# **Recreation, Informal Social Networks and Social Capital**

Alan Warde, Gindo Tampubolon, and Mike Savage School of Social Sciences University of Manchester

This paper examines the determinants of recreational practices amongst members of three diverse voluntary associations in the North West of England, focusing on being hosts and guests in private homes and eating and drinking outside the home. Using multi-level models analysing a rich data source on the social networks of members, we show how respondents' sociability is affected less by their socio-demographic characteristics than by the nature of their social networks. We show, against expectations, that there is little evidence of homophily in these recreational practices, which indicates that informal social contacts may be especially important in generating "bridging" and "boundaryspanning" types of social capital. We use the evidence to argue the need for a "sociology of companionship" which highlights routine sociability around recreational practices.

KEYWORDS: Companionship, recreation, social capital, social networks.

## Introduction

In the past decade the concept of social capital has been applied to an increasingly large number of fields to explain outcomes such as educational attainment, health status, economic prosperity, crime rates, and democratic participation (see for example, Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Stolle & Hooghe, 2004). Its wider use is valuable in its recognition of the importance of social ties and interpersonal connections in the contemporary world. However, its extension has resulted in loss of analytic precision as the concept has come to carry different meanings as it is employed in disparate theoretical traditions (Fine, 2001). Moreover, and partly as a consequence, there is considerable disagreement about how the processes which generate the effects attributed to social capital operate.

Our paper focuses on the role that engagement in informal recreational activities plays in social capital formation. It uses multi-level methods to examine the social network connections of members of three voluntary associations in North West England. We show how network structures within organizations affect general sociability and that network ties influence participation in a range of recreational and leisure practices. Further, we test

Address correspondence to: Alan Warde, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, UK M13 9PL. Email: alan.warde@manchester.ac.uk.

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the extent to which recreational practices are carried out by socially homogeneous groups to assess whether, and what type of social capital might be generated by informal sociability.

We begin with some theoretical observations to underline the importance of studying informal recreational practices, considering how these bear on current debates about social capital. Secondly, we explain the distinctiveness of our case studies, describe our data and our research methodology. We go on to describe the recreational practices of our sample of respondents as a means of examining the extent of sociability amongst our sample. Then, as a means of assessing the relationship between formal and informal sociability, we examine the overlap between associational involvement and informal socialising with co-members. Next we build models of respondents' involvement in recreational practices in order to see how far dining, drinking, and domestic invitations are structured by principles of homophily and network connection. The conclusion to our paper emphasises that recreational practices generally involve considerable informal social mixing, and we show the relevance of these findings for debates about social capital.

# Social Capital, Recreation and Companionship

We are particularly interested in the connections and relationships evident in informal recreational practices. Who goes where with whom? What types of bond sustain co-participation? We set this question in the context of contentious issues, as yet unresolved, within recent debates about social capital.

The study of social capital has diverse roots, mostly seeking to address issues arising out of the well-established tension between individual interests and the collective good. One major dispute concerns the instrumental and collective roles of social capital. For some, like Bourdieu (1987), Burt (1992) and Lin (2001), it is a matter of how individuals mobilise the resources of their social connections for personal or sectional gain. Burt and Lin use social network analysis to show how relative position within a network confers advantages upon incumbents by virtue of network structure, but are relatively little concerned with the personal characteristics of the people in the network or the quality and affective properties of their relationships. Bourdieu, on the other hand, explicitly rejecting social network analysis, considers the substantive characteristics of individuals and their relationships of friendship and especially kinship, but only insofar as these are privately "profitable". On the other hand, for Coleman (1990), Fukayama (1997) and Putnam (2000) social capital is a matter of how collective goods, like trust and cooperation, are generated. Thus, Coleman, one of the originators of the concept, uses the concept within a rational choice perspective as a means of exploring how individual self-interest can be over ridden. Putnam (1995, 2000), though not indebted to rational choice approaches, was also concerned with how social capital acts as a "social glue" binding together individuals who otherwise might fragment. For him (2000: 19), 'social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.' In this view, the concept of social capital proves attractive as the latest means to explore Hobbes's very old "problem of order". Neo-Tocquevillian perspectives with which Putnam is associated argue that the experience of engagement in civic associations leads people to be better able to reconcile differences and work cooperatively together. "Good government", Putnam (1993) writes, "is a by-product of singing groups and soccer clubs" (p. 176). Social capital deriving from voluntary association membership facilitates contact with people unlike oneself, thereby promoting social integration.

A second and related controversy concerns the mechanisms which generate social capital, whether it accumulates primarily through formal channels like associations (e.g., Putnam, 1993, 2000), or through informal social connections (e.g., Bourdieu, 1987; Burt, 1992). We can detect a move away from conceptions of social capital which privilege the significance of involvement in formal arenas, such as voluntary associations (see Anheier & Kendal, 2002; Field, 2003; Putnam, 2000), towards recognition of the way that informal social relations might generate trust and participation. Though Putnam is probably the main contemporary champion of the tradition of de Tocqueville, his later work broadens to include informal social connections. Putnam (2000: 93-94) has emphasised the importance of "schmoozing", spending time "in informal conversation and communion", in activity "less organized and purposeful, more spontaneous and flexible" than joining formal associations. However, at least some of those studying such informal sociability see the rise of "lifestyle communities" or "lifestyle enclaves" based on shared leisure interests and friendship networks as inimical to the generation of social capital (for an especially well known account here, see Bellah et al., 1996). Sociability in public and semi-public arenas where strangers learn to live with each other is replaced by contact with "people like us" who need not learn to engage with disparate others who fail to share their common concerns or enthusiasms.

