Theresa's children lived elsewhere but her husband, Graham, was in good health and she possessed an electric wheelchair that gave her access to the whole of the village and surrounding walking areas. She was also 20 years younger than Elsa although they had brought up a family over a similar period. The core narrative of Theresa's account might be represented by the phrase: *"That's how friendly they were here"* which followed one of several stories about neighbours' kindness. Elsa's narrative was more

complex combining nostalgia for a lost time (*"I liked it better the way it was and I liked the people that lived [here then]"*) with a distancing of herself and her values from most others in the village.

The personal circumstances of Joanne and Linda were less similar although both had lived in the village since the mid 1980s. Joanne had previously lived there from 1973 to 1983 and moved back in 1985. Both had been in full-time paid employment away from the village although Linda had been forced to give up work sooner because of her disability. Joanne had only just stopped work. One key difference was that Joanne's situation as a mother and for a while lone parent was shared by more women in the village than Linda's situation as a single woman who was disabled. Joanne's social networks and leisure activities were also focused more on the village than Linda's involvement in music. In common with Elsa, Linda's account emphasised the distinctiveness of her life and values and her perceptions of the decline of personal behaviour across society. These examples demonstrate not only that rural interviewees had different experiences of support in the village but also that their accounts were rooted in wider narratives of self and place.

Interviewees' experiences of support in the urban locality were even more individualised than in the village although, as discussed earlier, the presence of one or two supportive neighbours was a common experience for female urban interviewees and much valued. Those urban interviewees with extensive local family networks potentially had access to more support in the locality although, as has been noted elsewhere (Blaxter and Poland 2002), family connections may be demanding as well as supportive.

Sources of support

Table 6 below gives an overview of interviewees' main sources of support. It should be emphasised that these categories are complex with some blurring between neighbours and friends, especially in the rural locality, and interviewees taking different approaches to whether in-laws counted as 'family'. For interviewees who were members of alternative communities (such as a church)

fellow members might be either friends or something akin to neighbours. The data reflect the interviewee's stated orientation in seeking and receiving help rather than a quantitative measure of the sources of support used by them. The latter would have required a different research instrument such as a diary.

Table 6: Primary sources of support for interviewees in each locality

	Family only	Friends only	Family & friends	Family & neighbours	Friends & neighbours	None
Urban (n=39*)	13 (33%)	9 (23%)	9 (23%)	4 (10%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)
Rural (n=25*)	7 (28%)	4 (16%)	9 (36%)	1 (4%)	3 (12%)	1 (4%)

* *Note: 3 urban interviewees and 2 rural interviewees have been excluded because their accounts were unclear on the subject of support. This was mainly because they were ancillary to a conversation with another interviewee.*

Interviewees in the urban locality were most likely to rely on family only for help followed by the categories of friends only and a combination of family and friends. The order was different in the rural locality with the highest percentage of interviewees looking to family and friends for help followed by family only and then friends only. For the majority of interviewees, family was regarded as the 'natural' source of support but this might not be available for a number of reasons. Distance was a factor as well as the quality of the relationships involved and the death of close family members. The higher proportion of urban interviewees in the 'family only' category is not a reflection of better family relationships or necessarily sufficient support from that source but the absence of additional sources of help. For many of these interviewees, 'family only' signified 'family and no-one else'. The geographical isolation of the rural locality meant that family might live further away whereas the greater degree of sociability in the village favoured the development of local friendships. The

higher proportion of urban interviewees who relied on friends only for support seemed to reflect the fact that urban interviewees were more likely to have broken off ties with their birth family, either deliberately or through distance.

Age was also a factor in these patterns. Older and middle aged interviewees in both localities were most likely to look to family only for support and this usually meant their children or equivalent relationships (such as the partners of their children or nieces). Almost all the younger interviewees in both localities saw support as coming primarily from friends rather than family or neighbours. The latter finding may well have been a product of the situations of the young people interviewed and also the kind of help they described, which was mainly information or emotional support. Neighbours did not feature heavily in accounts of support in either locality except where the individual was disabled and/or family and friends lived at some distance. Younger and middle-aged women with children were most likely to seek and receive support from diverse sources: family, friends and neighbours. For these interviewees, family mainly meant their mother or partner's mother although a grandmother, aunt, sister or sister-in-law was important to some. Yet mothers were also likely to seek no help in some circumstances, such as if they were themselves ill.

The two interviewees who received virtually no support (the far right-hand column of Table 6) had no local family or friends and had moved to the localities in unusual circumstances. One was the young widower Ian (UM14) whose situation has already been discussed. The other was a female refugee with young children who had lived in the urban locality for two years and whose only family contact was a cousin living a few miles away.

The main gender difference in sources of support was that male urban interviewees were particularly likely to receive support from family only. This finding must be treated with some caution, however, since urban male interviewees were an older group than either rural males or urban females.

The interview data also showed that interviewees had clear views on what constituted appropriate demands on particular types of relationship. Few interviewees talked about borrowing money or other forms of financial assistance but those that did, and this was restricted to women, would only ask family to help in this way; either parents or other relatives who were older than them. For female interviewees and young male interviewees, friends were the most common source of emotional support. Female interviewees with pre-school children often had a routine of seeing other friends with children on particular days and helped each other out with childcare on a reciprocal basis. There were also examples in the rural locality of female friends collaborating on mail-order type sales to generate extra income. Male interviewees relied on friends to help with aspects of DIY, car maintenance or, in the rural locality, transport on occasions. As with the women, these arrangements were expected to be reciprocal on an individual rather than generalised basis. The ways in which female and male interviewees supported and received support from friends had many of the features of individualised social capital. Where it differs from Putnam's conceptualisation is that friendship is of course selective and, as Table 6 illustrates, around half of interviewees in each locality did not include friends as primary sources of support.

The number of interviewees who relied on neighbours for on-going support was small. This probably reflected the limited extent of neighbourliness especially in the urban locality and also the complexity of preserving both parties' privacy. Where neighbours were important was in those forms of support where proximity was crucial. The types of support in which neighbours became involved mainly concerned security (in which neighbours had a shared interest), the care of pets and plants when the owner was on holiday, and the provision of emergency support. The latter was of most concern to interviewees who lived alone and/or were disabled. However, as discussed in the final part of this section, the ability to rely on neighbours if an emergency occurred was a significant theme in many accounts. Neighbours with particular areas of expertise might also be of value although in fact only two interviewees mentioned this. In both instances, the

expertise was medical and was used to help a lone parent decide whether a child was sufficiently ill to need to be seen by a doctor.

The meaning of reciprocity

Norms of reciprocity are considered a significant aspect of social capital and also feature in literature around neighbourliness. Most often the focus is on generalised reciprocity whereby people help others not because they expect the recipient to return the favour but because at some point in the future they may need help from someone.

The principle of reciprocity was shared and valued by most interviewees but not for the most part in the sense described above. Reciprocity in interviewees' accounts was generally a one-to-one transaction between people who knew each other well. This is expressed in the following exchange with a separated father (RM4) living in the rural locality:

NEIL: Like one of me friends, I went with him to pick a car up the other day. He goes 'there you are, there's a tenner'. I said 'no'. 'Yes yes'. I said 'I'll be offended if you give that' because he was gonna give it to me boy to give to me. I said 'no, we're friends'. I said 'I might ask you for a favour and' I said 'that's how it should be'. So he goes, 'oh okay then, cheers.'

S.E.: Do you think living somewhere like [village], people do that to neighbours as well or is it just really friends?

NEIL: I think it's just friends.

As already noted, both male and female accounts of receiving help from friends or neighbours emphasised the reciprocal nature of the relationship even if they were not in a position to offer practical help. The moral requirement to reciprocate led some female interviewees to emphasise that they would do more than their fair share, implying that some did less:

"I feel I would be prepared to do anything." (Clare, UF18, early 30s)

"If any of these neighbours that I've got here say to me 'oh can you look after my child?' If I've got something definite, you know really important

to do, I would 'yeah no problem'. I am that type of person. I'll go round, 'yeah no problem'. But if you asked them..." (Georgia, UF1, aged late 20s)

Both these interviewees had spent a considerable period as a single mother. Georgia had recently remarried but childcare remained predominantly her responsibility. Georgia's efforts to develop the millennium green into a play area for all the local children seemed to have little effect on the readiness of other mothers to help with childcare. Friends were also perceived as offering support that had limits:

"I think even out of my friends people do tend if you use them too often it's that they are being used. It's the 'what can you give me if I'm going to give to you?' type situation and I'm sure they've got little mental scoreboards as well. It did used to hurt me but I've got the stage now where I don't expect to go out if suddenly something comes up." (Georgia, UF1, aged late 20s)

It was especially difficult for lone parents to maintain equality of exchange with friends who had less need of support because they had partners or other sources of childcare. In such a situation, shared expectations of reciprocity (expressed by Georgia in the phrase '*little mental scoreboards*') inhibited asking for help.

The norm of individualised reciprocity could be overlooked in exceptional circumstances such as serious illness:

"I've tried to be always there for her through having the children, you know, if I can so... It's, you know, even if she can't reciprocate I'd always, I would always be there for Mary and the children cos it's a tough time for them." (Liz, RF8, aged 30s, parent)

Interviewees distinguished between having to ask for help and it being offered, with the latter valued more highly. Asking for help risks rejection and incurs a debt whilst an offer of help comes with less obligation and a choice of whether to accept or decline. It can be argued that offered help is more likely to emerge in a

context of generalised reciprocity. Localised reciprocity based on one-to-one exchanges places those in most need of assistance at a disadvantage. Current norms of reciprocity – and possibly social capital itself – are thus more likely to reinforce rather than resolve imbalances between the need for and access to social support.

There were some instances of generalised reciprocity in the data, usually in association with an alternative form of community. One example was a housing project in the urban locality for homeless young people. Residents had their own bed-sits but shared a kitchen and other living areas. The project culture was one of trust:

“I think it’s just because we all come from [..] similar circumstances that we can relate to each other. So if someone’s feeling down, you know you can go over there. Like say if Hayley’s upset now, I’d go over and talk to her. If she didn’t wanna talk, I’d know to leave her because I feel that way. There’s times I’ve felt I’ve wanted to be left on my own. And then Hayley will then come to me knowing that I’d showed her that I cared about [her/it]. Hayley will then come to me to talk. And we all know that everyone in here, whether there’s just two people here all night, that that other person will always talk to you.” (Nicola, UF11, aged 18, living in a housing scheme)

Similar notions of shared support within a group occurred in accounts of a Sure Start type parents and toddlers group in the urban locality. Norms of reciprocity among church members were more difficult to assess because of the association between faith and helping others. It would have been surprising if church goers had talked in terms other than those of generalised reciprocity. The level of support described by rural interviewees such as Theresa and Joanne might also suggest generalised reciprocity but in fact this occurred within friendship networks in the village and excluded ‘outsiders’ of various kinds.

Latent community

The quote from Theresa (RF3) on page 128 expressed her confidence that others in the village would help if she found herself in trouble. The belief that neighbours would help out in an emergency featured in accounts of both localities, even when the speaker received little or no help from neighbours at present:

“but in an emergency you could knock on their door (Clare, UF18, aged early 30s, lone parent)

“[There are] lots of people that I could, if I was in dire straits, I could just knock on the door and say you know ‘can you help me out?’ and they, everyone would.” (Liz, RF8, aged 30s, parent)

The reference to knocking on a neighbour’s door signalled the transgression of usual norms of behaviour because of the degree of urgency. This belief in latent community seemed enormously important to interviewees. It represented a reversal of normal patterns of apathy and indifference and would demonstrate that the locality was better than its reputation. Some of the fieldwork coincided with media coverage of flooding elsewhere in Kent. Neither of the research localities was high risk but nevertheless two interviewees (one in each locality) volunteered the view that people would rally round if the locality were to be flooded. Several rural interviewees told the story of the ‘great snow (described in Chapter 7) to demonstrate underlying social resources and collective resourcefulness that would become active in an emergency. Urban interviewees did not have the same narrative repertoire and so resorted either to general statements of belief or examples from the Second World War or earlier.

5.7 Summary: lay understanding of key aspects of social capital

This chapter has explored interviewees’ experiences and perceptions of certain key aspects of social capital. These were the size of area that held social meaning for interviewees, the significance and complexity of relations with neighbours,

and experiences and expectations of support. The conceptual and methodological implications of the findings outlined in this chapter will be considered in full in Chapter 8. The following brief discussion is intended simply to highlight some significant themes.

Concepts such as 'know', 'trust' and 'reciprocity' were found to have richer and more complicated meaning for interviewees than is often acknowledged in the social capital literature, with the exception of a body of qualitative research discussed in Chapter 2. Accounts of place were located in a personal biography and social history: themes that will be developed over the course of the thesis. Interviewees' experiences of the availability of non-family support varied, even in the rural locality, which calls into question the possibility of social capital operating as 'public good'.

The tendency in policy approaches to privilege bridging social capital over bonding social capital is at odds with interviewees' concern with a growing deficit in *bonding* social capital (although they would not have used this term) at both an individual and societal level. Interviewees attached qualitatively different meanings and value to close connections compared with acquaintance and in no sense regarded these as interchangeable. From this perspective, gaps in social capital would be met not by knowing more people but by a small number of close dependable relationships.

Interviewees exhibited a sophisticated understanding of wider social changes that undermined neighbourliness although ideals of community based on open access and intense sociability were often inconsistent with interviewees' own behaviour. Most interviewees exhibited a highly individualistic approach to sociability with others living locally. They emphasised the importance of respect for privacy in notions of 'the good neighbour', were wary of getting too involved, and expected help to be reciprocated on an individual rather than generalised basis. In this way, interviewees were both located within and commentators on a social context that fostered individualism. This tension between voiced normative expectations and trends towards individualist behaviour is critical to understanding not only the

changing nature of contemporary community but also the ways in which people talk about their particular neighbourhood or locality.

This leads back to the question 'What is social capital *for*?' A number of possibilities present themselves. The norms and networks that are said to favour co-operation might be harnessed in the service of financial or civic collaboration. This is not, however, what these interviewees expected from community. Alternatively, social capital might result in the provision of practical, social and emotional support to individuals. Many of the interviewees described such needs but it is difficult to see how this would amount to a shared goal in a secular society since the well connected and self-sufficient would have nothing to gain. A third possibility is that social capital serves to maintain a distinctive group identity by safeguarding boundaries and socialising juniors and newcomers into the collective's rules and norms. This is closer to Bourdieu and Coleman's conceptualisations of social capital than Putnam's. Such processes of social inclusion and exclusion form part of the subject matter of the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Me, them and us: interactions of self, place and space

6.1 Introduction

It was noted at various points in Chapter 5 that interviewees' experiences and perceptions of their neighbourhood or village were situated in a personal biography and a localised context. In this, the second of three chapters setting out the research findings, more reflexive aspects of the data are brought to the fore. The theoretical frameworks built around the concept of social capital are temporarily set to one side in order to interrogate the interactions between self and place in more depth. There is a substantial psychological and social geography literature addressing these themes so in order to retain a sociological focus, the analysis concentrates on aspects of *social involvement* in the village, neighbourhood or locality or in sub-groups with a localised identity. Involvement or non-involvement seemed to comprise of two dimensions. The first was social inclusion or exclusion, which was produced by the attitudes and actions of others or interviewees' perceptions of these. The second dimension was engagement or distancing, which stemmed from the individual's own interests and sense of self. These dimensions were inter-related so that experiences of exclusion might reinforce a preference for social distance whereas involvement with a particular issue could alter a person's perceptions of their place in the local social environment. The chapter includes a discussion of civic engagement and community participation. These are usually treated as components or consequences of collective social capital. The approach adopted here, however, is to locate engagement and participation within a broader context of social involvement.

The chapter begins in section 6.2 with an outline of what place meant to interviewees, the significance of the locality's reputation and environment for their sense of self, and the intrusion of self into accounts of place. Section 6.3 considers the centrality of children and childhood to accounts of place and community, notions of good and bad parents and evidence for a generational divide. Section 6.4 addresses civic and community involvement and section 6.5

presents interviewees' experiences and perceptions of social exclusion and (more rarely) inclusion. The concluding section presents an interpretative framework in terms of community absence and presence, both physical and social.

6.2 Self and place

Understandings of place

Chapter 5 described how interviewees in the two localities related to their road, estate or village as an area with social meaning. Other aspects of place were also important to residents and for most urban interviewees these occurred within a more extensive geographical area than social interaction. For rural interviewees, significant social and physical aspects of the locality tended to map onto a similar geographical area; namely the village and surrounding walking areas.

Interviewees from both localities related to the place where they lived in a variety of ways. One understanding of place was as a physical environment experienced outside their home or other buildings. It included roads, pavements, alleyways, parks, common land, wasteland and (for rural interviewees) fields and a small area of beach. Such space was public or semi-public and supposedly neutral although particular elements, such as a children's play area, might be occupied and in a sense owned by different groups during the day and at night. Spaces might be physically accessible at certain times of the day and locked at others, or made inaccessible in specific circumstances such as building work or foot and mouth disease. Spaces might also be safe or unsafe and this was influenced by familiarity and the time of day. Most interviewees valued the availability of open space even if they did not use them themselves or no longer did. Parents of young children regarded parks as an essential feature of a locality:

"Kneller Park is quite nice. It feels like you're out in the country." (Sally, UF15, aged 20s, parent)

Interviewees in the rural locality talked less about the physical environment than urban interviewees but aspects of rural life that they prized, such as quietness or greater freedom for children, often stemmed from the physical environment:

"If you go for a walk across there, you'll see wildlife like you'll see nowhere else." (Harry, RM11, aged 60s)

"So I think because it's a place where your children can have some freedom, they tend to go and explore." (Liz, RF8, aged 30s, parent)

For Theresa, the combination of recently moving to the village and the accessibility she had regained through an electric scooter increased her appreciation of the local environment. The word 'walk' in the following quote is metaphorical:

"I can get on my little float and walk down the beach. It's lovely."
(Theresa, RF3, early 60s, disabled with diabetes)

For other older interviewees, ageing was experienced through a reduced ability to walk around a familiar environment. One rural interviewee (RF7) had recently given up collecting football pools:

MABEL: You talk to people at the door. 'How are you? How are things going?' Or if a different pet comes to the door, you talk about the pet. And they ask you how you're doing or if they have a holiday or what you're doing or whatever. It's surprising how you, how much you miss the talking. And an hour and a half out walking of a night didn't do you any harm. An hour and a half to two hours. And I done it twenty-five years. And it's just when I see those people now. And they're 'how are you?', you know, and I ask them how they are and all that. But when you see them every week, there's no problem. Yes it is, it is surprising. You get to know people doing that.

S.E.: Did you give it up because it got too much?

MABEL: Well for our legs. Yeah. For our legs, yes. You just don't realise you see. You're so busy talking you never mind about your body at the time. [...] Never mind. I done well, it was a nice turn. But of course with the Lottery, it's gone down a bit.

This quotation provides an example of the connection between physical mobility and social networks. Although Mabel continued to know people in the village

and would have a conversation if they met in the street, she felt that giving up the football pools meant that she knew less of the everyday detail of people's lives and hence knew them less well. Collecting for the football pools was an exception to the rule that sociability with neighbours (or villagers) occurred in the road rather than at the door.

Interviewees were very aware that the physical environment was vulnerable to the negative actions or inactions of others. Complaints about dog mess found in similar studies (for example Morrow 2001b) were rare in the data but traffic, inconsiderate drivers, vandalism, graffiti and hazardous litter (predominantly broken bottles, used condoms and discarded needles) were common themes.

"Used to find, erm, needles and used condoms on the grass over there, broken bottles" (Jane, UF7, aged 40s, disabled)

"I think that's where the older ones meet at night time and you have to watch out for glass cos they smash glasses and that. They do leave it a bit dirty sometimes but it's nothing compared with where I lived before."
(Karen, RF1, aged 30s, parent)

Karen's comment about broken glass in a public play area is matter-of-fact even though she had young children who might be hurt. Interviewees in the urban locality talked about discarded needles in a similar way. This is not to suggest that interviewees were not worried by the risks but rather that these were commonplace. There was no discussion of the problem in local newspapers over the period of the fieldwork.

In accounts of the rural locality, local teenagers were blamed for the vandalism and hazardous litter. Other forms of criminal damage, such as car theft, were either blamed on the teenagers or attributed to outsiders including travellers. Urban interviewees blamed teenagers and younger children for vandalism and graffiti but drug needles and other forms of hazardous waste were blamed on general others living nearby, as were different kinds of crime. Discourses on the bad behaviour of contemporary children and associated failures in parenting were an integral part of interviewees' accounts of damage to the local environment.

Inaction by the local authority was another source of complaint. Urban interviewees were more likely to blame the local authority for a slow response than for failing to prevent such problems by providing more facilities for young people:

“Like the hard standing down there. I used to take them down with their bikes. And it’s been covered with smashed glass for about 3 weeks. And the park round Meadway has been totally vandalised and not been repaired. And then we went over to Kneller and that park had been vandalised and not repaired.” (Clare, UF18, aged early 30s, lone parent)

“There’s a load of drugs needles up here. [...] Ten o’clock one night, me and Josie and my mother in law were out there clearing them up. And I hid them in that cupboard cos that’s a carousel in there and I hid them underneath the carousel. Phoned up the drugs erm in, down in (the town) somewhere, the needle exchange and they said ‘oh we’ll send somebody out’. Twenty-four hours it was before they sent somebody out.” (Steve, UM11, aged 50s, not working)

In contrast, rural interviewees of all ages recognised that there was little for young people to do in the village and some like Karen argued that the environment was better than elsewhere. Deciding who should take action to deal with damage to the local environment was more complex in the rural locality since the parish council, local authority and ‘the village’ were all involved in making decisions. The theme of civic engagement is addressed more fully in section 6.4.

Another understanding of place focused on facilities and services. These were experienced in an embodied way. People went to shops which were easy to get to or inconvenient. The GP surgery was noisy or the receptionist helpful. Buses dropped an interviewee outside their house or were undependable. Refuse was collected, green verges were left too long before being cut, teachers were friendly, headmistresses were intimidating. Public houses were a man’s pub, a family pub or a focus for underage drinking. Each locality had two buildings besides the church that were used as community spaces. All had multiple uses. In

the village these buildings were the village hall and the waiting room of the GP surgery, which also served as a library. In the urban locality they comprised of a community centre and a hall with associated facilities attached to the church. These indoor spaces were used by many different groups and for a range of activities. In a similar way to the fluid ownership of outdoor spaces such as children's play areas, the extent to which interviewees felt at home or conversely marginalized in supposedly community spaces was both time- and context-dependent. The clearest example of this were contrasting accounts of two parents and toddlers groups which used the same hall in the urban locality on different days. This is discussed in section 6.5 in relation to social exclusion.

The presence of others in the space outside a community facility could also alter its meaning. Older interviewees talked about groups of young people congregating in front of shops, outside the library or in the car park of the village hall. This changed the accessibility and meaning of those places. One male interviewee in the urban locality spoke of a group of teenage girls who hung around outside the library:

“they’re between fifteen and seventeen I suppose. I’ve seen ‘em sitting on the wall there, they’ve got big round earrings on. I think they’re worse than the boys from what I’ve heard.” (Joe, UM21, aged 75)

Joe's observation of the girls' behaviour was reinforced by hearsay from others in a similar situation to himself. As a man, being intimidated by a group of girls increased Joe's feelings of marginalisation in a familiar place. All spaces, both outside and inside, were settings for social interaction with others (family, friends, neighbours, acquaintances, staff and strangers) as individuals or in groups. The absence of people in a space was almost always temporary and might make it more or less safe depending on circumstances

A final way in which interviewees approached place was symbolically. A place often represented one half of a pair of opposites: safe or unsafe, familiar or unfamiliar, welcoming or hostile, unchanging or fluid, associated with freedom or constraint. The notions of 'urban' and 'rural' were part of this symbolic understanding of place. For older interviewees who had lived in the same place

for all or most of their life, significant points in their biography had a geographical location and some places had enormous personal significance:

"This house we chose it for the position because we used to do our courting in the brickfields at the back of here. [...] So there's quite a history here." (George, UM18, aged late 70s)

George's use of 'history' is in a personal sense referring to almost sixty years in which he and his wife had been courting and then married. But it might equally refer to the change in physical landscape from fields to built-up housing. For many of the older interviewees, descriptions of how the locality had changed merged with accounts of consistency and loss in their own lives.

The significance for self of the locality's reputation

Previous studies have explored people's sensitivity to the reputation of the place where they live (for example Cattell and Evans 1999, Anderson *et al* 1999, Popay *et al* 2003). Interviewees in this study were similarly aware of the reputation of their locality and addressed this spontaneously in the interviews. All assumed that I knew of this reputation.

Those interviewees, and these were the majority, who felt personally connected to the locality through birth or having settled there seemed most concerned by its reputation. The following example is from Gary, the young man who had been born on the social housing estate and lived in a housing project on its outskirts:

"It's going backwards. Just when it's just got cleared up and people do think it's bad. Everyone still thinks it's a rough area but it's just going to be, going back on itself and I think that's terrible. And I was born here and it does my head in. It's terrible. It was well good there." (Gary, UM9, aged 18)

The discussion that preceded this comment concerned a planned housing development close to the social housing estate where Gary had been born. He felt that additional people and particularly large numbers of children without a corresponding increase in provision would reverse fragile improvements in the local social environment. His defence of the locality is situated in a strongly felt

personal connection with the place (*I was born there*) and awareness of its negative reputation (*Everyone still thinks it's a rough area*). Gary differentiates between the locality of the present and that remembered from his childhood; a feature that might be expected from older interviewees but was in fact common across the data. The concluding assertion that *'It was well good there'* is nostalgic, contradicting Gary's general assertion that the locality had recently improved. Elsewhere in the interview Gary described the effects of violence by older boys on himself and his friends:

"It's got so much better since we've all grown up. Because I mean [...] there's times when I used to walk out when I was probably about seven eight year old and I used to get glass bottles thrown at me by all the older boys. And like me and all my mates were just like 'easy, easy, easy'. And it makes you, like it makes you think you're gonna have to stick up for yourself so you do. And then you start going a little bit crazy." (Gary, UM9, aged 18)

When Gary and his two friends were asked about the kind of place where they might want to bring up a family, Gary was adamant that it should not be somewhere like the estate:

"I wouldn't want my kids growing up on this estate. [S.E.: No?] I really wouldn't because it teaches too much." (Gary, UM9, aged 18)

This rational assessment of the estate as a bad place in which to bring up children is at odds with the final phrase of Gary's first quotation (*"It was well good there"*). An explanation may be that for Gary's current sense of self, growing up on the estate should have been in some sense 'well good'.

A more straightforward relationship between place and self was one in which a poor physical environment and lack of certain facilities reinforced an interviewee's dissatisfaction with their life. This was not in fact a common theme in the data although strongly expressed where it occurred, as the following example illustrates:

"(Urban locality) is a poor area to live in. A really poor area. I think it's degrading because it, it makes you feel so degraded to live in a place like

this and go out every day and it's just the same as sitting indoors because there's nothing for you when you get out there." (Caz, UF15, aged 22, lone parent)

Caz had also been born in the urban locality although she had moved around within it. In the interview she describes parallels between her own life and that of her mother. Both had had their first child at the age of seventeen. Since her mother had remained in the locality, Caz felt that she was fated to do the same. This fatalism extended to the view that her life would have been different if she had been born elsewhere or had moved away from the locality:

"I think if I'd have lived somewhere else I would have got a lot more out of my life than I have living, living in (town), living in (locality). And, erm, I think I would have been a lot... I don't think I'd have had two kids if I'd been away from here." (Caz, UF17, aged 22, lone parent)

The circular nature of the connection between Caz's life and her mother's was reinforced when Caz gave her mother as the main reason why she would probably never move away from the locality.

Urban interviewees most commonly dealt with the negative reputation of the locality or a part of it in one of two ways. The first was to explain how that reputation was exaggerated or out of date. The second response was to distance themselves, physically or socially, from the sort of people who gave the area a bad name. The denial response came largely from interviewees living on the owner-occupier estate whose personal experience of neighbourliness and crime did seem different from elsewhere in the locality:

"I don't mind here. A lot of people run it down but this part of (locality) is not too bad although I wouldn't want to be down on the main road."
(Sally, UF15, aged 20s, parent)

The distancing of self from negative elements in the locality was most apparent when interviewees were asked about its boundaries. My purpose was initially to explore how far the urban locality had a distinct identity for those living there but I became interested in the relationship between where the interviewee lived in the

locality and their view of whether or not the social housing estate should be included in its boundaries. The following exchange was with a woman (UF14) in her late 40s who had strong opinions on the subject:

S.E.: And what about X estate? Would people who live down here, would they think of that as...?

