# Social Capital in the Field: Researchers' Tales

Edited by Rosalind Edwards

With contributions from
Anne Gray; Sheila Henderson, Sheena McGrellis and Sue Sharpe;
Val Gillies; Susie Weller; Tracey Reynolds; Elisabetta Zontini;
Kanwal Mand; Venetia Evergeti; and Robert McAuley

# SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE FIELD: RESEARCHERS' TALES

Contributor notes


Rosalind Edwards is Professor in Social Policy and co-director of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group.

Venetia Evergeti is a research associate, attached to the Ethnicity strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group.

Val Gillies is a senior research fellow in the Intimacy strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Group, working on the 'Resources in parenting: access to capitals' project.

Anne Gray is a senior research fellow in the Education & Employment strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, working on the ' Family, social capital, education and labour markets' and 'Provision and deployment of care through family, mutual aid and local state' projects.

Sheila Henderson is a research associate, attached to the Intimacy strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, working on the 'Youth transitions and social change' project.

Kanwal Mand is a research fellow in the Ethnicity strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, working on the 'Households and family rituals' project.

Robert McAuley is a research fellow in the Education & Employment strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, working on the 'Social capital and higher education: bonding and bridging' project.

Sheena McGrellis is a senior research fellow in the Intimacy strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, working on the 'Youth transitions and social change project' and based on University of Ulster Magee.

Tracey Reynolds is a senior research fellow in the Ethnicity strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, working on the 'Families and young people's diasporic identities' project.

Sue Sharpe is a research associate, attached to the Intimacy strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, working on the 'Youth transitions and social change' project.

Susie Weller is a research fellow in the Education & Employment strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, working on the 'Locality, school and social capital' project.

Elisabetta Zontini is a senior research fellow in the Ethnicity strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, working on the 'Family care and provision in a transnational world' project.

Chapter 1

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE FIELD:
INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCHERS' TALES

Rosalind Edwards

Almost inevitably, at some stage in the course of conferences and meetings addressing the topic of social capital that I have attended, somebody will remark that we participants are building up our social capital. In other words, we are involved in the process of networking, making new contacts and reinforcing old ones, exchanging information, and generally using – or accumulating for potential use – social connections that will help maintain and advance our academic endeavours in various ways. And we are involved in these processes in a context where we understand the implicit, institutionalised norms about appropriate ways to behave in establishing and using these resources.

Researchers rarely venture beyond such ironic nod towards our activities, however. Social capital has become a topic of debate in academic circles (for example, Baron et al. 2000; Edwards et al. 2003; Field 2003; Fine 2000), in particular focusing on the work of James Coleman (1988, 1990), Pierre Bourdieu (1986, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and Robert Putnam (1993, 2000), each of whom has a different perspective on the constitution of social capital and its ramifications. For example, Coleman sees social capital basically as a property of individuals and as mitigating the effects of economic disadvantage in the development of human capital; Putnam similarly poses social capital as the redemptive driver for social cohesion and civic engagement, but conceives it at the level of a societal public good; while Bourdieu shares Coleman's interest in individuals as members of groups but conceptualises social capital as resources or assets derived from social connections that perpetuate (rather than remedy) social inequalities, and as interdependently linked to economic, cultural and other forms of capital. These explanations of social inequalities and their accompanying solutions have provided starting points for a whole gamut of research studies looking at the role and workings of social capital, spanning numerous substantive issues (families, health, delinquency, migration, economic development, lifelong learning, and so on), from a range of disciplinary perspectives (including sociology, economic, politics and psychology).

While researchers are keen to study the operation and possibilities of social capital for others, we do not appear to see analysing our own activities and experiences as able to tell us anything about social capital processes (except, notably, as part of Bourdieu's, 1988, wider examination of the French university system). Or rather, when we do turn the spotlight on ourselves to produce reflexive explorations of the research endeavour, we do not seem to address it in terms of utilising social capital in research relations. (Examples of the numerous edited collections and articles reflecting on the 'behind the scenes' progress of research projects include Bell and Roberts 1984; Renzetti and Lee 1993; Ribbens and Edwards 1998; and passim contributions to the International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory and Practice.) Yet, in order to carry out fieldwork especially, but also other aspects of the research process, researchers often need to cultivate and deploy social capital. This collection addresses such issues.

In a series of short reflexive papers, researchers involved with the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group programme of work (www.lsbu.ac.uk/families) draw on their research experiences to explore the ways that social capital is implicated in various projects that they have previously undertaken or with which they are currently engaged. Their reflections highlight and bring into question various aspects of the conceptualisation and operation of social capital. In particular,

there are explorations of the fungibility of social capital, its resources, trust and values; the nature of reciprocity and self-interest in social capital generation and maintenance; and the nature of bonding and bridging in social capital as this raises social identities. Issues of social class, age, ethnicity and gender are woven throughout.

Fungibility: resources, trust and values

Social capital fungibility, or its lack – that is, the extent to which it is transferable – has been a focus of attention. Both Coleman and Putnam have noted the limited fungibility of social capital. Social capital may be useful in some contexts but not in others, and it may be useful in those contexts for particular people but not be convertible into resources for others. The dynamics of fungibility, however, deserve further attention. Anne Gray (Chapter 2) reflects on fungibility in her overview of a number of areas in which social capital may be of use to researchers in their work – data gathering, information and advice, collaboration, funding and publication. As someone who has returned to an academic career after a break of some years, she notes the aspects of her social capital that were transferable from her previous mileux to the academic one in relation to these areas, and those where she has felt a lack of the sort of social capital that enables her to draw on her networks in order to understand the 'rules' of academic life, or even to be sure with whom she should be developing connections.

Specifically in relation to fieldwork, Val Gillies (Chapter 4) notes the way that her ability to 'snowball' among her longstanding White working class networks to provide interviewees for research is not fungible, in that she has not been able to 'pass on' this resource to other researchers attempting to draw on her as a social capital resource in this respect. Susie Weller's (Chapter 5) experiences also raise the question of time in social capital fungibility. Researching in a rural community in which she had grown up meant that Susie was easily able to gain access to her previous school as a case study research site, re-kindling relationships established in the past, but she also needed to nurture relationships in the present in order to conduct the fieldwork itself. Thus 'weaker ties' may sustain enough fungible social capital over time for the purpose of access, but this is not necessarily fungible into the stronger ties for the purpose of actual participation in research. Both Val and Susie refer to the importance of trust in this fungibility.

Trust is regarded as a key component of social capital (albeit implicit in Bourdieu's work, as opposed to an explicit feature of Coleman's and Putnam's), as attributes of individuals, groups and institutions, and as particularised or generalised – although whether trust is regarded as a source, process or outcome of social capital is subject to debate. Putnam argues that it is the least fungible aspect of social capital. Again, however, as indicated above, this may well be specific in relation to both strength of ties, related to place and purpose. Venetia Evergeti (Chapter 9) details how, in her attempts to gain access to a Turkish minority village in Greece, in the UK she was able to move from Turkish friends, who acted as sponsors for her – as trustworthy – to a particular student originally from such a village, and thence to Greece to stay with the student's family. Once in Greece, in the field, however, Venetia had to be far more active in establishing trust within the wider community in which she was staying and researching. The fungibility of trust evident in her social capital enabled cross-national access was not easily extendable into the local context in which more sustained involvement was required on the part of research subjects, and more sustained interactions with them on the part of the researcher.

Norms and values other than trust – where shared norms among social networks and the sanctioning of those holding values outside of these are seen as aspects of social capital – may also be subject to conversion or transfer difficulties. For example, Val Gillies (Chapter 4) describes her awkward negotiation of the different norms and values sanctioned among her White working

class networks and those predominant in the (middle class, institutional) academic endeavour. Knowledge of norms and values can be important in ability to utilise social capital. Kanwal Mand (Chapter 9), for instance, notes the expected reciprocal activities that she engaged in order to establish herself as someone who understood the traditions and cultural practices of a Sikh transmigrant, in the interests of the recipients' involvement in her research, but both she and Elisabetta Zontini (Chapter 7) also note the disadvantages for researchers of being treated and judged according to supposedly shared, gendered cultural values and assumptions.

Reciprocity and self-interest

Social capital is said to work because it involves mutual collaboration and the expectation of reciprocity – another key normative of the concept. People do things for each other in the expectation and trust that, at some time, these actions will be repaid. This is an iterative view of the generation and maintenance of social capital. Sheila Henderson, Sheena McGrellis and Sue Sharpe (Chapter 3) demonstrate the accumulative and reciprocal aspects of social capital, in their overview of accessing and maintaining the ongoing sample for the unique longitudinal study of young people in which they are involved. The researchers developed the good relationships that initially provided them with resources such as access and interview space, as well as relationships with the young people themselves. They also maintain their networks in, and thus knowledge of, locally based areas, which enable them to follow-up young people. Young people themselves can use their own social capital to provide resources for the researchers, such as interview space and useful contacts. And the researchers and research project have become a form of social capital for the young people, providing information and advice, or simply a resource to cite on their CV.

Social capital theorists often work with an underlying model of rational, self-interested action – people engage in the reciprocity inherent in social capital because they believe that they will gain from so doing. Bourdieu adds to this the ways that social capital is used to sustain privilege at the expense of the disadvantaged and marginalized. For researchers, this can lead to concerns about the ethics of utilising, or exploiting, their social capital in order to pursue their research agenda. For example, Val Gillies (Chapter 4) considers the dilemmas and responsibilities involved in drawing on her networks in one, personal mileux in order to represent them in another, academic field. Similarly, Elisabetta Zontini (Chapter 7) details how she engaged in reciprocal exchanges and particular presentations of self with research gatekeepers and participants to generate trust and commitment to her and her research. She notes how this could make her uneasy about the exploitation involved in such instrumental approaches, although she also saw the reciprocity that she was engaged in as a way of 'giving back' to her research participants.

Indeed, the model of self-interest leaves aside the affective side of social capital. In this respect, Robert McAuley (Chapter 10) discusses his experiences of using his own social capital to access undergraduates for his study of social capital in higher education. Working within a theoretical framework that stresses the ontological insecurity of late modernity and concomitant diminishment of social and civic responsibility, and seeing himself as a product of this time, Robert describes his shift from viewing social capital merely as a resource to be used for self-interested ends (as he felt he was doing in calling upon an old friendship for initial access to research participants), to appreciating and experiencing the transcendent process of the deeper social relations underpinning such manifestations of instrumentalism. This has led him to question how we can understand and 'get at' social capital as researchers.

Bonding and bridging social capital

Distinctions are often made between 'bonding' and 'bridging' forms in discussions of social capital. Putnam, for example, characterises the bonding form of social capital as based on homogeneous ties of solidarity ('people like us'), while bridging social capital operates across heterogeneous social and cultural difference. For Putnam, it is the bridging form that is of benefit in generating social capital rich regions and nations. In contrast, Coleman is largely concerned with advocating the benefits of bonding social capital, in local communities. Bourdieu can also be said to be concerned with bonding social capital, in his concern with the exclusionary reproduction of elite privilege. Woolcock (1998) has also added the form of 'linking' social capital, which is intended to capture hierarchical social and organisational relations. Interestingly, rather than bonding only with like others, social researchers in the field often need to 'bridge' or 'link' from a position of relative privilege across to people who are disadvantaged and marginalized in society. Crucially, the notion of these various forms of social capital integrally raises issues of identity in its ideas of, respectively, exclusive similarity and inclusive diversity. What constitutes 'like us' and 'not like us'? The complexity of this has barely begun to be addressed in the social capital literature, which tends to rely on static, simplisitic and ascribed characteristics such as social class and ethnicity.

The contributions to this collection that focus on social class, age and, especially, ethnicity highlight this complexity around identity. Tracey Reynolds (Chapter 6) and Elisabetta Zontini (Chapter 7), for example, note the fluidity of identity afiliation constructions that they engaged in, in accessing and establishing rapport with research participants, respectively around various aspects of British Caribbean, and Italian and Italian regional, connections.

A cosy and fixed notion of ethnic bonding is also challenged in Tracey's discussion. She recounts the way that her bonding endeavours in accessing research participants through gatekeepers, based on shared racial and cultural identity through her position as a second generation British-born Caribbean female, were contingent rather than cohesive. While this provided her with an entrée and familiarity with how to negotiate with gatekeepers in Caribbean community organisations in the UK, it also provided her with the knowledge that 'bonding' in terms of ethnic origin alone would not be enough to ensure access. Her gatekeepers demanded evidence of other aspects of her identity before they would use their own social capital to give Tracey access to research participants – that she should lay open her personal life and political commitment to the Black community.

The contingent and complex nature of what constitutes 'one of us' is also evident in Susie Weller's (Chapter 5) discussion. She had a 'bonding' research strategy, in that she tried to establish knowledge and similarities in terms of the locality, her case study school and its norms, and the pupils she was researching. While this strategy was successful in some ways, it was also compromised by time. Susie may have once been a pupil at the school herself, but the children themselves did not see her completely as 'one of us' or always share her remembered view of the locality in which they lived. The issue of place in forms of social capital is taken further by Kanwal Mand (Chapter 8). In particular, she calls into question the mainstream focus on closed networks and bounded communities and regions in mainstream social capital work, through her use of trans-national social capital.

Conclusion

Although I have attempted to separate out some aspects of the contributors' discussions of social capital in the field in this collection, into features of fungibility, reciprocity, and bonding and bridging, it is evident in some aspects of my discussion above, and especially in the contributions

themselves, that all these features are interconnected.  Within this, contextual issues such as time, identity, place and purpose have also emerged as important in the activation of social capital. There are also other aspects of social capital that can be drawn out of their discussions, features that have remained more muted, such as material and structural conditions, and the 'darker' divisive and oppressive side of social capital.

Indeed, it is the complexity of conceptions of social capital that make it an interesting – and a much debated – way of thinking about social relations, potentially allowing for analyses that go beyond each of the specific components.  Such interconnections and the explanatory distinctiveness of social capital, however, need to be established and explored through empirical investigation.  If social capital is a useful way of understanding how society works and the way people live their lives, then reflections about the dimensions of social capital and how they are played out in the research process potentially can be just as enlightening as the more usual investigations of research subjects' networks, associations, norms, values and activities.

References

Baron, S., Field, J. and Schuller, T. (eds) (2000) Social Capital: Critical Perspectives, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Bell, C. and Roberts, H. (eds) (1984) Social Researching: Politics, Problems and Practice, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The forms of capital' in J.E. Richardson (ed.) Handbook of Theory for Research in the Sociology of Education, Westport CT: Greenwood Press.
Bourdieu, P. (1988) Homo Academicus, Cambridge: Polity Press.
Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992) An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Coleman, J.S. (1988) 'Social capital in the creation of human capital', American Journal of Sociology, 94, Supplement S95-120.
Coleman, J.S. (1990) Foundations of Social Theory, London: Harvard University Press.
Edwards, R., Franklin, J. and Holland, J. (2003) Families and Social Capital: Exploring the Issues, Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group Working Paper No. 1, London: London South Bank University.
Field, J. (2003) Social Capital, London: Routledge.
Fine, B. (2000) Social Capital Versus Social Theory: Political Economy and Social Science at the Turn of the Millennium, London: Routledge.
Putnam, R.D. with Leonardi, R. and Nanetti, R. (1993) Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Putnam, R.D. (2000) Bowling Alone – The Collapse and Revival of American Community, New York: Simon & Schuster.
Renzetti, C.M. and Lee, R.M. (eds) (1993) Researching Sensitive Topics, London: Sage.
Ribbens, J. and Edwards, R. (eds) (1998) Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives, London: Sage.
Woolcock, M. (1998) 'Social capital and economic development: towards a theoretical synthesis and policy framework', Canadian Journal of Policy Research, 2:1, 1-17.

Chapter 2

THE SOCIAL CAPITAL OF SOCIAL RESEARCHERS

Anne Gray

Social capital may be of use to researchers in any of the following areas of their work:-
1. Gaining access to data, in particular to sampling frames and to groups of people for research work.
2. Gaining access to expertise, that is, to colleagues who may inform, inspire and pass helpful comments on writings or research proposals.
3. Finding research partners for collaborative projects.
4. Identifying sources of funding and working up funding proposals.
5. Finding sympathetic publishers and obtaining knowledge about suitable outlets for publication.

Returning to the academic system in my 50s after many years in public administration and research consultancy, I found myself well-endowed in areas 3 and 4, rather short of contacts in relation to areas 2 and 5, and with only a narrow range of highly specialised contacts in area 1. As a returner, particularly returning at first to a rather small department oriented towards policy practitioners and consultancy, I found my experience and contacts very different from that of younger researchers who had worked continuously in universities throughout their PhD and post-doctoral phases. Making and raising money seemed easy; feeling part of an intellectual community and getting my work published and recognised was a hard, highly competitive grind.