Given the centrality of this issue it is important to know more about the social relationships implicated in informal recreational practices. There is indeed some evidence that informal interactions are significant in promoting trust. Li et al. (2004) show, using data from the British Household Panel Study, that networks based on informal social relations generate more trust than involvement in formal associations, once socio-demographic variables are controlled for. However, research on the topic remains piecemeal and it is not clear what mechanisms generate the observed effects. Our material attempts to cast light on these matters. We examine the way that recreational activities are implicated in webs of companionship. More specifically, we examine the extent to which informal social contact facilitates the kind of social mixing which generates social capital.

Fundamental to our problem, and indeed to both the controversies sketched above, is the extent to which people have connections to others with similar or dissimilar social characteristics. This is a question which preoccupied Putnam and for which purpose he drew a distinction, well-known but somewhat problematic, between "bonding" and "bridging" capital. Though his definitions of the concepts were in terms of their functions (see 2000: 22), he is particularly exercised by the dependence of bridging capital on contacts with people of dissimilar characteristics. Putnam's fear is that bridging capital is in decline, that in future sources of solidarity will arise mostly from bonding capital, and that this transition will have strong negative social effects. His political project is summed up (2000: 411): "To build bridging social capital requires that we transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves". Arguably, however, the dichotomy simplifies radically by drawing several distinct properties of social relationships into one dimension, thereby prejudging that it is contact in formal and public arenas that connects people with dissimilar characteristics. This study draws on evidence relevant to determining whether participation in recreational activities contributes to the erosion of "bridging" capital, and more specifically whether it is an arena which draws together dissimilar people.

Understanding the relationship between social capital and informal recreational practices currently faces two major problems. First, it is difficult to find robust quantitative evidence about informal activity comparable with survey data on associational involvement, such as that used by Putnam (2000), Paxton (2000, 2002), or Hall (1999). Most such research relies on individual level data with relatively little information on the social networks of respondents. Putnam, for example, interprets trends in informal social interaction through survey measures reporting the amount of informal socialising that people undertake. There has been relatively little engagement with issues raised by social network analysts, with their structuralist concern to examine how individuals are configured in whole networks. Social network writers, in turn, have only engaged in piecemeal fashion with the concept of social capital, and mostly deploy highly instrumentalist assumptions, such as seeing it as a resource allowing individuals to obtain advantage (see Kadushin 2004; Lin 2000;. Burt (2000, 2002), for instance, has examined the power of bridging social capital which allows particular bankers to straddle otherwise disconnected cliques of other bankers. Social capital is here used as a means of exploring how individual advantage is secured by exploiting the factional structure of social networks.

A second problem of extending interest in social capital to informal social relationships is that the existing orthodoxy points to sustained processes of homophily in routine recreational and leisure activities. Following Wellman (1979) and Fischer (1982), it has become commonplace to note that informal social networks need not be based on neighbourhood residence, and that people seek out others with whom they share leisure interests and who may not live nearby. Bellah et al. (1996) see this as generating "lifestyle enclaves", where people turn their back on neighbours in preference for socialising with people like themselves. Although not empirically examined in the British context, such claims are consistent with arguments

about high levels of class specificity in informal sociability, relationships tending to exhibit "homophily" (Adams and Allan 1998; Allan, 1979; Crow & Allan, 1993). It is suggested that this tendency may be increasing. For example, urban living is being restructured as gentrification entails people moving to neighbourhoods where they expect to find other, like-minded, people (Butler & Robson, 2003; Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst, 2004). Similarly, it has been argued that new kinds of leisure activity based around large, corporate enterprises, such as gymnasia and leisure complexes, do not generate widespread sociability, but rather promote more individualised forms of engagement and social homogeneity because the fees charged for such activities exclude significant groups in the population. Such trends towards homophily around recreational and leisure activities have clear implications for the generation of social capital. For Butler and Robson (2003) informal sociability sustains "bonding" social capital amongst the middle classes rather than providing social interaction amongst a diverse population allowing "bridging".

Currently, then, there is a lack of theoretical clarity about how informal recreational practices generate social engagement and participation. We seek to supplement and refine accounts of the collective role of social capital by exploiting key insights from studies of social networks. We contend that greater precision can be obtained by drawing on structural approaches developed in social network analysis, for instance on ideas of the 'strength of weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) and the role of brokers in straddling 'structural holes' (Burt (1992). The analysis of connections within networks suggests a range of mechanisms which might explain patterns of participation and how connections are formed among diverse groups of people. It becomes possible to move from a metaphorical sense of network to the substance of interpersonal ties. Consequently, we concentrate on the structure, size and composition of networks, and the quality of ties and relationships exhibited by people who share in informal recreational practices.

## Methods

One avenue for exploring in detail the operation of informal ties is through case studies of formal and informal networks. By examining a formal organization it is possible to assess the interplay between organizational position and informal sociability. We reconsider a study of three organizations previously employed to analyse sources of political activism (see Ray et al., 2003; Savage et al., 2004). The organizations were located in North West England: a branch of the Labour Party, a branch of a national environmental organisation, and a local conservation group. These organizations have diverse characteristics, one a traditional political party, one a new social movement, the other a campaigning organization (for more details see Savage et al., 2004: 87). The fieldwork was conducted in 1999 and 2000. Our aim was to examine the nature of connections between all the members within these three organisations. We also collected material on some of the ties that these members had beyond the organization, from their reports on a number of leisure and recreational practices.