JUNE: I don't think of that as being in (urban locality). And the strange thing was when I was working for the housing society when we were actually sort of splitting the area up into names that people knew so that they could say 'I want to live in so and so'. They didn't class X estate as being in (urban locality) either.

S.E.: Oh I see.

[June describes her view of the locality's boundaries]

S.E.: That's interesting, because the people up in X estate who I've interviewed they tend to describe themselves as (urban locality) rather than, rather than Y estate.

JUNE: Well they would, yes. (LAUGHS)

The other housing estate, referred to as 'Y', was the one Michelle (UF13) described on pages 98-99. It had a worse reputation than anywhere in the urban locality. June's reference to proximity ('*X estate to them was closer to Y estate than it was to..*') is about social similarity and difference as well as physical distance. June's concluding remark ('*Well they would, yes*') reflects her appreciation of the significance of reputation to residents and also perhaps my naivety in taking their descriptions at face value. In fact the boundaries of the parish and electoral ward included X estate in the urban locality.

There were two other responses to the negative reputation of the urban locality. Older interviewees who had grown up there or lived there for a long time steered the conversation towards memories of the past as if to explain that the essence of the locality was something different from its present state just as they had themselves been and still were more than they might appear. Older male interviewees in particular were prone to this form of discourse. The other type of response to the reputation of the urban locality came from interviewees who had lived there for a short time and were planning to move on. These interviewees

either refuted or confirmed the reputation but did so in a factual way that seemed to have no personal association.

The personal nature of Gary's defence of the urban locality quoted on page 147 was matched by similar levels of attachment to the village among some rural interviewees:

"For me (village)'s not just where I live,(village)'s my life.[..] I will back (village) up to the hilt. I will always defend it." (Fay, RF2, aged 40s)

This was not, however, a universal view and there was greater variation overall in the rural accounts than the urban data. Almost all the rural interviewees addressed the village's reputation at some point during the interview although often in a more oblique fashion than urban interviewees. As far as I could ascertain the village was regarded by outsiders as geographically remote and socially insular. Interviewees dealt with the geographical remoteness in factual terms by supporting or (more often) refuting the assertion or arguing that facilities in the village were sufficient, even superior to elsewhere:

"Cos Theresa's under medical care and where we were was first class service and that was really important. But it's as good (here) if not better." (Graham, RM1, aged 60s, retired)

Dealing with the supposed social insularity of the village was more complex. One interviewee (RM4) who had moved to the village four years previously but had lived in the general area as a child described its reputation in these terms:

NEIL: I can remember it at school, like the children that come from down here come to my school and it was known as an interbred village. But now, it's, there's a lot of outsiders that are actually in the village now come from London and around and it's, it has changed a bit.

S.E.: Do you think that's overall a good thing?

NEIL: It is a good thing, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. [PAUSE] I do like to see like original families here as well.

The final sentence of the extract comes from Neil's realisation that he may have said more than he intended. His welcome of the influx of outsiders into the village reflected both his own history and problems he had experienced with established residents.

There were no overt references to the charge of social insularity or interbreeding in the interview data but interviewees did talk about the existence of cliques. Rural interviewees who identified with the village deflected the criticism of 'cliqueyness' in a variety of ways. One response was to emphasise the friendliness of the village in the past and bemoan the arrival of newcomers who had spoiled the social environment. This had similarities with the response of older urban interviewees except that these rural interviewees were more varied in age (between 30 and 90) and the scale of change was smaller.

"It's not a bad place to live. It's not as good a place as it was but then everywhere (has changed). In comparison I suppose it's better than a lot of places." (Henry, RM8, aged 50s, had lived in the village for 22 years)

Another response was to emphasise the continuing friendliness of the village and blame newcomers for failing to join in. The fact that newcomers often moved on after a short time was proof that they did not understand the nature of village life:

"It's because they don't talk back. It's, you know, it's not that they're bad people or we're bad people but it's just that we're different. A lot of people who moved here, I mean, couldn't wait to get out." (Fay, RF2, aged 40s, parent)

A third response was to dispute the term 'cliques' and argue that it was natural for people to form close friendships especially when they lived near to each other:

"We don't like pick out people that we don't talk to. They seem to see us like that but we talk to everybody, only..." (Michaela, RF11, aged 20s, parent)

Four rural interviewees talked about wanting to move away from the village. One of these was retired and wanted to live nearer town facilities and her children and

grandchildren. Another was a teenage male born in the village who sought the anonymity of urban life. The other two were women in their 20s and early 30s who had lived in the village for two or three years. These two women did not seem to relate to the village in the same impersonal way as urban interviewees in a similar situation. Instead of remaining aloof from a place that they disliked, their sensitivity to not fitting in was a factor in their desire to leave.

The ways in which interviewees dealt with the locality's reputation in the context of an interview were complex. As with other aspects of the data, interviewees' age and the history of their association with the locality influenced their response. However, two general findings emerge. The first is confirmation of the significance of place of residence for interviewees' identity and presentation of self to a stranger in the context of a research interview. The second was differences between the localities. Urban interviewees generally accepted the negative reputation of the locality but distanced themselves from its causes. In contrast, established rural interviewees disputed aspects of the reputation (substituting 'friendliness' for 'cliqueyness') and strongly associated themselves with those rephrased characteristics. More marginalised rural interviewees confirmed the reputation and either welcomed the dilution of village life by others like themselves or, in the case of female interviewees, absorbed the experience into their own sense of self.

The intrusion of self into accounts of place

A logical corollary of the links between place and self-identity discussed above was the tendency of aspects of self to intrude into accounts of both localities. This was partly factual as interviewees related details of their association with the place. But it also occurred as interviewees talked about experiences of exclusion, participation in or avoidance of community activities, and normative ideas of behaviour and community. A phrase along the lines of 'I'm (not) the sort of person who...' occurred sufficiently frequently in the data, particularly from female interviewees, to provoke the question whether it was the topic of place that elicited this way of talking or merely the situation of an in-depth interview.

Taylor (2001) encountered a similar phenomenon when interviewing women about their place of residence. Her perspective was psychological and her analytical focus was on the narrative devices used by interviewees. She concluded that the interpretative repertoires employed by the women in her study served to resolve dilemmas of identity and produce a coherent and plausible account of self in the context of the interview. Similar processes were apparent in these data when an interviewee broached a subject where they felt their own actions needed clarification or explanation or where their own life (present or past) was the reference point for comparison. The latter was particularly apparent among older interviewees and those of all ages with a chronic illness or disability. The reflexive work involved in biographical assimilation of chronic illness, which have been described in the sociology of health and illness (Bury 1982 and 2001, Williams 1984, Charmaz, 1987), spilled over into interviewees' accounts of their locality. This is illustrated by the following response to a question about the continuing significance of community:

"Since I was I suppose about eight, I've noticed that things have changed and things are no longer, erm, how I was brought up to associate with what society is all about. We have lost the sort of idea that for instance my parents imbued into my bringing up. It's no longer there. There is no discipline whatsoever and the kids don't understand it. And if they were brought up, I have to say, how my parents brought me up, they would understand. They would know you have to work hard throughout your life to do things. And I realise that, okay so I've got MS, but I've gotta work hard and er do something to do whatever I can to either fight it off or fight against it or, you know, just be a normal member of society. And most people nowadays if they were told, the youngsters nowadays if they were told they had MS they would give up. That would be it. They've signed their death warrant basically which is stupid cos you can get so much out of life." (Linda, RF16, aged late 40s, disabled with multiple sclerosis)

Linda's response goes beyond the question asked to set out a personal philosophy around the necessity to persevere in all circumstances. For Linda those

circumstances were multiple sclerosis, forced withdrawal from work and the deaths of both her parents in recent years.

In addition to the intrusion of personal biography and beliefs into accounts of place, there was another way in which self became apparent when comparing data. This was in respect of social class, which in the urban locality seemed to create a distance between the interviewee and the local social environment. This observation is tentative because of the complexity of allocating social class and the small number of middle-class urban interviewees, perhaps six out a total of 42. My notes of a conversation with a retired couple, Peter (UM1) and Jean (UF2), provide one example of this difference in perspective:

“Peter talked a lot about a lack of ‘community spirit’ in the area. People would come to events if they were free but didn’t participate in things like raffles. The raffle tickets at one event on the green had been bought mainly by the organisers who then won the prizes. The prize was a millennium cake from a local shop. This had been cut up and shared round but he said that still wasn’t the point.” (Field notes, 25 July 2000)

Peter and Jean were involved in a wide range of voluntary activity including the millennium green project. They knew people living in their road and other local people who were similarly involved in voluntary work but otherwise their social networks went outside the locality. Peter attributed poor support for raffles to a lack of ‘community spirit’ rather than restricted income or different views about the worth of that activity. My perception was that Peter and Jean’s relationship with the locality was one of voluntary input from a position of social distance rather than a contribution from within the collective. Community was ‘them’ rather than ‘us’. There were other aspects of a ‘professionalisation’ in attitudes towards community among interviewees who were involved in voluntary work, which I will describe in section 6.4.

More generally social class might take a person out of the social environment occupied by most others in the locality. One urban interviewee, Simon, had gone to the main primary school in the locality but his secondary schooling was at the

grammar school in town rather than the nearest comprehensive. His social life revolved around the church and school friends; a life which he recognised was unlike that of many young people in the area:

“I’m probably atypical. I don’t got out clubbing, things like that cos my days are taken up with activities that are, I’ve got drama, the choir, obligations rather than just activities. I do other things instead. We all make our own choices, especially as you grow up.” (Simon, UM6, aged early 20s)

Despite this, Simon did not see himself leaving the locality:

“I’m probably quite afraid of leaving the area because a lot of my family live in the area [...] and I’m involved in so much in the area. I mean I can go down into the post office and the woman in the post office has known me from when I was knee high to a grasshopper. If I left the area I would miss that.” (Simon, UM6)

For this interviewee, community meant family, social connections based around the church and a familiar environment that included people who had known him since childhood. Unusually among the urban data, this account made no mention of the locality’s reputation, social problems or change.

Differences in income and social class are often more marked in rural settings than urban. However, social class did not seem to act as a buffer in the village in the same way as in the urban locality. Where social class did manifest itself was in an emphasis on difference in values and interests as seen in Linda’s account quoted on page 153 and in the following response from Elsa to a question about whether people were less friendly than in the past:

“Well I don’t mix a whole lot with them. Only I go with the church lot. I go with the over sixties. And I used to do a lot of other work, well, I’ll be honest, for the Conservatives. So that was our lives, you know.” (Elsa, RF4, aged 85)

This perception of difference worked both ways and, as noted in Chapter 5, Linda and Elsa were among a group of rural interviewees who said that they had experienced little help during times of difficulty.

The significance of place for interviewees' sense of self and the intrusion of personal biography and circumstances into accounts of the two localities are themes that will reoccur throughout this chapter. The following section provides an example of this reflexive process.

6.3 The centrality of childhood to accounts of place

Children and childhood occupied a central place in interviewees' accounts of the two localities. Symbolically, children represented a marker of time and societal change and, in practical terms, children were the most common reason for interviewees to be involved in community activities. Interviewees commonly made two assertions about contemporary children. The first was that the behaviour of children and young people had declined markedly despite improvements in material circumstances. The second assertion was that children to whom the interviewee was personally connected had much less freedom than the interviewee had enjoyed when he or she was young. These particular children were better behaved than their peers but deprived in other ways. These two themes, which I have termed 'lost innocence' and 'lost freedom', created a moral discourse around good and bad parents. Good parenting meant safety but restriction and bad parenting meant freedom but neglect. The section concludes with discussion of a generational divide between older and young residents in both localities.

Lost innocence

One of the most frequent themes in both urban and rural interviews was the 'problem' of children and young people's behaviour. Interviewees of all ages complained that children and teenagers used bad language and were allowed to run wild in a way that would have been unthinkable in their own youth:

"There is quite a few teenagers round here that hang out on the street corner and whereas for us you know you might swear amongst your friends when you were that age. But the minute an adult come into

earshot, sh-tum. You'd know the adult and you'd know to [stop]. Whereas now they just don't, they don't care. I've had abuse from the teenagers."
(Dawn, UF8, 20s, parent)

A common theme was how children as young as six to eight were now involved in delinquent activities previously associated with teenagers. The youngest group of interviewees shared this view:

"There was a fire up there. [...] We was all outside having a look. And like little kids come up, didn't they? They must have been about seven or eight and they were going 'we don't fucking care, we were there. Jack done it, he's a hard nut. We're this, we're that.' And we're just sitting there going 'my God'." (Nicola, UF11, aged 18)

Similar complaints were made by rural interviewees and these were often, although not always, directed against the children of newcomers:

"They'd come in and you'd think 'they don't even know what please and thank you are', you know. And they [...] haven't got a clue and they just think cos they can do what they like at home, they can do what they like at school." (Maureen, RF6, aged 40s, parent)

"They've got a little play park over there and they trash things and that's the problem. Where the school is they've put big sapling trees and within two days the stakes were pulled up and then within a week the trees were pulled up. And I took some photos of them doing it and the next thing I know the parents were round. 'You can't take photos' and things like that." (Henry, RM8, aged 50s)

Older interviewees were the most critical of contemporary children, emphasising their material advantages:

"Oh it's terrible today to what it used to be. I just can't understand it. Now children are so violent and they've got everything there is to play with. They've got er television, they've got computers, they've got everything. Well, we had nothing." (Dennis, UM22, aged 87)

In common with other older interviewees in both localities, Dennis extolled the virtue of physical punishment as a deterrent:

“And as time goes on it seems to get worse, no matter what they do. As I say, for a start you’re not allowed to smack a child. Well my mother used to have a little cane. If we done anything wrong, we’d see her get the cane and run out and out the way. But it wasn’t violent. It was just either a knock on the wrist or just a little clap on the backside. But of course today they’re not allowed to do anything.” (Dennis, UM22, aged 87)

An interesting feature of Dennis’ and similar accounts is that the physical punishment was carried out by the mother rather than father. Although several interviewees mentioned male use of physical force, this was in the context of men fighting with men rather than disciplining children. The phrase *‘run out and out the way’* in the third line of Dennis’ quotation indicates the physical space to keep out the way until things had quietened down. Older women expressed similar views about the value of physical chastisement although more often from the perspective of having administered it to their own children:

“I mean there’s no discipline. You can’t give em a good smack. I feel sorry for the policemen sometimes. They get into trouble there. [..] All you’re doing is trying to chastise them in order to be able to look after them. There’s a lot brought up right (that way) than the other way around”. (Mabel, RF7, aged 73)

One problem with older interviewees’ condemnation of the behaviour of contemporary children was that reminiscences of their own childhood often celebrated incidents of rebellion or law breaking. This was particularly true of the accounts from male interviewees. Dennis’ first quote about the material advantages of today’s children was immediately preceded by a story from his own childhood:

“We see this policeman walking down, and he was a tall policeman. And er we used to pull up the turfs and throw it at him and took his hat off. And then run and he couldn’t catch us. Yeah. Oh yeah, they were wonderful times. Oh it’s terrible today to what it used to be. I just can’t understand it. Now children are so violent...” (Dennis, UM22, aged 87)

The difference between Dennis' behaviour when young and that of contemporary children might be said to lie in the level of violence (turfs of grass were thrown rather than other kinds of missile) and the fact that his childhood took place in a then rural rather than urban environment.

Lost freedom

Almost all interviewees talked about the reduced freedom experienced by children to whom they were personally connected (as parents, grandparents or older siblings) because of the dangers posed by traffic and possible harm by strangers. Parents also worried about their children getting into 'bad company'.

"Kids being taken, that's the main thing. And mixing with the wrong people." (Natalie, UF9, aged 20s, parent)

Urban interviewees with young children tended to keep the children at home or accompany them outside. The age at which they could safely let their children play outside unsupervised, remembered from their own childhoods as an important milestone, was the subject of discussion and worry:

"We've said this summer we might let them go out the front occasionally but it'd be sometimes. But as he gets older it depends on his friends really I think." (Dawn, UF8, aged 20s, parent)

The dilemma facing parents between allowing their children to go through important rites of passage, such as playing away from home, and protecting them in a society perceived as being far more risky than in the past was expressed by one urban interviewee in these terms:

"We've done what I consider our best for them to give them a street knowledge but at the end of the day I still don't want them going wild. I want them to enjoy themselves. I don't want them to be frightened every time they turn a corner, meet a new challenge. 'Is that gonna hurt me? Am I gonna die from that? What are mum and dad gonna say?' I want them to be their own sort of judge but I still worry. I wouldn't like to be a child growing up today. I really wouldn't. I think that's every estate, I don't think that's just here." (Keith, UM13, aged 40s, parent)

Rural interviewees who were parents talked about the greater freedom experienced by their children compared with children living in towns:

“There’s not a lot for (teenagers) but for our age group, our’s are eleven and eight, it’s a brilliant village. Couldn’t wish for better. You’ve got (names 3 open spaces) And they’re all wicked play areas. You’ve got the woodland where there’s loads of wild life going through there. As kids I would say they’ve got more being out here than they would have if we lived in the town.” (Chris, RM3, aged early 30s, parent, disabled by multiple sclerosis)

Traffic and danger from paedophiles remained a concern for rural parents - the murder of Sarah Payne had occurred a year earlier (Oliver 2001) - but greater trust was placed in the environment and in the children themselves:

“The children can just go off and I don’t have to worry about em like cos they’re off the roads a lot of the time and they’re over there. And you, it’s the freedom that they’ve got. And you tell them to be in at a certain time and they’re there.”(Neil, RM4, aged 40, parent)

However, rural interviewees who were grandparents felt that their grandchildren led more restricted lives than their own children had. This was part of a general perception amongst rural interviewees that the social environment of the village was changing along the same lines as wider society but at a slower pace.

Gender seemed to influence the attitudes of older interviewees in both localities towards the perceived reduction in children’s freedom. For older male interviewees, the reference point was their own childhood and they often told stories of unlimited daytime freedom and associated mischief. Older female interviewees said much less about their own childhoods and tended instead to compare the childhoods of their children and grandchildren. One explanation for this gender difference might be the domestic responsibilities and other restrictions imposed on girls of their generation, especially in large families and/or with low incomes. A 75-year old interviewee in the urban locality described her childhood in the these terms:

“When I was a little girl, other girls would come home, do themselves up. I had to run errands straight from school for the neighbours. Then I’d have my tea and then my mother used to do barrack work for the army and the navy and there was no buttonhole making machines [..] It was my job to sew on the buttons and they were flies in those days not zips and all the buttons, buttons on the shirts. [..] And of course they all had to be inspected. They used to line the women up and pull a shirt out and inspect it. If it was no good they’d chuck it back at you to do again that week. And you didn’t get paid on that run unless it was all correct. So that was my childhood. [S.E.: Did you mind?] No I accepted it.” (Lillian, UF19, aged 75)

Lillian’s experiences represented a childhood restricted not by external dangers (she was sent out to run errands after school) but by the necessities of poverty. This illustrates again how perceptions of social change in a place and wider society are situated within an individual’s life story.

Good parents, bad mothers

The themes of lost innocence and lost freedom produced a dichotomy in interviewees’ accounts between ‘good’ parents who controlled and protected their children but in so doing created a childhood experience that was inferior to that of the past, and ‘bad’ parents who did not care what their children got up to. The latter might by default allow an experience of childhood that was closer to idealised versions of freedom and independence although interviewees did not seem to recognise this possibility. Some interviewees, such as Keith quoted on page 159, were conscious of the tension between styles of parenting and levels of freedom. Others described stereotypes of bad parenting against which to compare their own:

“I don’t know whether it’s in the back of my head that if I’m looking after them, I know my children aren’t being unruly. [..] Cos I do feel it’s a parent’s responsibility and it’s not always the child’s fault if they end up being caught by police thieving or vandalising something because I feel that parents should maybe have shown a little bit more constructive criticism towards a behavioural problem or they should have been there

to... Instead of saying 'right, go off and play with the motorway', they should be like 'well let's go and do something as a family.' (Michelle, UF13, aged 30s, parent)

A few interviewees tried to find social reasons for the change in children's behaviour over time. These tended to be interviewees who were involved in community projects:

"Something's changed. Whether it's the parents, both parents having to work cos money's so short. [They] get to a point and say 'go and do what you like'." (Keith UM13, aged 40s, parent)

Female interviewees in the village were in general more condemning of bad parents and specifically bad mothers than female interviewees in the urban locality. Such mothers were presented as uncaring, lazy and selfish:

"I don't think today some mothers care. As long as their children are not under their feet they can be watching the telly or doing what they want to do." (Valerie, RF5, aged 50s, parent and grandparent)

There were a number of reasons why rural interviewees might have been more critical of bad parenting than their urban counterparts. One was the tendency to attribute bad parenting to single mothers and since only one of the rural interviewees had been a lone parent, this was an easy stereotype to endorse. Another group targeted for criticism were women who had children by different partners. These would be more apparent in the village where a smaller population was combined with greater social visibility and all children of primary school age attended the same village school. :

"As soon as they're, I don't know three, four, they're 'Go on, out you go. Look after yourself'. And I just think it's sad really.[..} They have all these children and they don't always want them, do they? [..] Some of them don't know who their father is. It's not very good is it? And they get all upset and they don't know who to go to?" (Maureen, RF6, aged 40s, parent)

Thirdly, established rural interviewees seemed to associate families where the children had different fathers or the mother was a lone parent with urban newcomers although from my limited understanding of family networks in the village this did not seem to be always the case.

Unsurprisingly no interviewees presented themselves as anything other than good parents although two mothers (one in each locality) talked about problems controlling young children whom they described as hyperactive. Another mother whose teenage son had a reputation for getting into trouble emphasised her strictness compared with other parents:

"Mine had to go to work or go to college. That's the rule of this house. I am not having them laying in bed all day. They've got to. There is a few that do that unfortunately." (Interviewee not identified to protect her anonymity)

The generational divide

As described above, older interviewees were often the most critical of the behaviour of children and young people. They also felt threatened by them, particularly when encountering a group. One reason for this was older interviewees' awareness of their own physical vulnerability:

"I'm not very fond of going off very far on my own. I would like to think there was somebody around because there's, well, what we call the hooligans around. That you don't know if they'll just stand in front of you and wouldn't let you by. Or maybe push you off. Me that's not able to walk, right? I'll be honest, there's my worry." (Elsa, RF4, aged 85)

"I've had three big fellas walk along here and one of them walked over my car. And I sat here, just like I'm sitting now, and he was jumping up and down the other side of me car. When I went out next morning there was footprints all over it. He had walked over my car. Now if I'd have gone out there, they'd have killed me. [...] Six foot high they were." (Joe, UM21, aged 75)

A second reason for older interviewees' preoccupation with the behaviour of children and young people was that two age groups frequently coincided. Such meetings might occur in public spaces, such as outside a shop, or in the semi-public space outside the interviewee's own home. In the latter case, the desire of children to play outside and the concern of some of their parents to keep them near to home for the reasons outlined earlier were in direct conflict with the preferences and anxieties of older neighbours. A particularly contentious issue was children playing football in what were deemed inappropriate places. Older interviewees complained about this mainly in terms of the physical threat to person and property although noise was also of concern:

"This old boy came out and told the children not to play up against one of the garages because if they kicked the ball hard enough it could bounce back and go through their window." (Georgia, UF1, aged 20s, parent)

This incident had proved a pivotal point in Georgia's involvement in the millennium green project as a way of giving local children a safe open space to play. The complete story is discussed in Chapter 7. Another interviewee, Edith (UF2), who was in her 70s described moving from a flat in Georgia's road to sheltered accommodation in the same road as Joe:

"Edith said that the children's behaviour had made elderly people in (Georgia's road) afraid to come out of their houses. They were always kicking a football around and other things. It made the old people really nervous. Moving to (Joe's road) had been a great relief." (Field notes, 25th September 2000)

For Edith the threat from the children was presumably worse than the groups of older young people whom Joe found so intimidating.

The physical threat posed by a miskicked football could become personalised if children were perceived as deliberately kicking the ball against a garage or front door or into a front garden (thus transgressing the boundary of private space) in order to annoy or intimidate older residents.

"And there's an older couple across the road that have lived here for years and years. They brought their children up and they [local children]

kick the ball into their garden. And he's got really nice flowers and they make a joke of it now to put it in the garden. And one day he told them he wouldn't give the ball back when he goes over to them outside. I heard them swearing and calling him names and I knew one of the girls and I called her and said 'you shouldn't be doing that. How would you like it if it was your granddad?' And for that I got called, erm, you know, all sorts." (Dawn, UF8, aged 20s, parent)

"The kids used to play football against their wall and they wouldn't move. And if they did go out, they got abused by the kids." (Debbie, RM9, aged 30s, parent)

The main difference in accounts from the two localities was in whether the nuisance or threat came from young people known to the interviewee or strangers. In keeping with other aspects of neighbourhood, urban interviewees tended to only know by sight children and young people living in the same road. Experiences of intimidation or fear were either highly personalised (coming from neighbours) or completely impersonal (coming from unknown groups of young people encountered by chance). In the rural locality, it was more likely that older interviewees would know the children and young people at least superficially. For older interviewees with widespread social networks in the village the fact of knowing the young people provided sufficient reassurance to dilute concern for personal welfare:

"They sit down on the wall down there by one of the shops down there. Sit on the wall. They're not any problem. I mean we do hear of things but they're no problem really. They might shout and sing and swear and that but there's no problem. They're just joking with their friend but er no they're no problem because I think when they know you, it does help too. Because they do know you as you get older. Whereas the younger ones don't." (Mabel, RF7, aged 73)

Mabel was more concerned about the behaviour of younger children who she was less likely to know, particularly if they were newcomers and also because of the reduction in her own community involvement discussed earlier. For other

older rural interviewees, such as Elsa, who felt more marginalised in the village, knowing the children and young people was less reassuring. The threat was not perceived as personal to themselves, as in the case of neighbourhood children intimidating older urban residents, but personal in the sense that it only affected people of their age and was allowed to occur by default because the collective did nothing to modify the young people's behaviour.

A generational divide is necessarily two-sided. Previous qualitative studies of social capital (for example Campbell *et al* 1999 and Morrow 2000) found that young people felt themselves to be judged unfairly by older people. This was true of some of the young males interviewed in this research. The following exchange was from an interview with three young men (RM5, RM6, RM7) aged 15-16 living in the village:

TRISTAN *It's hell really. It is bad. Like you do one thing. Like from a young age you get the idea and do something wrong and you just get accused for everything every day, for something you haven't done like and that. It's just like a one opinion like. [..] You can't do nothing. Like you walk out of the front door and you get accused for stuff you haven't done and that. [...]*

S.E.: *Who gives you a hard time?*

TRISTAN: *People who think they own the village like. They've been here all their lives and they think they own it and they don't.*

S.E.: *Is that old people or...?*

TRISTAN: *Well. Mostly old people yeah. There's a few like. Yeah it is older people mainly.*

ADAM: *They see the younger people and then they blame them. [...]* *I'm not saying like we're all like, don't do nothing. Yeah there is stuff we do do but not things they're saying we do. [AGREEMENT FROM OTHERS]*

The argument put forward by these young men was that although they had made some mistakes in the past and still did some things wrong, it was unfair that the

village as a whole and older people in particular blamed them for everything that happened (*'there is stuff we do do but not things they're saying we do'*). My reference to 'old people' (two-thirds of the way down the extract) was somewhat leading and in fact Tristan switches in his answer from 'old' to 'older' suggesting a wider age range than perhaps I understood at the time. Elsewhere in the interview, another of the teenagers talked about his own mother siding with critics of the young people who by implication were a similar age to herself:

"My mum she like, she gets on with all people I don't. She listens to them and she thinks they're alright." (Adam, RM6, aged 15)

This extract is an extreme version of the generational divide from the perspective of young people. These particular young men were truant from school, used drugs and were resentful of the way they felt they had become stereotyped in a social environment that provided little support and no forgiveness. Interestingly, they had each lived in the village for different amounts of time. One had been born in the village and came from an established family, another had lived there for seven years, and the third for something over a year.

Tristan expressed concern for his younger brother whom he felt was getting caught up in the same cycle as himself. An adult might phrase this in terms of a slippery slope from minor misdemeanours to more serious anti-social behaviour but, for Tristan, the escalation is not in behaviour but in blame:

"You do need something down here though. Like my little brother lives here as well and he's gonna need like occupying and each year as he like gets older and I know he's gonna start getting blamed for stuff and that as well so. [S.E.: How old is he?] Er twelve, thirteen. You see at the moment he's getting blamed for some stuff but like not as much. I know it will happen." (Tristan, RM5, aged 16)

Since these were the only teenage interviewees in the rural locality, there is no way of validating this perception or exploring the impact of gender. However, so many of the rural interviewees talked about groups of young people in the village as problematic that these processes of labelling and the existence of a generational divide seem well substantiated.