By way of background, my rather curious career left the academic system in the late 1970s after completing a PhD and lecturing for three years. I moved into local authority work, then to working in an African civil service, back to the UK and another local authority, and then into research consultancy on local economic development and increasingly on labour market issues. I became politically very engaged with the plight of unemployed people and their increasingly harsh treatment at the hands of governments bent on shrinking benefits and imposing workfare-type obligations. This led me to attend a number of conferences uniting trade unionists and social movements of the unemployed, and to take three short 'sabbaticals' to write pamphlets about policies affecting unemployed people. I began to be invited to speak at social movement events and was acknowledged as an activist by unemployed people's groups.

My arrival at South Bank University in 1998 was a serendipitous result of the social capital I acquired in these circles. At one of the unemployed people's conferences I had met a trade union research officer who later supported me and various friends in writing one pamphlet; we met regularly at his office and he supplied us with numerous helpful documents. During this work, he mentioned that he had been invited to speak at a conference in France, but wanted someone to replace him because of family commitments. He asked me to take his place to talk on UK labour market policy and the forthcoming plans for the New Deal. In the audience was a French academic who was in the course of drafting an application to the European Commission for research funding. She needed a British partner, and asked me to join their application. I was greatly surprised when, a few months later, we secured a three-year research grant. There followed my negotiation with Irene Bruegel and the Local Economy Policy Unit (LEPU) at South Bank, and in December 1998 I left consultancy employment and became established in a part-time post at the University, to research unemployed benefit systems, welfare to work policies and the 'precarious' labour market as part of a four-country team.

Another serendipitous contact came my way the following summer, through chatting to a staff member of the Equalities Commission for Northern Ireland at a conference at Middlesex University. This led to a tender invitation for a consultancy contract; Irene and I wrote a proposal and in due course secured enough funding to substantially increase my hours. On nearing completion of our report on tax credit issues, it was easy to get a further contract with the same funders, this time on childcare in Northern Ireland. These examples illustrate the importance of conference contacts for networking which leads to funding opportunities.

Contacts I made through the political meetings circuit were very helpful in gaining access to places where unemployed people could be found for interview. In 1997 I was invited to speak to a meeting organised by the Trades Council in Bradford, where I met people who were later able to arrange access to a New Deal training centre there and to an unemployed workers' centre in Chesterfield. Travelling by train to this meeting, I found myself sitting next to a former political acquaintance whom I had not seen since 1978, and it took some time for us to recognise each other. It turned out he was now on the management board of an unemployed workers' centre in Lowestoft. So when I began my research with unemployed people, I turned to him for contacts there and in Norwich, adding two more research areas to my list. A further speaking engagement led to a contact with the unemployed workers' centre in Brighton which provided another focus for my fieldwork.

Unfortunately this range of contacts has been too specific and too narrow to help gain access to members of the public for my current research on families and social capital. Although I have some valuable contacts with voluntary sector groups in Newham through previous consultancy work, I have no particularly suitable networks through which to find individual Londoners for interview about time use and care issues (Gray 2003). With no family now in the UK, and friends concentrated in a narrow range in terms of both occupation and age, I am perhaps less well endowed with useful contacts amongst families than if I had ever been a mother myself or had a large extended family in London.

In terms of contacts with other researchers and with well-published academics, I find that being a 'returner' to the academic system poses some problems. A young research fellow with a more conventional career pattern would have a network of scholars connected to her former department, postgraduate peer-group, lecturers and so on. But many of my former teachers have passed into the next world. I am barely in touch with any of my colleagues and fellow-students of over 30 years ago in Scotland; distance, my temporary emigration, and different occupational milieux having divided us. My many contacts in the consultancy and policy development worlds were useful people when it came to organising seminars at LEPU, but rather less so when trying to embed oneself in a more theoretical field. It seems to me that the passage from PhD student to post-doctoral research fellow conveys various forms of social capital which the 'returner' lacks. One is the shared and up-to-date understanding of academic practices and procedures, from the arcane mysteries of the RAE to the style and tone of refereeing journal papers. To share these knowledges conveys an advantage in the networking stakes, a form of cultural capital akin to Bourdieu's examples of common expectations about food and music amongst French élites (Bourdieu 1984). Another is a kind of social map of well-known researchers in one's field; people who to me are little more than names in journals are often, for the cognoscenti, faces they have met at conferences or parties, complete with an account of their current work in progress, of who knows whom, and of where they worked in the past. Hence also the risk, as a returner, of a relative deficit in social capital of the fifth kind, 'leads' towards academic publication. These perhaps come more easily to people with a continuous academic involvement, through joint papers with senior colleagues, who may in turn 'promote' their former PhD students as candidates to write book chapters, or to contribute to conference sessions and special issues of journals. The rootless

'returner' must instead fire random shots into the bush; sending material to unknown conference organisers and journal editors without benefit of 'cover' from joint work with well-known figures. I cannot complain that editors ever rejected my submissions, but they have usually asked for substantial revisions, often reflecting my lack of the 'cultural capital' of the more recent PhD student concerning journal style. (No consultancy-style bullet points, arguments pegged to accepted theoretical frameworks however apparently distracting, references just so.) Nonetheless I have benefited on occasions from people having put my name forward for conference sessions, mainly people I originally met in non-academic circles.

My experience is that sociologists are more willing to share their social capital than some other professional groups. They do not hog contacts and 'tips' as many consultants or journalists tend to do; rather, there is an expectation of sharing and mutual help. Nor do they display the professional exclusivity of economists, who sometimes seem to test each other's possession of an almost priestly expertise through jokes and commentaries on events, maintaining not only an intellectual 'distinction' but affirming their faith in the predominant (neo-classical) paradigm. Sociology, as a discipline which is open to others, and which acknowledges a plurality of paradigms, is refreshing in its lack of boundaries or of intellectual orthodoxies.

References

Bourdieu, P. (1984) Distinction : A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Gray, A. (2003) Towards a Conceptual Framework for Studying Time and Social Capital, Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group Working Paper No. 3, London: London South Bank University.

Chapter 3

CAPITALISING ON BOTH SIDES:
EXPERIENCES IN A LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH PROJECT

Sheila Henderson, Sheena McGrellis and Sue Sharpe

Introduction

As the fieldworkers involved in an ongoing longitudinal qualitative project of young peoples' transitions to adulthood since 1999, we can reflect on a variety of experiences of accessing, meeting up with, and interviewing research participants. In this piece we describe aspects of our own use of social capital in sample access and maintenance, the young people's experiences of potential attainment of social capital, and how the research process can serve in some cases to provide social capital for the researcher.

The study

Located in five sites of varying characteristics (four in England, and one in a Northern Ireland city), the Inventing Adulthoods study (called 'Fast Forward') was initially funded for three years but was extended for a further three years under the Families & Social Capital programme. It drew on the sample and methods of a large scale study of children's moral values conducted between 1996 and 1999 (the 'Respect Project'). (Details of both studies can be found on www.lsbu.ac.uk/fahs/ff). Each of these stages (here referred to as a whole as 'the project') were funded by the ESRC. To date, the young people involved have been followed up and interviewed up to five times during this period about all aspects of their lives.

In such a longitudinal study, the type and amount of social capital that we might need and use to pursue the young people as time goes by is significant, and more than is necessary for a single period project. Over the course of the project, knowledge of each young person's social and personal networks has become increasingly valuable for sample maintenance and in building a more complete picture of their lives. Such networks, relationships, and other aspects of what is regarded as 'social capital', have made a crucial contribution, both for us as researchers and for the young people as participants. We have drawn on our own resources, networks and connections to facilitate our research, and the young people have benefited by using their involvement in the project as a way of expanding their network base and adding to their own resources (Thomson and Holland 2003; Thomson 2003).

Access

The initial access to young people for the Respect Project was made through schools located in the five sites, but as the Fast Forward Project progressed, the contact relationship between the researcher and young person became more, or totally, independent from the school, and more focussed on individual arrangements, sometimes facilitated by other family members.

School networks
Good relationships with schools and teachers, particularly in the early stages of the research, contributed positively to sample maintenance. Gaining the support of the school secretary became an important resource in accessing changed contact addresses or telephone numbers, as well as providing space within the school for interview. As the study progressed the role of schools became

less central, and the individual relationship between researcher and participant became increasingly important in maintaining a stable sample over time. The research data and contact information has been coordinated and centralised at London South Bank University by a project researcher. From here we also keep in touch with the young people via regular newsletters. However, the nature, frequency and success of additional contact between individual researchers and young people varies across each site.

Parents

Parents were often a key point of interim contact with young people and this role increased as the interview location shifted away from school. They helped in making space available within the home for interviewing. Parents also volunteered information on the young people – what they were doing at school, at work, and possible concerns they had for them. A number of mothers were eager to try and discuss the difficulties of bringing up teenagers, and one family insisted on including the researcher in a family dinner after the interview. While mainly facilitating access, in some cases parents blocked their child's participation through concern that this would distract them from schoolwork.

Interview venues

These have changed over time, increasingly becoming a negotiation between both parties. Some young people still opt to be interviewed at school although they have left, and a positive relationship built up between the researcher and the school teacher or secretary involved facilitates this access. This link person is often interested and pleased that the young person is still taking part in a university research project. Other venues include university rooms; their own homes; their work space; or a public space of their choice such as a coffee bar. Researchers have found young people sometimes helpful in using their own contacts to find a suitable place, for example, upstairs in a coffee bar where one young man used to be manager.

Sample maintenance

Various strategies of communication have proved useful in maintaining sample contact, as well as the social or individual characteristics that the young person brings to the project, such as level of family stability, and their own communication styles and personal values.

Communication

The increased use of mobile phones has had a double-edged effect (Henderson et al. 2003), enabling us to communicate directly with the young people while their number remained stable, but contributing to frustration and lost contact as their numbers changed or phones were lost. This was particularly the case during the earlier stages of the project when pay-as-you-go phones were most popular. Text messaging has proved useful in arranging advance interviews with regular reminders, and for some young people, e-mail.

Social class

So far it has been generally easier to maintain contact with young people from middle class backgrounds than working class. However, this was mainly because of the relative stability of their families and homes. But there was a difference in locations and environments in that the more stable working class sample in London were easier to maintain contact with than those from families living in the disadvantaged area in the north of England.

Location and style of contact

Each researcher was responsible for maintaining contact with the young people in one or two of the sites. Having a member of the research team living near the research sites helped to minimise attrition and increase local knowledge. In Northern Ireland, for example, a line of enquiry on one young man resulted in the knowledge that he worked in a bar 'somewhere' in town. This venue was eventually traced through an independent contact and a few weeks and telephone calls later, an interview was arranged. By contrast, the outer city estate site was the most geographically distant from the researcher responsible and despite good contacts in, and knowledge of the area, it has been harder to use these resources successfully and attrition here has been much higher.

Furthermore, there have been times when the researchers have felt a lack of social capital, for instance, the researcher in Northern Ireland perceived her own community background to be disadvantageous when working in areas where she felt she was, or was perceived to be, an outsider.

How each researcher keeps in touch with the participants they are responsible for depends in part on their personal style, and choice of methods, such as e-mails, birthday cards, phone calls, text messages. But it also involves them all keeping some kind of balance in the research relationship, so that there is enough, but not too much involvement.

The young peoples' experiences

> I'm glad to be a part of it you know because like it's ... it's, like, as if somebody wants to hear about my life, you know?  It's like 'Hmm I'm not as boring as I thought I was' ... I mean like it's doing good, you know?

The young people too have reflected on their experiences of being involved in the project. Some described feelings of being 'special', being selected for the project as giving them positive sense of themselves and self-confidence in an interviewing situation; and sometimes improving their status with peers. Others focused on the emotional benefits of being able to talk about personal areas of their lives to someone in confidence (even though it is not a therapeutic situation):

> You can talk to someone, like it's like personal but it's impersonal at the same time ... It's a kind of like release for certain things really that you wouldn't normally say to your mates, your mum and dad and all that - so it's pretty good.

Some have cited the project in their CV when applying for university or other courses/jobs. For those coming for interview to a university site, visiting the campus and making an academic link was clearly enjoyable and possibly prestigious.

The ethical guidelines we followed over the course of the study precluded active intervention in the lives of the young people. However, sometimes research participants asked for, or could clearly benefit by, information and advice related to their situation. With the development of an open and trusting relationship this information could be passed on and followed up by the young person if appropriate or desired. For example, concerns about a young single mother struggling with the reality of unplanned motherhood prompted the researcher to give her information about a local personal development and back-to-education course for young mothers.

For some, the nature of their ongoing success or failure in life affected whether or not they wished to participate, for example, one young woman was reluctant to meet when things were going badly,

but keen to tell the researcher when they went well; conversely one young man's upward trajectory meant that he left the project behind.

Overview

Research is an intervention and potentially a resource. There is evidence that for some young people the research was deployed as a sign of distinction, by others as a means to access some of the cultural capital associated with the university environment. It could also be argued that in providing an environment for self-reflection and construction of a narrative of self, research was also productive of cultural capital (Skeggs 2002) for those who used it in this way.

The longitudinal nature of the study and the demand to maintain contact and commitment with young people over time demanded that researchers engage with young people's lives in such a way that made practices of sociability and the operation of several networks visible. There is no clear divide between cultural/social capital and other forms of capital. The finding that middle class young people are often easier to maintain contact with reflects both the more stable quality of their lives, but also that parents sought to facilitate their involvement in the research, the view that it is good for their CV, their studies etc. The ease with which researchers were able to maintain contact with particular samples also draws attention to the quality of their social capital (contacts, local knowledge, and availability) in relation to that particular site.

Sometimes the researchers have been able to increase their own social capital through the research process. Building relationships with young people in the project has led to useful connections with people in their broader network circle – youth and community workers, for example. In this context it gave the researcher returning to Northern Ireland a quick and useful update on the changing face of the social scene in her area, which she could then use for this and other ends.

When thinking about fieldwork it becomes clear that researcher's own social capital is highly relevant. This includes having the contacts negotiate access to settings/sites, and to research participants; as well as the skills to maintain research relationships. It is also possible to think in terms of an exchange of social capital between researchers and researched, with participants potentially both gaining resources for themselves as well as providing resources for researchers.

<div align="center">References</div>

Henderson, S., Taylor, R. and Thomson, R. (2003) 'In touch: young people and the mobile phone', in M.J. Kehily and J. Swann (eds) Children's Cultural Worlds, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd./The Open University (Book 3 of the Open University Course U212 Childhood).
Skeggs, B. (2002) 'Techniques for telling the reflexive self', in T. May (ed.) Qualitative Research In Action, London: Sage.
Thomson, R. (2003) 'When will I see you again? Strategies for interviewing over time', paper presented at 'Reflexive methodologies: interviewing revisited', Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, October 30-31.
Thomson, R. and Holland, J. (2003) 'Hindsight, foresight and insight: the challenges of longitudinal qualitative research', in R. Thomson, L. Plumridge and J. Holland (eds) 'Longitudinal Qualitative Research', Special Issue of International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 6, 3: 233-244.

Chapter 4

RESEARCHING THROUGH WORKING CLASS PERSONAL NETWORKS:
ISSUES AND DILEMMAS IN BRIDGING DIFFERENT WORLDS

Val Gillies

Despite enduring positivist fantasies about neutral, objective knowledge collection, researchers are both physically embodied and socially embedded in the worlds they study. This inevitable situatedness restricts movement through social space, ensuring relatively unproblematic access to some arenas, while barring or confining entry to others. Social contacts are often key in maximising fieldwork opportunities, enabling researchers to reach particular populations, engender their trust and persuade them to participate in studies. However, relying on personal contacts can generate complexities and dilemmas which are rarely acknowledged or written about. In the following discussion I will consider the consequences of including members of my own White, working class social networks in my research, and will focus in particular on the practical, ethical and personal implications of utilizing this form of social capital.

Social capital in the field: benefits and complexities

Over the past decade my working class background and social contacts have played a valuable role in my research work. They have ensured me relatively easy access to individuals who are commonly under (or mis) represented in academic studies and they have also shaped my particular interest in families who experience social and material marginalisation. Culturally dominant representations of working class parents as pathologically different and morally questionable generate an understandable wariness of research scrutiny amongst these communities. However, my longstanding personal locatedness within a particular network has enabled me to bypass, or at least diminish this mistrust. 'Snowballing' techniques have been central to this approach, with my attempts to reach interviewees relying on the willingness of my friends to introduce me and vouch for me to others. This has often been facilitated by familiarity, with interviewees remembering me from weddings, Christenings, family parties and other social events where my intimate connectedness to particular networks has been visible. Realisation of the significance of such personal ties in terms of fieldwork only dawned when I tried, unsuccessfully, to access other marginalised (non-White) communities. The limits of my snowballing capacity were also highlighted when I tried to work through my social contacts on behalf of another researcher. I discovered that, while I could vouch for her as trustworthy, my friends could not and would not.