Research design involved three stages: a postal questionnaire; a subsequent face-to-face interview; and for a small sub-group, an interview to elicit a life history. The postal questionnaire sent to all members of each of the three organisations obtained information, *inter alia*, on respondents' socioeconomic position, and on the extent of their participation in the organisation and in other voluntary associations. We obtained a very high response rate. We received 226 replies in total, 102 from the Labour Party, 94 from the Conservation group and 30 from the much smaller Environmental organisation. Complete response rates for the first phase postal questionnaire were for the Conservation Group 79%, for the Environmental Organisation 78%, and for the Labour Party 80%. We asked permission to re-contact each respondent for a face-to-face interview. The data reported in this paper come exclusively from the second stage of face-to-face interviews. This yielded a sample of 126 individuals, 53 from the party, 56 from the conservation group and 17 from the environmental organisation.<sup>1</sup>

Full data on social networks were obtained through respondents identifying, from a roster of named members, with whom they interacted in various specified settings including which of these co-members they met socially outside the organization. Because we used a roster, we did not rely on respondents recalling particular ties, but could ask them to look at all possible named members within the organisation and identify all salient ties. Our 126 respondents reported 697 ties to another named individual within the organisation (so-called dyadic ties). We also inquired about people's networks beyond the organization around a series of recreational practices, namely being invited to someone's house (and inviting others to their own house), having a meal at someone's house (and inviting others to their own house), drinking socially, and eating socially, during the previous fortnight. Anyone who reported any of these was asked whom their companions had been, and we recorded, for the first two mentioned, the occupation, age, gender, length of time that that contact was known, how often they met and whether they would describe the person as close. We also asked what was their favourite leisure activity, and with whom, if anyone, they talked about it. Again we asked for socio-demographic characteristics and the type of tie involved with the two first named contacts. As a result we obtained information on up to 14 named people reported for these recreational practices, which produced a total of a further 666 dyadic ties. Hence we have a total sample of 1,363 ties based upon 126 individuals, almost 11 per respondent on average.

We should emphasise that our respondents were not representative of the British population. It is well known that members of political or quasi-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>In this second stage, the response rate for the conservation group was 46% of all members (58% of those who had returned postal questionnaires), for the party 41% (52%), and for the environmental organisation 46% (57%). No interviewee was a member of more than one of these organizations.

political organisations are predominantly in professional and managerial jobs, and are highly educated (Hall, 1999; Li et al., 2003; Parry et al., 1992), and this was true of our sample (see Ray et al., 2003). Our respondents did not have especially high incomes, in large part because a significant proportion had retired. They were also predominantly white and middle-aged, but there were more or less equal numbers of men and women. The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are described in Table 1.

The fact that this is not a random sample of the British population has analytical advantages for exploring the relationship between social capital and recreational practices. Since all respondents are members of at least one voluntary association, we are able to examine the connections between people's formal involvement and their informal recreational practices in ways which have not been hitherto attempted. Indeed, for one question, concerning whether members socialise with other co-members, we can examine how position within an organisation, as well as the personal characteristics of a bounded sample of respondents (egos) and contacts (alters), affects the relations of sociability or companionship beyond the organisation's boundary. The other questions analysed are examined using ego network data, (i.e., we have only the respondents report of their contacts' characteristics), yet we are still able to examine how a person's position within internal organisation's networks may affect their recreation.

The frequencies and definitions of the dependent variables used in our analysis of recreational activities are shown in Table 2, which shows that all the six different recreational activities are undertaken by a substantial proportion of the respondents in a two week time period. We are able to examine what factors increase the likelihood of any respondent engaging in one of eight activities.

Our approach to modelling can be described as hierarchical. We construct the explanation, and build models, in three steps, asking the questions:

- 1) What are the characteristics of respondents and contacts who do that activity?
- 2) What is the structure of respondent's ties?
- 3) What is the nature or quality of the ties between respondent and contacts?

The steps are ordered in this fashion, moving from structural to affective characteristics, to permit estimation of increasingly particular aspects of network connections on respondent's behaviour. In each step we include a block of variables reflecting characteristics relevant to that step. The purpose of having these blocks and entering them together is to ascertain whether a joint activity can be explained better by going beyond socio-demographic characteristics (Model 2 compared to Model 1); and by going beyond the structure of respondents' ties (Model 3 compared to Model 2). Given the limited amount of empirical information about recreational practices and social capital and lack of clear theory as to what determines participation in these joint activities, this exploratory approach seems appropriate at this stage. This also informs the rule that we adopt in model selection later.

Characteristic Attribute	Labour Party (n = 102) %	Conservation Group (n = 94) %	Environment Group (n = 30) %	Total ( $n = 226$ ) %
Income*				
Less than £10,000	22.6	40.9	31.0	31.4
£10,000-£20,000	28.0	37.5	41.4	33.8
£20,000-£30,000	15.1	11.4	27.6	15.2
£30,000-£40,000	10.8	8.0	—	8.1
£40,000 and over	23.7	2.3		11.4
Highest educational qualification#				
None	10.0	2.2	3.6	6.0
CSE/GCSE	12.0	5.6	17.9	10.1
A level	13.0	14.4	3.5	12.4
Technical (HND/HNC)	10.0	18.9	25.0	16.5
Degree and higher degree	55.0	58.9	42.9	55.0
Occupational class				
Service class	83.3	71.8	58.6	75.2
Routine non-manual and personal service workers	7.3	22.4	24.1	15.7
Petite bourgeoisie	3.1	2.4		2.4
Foremen and technicians	_	2.4	10.3	4.3
Skilled, semi- and unskilled workers	6.3	1.2	6.9	2.4
Occupational group				
Managers and administrators	24.5	25.8	10.3	23.2
Professionals	42.2	30.1	24.1	34.8
Assoc professionals and technicians	14.7	19.4	27.6	18.3
Clerical and secretarial	4.9	15.1	20.7	11.2
Craft and related	5.9	2.2	3.5	4.0
Personal and protective services	1.0	4.3	3.5	2.7
Sales and related	2.9	3.2	6.9	3.6
Plant and machine operatives	1.0			0.5
Other	2.9	—	3.5	1.8

 TABLE 1

 Characteristics of the Respondents by Organisation Membership

\*Annual gross income in pounds sterling.

#(General) Certificate of Secondary Education and O-level are qualifications normally achieved at ages 15 or 16 at the end of compulsory secondary schooling. Advanced Level examinations indicate normally two years further study. Higher National Diploma and Higher National Certificate are sub-degree level technical qualifications.