The five young male interviewees from the urban locality were slightly older than this group of rural interviewees (aged 18-20 rather than 15-16) and although they talked in similar terms about older people 'giving them stick', this tended to be in the past. In keeping with other aspects of neighbourhood, the older people who criticised them were most likely to be neighbours so the criticism was personal but very localised. There was also a sense that older people in general disapproved or failed to understand young people in general but this was impersonal and bore no resemblance to the kind of labelling described by the rural male teenagers. There were no comments of this kind from the four young female interviewees in the urban locality. Again the small number of interviewees in this age group renders this analysis tentative.

What was clear from the data was that the generational divide seemed insurmountable to the young and older people affected. Older people in both localities responded by staying indoors, particularly after dark, and avoiding eye or verbal contact. The young males in the rural locality aspired to moving to an urban environment where they would be unknown and could live amongst other young people, although in fact only one of the three saw this as a realistic prospect.

Although the young males interviewed in the rural locality felt that the whole village was against them, rural interviewees in the intervening age groups (20s to 50s) tended to be more sympathetic to their situation on the grounds that there was little for them to do in the village. There was also a feeling that disruptive young people was a perennial problem that resolved itself:

"we always seem to have a group of slightly disruptive, nothing major but ever since I was little there's always been a (group) [...] I must say that all the ones that have really been problems have all turned into nice people. There's none, none that have gone really wayward in adult life. So I think, erm, they'll turn out. It's just a phase they go through I suppose." (Liz, RF8, aged 30s, parent)

As will be discussed in section 6.4, such sympathy did not extend into unanimous support for a proposal to give the rural young people an off-road

racetrack or other facilities they wanted. In the urban locality, interviewees from the intervening age groups were also generally sympathetic to the lack of organised activities or facilities for teenagers but did not see this as a priority for action by the local authority or themselves. In neither locality did interviewees in these age groups seem to feel personally threatened by groups of young people in the way that older people described.

A view of community as essentially cyclical, as expressed by Liz and other interviewees of a similar age, is probably most accessible to those at the mid stage of a life course. For the youngest and older interviewees, the day-to-day experience of community was predominant even though the young people recognised that young people who were older than themselves had got jobs and cars and moved on. Both these age groups spent a considerable amount of time in the localities and yet felt themselves marginalised in terms of social status and influence. This theme will be developed further in section 6.5 and 6.6.

6.4 Civic engagement and community involvement

Civic engagement is considered a key component of collective notions of social capital but its definition has varied. Putnam (2000) includes political, civic and religious participation, volunteering and philanthropy within the general heading. However, such a broad definition is problematic in the UK context for a number of reasons. One is the lower rate of membership of religious organisations and the tendency of these to be alternative forms of community so that, for example, norms of reciprocity apply to fellow members rather than to the geographical locality in which the religious institution is situated. Similarly the decline in active membership of political parties and organisations such as trade unions and the corresponding increase in support for single issue pressure groups operating at a national or international level has reduced the localised dimensions of political activism. The Office for National Statistics and Health Development Agency approach to civic engagement is narrower than Putnam's, focusing instead on how well-informed respondents feel about local affairs and how far they feel their community or themselves can influence decisions affecting their neighbourhood (Coulthard *et al* 2002). The focus in this study has been to

explore civic engagement in terms of interviewees' willingness to get involved in community affairs and activities and their experiences of so doing.

As described in section 6.2, the reputation and nature of the locality mattered a great deal to most interviewees and for those with children the day-to-day environment was immensely significant. At the same time, as discussed in Chapter 5, interviewees were often individualistic in their attitudes towards 'community' and reflexive about their place and status in the local social environment. In the same way that managing relations with neighbours involved a balancing act between cordiality and social distance, accounts of involvement or non-involvement in community activities were accompanied by explanations based on stereotypes of over-involvement and formed part of a wider discourse about self and place. This was particularly true of urban interviewees. In both localities, interviewees' accounts of civic or community engagement were mainly concerned with crime-prevention and the provision of activities for children and young people. They talked much less about other forms of voluntary work except in terms of doing favours for neighbours.

This section is divided into four parts. It begins with an overview of interviewees' involvement in community activities and organisations and considers the influence of age, gender and personal circumstances. The second part of the section discusses the role of stereotypes in interviewees' accounts of involvement and non-involvement. The third part describes interviewees' perceptions of civic processes and the final part addresses the impact of involvement on the individuals concerned, including experiences of linking social capital.

Interviewees' involvement in community affairs

The extent of interviewees' involvement in community organisations and activities is difficult to quantify from the interview data. This is partly because involvement might vary according to different measures such as time spent, level of responsibility held and degree of commitment felt. A further complicating factor was that the information was embedded in reflexive accounts that were simultaneously dealing with normative ideas about being a good neighbour,

parent and (more rarely) citizen and stereotypes associated with over-involvement. The presence of other forms of community within a locality, notably the church or a Sure Start type of parents' group in the urban locality, also made categorisation difficult. Members of these alternative communities might be engaged in communal activities within that setting but have no connections with other local organisations or activities. In the rural locality, friendship networks clouded the distinction between personal connections and involvement in community in a more general sense.

Table 7 below presents an overview of interviewees' involvement based around three broad categories. The 'very active' were those interviewees who were engaged in a range of voluntary activities in the local area and/or sat on formal committees and/or had initiated a significant local project. The group of interviewees categorised as having 'some involvement' were more likely to help out with activities run by others than take a more central role but did so on a regular basis. The third category of 'almost no involvement' were interviewees who never got involved in community activities or did so on an occasional ad-hoc basis. The reasons for non-involvement might be practical or attitudinal.

Table 7: Interviewees' involvement in community organisations and activities by gender

	Very active (n=14)		Some involvement (n=22)		Almost no involvement (n=33)	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
Urban (n=42^a)	3	4	5	7	12	11
Rural (n=27^b)	3	4	9	1	4	6
Totals (n=69)	6	8	14	8	16	17

Notes: a) there were 20 female and 22 male interviewees in the urban locality

b) there were 16 female and 11 male interviewees in the rural locality

As noted in Chapter 4, interviewees with an interest in or commitment to the locality were almost certainly over represented in the sample and agreeing to take part in an interview was itself altruistic. The data presented in Table 7 cannot be taken as an indication of the patterns of volunteering in the populations of the two localities but they do provide an insight into the personal circumstances of the interviewees in each category of involvement.

The apparent gender difference in the number of rural interviewees categorised as having some involvement in community activities needs to be treated with caution because of the greater number of female interviewees in the rural sample. Otherwise the range of involvement was fairly evenly distributed between female and male interviewees. There was, however, a gender difference in the personal circumstances of interviewees who were very active or had some involvement. Only one of the eight males categorised as very active in the community was in paid employment, three had retired and four had been forced to cease employment through disability. Three of these interviewees had school-aged children. Two of the female interviewees in this category were retired, three combined part-time work with childcare and one was a full-time carer for her child. Among the eight male interviewees with some involvement in community activities: two were in paid employment, one was unable to work through ill health and the remaining five were retired. None of these interviewees had school-aged children. Among the fifteen female interviewees in the same category: one was a student, one was unemployed, six combined part-time work with child care and six were retired.

The nature of the sample was such that few of the interviewees were in full-time employment and the reasons for this were gendered. The majority of male interviewees were not working because of disability or retirement whilst childcare responsibilities took two fifths of female interviewees out of the workplace all or part of the time. Of the six male interviewees who were unable to work because of a disabling health condition, four were very active in local affairs and one had some involvement. All six were married. Three female interviewees of working age were similarly disabled but none was active in the community. One had a family to look after and the other two lived alone.

For male interviewees, the cessation of paid work through disability or retirement seemed to be an important factor behind participation in voluntary work. The work undertaken was wide ranging and included neighbourhood watch, tenants' associations, schemes to improve the physical environment, local history, and activities for children and young people. For some male interviewees, involvement in community activities was part of the way that they protected their families:

"At the end of the day I live here, my wife and family, and I want it to be nice you know. But it's getting other people to have that same ideology."

(Keith, UM13, aged 40s)

All the male interviewees who were involved in community activities to some extent had a partner or lived with other family. For those with a disabling health condition, participation might be time-limited as their mobility reduced. Older male interviewees who were in poor health or lived alone had no involvement in community activities whereas female interviewees in a similar situation tended to have some involvement.

For female interviewees, children were a strong motivating factor behind involvement in community activities but childcare and other domestic responsibilities limited the scale of involvement that was possible. The female interviewees in this study were involved in a narrower range of activities than the male interviewees and these were mainly for the age group of their own children or women in similar circumstances to themselves. A woman who started a clothing co-operative in the village gave the following explanation:

"Having had four children of my own, I wanted to do something to help. [...] Being a small village it's an ideal thing to do." (Fay, RF2, aged 40s)

Other female interviewees had become involved in voluntary work alongside their husband, often when he retired.

Attitudes, values and aspects of personal biography were of course also significant. One interviewee had become more involved in community activities after the death of a baby. The 'some involvement' group of interviewees

included six church goers in the urban locality and three in the village. Two rural church goers were very active in the broader community. The discussion of this in the data is limited but it may be that religious faith encouraged voluntary work but much of this activity occurred within the church rather than the wider community. Some interviewees talked about community activities as a form of Christian outreach: another example of contributing to community from a distance.

Putnam's discussion of the influence of age on civic and community engagement usefully distinguishes between the attitudes and values of a cohort and norms of participation at different stages of the life course (Putnam 2000). He argues that although youth has in the past been a time of maximum political and civic engagement, this trend reversed in the United States from the 1960s with successive generations of young people become more disengaged from civic society so that volunteering and other aspects of civic participation have become concentrated at the opposite end of the age spectrum.

One interviewee talked in terms of having been more idealistic and politically active when younger, before the demands of a job and then family:

"I suppose when I was a teenager I think you tend to be more active in things anyway. And I was like with Friends of the Earth and things like that doing campaigns and things like that." (Sally, UF15, aged 20s, parent)

However, this was the only comment of this kind in the data and a more common pattern in both localities was for interviewees to become involved in community activities when they had children and/or when circumstances resulted in their being at home more of the time. Table 8 overleaf presents the age ranges of interviewees in each category of involvement.

Interviewees in the youngest and oldest age groups mainly had no or very little involvement in community activities whilst middle-aged and younger retired interviewees were the most likely to be very active or have some involvement. The 20-39 year old age group was fairly evenly divided between almost no

involvement and very active/some involvement. As with gender, these findings cannot be extended beyond the particular sample of interviewees. The apparent disengagement of the youngest age group from community activities is particularly problematic because most of the young people interviewed were marginalised in other ways through family background or, in the rural locality, through school truancy and attributed anti-social behaviour. Nevertheless these data provide a useful overview within which to explore the more qualitative insights provided by interviewees on the meaning of involvement and non-involvement, perceptions of civic processes and the personal cost of and lessons from taking part.

Table 8: Interviewees' involvement in community organisations and activities by age group

Age	Very active (n=14)					Some involvement (n=22)					Almost no involvement (n=33)				
	15- 19	20- 39	40- 59	60- 69	70- 89	15- 19	20- 39	40- 59	60- 69	70- 79	15- 19	20- 39	40- 59	60- 69	70- 89
Urban (n=42)	-	1	2	3	1	1	3	3	4	1	6	10	2	-	5
Rural (n=27)	-	3	3	1	-	-	2	3	3	2	3	2	4	1	-
Total (n=69)	-	4	5	4	1	1	5	6	7	3	9	12	6	1	5

Stereotypes of involvement and non-involvement

A concern about becoming 'too involved' in community affairs was a feature of many interviewees' accounts in both localities. However, this was situated in different perspectives. In the rural locality, ambivalence about involvement tended to be linked to statements about the fickleness of local allegiances. The following extract is from a joint interview with two friends, both in their 20s. Carolyn (RF12) had lived in the village for about 5 years and Michaela (RF11) was born there. Although they knew many people in the village and got involved to some extent in community events, particularly if these involved their children,

these women were wary of taking on responsibility because of past unspecified experiences:

CAROLYN: It's like 'oh so and so's not talking to so and so'. You go to someone else but they're not talking to them. So you're sort of... [PAUSE] Which we've had before, haven't we?

MICHAELA: But that's village life, isn't it?

In the urban locality, ambivalence about involvement in voluntary activities was more self-conscious and couched as a response to stereotypes of people who got too involved. One stereotype was that of the busy-body:

"Neighbourhood watch died a death up here because of apathy. [..] We're interfering busy-bodies until something goes wrong." (Keith, UM13, aged 40s, parent, very active in voluntary work)

Another stereotype associated with over-involvement in community affairs was the pest:

DAWN: It's a bit awkward. That's the thing cos is if you, you get people that ring up and complain all the time and you get the people who say 'oh I should ring up and complain' but never get round to it.

NATALIE: That's the thing.

(Dawn, UF8 and Natalie, UF9, both aged 20s)

Dawn identified herself as someone who meant to get more involved in community activities, such as her son's school's parent and teacher association, but never got round to it. If asked to help, for example with a school cake sale or a children's disco for her son's age group, she said that she usually did. These were, however, activities that benefited her son directly or indirectly. Natalie did not take part to the same extent but also did not seem to find this something for which to apologise. It was Dawn who agreed to be interviewed when I met her at a mother and toddlers group and persuaded Natalie to take part in the interview with her.

Clare (UF18) had complained to the Local Authority about the vandalised play area:

CLARE: When I phoned up, no-one had reported any of it.

S.E.: Really? Because lots of people have told me about that park.

CLARE: Yeah everyone's complaining about it but no-one has bothered to ring up and let the Council know. So I said 'well I'll put it in writing as well'. I thought 'I sound like Victor Mildrew' now! [..]

S.E.: What this the first time you've written to the Council about something?

CLARE: Oh no, I regularly ring them up! Because otherwise you go down there and you have to come straight back home. [..] I'm never nasty to them because it's not their fault but it would be nice if they'd fix it within two months.

Clare was clearly aware that the action of ringing up the council might be construed as an over-reaction either by council officers or me. To deal with this possible criticism, her account emphasised the apathy of others (as did Keith's on the previous page) and the rationality of her response (she is never rude to them despite the fact that it takes at least two months for the equipment to be mended).

A further stereotype was the individual whose involvement in voluntary activities compensated for gaps elsewhere in their life or indeed became their life. Dawn spoke in these terms of a friend who was a lone parent with a disabled son:

"She tends to get very involved in things for him because she's on her own and that's how she thinks of people really. [..] But she doesn't go out very often, I don't think, in the evening. It's only if it's something to do with him, which is a bit sad. She's older. She's sort of had her, I was going to say 'had her life', I don't mean it like that but she's had her single life, you know, and I think she's quite happy." (Dawn, UF8, aged 20s, married)

The small number of urban interviewees who were active in community affairs in a formal way, by being on committees or initiating projects, also categorised others by the extent of their involvement or non-involvement. The apathy of local people who failed to get involved in local affairs was a theme in the accounts of all interviewees who carried out voluntary work. Hostility towards the particular beneficiaries of a project and cynicism towards society in general were other categories applied to local people who were not involved in community matters by those urban interviewees who were.

This interpretative divide between the 'community active' and the supposed apathetic, hostile or cynical non-involved needed to be softened in the case of family and friends who were not engaged in community activities. Georgia, the initiator of the millennium green project in the urban locality, identified an interim category of 'people people' who supported community projects indirectly through the support of key players:

"I've got a couple of main friends that are, er, they're not community active but they're aware of people. They understand people. They're people people is what I call them. And they have physically come over and helped me out when I've had community events." (Georgia, UF1, late 20s, parent)

Unsurprisingly, those interviewees who were not particularly involved in community affairs did not give apathy or hostility as the reasons for their non-involvement. Lack of time was the most common explanation with some interviewees also feeling either that they lacked the necessary skills or experience or that the initiative was unlikely to succeed because of the scale of the problem.

The main significance of these stereotypes is that the stereotype of the 'too involved' was dominant in the accounts of urban interviewees despite contradictory versions. Interviewees who were community active felt it necessary to distance themselves from the stereotype and from potential charges of self-promotion whilst others used it to excuse their lack of involvement. This was less apparent in the rural data where interviewees were more likely to talk about

voluntary activities without resorting to these forms of justification. The issue of distance was still present in the accounts of rural interviewees but in a more literal sense relating to the relationship between the village and Local Authority. This is discussed in more detail below.

Perceptions of civic processes

Most interviewees in the urban locality felt that they could and would contact the council or a councillor if there was an issue about which they felt sufficiently strongly although less than half had actually done so. There was also some cynicism concerning the underlying motives and effectiveness of political processes. A female interviewee, Sally, living in the urban locality was a member of a citizens' jury and completed a questionnaire every six weeks on aspects of local government:

"So I actually do that. [...] Like there was one recently about changing the style of leadership in the Council. Whether they'd go to a mayor and a cabinet and things like that. I had to give some feedback on that. So I feel that in a way is more my way of changing things. It's more proactive perhaps." (Sally, UF15, aged 20s, parent)

Sally's mother was the secretary to the parish council of the village where she lived and Sally had trained as a social worker and been involved in environmental campaigns. This prompted a question about whether it was a family tradition to be involved in civic or community affairs. Sally argued the opposite since her mother's experiences had made Sally distrusting of more direct forms of political participation:

"I wouldn't go along to like the local Council meeting and things like that. But then that's because having seen my mum's views on it and her side of it, what actually happens and how much notice they take of the public at the meetings and things like that, I tend to think of it as a bit of a waste of time. I dunno, I wouldn't say there's a family tradition. It just sort of happens by chance." (Sally, UF15, aged 20s, parent)

Rural interviewees were generally aware of issues discussed at the parish council, both through a village newsletter and word of mouth from someone on

the council they knew. The involvement of the parish council in local affairs was also fairly visible since they were responsible for local building restrictions, controlled what happened in the village hall and could initiate changes to the physical environment such as bollards to dissuade motorbikes from public footpaths. The parish council and local councillor had in the past fought on the village's behalf against environmental hazards such as a spillover rubbish tip for an urban centre. The protests had at times been successful and at other times unsuccessful. Rural interviewees were more likely to have met their local councillor than urban interviewees even though he lived in another village.

Despite the general approbation for the parish council, there was some concern that it no longer served the village in quite the way it had in the past. This was blamed on the overburdening of the parish council with business that originated from the Local Authority rather than the village:

"The council, the parish council I think their role's changed in a village now they have to take on so much more that I don't think the money is there for them to do the social bit. It was always the parish council that used to run it (the youth club)." (Liz, RF8, aged 30s, parent)

There was also a perception that the Local Authority and associated services were remote and failed to appreciate or prioritise villagers' concerns over matters such as vandalism:

"You had a village bobby, we had two village bobbies here you see. They disappeared in Thatcher's days and so response time now is about forty-five minutes to come out here. [...] So, you know, you see kids trashing the school and you call them out here and by the time they get here the kids are gone. And their attitude's very low priority but it's not really is it? It's not low priority the status because if they eliminated that side then... These kids you see are getting into mischief and then into vandalism. And it would stop at the mischief stage." (Henry, RM8, aged 50s)

So whilst urban interviewees generally felt that they could contact the Local Authority about matters of concern but rarely did, rural interviewees were more

likely to feel that such contact was pointless because of the remoteness of the Local Authority in distance and viewpoint.

Although the villagers had an intervening level of decision making in the form of the parish council, there was a perception that this forum did not always secure what 'the village' wanted. Moreover its existence made public and institutionalised differences of opinion over particular issues. The most contentious recent example had been a proposal to build an off-road racing track for teenagers on waste ground at the edge of the village. Supporters of the plan argued that the land was only used for walking dogs and there were plenty of alternative spaces for that. Since the young people at whom it was aimed were already involved in various forms of risky behaviour, this would give them a safe outlet. Opponents of the scheme worried about the noise, safety and the problem of attracting other (undesirable) young people from a wide area. The arguments for and against the scheme had acquired an emotional dimension following the deaths of two teenagers from the village in a high-speed car accident (mentioned on page 128 and discussed more fully in Chapter 7).

One of the main proponents of the scheme, Neil, blamed its failure to gain approval on legal obstacles conjured up by a distant Local Authority:

"There's the insurance as well. They say 'can't get insurance for this'. And apparently you need a public liability licence which we could have got and everything but it's just barriers all the time like, you know. So it never happened. But that's what most of the children wanted out here, a motorcycle track. [...] I said to the Council, because I kept going down to meetings and that and I said 'well, why don't you do er what they do in like car, pub car parks?' Like they've got 'owners park at their own risk', you put 'riders ride at their own risk'. But they said cos it's on Council ground, the mothers and fathers would be 'why did the Council let them?' if they get injured and things like that. So, it's just a barrier." (Neil, RM4, aged 40s, parent)

The young people themselves, who had been less involved in the process of application, attributed its failure to the negative attitudes of 'the village' towards them as individuals and as a group:

TRISTAN: We've wanted one like anything for years. They could build like [...] a club like. People could buy their own cars and do them up and do a little rally or something like that. Do little projects down there, stuff like that.

ADAM: We'd build the track as well.

TRISTAN: We'd be willing to do all that, willing to do all that. But they just won't, they won't have it.

S.E.: Why do you think they won't?

TRISTAN: I really don't know. I don't think they think that we're like good enough for stuff like that.

(Tristan, RM5, aged 16 and Adam, RM6, aged 15)

The millennium green project was the nearest equivalent in the urban locality. Its initiators had made considerable efforts to try and consult local people including children and young people. Despite this, physical components of the scheme such as fencing and trees were routinely vandalised by local children. None of the young people concerned was interviewed so it is not possible to say anything about their perceptions of the civic processes involved or compare these with the rural interviewees. Nevertheless it is obvious that neither group of young people was fully engaged in the civic processes of their particular locality.

The impact of taking part

The accounts of the fourteen interviewees who were very active in local organisations and affairs provide insights into the effects of participation on their own lives and outlook. Interviewees talked about personal risks and costs of community work and described encounters with those whom they perceived as having more influence and impact than themselves. There was also some indication that the act of participation and contact with community development professionals affected the way these particular interviewees perceived and talked about community. All these effects were more apparent in the accounts of urban interviewees than rural ones.

Interviewees who had been very active in community matters for some time were aware of a possible conflict between the demands of the voluntary work and the needs of their own family. Keith who was involved in four different community organisations and also worked full-time said that he tried to keep it within limits:

"You try and do your bit but I'm not prepared to sacrifice the family for it." (Keith, UM13, aged 40s, parent, very community active)

Steve, like Keith, lived on the social housing estate and had found that leadership of a neighbourhood watch scheme had increased the expectations and demands of others to such a degree that it had affected his health and been the subject of disagreements with his wife:

"There was a couple of times somebody's come and knocked at the door, I'd just sat down to a meal. This one day I had to go round to X Court. There were two women round there arguing about a bloody catalogue. And it was getting to fisty cuffs and I had to separate them and mediate for them. And when I came back two hours later, me dinner's in the bin and Jen is furious. But this happened on quite a few occasions. Instead of me saying 'I'll be round after I've had me dinner'. I never used to do that. I used to take it as an emergency and go. [...] And it did get too much for me in the end because I was the only one and I had the whole estate coming at us and it made me ill and I said 'right'. But then (the MP) wrote me a letter to say would I start it up again? And I said I would." (Steve, UM11, aged 50s, not working, very community active)

There might also be an emotional cost to involvement particularly if the individual has initiated a project that then encountered problems. This has occurred in the case of vandalism to the millennium green project in the urban locality:

"I'm still being battered by this particular project because I'm coming up across all the problems that people said that there would be. The vandalism, the negative (attitudes). The vandalism is the main problem and that is soul destroying but I've got on top of it because I've realised that it's a social problem and it's not personally at me so I've got that bit. But it is trying to cope with it and trying to understand it and trying to

work round it. [...] And the lack of people's commitment in the area. That has been soul destroying." (Georgia, UF1, aged 20s, parent, initiator of millennium green project)

Only one of the rural interviewees very active in community matters talked in terms of being overwhelmed or disillusioned by the reactions of others. My perception is that community activities and initiatives were generally more embedded in the rural collective and therefore the onus on individuals was less great but other kinds of data would be needed to verify this. The off-road racing track proposal was one example of a project where its proponents had encountered similar opposition and isolation to the early stages of the millennium green.

All seven urban interviewees had had direct contact with statutory agencies through their voluntary work and one had been a local councillor. Six of the seven interviewees knew the local MP, mayor and other councillors and had observed the work of community development professionals from the Local Authority and specialist agencies. The editor of the local newspaper had been co-opted onto some committees to assist with publicity. There was some criticism of the extent to which specialist agencies consulted community representatives but otherwise interviewees were generally complimentary about the official support they had received. Those involved in neighbourhood watch had developed close links with the local police although this did not guarantee the level of policing residents wanted. Similarly, connections with political representatives did not improve routine services such as refuse collection or the speed of response to hazardous waste.

There was something of a gender difference in the accounts of contact with those in positions of influence. The urban male interviewees tended to emphasise the familiarity of their association with more powerful others whilst female urban interviewees talked more about the usefulness of the association. Georgia for example had noticed that, with the exception of the vicar ('whose job was community'), people in higher positions only turned up for more high profile

events. She nevertheless appreciated what they could achieve and how they did it:

"I've got the point where I know when and where they will turn up. But, erm, they're very good for writing letters to official people and putting together speeches. They're handy in their own sphere but it's a business sphere. It's the area that is sort of like their domain. And the thing that I noticed that Ian the MP did the other day, instead of writing to Mr Thorpe who is involved in youth work and that sort of area, erm, he wrote 'Dear Jonathan' and 'from Ian', you know. And as Ian said himself 'I do not deal with the middle men, I go directly to the top'. And they know who the top people are from whatever situation you want to get involved in. And their letter with their little MP at the end of it does go a long way. So for that area they're very handy. [...] They give you the extra clout when you need it." (Georgia, UF1, aged 20s, initiator of millennium green project)

Rural interviewees who were very community active had had less direct contact with political representatives or statutory or specialist agencies with the exception of the local councillor who chaired the parish council. Community proposals and concerns went to the parish council and via the councillor to the Local Authority. Experiences of coverage of village news by the local newspaper had also been more mixed. These factors created a rather different relationship with linking social capital in the two localities. In the urban locality, interviewees who were very involved in community affairs had had direct contact with a broad range of more powerful individuals and organisations. However, this contact was always associated with a specific project and it was uncertain whether any more general change had occurred in the status or power of individuals or the community as a result. In the rural locality, such linking social capital as existed was located in the mechanism of the parish council and the person of the local councillor.

The first evaluation report of the Salford Social Action Research Project on social capital reported a conceptual development away from neighbourliness, social networks, voluntary group membership and social support into a more

radical and politicised sense of social capital (Ong *et al* 2000: 22) evident in aspects such as power, self-belief, respect for others, political know-how and scope of networks. The accounts of those urban and rural interviewees with experience of linking social capital, if that is the right term for it, suggest that whilst individuals gained in some of these elements through their involvement in community activities, the process of engagement left existing structures of decision-making untouched.

Although the word 'community' has been used frequently in this and other sections of the thesis, few interviewees actually used the term except when talking about idealised social relations of the past. The exception was those urban interviewees who were very involved in community affairs who seemed to have taken on some of the language and perspective of community development professionals. Part of this was a distancing of self from the collective social entity at which the initiative was directed. The phrase '*but I've got on top of it because I've realised that it's a social problem and it's not personally at me so I've got that bit*' in the fourth and fifth lines of Georgia's description of the emotional cost of the millennium green project (pages 183-184) is an example of this reflexive process. Rural interviewees who were very active in community affairs were more likely to refer to 'the village' than 'the community' (and in fact other rural interviewees used the same term) but the same process of distancing from the collective social entity seemed to be taking place. So whilst individuals who had little interest in community affairs distanced themselves from the collective through inaction, those interviewees who were most involved in the community in practical ways had - through the very process of engagement - come to distance themselves conceptually. The placing of self within or outside the collective was also a feature of interviewees' accounts of social inclusion and exclusion, which form the last substantive section of this chapter.

6.5 Experiences of exclusion

As discussed in Chapter 2, social exclusion has been conceptualised in a number of different ways. Social policy approaches generally focus on participation in or exclusion from key aspects of society. The literature on social identity highlights the centrality of perceptions of similarity and difference to the creation and

maintenance of identity at an individual and collective level. Post-modernist writing has addressed the fluidity and contextual nature of identity in contemporary society with Bauman's memorable reference to the lack of a social space 'unquestionably one's own' (Bauman 1997: 26).