Having this kind of privileged access to particular individuals through personal networks brings complications and responsibilities as well as benefits. When interviewing people linked to your own social circle you invariably bring background knowledge to the situation that you would not otherwise have. This knowledge can aid the flow of the interview and facilitate rapport, but it can also introduce an extra interpretive dimension, contextualising and sometimes provoking doubts over versions of events as they are told. Working out how best to accommodate and justify such 'inside', personal perspectives within the research framework can be tricky, particularly if the contextualising information is identifying and or confidential. Interviewing more than one member of a family or network can compound this dilemma, often by introducing multiple, conflicting accounts which have to be actively interpreted (Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2003).

It has also been suggested that personal attachments to interviewees may invite over-identification with their lives, leading to the imposition of assumptions and misinterpretations which 'steal the

words out of their mouths' (Reay 1996). I would argue that all researchers are personally invested and partial in their interpretations, whatever their relationship to the interviewee (Bordo 1990), but (as with any research) conscious reflexivity to achieve an emotional and critical distance is essential to avoid over-simplistic appropriation. As Valerie Hey notes 'research is always at some level about seeking and in part claiming an understanding of the other' (Hey 2000: 161). In studying individuals from within my social network I am not asserting any special warrant on the grounds of empathy or interpersonal affinity, but am attempting to hear, interpret and produce analytical accounts of lived experience. Yet any effort to give research participants a 'voice', either by translating their views or by speaking out on their behalf, reflects the researcher's interpretation, which is inevitably grounded in their own subjective and material reality. Consequently, I remain aware that the research I produce only ever tells a personal and partial story about the lives of the people I have studied (Griffin 1996).

Mediating between different worlds

The 'inside' knowledge and assumptions that are brought to an interview are often challenged by particular insights gained during the research encounter. This can be problematic if revelations relate to members of the researcher's social network. Principles of confidentiality need to be upheld, but this necessitates great care in social situations to ensure you remember what you are not supposed to know outside the research context. This is actually more difficult than it might seem, especially when considerable time has elapsed and alcohol is flowing. Also maintaining a silence about a particular research encounter can sometimes be viewed as provocative. Research ethics that academics take for granted are often not shared or respected in more personal contexts. Refusal to discuss the contents of an interview may be incomprehensible to relations and friends who feel they have a close and trusted relationship with the research participant (as well as the researcher). I was once accused of pomposity by a friend because I had interviewed her sister and would not disclose what was said about a particular incident. The indignant response of my friend derived from her conviction that her sister would not tell me anything that would be kept secret from her. While my friend may have been right, from my perspective confidentiality in this context was sacred and to breech it would have been an unforgivable betrayal. My mumbled references to 'rules of the job' did little to diffuse my friend's anger and merely compounded this uncomfortable incompatibility between my personal and academic worlds.

Such occasional cultural collisions are inevitable given the huge gap between the formal, middle class principles that underpin academic research and the everyday lived experiences and values of my working class social contacts. A consequence of moving into higher education has been my gradual detachment from the day-to-day context which frames the lives of my family and longstanding friends. Much of my everyday life is orientated towards academic tasks that do not translate well into the language and culture I grew up with. Given its potential to become a source of alienating difference I rarely discuss my work in any detail with my working class friends and am rarely asked about it. During fieldwork, however, I have been able to mediate between personal and academic arenas with relative ease. Friends can recognise and engage with my interest in a particular topic, like step-families, teenagers or mothering and will often suggest contacts and negotiate my introductions. They are, however, invariably uncurious about what develops from the interviews. This disinterest marks the site of another cultural mismatch, where the ethical obligation of the researcher to keep participants informed clashes with a less reverential perception of research as personally immaterial. This disparity was humiliatingly played out in my early years as a researcher when my attempts to feed back findings to my interviewees inspired either polite indifference, gently mocking humour, or in the case of one harassed lone mother, irritated exasperation.

Nevertheless, interviewees I reach through personal contacts often place considerable faith in me and risk the disclosure of highly sensitive information. A situation which an interviewee might experience as an intimate but fleeting conversation leaves a permanent trace in the form of a tape recording or transcript, and the responsibility of holding such information can be quite intimidating. Although confessions and harrowing experiences may emerge during the course of any qualitative interview, they have a different significance if the researcher is situated within the same network. The researcher's locatedness may generate particular trust and confidence, yet there is also an increased potential for information to accidentally leak into this very personal arena.

I am acutely aware of my responsibilities in this respect and have frequently agonised over the implications of using certain accounts or experiences in my research. On one occasion my anxiety rose so high that I taped over an extract from an interview, feeling that the described incident was too risky to for me to keep on record. On other occasions my dilemmas have focused on how to sufficiently anonymise experiences or relationships for writing up purposes. The huge gulf between everyday working class lives and the abstract, academic context in which most research dissemination takes place offers some protection, but risks are unavoidable when real experiences enter a public domain. There are no clear cut directions to follow in these circumstances and there are many factors to weigh up including the potential wider impact of an interviewee being identified, their own thoughts and feelings on the matter and the extent to which a protective disguise might be applied without distorting the research interpretation. Ultimately though, I have to rely on subjective judgement and live with the responsibility this entails.

Ethical standpoints and personal investments

These issues feed into wider debates about the ethics of researching amongst your own social networks and more specifically the concern that this practice constitutes a form of exploitation. I have thought carefully about this, and would argue that while the potential for me to do harm exists (as with any research), the benefits more generally outweigh the risks. Academics have traditionally studied the working class subject from the safe distance that privilege affords, drawing on value judgements which reinforce their own superiority and tell us more about middle class projections than they do about working class lives (Walkerdine 1996).  My education and salary mean I can no longer claim to be working class, but enduring emotional social connections drive my commitment to highlight real life experiences of marginalisation. These connections are not assertions of my special insight or authenticity, but for me they do invoke a responsibility to challenge frameworks of knowledge which reproduce inequality and injustice through their representation of working class experience. As a researcher I have the ability to speak for others and a personally felt obligation to use this power to good effect, and I would argue this is often best achieved by drawing on my own social networks.

Having constructed such an apparently noble justification it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge how I have benefited personally from my social capital. That highlighting experiences of hardship and struggle has furthered my academic career is something I have never lost sight of. Guilt and discomfort at this irony can generate a desire to over-emphasise the impact of research, and although it would be gratifying to present myself as selflessly conducting research to highlight and confront injustice, the reality is considerably less admirable. As an academic researcher I am precariously positioned, dependent on middle class/institutional social capital and thereby to some extent personally invested in reproducing structures of privilege. While I am committed to exploring marginalisation, my work is heavily shaped and contained by institutional demands and expectations. As Liz Stanley (1990) notes, those engaged in theory and research may be orientated towards a political aim of critiquing and changing the social world, yet in order to pursue this goal personal investments must be made in the academic mode of production. Nevertheless,

the realisation that research is inevitably grounded in wider frameworks of privilege and disadvantage does not detract from the crucial role I feel it can play in identifying and challenging dominant representations through which power is exercised and oppression maintained.

To conclude, a number of instrumental, personal and political factors have shaped my decisions to access interviewees through my own social circle. These contingent judgements involve more than an immediate evaluation of risks and benefits, but also include a broader consideration of what it would mean not to draw on my personal working class networks. On balance I would argue that bypassing this form of social capital would only serve to make me complicit in further marginalising working class perspectives and experiences.

References

Bordo, S. (1990) 'Feminist, postmodernism, and gender-scepticism'. in L.J. Nicholson (ed.) Feminism/Postmodernism, New York: Routledge.

Griffin, C. (1996) '"See whose face it wears": difference, otherness and power', in S. Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger (eds) Representing the Other, Sage: London.

Hey, V. (2000) 'Troubling the auto/biography of the questions: re/thinking rapport and the politics of social class in feminist participant observation, genders and sexualities', Educational Ethnography, 3, 16-183.

Reay, D. (1996) 'Insider perspectives or stealing the words out of women's mouths, Feminist Review, 53, Summer, 57-73.

Ribbens McCarthy J., Holland J. and Gillies V. (2003) 'Multiple perspectives on the family lives of young people: methodological and theoretical issues in case study research', Journal of Social Research Methodology, 6 (1), 1-23.

Stanley, L. (1990) 'An editorial introduction', in L. Stanley (ed.) Feminist Praxis, Routledge: London.

Walkerdine, V. (1996) 'Working class women: psychological and social aspects of survival', in S. Wilkinson (ed.) Feminist Social Psychologies: International Perspectives, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Chapter 5

RESEARCHING THE FAMILIAR:
AGE, PLACE AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE FIELD

Susie Weller

Introduction

This paper explores the efficacy and limitations of my own social capital in relation to conducting fieldwork in a familiar area. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to provide a rigorous definition of social capital, it is important to note that the concept is multidimensional. As Putnam (2000) suggests, social capital consists of both bonding and bridging elements. Bonding social capital refers to the exclusive connections amongst homogenous groups, whilst bridging social capital refers to the networks between different 'sociological niches' (Putnam 2000; Field 2003: 65). Moreover, Woolcock (2001) outlines the notion of linking social capital. This refers to a vertical shift in which an individual's or community's informal networks allow them to access formal networks of information or resources. Nevertheless, these constituent categories of social capital are highly contested. In this paper I specifically draw upon networks and relationships of trust in relation to gaining and maintaining access to a school.

Research in a familiar area often presents the opportunity to draw upon pre-existing networks and relationships with, for example, friends, relatives, colleagues or - in the case of this research - former teachers, to gain access to institutions, organisations or social groups which may otherwise be challenging to enter. This paper examines the benefits of social capital in aiding access to both spaces of research and to participants' views and opinions. Moreover, I highlight the role that both age and place play in aiding, challenging and fracturing social capital. Whilst factors of my positionality, such as gender, were indeed influential, I believe that, in this research, age and place were of particular significance.

I begin by outlining the context of the research detailed in this paper, highlighting the advantages that my own social capital brought to gaining access to a school. I subsequently examine how age-based power relations challenged the efficacy of my social capital by illustrating my complex and dynamic positioning between teaching staff, who ultimately controlled access to the institution, and teenage participants. Finally, I explore the role of place in fracturing the advantages of my own social capital, highlighting the complexity of trust relations within the research process.

Setting the scene: utilising social capital

It is possible to view the parallels between philosophies adopted in the 'new social studies of childhood' (see Holloway and Valentine 2000) and Putnam's (2000: 16) statement that social capital is about 'doing with' not 'for' people. This study was premised upon fostering a 'children-centred' research ethos, which attempted to deconstruct the uneven power relations between the researcher and participants. Adopting children-centred techniques, where participants select their preferred method of communication, I believe, is important in developing a more egalitarian research process. Advocates of such an approach feel this is advantageous in engaging participants who might not feel comfortable with more conventional methods.

The study in question explores the spatiality of teenagers' social exclusion and citizenship within rural communities. Adopting the Isle of Wight, UK as a case study, the research charts the

experiences of 600 thirteen to sixteen year olds as they make the transition to compulsory citizenship education (see Weller 2003). It was never my direct intention to return to the area I 'grew-up' in, nor indeed my former High School to conduct fieldwork. After a comprehensive exploration of suitable case study areas, eleven potential sites were established. Considerations of the appropriate locale then turned to practical issues, and my former High School was keen to accommodate a degree of access that no other schools could afford. Herein lies one of my preliminary encounters with the positive aspects of social capital. Nevertheless, the advantages that my own social capital brought to the research process were often challenged and fractured by both age and place. It is to the consideration of these two issues that this paper now turns.

Challenging social capital: age-based power relations

As a former pupil of the case study school, I shared sets of negotiations with teachers whom both knew and, I believe, trusted me (in the past). Trust, according to both Coleman and Putnam, is a fundamental constituent of social capital (Field 2003). Indeed, the school never requested security clearance, although I did gain written clearance to reassure any potential concerns. Initial access to the school was established through one key member of staff, who had both known and taught me for a number of years. Furthermore, we shared a common interest in the same subject. I was conducting research from a geographical standpoint and he was a geography teacher. Our pre-existing relationship mattered in (re)establishing a relationship of trust and communication.

My own social capital was also invaluable in gaining access to the views and experiences of participants. My previous connections with, and experiences of, the school also provided me with the opportunity to demonstrate my understanding of the physical networks in many participants' lives, for example, spaces within the school. We, therefore, had some shared understandings and ideas of common norms. In this sense, I had aimed to situate myself as a partial 'insider'. Teaching staff passed on their conceptions of me as a trustworthy person to participants. As Field (2003) outlines,

> ... trust may be particularly important in respect of access to assets such as knowledge, which are relatively tangible and sometimes tacit (p. 64).

Furthermore, I often purposefully highlighted my own former place and relationship with the school to build trust, rapport, and to ensure that participants did not view me as an authoritative teacher-figure. This pseudo-insider role was reinforced as I established closer and more trusting relationships with the teenagers, and several participants moved on from calling me 'Miss', to talking on first name terms. This is a scenario in which teenagers rarely find themselves in at school, as teachers, guest speakers and visitors often prefer to be addressed more formally. When explaining my research I was able to do so in terms of my role within a similar learning institution, and some participants seemed to understand my research in terms of helping me out with something similar to a school project.

At the same time my position within the school and wider case study area was often 'awkward'. Within the school I inhabited an uneasy position between teachers, some of whom had taught me, and the teenage participants. In reciprocating our relationship of trust, or perhaps in testing my allegiances, some participants endeavoured to engage me in gossip about teachers within the school. This was often challenging to appease, particularly as I wanted to become a pseudo-insider. Some participants, therefore, attempted to draw upon my social capital to gain information, and I had occasionally had to hide my knowledge of previous connections and experiences in order to maintain my relationships of trust with teaching staff. Concurrently, I also wanted to establish a new and credible relationship with staff within the school. Several teachers had worked in the school when I was a pupil there and so I had to forge a different kind of relationship, demonstrating

my role as a researcher, as someone who might be able to help the school, and ultimately someone who was older and no longer a pupil.

Holmes (1998) suggests that being an adult can both aid and hinder research with children and teenagers. Quintessentially, my role in the research process was influenced by my own 'messy' conceptualisations of age. I was, in most cases, ten years older than the teenagers I was working with, although I often felt I projected a younger appearance physically. These perceptions were quashed to some extent in an interview discussion with two participants. Despite having several friends in their late teens, Funda and Nikki both perceived me to be much older than them. In a discussion concerning power and the royal family, I noted that Prince Charles had visited that Island when I was a child. Funda responded by suggesting:

> He must have been quite young then. He's quite old [now].
> (Discussion with Funda and Nikki, 2 July 2002)

My perceptions of how old I appeared to participants was challenged by Funda's inference that my childhood was indeed a long time ago.

I often found myself struggling to fit in with two opposing groups within the school, both of whom ultimately controlled access. On one hand I had to maintain access to the school by demonstrating to teaching staff that my work was of enough value to warrant participants missing lessons. Concurrently, I had to suppress any possibilities that I was a teacher-like figure in order to gain in-depth access to participant's thoughts and opinions. I simultaneously had to demonstrate different forms of cultural capital in order to establish both trust and a degree of belonging to different groups within the school. Moreover, my personal experiences and indeed social capital, I believe, aided my ability to communicate and relate to diverse views and understandings of teenagers, but at the same time it should be acknowledged that my own experiences were, in many instances, very different. Janna noted the importance of a school council in countering the 'adultist' assumption that their own past youth gives them an insight into the lives of teenagers today:

> Susie: Do you think the school council is quite effective?
> Janna: Oh yeah, 'cos then [teacher] gets to hear our views on what we think is good for the school because as we know…
> Susie: Yeah.
> Janna: ... 'Cos we're like part of it. It's hard for him to be in our shoes even though he has been, you know it's hard for him to like the same stuff we like.
> Susie: Yeah.
> Janna: It's hard for him to imagine what it's like for stuff and us.
> (Discussion with Janna, 5 July 2002)

It is important to draw upon Janna's insight in order to highlight the limitations that past connections bring to the benefits of my own social capital. These advantages were often fractured and contested by my positioning between participants and teaching staff. At different times I both emphasised some, and suppressed other, aspects of my own cultural capital to gain access to the thoughts of others.