Specifically, we do not rely on the standard or often used variant of adjusted  $R^2$  and instead rely on Bayesian Information Criterion to choose a model (Raftery, 1995; Long, 1997: 110-112).

The independent variables that we used in model building were of five types. The first was simply a control for the organisation of which the respondent was a member. Second, personal characteristics were considered—

Activity	N	%
Met co-member outside the organisation during previous year	71	56.4
Activities in last fortnight	N	%
Had someone visit at home	94	74.6
Went out to a restaurant	84	66.7
Visited someone else's home	74	58.7
Went to someone's home for a meal	63	50.0
Went out for a drink	63	50.0
Had someone visit at home	59	46.8
Total	126	

TABLE 2							
Res	pondents'	Participation	in	Recreational	Activities		

sex, age, occupation, personal income, educational qualifications, and the total number of associational memberships reported.<sup>2</sup> Third, homophily of respondent and contact was explored along three dimensions: belonging to the same sex, same age group, or same class.<sup>3</sup> A particular issue with constructing a variable for class homophily was that respondents did not frequently identify an occupation for alter. We dealt with this by using multiple imputation methods.<sup>4</sup> Fourth, several variables measured the structure of respondent's network. The *size of the network* was the sum of all contacts reported by any one respondent. Any contact could be denoted as standing in one or more of the following relationships to respondent: partner, extended family member, friend, neighbour, co-member of another voluntary associ-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Highest educational qualification, personal income and age group were treated as continuous covariates because, being based on ordinal variables with 8, 11 and 6 levels respectively, they will change the substantive conclusions very little while in return we preserve degrees of freedom to explore other effects.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>We employed the Cambridge stratification scale (see Stewart et al., 1983), which allocates occupations a score, on a continuous single hierarchical dimension, based on patterns of friendship. This was used both to assign respondents to a class position (the Cambridge score) and to identify degree of class homophily between respondents and their contacts, where homophily was estimated as distance between the occupations of respondent and contact.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>We imputed ten values to each missing answer. These values reflect the uncertainty, i.e. they are from an underlying distribution of the missing answer. In effect we have ten sets of data, hence multiple-imputed datasets. These multiple datasets together reflects the uncertainty inherent in the process of imputing values to missing answer. We then estimate model of interest (i.e. Model 1, Model 2 and Model 3) to each of these datasets, effectively ten times for each model, and pool the results to arrive at estimates and inference using Rubin's rule (Rubin, 1987). It must be noted here that there is not yet a standard way of comparing these pooled results of different models to select a model. As mentioned above, given the exploratory nature of our approach we satisfy ourselves with comparing BICs of different pooled models to choose the most plausible models.

ation, colleague, or acquaintance. This produced a measure of *range of ties*, a sum of how many of these relationships were reported. That is, if a respondent's contacts consist of a partner, a friend and a neighbour, then range of ties amount to three. We also produced a measure of multiplex ties: if any given contact stood in more than one such relationship to respondent (e.g., both friend and neighbour) then this was deemed *multiplex*. For modelling purposes we created a variable of the (log of the) *proportion* of *multiplex* ties among all ties for each respondent. Log of the variable is taken to deal with the fact that its distribution is skewed. Finally, we operationalised aspects of the reported affective characteristics of dyadic ties: whether the tie was multiplex, frequency of meeting, length of time known, and respondent's perception of the closeness of the relationship.

Because we model dyad characteristics (i.e. whether respondent and contact shared a meal or not, for instance), the dependent variables are binary. We therefore use logistic regression. Furthermore, the data can be conceived as structured on two levels. On the first level reside respondents; and for each respondent there maybe many contacts situated at another level. Because there is therefore potential for these dyads to respond similarly, the standard error may misleadingly be reduced. To correct for this we use robust standard error in Stata (Rogers, 1993; Williams, 2000; StataCorp 2003).

#### Findings

## Associational Membership and Recreational Companionship

We begin by looking at the ways that contact within the three organisations can be extended to informal engagement. This is particularly important for considering how involvement in formal associations might generate more wide ranging informal contacts, so that we can assess the degree of overlap with "schmoozing" activities. We asked, using a roster, which of the other members of the organisation respondents met outside of the formal activities of that organization. Fifty-six per cent of respondents said that they met fellow members outside the confines of the activities of the organisation of which they were co-members. Table 3 reports the variables that predispose people to meet with other members socially (reported as odds ratios<sup>5</sup>).

Model 1 considers the socio-demographic attributes of respondent and contact, so that we are able to see whether homophily is important to people socialising beyond the confines of the organization. Two characteristics are statistically significant. The chances of meeting someone from the organi-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>Following Long (1997), results of logistic regression given in terms of odds ratio can be interpreted as follows. Values significantly different from 1.0 (using p < 0.5) are indicative of a factor that is associated with the outcome. For a unit change in a variable or the presence of a characteristic, say multiplex tie in Table 3 Model 3, the odds are expected to change by a factor of 2.799 times. Conversely, if the odds ratio is less than one, then a unit change in a variable or the presence of a characteristic reduces the odds by the estimated factor.

	Stage 1		Stage 9		Stage 3		
				4			
Factors entered at each stage	Odds ratio	Р	Odds ratio	þ	Odds ratio	þ	
Respondent Characteristics							
Âge	1.333	.004	1.254	.042	1.169	.209	
Gender (is female)	1.047	.860	0.996	.986	1.085	.765	
Education	1.052	.526	0.993	.930	0.998	.980	
Income	0.922	.110	0.914	.068	0.897	.050	
Conservation group	1.322	.257	1.059	.811	1.405	.200	
Environmental group	0.897	.792	0.836	.670	0.902	.821	
Relationship to companion							
Same gender	1.203	.251	1.209	.250	1.455	.053	
Age difference	0.717	.003	0.701	.002	0.818	.091	
Class homophily	0.995	.527	0.994	.457	0.999	.888	
Cambridge score	1.001	.888	1.001	.829	1.002	.707	
Network Structure							
Network position	0.923	.668	1.030	.879	0.884	.576	
Proportion of multiplex ties			4.917	<.001	2.192	.140	
Range of ties			1.037	.728	1.033	.771	
Network size			0.976	.431	0.971	.419	
Characteristics of ties							
Frequency of meeting					1.429	.005	
How long known					1.013	.366	
Especially close					4.307	<.001	
Multiplex tie?					2.799	.003	
N	697	697		697		697	

Factors Associated with the Likelihood of Informal Contact Outside Organisations

Difference of 48.1 in Bayes Information Criterion (Raftery, 1995) provides very strong support for Model 3. See Note 6 on model selection.