Some older interviewees in the urban locality talked about experiences of poverty in their childhood and youth which became noticeable when they were evacuated as children during the war or, for the men, signed up for the armed services:

"The doctor comes along and looks you up and down sort of thing. And I'm looking down at all these other blokes. They've all got these white pants. And I thought 'what are they then under their trousers?' [LAUGHS]. Cos I was all naked once I'd got my trousers [off] you see. Well we never had pants, or vests come to that. But then when I got called up, you had everything. You had pants, vests, socks, boots. And once there was two or three studs missing, the sergeant would tell you 'go down and get them new studs put in' and all that. Cor." (Joe, UM21, aged 75)

Such memories fit with a relativist understanding of poverty and social exclusion. However, the same interviewees tended to emphasise that deprivation was universal in the urban locality at that time and this negated the feeling of being poor:

GEORGE: I got married to her when I was twenty-three years old and on that day, the same day, I had my first, my very first new pairs of shoes.

LILLIAN: But we were all like that.

GEORGE: Oh yes, yes we were.

LILLIAN: This is what I'm trying to say. We weren't really poor because we were all like it. We were fed, well country fed you know. We were filled.

(George UM18 and Lillian UF19, both aged 70s)

The analytical focus here is concerned more with how interviewees experienced, understood and responded to social exclusion in their present lives. Unlike the quotations above, interviewees mainly talked about social exclusion in terms of their social relations with others rather than more general issues of socio-economic disadvantage and deprivation. Interviewees experienced social exclusion in different forms that I have termed 'generalised', 'located' and 'personalised' exclusion. This understanding is closer to the social identity literature than the social exclusion literature although both will be revisited in Chapter 8. There were also a few attempts by urban interviewees to find community in other types of association which has resonance with post-modernist perspectives. Another notable feature of accounts of social exclusion is that they were far more common from the female interviewees, suggesting again a link with social identity. Although both younger and older interviewees felt marginalised in their locality, as described in section 6.3, they generally felt at home amongst their peers. Whilst for female interviewees with children and one teenage female interviewee, it was in groups of women of a similar age that they felt excluded or marginalised.

Generalised exclusion

As described in Chapter 5, rural interviewees related to the village as a meaningful social entity irrespective of how well they felt they fitted in. A consequence was that social exclusion or marginalisation was also experienced in a general way. This has already been illustrated in the case of the three teenage males who felt that lack of support for the off-road racing track was because '*they (the village) didn't think that we're like good enough for stuff like that*' (Tristan, RM5, aged 16). Later in the same interview the young men talked about the problem of having nowhere to sit and 'chill out'. It was unclear whether this included smoking cannabis:

TRISTAN: We just need to sit down and chill out and listen to our tunes and that as well. Stuff like that.

S.E.: Is there anywhere you can go to do that?

ADAM: Sit out front of here [village hall] and do what we do. Or sit over the field out the way. But that's like trouble. [..]

S.E.: Can you meet up in someone's home?

TRISTAN: No. A few of our mates have flats and stuff but... We used to have like a garage we could hang out in. Sit in the garage. But it's just gone pear-shaped. It happens every year like. Half way through the year we'll have somewhere to go and then get it stopped. Next year it'll go on again just like that.

S.E.: What happens?

TRISTAN: Well just stuff happens. Like stuff gets said and that and you get parents 'can't be doing with that type of agro round here' and that.

The theme of this account is a continuous cycle of finding somewhere to meet up as a group and then being told to go elsewhere. Similarly, interviewees such as Karen (RF1) would encounter the cliques from which she felt excluded in a number of settings within the village: in the street, at the school gate, in shops, at community events or in neighbours' houses.

Past studies have revealed the significance of 'old' families within village communities (for example Strathern 1981). The same type of differentiation was present in the accounts of a few rural interviewees:

"A lady I know she's lived here all her life and she was talking to me about the newcomers. And I said 'what do you mean the newcomers?' And she was talking about in 1952 they built [local industry that was subsequently closed]. And that was when most of the what appear to be council houses now were built. And she was talking about those people. Nineteen fifty- two! And you think 'blimey'." (Barry, RM2, aged 50s, lived in the rural locality for 15 years)

One rural interviewee used the term 'rooted families' to describe those who had lived in the village before the development of local industry. Three of the older urban interviewees, all of whom were born in the locality, talked about old local families in a similar way although there was an additional dimension of social class in the distinction. One urban interviewee described how the significance of

old families continued to be ritualised through the appointment of a 'village' representative:

"We have a little custom here [...] There is from time to time, not very often I might add, an election takes place of a very special kind. The local residents elect a person called Mr or Mrs, as the case may be, (Urban Locality). [...] Mr or Mrs (Urban Locality), as the case may be, takes on various duties. The main one is to record village events and history and talk to whoever. (George, UM18, aged late 70s, born in the urban locality)

The 'whoever' in the last line included people like myself. The incumbent had died the previous year and had not yet been replaced which George said was why he had agreed to talk to me.

Despite these assertions, the distinction between old families and newcomers was much less significant in both localities than it had been in the past and for similar reasons. Members of the old families had often moved away or died and the expansion of population combined with the ageing of individuals had diluted the presence of those who remained. In the rural locality, it was the families and friendship networks from the industrial development in the 1950s and 1960s that were more prominent in the social environment. Neil (RM4), who had lived in the village for four years, had experienced exclusion and physical intimidation from other villagers despite his efforts to help the young people. In the following extract he corrects my assumption that these networks were based on family. The 'older generation' referred to are the 1950s and 1960s residents rather than 'rooted families':

NEIL: If er, say for instance, I fell out with a certain person in the village, then I could fall out with, indirectly, about twenty other people. It's very cliquy.

S.E.: Yeah. And would you necessarily know who those were?

NEIL: Oh yeah.

S.E.: Oh, so you know who's related to who?

NEIL: Yeah. Well, it doesn't have to be related, just friends. It's more so the older generation. You know, I could be talking to one bloke

one week and say when you fall out with his mate, you go 'all right?' say to Joe and he'll ignore me because he's with his mate because he's fell out with me. [...] And then when he sees you on your own he'll go 'oh all right?'

The only instance of generalised exclusion occurring in the urban data concerned the residents of a housing facility for homeless young people. Most of these young people came from outside the locality although within the general area. The male residents interviewed were more sanguine about the local social environment than the females, although both male and female residents had been assaulted. Female residents said that they avoided going out, especially at night. This is of course partly about crime and fear of crime but the resentment of local residents to these young people, who they felt were getting better treatment from the housing association than their own children, was demonstrated in an incident at a neighbourhood watch meeting held in the housing facility. I was present at the meeting at which a local woman had produced a newspaper cutting reporting that the facility's residents were receiving free driving lessons. She argued that this was unfair and a misuse of rent. My perception at the time was that this was an individual giving vent to their opinions but the facility manager later responded by banning local people from using the facility for meetings. Two of the male residents (interviewed together but giving slightly different versions of the story at different points in the interview) and two other interviewees, who were sympathetic to the managers' response, related this incident to me unprompted. The two non-resident interviewees had been present but the residents had not:

"One of the people there started slagging off the young people that live in the (facility). The Housing Association took an exception to it quite rightly. I'd do the same if they were slagging off my family. 'That's it, you don't hold your meetings here.' " (Keith, UM13, aged 40s)

"Apparently, you know, there was someone supposedly giving some stick because, you know, this place has been paying for people's driving lessons in here and helping them out. You're living here, you know. You work or you go to college. You do your bit, yeah? But I say that the

greater percentage of people in here are probably, they're living here because [...] circumstances at home like family breakdown or just basically not getting on at home so it's not, they're not moving here to get the free driving lessons. They're moving in because there's obviously an obligation they have to or live under a box, so... You get people outside just knocking it a bit and saying, you know, throwing it in our face. It's not, it's nothing, you know. There's something about yourself you know as well which is kind of annoying." (Dave, UM8, resident of housing facility)

None of the accounts of this incident disputed the factual nature of the woman's claim or the rightness of the manager's response. The potential effects of such incidents on the young people's possibly fragile sense of self (expressed in Dave's references to *'you do your bit, yeah?'* and *'there's something about yourself you know'*) might explain the manager's reaction. This neighbourhood watch meeting was the only account of generalised exclusion found in the urban data and it is perhaps significant that it occurred on the social housing estate where family and friendship networks were most like those of the rural locality.

Located exclusion

A consequence of the generally fragmented nature of social relations in the urban locality was that the experiences of social contact and social exclusion described by urban interviewees tended to be located in specific settings. Female interviewees with dependant children were the group most likely to talk about social exclusion and this often occurred in places associated with their children. Betty, whose children were now young adults, still remembered her feelings of isolation when waiting at the school gate:

"One or two of them would talk in the playground but most of them would just kept themselves to themselves, didn't want to know. They wouldn't chat to you while you're waiting for the children to go in, that sort of thing. Or while you were waiting for them to come out. They'd just stand there in their little cliquy group and then they'd sort of take their kids and go off and that would be it, you know. Very few would actually get together and talk." (Betty, UF4, aged early 50s)

The existence of cliques from which the interviewee was excluded was a frequent theme in female accounts. An interesting example arose in respect of one of the three parents and toddlers groups in the urban locality. Three interviewees were recruited from a group held in community hall near the owner-occupier estate and five interviewees through a Sure Start type group held in the church hall one afternoon a week. There was a third group, held on a different day in the same room as the Sure Start one, from which I was unable to find interviewees. My experience was that this third group was more impenetrable than the others and this was confirmed by five interviewees who had tried the third group or knew of its reputation and had gone elsewhere. The three reasons given for disliking this particular group were that it was run by church people for church people, the hall was too big and noisy, and it was cliquey. The first reason was inaccurate since the group was run more as an outreach initiative aimed at people in the wider community. The comments about size and noise were curious since the same was not said of the Sure Start type group which met in the same space. The remaining issue of cliqueyness was described by Caz (UF17, aged early 20s, lone parent) in these terms:

CAZ: It's not my cup of tea. [..] It's in the church, it's all church related and I'm not a churchy person. I went there once and erm it just wasn't me. The people there aren't like my sort of, they're off the estate and I'm not an estate person. I'm a, I've been brought up round sort of houses, not on estates, so I don't really get on with people from estates. And they're all in their little, it's like being back at school. You get your little groups who, who if you wear make-up you're with them and then you get your skanky mums. [LAUGHS]

S.E.: Tell me who your skanky mums are.

CAZ: They're just like really drab and they don't put make-up on and they just go. I'm a skanky mum because I just walk in hair tied up here and whatever clothes I can find to put on in the morning. I really can't be bothered with all the make-up and making myself look nice. So, so the skanky mums sit one end and the mums that could be bothered sit the other and if you go in one day with make-up on and the next day you don't know what end to sit at. So, so it's all about clans in a way and I'm not like that.

Caz's experience of the social barriers between an in-crowd and the 'skanky mums' reminded her of similar marginalisation at school. In the process of recounting the experience, Caz was simultaneously constructing a defence of herself based on difference. She emphasised that she was not churchy or an estate person (*"I've been brought up round sort of houses, not on estates"*), nor was she someone who would act in such an unfriendly way (*"it's all about clans [..] and I'm not like that"*). Caz's defence continued when she described what she liked about the Sure Start type group:

"It's a lot different because er there's not many people from directly where you are. Which is a nice thing because you can keep yourself to, keep yourself away from people you don't want to be with. But it's nice to hear that along there that it's parents [who] do have problems whereas along there they cover their problems up. I mean there is a woman, two black eyes. Two black eyes and her kids were skeletons, bless them, and she just wouldn't admit she had a problem at all. And at least along there each of us knows we've got a problem with either our children or our lives so we go along there to-to make it seem a little bit better. And no-one judges you, see." (Caz, UF17, aged early 20s, lone parent)

Caz's account is contradictory since she avoids exclusion by being excluding. What she liked about the Sure Start type group was that participants came from a wide area and so she would avoid meeting neighbours and school contemporaries there and could avoid encountering members outside group sessions if she wished. Her main defence of self was that the women at the cliquey group also had problems, represented by the extreme examples of domestic violence and neglect of the children, but tried to hide them whereas Caz and others at the Sure Start type group were superior for having recognised their problems and sought support. Another single mother talked about being made to feel like an alien at the unfriendly group because everyone stared but nobody talked to her. She appreciated the friendliness of the Sure Start type group and the uncritical exchange of advice, which made her feel that she was not having to cope alone.

The example of the Sure Start type group illustrates two ways that interviewees responded to located social exclusion. One was by avoiding the setting and the

other was by finding or creating an alternative version that was less excluding and, crucially, of which they were on the inside.

Male interviewees did not talk about located social exclusion in this way although it may be that this was more likely to occur in work-related rather than community spaces because of the gender balance. An exception were the accounts of three male interviewees of walking into one of the pubs in the rural locality for the first time:

"In the local pub it takes a while. Well the one that's knocked down. That took a while to fit in. [...] I can remember I walked in there and I wanted some fags and er the whole place stopped. Silence. So I just looked at everybody and walked up to the bar and everybody kept looking. [...] That was about the only time I ever felt out of place." (Chris, RM3, aged 30s, lived in village for 14 years)

A characteristic of a pub is that it is generally a male dominated space and this was certainly the case in both localities. All the female interviewees in the urban locality also talked about feeling unwelcome in local pubs and so went to a family pub outside the locality, if they went to one at all. The rural male interviewees ignored the reaction and in time the unfriendliness dissipated. The male urban interviewees identified different characteristics of the pubs in the locality and went to wherever they felt most at home.

Personalised exclusion

There was a third form of exclusion described, again, mainly in the accounts of female interviewees. This was when exclusion became personalised in the sense that the interviewee attributed the unfriendliness or hostility of others with a particular characteristic of herself and responded by withdrawing partially or completely from social situations in which rejection was a possibility.

A mild form of this self-awareness was evident in the following quotation from Liz, a woman in her 30s who had been born in the village and was very active in community activities. The phrase 'being who I am' third line does not refer to Liz's own circumstances or character but the fact that her father had been the

village policeman. Even though he had retired almost twenty years earlier, Liz perceived that the association would always make others in the village treat her warily:

“Half the time I don’t know what goes on in the village cos I don’t really go round with people that gossip. I mean my sister in law she knows absolutely everything but it’s not, again possibly being who I am people don’t tell me so I don’t know what goes on down the village. [S.E.: You don’t seek it out?] No not really. I mean you do know what goes on in the village but only briefly and to be quite honest with you sometimes half the time I don’t believe it cos they tend to turn it into something completely different anyway.” (Liz, RF8, aged 30s, parent, policeman’s daughter)

The internalising of exclusion was found in a more serious form in the accounts of two female rural interviewees who had lived in the village for two and three years respectively:

“I’m sort of more a one person kind of friend than sort of like a group. Just one person. I do find a lot of them are in groups here. Mostly in groups and they like keep themselves to themselves a bit you know. I do not get involved. Sometimes I’m best to do that really.” (Karen, RF1, aged 30s, parent)

“She was having a problem with a friend down the road in the village. They were good friends. Kelly’s daughter had been to her first sleepover there. But then her friend accused her of saying things. Came up to her in the shop and assaulted her. She doesn’t know why. Now her friend’s mother and sister have it in for her too. She and her partner are thinking of moving again. [...] If they do, they won’t tell anyone. Kelly would like to do it quietly. Park the van round the back and load it up from there. [...] She’s been going to an anger management course. It teaches you to think ahead how you’ll react. When something happens to rile you, then you’ll do such and such rather than losing it. She thinks other people in the village ought to do an anger management course as well.” (Notes of an interview with Kelly, RF13, aged 20s, parent. The interviewee did not wish the interview to be tape-recorded.)

Both Karen and Kelly used a similar formula of 'I'm not the sort of person who' to that employed by Caz in the extract quoted on page 193. As a result of accumulated experiences, Karen's understanding of herself as a social being had settled on the premise that she did better in one-to-one interactions than in a group and the best strategy was to avoid getting involved. Kelly's whole account was a denial of negative interpretations that might be placed on her inability to get on with her in-laws or others in the village. One way of refuting this is to transfer the accusation to others. Whilst Caz highlighted the personal problems of those who acted in a superior way at the parent and toddler group, Kelly argued that her excluders were as much in need of anger management techniques as herself and implicitly more in need since they did not acknowledge it. The main difference between these two women and female interviewees such as Caz in the urban locality was that there was no alternative version of community they could access. Kelly had considered starting an art group in the village but thought others would come along to mock.

6.6 Summary: dimensions of presence and absence

The analysis presented in this chapter has largely departed from the conceptual framework of social capital in order to explore the meanings of place and space articulated by interviewees in more depth. It was found that interviewees related to the place where they lived in a variety of ways and its characteristics and reputation had significance for their own sense of identity. Accounts of place were infused with aspects of self, whether in the form of biographical comparisons, as in the centrality of childhood to accounts, or personal values applied to discussions of parenting or providing justification for involvement or non-involvement in community affairs. Perceptions and experiences of social exclusion presented the most tangible example of the relationship between self and place. Social exclusion occurred in a variety of forms (generalised, located and personalised) which reflected both the interviewee's own situation and the social characteristics of the locality. Underlying these reflexive accounts were different assumptions, as described in Chapter 5, about neighbourhood, neighbourliness and the complexities of seeking and receiving social support.

One of the starting points for this research, discussed in Chapter 4, was that particular personal circumstances would render people experts on the availability or otherwise of help within the local community. This was, of course, a one-sided view of support and did not allow for the possibility that, for some interviewees, a disabling health condition that prevented them from engaging in paid employment might create an opportunity (albeit sometimes short term) to become more involved in community affairs. Nor did it consider the impact of gender or the type of locality in which the individual lived. Subsequent observations have suggested the development of an alternative conceptual framework for exploring people's relationship to the place where they live. This framework combines two factors. The first is the extent to which an individual is physically present in or absent from a locality over the course of their life. The second factor is the social meaning and status associated with particular life stages or circumstances. The framework is described below and presented in pictorial form in Figure 4 overleaf.

Children and young people are generally physically present and visible in a locality for much of the time but are not ascribed the same kinds of social status or roles as adults (Morrow 1999). Paid employment in contemporary society generally takes people out of the locality physically and reduces their social presence except when they are particularly community-minded. The closure of major local industrial employers in both localities had reduced the likelihood that workplace networks would be replicated in the local social environment. Parenthood is the factor most likely to increase social presence in a community but paid employment limits the extent of physical presence and the association between parenthood and voluntary activity seems to be gendered in complex ways.

An interesting feature of the three sub-populations on which this research was focused was that they typically represent different balances between physical presence in a locality and social status in the community. The intricacy of interviewees' accounts of the interactions between themselves and others in the locality is in keeping with this complexity.

Figure 4: Community presence and status by life stage/situation

Life situation / stage	Physical presence in a locality	Social status in the community
Children	Present in the locality for much of the time	Need to be protected. Not regarded as social agents unless behaving badly. A social extension of their parents.
Young people	Presence depends on school attendance and whether in employment. Those seen as most problematic are most physically present.	Status depends on behaviour. Often not consulted. Not given responsibility or the facilities they say they want. Uncertain transition to adult status especially if they do not become employed.
Employed adults	Absent for much of the time.	High social status despite absence.
Non-working adults	Present much of the time although disability may limit external presence.	Status depends on the reason for not working. Not a social institution in the same way as retirement.
Employed parents	Absent for some or much of the time.	Recognised as having a high stake in the community. Praise for not relying on benefits if a single mother but discourses around parental neglect.
Non-working parents	Present for some or much of the time.	Recognised as having a high stake in the community. Regarded as less self-reliant if a single mother and not working. Charge of neglect depends on children's behaviour.
Fit retired	Present for some or much of the time.	Often net contributors to community. Removal of status as a worker or parent. New identity may depend on income and family circumstances.
Older people with a disabling health condition	Present for much of the time but external presence may be limited.	Depends on continuation of social networks. Older people themselves often perceive their social status as undervalued and declining.

The more reflexive analysis of the interviewee data presented in this chapter has sought to balance the information-giving and performative dimensions of interviewees' descriptions of the place where they live. A third analytical strand, as yet unexplored, focuses on the telling of stories in interviewee accounts, both as a distinct form of presentation in the context of an interview and as indicative of a collective culture. Such stories provide the subject matter for Chapter 7.

Chapter 7

The telling of stories in accounts of place

7.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the stories told by interviewees in the course of the interview. These stories present a methodological challenge requiring both detailed contextual analysis and comparisons across the interview set. Three questions directed the analysis: 'Why is the interviewee telling this story at this point in the interview?', 'What does the story reveal about the interviewee's perceptions of place and community?' and 'What is it about place and ideas of community that produce this kind of talk?' These questions focus on the nature of the locality but interviewees' stories were also about themselves in a particular role in a particular place at a particular time. Stories might have a variety of functions – such as illustrative, persuasive, nostalgic, interpretative, self-presentational, or distancing - and have more than one purpose. An additional complexity lies in the co-authorship of narrative and the influence of the interaction between narrator and audience on the telling of a story or shaping the way it is told.

Not all interviewees told stories and a few told many. Most of the stories were about events of personal significance to the interviewee and restricted to a single interview. However, three incidents were related in storied form in several interviews. Two occurred in the rural locality and one in the urban. There were significant differences in the content of the collective stories, the range of interviewees to whom it was known and the time lag between the central event and the interview. This indicates an association between the social characteristics of a place and whether and how stories become part of a collective narrative. An analysis of the stories told about a place by the people currently living there offers potentially deeper insights into social and cultural processes than could be gleaned from interviewees' non-storied descriptions. This interesting possibility needs to be balanced by the recognition that collective stories of place are just as much a form of performance as are individual narratives. What is being

addressed is a place's reputation, which - as argued in Chapter 6 - had personal significance for its residents.

The chapter is divided into five sections. Section 7.2 discusses theoretical approaches to the analysis of stories and interviewees' perceptions of the trajectory of change in the two localities. Section 7.3 presents examples of six types of individual stories that occurred across the dataset. The three collective stories are discussed in Section 7.4 together with events that had the makings of collective stories but were absent from interviewees' accounts. The chapter concludes with a summary discussion of the significance of stories in interviewees' accounts of place and community and the association between locality characteristics and the stories told by people living there.

7.2 The role of stories in accounts of place

Dealing with stories

The analytical treatment of stories in accounts of place poses a number of problems. The first is their descriptive accuracy compared with other forms of discourse, particularly if the reminiscence is nostalgic comparing romanticised versions of past communities to failings in contemporary society. Critics have argued that such views are contradicted by historical evidence for the negative features of close-knit communities (Crow and Allan 1994). The universality of complaints of declining values and behaviour in different cultures and periods has also been highlighted, suggesting that they are simply a reaction to social change. Campbell *et al* (1999) provide a counter-argument that what is empirically useful about nostalgic accounts is not what they say about the past but the reasons people give to explain change since these *are* geographically and historically specific. This point is supported by the explanations given by interviewees in this study for changes in neighbour relations (described in Chapter 5).

A second issue concerns the performative and often rehearsed nature of stories. Cornwell (1984), in her study of accounts of health and illness in East London,

found significant differences between the 'public' and 'private' accounts of community in the past given by the same interviewees on different research occasions. Riessman (1990b) argues that narratives are strategic: edited versions of reality in which the narrator has chosen what to disclose and how to disclose it. Narrative research, particularly in the field of social psychology, has responded to this tendency by often focusing on the linguistic form rather than content of stories (Andrews *et al* 2000) and the presentational techniques used to resolve dilemmas of identity (for example Taylor 2001). This is less useful when the focus is sociological although the identification of certain symbolic tools, such as metaphors connected with physical barriers, can be enlightening. Another response is to understand the co-authorship of narratives as a challenge to assumptions about the supposed spontaneous nature of 'naturalist' research data.

A third issue is the applicability of analytical frameworks built around the identification of core narratives in textual narrative to oral story telling in informal settings. A common typology applied in psychological research on narratives identifies four narrative types: the romance, the comedy, the tragedy and the satire (Lieblich *et al* 1998). Each contains a hero but the outcome varies between narrative types. Other approaches take account of the direction of narrative: progressive, regressive or stable.

Bury's discussion of illness narratives (Bury 2001) provides a useful overview for dealing with the complexities of story telling. The background to this article was renewed interest within medicine in patient narratives as providing more 'authentic' insights into patients' experiences and health beliefs (for example Hudson Jones 1999). This is similar to the assumptions of authenticity of interview accounts that have been attacked by Silverman (2001). Bury identified three types of narrative form: 'contingent narratives' which aim to make sense of the experience of illness; 'moral' narratives' that address the effect of illness on the person's identity and in so doing seek to make sense of a changed self; and 'core narratives' that borrow from cultural resources concerning the meaning of suffering and illness. Within these broad narrative types, stories might fit one or more sub-forms (such as epic or heroic, tragic, comic or ironic, disembodied or

romantic, and didactic) and be progressive, regressive or stable in direction. The sense-making and biographical reconstruction work undertaken as a response to chronic illness may have parallels in how people make sense of rapid change in the environment around them and to which they feel a strong personal connection. This may be especially the case when such change coincides with changes in their own being and status through circumstances, ageing and/or illness. The framework for analysing illness narratives proposed by Bury (2001) has been applied, with some variations, to the analysis of stories of place presented in this chapter.

Perceptions of change

Most of the stories told by interviewees dealt with change at a biographical or collective level. Rural and urban interviewees had different perceptions of the nature and direction of change in their locality, outlined below, which served as a second frame of reference (the first being the social meaning of neighbourhood discussed in Chapter 5) underlying their accounts.

Change was a significant theme in all except one interview in both localities. Even the youngest interviewees described how places, manners and social norms had changed since they were younger. The interview format encouraged this discussion to some extent through questions inviting comparison of experiences between different points in the interviewee's biography. The only interviewees who perceived their locality as unchanged were the rural couple, Graham and Theresa (RM1 and RF3), who argued that the village was the same as when they had lived there thirty-three years previously. This perception of constancy may have stemmed from their recent return, their social self-sufficiency as a couple or the fact that what was significant to them about the village in terms of friendships had indeed not changed. Alternatively, assertions of the unchanging nature of village life may have been part of a public account presenting the rural locality as an idyll compared with the urban life they had recently left.

At one level, rural participants talked about change in terms of the natural passage of time and the succession of each generation to the roles of their

parents. Participants in the group discussion at the over-60s club described the village as a 'young village' much as it had been in the 1950s and 1960s:

S.E.: Is there much mixing between generations?

PARTICIPANT 1: Yes you generally see the youngsters all together.

PARTICIPANT 2: The village is a young village now because most of them have come from town and that. And they've all got young children. So they're all friendly. The young mothers you see them with their prams. They seem to be friendly like we were when we first came.

The assumption that similarity of situation would create automatic friendship or at least friendliness was not matched by the actual experiences of some of the younger female interviewees.

At another level, rural interviewees described change as linear and generally negative. It was evident in a reduction in sociability and people's willingness to help each other out or get involved in community activities. There was a minority view that the village had benefited from the influx of new people. Social change within the village was felt to be similar in nature to that found in society in general but occurring at a slower pace. As discussed in Chapter 6, rural interviewees who were parents or grandparents felt that villages in general and their village in particular offered a safer environment in which to bring up children. Danger came mainly from outsiders: careless drivers or 'paedophiles'. It is perhaps significant that the interviews took place a year after the murder of eight year old Sarah Payne in July 2000 (Oliver 2001) and two years before the murder of the Soham schoolgirls, aged ten, in August 2003 (BBC News 2003). Both incidents were widely publicised. In the first case, danger came from a chance encounter with a stranger but in the second, danger was present within the school; an institution that epitomises the protection of children. Drug-use and vandalism, attributed to teenage boredom, were partially excused on the grounds that it was prevalent everywhere but in other ways the village was presented as an oasis of relative safety and communal spirit. This perception informed the kinds of stories of community told in the interviews.

Whilst rural interviewees perceived change in the social fabric of the village as mirroring but in some ways independent from that in wider society, urban interviewees made no such distinction. Negative aspects of the urban locality were presented by interviewees as being common to urban society with little prospect of the locality escaping such change. The oasis metaphor was occasionally applied to a particular street or row of housing but much more rarely than in accounts of the rural locality. Social change was perceived as linear and in a negative direction that was generally irreversible. An exception was the descriptions by the five oldest urban interviewees of extreme poverty experienced in their youth, which they felt was no longer a feature of the locality. However, such improvements in material circumstances belonged to the distant past and were accompanied by a perceived decline in manners and people's willingness to help each other so that positive change in the material sense was overshadowed by deeper social decline.

A few urban interviewees also talked about change as circular but in a different sense to the natural passing of generations described by some rural interviewees. A particular neighbourhood, road or block of flats that had been dangerous or otherwise unpleasant to live in might improve, often because those deemed responsible had been cautioned or moved out:

"We've had shotguns up here, crossbows. There was a family living at the top of the stairs there. They were drug dealers. And we managed to get all that cleaned up which I think is what Neighbourhood Watch is all about." (Steve, UM11, aged 50s)

However, such improvements were regarded as hard won, potentially short-lived and vulnerable to reversal:

"It's going backwards. Just when it's just got cleared up...."
(Gary, UM9, aged 18)

As described in Chapter 6, this fragility of improvement took its toll on the small number of community activists in the urban locality and this is reflected in the ambivalent hero stories discussed later in this chapter.