Fracturing social capital: researching familiar places

The spatial manifestations of social capital were also important in this research project. Whilst the access I had gained to the school was both relatively unproblematic to negotiate and generous in terms of the amount of time and space I was afforded, other gatekeepers within the school challenged this freedom. As Holloway and Valentine (2000) suggest, spaces occupied by children and teenagers within school are highly structured and regulated. Furthermore, Holmes (1998) states that the way in which teachers and pupils address one another reveals much about adult

power and hegemony. For children- or teenage-centered researchers, this school culture creates challenges, which restrict the deconstruction of power imbalances:

> I had a problem collecting Tommy and Matt from class. I tried to explain to the teacher why I needed them and she was fine to begin with, but as things got a bit manic with her class arriving she changed her mind and said she needed them. She then changed it again saying they'd have to make time up after school.
> (Research Diary, p. 74, 4 July 2002)

Whilst my connections with certain members of staff aided my overall access to the school, this was sometimes challenged by other staff who were not familiar with me, did not necessarily share the same agenda, and had not built their own particularised relationships of trust with me. Research within institutions is, therefore, limited vis-à-vis social capital by the areas where trust has not or cannot easily be established.

The second arena in which space played an important role was through my own knowledge of the local area. Although I had never met the participants before, we had common ties and networks, which were invaluable in establishing continuous dialogue. This was significant in building relationships of trust when, for example, participants described areas they hung out in. I was often able to demonstrate 'insider' qualities by acknowledging and establishing where that area was. This contrasts with the situation in another research project that I co-conducted in an unfamiliar area (see Barker et al. 2003). In that case, my lack of knowledge of local spaces did not necessarily challenge trust relations, but it did more obviously establish me as an 'outsider'; as a fleeting visitor in participants' lives. If building trust takes time, as Field (2003) suggests, then the social capital I drew upon in order to conduct fieldwork allowed me to skip several stages of the trust building process. Concurrently, situating myself as an 'insider' with local knowledge may have hindered access to some participants' experiences. As previous research details, many teenagers carve out spaces within their communities to hide from adult surveillance and regulation (see, for example, Jones 2000; Matthews 2003).

My connections with the area and my previous relationship with teaching staff may have deterred some participants from divulging aspects of their lives. Here, the advantage(s) of my social capital were complicated and fractured by my positionality. Moreover, the key issue vis-à-vis my relationship with the case study area lay not in my previous status as a resident but in my new status as a non-resident. The period of time I have spent away from the area has reshaped my conceptualisations of rurality, as well as distorting memories of my teenage years. For example, I grew up in a village in my case study area. Now, as a resident of London, I perceive the Island to be perhaps 'more' rural than when I was living there. This process has been reinforced through indicators developed in other research (Cloke and Edwards 1986; Tucker and Matthews 2001). Some participants challenged my current perceptions and were adamant that they resided in an urban area (Barker and Weller 2003):

> Susie: So do you feel like where you live is the countryside or is it more like an urban area?
> Bob: It's er an urban area.
> Susie: Yeah. Yeah. And if I said to you, like ummm, (pause) describe the countryside, what kind of words would come to mind?
> Bob: Well, there isn't really any countryside in [the area].
> (Discussion with Bob, 4 July 2002)

Whilst the research locale was familiar in many ways, the distance created by a period of non-residency meant that my networks were often partial or restricted. The arenas in which this research was conducted shaped and challenged my social capital in terms of the efficacy of networks and my own understanding of the area.

## Conclusions

Tooke (2000), in considering reflexivity, suggests it is beneficial to draw upon the notion of 'betweenness' (see England 1994; Rose 1997). The idea of betweenness infers that research inhabits a world between the researcher and the participant (Tooke 2000). In these terms it is often problematic to identify the location of my own social capital, in Putnamesque notions of 'bonding' and 'bridging'. I did share some common experiences, and in the main I was from the same ethnic and class backgrounds as participants. Nevertheless, our constructions of age coupled with my time away from the area meant that we did not occupy the same 'sociological niche' (Field 2003: 65). This was also echoed in my relationship with the teaching staff involved in the research. The challenges created by both age and space, despite my background, suggest that bridging or linking social capital might be more appropriate reference points. Nevertheless, the advantages of my (past) social capital are limited, challenged and fractured by age-based power relations and aspects of space, which often situated me 'between' people and places.

## References

Barker, J., Smith, F., Morrow, V., Weller, S., Hey, V., and Harwin, J. (2003) The Impact of Out of School Care: A Qualitative Study Examining the Views of Children, Families and Playworkers, DFES Research Report 446, London: Stationery Office.

Barker, J., and Weller, S. (2003) 'Never work with children?': The geography of methodological issues in research with children, Qualitative Research, Vol. 3(2), pp.207-227.

Cloke, P., and Edwards, G. (1986) Rurality in England and Wales 1981: A replication of the 1971 Index, Regional Studies, Vol. 20(4), pp. 289-306.

England, K.V.L. (1994) Getting personal: reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research, Professional Geographer, Vol. 46, pp.80-89.

Field, J. (2003) Social Capital, London: Routledge.

Holloway, S.L., & Valentine, G. (2000) Spatiality and the new social studies of childhood, Sociology, Vol. 34(4), pp.763-783.

Holmes, R.M. (1998) Fieldwork with Children, London: Sage.

Jones, O. (2000) Melting geography: purity, disorder, childhood and space, in G. Valentine and S. Holloway (eds) Children's Geographies: Playing, Living and Learning, London: Routledge.

Matthews, H. (2003) The street as a liminal space: the barbed spaces of childhood, in P. Christensen and M. O'Brien (eds) Children and the City: Home, Neighbourhood and Community, London: Routledge Falmer, pp. 101-117.

Putnam, R. (2000) Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rose, G. (1997) Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics, Progress in Human Geography, Vol. 21, pp. 305-320.

Tooke, J. (2000) Betweenness at work, Area, Vol. 32(2), pp.217-224.

Tucker, F., and Matthews, H. (2001) 'They don't like girls hanging around there': conflicts over recreational space in rural Northamptonshire, Area, Vol. 33(2), pp.161-168.

Weller, S. (2003) 'Teach us something useful': contested spaces of teenagers' citizenship, Space & Polity, Vol.7(2), pp. 153-172.

Woolcock, M. (2001) The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes, Isuma: Canadian Journal of Policy Research, 2(1), pp.1-17.

Chapter 6
‘INSIDER/OUTSIDER’ CARIBBEAN RESEARCHER:
EXPLORING SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ACCESS IN THE FIELD

Tracey Reynolds

Introduction

Social capital is an integral part of the research process, and relationships, networks and ties of trust and reciprocity that are established through social capital inform the research relationship between the researcher and the research participant, and issues of research design and access. However, the complex and diverse ways in which social capital operates in the research context is not fully explored by social capital theorists. This paper is a reflexive account of how social capital actively shapes the research process by drawing on my research experiences in the field. It outlines my use of social capital to access a research sample of Caribbean young people vis-à-vis a non-purposive snowballing method. The analysis is based on my ongoing fieldwork in a study entitled Caribbean families, social capital and young people's diasporic identity. This is one of three projects within the Ethnicity strand of the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group that set out to explore the relationship between family and social capital across diverse minority ethnic groups in the UK (see Goulbourne and Solomos 2003). In brief, the aim of the project is to investigate the ways in which Caribbean young people derive a sense of ethnic identity and to what extent they utilise family/kinship networks and relationships as important social and material resources of social capital.

A second aspect of the paper is to consider the ways in which ‘gatekeepers’ impact on the research process. In the study I developed contacts within Caribbean community organisations as well as utilising my own personal and professional networks in order to generate a sample of young people (see Reynolds forthcoming). Within these community organisations, ‘gatekeepers’ were instrumental in controlling my access to the research participants. This discussion highlights how my relationship with these ‘gatekeepers was characterised by ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital. ‘Bonding’ social capital because the ‘gatekeepers’ relied upon group members’ commitment to shared norms, values and trust relationships to help or hinder my access to potential participants. Also, ‘bonding’ social capital because I shared the same racial and cultural background as the members of the community organisations I approached and I could use this ‘insider knowledge to negotiate access and cultivate relationships of trust. However, to access participants I also had to employ ‘bridging’ social capital to successfully intersect the groups’ ‘bonding’. The points at which ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital is intersected by the researcher reveal much about the insider/outsider role the researcher assumes in the field and the significance of power relations in the research process. Thus, a third aim of this paper is to critically interrogate these concerns

Access and social capital and the insider/outsider research relationship

The study involves in-depth qualitative interviews with 25 young people (16-30 years old) of Caribbean descent or origin and members of their family and social networks in the Caribbean and UK (75 interviews in total). To date I have completed one third of the interviews. In the planning stage of the research it was quickly determined that a ‘snowballing’ method would be used because existing studies show that ‘snowballing’ is the best way to quickly generate a research sample of groups and individuals that are difficult to access for study, such as the Caribbean young people (May 1997; Reynolds 2002). I wanted to make sure that my sample contained a diverse group of young people so I approached various representatives and ‘leaders’ of Caribbean community

organisations across the UK and requested their assistance in identifying young people willing to participate in the study. 'Snowballing' then commenced from each of these locations. The organisations and groups I approached for assistance included Black church groups, Black Saturday/supplementary schools, youth groups, further education colleges and universities in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Bedfordshire. I also held meetings with representatives of the High Commissioners offices of Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica to establish further contacts and networks that I could access when I commenced the second stage of my fieldwork in the Caribbean.

'Snowballing' is a central feature of social capital because this method utilises individuals' established social networks and pre-existing co-operation and levels of trust between individuals in group situations to generate a sample (Devine and Roberts 2003). In the study, a primary advantage of 'snowballing' from multiple sites of, for example, Black church groups, Black Saturday/supplementary schools, youth groups, further education colleges and universities, is that it revealed young people's multiple and diverse 'bridging' and 'bonding' networks and social relationships, while at the same time highlighting the research relationships to emerge out of the fieldwork. The contacts I established within each of these sites and the snowballing that followed from them reflected my status as a second generation British-born Caribbean Black female researcher doing research within the Caribbean community in the UK and the Caribbean. I used this status to negotiate my 'insider/outsider' positioning and utilise 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital within these groups and networks.

Social capital is embodied within the research process because the researcher is either building on existing contacts and networks, or the research project itself cultivates new contacts, networks and relationships of trust. A range of social norms governs the negotiation process and certain kinds of sociability and relationships must be established before networks based on mutual obligation and trust are cultivated (Morrow 2001). This is particularly true when negotiating access to groups that are relatively closed (Bryman 2002). The researcher's knowledge and ability to negotiate these group norms and practices reflects both their 'insider' research positioning and 'bonding' social capital. Indeed, Julia Sudbury (1998) comments that a benefit of being positioned as 'insider' within a study is that it provides the researcher with additional insight and knowledge of the community being studied. My research experiences highlight three key issues that certainly support this viewpoint. Firstly, as a member of the Caribbean community I knew that it would be difficult to access groups and individuals without personal connections because there are a range of values within the Caribbean community that suggest that research has generally done more harm than good. I was also acutely aware, as others have pointed out (Goulbourne 2002), that the Caribbean community is experiencing 'research fatigue', particularly in certain geographical locations and around certain policy issues such as education, social exclusion, and crime. Therefore, I anticipated that from the onset of the study that I would have to establish some shared ground, and work at cultivating and facilitating trust relationships.

Secondly, my 'insider' status' and 'insider' knowledge' of how social networks develop within the Caribbean community meant I had a 'taken for granted' understanding that sites such as Black churches, Black youth groups and Black supplementary schools would be the best points to begin 'snowballing'. Even in instances where I did not have any contacts within community organisations, I utilised my social capital to approach existing contacts (drawing on introductions from people such as Professor Harry Goulbourne) who I knew could facilitate my access into these groups or played up my institutional position as an academic researcher. This process in turn provided me with a wealth of social capital that I could further utilise.

Thirdly, in the study I heavily relied upon used my 'insider' status, and knowledge of researching within the Caribbean community, to play up or play down my 'sameness' and 'difference' to the research participants. In terms of the my interviews with British-born Caribbean young people, more often than not I stressed our 'sameness' and focused on the fact that we share the similar experiences of being second/third generation British-born Caribbean children. Similarly, for those young people born and raised in the Caribbean region and now living in the UK as young adults, I often referred to my Jamaican partner sharing this similar experience and I was able to use this connection as our point of sameness. During meetings with the 'gatekeepers' I also used my 'insider' status to stress sameness and difference between us. Thus, on the one hand, I played up the fact that I was researching a community that I belong to. On the other hand, I also stressed the fact that I was not a member of the groups that I approached, which meant that I could better safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of group members who agreed to participate in the research. Another primary advantage of my 'insider' knowledge is that I could recognise and understand many of the unexplained and undefined customs and practices that 'gatekeepers' performed to control my access to the young people. For instance, (as I describe in detail below) I anticipated that the 'gatekeepers' would ask questions about my personal life and political awareness, and I was expecting to be questioned extensively about my professional and personal interest in the study when I attended these meetings. I also knew how to utilise my social capital to establish contacts that would assist me with generating a research sample.

The role of 'gatekeepers' and access in the field

'Gatekeepers' are concerned with safeguarding the interests of their groups and organisations and to this end they seek to establish control over access and the research setting (O'Connell Davidson and Layder 1994). In the study, my negotiations over access were lengthy and time-consuming because I had to go through two, sometimes three, tiers of 'gatekeepers' within groups and organisations in order to access young people for interview. At each tier, new 'gatekeeper' relationships would be cultivated in order that trust was (re)established. In terms of negotiating access I started with a letter of introduction to the organisation or community group outlining the aims of the study, and a request to meet with them. These initial face-to-face meetings with the community representatives were usually very formal and I would be questioned extensively about the nature and purpose of the research. Indeed on two occasions I had to go before a committee to explain the study and respond to their questions. I was also encouraged to reciprocate in the process by providing and answering questions about my own personal background. Common questions were: 'where am you from?', 'what country are your parents from?', 'have you ever visited the Caribbean?' and 'what are you personally doing to 'give back' to the Black community'? I also had to address their concern that the research would be contextualised in order to avoid negative misconceptions about the Caribbean family. Once trust was established at this stage, first tier 'gatekeepers' would then pass me onto the next tier of 'gatekeeper', such as individuals working directly with the young people or parents. These meetings were much less formal and shorter in length because they trusted the person who had referred me to them. In these instances, second tier 'gatekeepers' often required only basic information about the project and reassurances about confidentiality and anonymity before they identified young people to participate in the study. By the time I spoke with the young people, they generally asked me few questions and they were happy to participate in the study because I had already established trust relationships in previous stages.

My 'insider' knowledge provided me with an understanding of the underlying rationale behind this vetting process and I was able to utilise my social capital to develop particular strategies to overcome concerns. I was aware that a shared racial and cultural positioning with the 'gatekeepers' would in itself not be enough to guarantee access, because the Caribbean community has a sophisticated understanding of the research process compared to other less researched minority

ethnic communities (see for example, Zontini 2004). I knew that my initial request to participate in the research might be treated with suspicion because policy research has tended to problematise and create misconceptions about the Black community. So to overcome these concerns I developed a number of strategies. For example, I created a project leaflet that was sent out to all the community organisations I approached for assistance. This project leaflet had a photo of the strand leaders (Professors Harry Goulbourne and John Solomos) and myself, to promote this notion of 'sameness'. I also produced a 'frequently asked questions' leaflet that provided information about my role as a researcher, and addressed issues around analysis and reporting of the data. I fully anticipated that I would have to hold series of face-to-face meetings with the 'gatekeepers' and in these meetings I would be questioned extensively about my personal background and my political awareness concerning issues affecting the Black community.

The fact that I felt a need to employ a range of strategies with the 'gatekeepers' reflects my 'outsider' location. For instance, in our meetings questions were asked about my institutional position and the personal benefits I would achieve from this academic enterprise. The meetings were often formal in nature and the information offered by the 'gatekeepers' promoted the official version of group activities and events. I was mindful that the 'gatekeepers' might direct me towards participants who best represented the interests of organisation or their own interests, and that the access granted by the 'gatekeepers' revealed their own investments in maintaining and developing particular social networks, and also their own particular interests or bias. My status as the 'outsider' also allowed the 'gatekeepers' to exercise power and authority in facilitating and denying my access to young people within their community organisations. In the study the 'gatekeepers' utilised 'bonding' social capital to foster the compliance and co-operation of their group members, and in this way they were able to control the research process. For example, in my contacts with some Black-led church groups, the 'gatekeepers' successfully used my 'outsider' status to prevent me from establishing contact with their young church members. Generally, the Black-led church groups were the most resistant to my attempts to get access to young people on the basis that I was not a member of their church. Previous research by Valentina Alexander (1996) also highlighted a similar experience of encountering a 'closed-door' policy when she conducted research in Black-led churches. In terms of my study, only two out of ten Black-led church leaders I approached agreed to meet with me to discuss the study. Of the two church groups, one agreed to identify young people from their church on the basis that the interviews were conducted on church premises and in the presence of a senior church official. I had to decline their invitation to assist me with this study because of ethical concerns around confidentiality and anonymity. It later emerged that that the youth council at this church had their decision to agree to young members meeting with me individually in a private setting overruled by senior church officials. This example highlights the power relations that underpin group membership. Not only do 'gatekeepers' speak for and behalf of others who hold junior status and are less powerful, but they exercise power in denying the researcher access to individual members. Consequently group participation can sometimes be disempowering for, not only the researcher trying to gain access, but also individuals because membership can inhibit freedom of personal choice.