Question: In the last year, who on this list [Roster of organisation's members] have you met with outside of the activities of [Organisation]?

sation socially are significantly higher among older members, and the odds reduce significantly the greater the age difference. There is, however, no evidence that class or gender homophily matter. Nor did the position of ego within the internal organisational network make any difference: external sociable engagement was not a function of being core or peripheral in the official activities of the association. Nor did the number of different types of association to which respondents belong have any significance. There thus appears to be no overlap between position within the organisation and networks of sociability between members.

Model 2 adds characteristics of the structure of respondent's network ties. Having a larger number of multiplex ties, where respondents said that they knew a fellow member in two or more capacities (e.g., family and neighbour, or colleague and friend) considerably increases the likelihood of joining in sociable activities. The more complex the range of the personal ties with other members, the more they engage in sociable activities. Age continues to be significant as an indicator of engagement once the character of the respondent's network is taken into account.

In model 3 the particular nature of the tie between ego and alter is examined. The additional variables were frequency of contact, number of years known, feeling close and knowing each other in more than one capacity (measured as having a multiplex tie with a particular contact). These ties matter. Feeling close increases fourfold the likelihood of engaging in a sociable activity with that person. Having a multiplex tie to alter also increases the likelihood almost threefold. Greater frequency of meetings between ego and alter also has some effect. Once the nature of ties is taken into account income becomes marginally significant while age effects drop out of the model. The Bayes-Schwarz Information Criterion indicates very strong support for the third model.<sup>6</sup> The final model shows that the factors associated with the nature of the mutual tie between ego and alter are the main sources of differences in the likelihood of members of an organisation engaging in sociable activities beyond the bounds of its official activities. Measures of homophily appear much less important.

### Ego Networks in Six Popular Recreational Activities

Let us now consider the determinants of people's involvement in six specific recreational activities. These activities are instructive because they cover common forms of sociability, which span private and public realms, some of which imply reciprocity, and which it might be anticipated would reflect different degrees of closeness between co-participants. When examining these activities (see Tables 4 to 9), we proceed in the same way as before, building models in three steps—first, socio-demographic and homophilic characteristics, then network structure, then nature of network ties. In general the components of the models were not very good at explaining the probability of the outcome. We only comment on the findings referring to the first and second steps where relevant, concentrating rather on the description of the full model 3, though the tables report each step for the sake of completeness.

As regards inviting people home for a meal (Table 4), conservation group members were significantly less hospitable than those from the other

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>There is not yet an established measure of model selection for the purpose of comparing models involving multiple imputations comparable to Bayes-Schwarz Information Criterion for comparing non-nested models (Raftery, 1995). The important question in our sets of models is what is the support for including network structures (Model 2) or quality of ties (Model 3) when compared to the simple model (Model 1)? We seek the most parsimonious model (significantly different from zero at 10% level) using observed-only data in terms of BIC. These are reported for each table; all point to the importance of including network structures and ties qualities.

	^		<u></u>				
	Model	1	Stage 2	2	Stage 3	3	
Factors entered at each stage	Odds ratio	Þ	Odds ratio	þ	Odds ratio	þ	
Respondent Characteristics							
Age	0.790	.032	0.871	.235	0.935	.571	
Gender (is female)	1.152	.571	0.981	.936	0.919	.728	
Education	0.964	.678	0.945	.518	0.955	.601	
Income	0.993	.894	1.011	.804	1.006	.894	
Conservation group	0.369	.001	0.492	.023	0.505	.029	
Environmental group	0.478	.126	0.610	.299	0.608	.299	
Relationship to companion							
Same gender	0.724	.105	0.699	.076	0.740	.166	
Age difference	1.287	.041	1.339	.017	1.328	.021	
Class homophily	1.007	.498	1.007	.529	1.008	.485	
Cambridge score	1.013	.116	1.008	.317	1.007	.374	
Network Structure							
Network position	0.759	.270	0.901	.681	0.890	.652	
Proportion of multiplex ties			0.378	.088	0.379	.105	
Range of ties			0.966	.772	0.988	.923	
Network size			1.303	.007	1.296	.010	
Characteristics of ties							
Frequency					1.215	.096	
How long known					0.987	.148	
Especially close					1.454	.241	
Multiplex tie?					0.877	.670	
N	666		666		666		

 
 TABLE 4

 Factors Associated with the Likelihood of Inviting Contacts to Meal at Respondents' House

Difference in BIC (Raftery, 1995) of 26.9 provides very strong support for Stage 3. See Note 6 on model selection.

Question: Can you tell me which of these social activities you have done in the last two weeks? Had someone to your house for lunch or dinner? Can you tell me the names of the peoples you did these things with?

two organisations. We also see that age-based homophily is significant, with much less hospitality when age differences are greater. Once we took into account the quality of ties only network size remains significant; the larger the network the more likely an invitation will be extended to someone else to eat a meal.