7.3 Individual stories

This section presents six types of individual story that were present in the data: stories of a biographical turning point, stories of the golden past, stories of hardship, stories of recent community, stories of intimidation, and ambivalent hero stories. The different types of story varied in prevalence between the two localities. Stories of a biographical turning point, stories of the golden past and stories of intimidation were present in the accounts of both urban and rural interviewees. Stories of community spirit from the recent past were also found in the two localities although very different in content. Stories of hardship and ambivalent heroism were confined to the urban data.

Stories of a biographical turning point

Many of the stories related in the interviews concerned personal incidents usually of a tragic kind such as illness, an accident, redundancy, betrayal or a death. Other stories concerned moments of personal triumph often in the face of adversity. Such events are termed here 'biographical turning points' and were matters that preoccupied the interviewee and were in some sense unresolved. Core narratives of tragedy and heroism were clearly evident. Where such stories were unconnected with the locality, they have been omitted from the analysis presented here. The three stories discussed below were examples of stories that were situated in the local social environment and which represent the three types of narrative identified in Bury's framework (Bury 2001).

The first story is an example of a biographical turning point described in the form of a contingent narrative. This was the most common narrative type for stories of a biographical turning point. The interviewee, Bill (UM2, aged 82), was confined to a wheelchair by arthritis from which he had suffered for over twenty years. He had been forced against his wishes to take early retirement from manual work because of the condition. The incident told in the extract below had occurred on New Year's Eve eighteen months before the interview:

S.E.: I was wondering whether over time you'd got used to that or it's still as frustrating as at the beginning?

BILL: About what?

S.E.: About the arthritis.

BILL: Oh the arthritis, yeah. I've been so used to doing my own thing.

S.E.: That's what I thought.

BILL: Yes. Doing me own thing. It's a bit, you know, aggravating at times. Mind you I've got, I watch the telly. I've got everything here but being a person, I used to get about you know before I had this accident. I had a fall in here see. A fall on me knees. I was on crutches at the time because of my arthritis. I was on crutches and I went to open the door. I put the crutch to one side and open the door and at that precise moment me legs gave way. Then I went on me knee, this one. (TOUCHES HIS KNEE) This is the worst one. Didn't know you could do so much damage going on your knees like that. [..] My son was gone, he went out to celebrate the New Year. [..] I just managed to crawl to get him on the phone and I told him what happened. Crawled across the floor, dragged myself across the floor. [Describes being taken into hospital and then into a residential care home.] I was in there for twelve months. Yeah. It was nice in there. There was food and they keep walking over, tending to you. It was all right but I wanted to get home. You know. Back to me roots."

The question that led to the story invited a comparison between Bill's present life with arthritis and a past without it. The central event for Bill, however, was not so much the development of arthritis which had been part of his life for many years but the recent fall which had caused incapacity, removal from home for a year, continuing physical discomfort and the loss of independence. Bill's preoccupation with the fall focused on the fact that it seemed an insufficient reason for his current problems ("*Didn't know you could do so much damage going on your knees like that*"). He returned unprompted to the subject later in the interview:

"This one (knee) hit the deck first you see, took all me weight. I lost two stone over this. I was thirteen stone, went down to eleven stone. Two stone over this fall. When she (the manager of the residential care home)

told me, she said 'oh you're eleven stone now, lost two stone'. I gained four pound before I came out. They weighed me and said 'well you've put on about four pound'." (Bill, UM2, aged 82)

The loss of two stone in weight was a physical sign of a reduction in self that had occurred in other ways. The centrality of the fall to Bill's reflections on his current situation ruled out alternative explanations for the weight loss such as the death of his wife the same year, the on-going deterioration in his health condition, ageing or changes in diet associated with a stay in hospital followed by the residential care home. The link with the locality is contained in the phrase *'Back to me roots'* on the last line of the first extract. Bill's understanding of normality depended on being able to do his 'own thing' in familiar surroundings. Changes in the local physical and social environment or due to ageing seemed to have no impact on this fundamental sense of belonging. The direction of the story is initially regressive although Bill's return home signals progress and a partial victory.

The purpose of Bill's story of the fall is explanatory rather than self-presentational and the event did not seem to pose a significant threat to his moral status. The reverse is true of the next example, which fits Bury's category of a 'moral narrative' (Bury 2001: 274) and is more evidently located in the local social environment:

"Cos this headmistress you have to make an appointment to see. And in fact I had to phone up one time and she laughed at me over something that was an incident and I couldn't believe that she laughed at me. I've never ever in all these years, in twenty-eight years that my kids have been at school, had a teacher or a headmistress laugh at me. I couldn't believe it. I thought she was really rude. I told her that. I said 'you laughed at me' and I just couldn't believe it. She did apologise when I, but I just couldn't believe it. And you have to make an appointment to see her. "
(Joanne, RF15, aged 40s, parent)

The threat to Joanne's moral status and sense of self came from the specific incident of the headmistress laughing at her but was more generally situated in a context of unequal power relations signalled by the making of appointments. Joanne framed the story to reassert her identity by emphasising her long experience of schools and the heads of schools (in comparison to the headmistress who had recently arrived) and the fact that she was someone who had *never* been laughed at by a teacher and could not believe it when it happened. The story had a heroic element in that Joanne stood up to the headmistress and achieved an apology. This victory was temporary, however, since the requirement to make an appointment and the associated inferiority of status remained.

This story did not exist in isolation but was part of at least two other narratives contained in Joanne's account and touched on by other interviewees in the rural locality. One of these narratives concerned Joanne's life as (until recently) a lone parent and her staunch defence of teenagers, and by implication her own sons, from criticism. The story about the headmistress who laughed emphasised that this event was unprecedented, thus implying that her children were never in trouble at school. This pre-empted any negative impression I may have gained from others of her children or Joanne herself. This is connected to the collective story of the car accident (discussed in section 7.4) in which one of her sons was involved.

The second narrative concerned changes to the school management following an unfavourable OFSTED report. This seemed to be common knowledge in the village since three interviewees mentioned it. Joanne did not refer to the OFSTED report under the old headmaster but cited OFSTED as an authoritative source of support for her personal view that the school had got worse under the new headmistress:

"I don't believe either that they had a very good OFSTED report. They're supposed to be shaking up down there with the new headmistress but I haven't known it be any better. And as I say it's worse, but that's my opinion." (Joanne, RF15)

Joanne praised the former headmaster of the school for being fair, popular with the children (implying that the new headmistress was not) and, crucially, *'you could approach him any time'* suggesting a more equal relationship. The former headmaster was also an interviewee (RM9) and he emphasised the social welfare as well as educational aspects of his role and, like Joanne, made no reference to the OFSTED report that had prompted his retirement.

So whilst Bill's story of the fall related only to his personal circumstances, Joanne's story of being laughed at by the headmistress was part both of a wider narrative of her own life and connected to discussion among villagers about 'the problem' of young people and the quality of the local school. Joanne's final phrase in the second extract (*'but that's my opinion'*) defends her against challenge and demonstrates an awareness that different versions might exist of the same narrative. The presentation of self, which is the underlying theme and to some extent purpose of Joanne's story of her encounter with the headmistress, connects to collective stories (which she chooses not tell) about teenagers and the headmaster who was replaced. It also provides a richer context in which to understand her descriptions of the village as being 'very kind' in times of trouble (discussed in Chapter 5, page 128).

The third example of a story of a biographical turning point comes from Georgia, the initiator of the millennium green project in the urban locality. Georgia's situation as a formerly single parent and a community activist rendered her account particularly interesting. It was also the first interview that I undertook. I was therefore aware through the analysis process of the danger of placing too much emphasis on her account and that of certain others. These concerns are of less significance when analysing the following story of how she decided to do something about the lack of an open space for children in her part of the urban locality, which has elements of all three of Bury's narrative types:

"And I looked out of the window. This was the end of July so I'd just finished all my exams and this old boy came out and told the children not to play up against one of the garages because if they kicked the ball hard enough it could bounce back and go through their window. Well I turned

round and (LAUGHS) flipped. Went out there and tried to explain to this guy that if they could really kick the ball that hard against the opposite wall and it would then bounce back across the wall and it would not go through his window. It wouldn't have the velocity. (LAUGHS) Tried to explain logic to him but he just wasn't gonna have it and it was an illogical situation. [S.E.: And it wasn't like somebody had had a window broken?] No, I'd been here for three years before then and I've never known any balls to cause any major damage. Maybe they'd bounced on a car or something but they hadn't caused any physical damage. So I found it really annoying because this was an on going regular occurrence. So I went out there, flipped, turned round to these boys who lived just up the back here, not actually in this road. I said to them, you know, 'what would you like?' And they said a sandpit area. They were around ten, eleven at the time. 'And just a place to play football.' Anyway I wrote up a big letter (LAUGHS) after doing two thousand word essays Der der der der der der (GEORGIA MIMES AND MAKES THE SOUND OF FAST TYPING) So I wrote up this big letter to the council and just tried to explain, you know, that my son was coming to the point where he was going to be going out and playing in this road and he would be facing these sort of situations and for the other children who live round here, you know, they needed somewhere safe to play as well. So sent the letter off, made lots of phone calls to the council and drove them crazy and everything, you know. Because that's what you're taught when you go to college is that you keep on going. So I just, I got into that mode and I didn't realise just how in your face I was actually being. Because even the councillor that I went to see, even she was stunned cos I didn't think anything of it actually and I went round to their home address and knocked on their door and said 'Look I've got this problem. How do I sought it out?' And I wasn't prepared to go until they gave me an answer. (LAUGHS) 'You're a councillor, it's your job.' (GEORGIA LAUGHS, S.E. LAUGHS) So I basically made a nuisance of myself for about three months and eventually the council sent me a representative who I later found out was doing it on an unofficial basis because she'd been sent

round to pacify me but not to actually take on the project because they had too many projects going on. Because she recognised me from years ago and things, she thought 'Well I'll give you a little bit of a helping hand' so she put me in contact with the right people." (Georgia, UF1, aged late 20s)

I had heard Georgia tell the same story at a public meeting four weeks before the interview. Narration on different occasions enables the narrator to practise and refine the story although each telling is moulded by the social interactions surrounding it and perceptions of audience reactions. I did not tape record the public meeting so am unable to compare the two narrations in detail. However, my notes record substantive differences between the accounts. In the public meeting version, the trigger was a group of old people standing around complaining about the children rather than one 'old boy' telling the children not to play against the garages. At the public meeting, Georgia described the community worker as someone who had seemed part of an elite when she was in her teens. In the above extract, it was the community worker who recognised Georgia. Thirdly, the public meeting version of the story provided more contextual information in terms of the breakdown of Georgia's marriage and daily walks over the waste ground which made her feel that the land should be put to better use.

The story of the kids playing football is a contingent narrative in the sense that Georgia is explaining her involvement in the project by emphasising a combination of circumstances. These circumstances were that she had just finished exams, the old man's complaint lacked logic, such complaints were a regular occurrence, the boys' requests were modest (a sandpit and '*just somewhere to play football*'), her own son would soon require somewhere to play outside and the coincidence of having known the council representative in the past.

There are also elements of a moral narrative in the story as Georgia repeatedly emphasises the uncharacteristic nature of her behaviour caused by accumulated

stress, inexperience and a college-induced attitude of not giving up. She 'even' goes round to the councillor's home address and knocks on her door; a transgression of boundaries of privacy (discussed in Chapter 5 in connection with relations with neighbours). Building a picture of herself as acting out of character in extenuating circumstances protects Georgia against the charge that she did not have the qualities or right to take a leadership role. The phrase '*I got into that mode and I didn't realise just how in your face I was actually being*' emphasises that Georgia now appreciates how things should be done or not done. She may have had no qualifications for a leadership role at the time but she can look back with experience and self-awareness. This meets a requirement to present herself currently as a 'morally competent actor' (Pinder 1995: 624, Bury 2001: 273).

Thirdly, this is an epic narrative with comic and ironic elements. Georgia is the hero defending the children against the neighbours' complaints and pitting herself against the council's lack of interest and the councillor's closed door. The comedy is signalled by the occurrence of laughter in the telling and the mimicry of furious typing. The irony lies in the past connection between the community development officer and Georgia which has the opposite effect of that supposedly intended by the officer's employer. The form of the story is romantic since it is a tale of the struggle rather than the victory. The reality was that the success or failure of the project was still in the balance at the time of interview. Georgia's casting of herself as an unlikely hero is consistent with the moral dimensions of the story and wider cultural norms (described in section 6.4 of Chapter 6) concerning negative stereotypes of involvement in community affairs.

Stories of a golden past

The second type of story found in the interview data from both localities described a golden past, often from the narrator's youth. Although both men and women talked about past times when people had been nicer to each other and 'community' stronger, male interviewees were more likely to express this in stories of events whereas women tended to give general descriptions of how things were. The following example from Joe (UM21, aged 75) is typical in a number of respects:

JOE: There's a chap along there. His stables were out here, where the lady's barber shop is. Just round the corner. So he said 'Joe' he said 'if you take this sheep along to (urban locality)' he said. 'there's a bike out there, a lady's bike.' You know, with a frame like that. (DRAWS THE V-SHAPE OF THE FRAME IN THE AIR WITH ONE HAND) He said 'you can have that.' Well I got this sheep with a lump of rope round its neck on a Sunday morning and I walked along and it took me about two hours. Well you know what it is with sheep! (LAUGHTER)

S.E.: They've got a mind of their own, haven't they? (LAUGHS)

JOE: And I got out there and I put him in there and I found this old bike all under a load of rubbish and all that. And that's what I got for taking the sheep round. And people were laughing at me and they said 'don't stop son' and oh dear! Well I was only about thirteen then at the time.

The interview with Joe took place in the company of a gatekeeper who was interested in local history. It is not known whether Joe had previously told the story of the sheep to the gatekeeper or which of the two of us was the primary audience at this point in the interview. This story does not fit any of Bury's three types of narrative since there is nothing substantive that required resolution. It is, however, a romance with Joe as hero struggling to take the sheep for a short walk. It serves two purposes. The first is to entertain with emphasis placed on the comic elements in the incident: the obstinacy of the sheep, the reward of a lady's bike-and the laughter of those encountered on route. The second purpose is to illustrate the extent of physical and social change that had occurred in the locality. The sheep is symbolic of a rural life whilst the requirement for the sheep to be led emphasises the rare use of other means to transport livestock. The reward of a bike is indicative of a scarcity of material goods although Joe's emphasis on it being a lady's bike might also suggest a retrospective reappraisal of its worth. The fact that Joe persevered with the task and the bike was there as promised demonstrates a more trusting and co-operative society although the

location of the bike under a pile of rubbish raises questions about either the trustworthiness of others or its value.

Other stories of this kind similarly focused on the narrator's childhood or youth. They described incidents of harmless mischief that generally went unpunished, innocent fun of the narrator's own making, heroic deeds by others or unexpected acts of kindness or generosity. Their primary purpose was to illustrate the magnitude of change (especially in the urban locality) or to entertain or a combination of the two. These stories did not conform to any of Bury's narrative types although they reflected heroic and comic sub-forms. They were also less enlightening about present day community than any of the other types of story. What did emerge was that these particular stories seemed to have a role in redirecting the conversation away from the locality as it currently was and the interviewee's present circumstances to another place, time and self. There were three interviews (Joe's was not one of these) in which I felt that the questions being asked were not addressing issues of much relevance to the interviewee(s) and that both the interviewee and I were searching for a way out of this dilemma. All three interviews were with older interviewees (aged mid-70s and over) living in the urban locality. Talking about the 'good old days' was a solution to this social predicament and provided a way for me to access past-present comparisons notwithstanding the limitations, discussed earlier, of such data. Thus another way of understanding stories of a golden past is as a conversational tool that creates distance and repairs an incompetent social interaction.

Stories of hardship

In the accounts of older urban interviewees, stories of a golden past were often balanced by stories of material hardship from the narrator's childhood or youth. These were similar to the golden past stories in that their primary aim was to explain through illustration but their intent was more serious and they often contained elements of a moral narrative that sought to relate the experience of poverty to their own sense of self then and now. Any comic elements tended to be ironic and although none concerned actual tragedy, the potential for tragedy was evident.

Most of the hardship stories concerned insufficiency in food or clothing (particularly shoes) or working conditions. The following story, told by an older interviewee, Lillian, was slightly different since it addressed the social and moral consequences of such hardship. It came out of a discussion between Lillian and her husband George about whether people living in the urban locality in the 1930s and 1940s had 'felt' poor since everyone was similarly deprived. The story was followed by another story, this time from George prompted by Lillian, about his experiences at a school attended by children from much wealthier families to which he had gained a scholarship. Lillian is thus directing the conversation and the telling of stories to explain something deeper about the meaning of poverty:

"The only time I felt poor and I did feel this. Because the war had started in 1939 and I was thirteen and the school had left to be evacuated they allowed me to leave school at 13 although the school age was fourteen. But there was no school to go to. And my mother (LAUGHS) went and got, found me a job at Broadley's, the tailors. Can you imagine going to a top quality shop as poor as a church mouse? Oh and she was told that the uniform, you had to provide the uniform for shop work in those days. And I was told the uniform was black. So Lillian arrives at Broadley's, a shop where all the people from Park Road used to get their clothes on approval and send them back if they didn't like 'em. [...] And Lillian arrives from (urban locality) in her black crêpe dress cut down. Uneven hem because the crêpe in those days wasn't crêpe as it is now and in this shop with all the ladies or all the assistants that were well trained assistants because you had to go forward and say 'Can I help you madam?' in those days. And I've never felt so embarrassed in all my life cos they made me feel so (pause) I dunno. But my mother, because of the area we come from, didn't see anything in this. She didn't see what she'd done to a young girl who, erm, (pause). Cos, er, that's how life was in those days." (Lillian, UF19, aged 75)

Lillian's story of her first day of work fits Bury's moral narrative type. The act of walking into a 'top quality' shop wearing a dress with an uneven hem fundamentally challenged her identity which until that point had been within a

social environment in which her family's economic circumstances were unremarkable. The cut-down crêpe dress, which was presumably someone's best, was inadequate for a shop devoted to clothes and in which all the other assistants were to Lillian's eyes 'ladies'. She cannot find words to describe how the shop assistants made her feel, or the personal impact of this experience or her mother's inability to comprehend its significance. The final sentence of the extract '*that's how life was in those days*' provides a partial resolution by emphasising the gulf between then and now. Nevertheless the fact of recounting the story sixty-two years after its occurrence and the absence of core narrative devices suggests that the shame is incompletely repaired. Towards the end of the interview, George voiced the opinion that if given the choice between going forward or going back eighty years, he would go back 'like a shot'. Lillian disagreed:

"I think people were nicer in those times. They helped each other. But I don't think I personally could live in (those times). I'm talking about now what I see of London and that, and how this area was. I don't like squalor. That hurts me how I read how (town) was. If you read that book on (town), it's disgusting and I don't like that. I don't think I could have lived with that." (Lillian, UF19, aged 75)

Lillian is talking here about self-awareness. She says that she does not think that she personally could live in conditions of squalor but the three of us know that she did during her youth. The significance of the story of the first day at work is that it marked a transition from a state of unaware deprivation to an acute consciousness of difference. That process was, however, incomplete and it is in Lillian's later life that the enormity of having been connected with squalor impinges on her moral consciousness: '*That hurts me [..], it's disgusting*'. The non-storied elements of interviewees' accounts illustrated the ways in which a locality's current and recent reputation had personal significance for those living there. What Lillian's account and other stories of hardship demonstrate is that such an association may be life long and that an event that occurred sixty years earlier may continue to affect their sense of self.

Stories of recent community

Stories of recent community mainly occurred in the rural data although there were a few examples from sub-communities in the urban locality. The most prevalent story was that of 'the great snow' which is discussed in section 7.4. Individual stories of recent community involved acts of kindness or examples of sociability or trustworthiness in which the narrator was either the recipient or a contributor. These stories were usually presented as part of a wider narrative concerning the social benefits of village life and thus had illustrative and persuasive purposes. The term 'recent' is used to denote a connection with the locality as it currently is rather than a fixed time span. The example given below actually occurred in the 1960s but the underlying argument was that similar circumstances would produce the same level of co-operation today. These stories were often self-consciously performative, produced as clinching evidence for a particular view of community. The following example was co-authored between Graham (RM1) and his wife Theresa (RF3):

GRAHAM: Oh the classic case of help in the village was when we was here before. A friend of our's, opposite side of the road, lived in the village practically since he was knee high. He phoned me. He said 'come and have a look at the car, Graham. There's something wrong' he said. Well I listened to it and said 'I think the big end bearing's going'. 'Oh dear' he said. He worked then in X (a town 30 miles away), you know. He was like 'I don't know what I'm gonna do'. I said 'well we'll sort that in the afternoon' because he worked nights. 'What we'll do for now is I'll take you to work and call back in the morning for you'. That was on the Friday about six. Told me mates and she (Theresa) called friends of her's. People living in the same road then and the same road now. 'Is that right about Jim's car?' I said 'yeah'. 'Oh' they said, 'we'll sort it out'. So it ended up four or five of us. When we got, we stripped it and found out the bits, got the bits we wanted, rebuilt it, put it back together in a day you see. When he come home, when we collected him that night, he said 'I've been worrying all day thinking about it'. I said 'don't worry, it's sorted'. He said 'I really don't know what to do' he said and

came back. I said 'on second thoughts Jim' cos there was all people hanging round corners, you know. 'Come to think of it' I said, 'I could be mistaken Jim. Cos that noise, it doesn't seem too bad now.' He said 'yeah'. Cos of course it purred like a kitten. 'I don't believe that' he said cos, you know, it was a terrible noise. Of course I told him and he nearly cried.

THERESA: *He did. He nearly did.*

GRAHAM: *He walked back in the house.*

THERESA: *Yeah he couldn't say anything. His wife still lives here. She lives round the corner.*

GRAHAM: *She was the first visitor, wasn't she?*

THERESA: *Yes she was, she was the first visitor. Then their daughter come.*

In common with stories of a golden past, this story of recent community does not conform to any of Bury's narrative types since there is nothing to resolve or make sense of. There are comic aspects in the element of surprise and people 'hanging round corners' to witness Jim's reaction and the overall narrative form might be said to be a comedy since order is eventually restored in the car's successful repair. The story's key themes are efficient social networks (*'Told me mates and she called friends of her's*), co-operation (*Oh' they said, 'we'll sort it out'. So it ended up four or five of us.*) and technical competence (*'we stripped it and found out the bits, got the bits we wanted, rebuilt it, put it back together in a day'*). As Graham himself said, it is a classic case of community or indeed social capital in action. There are also gendered elements in the male recipient who almost cried and the wife and daughter who, thirty years later, call in to welcome them back.

One of the most revealing features of this and similar stories is that it was presented as evidence for the depth of community spirit in the village but in fact only the friendship networks of the narrators were involved. Such stories therefore confirm perceptions gained from not-storied parts of accounts that friendship networks were the main source of non-family support and indeed social exclusion in the rural locality. Thus a story designed to present the

universality of 'community' served instead to confirm its specificity. Also revealing is the importance Graham and Theresa attached to the village being the same kind of place that they fondly remembered from the past with many of the same people still living there (*'people living in the same road then and the same road now'*) Other interviewees who had not moved away had a more modest aim of showing that it still had some of the characteristics of that 'better' time.

There were no similar stories of recent community in the urban data although some interviewees associated with sub-communities (notably the church, Sure Start type parent and toddler group, and housing facility for young people) gave accounts of their first impressions of that place or examples of mutual help. None of these seemed to have an equivalent presentational purpose to the rural stories. There was, however, one story in the urban data that addressed a very different form of community from that described by Graham and Theresa:

GARY: I was getting dusted down. I was getting beaten up down the bottom down there. This is when I was a problem type. And everyone come out and I had all these people, cos the people who were beating me weren't from the estate. Everyone just come out and it was like 'Oye! Leave him alone! Leave him alone!' You know you've always got your support. Not so much, you know, someone like you Ben who, no offence or anything, but not so much someone, people that have just moved here.

BEN: I know nobody.

GARY: Yeah you don't. But if you get your face known that's all you need really.

(Gary, UM9 and Ben, UM10, both aged 18)

Gary's story of communal assistance when he was being beaten up reflects the different social meanings the locality held depending on interviewees' networks and personal history (discussed in Chapter 5). The story has a moral dimension with Gary emphasising that it involved a former self (*'when I was a problem type'*). In telling the story, Gary has to negotiate between an awareness that the support he experienced and can still rely on comes from having been born on the

estate and the implication that this excludes the two friends who are being interviewed with him. The resolution of 'getting your face known' is contradicted by his earlier statement but is sufficient to restore equality in status with his friends. As discussed in Chapter 6, Gary's account of growing up on the social housing estate was complex, alternating between recognition of its social problems and nostalgia for a place that had been 'well good'. The story of being rescued illustrates and resolves that tension by bringing together the negative and positive elements. The implication is that Gary was rescued because he had grown up on that estate but he might not have got into the situation of being beaten up if he had lived somewhere else.

Stories of intimidation

Stories of intimidation occurred across the dataset and did not seem to be gendered or restricted to any particular age group. There were, however, differences by age and gender in the association between the narrator and the person or persons causing intimidation. Amongst male interviewees aged under-45, intimidation tended to come from other males of a similar age although women were sometimes involved. Female interviewees in their 40s and younger talked about intimidation from women of a similar age, men of all ages and groups of children and young people. Middle-aged and older men and women mainly talked about intimidation by children and young people. Fear of others was often described in the interviews in factual terms but in some accounts it took a more storied form. These stories contained none of the obviously rehearsed elements of stories of biographical significance or stories of community (past and present) but this did not necessarily mean that they were not performative in other ways.

The following story was typical of several in the respect that the intimidation resulted from having witnessed verbal abuse and violence directed against someone else:

"I remember our first Christmas there. We suffered really badly. We had really bad snow that Christmas and a taxi driver had come up. I was walking down and a taxi driver had come up to drop a fare off and had

lost his bearings like on the ice and had started to sort of spin. But the kids were erm hurling stones at him as well. And you just think, you know, these kids are like eight and nine years old. They're using abusive language that I would never have dreamed of at that age, of even knowing when I was that age. And it was just so intimidating. I just never went out." (Michelle, UF13, aged 30s)

The spectacle of a gang of children throwing stones at a taxi stranded on an icy road served as a focal point for Michelle's dislike of the estate and her self-imposed isolation. The connection with Christmas and their first Christmas in a new home underlined the disparity between expected and experienced community. Christmas is also a memorable date around which to fix the chronology of events. This is mainly a contingent narrative describing the event that crystallised Michelle's perceptions of the local social environment. She blamed the environment for a succession of personal crises that were only resolved following a move to another part of the locality. Michelle's story does not explicitly address the personal implications of being frightened by a group of children although she does emphasise how their speech and behaviour were far outside what she considered normal. Other stories of intimidation used similar techniques to emphasise the scale of the threat in terms of the number, physical size and/or extreme behaviour of the intimidators. A common solution, expressed at the end of Michelle's story, was to avoid situations perceived as risky.

A different and more matter-of-fact response to violence and the threat of violence appeared in two stories of intimidation told by male interviewees living in the rural locality. One of these came from one of the three male teenagers interviewed together. It was preceded by a discussion about rivalry between different groups of young people and the police not knowing who to blame for recent thefts of car stereos:

ADAM: They've (the police) different people up at different times. Like one person said he'd seen Ash at one time and another person said they'd seen Darren and Rich another

time and you get four different people said they'd seen it at the time.

TRISTAN: That's right. And I was on cold turkey at the time so, do you know what I mean? They seen me in my car and I was like pulled up, two o'clock in the morning. A geezer came up with a three foot crow bar, looked at me and it came straight through the window and went in my face and that. And then they called the police and all that lot. They called the police cos I drove my car back all smashed up and they got nicked and so that was alright. They're the people that are gonna get it.

NEIL: But you asked me, didn't you? One of the questions is how is it for children down here? And he'll tell you.

(Adam, RM6, aged 15, Tristan, RM5, aged 16; Neil, RM4, aged 40s)

Bravado features heavily in this story with references to drug use, being out in the early hours and driving a car despite being too young for even a provisional driving licence. It is not clear whether the primary audience was his friends, the gatekeeper or I. This story clearly bothered the gatekeeper, Neil, who intervened to move the conversation back to a safer question about facilities in the village for young people. Both Tristan and Neil were conscious of the impression the story conveyed. Where they differed was in whether that impression was desirable.