In addition to contacts and networks established through community organisations, I also used my own individual and family networks (most notably my younger sister) to identify potential participants. In these instances access to individuals or groups were relatively straightforward because a 'trust-based relation' (Field 2003: 64) was already established, and I could these (direct and indirect) personal connections for my own benefit. However, using family and personal relationships in this way raises moral and ethical questions for the researcher that are rarely discussed (Plummer 2001). For example, is the researcher exploiting intimate/familial trust-based relationships for personal gain? To what extent do participants (accessed through friends or family) take part in the study because of a genuine interest in the research or because of a commitment to

their friendship or imitate relationships? In discussions focused around research relationships and social capital, these moral and ethical dilemmas have yet to be fully interrogated.

Conclusion

The various stages of research fieldwork, for example, sampling method, access (including gatekeepers) and interviews, utilise and develop social capital. Yet, this complex relationship is yet to be fully explored by social capital theorists. The points at which 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital is intersected by the researcher reveal much about the insider/outsider role the researcher assumes in the research field. In this study I was simultaneously 'insider' and 'outsider'. My 'insider' location was based on a shared racial and cultural background. I was able to use the social capital of my 'insider' status to negotiate and cultivate trust-based relations within organisations and develop strategies to overcome concerns. However, I was also an outsider by virtue of my non-membership of the organisation and its group norms and values. As the 'outsider' I had to rely upon 'gatekeepers' to 'bridge' into community organisations and access Caribbean young people, and the 'gatekeepers' exercised power and authority in facilitating or denying my access. My discussion concerning 'insider/outsider' researcher positioning, and 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital, is one of many ways in which social capital informs the research process. As such social capital theories need to develop critical thinking around social capital as both theory and practice in research settings.

References

Alexander, V. (1996) '"A mouse in a jungle": the Black Christian woman's experience in church and society in Britain', in D.D. Jarrett-Macauley (ed.) Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism: Writings on Black Women, London: Routledge.
Bryman, A. (2002) Social Research Methods, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Devine, F. and Roberts, J. (2003) 'Alternative approaches to researching social capital: a comment on van Deth's measuring social capital', International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 6:1, 93-100.
Field, J. (2003) Social Capital, Key Ideas Series, London: Routledge.
Goulbourne, H. (2002) Caribbean Transnational Experience, London: Pluto Press.
Goulbourne, H. and Solomos, J. (2003) 'Families, ethnicity and social capital', Social Policy and Society, 2:4, 329-338.
May, T (1997) Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process, Buckingham: Open University Press.
Morrow, V. (ed.) (2001) 'Conceptualising social capital in relation to the well-being of children and young people: a critical review', Sociological Review, 47: 4, 744-765.
O'Connell-Davidson, J. and Layder, D. (1994) Methods, Sex and Madness, London: Routledge.
Plummer, K. (2001) Documents of Life 2, London: Sage Publications.
Reynolds, T. (2002) 'Reflexivity and power in the research process: the relationship between Black female researchers and Black female research participants', in T. May (ed.) Companion to Qualitative Research, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
Reynolds, T. (forthcoming) Family Relationships, Caribbean Young People and Diasporic Identities: Preliminary Analysis, Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group Working Paper Series, London: London South Bank University.
Sudbury, J. (1998) Other Kind of Dreams: Black Women's Organisations and the Politics of Transformations, London: Routledge.
Zontini, E (2004) Italian families and Social Capital: Rituals and the Provision of Care in British-Italian Families, Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group Working Paper No. 6, London: London South Bank University.

Chapter 7

DEPLOYING SOCIAL CAPITAL IN SOCIAL RESEARCH:
REFLECTIONS ON ETHNICITY AND OTHER RESOURCES

Elisabetta Zontini

Introduction

We, as researchers, are enmeshed in socially negotiated ties, norms and values, relationships and networks, in short in forms of social capital, not dissimilar to those of our informants/study participants. Much has been written about the researcher's positionality and its influence on the research process. We have learned from feminist social scientists how our bodies, past experiences and vision of the world influence the research process and how, rather than striving to reach the impossible goal of impartial objectivity, we should become reflexive in our research practice and acknowledge the limitations, as well as the inevitability, of the partiality of our accounts (Haraway 1988).

This paper, although influenced by these debates, focuses instead on what kind of resources we, as researchers, draw upon and activate during the research process and with what consequences? What forms of social capital do we use? For what purposes and with what consequences? Instead of focusing on how individuals draw on social capital to conduct their daily lives, in this paper I want to reflect on how researchers may use their own and their informants' social capital to conduct their research. Rather than providing answers, this paper raises questions which are intended for reflection and further debate. I will use as main example my current ongoing project Italian Families and Social Capital: Rituals and the Provision of Care in British-Italian Transnational Families (Zontini 2004) but I will also draw on my past projects on Filipino and Moroccan migrant women in Italy and Spain (Zontini 2002).

Accessing participants

One of the main problems that we have to face as researchers is how to access participants. This involves building relationships of trust with them so that they agree to take part in our studies and give up their often scarce free time for our benefit. My first step in the fieldwork on Italian families has been to participate to two conferences on youth of Italian origin organised by a regional Italian government in Brussels and Trentino (Italy). Although not directly on the topic of my research, these conferences proved invaluable in my obtaining information about Italians emigrants and, above all, to make initial contact with Italians living in London. I had already tried to contact church groups and other organisations in London, but attending these conferences and meeting some 'key' people speeded up and facilitated considerably my subsequent contacts. Having some names and organisation I could mention in a phone call, helped my interlocutors to have a sense of who I was and facilitated the establishment of trust. Often, I think they agreed to be interviewed as a favour to the people who had given me their names. In a way, I was benefiting from somebody else's social capital. This was evident for instance when I contacted the leader of a regional association, Mr. Lorenzetti[1]. He invited me to his organisation's management meeting and there he explained to the other members who I was and what I was doing. Having met me through a person of trust and seen me face-to-face, most of the delegates present at the association's meeting (except one) agreed to be interviewed subsequently. After their interview, these people also provided me with

---

[1] Pseudonyms are used to preserve anonymity.

the contact details of some of their relatives, so enabling me to start snowballing. There was some reciprocity involved in my exchange with the president of the association. In fact, he asked me to say a few words about the Congress to the other members. Their organisation had been asked by the Italian regional government to send a young delegate to the Congress but they had failed to find anybody interested in going. I thus had become the delegate from the UK and so they felt some kind of responsibility towards me.

The president of the regional organisation also suggested that I use his wife's contacts since, as he put it, 'women are more organised'. Whereas his main contacts were within the regional association, his wife was a member of a women's organisation that included women from different regional and social backgrounds. Mrs. Lorenzetti arranged for me to take part in a meeting of her organisation. There, the women were somehow reluctant to take part in the study and none seemed to volunteer their contact details. Disappointed at how the evening was going for me, Mrs. Lorenzetti and her sister (who I had already interviewed) started using their friendship with the other women to convince them to take part in the study. After that, I was able to interview several of them and their husbands.

Two points can be made from my experience. The first one is the importance of establishing personal connections, including spending time in participating in meetings and events that are not so directly linked to the study we are conducting. The second one relates to the benefits we derive by using our informants' social capital. As far as the first point is concerned, both the people from the regional association and the members of the women's group agreed to be interviewed after they had met me and talked to me in a setting that was familiar to them (albeit after 'arm twisting' in the case of the women's organisation). The fact of being introduced by people who they consider as trustworthy also helped. As far as the second point is concerned, I soon became aware of, and uneasy about, the way in which I was using some of my informants' contacts and networks.

Often I asked my informants to provide me with further interviewees by drawing on their personal connections. Both Mr. and Mrs. Lorenzetti put at my disposal the contacts derived from their central position within Italian associational life to help me identify potential interviewees; they also used their position of trust and respectability to convince them to take part in the study. Other key informants I met during fieldwork did the same. To my surprise, a member of a London-based Italian trade union, who I was meeting for the first time, opened her address book and gave me the name and addresses of a number of her personal friends. In another instance, a mother 'forced' her reluctant 16-year-old son to do the interview with me. After finishing talking to me at her office, she called him at home to ask him to take part in the study. He refused saying that he was too busy. She insisted, asking him several times to please do it. He replied that he had done this other times, and she said that it did not matter and kept on insisting. In the end she convinced him by offering to treat him to a nice lunch out. The boy clearly accepted to please his mother; his mother probably tried to persuade him to please me or to do me a favour. In the end, I was not so sure I wanted to interview such a reluctant participant thinking that, given the premises on which the interview was agreed, it would have been of little value. However, I felt that after she had insisted so much I could not refuse. Unexpectedly the interview went very well. The reason why she felt compelled to ensure this interview, however, is less clear to me. Maybe she did it just to be nice to me or maybe because I had been introduced by a friend of her whom she trusted? If the latter was the case, I was again taking advantage of somebody else's social capital. All this raises the question of how much we should use the special position of power, authority or respect of our key informants to speed up our research process? Does this amount to being exploitative or 'extractive'? And how far should we go with such practices? This is certainly an issue that raises ethical questions and is something on which we should reflect.

However, using informants' networks is not always a shortcut that we can use to achieve our goals, such as getting a research sample in the shortest time; it may be part of the purpose of the study. At times, following informants' networks can be a crucial and central part of our studies, as may be the case when we are trying to document the social networks in which ordinary people are enmeshed. Although in line with the aims of the study, this approach raises some methodological questions, apart from the ethical problems mentioned above. For instance, during the course of my study, I became aware that I could influence my sample by using the networks of one informant as opposed to those of another. Because people build relationships of trust and reciprocity with people who tend to share their values, often the circle of people contacted through one informant tended to have many characteristics in common. Given the small sample for my study (25 families) I became aware of the implications of following up the networks of specific individuals. My dilemma became whether I had to try to investigate some networks in depth, or to diversify and present a broader picture as possible by taking into account a number of smaller networks. Probably both options are valid, and the choice of one as opposed to the other depends on the aims, objectives and constraints of the study. However, it is important to pay attention to these issues and reflect on them in the course of our studies.

Ethnicity as resource?

According to Goulbourne and Solomos (2003) ethnicity can be interpreted as a social capital type resource that can be used in daily life. However, in the context of this article, rather than focusing on ordinary people's use of ethnicity, I would like to reflect on the extent to which ethnicity is used as social capital or as a resource by the researcher in the process of conducting research. We know from research on ethnicity and identity that 'an individual's self-identification does not necessarily have to be the same at all times and places (…). An individual may change ethnic identification over time, for various reasons. At various times and places, one is more or less at ease dropping or inventing a self-identification' (Waters 1990: 19). If that is the case, what happens to the self-identification of the researcher? How does the researcher change or create his/her ethnic identification? For what purposes? With what consequences?

The ethnicity of the researcher (as well as her age, gender, etc.) inevitably plays a role in the research process. In my previous project I investigated the experiences of people from a different ethnic background. They were female migrants from Morocco and the Philippines residing in Italy and in Spain. How I saw things and how I was seen by the people I talked to obviously changed when I was in Bologna, in my country of origin, and when I was in Barcelona. Whereas in Bologna I was an Italian (although one who lived abroad), in Barcelona I was a fellow foreigner. None of these positions was 'better' as far the research was concerned, so that it was not the case that I obtained much more information in one city as opposed to the other. Yet, my somewhat different positionality implied different ways of behaving on my part and different reactions from my interlocutors. In Bologna both officials and immigrants assumed that I knew the city's situation well and thus conducted more 'political' discussions, commenting in detail on current and past local events whilst also trying to 'test' my position on such events. In Barcelona my interlocutors often assumed that I was not interested in such local affairs or maybe that, coming from outside, I could not understand them. As far as my relationship with my migrant interviewees is concerned, they saw me as someone who could help them in solving some of their problems in Bologna, although less so in Barcelona. In Bologna, in addition to giving language classes, I was asked to give information on a range of issues. In Barcelona, the women I met had fewer expectations that I, as a foreigner, could help them. They rather shared with me their complaints about the city and local people in general since they knew they could not offend me. All this is to stress the point that I do not believe that having a similar ethnic background to our interviewees is necessary, or even

desirable, for the research process. However, what happens when we do, as is the case in my current research project?

There are some obvious advantages in working with one's own ethnic group. These can include speaking the language and being generally more aware of the cultural norms and practices of the people we study. We also may already know people from our own ethnic group, thus speeding up the process of getting precious contacts. Even if we do not, we might have a greater awareness of the organisations that operate in our country of origin, or in our ethnic group in the immigration country, that could offer us some extra help in identifying suitable people. It can also favour the building of rapport with our informants. I had the impression that some people were more willing to talk to me because I was Italian and, because of that, they thought I was better equipped to understand their experiences. On the other hand, there could be also limitations. Interviewees may feel under scrutiny from an interviewer who they perceive as sharing their cultural values and who can thus judge their behaviour against specific norms. Moreover, the interviewer herself can be judged for her supposed adherence to specific norms and trusted or mistrusted accordingly. It has not been uncommon for interviewees to ask a number of questions to try and understand my position on a range of issues, spanning across family to politics and religion. It is also common for them to let me know their opinion on my behaviour, based on our supposedly shared cultural norms. In one instance, a woman I met at a drop-in centre for elderly Italians, in answer to my question about whether I could meet her again at the centre, replied that she was happy to see me but that she thought that, given the fact I was pregnant, I should spend my time at home with my husband looking after myself rather than going around doing interviews. Another woman, when I said that I would do the second phase of my fieldwork after I returned from maternity leave, reproached me by saying that she could have never left her children to be cared for by a stranger and that she would rather have no money than be separated from her young children to pursue a career. Finally, the interviewer can fail to see and reflect on several aspects that might be specific to the particular ethnic group studied because they seem normal or 'natural' to him or her.

There are also other problems, some of which are of an ethical nature. As ordinary people change their ethnic identification according to circumstances, during the course of my study I too became aware that I was constructing my ethnicity and deploying it strategically. In the Italian context, we know that immigrants from Italy tend to have a scarce sense of themselves as Italians per se, but rather to identify with the locality they are from (Waters 1990). Regional origin has great importance for both Italian emigrants and Italians in Italy, so that some commentators speak of the presence of regional ethnicities rather than of a national one (e.g. Maffioletti 2004, personal conversation). For instance, I started fieldwork using my own regional identity. I contacted the province of Trento and the Trentino associations and stated that I was myself Trentina. It helped. I was invited to attend two congresses and welcomed by the London-based regional association. Yet, I felt very uncomfortable doing this since I never think of myself in these terms. I left Trentino when I was 18 and in most circumstances I would not primarily identify with a so-called 'Trentino identity'. I thus resorted to my supposed ethnicity to achieve my research objectives. I also noticed that I was 'adjusting' my identity according to whom my interlocutors were. Sometimes I was only Trentina, at other times I was also partly a southerner. For instance, when speaking with people of the south, I might have emphasised that my grandfather was from Naples, that my father-in-law was from Puglia, or that I had a Sicilian connection through my mother-in-law. At times my husband too was described as a southerner, and at others as from the north where he was born. I did not do this consciously and in most cases I was genuinely trying to 'break the ice', build rapport and establish some common ground with my interviewees. Yet, reflecting on it retrospectively, I must recognise the limitations of using 'common' ethnicity as a problem-free resource. While I was trying to stress my similarity with my interviewees, what were the differences among us that I was trying to play down for the sake of conducting a good interview?

Building social capital in the field

Even though ethnicity may involve choice and can to an extent be manipulated, it remains a social capital type resource which is embodied and over which we do not have complete control. There are, however, also external forms of social capital that can help us in the field and which we can create and invest in. I have already talked about the importance of building trust with our study participants. This may mean spending time with them besides the time of the interview; being prepared to answer questions regarding ourselves and being open-minded and non-judgmental towards their experiences. Being involved in some kind of reciprocity is also a good way to consolidate the relationship with our informants. This is a strategy that I tried to employ in my previous study.