Analysing the answers to the question of whether ego had been invited out to someone else's home for a meal showed that only one variable was ever statistically significant, network size (Table 5). The larger the size of respondent's network the more likely s/he was to accept an invitation. Since we would expect that the giving and receiving of invitations to take meals in

Factors entered at each stage	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
	Odds ratio	p	Odds ratio	þ	Odds ratio	Þ
Respondent Characteristics						
Age	1.029	.793	1.163	.205	1.125	.363
Education	0.994	.947	0.987	.888	0.978	.819
Income	1.087	.125	1.099	.089	1.103	.079
Conservation group	1.071	.818	1.389	.329	1.398	.315
Environmental group	1.813	.123	2.264	.049	2.240	.053
Gender (is female)	1.243	.427	1.039	.882	1.021	.933
Relationship to companion						
Same gender	1.171	.455	1.159	.484	1.135	.566
Age difference	0.979	.846	1.005	.967	1.022	.851
Class homophily	0.991	.382	0.990	.349	0.991	.366
Cambridge score	1.000	.962	0.996	.558	0.996	.577
Network Structure						
Network position	0.928	.706	1.102	.620	1.119	.565
Proportion of multiplex ties			0.479	.206	0.374	.131
Range of ties			0.947	.607	0.936	.544
Network size			1.321	.005	1.328	.005
Characteristics of ties						
Frequency of meeting					0.878	.332
How long known					1.003	.787
Especially close					1.344	.377
Multiplex tie?					1.330	.341
N	666		666		666	

TABLE 5

Factors Associated with the Likelihood of Being Invited for Meal by Contacts

Difference in BIC (Raftery, 1995) of 24.2 provides *very strong* support for Stage 3. Question: Went to someone else's house for lunch or dinner?

domestic surroundings are mostly reciprocal, it is perhaps surprising that quality of tie was not also relevant. However, we are obliged to conclude that the exchange of invitations among people like those in our sample is almost entirely a function of how many people a person knows: a simple function of network structure.

Receiving people at home just for a visit was influenced rather more by social and network features (see Table 6). In model one, being female and not being in the same age group were statistically significant. Gender did not affect hospitality once network structure was taken into account. Those with a comparatively narrow range of ties had more visitors, as did those with a large number of people in their network and, to a lesser extent, did those who had a greater proportion of multiplex ties among their network associates. Taking account of the quality of dyadic ties made no difference. Thus

	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3		
Factors entered at each stage	Odds ratio	þ	Odds ratio	Þ	Odds ratio	þ	
Respondent Characteristics							
Âge	0.917	.232	0.972	.705	1.004	.966	
Gender (is female)	1.525	.029	1.486	.050	1.467	.064	
Education	0.981	.790	1.010	.857	1.017	.765	
Income	1.008	.847	1.026	.465	1.022	.542	
Conservation group	0.867	.514	0.910	.640	0.911	.646	
Environmental group	1.361	.374	1.523	.186	1.526	.170	
Relationship to companion							
Same gender	0.839	.350	0.818	.301	0.835	.352	
Age difference	1.291	.009	1.324	.004	1.316	.005	
Class homophily	1.001	.879	1.005	.541	1.005	.531	
Cambridge score	0.995	.315	0.994	.229	0.993	.206	
Network Structure							
Network position	0.913	.531	0.915	.561	0.899	.480	
Proportion of multiplex ties			1.575	.227	1.631	.274	
Range of ties			0.700	<.001	0.706	<.001	
Network size			1.172	.021	1.168	.023	
Characteristics of ties							
Frequency of meeting					1.152	.132	
How long known					0.996	.607	
Especially close					0.905	.669	
Multiplex tie?					0.905	.732	
N	666		666		666		

 TABLE 6

 Factors Associated with the Likelihood of Having Contact to House for Visit

Difference in BIC of 35.7 provides *very strong* support for Stage 3. Question: Had someone to your house for a visit?

we must conclude that it is only features of network structure and homophily by age among the variables we have measured, which affect who is received at home.

Predicting influences on paying a visit to another's house was even less well explained. Only two factors mattered at all, network size, where the larger the network the more likely a visit, and range of ties, where again those with a narrower range of ties were more likely to be the recipients of hospitality (see Table 7).

In general, then, private hospitality does not appear understandable in terms of people's social connections. This kind of private sociability does not appear to be particularly closely linked to people's intimate social networks in ways which would be consistent with the idea that people's informal sociability is linked to their activity in "lifestyle enclaves" with "people like us".

	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
Factors entered at each stage	Odds ratio	þ	Odds ratio	þ	Odds ratio	þ
Respondent Characteristics						
Age	0.827	.039	0.873	.153	0.873	.184
Gender (is female)	1.366	.142	1.229	.332	1.184	.422
Education	0.948	.533	0.978	.765	0.987	.858
Income	0.999	.977	1.003	.938	1.002	.972
Conservation group	0.851	.531	0.855	.573	0.888	.671
Environmental group	0.667	.333	0.700	.363	0.695	.352
Relationship to companion						
Same gender	0.889	.517	0.884	.514	0.909	.628
Age difference	0.894	.303	0.916	.416	0.931	.513
Class homophily	0.989	.203	0.992	.359	0.993	.401
Cambridge score	0.993	.199	0.992	.122	0.991	.101
Network Structure						
Network position	1.033	.845	1.051	.759	1.042	.801
Proportion of multiplex ties			1.810	.115	1.293	.535
Range of ties			0.762	.001	0.764	.002
Network size			1.198	.009	1.196	.010
Characteristics of ties						
Frequency of meeting					1.164	.230
How long known					1.002	.870
Especially close					1.107	.712
Multiplex tie?					1.338	.353
N	666		666		666	

 TABLE 7

 Factors Associated with the Likelihood of Visiting Contact's Home

Difference in BIC of 32.8 provides *very strong* support for Stage 3. Question: Went to somebody else's house for a visit?

One explanation may be that some of this private hospitality may be structured by people's relationships to other household members (for instance, when respondents entertain their partner's friends or acquaintances). This suggests that private hospitality may be conducive to a significant degree of contact with relevant strangers. Younger people are less likely to invite others to their homes. Generally we see little evidence for homophilic processes here.