The story contained elements of heroism in Tristan driving back with a damaged car and possible injuries and irony in the fate of the attacker who called the police. However, it does not fit any of Bury's narrative types. One reason might be that it is an unfinished story: *'they're the people that are gonna get it'*. Another reason is that the story is not reflexive. Tristan is not trying to explain how he came to be in that situation or consider what it says about himself. This story highlights the ambiguity surrounding the social position of these teenagers in the village. Their main theme during the interview was the unfairness of the treatment they received from others in the village and their desire simply for

somewhere to 'chill out' and a racing track where they could mend cars and let off steam. And yet the telling of this story, which unapologetically touches on the sensitive subject of young men driving cars in the early hours of the morning (because of the fatal car accident discussed in section 7.4), confirms their reputation. It may be that this is an incompetent narrative in allowing such contradictions to become apparent or the teenagers may be deliberately choosing to present themselves as hard men on the edge of society.

Ambivalent hero stories

The final type of individual story found in the data was ambivalent hero stories. References to violence or the threat of violence were fairly common in interviews with men and women living in both localities. Stories about violence could be told from at least four perspectives: those of the victim, perpetrator, on-looker or resister. Michelle's and Tristan's stories are examples of the narrator as on-looker and victim respectively. The two stories of ambivalent heroism presented below are told from the positions of resister and perpetrator. For obvious reasons, the latter was the most difficult to present favourably and this was the only instance of it in the data. The ambivalence that characterised this type of story did not occur at the time of heroic action but afterwards in the process of narration. Ambivalent hero stories only appeared in the accounts of urban interviewees and were rarer than other types of story.

The first example of an ambivalent hero story came from Jane (UF7) who had lived in her current home for eight years. Her mobility was severely restricted by rheumatoid arthritis although at the time of the event recounted she was still able to walk outside with crutches. The story was prompted by a question about the nature of the neighbourhood. The perpetrators of the reported intimidation were the family who lived opposite:

"We came back one day from shopping and there's eggs thrown at the front of the house. So I just rang (Housing Association) and said 'you can come down now and you can clean it up'. They came down. They took photographs. They knew who it was. They'd also had goes at their next-door neighbour. Broken her front door, terrorised her but she wouldn't

stand up to them. But I said, 'If it means it'll stop, we will go to court' I said, 'because people like that should not terrorise other people who want to live a decent life'. And she came, one of the women came across and said 'I'm going to blow your kneecaps off' and I said 'well if that's what you want to do'. I mean I was frightened, don't get me wrong. I said 'but if that's what you want to do, then do it cos', I said, 'they're really no good to me anyway', I said. 'Now you get the other side of the gate', I said 'because you're trespassing'. I rang 999. It was logged. As soon as I rang, they said they'd send someone up here straight away. Put the windows through at night and everything. And they terrorised the young family that was living there at the time. There was a girl with two little ones. She ended up doing a moonlight flit, pushing the keys through my door one night with a note saying she couldn't stand any more, she'd just up and gone. [S.E.: Is that still the situation?] No it has, erm, it has quietened down considerably. I mean that lasted for about, must have been going on for about two and a half years. But now we have like a patrol van that goes round the estates. Mainly to do with the environmental noise and things like that. They monitor the noise and make sure there's, I suppose, no undesirables hanging round cars and things like that. And it has stopped." (Jane, UF7, aged 40s)

This story fulfils something of the purpose of a contingent narrative in that it explains how Jane came to stand up to her violent neighbours but it does not address the continuation of that resistance or at least sufferance for a further two and a half years until the threat of eviction quietened the situation down. It also deals with identity in Jane's reference to her own incapacity (*'but if that's what you want to do, then do it cos they're really no good to me anyway'*) and emphasis on the fact that she was frightened. These factors present her as an unlikely hero.

The story is replete with metaphors derived from collective understandings of privacy and moral behaviour. The boundary between the public and private is particularly emphasised – eggs had been thrown at the front of Jane's house, a

neighbour's front door had been broken down and windows broken. In response, Jane pushes out the boundary of her private world by demanding that the attacker retreats to the far side of her front gate or she will prosecute her for trespass. This transforms who has the initiative and the balance of power. Jane's justification for her action comes from the neighbours' behaviour which is the opposite of *'other people who want to live a decent life'*. A second line of justification comes from the ineffectiveness of established authority in the form of the housing association and law: *'They came down. They took photographs. They knew who it was.'*

The performative dimension of the story are reflected in the repetition of 'I said', which lends veracity to the account and also in the phrase, *'I mean I was frightened, don't get me wrong'*. This directs the listener to understand Jane's role as neither victim nor hero but a reluctant frightened combatant forced to act by extreme circumstances and the absence of effective action by the relevant authorities. This protects Jane against criticism for getting involved. A similar presentation of identity occurred elsewhere in the interview when Jane described coping with rheumatoid arthritis, being a single parent, or dealing with a daughter's drug problems. The overt purpose of this story is to illustrate the nature of the local social environment but it also serves to resist stereotypes of disability, femininity and heroism. In this way it has elements of a moral narrative as well as a contingent narrative.

The second example of an ambivalent hero story came from the urban interviewee, Steve. The story occurred part way through a lengthy monologue initiated by a question about developments since a community meeting the previous week. At one level, the story concerns the reasons why Steve had become involved in trying to revive a neighbourhood watch scheme on the estate despite having 'retired' from community activities. At another level, the story is concerned with a series of events in which violence (verbal and physical) is condemned but Steve is himself violent:

"So, I mean, this community up here, they're not community. I mean they're going out like vigilante groups. Four o'clock in the morning, I

don't know. 'I've just heard a noise' and there's four or five people out in the Court. I mean I don't, I don't want anything to do with that. Because to be honest with you, that's one of the main things that I actually got interested in Neighbourhood Watch because there was a fella used to live upstairs and he was selling drugs over in the, oh what do they call those? staircase door. And he used to come and shout and scream and holler over at, you know, not just me, anybody. Walk up the Court and he was 'ra ra ra, you bastard this,' and all this. And there was one day he started, the police were called five times this day, on a Friday, and, er, anyway, he started 'yak, yak, yak,' and screaming and shouting and the fella next door Terry, I mean he's a gentle giant Terry. He's a big lad but he won't say boo to a goose, he came and knocked at the door and he said 'Steve I don't care what happens now but' he said 'I'm gonna get his mouth shut once and for all.' I said 'don't you do that Terry, I'll go and do it.' I went up there and I kicked his front door in, but he'd, he'd locked himself in another room, and I thought 'well, I've done enough damage here, I'd better keep away'. Nevertheless, he told the woman, he wasn't even supposed to be living there, he told the woman to get all her stuff together and they were moving out. And er, as they were going down, it was about half past eight on the Friday night, as they were going down my neighbours were in here. We were having a party, the party had only just started. And he screamed abuse through there and I chased him down the road and we all stood round his car. And I must admit, it was the wrong thing to do, but I'd had that much. And the police weren't doing that much about him. I just got hold of him and gave him a good smacking. I broke his nose. I er blacked both his eyes, you know, and I really give him a good hiding. I felt rotten about it but the next morning I was arrested and charged with erm ABH and affray. And during the six weeks that you have to wait on bail, he'd been arrested at X School selling drugs. And all the charges against us were dropped. So I said to myself, 'right, this isn't the way to go about it. It's time to start up a Neighbourhood Watch, get involved'." (Steve, UM11, aged 50s, not working due to disability)

Like Jane, Steve was using the story to illustrate local problems and to explain something of his past history of community involvement. In the first sentence of the extract he refers to normative views of community, *'this community up here, they're not community'*. His view, which he assumes I share, is that a 'real' community would not resort to vigilante style action. Steve uses a number of devices to set the scene and justify his eventual violence. He emphasises the frequency of the disturbance (*'he used to come and shout and scream and holler'*) and the fact that it was general rather than personal. The anti-social behaviour of the eventual 'victim' is highlighted: he was a drug dealer who sold drugs in the environs of the Court and at a local school and who was not even supposed to be living there. These un-neighbourly activities are contrasted with Steve himself who is sought out by a neighbour, takes action himself to prevent Terry from getting into trouble and is in the act of hosting a party for all the other neighbours. Like Jane, Steve refers to authority in the form of the police being aware of the problem but not doing enough to stop it. The combination of extreme provocation and the lack of action by those officially responsible pushed Steve into extreme action. At this level, this is a contingent narrative explaining how events spiralled out of control. The action occurs in two phases. In the first phase, Steve kicks down the neighbour's front door, finds he has locked himself in another room and then exercises self-restraint (*'I thought 'well, I've done enough damage here, I'd better keep away''*). This violent entry into a neighbour's private space transgresses normal boundaries but is arguably for a greater good or under extreme emotion. Steve's subsequent restraint is contrasted with the behaviour of the neighbour in screaming abuse through a window at the neighbours partying in Steve's flat. The remainder of the story alternates between collective (*'We all stood round his car', 'all the charges against us were dropped'*) and personal responsibility (*'I just got hold of him', 'I broke his nose', 'I blacked both his eyes', 'I really give him a good hiding', 'I was arrested and charged'*).

Steve's ambivalence about his role as hero (or anti-hero) in the story is captured in the phrase, *'I felt rotten about it'*. This regret is presented as stemming from moral rather than pragmatic considerations since it precedes the charges for ABH

and affray. The moral of the story is underlined by the use of 'So' in the concluding line. Steve and his accomplices are given a second chance when the charges against them are dropped after the 'victim' is arrested for selling drugs; *'So I said to myself, 'right, this isn't the way to go about it. It's time to start up a Neighbourhood Watch, get involved'*. This brings the narrative back round to the story's introduction and emphasises a crucial difference between Steve and his neighbours. Whilst he regretted his actions and determined to use non-violent means in the future, others remained willing and even enthusiastic to use vigilante tactics. In this way, Steve's story of beating up the drug dealer neighbour is also a moral narrative seeking to resolve the implications of this action for his sense of self and present it in a way that is morally acceptable to himself and me.

Ambivalent hero stories seemed to have a variety of purposes. One was to convey the reality of living in that neighbourhood and dealing with those kinds of neighbours. This assumed that, as an outsider, I had not had similar experiences and needed to be convinced or was open to being impressed. The telling of the story was carefully managed and commentary added so that I would properly understand the sort of person the narrator was. The narrator's action was posited as heroic but uncharacteristically so. Indeed intervention of any kind was presented as unusual and due to extreme provocation. The strength of his or her moral obligations temporarily overrode considerations of the possible consequences. This may well be how Jane and Steve regarded themselves but it also established a prior defence against charges of interference, acting rashly or being unsuitable to play such a prominent part, which links to collective ideas about the undesirability of 'over involvement' or self-promotion. The paradox of both stories is that Jane and Steve present themselves as community-minded in a situation in which community, and the services ostensibly available to protect it, have failed thus necessitating acts of individual heroism.

7.4 Collective stories

The stories discussed in section 7.3 were all examples of stories told by individuals about events that they had seen or been involved in and theirs was the only account of that event in the data. The collective stories presented below differed from this in two respects. The first was that the narrator had not necessarily witnessed the event first hand but nevertheless recounted the story with authority. The second difference was that the story appeared in several accounts although in different versions.

'The Great Snow'

Seven out of the nineteen rural interviews included references to a time when the village had been cut off by snow about fifteen years earlier. The exact date has been omitted from the extracts quoted to protect the locality's anonymity. A few of the references were factual but the event was mainly related in the form of a story. The story seemed to have various purposes. One purpose was as a contribution to the on-going discussion about the locality's accessibility or remoteness and the adequacy of its own amenities. A situation such as snow would test the village's self-sufficiency:

"There's only these few shops here but you can get mostly anything you want here. And especially when we've had some bad weather. In, when was it? (Year) was it? No, yes beginning of (year). January, February. We had these terrible snowfalls and that. And of course nobody could get to town. So we used to order some shopping from the town. Came down here. The fireman picked em up. Brought em to the village hall. We all had to go to the village hall to buy our milk and our bread and the most important things. Tinned stuff if you needed it. It really is blocked off here." (Mabel, RF7, aged 70s, had lived in the village for over 50 years)

Although Mabel was initially uncertain about the date of the great snow, the year given was confirmed by other accounts. The ability to identify the year indicates the rarity of that amount of snow in that part of Kent. However, this did not seem to affect interviewees' perception that this was something for which 'the village' should be prepared. One feature of Mabel's account is the omission of much of

the detail found elsewhere (for example there is no explanation of why the provisions were sold in the village hall rather than the shop) and of dramatic elements.

The longest and most detailed accounts came from Harry who was the village policeman at the time of the snow:

"I don't know what would happen now if we got cut-off by snow as we did for a week back in (year) I think it was. I was out here as the only policeman and the road was completely blocked with snow and so unless they did something about getting the food into the village we would starve. And what happened was a farmer used to drive a tractor all the way into town and get provisions for the local shop. He did that every day. A three hour journey there and a three hour journey back. The shopkeeper, who wasn't particularly liked, started to take advantage of the situation by charging three pound for a pint of milk. I had some complaints and decided that we were going to do something about that. I spoke to the farmer, a friend of mine, and he wasn't happy with the way that this shopkeeper was selling provisions. So I asked the parish council if they would set up their own shop in the village hall and the food could be delivered to there. [Description of the logistics of getting provisions to the village] And the parish council sold it at Tesco prices and overall we made thirty quid profit over a period of a fortnight. We found of course there was panic buying and so we cured that by getting the voters' register out and making sure that a family could only make one visit per day. And then it was based on the amount of food, in the family and how much they could have. And so the food was rationed fairly. It worked very, very well. [Description of how medical help came into the village if needed] But there was one particular woman who came to me with the midwife. She said 'I've got to get this woman out because she's expecting any moment and it's gonna be a breach birth so I don't want her here, I want her in hospital.' So I said 'right okay, get yourself packed. Next helicopter comes in I'll get them to.' Well being a pilot myself, I knew quite a few of the pilots. I knew this guy who came in and it was the X

newspaper who were bringing in vital provisions, doing their bit. Which turned out to be a bottle of ginger wine from Stone's Ginger Wine, who were funding half the use of the helicopter, and a tin of biscuits. And this reporter arrived dressed in a suit, a fur coat and high heels. (LAUGHS) So much to her protest we turfed her out of the helicopter and I knew the pilot and we loaded this woman on board. And this girl reporter complained bitterly. 'You can't do this, we're paying for this helicopter'. He said 'I'll do as I please. I won't charge you for this flight' he said. 'I'll leave you here for the time being.' He did concede to let the photographer come. And he wanted me to go with him because being a pilot he had no features to work by because of the snow to know where the hospital was. So we arranged for a big cross to be bulldozed out from the parade ground of Y barracks where the ambulance would be waiting so that we could see the cross. And I was able to [...] fly him in a straight line to the garrison where she was landed. And there's a photograph in the front page of the X (newspaper), which we didn't see for a week, we weren't getting newspaper. And the headlines were 'The X saves snow mum' with her getting out of the helicopter being given a hand with the suitcase. And I thought 'she fought tooth and nail for that not to happen'. There are some funny tales that come about from those days that we were stuck in the snow." (Harry, RM11, aged 60s)

In common with almost all the stories of the snow, Harry's introduction poses the question 'what if that event happened now?' However, it is not really a story about self-sufficiency or community but about the need for strong leadership in a difficult situation. This is exemplified in Harry's own role in ensuring the provision of supplies and co-ordinating rationing. The account provides a mixed view of human nature. Those in authority were supportive (the police, coast guard and fire service helped get provisions to the village) but individuals behaved badly: the shop keeper overcharged, villagers were inclined to buy too much out of panic and the journalist objected to giving up her seat on the helicopter to a near-term pregnant woman. It was Harry's proactive intervention, social networks and varied skills that restored order. In this sense, Harry's

version of the great snow fits the narrative form of a comedy. This account and the individual stories of leadership discussed earlier differ in three important ways. The first is Harry's complete lack of ambivalence about taking a leading role. It was presumably much easier to extend the role of village policeman than for lay people such as Steve, Jane or Georgia to step into the limelight. Secondly, the established authorities responded well to the crisis. This was not a story of the failure of civic society but its success. Thirdly, the crisis that affected the village was caused by the external and impersonal forces of nature rather than the behaviour of some within the community, as was the case in ambivalent hero stories.

A third version of the story of the great snow reframed the 'what if?' question to apply to the social cohesion of the village:

"I've seen the times when the villagers have really rallied together especially when we're snowed in. I mean we haven't been snowed in properly now for about fourteen years but when we was, we was snowed in for a week and erm the village community they really did pull together. I mean we had the odd few that was ridiculous [...] Mum and dad's house was the hub of the communications for the whole village and we had people knocking on our door and saying 'I haven't got any money to buy cigarettes' and that sort of thing. [...] Everyone was out and it was a lovely time when we were snowed in. Everyone helped each other, you know. I think we'd still get that, I think, if we did get snowed in. I think we would still have that here." (Liz, RF8, aged 30s, daughter of Harry)

In community-focused stories of the great snow, villagers pulled together to get through a difficult experience and there were resulting social benefits to the collective. The central message was that such community spirit was still present, albeit latently. The repetition of '*I think*' in the last two lines of Liz's quotation suggests that even for someone with a very favourable view of the village, the extent of change over the previous fifteen years raised doubts about strength of collective solidarity. This increased the symbolic significance of an idealised community response to the great snow.

There were aspects of heroism and comedy in most of the stories of the great snow although none was concerned with resolution or identity. The stories had certain parallels with stories of civilian wartime experiences particularly in details such as profiteering, rationing and the use of registers. Some interviewees had first hand experience of that time. For others it was part of a collective consciousness about the nature of a state of emergency. A second way that stories of the great snow were connected to a collective consciousness was that it was known to and recounted by interviewees who had not been living in the village at the time. Second hand accounts of the great snow had two common elements: the arrival of helicopters (the pregnant woman was omitted) and the proof of community solidarity. Thus what, according to Harry, had been a mixed experience of community had become through the act of telling symbolic of the villagers' ability to rally together in times of trouble. The key question was whether this would still happen today. A second snow-blocked winter had not occurred but another recent event had put the village's unity to the test. This was the fatal car accident.

The fatal car accident

The fatal car accident had occurred about a year before the fieldwork in the rural locality. Two teenagers from the village had been killed and a third seriously injured. It had taken place in the early hours on the main road leading to the village and flowers still commemorated the spot. The accident was mentioned in eight out of the nineteen rural interviews. Some interviews contained a passing reference to the accident that only made sense retrospectively:

"I think when things happen to us, it hits the village so hard it really affects (everyone)" (Fay, RF2, aged 40s)

Other interviews contained a fuller, storied account usually linked to the 'problem' of local young people and/or disunity in the village. One interviewee (whose name has been withheld to protect anonymity) explained the sensitivities in these terms:

"I find that village life can be a bit hypocritical at times you know. I mean I will say it, other people might not do, but [...] the lads that died,

one in particular was not a nice boy and a lot of the villagers were always talking about them and being nasty, really nasty to them and I was as well cos he was always in trouble. He stole. He was one of these lads that walked around as if no-one could touch him and he was a law under himself and if, it's an awful thing to say but I will say it, if he hadn't have died he would have killed someone else. [Description of what happened] But, erm, everyone was really moaning about them and then when it happened, it was a shock of what, how it happened but it wasn't a shock that it had happened. And everyone's saying, one particular, quite a religious man was sort of saying 'oh the village should pull together at this time of' and if you'd heard what he said about him beforehand. I find it hypocritical. [..] The teenagers were absolutely devastated, I think. They were walking around in just sheer shock. I mean you had to feel sorry for the way it happened and it was just awful. You don't wish that on anyone and it sort of put them in tow but they're starting up again now. Driving round in cars. We don't get a lot of it. Not like you would (elsewhere) but cos I think it's such a small village you would probably notice it, even one car. [..] They just acquire these cars and whether they're car worthy or not, you know road worthy or not, they just drive them, so... I don't know where they get hold of them. They normally end up in a ditch somewhere or other. [..] It seems to me that, erm, sort of adults tend to encourage it but I don't know. I mean we did have a quite a large drug problem in the village. It was only minor drugs through (names one of boys that was killed). I don't know but people are not talking about it so much since he's gone so. It's probably still around but not to the scale that I think that he was doing. He was just so disruptive. (tells story of same boy disrupting a fête)"

The central tension between the shock of what had happened and the reputation of those involved produced fragmented accounts. What was unresolved was not so much the accident itself but how individuals and the village as a collective should respond. Phrases such as '*I will say it, other people might not do*' and '*it's an awful thing to say but I will say it*' indicate the tension between providing a

'truthful' account and risking appearing unsympathetic or transgressing conventional boundaries about what can be said about those who have died. These were moral narratives in the sense used by Bury since the accident had raised issues of identity, as yet unresolved, for both the village and more reflexive individuals. This question remained live in people's consciousness because of discussion about whether the village should pay for a physical commemoration of some kind.

Neil, whose sympathies generally lay with the young people, described the aftermath of the accident a year on:

"It did split a few families and there was some people taking sides here and there and they didn't think that the youngsters was, er, worth anything like you know. A lot of people thought 'ah they're better off out of the way,' which you don't, you don't wish that on anyone like, you know, what actually happened to them. But, erm, it did, there's half and half. One part of the village was against them. But I think at the moment it's level. Everything's okay like, you know, at the moment. Cos they, er, it was the anniversary the other week of, well about three weeks ago I think it was. So a lot of people went down to the actual, where it actually happened and lit candles and things. I wasn't actually here that weekend but I was told about it when I come back." (Neil, RM4, aged 40s)

Neil's description of the social environment of the village as *'everything's okay [...] at the moment'* arguably presents a more realistic picture of community than the story of the great snow. The organisation of a shared ritual and the fact that this was later described to Neil are further indications of a collective consciousness based not only on significant events of the past but also the challenge of making sense of the present.

The fatal car accident had symbolic reverberations throughout the rural data. Divided opinion over the proposal to build an off-road racing track focused on the issue of young people's propensity to take risks; the central theme of the tragedy of the car accident and the debated reputation of its casualties. Joanne's

description of kindness and continuing support from 'the village' (quoted on page 128 of Chapter 5) was located in her own brief version of the story of the fatal car accident which, understandably, contained no hint of wider dissent:

"It has got a village community spirit. (Son) was involved in a very tragic accident last year. Some friends' sons died in the car. So the village have been very, very kind. If something goes wrong in your life, they will help you." (Joanne, RF14, aged 40s)

The free driving lessons

The only example of a story recurring in different interviews in the urban locality concerned allegations made at a community meeting about a housing association paying for driving lessons for young people living in a specialist housing facility. This incident has already been discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to generalised exclusion (see pages 191-192). Three out of the four accounts described the incident much as I had witnessed it, with a single woman making the complaint and some background murmurings from others present. In a fourth version, recounted by a resident in the housing facility who had not been present at the meeting, the single antagonist had become 'local people':

"They had the residents' meetings upstairs and, not residents' meetings, sorry, neighbourhood watch meetings, yeah? So people from round here come in and it was, things was mentioned in there. Not at us, I've never, I've never had... They were mentioned in there that, you know, it seemed like they were rubbing it in our faces about the driving lessons. Like 'I live in a (Housing Association) house across the road over there, why doesn't my son get driving lessons?' You know, but because you haven't kicked, because that person hasn't kicked their son out and has given them a helping hand. You know, their son's there, so they've got the option of saying, 'okay, well my son', you know. The majority of us, our parents don't wanna come in and say 'there you are, there's fifteen quid, go and have a driving lesson.' You know, that's the reason why the majority do live here." (Ben, UM10, aged 18)

Ben's purpose in telling this story seemed rather different from the other three interviewees (one fellow resident and two sympathetic non-residents). They used the incident to illustrate the pettiness of local people and resulting lack of 'community' in any meaningful sense. My perception was that for those interviewees the story of the free driving lessons was told largely because of its immediacy. An interview at another time would have produced different anecdotes. Ben's retelling of the story, is however, imbued with greater personal significance. The main theme is not failed community but failed family. He attributes to hostile others an idealised version of family in which a parent has the opportunity to help their son by paying for driving lessons and does so. In this version, the complainants should have been grateful to the Housing Association for not paying for their children's driving lessons so that they could offer to instead. What might appear on the surface a collective story about stigma is in fact a moral narrative about unresolved issues for an individual. It is therefore the opposite of individual stories in the rural locality (such as Joanne's story of the headmistress who laughed and Tristan's story of the man with the crowbar) that were tied into collective narratives.

There were no other examples of shared stories in the urban interview data although there were indications of a collective consciousness that included something of a shared history among sub-communities, such as the church. There were almost certainly events in the locality about which stories might have been told and perhaps were but these were not accessed through this research. This may be simply a function of size of interviewee sample relative to the local population or alternatively it may say something deeper about the effects of urbanisation on the telling of collective stories about a place.

Absent stories

There were three events of shared significance mentioned by rural interviewees that did not appear in the form of collective stories in the same way as the great snow or fatal car accident. These throw additional light on the significant characteristics of those two events.

The first of these was the filming of an advert for a horror movie style computer game near the village and the participation of villagers as extras. This had received some press attention because of its supposedly unflattering portrayal of the local environment and people. It was mentioned by one interviewee who had taken part and described it as unexpectedly well paid and a laugh and by another informant who said that villagers were appalled by the portrayal. No other interviewees mentioned the advert even though it was fairly recent at the time of interview. This had similarities with the fatal car accident in terms of (allegedly) divided opinion and sensitivities concerning reputation (the village's rather than individuals') but obviously lacked a tragic core. It is likely that many and possibly all the rural interviewees were aware of the controversy but either felt it was irrelevant to the subject of community or chose not to talk about it perhaps because they felt it gave a negative impression of the village.

The second event that was well known in the village but not presented as a collective story was successful opposition to the siting of an environmental hazard close to the village. According to one interviewee, this had involved villagers carrying placards and blocking an access road. Although all interviewees were asked about collective action, no other references to this event appeared in the data. It had the makings of a story of collective solidarity, similar to that of the great snow, but did not seem to have acquired the same significance. This may have been because the protest lacked dramatic or comic elements or because it was simply one stage in an ongoing battle, largely conducted by the parish council and with variable success.

The third event of shared significance was foot and mouth disease. As described in Chapter 4 (pages 69-70), this had delayed the commencement of fieldwork in the rural locality for three months. My expectation was that villagers would have found the experience distressing and be worried about the economic viability of local farms so might be reluctant to discuss the issue. Such themes were prominent in media coverage. Few rural interviewees mentioned foot and mouth disease without prompting but not for the reasons I anticipated. None seemed to have been particularly affected by the outbreak other than restrictions on the use

of footpaths and infection control procedures at the school. Two interviewees referred to the import of affected animals from a wider area of Kent for slaughter and incineration on a site outside the village but seemed assured that it was far enough away from the village to pose no environmental risk. No interviewees commented on the similarity between this incident and previous uses and attempted uses of the surrounding area for the disposal of waste from wealthier parts of the county. The apparently minimal impact of foot and mouth disease on the lives of rural interviewees demonstrated the partial nature of the social system operating in the rural locality (Stacey 1969). Few residents relied on agriculture for employment and links between the villagers and surrounding farms were weak. This perhaps explains why foot and mouth disease had not achieved the status of a collective story, or at least not at the time of fieldwork.

These examples of events in the rural locality that had the potential to be the subject of collective stories but did not appear as such in the interview data highlight essential ingredients of the two stories that did. Although very different in form – one was essentially a comedy and the other a tragedy – the stories of the great snow and fatal car accident both concerned a dramatic and unusual event and raised issues of continuing relevance to the collective life of the village. These stories would presumably continue to be told to outsiders until the central issues were resolved or they were superseded by other events fulfilling a similar purpose. A third circumstance in which such stories would disappear is the disappearance or dilution of the population that considers them worth telling. This may have been the fate of collective stories of the village that became the urban locality.

7.5 Summary: the significance of stories in accounts of place and community

The focus in this chapter has been on the stories told by interviewees in their accounts of the locality in which they lived. These stories generally included a personal element but also addressed wider questions about idealised or failing community. The analysis distinguished between stories told in a single interview

and stories of the same event told in several interviews. Six types of individual story were present in the data. These were stories of a biographical turning point, stories of the golden past, stories of hardship, stories of recent community, stories of intimidation, and ambivalent hero stories. The prevalence of each type of story varied between the localities. Stories of hardship and ambivalent hero stories occurred only in the urban data whilst stories of recent community applying to the locality as a whole were restricted to the rural data. Stories of biographical turning points, stories of the golden past and stories of intimidation were told by interviewees in both localities. The only two clear examples of collective stories found in the data occurred in rural interviews. These were stories of the great snow and stories of the fatal car accident.