I was asking precious time from women who hardly had any time for themselves, and who were juggling paid-work and family commitments in an often hostile environment. Given this, while I was doing fieldwork, I tried to offer something in return to them. Among other things, I accompanied individual immigrant woman carrying out tasks such as looking for a job, a flat, or to denounce a situation of discrimination to various institutions and associations. These include a long list of charities, trade unions, council offices, and even a university where I accompanied a Filipino live-in domestic worker who wanted to register for a Masters in Human Rights. I accompanied immigrant women trying to participate in protests and in the occupation of a church to ask for legalisation (in Barcelona), and when they queued to look for a job (in Bologna) or a flat (in Barcelona), as well as when they went shopping or to pick up their children from school. After some weeks of conducting participant observation in a charity that offered work to immigrant women, both the volunteers and a small group of Moroccan women who had approached the charity to look for a job, but whose Italian was still insufficient for them to be able to work, asked me to give them Italian lessons. I agreed and for a few months I gave regular classes twice weekly to four Moroccan women. As in Bologna, in Barcelona too I ended up as a volunteer in an NGO that was working with immigrants. In this case it was a service for helping foreigners to get access to housing. The service involved phoning agencies and replying to advertisements, agreeing appointments for seeing flats, and accompanying people to see them and to deal with letting agents. If in Bologna I had direct experience of seeing racism operating in the sphere of work, in Barcelona I had the opportunity to see it in the sphere of housing. As had happened in Bologna, doing voluntary work of this type offered me the possibility of getting to know and gain the trust of several women, and to see from a privileged perspective their daily experiences with discrimination and their struggles to access services. Engaging in some forms of reciprocity is important and desirable. However, given the time and dedication it requires, it is not always a feasible strategy.

In this short piece I have explored some of the ways in which different forms of social capital are used by social researchers in conducting their projects, drawing on my own experiences. I focused on how we negotiate access to our informants, how we build relationships of trust and how we engage in forms of reciprocity with our study participants. I paid particular attention to the question of ethnicity by pointing out the problematic and context-related nature of this particular social capital resource. I have also drawn attention to the some of the benefits of using social capital in the field as well as to the constraints and problems that may derive from doing so.

References

Goulbourne, H. and Solomos, J. (2003) 'Families, ethnicity and social capital', Social Policy and Society, 2 (4), 329-338.

Haraway, D. (1988) 'Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective', Feminist Studies, 14 (3), 575-599.

Maffioletti, (2004) Director of the Centro Studi Emigrazione Roma (Emigration Research Centre of Rome), interview conducted 15/01/04.

Waters, M.C. (1990) Ethnic Options. Choosing Identities in America, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Zontini, E. (2002) Family Formation and Gendered Migrations in Bologna and Barcelona. A Comparative Ethnographic Study, DPhil thesis, University of Sussex.

Zontini, E. (2004) Italian Families and Social Capital: Rituals and the Provision of Care in British-Italian Transnational Families, Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group Working Paper 7, London: London South Bank University.

Chapter 8

'INSIDER' AND 'OUTSIDER' AMBIGUITIES:
SOCIAL CAPITAL, GENDER AND POWER IN THE FIELD

Kanwal Mand

Introduction

This paper reflects on a research project in which I shared a similar migration history and ethnic identity with many of the participants.  I draw on my doctoral research carried out in Tanzania, Punjab, and in East and West London, amongst 10 Jat Sikh extended families.  These families were chosen for the research because they had significant social relations that they actively maintained in other national contexts – the focus of my study.  In the course of this paper, I highlight the inherent role of social capital in the process of conducting my fieldwork.  In particular I focus on my experiences in Tanzania with the aim of relating this to the key tenets of social capital: norms, trust, obligations and reciprocity (Coleman 1988, 1990; Putnam 1994; for a review see Edwards et al. 2003).

In my research, maintaining distinctions based on place and identity (be they professional or personal) were all the more difficult to because of the interrelationship between my own cultural and migration history and that of my informants.  Such elisions are contrary to the traditional model of anthropological fieldwork in which a 'neutral' and 'detached' fieldworker travelled away from 'home' where s/he would study the 'other' through intensive dwelling/interaction.  This rationale mirrored the process of fashioning the discipline as a science (Stocking 1992; Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

As such, in the course of the research, the objectivity posed in traditional fieldwork models, entailing detachment and the stance of being neutral, proved to be a fantasy.  I found who I was and those who I knew was imperative for gaining access to, and the trust of, the women I approached to take part in my research, as I sought to understand their experiences of marriage and transnational mobility.  It became apparent that both researcher and informant hold varying social locations and these need to be accounted for, as what comes to be known bears a relationship to how it came to be known.  I found that, despite sharing many similarities with the women, over the course of conducting fieldwork in three national contexts, I also realised the significance of power relations for the generation, analysis and representation of data.  The methodological issues thrown up in the course of my research further point to the ways in which dominant concepts of social capital, which privilege closed networks (Coleman 1990) or notions of bounded communities (Putnam 1994), need to be reflected on critically given the complexity inherent in social research and in the light of global processes such as transnational migration (Basch et al. 1994).

Anthropological routes/roots

Like my father, I was born in Tanzania and I lived there until the age of ten. Following a brief period in India, my nuclear family and I migrated to Britain.  In the intervening years, though, I have been involved in regular visits to Tanzania to visit family members.  In making these visits, I was involved in a visiting process that was also part of the experience of the people taking part in my research. Over the summer period in which my fieldwork was conducted, I witnessed visits by four of the ten families, from the UK to Tanzania, for the purposes of visiting and attending weddings.  Another factor that I shared in common with my informants is my cultural heritage.  Here social capital is

apparent through the processes of socialisation, as I held a great deal of embodied knowledge regarding ways of being Sikh (Bourdieu 1997; c.f. Kahn 1996). Furthermore, I utilised my own and my informants' kin networks in order to gain access to women's stories concerning marriage and migration, as well my own movements across the research sites. Again, this reflected the experiences of the subjects of my research who also went to places and met people on the basis of social networks. In reflecting on this, I became acutely aware that my utilisation of networks was influenced by, and also influenced, relations between household members who were dispersed across national boundaries.

My purpose in embarking on a journey to Tanzania was to conduct field research for my PhD (Mand 2004). However, in my identity as an anthropologist in flight for the collection of data in Tanzania, Punjab and England, I had also been in the process of searching for my own roots. I sought to understand the travel of previous generations of Sikh women. I began my research in Tanzania, where elderly women in my sample interlaced their stories about their migration in terms of arrivals and departures from people and places, as well as new experiences encountered in Africa, with tales about my own grandmother (my father's mother). Often they seemed to feel that I wanted to hear about her as opposed to them and therefore my curiosity was identified on the basis of being a grand-daughter. Furthermore, the request by one of my informants for me to purchase gold coins along my journey (at Abu Dhabi airport) on their behalf signalled that I was seen as 'one of them' (a Sikh transmigrant woman) as such a request is unlikely to be posed to an 'other'. For me, however, rather than an assertion of 'insiderness', the act of purchasing and transporting goods on behalf of informants was purely strategic. I sought to develop relations with households and felt that goods were a potential platform upon which to base future questions regarding consumption. Whilst there is an element of engendering, whereby my purchase of gold coins could result in the recipients feeling obliged to help me, the notion of obligation remained implicit rather than explicit. The obligation may be expressed at the level of 'looking after' me, in terms of ensuring my physical safety during my fieldwork visit, although, as we shall see, this was not necessarily experienced by me as reciprocity.

My anxiety about getting the purchase of gold coins right was based on my lack of experience in such ventures. I worried that if I slipped up then I would be perceived as 'unknowing' and would be labelled as being 'from there' (the West) where younger women are unaware of 'traditional' ways. An assumption behind the label of being an 'insider' is one of authenticity (c.f. Narayan 1993). As I was to discover in the course of my fieldwork, these initial anxieties were premised on rigid notions of being an insider/outsider, as represented in anthropological literature that fails to take into account interconnectedness arsing from migration. Similarly, in the traditional model privileging travel away from 'home' for the purposes of collecting data, the location of home is in itself not a given either for me or my informants. Rather than creating binary distinctions between home and away, a more fruitful approach would be to look at the practices of home making and the significance of place, gender and generation in this process (Fog-Olwig and Hastrup 1997; Gardner 2002).

What the above highlights is the ways in which I sought to enter the field on the basis of social networks that carried with them obligations and an expectation of reciprocity. However, as we shall see below, there are other factors that affect the use of social networks that, at the start of my journey, had seemed very positive and full of promise. Another point to note is the ascribed identity, placed upon me through the request of purchasing gold coins by my informant, which aligned me as 'one of them' and assumed that I had the knowledge to make such a purchase. This type of identification was both ascribed and undertaken by me with varying degrees of comfort over the fieldwork period and in accordance with geographic place. The notion of multiple identities and 'choice', often presented as part of post-modernist theories celebrating hybridity and creolisation,

need to be located in structural and cultural factors. By extension, therefore, a focus on social capital and its relationship to identity in the field necessitates a focus on gender and power.

'Them and us': understanding fieldwork relations

As mentioned above, power relations operate through all levels of the research process. A greater awareness of the 'self' in fieldwork can be an opportunity to understand ideas, notions or perceptions held by informants, and can be valuable for analysis. Furthermore, the 'self' as informant and as a mediator between one and another cultural context moves away from the fantasy of an objective neutral fieldworker (Okley 1992). In writing about my research into families on the basis of familial connections, I am engaging with debates concerning 'outsider' and 'insider' positions and the ways these related in the research. For Mascharenhas-Keyes (1987) being an 'insider' (in terms of sharing an ethnic and migration history with informants) and 'outsider' was experienced as a contradiction between her 'native' self and 'professional' self. However, I found that much of the literature attributed fixed positions in the research process and neglected the 'interactive processes through which 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' are constructed' (Naples 1996:140; c.f. Narayan 1993). Naples' analysis of women's experiences of belonging resulted in acknowledging her own feelings of being an 'outsider' when undertaking research with women in a rural location in America. She found the rural setting to have a profound effect on her access to women as there were few public places in which to meet them, and that informants themselves spoke of feeling 'outside' of the community. Therefore, although Naples accounts for similarities between the women she studied and herself in terms of race and class, she 'became more convinced than ever that place profoundly influences the way we see the world around us' (Naples 1996: 142, my emphasis). Naples concludes that being an 'insider' or 'outsider' is not a fixed experience or position; rather these experiences are contextual and shifting (Naples 1996: 140). In my own research, I found that at times I felt and behaved like an 'insider'. This aspect of my identity arose from a shared history and cultural referents. However, these shared aspects were subject to the social location of my informants as well as the geographic/social space where we interacted. Hence, whilst I shared a great deal with women in Tanzania and was often spoken of as an 'insider', this was certainly not the case when I worked in Punjab. Other ways in which my 'outsiderness' was apparent related to my desire to be mobile (for the purposes of the research and due to my own desires), which contradicted local ideals concerning the movement of young unmarried women.

Narayan questions the dichotomy behind notions such as 'insider' and 'outsider' and the term 'native anthropologist' on the basis of for whom, where and for what purposes do these terms relate? Instead, she stresses that 'at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations' (Narayan 1993: 671). My 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' related not just to common migration patterns, cultural, ethnic background or kinship, but also other aspects of my identity in terms of age, marital status and educational achievements were prevalent in my engagements with the women in my research and their families. For example, unlike the majority of women I lived with or worked with, I was unmarried and this was topical owing to my focus on women's experiences of marriage and transnational mobility. At other times, my unmarried status were less prevalent, as other experiences such as working outside the domestic sphere and or educational experiences were foregrounded by informants.

Gendered social capital and field negotiations

From the outset of my research, I was concerned that returning to Tanzania would be subsumed under a 'familial' visit. I had wanted to be perceived as a researcher and for this reason I sought to

clear a path and negotiate access with the aid of my father prior to my actual fieldwork visit. Abu-Lughod's (1986) description of being accompanied by her father to the 'field' and the position this implies of a daughter and a guest resonates with my own experience. The role of gender in the fieldwork process is increasingly addressed as significant for the type of data collected and as a source of information regarding gender norms and ideals held by people (Callaway 1992). During the pre-fieldwork trip I became aware that my familial and gender identity could lead to obligations that may have affected my ability to carry out fieldwork. Therefore, I decided to live away from my extended kin with another Sikh household in another part of Tanzania, where plans were afoot for a household member's wedding. The household is distantly related to my extended kin and I had not taken into consideration that this prior relationship could mean that the household head felt responsible for my welfare. The result was that I experienced a lack of mobility in the Tanzanian context, made more complex by the relations of reciprocity and obligations in existence between my adopted household and my own extended kin. For example, during the wedding celebrations my hosts mobilised the resources of other Sikhs[2] and my extended kin, and these were related to me living with them. On a more basic level, my male host repeatedly spoke about the responsibility that they felt for me and how my desire to be more mobile aggravated their sense of duty. Through my experiences in the Tanzanian context I became aware of the ways in which gender relates to the experience of places owing to the familial context, and the influence of historical and social processes on women's geographic mobility within Tanzania. For example, Sikh women's mobility within Tanzania is related to the historical racialisation of the place and the ensuing demarcation of areas as 'safe' or 'unsafe' for women. (c.f. Nagar 1995).

This gendered and familial positioning led to mixed feelings about the validity of my research and my relationship with the families in the field. Below is an account I presented in my field notes:

> I am not amongst 'alien' people. Quite the opposite, I know the streets here like the back of my hand. The faces, at least of the older generation, are familiar despite not recalling their names or family histories. It is a strange time being here, for unlike England where all is familiar at a very conscious level, here it is all in memory or at that level of the subconscious. At times when I have gone to talk to a woman at her home, I suddenly realise that I have been here and played in that very room where we are talking. The women all recall me and usually exclaim how similar to my mother I am. Strangely when it is men they recall my grandfather but I have gained a lot of access and respect from these women because of my mother. She was the only Asian lady doctor during the 1970s and obviously kept confidences and more importantly was able to 'mix up' [socialise] with them, a quality they admire (September 1999, Tanzania).

In Tanzania, I (re)entered relations that had been established since childhood and through my own kin living there. Nevertheless, I was aware – and made aware by my informants – that I lived away from Tanzania. There was a presumption on the part of the women, who admired the ability to 'mix up' (socialise), that positioned me as an outsider based on my living in England. The underlying feeling behind their statements about being able to 'mix up', being 'one of us', is a result of perceived differences that arise through migration. The perception of difference becomes further compounded in the context of transnationalism where return visits or extended stays are frequent to and away from Tanzania. My romanticised view of fieldwork fell apart when I questioned what it meant to 'mix up'. Why was it admirable and how did it manifest? I realised that my 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' conflicted. My expectations and the ensuing struggles over my role and related mobility, within the locality, separated me from my informants. As I sought to distinguish myself from those in my fieldwork locality, I felt that they sensed this and sought to draw me in through

---

[2] I have written about the mobilisation of social networks and resources during transnational wedding in Mand 2002.

notions concerning gendered norms. Being from 'there' (Tanzania) felt different from feeling a part of the place. I realised that the anthropological ideal of 'immersion', 'going native', is a privilege that is premised on an unbridgeable distance between researcher and researched and fails to take into account the agency of informants (Amit 2000).

As mentioned above, the research was conducted amongst ten families with linkages in Punjab, Tanzania and England. Following my stay in Tanzania, I went to Punjab to be with a family who were in Punjab, from England, for the purposes of a marriage involving a male migrant (originally from Tanzania) to a woman in Punjab. I was present in the house, in Tanzania, when the groom's mother called her sister-in-law about the prospective marriage. The way in which news of the wedding travelled and later the travel of members of the household, from various localities, to Punjab illustrates precisely the ways in which social relations are maintained and created transnationally. During this marriage, I observed and participated as part of the groom's entourage during rituals performed for the wedding. I was positioned by Punjab-based Sikhs as part of the groom's family (we had no kin relationship) on account of me being with them in the idiom of speaking about wife givers and receivers (Raheja and Gold 1994). A further factor that led to Punjab-based Sikhs positioning me as being an 'outsider' was because I had come from abroad, just like the groom and his family. Many of the initial inquiries I made to the bride's family concerning the wedding elicited vague responses. Following the wedding and subsequent departure of the bride, I began to visit the bride's natal kin and developed a different relationship based on my identity as a researcher and one with less of a role in the groom's family. Hence, I noticed a different, more open, reception and response to questions that I had posed earlier.