Tables 8 and 9 indicate the determinants of participation in recreational practices which involve meeting in public on commercial premises, namely eating out and going for a drink. As regards going out for meal (Table 8), neither demographic variables nor measures of homophily register significant. This reflects a practice which involves people of all ages and both sexes, a comparatively neutral site symbolically for middle class people. Network

	Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3	
Factors entered at each stage	Odds ratio	þ	Odds ratio	p	Odds ratio	p
Respondent Characteristics						
Age	0.961	.678	1.027	.793	1.174	.153
Gender (is female)	1.225	.420	1.091	.723	0.987	.959
Education	0.961	.664	0.978	.775	0.996	.962
Income	1.031	.569	1.034	.493	1.025	.621
Conservation group	0.682	.176	0.725	.269	0.735	.312
Environmental group	1.193	.660	1.289	.499	1.219	.610
Relationship to companion						
Same gender	0.896	.588	0.888	.565	0.945	.781
Age difference	0.944	.617	0.968	.786	0.963	.744
Class homophily	0.985	.133	0.987	.181	0.987	.203
Cambridge score	0.995	.424	0.993	.293	0.992	.241
Network Structure						
Network position	0.881	.491	0.943	.757	0.935	.733
Proportion of multiplex ties			1.280	.566	1.045	.933
Range of ties			0.826	.059	0.848	.131
Network size			1.228	.009	1.216	.016
Characteristics of ties						
Frequency					1.484	.006
How long known					0.977	.013
Especially close					1.410	.179
Multiplex tie?					0.997	.993
N	666		666		666	

 TABLE 8

 Factors Associated with the Likelihood of Going Out for Meal with Contact

Difference of 18.7 in Bayes Information Criterion (Raftery, 1995) provides very strong support for Stage 3.

Question: Went out with someone to eat to a restaurant or café?

size is significant; the larger the network the more often the respondent eats out with his or her contact. Once again eating together seems to be a feature of relationships of shorter duration, but also of those relationships where meeting one another is comparatively frequent. Thus knowing a lot of people, and seeing frequently those whom ego has first encountered relatively recently gives the best statistical prediction of going out together for a meal.

The second activity, going out for a drink, does give a more thoroughly interpretable model (see Table 9). Here we report all three steps in the model in detail. Model 1 shows that those who go drinking are about twice as likely to be male, but their companions might be either male or female. A drinking partner is also very likely to be in the same age category. Respondent's income doesn't matter, taking a drink being a relatively inexpen-

	Stage	1	Stage 2		Stage 3	
Factors entered at each stage	Odds ratio	þ	Odds ratio	p	Odds ratio	p
Respondent Characteristics						
Age	0.700	<.001	0.715	.001	0.786	.023
Gender (is female)	0.524	.037	0.413	.006	0.360	.003
Education	0.859	.078	0.885	.196	0.894	.262
Income	0.968	.505	0.949	.326	0.942	.280
Conservation group	1.049	.881	0.945	.869	1.034	.927
Environmental group	1.244	.712	1.217	.699	1.194	.750
Relationship to companion						
Same gender	1.119	.590	1.132	.558	1.241	.344
Age difference	0.663	.001	0.683	.003	0.686	.004
Class homophily	0.999	.929	1.003	.791	1.004	.724
Cambridge score	0.996	.624	0.997	.666	0.995	.588
Network Structure						
Network position	1.150	.497	1.171	.433	1.176	.455
Proportion of multiplex ties			3.139	.055	1.789	.399
Range of ties			0.775	.026	0.784	.045
Network size			1.247	.024	1.226	.034
Characteristics of ties						
Frequency of meeting					1.635	<.001
How long known					0.981	.037
Especially close					1.373	.181
Multiplex tie?					1.414	.247
N	666		666		666	

TABLE 9

Factors Associated with the Likelihood of Going Out for Drink with Contact

Difference of 5.9 in Bayes Information Criterion (Raftery, 1995) provides *positive* support for Stage 3.

Question: Went out for a drink with someone to a bar, café or club?

sive activity. Model 2 continues to show homophily by age as a significant determinant. It also shows that network size is significant; again those with a larger network participate more. Model 3 shows that the nature of the ties between ego and alter are also highly significant. Gender, age and network size remain significant, but any pair of individuals going out frequently for a drink is likely to meet more frequently than average, to have known each other for a relatively short period of time, and also to feel close to one another. Going drinking together is a way of building relationships of affect quickly, perhaps because it can conveniently be repeated relatively often. This is quite a strong model indicating that ego's characteristics, age homophily, network structure and quality of ties matter in determining who will be a drinking companion. The implication is that the relationships established are ones based on relatively regular meetings but without the relationship having lasted very long. Insofar as going for a drink is a comparatively casual form of engagement it is interesting that the selection process is much more predictable than that for potentially more deeply obliging forms of involvement. Arguably, going out for a drink stands proxy for the most accessible and least restricted form of sociability and yet it is the most socially differentiated of the six activities under examination. Is this some indication of the separation of the public and the private sphere, some indication of the context for the *establishment* of dyadic relationships?

So, a person going out for drink is probably male, with a larger social network, has companions of the same age, who have been known for a comparatively short time, but who are seen frequently and who are considered to be fairly close. This model gives a strong explanation of the process whereby people select their companions to go out for a drink.

If we reflect on the findings regarding these six activities we see that they are not easy to explain in terms of social characteristics, positions, and ties. Nevertheless, age homophily matters with respect to three activities. Being from a different age group increased the likelihood of being a host for a meal or a visit; but going out for a drink was an activity undertaken with people of the same age. There was evidence that ego's network structure was a primary facilitator of these sorts of activity. For each of the activities having a larger network size increased the likelihood of participation. In addition, those with a smaller range of ties were more likely to be involved in domestic visits and going out for a drink. The nature of the tie made no difference to any of the four domestic activities, but both dining out and going for a drink was more likely to occur if the people involved met frequently and if they had known each other for a comparatively short time. This suggests that going out to eat or drink on neutral territory may be a way of getting to know someone better. It seems likely that if we sought to extrapolate to other sorts of leisure activity there would be considerable variation between practices with regard to the effects of participation and social contact.