Bury's framework of narrative types, proposed for the analysis of patient narratives of chronic illness (Bury 2001), was used to compare the purposes and forms of different types of stories contained in these data. Not all types of story told by interviewees fitted Bury's categorisation and some contained elements from more than one narrative form. However, this proved a useful conceptual tool for distinguishing between stories that sought to make sense of experiences, those that addressed issues of identity, and the influence of core narratives and shared cultural assumptions.

Stories of a biographical turning point included examples of both contingent and moral narratives, with forms of core narrative also evident. Such stories were often part of a wider personal narrative threaded through the interview but might also reflect themes found in non-storied accounts of place, such as negative stereotypes of community involvement or the problematisation of young people.

Neither stories of the golden past nor stories of recent community conformed to Bury's narrative types. These stories did not, in general, seek to make sense of an experience but rather to illustrate, persuade or entertain. The performative aspects of story-telling were most evident in these types of story and, in some interviews, the stories had the effect of directing the conversation away from subjects that the interviewee could not or did not wish to talk about. Stories of recent community

told by rural interviewees confirmed an insight gained from the non-storied data that support came from friendship networks rather than 'the village' as a whole. Whilst for some rural interviewees this was their experience of community, it meant that support would not be available in the same way to those outside the networks.

Stories of hardship told by urban interviewees about their childhood or youth often contained elements of a moral narrative as interviewees sought to make sense of the moral implications of poverty, then and now. These stories illustrated an association between place, socio-economic circumstances and personal identity that might last a lifetime. Ambivalent hero stories were similarly reflexive, demonstrating the difficulty of taking action in response to threats from neighbours but in a context of insufficient support from statutory services and negative cultural stereotypes concerning involvement. In contrast, stories of intimidation tended to avoid reflexivity either by emphasising the scale of the threat or, in two instances, by playing down the significance of violence.

The two stories told by several rural interviewees offered insights into the existence of a collective consciousness in the rural locality and its apparent absence in the urban locality. Both stories addressed questions of continuing relevance to the identity of the village. Stories of the great snow, particularly when told by those who had been less involved, concerned the likelihood of collective solidarity if a similar event reoccurred. This linked to concern about the extent of actual and latent community in the village in a context of population movement and perceived changes in social norms and behaviour. Stories of the fatal car accident were prompted by the shock of the event and uncertainty about what constituted a 'proper' response, both as individuals and a collective. The event remained high in the collective consciousness because of the unresolved problem of bored young people in the village associated with antisocial and risk-taking behaviour. The absence of shared stories in interview data might indicate either fragmented social networks (as in the urban locality) or the lack of critical ingredients such as dramatic impact or unresolved issues that had continuing relevance.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, stories told by interviewees in accounts of place pose methodological challenges, particularly for sociological research. The analysis presented here has sought to distinguish between different types of story and interrogate their purposes, both interpretative and conversational. Some stories illustrated associations found in the non-storied data concerning the interaction between characteristics and experiences of place and the interviewee's own sense of self. Others signalled the influence of a collective consciousness or culture on both the way stories were told and perceptions of community in its fullest sense. It is these kinds of contextual insights into people's perceptions and experiences of the place where they live that seem to be lacking from much of the social capital literature and policy approaches to community. The wider implications of this research for those two areas are the subject of the final chapter of this thesis.

PART IV

DISCUSSION

Chapter 8

Making sense of the whole: accounts of place and community

8.1 Introduction

As outlined in the introductory chapter, this research began as a study of social capital and specifically the relationship between a person's circumstances and the social resources they can access within the locality where they live. It developed into a study of lay accounts of place and community in the specific contexts of an urban and a rural environment. This evolution stemmed partly from gaps identified in the theoretical and empirical literature but mainly from the nature and content of interviewees' accounts.

Each of the three chapters contained in Part III of this thesis (Chapters 5-7) was based on a different conceptual starting point. Chapter 5 approached the interview data through the conceptual lens of social capital and sought to explore how key aspects of social capital varied according to the nature of the locality and the personal circumstances of the interviewee. Chapter 6 put the assumptions of social capital to one side and asked what mattered to interviewees about the place where they lived. Chapter 7 sought to interrogate why interviewees told stories at certain points in their account and the significance of the examples encountered of collective stories. A summary of the main findings was provided at the end of each of those chapters and will not therefore be replicated here. The purpose of this chapter rather is to explore the theoretical and methodological significance of the study as a whole and suggest avenues for further research.

The chapter begins with a consideration of the methodological strengths and limitations of the study; thereby setting parameters for the substantive discussion that follows. This discussion is structured around four themes. The first theme (presented in section 8.3) is the significance for interviewees of the place where they live. The second theme (section 8.4) is the transience and uncertainty of community as experienced by interviewees and in contrast with policy expectations. The third theme (section 8.5) concerns symbolic and cultural aspects of community reflected in

interviewees' accounts. The fourth theme (section 8.6) is the theoretical and methodological implications of the research findings for the concept of social capital. The chapter ends with an outline of future directions.

8.2 The methodological strengths and limitations of the study

The research methods used in this study and associated methodological issues were discussed in detail in Chapter 4. The concern here is the consequences of those methodological choices for the broader inferences that can be drawn from the findings.

The overall research design generally allowed for comparisons of similarity and difference in the way hoped for. It produced a diversity of context along the dimensions of locality characteristics and interviewees' gender, life stage and personal circumstances. The unplanned selection of an urban locality with a rural past provided additional insights into historical and symbolic aspects of community. The use of community avenues to recruit interviewees had both advantages and disadvantages. It provided reassurance to interviewees through association with a known group or individual and placed me within the same collective space, albeit temporarily and with a different purpose to that of interviewees. A probability based sampling route would have had advantages in terms of the generalisability of findings but would have lacked a local association and it is not easy to see how in practical terms purposive representation of certain sub-groups could have been achieved.

The reasons for extending the sampling strategy to include people in categories other than unemployed youth, lone parents and people with a chronic disabling health condition has been discussed in section 4.6 of Chapter 4. The initial assumption was that people in these specific situations would be experts on the availability of local support. This was true but the categorisation of individuals in this way did not accord with interviewees' accounts of themselves. Interviewees' views and experiences of the locality were based on more general factors: their life stage (youth, parenthood or ageing); their association with the locality; and their personal history lived out in that place or elsewhere. The example of male interviewees with a disabling health condition who were very active in local community affairs demonstrated the flaw of

treating dependence as predictable or one-way. An important limitation of the study was the fact that the total number of people interviewed was fewer than originally planned and there was low representation of people in certain sub-groups; in particular young people and older men in the rural locality and lone fathers in both localities. This rendered some findings tentative because there were insufficient confirming or disconfirming instances in the dataset. The smaller number of interviewees and higher proportion of female interviewees in the rural locality was also significant although the analysis has taken account of those factors.

Silverman's critique of the over reliance on in-depth interviews in qualitative research (Atkinson and Silverman 1997, Silverman 2001) is of obvious merit and the discussion of further research at the end of this chapter includes suggestions for the use of other qualitative methods. However, the focus in this study was on the content and, to some extent, construction of interviewees' accounts of their place of residence and for this, in-depth interviews were the only option. The interview occasion was approached as part of the context that shaped individual accounts and the analysis took account of presentational and performative elements. As argued in Chapter 7, the stories told by interviewees during the interviews provided unexpected and rich insights into shared cultural assumptions and anxieties about community, and indicated the existence of something approaching a collective consciousness in the rural locality.

The issue of generalisability, a well-known vulnerability of community studies, remains. It is not possible to generalise from these findings to the populations of the two localities or assess the extent to which interviewees' experiences and expectations of community are typical. This was never the intention of the study. What the research does provide is a case study anchored in real places with distinct identities and particular, knowable characteristics. Neither locality was a complete or closed social system and interviewees' social networks varied a great deal in their size, geographical dispersal and level of benefit afforded to the interviewee. This infinite variability accords with Payne's argument that the true value of community studies lies in exploring how various parts of human life inter-relate and balancing the simplification of sociological theory with the 'complex messiness' of human existence (Payne 1996: 31).

The study's aims were presented in section 4.2 of Chapter 4 and are reproduced below for ease of reference:

- a) to explore the ways in which women and men living in the same urban or rural locality experience aspects of social capital, social support and social exclusion;
- b) to explore the networks and social resources available to and used by women and men in the situation of being an unemployed teenager, a lone parent and/or having a chronic disabling health condition;
- c) to explore the ways in which the rural or urban nature of a locality affects the experiences and perceptions of those living there;
- d) to develop an understanding of how place, life situation, social structures and social resources interact in the lives of those interviewed;
- e) to consider the adequacy of current research tools for measuring social capital and social exclusion;
- f) to explore lay understandings of 'community'.

Aims c), d) and f) came to predominate over the course of the research. The interview data also lent itself to the exploration of experiences of social capital, social support and social exclusion (aim a) and an assessment of the adequacy of research tools (aim e) although methodological debates around social capital have moved on since 1999 when this research began and seem to be focusing currently on the statistical validity of questionnaires (see, for example, O'Brien *et al* 2004) rather than issues of meaning in a qualitative sense. The problems recruiting sufficient male and female interviewees in the categories named in aim b) and the conceptual justification for including other groups in the research have been discussed already. It should also be noted that whilst the interviews explored the relative importance of family, friends and neighbours as sources of support and the meaning of these different relationships, this did not amount to a systematic analysis of networks. Nor did the research explore in any depth issues of interdependence in family relationships although this was covered in respect of friendship and neighbour relations.

8.3 The significance of place

The place where they lived was very important to interviewees, whatever their age and whether they liked or disliked living in the locality. This runs counter to theories concerning the shift towards more diffuse and fluid forms of 'community' (for example Castells 1997, Urry 2001). It is of course conceivable that people who declined a request to be interviewed had little interest in the locality and the interview sample was therefore skewed. However, there was no indication from contacts in either locality that anyone considered place in general or their locality in particular a surprising or inappropriate topic for research. This does not imply that the locality was of equal importance to all interviewees or that it was significant for the same reasons.

Interviewees wanted a range of things from their locality. Firstly, they wanted a physical environment that was safe and pleasant and, if they had dependent children, this also meant somewhere where children could have a degree of unsupervised freedom. Secondly, most interviewees wanted a limited sociability that maintained cordiality and yet safeguarded privacy. Thirdly they wanted a social environment from which, at the very least, they did not feel excluded and at best in which they felt they belonged. Fourthly, they wanted to feel assured of latent sources of support that would become apparent or could be called upon in an emergency. Fifthly, they wanted to feel proud of the place where they lived or at least not ashamed. These themes mingled in interviewees' accounts so that 'factual' details were interwoven with dimensions of personal biography, experiences of social exclusion, issues of reputation, and normative assertions about the behaviour of others.

There seemed to be several reasons why the locality was significant to interviewees. At a basic level, its physical and social characteristics affected the well being of interviewees and their families. For most interviewees, the place where they lived also represented 'society' in a way that was tangible. Social change and in particular social problems witnessed in the locality were understood as endemic to society as a whole. Conversely even the rural locality, which was presented by some interviewees as an oasis in a harsher world, was seen as vulnerable to the negative changes seen elsewhere. Place was also significant to interviewees because it was associated with

their sense of self in complex ways. The characteristics of the place where interviewees grew up seemed to be of additional consequence, particularly if it was symptomatic of deprivation as evident in the stories of hardship discussed in section 7.3 of Chapter 7. All interviewees were sensitive to negative aspects of the locality's reputation and responded in differential ways. The locality was also a significant setting for individual experiences of social exclusion. These experiences seemed to be influenced by the characteristics of the locality with rural interviewees talking about exclusion as generalised whilst for urban interviewees it occurred in specific social spaces redolent of a more fragmented social environment. Finally, interviewees talked about the locality as a marker of time: linked to stages in their own biography (from child to young adult to parent to later life); physical changes in the locality (the pulling down of landmarks or the incursion of housing onto open spaces); and social changes in the locality and wider society.

There is an assumption in most contemporary theories of community that as family structure, working patterns and the nature of society change, new forms of social connection will develop to replace what has been lost (Pahl and Spencer 1997, Pahl 2001, Castells 2001). The inevitability or desirability of these developments is often unquestioned. It is undoubtedly true that wider access to higher education and greater job and housing mobility as well as the development of new technologies create opportunities for some, perhaps many people to develop new types of social networks based on coincidence of interest rather than place. However, these new forms of 'community', if deserving of that name, are limited in two crucial respects.

The first is that new forms of community will be predominantly available to those who are already advantaged in terms of income, education, or status and who are also likely to be living in places where 'community' is seldom tested. This mirrors Bourdieu's arguments about the social patterning of different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986). The evidence from this study suggests that for people in less advantaged situations and/or tied to the locality by circumstances, the social characteristics of the place where they live remain as significant as ever; perhaps more significant given heightened awareness of 'public dangers' and reflexivity between personal identity and the reputation of a place. The characteristics of the sample are highly relevant here since most of the interviewees were present in the

locality for substantial periods either through the pull of parenthood or the push of having ceased full time paid employment or conversely having not yet entered the workplace. As discussed at the end of Chapter 6, physical presence in a neighbourhood was not always matched by social status so that interviewees at both ends of the age spectrum felt powerless to alter a social environment that failed to meet their needs. There were also indications that in the urban locality, social class was accompanied by a distancing of self from the local social environment practically and/or emotionally. This cannot be substantiated because of the class mix of the sample but would merit exploration in further research, as would the distancing effect of leadership roles in community initiatives on the lay people involved.

The second limitation of new forms of community is that these are largely based on the types of relationship categorised as bridging and linking forms of social capital (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Whilst such networks may offer access to new and more disparate sources of information and produce tangible benefits in terms of employment or commercial opportunities, they are unlikely to provide localised forms of practical help. This raises the possibility that people who require the forms of practical assistance typically derived from bonding social capital will be triply disadvantaged. Natural sources of bonding social capital (notably family) are reducing as families become smaller, family members move away or family cohesion breaks down with changes in partner. At the same time networks of others in the vicinity – particularly those in paid employment - are diversifying and becoming more selective. A social connection based on proximity of address may no longer be a sufficient reason for initiating contact, let alone offering or asking for help. Thirdly an ageing population is stretching the resources of both the statutory and voluntary sectors. Whilst the focus of central and local Government policy on the links between parenting and juvenile delinquency are increasing the support given to lone parents (evident for example in Sure Start initiatives), older people living in disadvantaged areas seem likely to become increasingly left out of 'the community' whilst children and young people have always been marginalised in decision making. Again, this would merit further research.

8.4 Transience and uncertainty

Not only was the place of residence significant to interviewees in complex ways, it was also characterised by transience and uncertainty. This applied both to the changing nature of the locality and to interviewees' perceived role and status within it.

Transience was manifested in changes to the physical landscape, mainly through the building of new housing, and the corrosion of the physical environment through neglect, carelessness or deliberate acts of vandalism. Transience in a social sense was attributed to high levels of population mobility and the moving away or death of neighbours that the interviewee had got to know when they first moved into their current home. The response of some interviewees in the urban locality was to look for more stable and also more tailored forms of community in association with particular groups. There were also cultural dimensions to transience with interviewees talking with regret about changes in norms of behaviour and a reduction in sociability and trust. This was present in the accounts of interviewees of all ages although most prominent in those of older interviewees. Transience also had personal and embodied aspects with the loss of significant relationships or roles and an awareness of the passing of biographical time that was reinforced by physical and social changes observed in the locality.

Descriptions of relations with neighbours as a balancing act between cordiality and respect for privacy and the necessity of being able to reciprocate social support on an individualised basis illustrate the uncertainty underlying non-family social relations as described by interviewees. Family relations may well have been similarly uncertain but this did not feature in these data. The use of metaphors about physical barriers (such as doors, locks, fences and gates) was linked to a shared understanding of social conventions that might easily be transgressed. Reflexive accounts about the interviewee as a neighbour or friend emphasised the interviewee's awareness of and compliance with these norms, reiterated by examples of the failure of others to do the same. Community involvement was similarly complicated with interviewees finding it necessary to justify their taking a leading role. This was exemplified by the ambivalent hero stories discussed in Chapter 7.

These observations support the following comment by Crow *et al* in their discussion of neighbourly relations in a small town on the south coast of England:

“the construction of the idea of ‘good’ neighbouring around the principles of ‘friendly distance’ makes a degree of uncertainty over how best to behave inevitable” (Crow *et al* 2002: 142)

This observation about ‘good’ neighbouring could equally well be applied to ‘good’ friendship, ‘good’ parenting or ‘good’ citizenship. Such uncertainties accord with post-modernist ideas about the fluidity of identity and role in contemporary society. Bauman’s treatment of community as paradise lost (Bauman 2001) combined with his descriptions of the social uncertainty of life in post-modern western world, expressed in the quotation below, provide probably the most complete conceptualisation:

“the boundaries which tend to be simultaneously most strongly desired and most acutely missed are those of a rightful and secure place in society, of a space unquestionably one’s own, where one can plan one’s life with the minimum of interference, play one’s role in a game in which the rules do not change overnight and without notice, and reasonably hope for the better”
(Bauman 1996: 26)

Critiques of the ideology of community (for example Sennett 1973, 1998) and Cohen’s treatment of community as a symbolic phenomenon (Cohen 1982, 1985) provide alternative explanations that understand community as located within a fragmented, diverse and individualised social and cultural context.

Another reading of the uncertainty expressed by interviewees in circumscribing an appropriate role in their neighbourhood or village relates less to the conditions of late or post-modernity society than to the long term legacy of a retrenchment of the welfare state beginning in the 1980s and accompanying rhetoric promoting the primacy of individual over collective interests. This coincided with transformations in employment, particularly the closure of heavy industry, and changes in rural communities that eroded the dominance of agriculture. These developments, evident in the localities in which this research was situated, broke the links between the working and non-working parts of people’s lives and the inter-generational bonds created by similar life courses.

The transience and uncertainty that characterised interviewees' experiences and resulting perceptions of community are at odds with the resurgence of policy interest in community described in Chapter 3. There was no evidence in the data that interviewees saw community as an alternative or more effective form of governance although there were examples from both localities of the direct and indirect imposition of community norms. 'Gemeinschaft' was combined with a more Foucauldian model of surveillance and self-discipline with frequent references to what interviewees supposed others thought of them. In the rural locality this was perceived as coming from the village as a whole, in the urban locality from specific groups. However, there seemed to be little interest in the delegation of greater responsibility to the community although this was not probed directly. Rather, the perceived abrogation of responsibility by the statutory authorities was a common cause of complaint, particularly in the urban locality. Even those interviewees who advocated a return to more informal ways of dealing with juvenile delinquents, usually involving physical punishment, expected this to be carried out by the police, or specifically a 'neighbourhood bobby', as they remembered or imagined happening in the past.

8.5 Symbolic and cultural aspects of community

As discussed in Chapter 3, the concept of community has strong emotive and normative connotations. Traditional community has been conceived of as a form of association characterised by smallness of scale, intimacy, unity, sociability and the trustworthiness of members. The decline or absence of community in this sense is used as an index of contemporary social ills and becomes sacred. The theme of regaining or recreating 'gemeinschaft' resonates in communitarianism (Etzioni 1995, 1997) and the policy literature that has adopted this stance. In parallel with the family, community has often been treated as a single normative entity rather than a myriad of social relations and processes, both positive and negative. Other writers (notably Turner 1969 and Cohen 1985) have approached community in terms of particular kinds of social relationships or a group awareness of difference from other groups. As such, community is a cultural and symbolic field through which people learn and practise what it is to 'be social'.

These contrasting understandings of community were present in the interview data. Interviewees talked about neighbour relations in the past as being more sociable, more trusting in a material sense and more supportive in practical terms. This is a more intimate version of neighbourliness than experienced in present society and closer to current ideas of friendship than the 'friendly distance' between neighbours (Crow *et al* 2002: 129; see also Willmott 1986) that interviewees tried to maintain in practice. Community as a cultural identity or outlook was present in the accounts of many rural interviewees but largely absent from accounts of the urban locality except when urban interviewees described the locality in its rural past or membership of particular organised sub-groups. This difference between the localities in terms of collective identity influenced the kinds of individual stories told and the virtual absence of collective stories from urban accounts. Methodological insights in relation to narratives of chronic illness (notably Bury 2001) proved useful for analysing the content and form of the stories told by interviewees. Stories served a variety of purposes. The most revealing stories in terms of understanding lay perceptions of community concerned what the narrator valued, what had affected them profoundly and what they felt was in doubt or under threat. Interviewees told reflexive stories about experiences of poverty and the risks of getting too involved in community affairs or taking too prominent a role. They were generally not reflexive in stories of past or recent community or indeed intimidation.

The two collective stories from the rural locality dealt in different ways with the meaning and dependability of community. The story of the 'great snow' celebrated collective solidarity and resourcefulness in the face of an externally imposed emergency. It was presented as evidence of continuing, if latent, community resources although the very fact of its telling suggested this was now in some doubt. The story of the fatal car accident addressed the realities of community in dealing culturally with a tragedy that had befallen not heroes or the innocent but those on the margins of mainstream village society. The current size of the village population, the closure of local heavy industry which had in the past provided common employment, and patterns of mobility influenced by cheap housing rather than other ties raises questions about the extent to which the rural locality still operated as a 'real' community. A theoretical alternative is offered by Anderson's seminal concept of 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) to which individuals feel attached and which

forms a significant part of their self-identity (see also Phillips 2002). The telling and retelling of stories that celebrate unity or seek to resolve schism are part of this fluid process of attachment and reattachment. This in turn links back to the earlier discussion about the effects of transience and uncertainty on self-identity. One interpretative device available to rural interviewees but not to urban ones was to emphasise dependable features of life in a village setting and their own place in that social environment.

8.6 Whither social capital?

This study raises questions about both the measurement and meaning of social capital. At a methodological level, it illustrates the variability of individuals' understanding of key components. Crucially, the size of area that had meaning for interviewees as a social environment varied between the two localities and between groups in the urban locality. This has implications for the interpretation of all associated indicators including social support, trust and reciprocity. The rural locality was often talked of in terms of a unified social entity although it was no longer likely that most or indeed any residents knew everyone who lived there. 'The village' did seem to have symbolic and cultural properties of Anderson's imagined communities (Anderson 1991), which complicates further the interpretation of descriptions of its characteristics. Such variability and complexity is largely evaded in quantitative research instruments including the Office for National Statistics' harmonised question set (Green and Fletcher 2003). In particular, these research findings suggest that it is difficult to know what is actually being measured by questions about trustworthiness and generalised reciprocity and yet these are the basis of much quantitative analysis (for example, Wilkinson *et al* 1998; Kawachi *et al* 1999).

As discussed earlier, neighbour relations and the obtaining of social support were fraught with uncertainty and conditioned by internalised social conventions regarding appropriate behaviour, individual reciprocity and the importance of not imposing. Similarly, among urban interviewees, involvement in community affairs and particularly taking a leading role had to be negotiated within negative stereotypes of self-promotion and over-involvement. Self-sufficiency and 'minding one's own business' were presented as social virtues and 'not getting (too) involved' as a social

necessity. Interviewees relied mainly on family or friends for practical and emotional support. Where this was unavailable or insufficient, most opted for self-reliance although some looked to a group of like-minded individuals as an alternative form of community. In theoretical terms, this suggests a more individualised version of social capital than that of a public good and augments arguments concerning the significance of *access* to social resources, which, for interviewees in this study, included the crossing of self-imposed barriers. The rare instances of linking social capital reported by interviewees suggested that the experience of seeing how people in positions of power or influence achieved desired outcomes changed interviewees' perceptions but not their personal effectiveness or felt legitimacy of their own role. This supports Bourdieu's idea of social capital as the resources that can be accessed through social networks (Bourdieu 1986) and Foley and Edwards' context-dependent conceptualisation of social capital as 'access plus resources' (Foley and Edwards 1999).

The application of the concept of social capital to geographical communities raises many questions about the meaning and purpose of social capital in this context and the nature of the local social system in which it is supposedly operating. Early literature on social capital (Loury 1977, Coleman 1988 and parts of Putnam 1993) contained examples of collaborative action to achieve a shared goal which might be financial, political or more broadly social. Within Bourdieu's conceptualisation (Bourdieu 1986), social connections bring gain to an individual member of an elite because advantaged classes act in collaborative ways to safeguard their privileges. Recent policy discussions have linked social capital with goals as varied and ambitious as reducing unemployment, improving health amongst disadvantaged groups, reducing truancy and crime, eliminating juvenile delinquency, and increasing the informal care available in the community. Missing from this debate is a discussion of what might constitute shared goals for people living in the same neighbourhood, estate or village.

At an individual level, social connections were used by interviewees to access help for themselves or others or, less commonly, to promote collective action against a shared threat or in support of a shared goal. There were also examples of the negative use of social networks to exclude and intimidate. There was no evidence of collective social

capital operating across the urban locality as a whole although it seemed to exist in some sub-groups and across extended family networks, sometimes with negative consequences for outsiders. In the village, social capital was evident at an individual level, operating mainly through friendship networks, but was unevenly distributed despite the assertions of some interviewees who held a secure position in the local social environment. There was evidence of collective norms amongst established villagers in terms of the value of village life and corresponding obligations to participate but these were framed in terms of the failure of newcomers to understand or conform. The socialising of newcomers and juniors had succeeded to the extent of the shared telling of a collective story (that of the 'great snow') and shared discourses about the problematic nature of young people's behaviour but had achieved neither social unity nor control.

In summary, the research findings reported here are more indicative of social capital as possessed by individuals or residing in certain social relationships than the characteristics of a collective. Social capital as a feature of a social environment was more likely in the rural locality than the urban. Even in the rural locality, 'community' was concerned as much with the boundaries that defined 'them' as with the values that defined 'us' and was largely ineffectual, outside of friendship networks, in providing the kind of support or even acceptance required by the more socially isolated.

8.7 Future directions

There are a number of ways in which the themes discussed in this chapter and the thesis as a whole might be taken further. The research approach used in this study might be fruitfully applied to other types of locality including perhaps different forms of rural social environment and/or localities with a different mix of social class, ethnicity or past history as a 'community'. However, given the recent spate of community studies, there is a risk of duplication. Another possibility therefore would be to focus on specific themes. Further empirical research on community involvement in terms of physical presence, social status and cultural barriers to participation might elicit new insights into what is regarded as a fundamental weakness in contemporary

civic society. A life stage approach to involvement in and exclusion from geographical and other forms of 'community' would also merit exploration.

Any further qualitative research aimed at replication of this study or the development of specific themes would need to employ a greater variety of methods in order to access other viewpoints and provide confirmation of the insights gained so far. One example might asking interviewees in a selected locality to keep a diary of events and encounters over a set period and comparing this with their perceptions and the public presentation of community contained in newsletters, local newspapers and other media over the same timescale. A second example would be more structured observations and analysis of community meetings, activities and even shared spaces with the assistance of recording equipment. This would need to be handled carefully because of the ethical challenge of ensuring informed consent of all present. A third example of an alternative methodology would involve the inclusion of visual elements as advocated by Payne (1996) and exemplified by Morrow's exploration of the significance of different parts of a locality through the taking of photographs by primary school aged children (Morrow 2001b).

Finally, one of the most interesting aspects of this study was interviewees' use of stories and the identification of collective stories in the rural locality. There seems to be a gap in the available literature concerning a specifically sociological approach to understanding the content and function of such stories about place and community. Further empirical work in this area would advance both theoretical and methodological understanding.

APPENDICES

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|------------|--|
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Organisations and individuals contacted during the research

[Note: Some of the voluntary organisations covered a wide area. For clarity, I have used 'locality' to denote the ward or village on which the research was focused and 'area' to mean the town or rural area in which the locality was situated.]

2 residents / tenants associations in the urban locality

Parish Council in the rural locality

Church of England church in each locality – initially through clergy, followed by attendance at Sunday morning services. (Note: there were no churches of other denominations or other religious associations in either locality.)

Parents and toddler groups in each locality: 3 in the urban locality and 1 in the rural locality

Sure Start project in the urban locality

Council for Voluntary Services

Gingerbread group (voluntary self-help organisation for lone parents)

Over-60s clubs:- 1 in each locality

Age Concern groups in each area

Arthritis Research Campaign group in urban locality

Multiple Sclerosis Society branch covering both areas

Multiple Sclerosis self-help group in rural area

Housing project in urban locality for homeless young people

Drop-in unemployed support centre covering both areas

Regeneration project for area of wasteland in the urban locality

Individual in urban locality who was co-ordinating a plaque commemorating wartime casualties – through notice seen in library

Individual investigating the history of the urban locality

Reply slip

Please complete this reply slip and post it to:
Sarah Earthy,
University of Surrey,
Department of Sociology,
Guildford,
Surrey GU2 5XH.

Or alternatively telephone the number on the other side of this page.