Conclusion

It would seem that utilising an 'insider' position in the process of collecting data is beneficial. However, throughout this paper I have tried to illustrate that this is an ambiguous process. As the illustration from Punjab suggests, whilst being part of a family allowed me access, the very same position meant that the bride's family were hesitant to speak about the wedding with me. More often than not, I found that being identified as an 'insider' did hinder the collection of data in terms of access to others kinds of knowledge and my own desires for conducting research. At the same time, I have tried to illustrate that the social networks I studied and entered for the course of my fieldwork had a far longer history than the given ethnographic moment. In this sense, informants as well as researchers need to be seen as active agents who interactively construct knowledge.

I have sought to highlight factors such as who you know, shared ethnic and migration history and embodied knowledge as being key in gaining to informants. At the same time, I have been drawing out the limitations of such positions on the basis of gender and power relations that need to be taken into account in the course of writing the data up. What is important to clarify, however, is the difference between positionality in terms of 'insider'/'outsider' and using the self as a way of understanding the worldview and experiences of informants. Using our bodies and our embodied or more prescribed knowledge enables us to further draw out and reflect upon the gendered selves inherent in social capital being embedded within collectivities. Therefore, whilst social capital enables individuals to raise their standard of living (in my case, many knew and encouraged me for my educational betterment), it does not naturally correlate to better data or field relations. Rather, as we have seen 'insider'/'outsider' positions are shifting and contextual and, for me, were related to my social identities and migration history.

References

Abu-Lughod, L. (1986) Veiled Sentiments. Honor and Poetry In A Bedouin Society, Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.

Amit, V. (2000) 'Introduction', in V. Amit (ed.) Constructing the Field. Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World, London: Routledge.

Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N. and Szanton-Blanc, C. (eds.) (1994) Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-states, New York: Gordon and Breach.

Bourdieu, P. (1997/1986) 'The forms of capital', in A.H. Hasley, H. Lauder, P. Brown and A.S. Wells (eds) Education: Culture, Economy, Society, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Callaway, H. (1992) 'Ethnography and experience. Gender implications in fieldwork texts', in J. Okley and H. Callaway (eds) Anthropology and Autobiography, London: Routledge.

Coleman, J.S. (1988) 'Social capital in the creation of human capital', American Journal of Sociology, 94, supplement S95-S120.

Coleman, J.S. (1990) Foundations of Social Theory, London: Harvard University Press.

Edwards, R.; Franklin, J. and Holland, J. (2003) Families and Social Capital: Exploring the Issues, Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group Working Paper No. 1, London: London South Bank University.

Fog-Olwig, K. and Hastrup, F. (1997) 'Introduction', in K. Fog-Olwig and F. Hastrup (eds) Siting Culture: The Shifting Anthropological Object, London/New York: Routledge.

Gardner, K. (2002) Age, Narrative, Migration. The Life Course and Life Histories of Bengali Elders in London, Oxford: Berg.

Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. (1997) 'Culture, power, place: ethnography at the end of an era', in A. Gupta and J. Ferguson (eds) Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology, Durham/London: Duke University Press.

Khan, M. (1996) 'Your place and mine: sharing emotional landscapes in Wamira, Papua New Guinea', in S. Feld and H.K. Basso (eds) Senses of Place, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Mascheranhas-Keyes, S. (1997) 'The native anthropologist: constraints and strategies in research', in A. Jackson (ed.) Anthropology at Home, London/New York: Tavistock.

Mand, K. (2002) 'Place, gender and power in transnational Sikh marriages', Global Networks: A Journal of Transnational Affairs, 2(3): 233-248.

Mand, K. (2004) Gendered Places, Transnational Lives: Sikh Women in Tanzania, Britain and Indian Punjab, Unpublished D-Phil thesis, University of Sussex.

Nagar, R. (1995) Making and Breaking Boundaries: Identity Politics Among South Asians in Post Colonial Dar es Salaam, Unpublished DPhil Dissertation, The University of Minnesota.

Naples, N.A. (1996) 'The outsider phenomenon', in C.D. Smith and W. Kornbulm (eds) In the Field: Readings on the Field Research Experience, Praeger: Westport.

Narayan, K. (1993) 'How native is a "native" anthropologist', American Anthropologist, 95(3): 671-686.

Okley, J. (1992) 'Anthropology and autobiography. Participatory experience and embodied knowledge', in J. Okley and H. Callaway (eds) Anthropology and Autobiography, London: Routledge.

Putnam, R. (1994) 'Tuning in, turning out: the strange disappearance of social capital in America' (accessed online: http://www.apsanet.or/ps/dec95/Putnam.cfm on 15/10/2000).

Raheja, G. and Gold, A. (1994) Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Stocking, G. (1992) The Ethnographer's Magic, Wisconin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Chapter 9

BUILDING TRUST THROUGH SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE FIELD:
REFLECTIONS FROM AN ETHNOGRAPHY IN MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN GREECE

Venetia Evergeti

Introduction

Methodologically and analytically speaking social capital can be seen differently depending on the discipline and the method of inquiry. In this paper, I wish to explore this issue through the critical eye of symbolic interactionism (SI) and with reference to my ethnographic fieldwork in a village of an ethno-religious minority in Northern Greece. Exploring social capital in the field from an interactionist perspective enables us to demonstrate that seriously taking into account and immersing oneself in the formal and informal networks of the community under study is part and parcel of the ethnographic process itself. In other words, through everyday interactions and a process of socialization the researcher not only gains an understanding but also learns to operate within the already established household, family, kinship and wider community networks of the field site.

In what follows, I will provide some reflections on the research process itself, mainly informed by my experiences in the field. In so doing, my aim is to describe the kinds of shared understandings necessary for the purposes of completing the ethnographic project. The aim here is to draw on some of my fieldwork experiences in order to reflect on my changing role within the community. More specifically I want to shift the analysis from exploring social capital as a distinct product of the community to exploring it as an integral part of the researcher's socialization into and acceptance (or rejection in some cases) in the community. Furthermore, in my discussion I will address the issue of trust and its importance in the ethnographic process. Trust is not a mere theoretical or methodological issue but one that is pertinent to the social processes of membership of any social group. Building trust and reliability through communication and interaction is significant not only for gaining access but also for getting on while in the field and obtaining important information.

Background

The perspective of SI has often been associated with the more general term of qualitative sociology because of its emphasis on ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation as methods of inquiry. Schwartz and Jacobs have named it 'the reality reconstruction business' which is '…the messy, tortuous business of learning to see the world of an individual or group from the inside' (Schwartz and Jacobs 1979: 2).

And so it was that, guided by the general principles of this sociological school and my thirst for knowledge about my chosen group, I set out with a diary and a camera in my bag, and all the naïve romanticism and anticipation characterising most young ethnographers, to do an ethnographic study of a community in Western Thrace. For a good part of five wintry months I stayed with a Turkish family in a small village in the Northeast corner of Greece called Ditiki Thraki (Δυτικη Θρακη). The area is home to a Muslim population of approximately 130,000[3],

---

[3] As Poulton (1994:183) has pointed out, various sources have given at times different estimates of the Muslim population in Thrace and therefore assessing the number of different minorities in Greece is problematic. When I visited the Greek National Institute of Statistics (ESYE) and asked for statistical

consisting of Turks, Pomaks and Roma (or Gypsies) which the Greek government homogenises under the umbrella term 'the Muslim minority of Western Thrace'.

The Muslim minorities in Thrace were established through the treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923. A separate convention in the treaty recognized the three ethnic groups as one religious minority, and imposed upon Greece and Turkey a number of obligations that the two countries had to respect vis-à-vis their respective minorities (the Muslim minorities in Greece and the Orthodox Greek minority in Turkey). Since then the issue of the Muslim communities in Western Thrace has played a significant role in the developments of the Greek-Turkish relations. Also, the area of W. Thrace has a strategic military position and Greece has often expressed fears that a Muslim minority, so close to the borders of Turkey and with a Turkish ethnic consciousness, could result in a situation similar to the one in Cyprus. Therefore the minority population is mostly regarded with suspicion in relation to their affiliation with Turkey. This has resulted in the Greek authorities adopting assimilation policies towards the Muslims in Thrace and considering them as a constant threat in the area.

My research focused on the issues of ethnic and religious identity and how members of minority groups negotiate various elements of their identities in public places but also within the 'private' realm of their kinship and family (Evergeti 1999). During my fieldwork in the area of Western Thrace and more specifically in the village of Mikrohori[4], the interviews that I had with my informants were in the style of informal conversations, occurring naturally, sometimes as group discussions and some others on a one-to-one basis. Where possible, I tape-recorded the conversations. Other times I kept notes. In addition, I was keeping a detailed diary of daily events and taking numerous photographs for visual analysis. My questions about their life, culture and identity were often perceived as funny and unusual by the people of the village. However, my status as a stranger in respect to their own reality, justified my 'unusual ways' and allowed me to ask about things that, for them, were taken for granted. Furthermore, the fact that I was seen as an outsider gave me access to places where the women from the community would not have been accepted, such as the coffee shop. Being able to go to the coffee shop meant that I was able to interact with and observe the men in their 'own' space, in the same way that I could interact with the women in their domestic spaces. Also, during my visits to the coffee shops of the village I gained immense knowledge about important aspects of male friendships, and the symbolic importance of drinking coffee and smoking together in reinforcing such friendships and kinship networks.

Although my belonging to the community was not acknowledged in the same way as the other inhabitants of the village, in the later stages of my fieldwork I was referred to as a member of the village in comparison with other Greeks or even Muslims from other villages. Part of my internalisation was to learn and respect their cultural norms and habits. This happened gradually through my various experiences of participating in a range of events and interacting within the same family networks as my informants. Furthermore, the more I knew and could articulate what was socially expected in different social occasions, the more I was gaining ground in my 'membership' of the group. In this respect, my participant observation was a dynamic process of ongoing learning, interpretation and networking.

As I will describe below, when I first arrived in the community I was received with suspicion, especially because I was asking questions about their ethnic identity, which was a topic of controversy between them and the Greek State. As Gold points out, 'the face-to-face relationships

---

information on Muslim communities in Thrace, I was told that there had been no question included in the Greek census regarding religion or ethnic origin since the 1950s, because Greece was a 'religiously homogenous country' (Evergeti 1999).

[4] Pseudonyms have been used for all my informants and their village.

of the field worker with his/her informants, are fundamental in proving to them that he or she is trustworthy and is there only to learn without judging them' (1997: 394).

My case study offers a plethora of instances through which I could analyse the workings of social capital and trust within the research process. However, for the purposes of this discussion I have chosen only two instances: firstly, the way I got some contacts and eventually access to the community; and secondly an incident with the local police. I believe that these examples illustrate most vividly how the social resources and information circulated in strong social networks become important tools in the research process. Furthermore, these instances demonstrate that, in a similar way to generating social capital within various groups, trust plays an important role in building strong relationships within the field.

Negotiating a role of acceptance: the issue of trust

Gaining access has often been described as the most important step of any research project. As part of this, the kind of connections and affiliations one might use to enter the field is of great importance as it impacts on the community's perception of the researcher's role and identity.

Entering the community required my active participation within various social networks. At the time I was a Ph.D. student at the Department of Sociology, University of Manchester, and had no connections in the community under study. I started by talking to some Turkish friends of mine about my research. One of them knew someone who was also studying at Manchester and was from the 'Turkish minority in Greece'! I have to admit that there was great luck involved in finding someone from the ethnic minority I wanted to study doing a Ph.D. in Manchester. Nevertheless, I must also admit that I was well aware of the fact that ethnicity was indeed a connecting element, generating bonding social capital and close affiliations within the group of Turkish friends. I went to see the student who my Turkish friends had mentioned, named Aiz, one evening a few months before I started planning my fieldwork. Obviously, that first contact was very important in terms of my later organization of the research. We had a very general discussion. Aiz was very reluctant to talk to me and was mostly asking questions about my interest on the subject. He was quite clear with me that he was suspicious of any Greek who was asking questions about the culture and identity of his community. To my surprise, because of his initial hesitance, at the end of our first meeting he invited me to visit him again in a few weeks time, when his wife would have arrived to join him in Manchester.

I thus visited Aiz and his wife Sarah again a few weeks later, and this time I was more explicit in terms of the aims of the fieldwork and my research interests. Both Aiz and Sarah were eager to explain to me some of the serious problems that their minority community was facing. Moreover on this occasion they were open and positive about me visiting the area, and at the end of my visit they gave me contact details for their families and friends back in their village, and even suggested that I could stay with Aiz's parents for the duration of my fieldwork. Our common Turkish friend, Zeki, who was a sociologist himself, later explained to me that they had asked him numerous questions about me and the reasons I was interested in the issue. Zeki said he had explained to Aiz and Sarah that it was only for the purposes of my Ph.D. and not in order to check out whether or not they were loyal to Greece, and had reassured them that he trusted me. In this respect, first Zeki and then Aiz and Sarah served as important 'gatekeepers' to the rest of the group. Interestingly, in this instance Zeki's trust in me was somehow transferable to Aiz and Sarah and eventually to their family. Nevertheless, this was only one level of trust that gained me access to the group. Eventually I had to gain people's confidence and show them with my actions that I was trustworthy enough for them to let me in their world and confide in me. This was a two-way process: the more I was

gaining membership of the group, the more people would trust me and vice-versa, and the more people would trust me, the stronger my association as a member of their village would become.

Eventually I did stay with Aiz's family in their village and gained important contacts with people from other villages in the area through Sarah's sister. Staying with this family positioned me in a certain way within the village. Aiz had explained to me that, because of his education, he and his family were not a representative example of the minority.[5] His father used to be a teacher and was therefore well respected in the village and had contacts in the nearby towns. Education level and who one knew made the person more influential and increased the level of respect within the village. This is a very common ethnographic finding especially in small communities (Delaney 1991). Later on I realized that this was something that the whole family regularly alluded to. For example, Mr. Aleck (Aiz's father) often pointed out that his family was unique within the village and the wider area in having a son doing a Ph.D. in the UK. Also, some of the other inhabitants of the village often referred to it, but not always in the most complimentary way. On the one hand, everyone in the village knew and acknowledged the fact that Mr. Aleck and his son were educated and some people also pointed to the fact that outside visitors would always stay with them (as I did). On the other hand, some thought that the family I was staying with was too 'flashy' and snobbish. Therefore, where I was staying influenced negatively, in the beginning at least, other people's perception of me. This of course was only communicated to me later on when, with the passage of time, I had entered into and gained the trust of other family and kinship networks in the village.

The issue of trust has often been seen as a component of social capital and it is without doubt one of the most important elements in the ethnographic process. It is a significant social resource which, although it can be transferable in some instances, still needs to be built through social interactions and active connections among people. Thus, although Zeki's trust in me was to some extend transferable to Aiz and his family and to a lesser extend to the rest of the village, I had to actively built and maintain a sense of trustworthiness and reliability in order to foster strong relations and networks in the community where I was studying. In this respect, trust is an interactional and communicative process that is achieved and reaffirmed through continuous social encounters.

A visit to the police station: the issue of trust again!

> Each observer, himself [sic] a member of society, marked by sex, age, race, and the other characteristics by which people place one another in various roles or relations, must find out not merely what the significant kinds of people are in the groups and situations he wants to study; he must also learn to perceive quickly and surely what role he has been cast in by the people he is studying. He must then decide whether he can effectively and on honest terms get them to see him in such a light that they will trust him (Hughes 1993: 435).

After the first few weeks of my stay in the village of Mikrohori I got a message to go and visit the local police station. More specifically, a policeman had phoned the coffee shop and had asked if there was a young Greek woman who had recently moved into the village. When he got a positive answer he said that the sergeant of the local police station (which was situated in a nearby town) would like to talk to me and that I should visit him in his office. Within a couple of hours everyone in the village was talking about this. Most people thought that this summons had to do with my visit in

---

[5] The area is quite remote and underdeveloped in many respects. The education level is very low (Kanakidou 1994) and most of the people are farmers working the land.

the area and urged me not to be frightened by the police tactics, which they themselves knew only too well. Everyone was very supportive and for the first time since I arrived I felt a real member of the village.