# Discussion

In this paper we have analysed and explained the social bases of engagement in a number of recreational activities. We have explored the behaviour of our 126 interviewees across several different domains of recreational practice, and examined the impact of networks on these. We have shown that differences in network structures and nature of network ties are an important part of an explanation of who engages in which types of recreational activity. An individual's network characteristics are at least as likely as her/his personal characteristics to explain engagement in sociable activties, and these network characteristics are independent of socio-demographic characteristics of individuals. Within the confines of this paper we have not been able to isolate the mechanisms that transform contact into effective social capital. Hence, we cannot answer definitively whether the informal connections which we have demonstrated actually generate social capital. However, conceptualisations both of weak ties and of the functions of bridging capital assume that heterogeneity of social contact would be a source of mutual sympathy and cooperation (a point which Bourdieusians would not contest), giving us some confidence that companionship through recreational activity is a potential contributor to (personal and collective) social capital. To the extent that interpersonal contact is a prerequisite of the existence of social capital, then networks clearly affect the generation and reproduction of social capital.

Regarding debates about social capital, a number of points can be made. Firstly, there is little relationship between informal recreational practices and membership or involvement in formal organisations. There is no relationship between respondent's position within their organisation and their sociability, even in areas such as socialising with fellow members, where one might expect to find this. In addition, the actual organisation in which the respondent was a member rarely made any difference to their routine informal sociability. The only exception was with invitations to eat a meal at another's house. This supports the arguments of Li et al (2004) that informal sociability is fundamentally different to membership of associations.

Secondly, we can see clear evidence that people's personal networks make a significant difference to their informal sociability, the implication being that people's own personal communities are important and salient. People's informal sociability is not simply a product of their personal characteristics. The closeness of their ties to others matters, as does the multiplexity and nature of their ties to them. Variables estimating the nature of relationships (features of the dyadic tie itself) often gave improved explanations of sociable engagement, and models which included these factors were shown to be significant improvements on those without. At first sight this might appear merely tautologous because we would expect, say, frequent meeting and multiplexity of a given tie to be as much a consequence as a cause of participating in a given activity. Nevertheless the implication is that it is affective qualities, as much as anything else, that justify and support social relationships of leisure and recreation.

Thirdly, we found homophily relatively unimportant. Contrary to expectation, participation in most of the recreational activities that we examined was not conducted in the company of persons with highly similar social characteristics. Of our three measures, on no occasion did gender or class homophily register as significant at the 95 per cent confidence level. Age did however matter with respect to three activities. In general, however, we do see considerable evidence for social mixing in all the recreational practices we examined. We see our findings as suggestive of the importance of companionship. Here, rather than boundaries to ties erected around gender, age and class, we see people sharing more of their leisure time with a diverse range of people. To the extent that this is the case, then there would be something to celebrate for those who are concerned to foster social capital in the contemporary world, for it would seem that these informal connections do promote bridging capital of the strategic kind that Szreter (2003) identifies as "boundary-spanning". That is to say, people with different social characteristics, and therefore different social experience, are regularly coming together in situations which might increase tolerance and mutual understanding.

The absence in the UK of any indication of class homophily is surprising. Previous research led us to expect some degree of homophily among coparticipants in all the activities examined, and even more with respect to those which involve exchanges of visits of each others' homes. The results might be thought to be the result of the sample being so thoroughly middle class. When considering the whole network data inside the organisations there were so few working class people in the sample that it would be difficult to achieve a statistically significant indication of homophily. However, we measured social distance between occupations using the Cambridge Scale which does differentiate positions *within* the middle class. So, the evidence suggests that while members of associations in Britain are becoming increasingly uniform in class terms, that is not the case with informal recreational activities.

What should we make of this? People engaged in routine recreational activities do not appear likely to be close friends. Sociological research shows that best friends do tend to be of the same social class (Goldthorpe et al, 1987), also that the social characteristics of best friend generally gives a fair prediction of the engagement of ego in social activities of different types (Warde & Tampubolon, 2002). However, going for a drink or joining a comember after a meeting in some form of entertainment is not likely to require particularly close friendship. All the measured affective qualities of ties (longevity, frequency, closeness, multiplexity) do matter intermittently, but closeness is rarely significant. Perhaps, then, these unexpected findings should be considered evidence of the "ordinariness" of the activities we have inquired about. Had we picked ones that were more symbolically marked, then we might have uncovered greater evidence of class being a part of the process of selecting companions. Nevertheless, these are activities frequently undertaken by most people and thus indicative of widely shared experience in the UK.

It would appear that informal recreational practices involve the transcending of social and professional identities, and that one can detect the kinds of routine "bridging" social interaction that Putnam would see as central to the generation of social capital. The networks of people involved seem to be less socially uniform than those of associations and therefore more promising ground for building social capital. It is for this reason that we think more attention might be paid to the concept of companionship. The types of activity we examined do not seem to require the degree of social similarity that is associated with close friendship or marriage. Yet to describe the relationships of fellow participants as acquaintanceship does not seem to capture the essence of the relation. As we noted above, by far the most frequent response to our closed questions identifying what type of relationship ego had with alter was friendship (60%). Very few alters were described as "mere" acquaintances. This suggests a need to refine the concept of friendship to better distinguish its forms or degrees. It is unlikely that offering respondents to a survey the choice of describing someone as a companion would increase our capacity to interpret the quality of mutual attachment or affect. However, there seems to be some potential value in making a distinction between the properties and functions of close friendship and those of routine co-participation in recreational activities. Networks of companionship, intermediate between friendship and acquaintanceship, may be central both to recreational practice and social capital.

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