Your name: -----

A telephone number where you can be contacted: -----

Your home address (optional)

Looking for local people....

Do you live in the Luton area of Chatham?

Would you be willing to talk to a researcher from the University of Surrey about living in Luton as part of a wider study about community?

If so, please read further...

Unis

University of Surrey

Guildford
Surrey GU2 5XH, UK
Telephone
+44 (0)1483 300800
Facsimile
+44 (0)1483 300803

School of Human Sciences

Department of Sociology

Research study looking at people's experiences of living in the Luton area of Chatham

What is the study about?

The word 'community' is used a lot these days. It is assumed that the local community affects many aspects of people's lives. This study aims to explore some of these assumptions by talking to people in different situations about their views and experiences of the same local area.

The researcher is a postgraduate student from the University of Surrey. The study is independent of any local authorities or other organisations.

What will be involved if I agree to being interviewed?

I would like to talk to you about your experiences of living in Luton and Chatham. The interview will last about an hour and is very informal. It can be fitted around your routine and responsibilities.

I would ideally like to talk to people at home on a one-to-one basis but understand that some people may feel more relaxed if a friend is present. All conversations will be in complete confidence. The identity of everyone taking part will be kept anonymous.

Getting in touch

If you would be willing to be interviewed as part of this study – or would like more information before you decide - please contact Sarah Earthy on the following telephone number:
- 07790 711834 (mobile)

Or fill out the reply slip on the other side of this page.

Making contact does not commit you to being interviewed.

University of Surrey

Guildford
Surrey GU2 5XH, UK
Telephone
+44 (0)1483 300800
Facsimile
+44 (0)1483 300803

School of Human Sciences

Department of Sociology
Tel: 01483 259365
Fax: 01483 259551

Research study looking at people's experiences of living in the [REDACTED] area of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

My name is Sarah Earthy and I am a postgraduate research student based in the sociology department of the University of Surrey in Guildford. I was born in Kent and until two years ago had spent most of my life there. My research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and is completely independent of any local authorities or organisations.

The word 'community' is used a lot these days – by politicians, policy makers and the media. It is often assumed that the local community affects many aspects of the day-to-day lives of people living there. I would like to explore some of these assumptions by talking to people at different stages of life and in different situations about their views and experiences of the same local area. I am also interested in the different social networks people have and who they go to for information or help.

I will be spending much of the next 12 months (July 2000 to June 2001) talking to people living in the [REDACTED] area of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I would particularly like to talk to women and men in any of the following situations:

- ◆ if you have a disability or health problem that makes it difficult for you to get around
- ◆ if you are a lone parent with a child or children under the age of 16
- ◆ if you are aged 16-18 and unemployed.

Each interview will last between one and two to three hours and can be fitted around your routine and responsibilities. I would ideally like to talk to people on a one-to-one basis but understand that some people may feel more relaxed if a friend in a similar situation is present. All conversations will be in complete confidence and the identities of those taking part and the area they live in will be kept anonymous.

If you feel you might be interested in taking part or for more information please telephone me at the University on 01483 873961, or on my mobile on [REDACTED]. Making contact does not commit you to being interviewed.

**University of Surrey**

Guildford
 Surrey GU2 5XH, UK
 Telephone
 +44 (0)1483 300800
 Facsimile
 +44 (0)1483 300803

School of Human Sciences

24 July 2000

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

We are writing to confirm that Sarah Earthy is studying here at the University of Surrey under our supervision for a Ph.D. degree in sociology. Her research is concerned with how people in different situations feel about their local communities; Sarah is able to provide additional information on her study. If you have any further questions or concerns about her work, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely

Dr Hilary Thomas
 Senior Lecturer in Sociology

Dr Chris Smaje
 Lecturer in Sociology

INTERVIEWEE CHARACTERISTICS

Interview number	Research name	Interviewee number	Age	Length of time lived in locality	Others in household	Parental status	Employment status	Recruitment method	Additional information
Urban 1 (pilot)	Georgia	UF1	20s	9 years	child and new husband	child of school age	not working	women's meeting	Lone parent for 10 years. Initiated millennium green project..
Urban 2 (pilot)	Peter	UM1	60s	20+ years	wife	children grown up	retired	through UF1	Interview not taped.
Urban 2 (pilot)	Jean	UF2	60s	20+ years	husband	children grown up	retired	through UF1	Interview not taped.
Urban 3 (pilot)	Bill	UM2	82	born in locality	adult son	children grown up	retired	approached by SE in the street	Severely disabled by arthritis. Made redundant because of ill health. Widower.
Urban 4 (pilot)	Edith	UF3	70	40+ years	living alone	children grown up	retired	church	Brought up 6 children by herself. Disabled by asthma, arthritis and diabetes. Tape recording failed.
Urban 5 (pilot)	Jack	UM3	50s	born in locality	wife and adult children	children aged 18+	working full time	church	Husband of UF4.
Urban 5 (pilot)	Betty	UF4	50s	24 years	husband and adult children	children aged 18+	long term disabled	present when SE called to interview husband	Wife of UM3. Disabled by back problems.
Urban 5 (pilot)	Rachel	UF5	18	born in locality	parents and brother	none	student	present for interview with UM3	Daughter of UM3 and UF4.
Urban 5 (pilot)	Tom	UM4	20s	born in locality	parents and sister	none	not known	present for interview with UM3	Son of UM3 and UF4.

Urban 6 (pilot)	Maggie	UF6	30s	5 months in flat, 7? years in locality	living alone	none	unemployed	church	Intending to train as a Methodist minister.
Urban 7	Jane	UF7	40s	12 years	living alone	children grown up	long term disabled	church	Severely disabled by arthritis. Lone parent through divorce. Providing childcare for grandchild and a friend's son. Current house was just outside locality.
Urban 8	Sam	UM5	71	5 years but had travelled through locality many times	adult son	children grown up	semi-retired	tenants' meeting	Romany. Chair of tenants association. Daughter living in same block.
Urban 9	Simon	UM6	23	born in locality	parents	none	working full time	church	Recently got a job after a long period of unemployment.
Urban 10	Frank	UM7	60	N/K	wife	children grown up	retired	church	Several experiences of redundancy.
Urban 11	Dawn	UF8	20s	born in locality	husband and children	youngest child pre-school	working part time	mums and toddlers group	
Urban 11	Natalie	UF9	20s	born in locality	husband and children	youngest child pre-school	not working	asked by UF8 to join her for interview	
Urban 12	Dave	UM8	21	born in locality	room in block for homeless young people	none	student, working part time	SE dropped into centre	
Urban 12	Gary	UM9	18	less than a year	room in block for homeless young people	none	student, working part time	SE dropped into centre	

Urban 12	Ben	UM10	18	less than a year	room in block for homeless young people	none	student, working part time	SE dropped into centre	
Urban 13	Steve	UM11	50s	20 years	wife, adult daughter and grandchildren	children grown up	long term disabled	residents meeting	Long involvement in neighbourhood watch. Experiences of redundancy.
Urban 14	Hayley	UF10	18	less than a year	room in block for homeless young people	none	student, working part time	SE dropped into centre	Staff member present during interview.
Urban 14	Nicola	UF11	18	less than a year	room in block for homeless young people	pregnant	not working	SE dropped into centre	Staff member present during interview.
Urban 14	Lucy	UF12	18	less than a year	room in block for homeless young people	none	student, working part time	SE dropped into centre	Staff member present during interview.
Urban 14	Aidan	UM12	18	less than a year	room in block for homeless young people	none	student, working part time	SE dropped into centre	Staff member present during interview.
Urban 15	Keith	UM13	40s	12 years	wife and children	youngest child pre-school	working full time	introduced by UM11	Involvement in a range of voluntary activities.
Rural 1	Karen	RF1	30s	2 years	husband and children	youngest child pre-school	not working	contacted via UM13	
Urban 16	Michelle	UF13	31	4 years	husband and children	youngest child pre-school	worked Saturdays	Sure Start	Past history of postnatal depression.

Urban 17	June	UF14	47	7 years	living alone	none	working full time	picked up leaflet left in housing project	Worked as a manager in the housing sector.
Rural 2	Fay	RF2	40s	since age of 5	husband and children	children of school age	not working	introduced by RF8	Ran clothing co-operative in village hall.
Rural 3	Theresa	RF3	60s	1950s-1968, Dec 2000-	husband	children grown up	retired	summer fete	Wife of RF3. Severely disabled with diabetes.
Rural 3	Graham	RM1	60s	1950s-1968, Dec 2000-	wife	children grown up	retired	present when SE called to interview wife	Husband of RF3.
Rural 4	Elsa	RF4	85	44 years	living alone	children grown up	retired	summer fete	Had been sole carer for husband with Alzheimer's Disease.
Rural 4	Valerie	RF5	50s	27 years	husband	children grown up	not working	called in to see RF4 during interview	Neighbour of RF4.
Rural 4	Maureen	RF6	40s	born in village	husband and children	children grown up	working part time	called in to see RF4 during interview	Friend of RF4.
Rural 5	Mabel	RF7	73	53 years	partner	children grown up	retired	summer fete	Suggested as interviewee by 3 other rural interviewees.
Rural 'focus group'	Over 60s club	Approx. 15 members present	aged 60-96	varied	varied	varied	retired / not working	SE attended meeting by invitation	SE went along hoping to recruit interviewees but members wanted to talk about the village at meeting. Tape recording missed some contributions
Urban 18	Sally	UF15	20s	10 years	husband and children	one child of pre-school	part time student	mums and toddlers group	

Rural 6	Liz	RF8	34	born in village	husband and children	youngest child aged pre-school	working part time	mums and toddlers group	
Rural 7	Barry	RM2	50s	15 years	wife	children grown up	long term disabled	summer fête	Severely disabled by multiple sclerosis.
Urban 19	Ian	UM14	20s	3 or 4 years	children	youngest child pre-school	working full time	Sure Start group	Widower. Current house just outside borders of locality.
Urban 20	Su	UF16	20s	2 years	children	youngest child pre-school	not working	Sure Start group	Refugee. Husband and family abroad. Tape recording partially failed.
Urban 21	Caz	UF17	22	born in locality	children	2 children pre-school	not working	Sure Start group	Recently separated from partner.
Urban 22	Clare	UF18	30s	8? years	children	youngest child pre-school	working part time	Sure Start group	No contact with children's father. New partner living separately.
Rural 8	Chris	RM3	30s	14 years	wife and children	children of school age	long term disabled	contact via RF8	Severely disabled with MS. Carried out informal youth work in village
Rural 8	Debbie	RF9	30s	14 years	husband and children	children of school age	not working	contact via RF8	Wife of RM3.
Urban 23	Andrew	UM15	36	3 years	wife and child	child aged pre-school	not working	Sure Start group	Became 'house husband' after being made redundant.
Rural 9	Neil	RM4	40	4 years	estranged wife and children	children aged school age	long term disabled	vicar	Carried out informal youth work in village.

Rural 10	Tristan	RM5	16	born in village	parents and siblings	none	school	introduced by RM4	Absent from school on day of interview. RM4 present.
Rural 10	Adam	RM6	15	15 months	parents and siblings	none	school	introduced by RM4	Absent from school on day of interview. RM4 present.
Rural 10	Kevin	RM7	15	7 years	parents and siblings	none	school	introduced by RM4	Absent from school on day of interview. RM4 present.
Rural 11	Henry	RM8	50s	22 years	not known	not known	working full time	introduced by RM4	Interviewed in street. Introduced as someone with views about young people.
Rural 12	Margaret	RF10	60s	30+ years	husband	children grown up	retired	cleaning brasses in church	
Rural 13	Michaela	RF11	20s	born in village	husband and children	youngest child pre-school	working part time	mums and toddlers	Asked to be interviewed with RF12.
Rural 13	Carolyn	RF12	20s	5 years	husband and children	youngest child pre-school	working part time	mums and toddlers	Asked to be interviewed with RF11.
Rural 14	Kelly	RF13	20s	3 years	partner and children	youngest child pre-school	not working	mums and toddlers	Did not want interview tape-recorded.
Rural 15	Richard	RM9	50s	an association of 17 years	elderly parents	none	early retirement	vicar	Previous headmaster of village school. Lived in a village away from the rural locality.
Rural 16	John	RM10	50s	107 years	wife	children grown up	long term disabled	church	
Urban 24	Ken	UM16	60s	born in locality	wife	children grown up	retired	contacted by SE from notice about memorial plaque	Very interested in local history. UM17 present for part of interview.

Urban 24	Stuart	UM17	50s	15? years	wife	children grown up	long term sick	asked by UM16 to be present for interview	Periodically disabled by chronic fatigue syndrome. Researching history of local area. Accompanied SE on visits to UM20 and UM21.
Rural 17	Harry	RM11	60s	37 years	wife	children grown up	retired	RF8	Father of RF8, husband of RF14. Formerly policeman in the village.
Rural 17	Eve	RF14	60s	37 years	husband	children grown up	working part time	at home when SE interviewed her husband	Mother of RF8, wife of RM11.
Rural 18	Joanne	RF15	46	28 years (1973-1983 and since 1985)	husband and children	one pre-school child, other children teenage or adult.	recently left work	church	Lone parent when older children growing up. Youngest child from 2 nd marriage.
Rural 19	Linda	RF16	40s	17 years	living alone	none	long term disabled	church	Severely disabled by multiple sclerosis.
Urban 25	George	UM18	late 70s	born in locality	wife	none	retired	via UM16	Husband of UF19. Health poor. Interviewed partly with wife and partly separately
Urban 25	Lillian	UF19	75	born in locality	husband	none	retired	via UM16	Wife of UM18.
Urban 26	Cyril	UM19	60s	40+ years	wife	children grown up	retired	via UM16	Talked about locality using collection of photographs.

Urban 27	Penny	UF20	60s	born in locality	husband	children grown up	not working	via UM16	Former councillor. Wife of UM22. Current house outside the urban locality.
Urban 27	Clive	UM20	60s	N/K	wife	children grown up	retired	present when SE interviewed his wife	Husband of UF20. Current house outside the urban locality.
Urban 28	Joe	UM21	75	born in locality	living alone	children grown up	retired	via UM17	UM17 present during interview. Disabled by arthritis. Widower.
Urban 29	Dennis	UM22	87	born in locality	living alone	children grown up	retired	via UM17	UM17 present during interview. Health poor. Widower.

Appendix F

Table A: The domestic situation of interviewees (n=69)

	living with parents	living alone	living with children only	living with partner only	living with partner & children ^(c)	living in shared accomm. ^(e)
Urban	3	6	6 ^(b)	10	10	7
Rural	4 ^(a)	2	-	10	11 ^(d)	-
Total	7	8	7	20	20	7

(a) includes 1 adult male interviewee living with elderly parents

(b) includes 2 older male interviewees living with a non-dependant child

(c) includes partners who are not related to the children in the household

(d) includes 1 interviewee in the process of separating from his partner

(e) all interviewees in this category were living in a housing project for homeless young people

Table B: The parental status of interviewees (n=69)

	young person (aged 15-19) without children	adult without children	adult with youngest child pre-school	adult with children of school age	adult with all children aged 18+
Urban	7*	7	10	1	17
Rural	3	2	5	5	12
Total	10	9	15	6	29

* one female interviewee in this age group was expecting her first child

Table C: The employment status of interviewees (n=69)

	School	Further Educ	Full time child care	Part time paid employ	Full time paid employ	Unemp-loyed or econ inactive	Long term sick/ disabled	Retired
URBAN								
Men	-	4	1	-	5	-	2	10
Women	-	3	5	3	1	2	2	4
Total	-	7	6	3	6	2	4	14
RURAL								
Men	3	-	-	-	1	-	4	3
Women	-	-	3	5	-	3	1	4
Total	3	-	3	5	1	3	5	7
TOTAL	3	7	9	8	7	5	9	21

CONSENT FORM

Before starting the interview, I would like you to make sure that you have enough information about the purpose of my research and how long the interview is likely to last. If you agree, I would like to tape record our conversation so that I don't miss anything you say. But you can ask me to turn the tape recorder off at any time or rewind the tape to erase something you don't want recorded. Everything you say to me is in confidence and I will not disclose it to anyone else without your consent. I will be publishing findings from my research and presenting the research at conferences and may use your own words along with those of others to illustrate particular views or experiences. However, your identity and the identity of this part of XXXXXXXX will be kept anonymous and I will leave out any details that might identify you. You are completely free to refuse to answer any questions or to stop the interview at any stage and you do not have to give a reason for doing so. You can also at the end of the interview withdraw anything you have said that you would rather not be included.

If you are happy to carry on with the interview, please sign below and print your name. Signing this form does not affect your right to stop the interview at any point.

- 1) I consent to being interviewed for the purpose of this research study
- 2) I consent to our conversation being tape-recorded
- 3) I consent to my views and words being included in published or presented material provided that my identity is kept anonymous
- 4) I understand that I can stop the interview at any stage and do not have to give a reason for doing so.

Signature: _____ *Date:* _____

Full name (BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE) _____

Address: _____

Interview guide for use with (unemployed) young people

Background

How long lived in the area. Home situation. Which school went to and when left. Training history. Work history. Family – local/ not local? Ditto friends. Age.

General views of local community/neighbourhood/area

What's it like living round here? [Check boundaries & relevance of ward/estate boundaries?] Facilities - shops, schools, colleges, GP surgery/health centre, other facilities. Physical features – housing, rubbish, graffiti, vandalism, traffic, parking. Social features - much going on for children/young teenagers/ people own age/older people? Clubs, formal events, informal events, pubs/places to meet. Services – education, council, health services, police. What things in the neighbourhood are most important to you? (if you had a camera/ drew a map?) What do you like about the area? What don't you like? Any general problems?

How neighbourhood links to other areas

Transport generally. What transport you use, if any. How much do you go outside the area? For what? Where? How do you get there? How easy is it? Did you travel more/less when you were younger? Before you left school? Where do you identify with most – e.g. [area] or [locality]?

'Community'

Going back to local neighbourhood, is this somewhere you enjoy living? What was it like growing up here? What's it like being a young person here? Would you say this was a 'community'? [meaning, identity, friendliness, reciprocity, support, trust, safety, privacy] Have you yourself received help or support? How has neighbourhood changed over the time you've lived here? [What think it will be like in 5 years time?] Examples of local people rallying around an issue? What processes involved? Your part in process? Other examples? How well do you feel people of different ages get on round here? Different backgrounds? How far do people trust each other? Crime – who affected? what kind? who responsible? How many people do you feel you know/know well round here? Limits of social exchanges/support? Are people nosy? Judgmental? Who has most say? Who gets left/feels on the outside? What is it like for newcomers? What is it like for people who have lived there a long time? Do you feel the opinion of others affects what you do? what you can do? what your [parents] say? Perceptions of differences with other kinds of area – including rural. Were communities different in the past?

Getting things changed / stopping change

Is there anything that you would like to see changed around here? Any changes that have happened that you've not liked? Any changes that you've liked? Do you feel you have a say? Do you know who the local councillors are? Opportunities to influence decisions – as young people/an individual. Examples? Would you get involved? What role do you think you would take? Did you vote in the last election? (general, local, European) Will you vote in next election?

Barriers/ encouragements to participation. Has this changed with being unemployed?

Responsibility/Independence

Changes as have got older. Opportunities. Expectations of family and others. What were important stages? Should you have more rights? More responsibilities?

Being unemployed

Details of situation. Work aspirations. Do you know anyone that does what want to do? What's hard about not having a job/having left school? What's good? Different for blokes and girls? Times and places when aware that not working. Times and places when feel no different from previously (who with, what doing).

Social life

Own social life. What kinds of things do you do? With whom? Where? Changed over time? What do that didn't? What don't you do that you used to? What would you like to do but don't/can't? What influences what you do? (money/opportunities/friends/confidence/ safety etc) Ditto what you don't do?

Supportive social networks

Who is important to you? Role of family/friends?

What would you say makes a good friend? Is there anyone you go to for information/advice? Have a laugh with? Sound off to/shoulder to cry on? Practical help? Emergency? What about looking for a job – is there anyone there that you feel might be able to help?

How do you communicate - phone/mobile/face-to-face/letter/e-mail. What influences who you rely on for different things? Other sorts of 'community' than geographical – do you feel you belong to other communities? Which is more important? Do these communities change? Newcomers?

Has types of social networks/support changed over time? In what way? Why? Since leaving school? Being unemployed? Looking at people of own age who are working, do you think they have different types of social contacts/support? Are their relationships different? Ditto those still at school? Different for blokes and girls?

What do you do keep your social contacts going? Meeting new people? How? For what purpose? How easy?

Are there networks/communities/social activities that would like to join but feel that excluded? Looking at diagram, which people/relationships do you feel are completely positive? Any that have a constraining effect, set conditions, expectations, demand in return? Who has most influence on you? How has that changed over time, as you've got older?

Summary and looking forward

Balance between ties to and within locality and outside. Looking to future – where living? what doing? who in contact with? What will change when you get a job? Will things that are currently important to you in neighbourhood change? Will you be more/less involved in where you live? Will it get easier/harder being a young person in [locality]?

Interview guide for use with (lone) parents

Background

How long lived in the area. Home situation. Work situation. Health. Family – local/ not local? Ditto friends. Age.

General views of local community/neighbourhood/area

What's it like living round here? [Check boundaries & relevance of ward/estate boundaries?] Facilities - shops, schools, colleges, GP surgery/health centre, other facilities. Physical features – housing, rubbish, graffiti, vandalism, traffic, parking. Social features - much going on for children/teenagers/ people own age/older people? Clubs, formal events, informal events, pubs/places to meet. Services – education, council, health services, police.

What things in the neighbourhood are most important to you? (if you had a camera/ drew a map?) What do you like about the area? What don't you like? Any general problems?

How neighbourhood links to other areas

Transport generally. What transport you use, if any. Do you go outside the area? For what? Where? How do you get there? How easy is it? Did you travel more/less in the past? Where do you identify with most – e.g. [area] or [locality]?

'Community'

Going back to local neighbourhood, is this somewhere you enjoy living? What's it like bringing up children here? Would you say this was a 'community'? [meaning, identity, friendliness, reciprocity, support, trust, safety, privacy] Have you yourself received help or support? How has neighbourhood changed over the time you've lived here? How has neighbourhood changed over time? [What think it will be like in 5 years time?] Examples of local people rallying around an issue? What processes involved? Your part in process? Other examples?

How well do you feel people of different ages get on round here? Different backgrounds? How far do people trust each other? Crime – who affected? what kind? who responsible? How many people do you feel you know/know well round here? Limits of social exchanges/support? Are people nosy? Judgmental? Who has most say? Who gets left/feels on the outside? What is it like for newcomers? What is it like for people who have lived there a long time? Do you feel the opinion of others affects what you do? what you can do? what your child(ren) do/does? Perceptions of differences with other kinds of area – including rural. Were communities different in the past?

Getting things changed / stopping change

Is there anything that you would like to see changed around here? Any changes that have happened that you've not liked? Any changes that you've liked? Do you feel you have a say? Do you know who the local councillors are? Opportunities to influence decisions – as a group/individual. Examples? Would you get involved? What role do you think you would take? Do you usually

vote? (general election, local election, European election). Will you vote in the next election? Barriers/ encouragements to participation. Has this changed with being a parent?

Being a parent

Details of situation. What most like about being a parent. Things that are difficult – balancing, economic, responsibility, time for self. Different for men/women? Defining identity in different situations. Times and places when feel off-duty (who with, what doing).

Social life

Own social life. How much time to socialise? What kinds of things do you do? Changes over time? - age / changes in area / becoming a parent/ becoming a lone parent? What don't you do that you used to? What do you now do that didn't previously? What don't you do that you would like to? What influences what you do? (money/children/time/ working hours/ safety/confidence etc) Ditto what you don't do.

Supportive social networks

Who is important to you? Role of family that born into? Role of in-laws? Extent of contact with child's other parent?

What would you say makes a good friend? Is there anyone you go to for information/advice? Have a laugh with? Sound off to/shoulder to cry on? Practical help? Emergency? How do you communicate - phone/mobile/face-to-face/letter/e-mail. What influences who you rely on for different things? Check age profile and location of those on diagram. Other sorts of 'community' than geographical – do you feel you belong to other communities? Which is more important? Do these communities change? Newcomers?

Has types of social networks/support changed over time? In what way? Why? Since becoming a parent/lone parent? Looking at people of own age who don't have children, do you think they have different types of social contacts/support? Are their relationships different? Ditto people with children but parenting shared? Ditto different for men and women? Ditto different by age?

What do you do keep your social contacts going? Do you ever do things to try and meet new people? What do you do/have you done? For what purpose? How easy is it?

Are there networks/communities/social activities that would like to join but feel that excluded? Looking at diagram, which people/relationships do you feel are completely positive? Any that have a constraining effect, set conditions, expectations, demand in return? Who has most influence on you? How has that changed over time?

Summary and looking forward

Balance between ties to and within locality and outside. Looking to future – where living? what doing? who in contact with? What will change as child[ren] grow up and move out? Will things that are currently important to you in neighbourhood change? Will you be more/less involved in local affairs? Will it get easier/harder bringing up children in this area?

Interview guide for use with people with a disabling health condition / older interviewees

Background

How long lived in the area. Home situation. Work situation. Health. Family – local/ not local. Ditto friends. Age.

General views of local community/neighbourhood/area

What's it like living round here? [Check boundaries & relevance of ward/estate boundaries?] Facilities - shops, schools, colleges, GP surgery/health centre, other facilities. Physical features – housing, rubbish, graffiti, vandalism, traffic, parking. Social features - much going on for children/teenagers/ people own age/older people? Clubs, formal events, informal events, pubs/places to meet. Services – education, council, health services, police.

What things in the neighbourhood are most important to you? (if you had a camera/ drew a map?) What do you like about the area? What don't you like? Any general problems?

How neighbourhood links to other areas

Transport generally. What transport you use, if any. Do you go outside the area? For what? Where? How do you get there? How easy is it? Did you travel more/less in the past? Where do you identify with most – e.g. [area] or [locality]?

'Community'

Going back to local neighbourhood, is this somewhere you enjoy living? Would you say this was a 'community'? [meaning, identity, friendliness, reciprocity, support, trust, safety, privacy] Have you yourself received much support or help? How has neighbourhood changed over time? [What think it will be like in 5 years time?] Examples of local people rallying around an issue? What processes involved? Your part in process? Effect of health or other personal factors on extent of involvement. Other examples? How well do you feel people of different ages get on round here? Different backgrounds? How far do people trust each other? Crime – who affected? what kind? who responsible?

How many people do you feel you know/know well round here? Limits of social exchanges/support? Are people nosy? Judgmental? Who has most say? Who gets left/feels on the outside? What is it like for newcomers? What is it like for people who have lived there a long time? Do you feel the opinion/behaviour of others affects what you do? what you can do? Perceptions of differences with other kinds of area – including rural. Were communities different in the past?

Getting things changed / stopping change

Is there anything that you would like to see changed around here? Any changes that have happened that you've not liked? Any changes that you've liked? Do you feel you have a say? Do you know who the local councillors are?

Opportunities to influence decisions – as a group/individual. Examples? Would you get involved? What role do you think you would take? Do you usually vote? (general election, local election, European election) Will you vote in next

election? Barriers/ encouragements to participation. Has this changed with your health/disability?

Health problem / disability

History. Effects on daily life. Effects on family. Different for men/women? Defining identity in different situations. Times and places when feel as previously (who with, what doing)

Social life

Own social life. Changes over time? - age / changes in area / own health/disability? What don't you do that you used to? What do you now do that you didn't previously? What don't you do that you would like to? What influences what you do? (mobility/money/safety/confidence etc) Ditto what you don't do.

Supportive social networks

Who is important to you? Role of family and in-laws? What would you say makes a good friend? Who, if anyone, do you go to for information/advice? Have a laugh with? Sound off to? Practical help? Emergency? How do you communicate - phone/mobile/face-to-face/letter/e-mail. What influences who you rely on for different things? Check age profile and location of those on diagram. Role of statutory and voluntary services compared with informal. Other sorts of 'community' than geographical? Differences in importance? Do these communities change? Newcomers? Has types of social networks/support changed over time? In what way? Why? Since becoming disabled? Looking at others of own age who aren't disabled, do you think they have different types of social contacts/support? Different nature of relationships? Different for men and women? Different by age? What do you do keep your social contacts going? Do you ever do things to try and meet new people? What do you do/have you done? For what purpose? How easy is it? Are there networks/communities/social activities that would like to join but feel that excluded? Looking at diagram, which people/relationships do you feel are completely positive? Any that have a constraining effect, set conditions, expectations, demand in return? Who has most influence on you? How has that changed over time?

Summary

Balance between ties to and within locality and outside. Will things that are currently important to you in neighbourhood change? Will it get easier/harder for people with a disability / older people to live in this area?

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