A few days later, and after I had received a second similar message, I visited the police station. Naturally, I was uncomfortable. Somehow I was feeling as if I had done something wrong. Mr. Aleck had volunteered to give me a lift to the police station and if necessary to talk to the sergeant and explain that I was his guest and was not causing any trouble in the village. When we got to the police station, the sergeant was very polite to us but explained quite firmly that he wanted to see me on my own, so Mr. Aleck had to wait in the reception. The sergeant asked numerous questions as to what I was doing in the area and how long I was planning to stay. He said that he was only asking out of concern and in case something happened to me! Although he showed a lot of surprise and described the purpose of my visit as 'quite unusual', he also said that if I needed any information or anything else for my research I should not hesitate to ask the police. The fact that I had been called to the police station annoyed me and I could not help asking the sergeant whether he would have done the same if he was in any other part of Greece and someone had visited the area. He said no, emphasizing that this was not like any other area in Greece. He went on to explain that the issue of the 'Muslim minority' was a sensitive one, especially because of their geographical location so close to the borders with Turkey. He was eager to tell me that the 'Muslims' of the area were well-treated and he pointed out the contrast with 'our minority' (meaning the Greeks) in Istanbul.[6] When he realised that I was annoyed, he became more apologetic and explained that his intentions were not to intimidate me or anyone else in the village. However, he did say that there was 'a climate of paranoia' in the area and that probably the inhabitants of Mikrohori had made this into much more than it was.

On our way back to the village Mr. Aleck told me that the young policeman in the reception had offered him coffee and had also asked him a few questions about my visit to the area. Mr. Aleck thought that, when the police heard of my visit to the area, they probably assumed that I was a reporter for a minority rights group[7] and therefore were eager to give me their view of the situation in Thrace.

The information that this single incident provided for my research was immense. For the purposes of this discussion, its importance lies with the fact that this became a symbol of my close affiliation with the village. Throughout the months that followed, my visit to the police station was repeatedly mentioned by the inhabitants in Mikrohori, mostly in terms of my 'defiance' to the police sergeant. Many people explained to me that they did not see this as an isolated incident but part of the general trend of policing in the area. Furthermore, it seemed to me that it served to break down the initial barriers between me and some of the inhabitants of the village. For example, this incident gave many people the opportunity to open up and tell me about their own negative experiences with the local police. Also, it helped to prove that not only I had not been sent to 'check up on them', as some people thought in the beginning, but also the police seemed to be checking up on me. Subsequently, because of my negative experience with the police, I was seen and referred to as someone who they could trust! In other words, although people had started trusting me as they got to know me, the incident helped to bring their trust and acceptance of me to a higher level.

---

[6] He was referring to the fact that the Greek minority of Istanbul has suffered from Turkish persecution and they now number only 2,500 people instead of the 100,000 that they comprised just after the signing of the Lausanne treaty.

[7] Helsinki Watch had in the past sent under-cover reporters to the area, and they produced a damaging report on Greek violations of the human rights of the minority. See Helsinki Watch Report 1990, *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Turks of Greece*, pg. 11-29 and 31-32.

There is a peculiar antithesis in the two incidents that I have described above. In the first instance, the fact that Zeki trusted me allowed Aiz and his family to also trust me to a degree that gave me access to their village. However, the fact that the Greek police were seen by the inhabitants as 'checking' on me and therefore distrusting me, was interpreted as a sign that they could trust me and also accept me as a member of their group. The particular meaning that the Mikrohorians attached to this situation was enhanced by my previous encounters with them. In other words, people could have interpreted the police incident differently: my invitation to the police station could have been seen as going to report my findings. However, the fact that they did not see it in these terms meant, for me, that they had already started seeing me as trustworthy and reliable, and the police incident only helped to strengthen their view. As I mentioned above building trust is an interpretive process and is reaffirmed through continuous social interactions.

Concluding remarks

As I illustrated in my discussion, entering the field through affiliations within a specific network influences the researcher's image within the community, and also the type of information one gathers. However, this is an important aspect of the research process and taking it into account is an essential step towards using it as illuminative data in itself.

By analysing the above ethnographic instances I have attempted to demonstrate that generating and utilising social capital is an integral part of the research process. Not only does the researcher need to understand social networks and how they operate within the community under study, but s/he also needs to competently employ them as a resource in everyday life in order to gain access to – and most importantly the trust of – the people involved. In this respect, the research process, like any other social situation, requires a constant interactional effort to produce and reproduce social relationships and networks based on shared meanings and a sense of trust. As I pointed out above, my affiliation with Zeki and his network of Turkish friends was sufficient to gain me access to the particular village in the area of Thrace. However, once I was in Mikrohori I had to actively establish myself as a trustworthy and reliable person through my every day interactions with the inhabitants. The police incident and my general disaffiliation with Greek officials reaffirmed and reinforced my acceptance as a member in the village and the inhabitants' perception of me as someone they could trust. The examples I used here illustrated the importance of trust in the research process. What I have sought to portray is that establishing trust was an ongoing process that was an integral part of my ethnography and as such lasted throughout my fieldwork.

References

Delaney, C. (1991) The Seed and the Soil, Berkeley: University of California Press.
Evergeti V, 1999 Negotiations of Identity: The Case of a Muslim Minority Village in Greece, Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Sociology, Manchester University.
Gold, R. (1997) 'The ethnographic method in sociology', Qualitative Inquiry, 3(4): 388-402.
Hughes, E.C. (1993) The Sociological Eye, London: Transaction Publishers.
Kanakidou,E. (1994) *Η Εκπαιδευση στη Γλωσσικη Μειονοτητα της Δυτικης Θρακης,* (Education in the Muslim Minority in W. Trace), Athens: Ellinika Gramata.
Schwartz, H. and Jacobs, J. (1979) Qualitative Sociology: A Method to the Madness, New York: Free Press.

Chapter 10

DOCKERY, NOW:
SOCIAL CAPITAL AND FIELDWORK

Robert McAuley

Introduction

Philip Larkin's (1964) poem 'Dockery and Son' is a reflection on the failure to generate social capital, its personal and social consequences.  Returning to his Oxford College to attend the memorial service of a friend, Larkin contemplates the implications of avoiding family life alongside failing to keep in touch with his fellow graduates.  As a graduate and researcher on social capital within higher education, the poem has a double resonance for me.  Working within the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, I am currently conducting a qualitative study on social capital within higher education, interviewing undergraduates at two universities on their experiences of and attitudes towards friendship.  In this paper I want to describe the process of conducting pilot interviews for that study and how I drew upon my own social capital to find undergraduates to participate in that initial fieldwork.  In this brief paper I want to explore the impact of generating social capital prior to, and subsequently drawing on that social capital during, fieldwork, which may have value to the general debate, particularly in establishing the relations between identity and social capital.

Fieldwork

With my project manager, I agreed that we would road test our interview questions on social capital within higher education by conducting individual pilot interviews with a group of undergraduates study at a higher education institution in the north of England.  My primary reason for choosing this particular university, which I shall call Kasper University, was that I had studied there for a Masters degree and I was hoping that one of my former tutors would act as a sponsor within my current research.  I have changed the names and positions of those involved in the pilot study to preserve their anonymity.

Eight years ago I studied for a Masters degree in cultural studies at Kasper that, in the spirit of the subject, was an interdisciplinary melting pot of politics, media and textual studies, sociology, and human geography.  Midway through that twelve-month period, I attended a module on political television and theatre and became friends with its creator, Trevor.  As with many friendships, our relationship was forged on common ground, in this instance the genius of Alan Bleasdale, his ability to reflect the economic and social inferno that was the first years of the 1980s in Britain, and a shared belief in the potential of theatre and television as an element for change.  Once that common ground was established within seminars and shared talk, being in his company seemed to transcend the often-uncomfortable emotional threshold separating pupil and teacher.  While describing this instance of social capital building feels embarrassing, especially when I think of Trevor himself reading this, his friendship led me back to his office door in the hope he could kick-start my pilot interviews by introducing me to some of his students.

After establishing the extent to which our lives had changed over the past eight years, I broached the subject of my study and how Trevor could aid its development.  Agreeing to help and briefly considering which of his students would be most suitable, Trevor told me that he would get in contact with a second year drama student.  The fact that Trevor chose an undergraduate who had

just completed a full length play, and one that he considered worthy of entering to a prestigious arts festival, while daunting, was highly significant in the subsequent development of pilot interviews. The next day I met Helen at the apt location of the University theatre foyer where we conducted my first interview on the friendships she and her friends had established at university. The term itself acts as a useful introduction to social capital in that, compared with 'friends', the concept of 'friendship' implies a greater resonance both temporally and spatially as a signifier of social relations.

Friendship and fieldwork

Within interviews, my aim has been to establish the characteristics that affect friendship, and how those characteristics shape the nature of student ties, communities and cultures at and beyond university. Higher education has particular significance in relation to friendship, in that universities are now one of the primary sites for economic and social transition for young people. Economically, globalisation and its insistence on more diverse, knowledge-based labour markets means that higher education has come to replace industry as the main route into secure employment. The move away from mass production has in turn had a radical impact on a society in which the old certainties of geographical, social and cultural continuity founded around large employment centres have been replaced by increasing mobility and transition among those seeking work (Beck 2000, Young 1999). The purpose of my study is to identify the impact of this social and economic dialectic on the formation of identity, and community and civic responsibility, at a point in which globalisation can been seen as having detrimental effects on all three. The growth in economic, social and political instability throughout the world during the latter half of the 20th century has resulted in what is generally agreed to be a 'crisis in modernity' within which the growth of ontological insecurity diminishes people's sense of social and civic responsibility (Giddens 2002).

As an intellectual response to these realities, social capital refers to the ability of social ties and bonds to generate economic, human, or cultural capital (Coleman 1988, Putnam 2000). The debate arises over the term as to what value that process should have in respect to what motivates or should motivate people into drawing on friendship (Portes 1998). While functionalists perceive social capital as having an intrinsic value in its ability to generate legitimate economic capital, structuralists argue that such an approach fails to acknowledge the impact of self-interest and social capital's role in the constitution of existing class relations. In his analysis of the emerging social capital debate, Portes (1998: 22) highlights how it often clouds the distinction between economy and society:

> Communitarian advocacy is a legitimate political stance; it is not good social science. As a label for the positive effects of sociability, social capital has, in my view, a place in the theory and research provided that its different sources and effects are recognised and that their downsides are examined with equal attention.

At an individual level, my decision to knock on Trevor's door could be described as pure self-interest: seeking his help and social connections to further my own employment or career prospects. My rationale at the time was that, in conducting a critical study on social capital in higher education, the opportunity to allow students to express their own experiences and concerns within a sociological context was a good enough reason for asking Trevor for his help and assistance. In this context, social capital could only work if Trevor believed in my study and asked his students if they wished to participate, thereby allowing all of us to contribute to research in the hope that it will influence social policy in positive ways. It was only after undertaking the project, however, that I became convinced of social capital's potential in establishing an elliptical relationship between intended social relations that transcend self-interest and actual social relations that reflect that intention in both their form and constitution. Yet, at the time, the fact that I had yet

to harvest the necessary data to substantiate that albeit well-meaning aim made me feel highly insecure in relation to the idea of social capital and the practice of my study in realising it. Recollecting Larkin's poem at the time, however, highlighted my own equivocal perspective on social capital leading up to and during those pilot interviews. Turning back the clock to the point when I was considering ways to conduct pilot interviews, my approach to social capital drew upon Coleman's (1988) and Putnam's (2000) largely functional interpretation of social capital as a resource that actors can draw on both rationally and socially to enhance communal bonds. Having not yet built those communal bonds myself, however, I experienced an insecurity that seemed to destabilise my ability to act rationally or even the belief that I ever could. I felt like Dockery:

> Only nineteen, he must have taken stock
> Of what he wanted, and been capable
> Of . . . No, that's not the difference: rather, how
> Convinced he was he should be added to!
> (Larkin 1964: 37)

While Dockery and I may have experienced the same sense of ontological insecurity, it is also important to establish the different historical periods in which we grew up. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to note that the fact that my formative years were in the 1980s had a significant bearing on my interpretation and application of social capital. This was a decade that produced in me a different sense of 'how convinced he was he should be added to'. Following on the collapse of Fordism at the start of the decade, the 1980s witnessed the birth of the consumer society in which people defined themselves in terms of what they owned or what they could possess (Featherstone 1991). While I never intended bribing Trevor for his assistance, I was still motivated by an ethos that social capital could or should be based on mutual self-interest. My implicit belief in that definition, however, disintegrated when I entered Trevor's office.

With its tottering pillars of essays, thumbed books, and arcane movie posters, Trevor's room felt like an ad hoc shrine of theatre knowledge and creativity. In social terms, Trevor's room functioned as a local site for worship, with students encamped outside his door in contemplative huddles or standing alone like thoughtful bodhisattvas. During the subsequent pilot interviews with Helen and her friends, Trevor's influence and the respect they felt for him recurred throughout our conversations about their lives and experiences at the university, often when I had not explicitly raised his role. To all, as with many within the English department and in the theatre generally, he was a selfless resource and diviner of contemporary British theatre history. I discovered that, as a tutor, Trevor was also an active facilitator for social capital among his students. He explained to me during a conversation we had after I had completed my pilot interviews, that he refused to let his first year undergraduates return to their parents at weekends, as he knew it would have a detrimental impact on their ability to generate long-term friendships at university. Such a policy probably explained why the second year students I interviewed regarded their course, friendships, and experiences at that time as the best days of their lives, even though they were still living them.

All this felt like a stark contrast to my own nomadic existence at that time, recently arrived in town to record lives and experiences; taking not giving. Before I actually began the process of interviewing, meeting up with Trevor that day only seemed to contrast his life and work as a lecturer, and my own position as novice researcher: 'for Dockery a son, for me nothing'. While the conclusion appears, like Larkin's (1964) poem, mournfully retrospective, experiencing that feeling made me reflect on the relations between social capital and ontological security. I had arrived with nothing but an idea that was subsequently overwhelmed by an economic, social and cultural life built through an intuitive interest in the well-being of others. For myself, living like a qualitative nomad for the past eight years, that life seemed unattainable through a far more reflexive model of social capital (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000). Yet, I came to realise that feeling was itself reflective of my own

position and status in a society seemingly set on the edges of post modernity and its impact on my own sense of self. In Modernity and Self-Identity, Anthony Giddens (1991: 45) provides a concise account of that process and its impact on our sense of self in relation to others:

> Rising anxiety tends to threaten awareness of self-identity, since awareness of the self in relation to constituting features of the object world becomes obscured. It is only in terms of the basic security system; the origin of the sense of ontological security, that the individual has the experience of the self in relation to the world of persons and objects organised cognitively through basic trust.

It was only through initiating and conducting what became an expedition into social capital that I could overcome the insecurity I felt towards the world of persons and objects, and how it could be and was organised cognitively through basic trust. What I came to realise during my own subsequent research, was that while certain ideas or inflections of social capital maybe measured quantitatively in terms of economic or social development, their qualitative value can only be understood through the feelings we feel and display towards each other, and how they become manifest in our social capital. An apt metaphor of this relationship is provided by Roland Barthes (1981: 6), who points out in his work on photography, 'For there to be a sign there must be a mark; deprived of marking, photographs are signs which don't take'.

Conclusion

Until initiating this study I had been unconvinced that social capital could be anything more than an exercise in mutual self-interest in which increasingly atomised individuals collide, sustain each other, and then disengage in an apparently random social cosmos. Initiating this study, I have come to realise social capital's potential as a foundation for an act of vocation that can simultaneously generate and reflect progressive social relations or 'signs that take' that transcend individual or rational determinism. During the brief period I spent with Trevor and his students, I came to realise that the question was not what is social capital but what we should regard as a reflection of it. By 'reflection', I do not mean simply the material products of social capital, whether they are economic or cultural, but also the community that social capital facilitates. While my own research subsequently produces over eighty interviews with undergraduates, it is not the transcripts that provide a measure of my own social capital, but also the psychological effect those young people had on me and on how I conceive, describe, and theorise social capital.

For Coleman (1988: 101), in order to appreciate how social capital 'works' we need to understand that 'something of value has been produced for those actors who have the resource available' and then deconstruct it to discover what aspects of the social structure of the group contributed to the outcome. What distinguishes my own position from that of functionalists such as Coleman is that that value needs to be experienced in social and psychological terms alongside the economic and cultural resources that contribute to and result from social capital.

References

Barthes, R. (1981) Camera Lucida, New York: Hill and Wang.
Beck, U. (2000) (trans. P. Camiller) The Brave New World of Work, Malden, Mass: Polity Press.
Coleman, J. (1988) 'Social capital and the creation of human capital', American Journal of Sociology, 94, pp.95-121.
Featherstone, M. (1991) Consumer Culture and Postmodernism, London: Sage.
Giddens, A. (1991) Modernity and Self-Identity, Cambridge: Polity Press.
Giddens, A. (2002) Runaway World: How Globalisation is Reshaping Our Lives, London: Profile.
Larkin, P. (1964) 'Dockery and Son', The Whitsun Weddings, London: Penguin.

Portes, A. (1998) 'Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology', Annual Review of Sociology, 26, pp.18-21.

Putnam, R. (2000) Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, New York: Simon and Schuster.

Young, J. (1999) The Exclusive Society, London: Sage.