Social Connection in the City:

Representations and Motivations

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Declaration

I, Victoria Sophia Zeeb, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

A longstanding sociological tradition conceives of city life as profoundly alienating and insular (Durkheim, 1897; Simmel, 1903). As UK cities continue to grow this could be detrimental for city dwellers as a vast amount of evidence underpins the notion that connecting with others is crucial for wellbeing (Aked, 2011). Although the link between social connectedness and wellbeing is well established, less is known about how connecting with different types of social ties is represented by lay people and what motivates this desire to connect. Using Social Representations Theory and Mattering theory, the aim is to examine the content and the underlying structure that shapes common-sense thinking about social connectedness in the contemporary British city and understand the social psychological complexities that shape motivations for connecting with others.

To do this, three studies were conducted using the Grid Elaboration Method (GEM) (Joffe and Elsey, 2014), a novel free association and interview technique. All studies were conducted in Britain's two largest cities, London and Birmingham. In Study 1, city-dwellers' aspirations were examined to look at the importance of social connectedness compared to other aspirations. Thematic analysis of 96 interviews revealed that social connectedness is the most prevalent aspiration and includes connection with 'strong ties', such as friends and family, and 'weak ties', such as strangers and acquaintances at work, in the community and the city at-large. In Study 2 and Study 3, a deeper exploration of connectedness with friends and weak ties was conducted. Building on the first study, thematic analysis of the interviews from 52 city dwellers revealed that thinking about social connection is shaped by the 'self/other' thema, is motivated by a desire to 'matter' and shaped by city contextual factors such as time and technology. This work makes a unique contribution to the study of social connectedness in the city and could be applied to create more effective wellbeing interventions and policies.

Impact statement

The main impact of the research completed for this thesis is based on its ability to inform future city design and policy. For example, it can be applied to the design of city spaces that foster rewarding social connection. This is achieved by presenting the content of lay people's representations of strangers and acquaintances, what these connections are motivated by as well as the city contextual factors that play in to their desire for social connection. In particular, the thesis shows that spaces need to be designed in a way which allows people to have fleeting positive interactions, to look out for one another in small ways and show interest in the other. By applying the findings of this research to city design, it can aid understanding of the types of spaces that engender these kinds of relationships – semi-public spaces such as cafes, shops, cultural and sporting events - that make people feel at ease and engender collective effervescence.

Another way in which this research has real-world impact is by informing the types of services offered in cities. The findings presented in this thesis highlight the importance of 'mattering' to others. The implications of 'mattering' challenge the current emphasis on 'smart' services that prioritise quick and efficient services, such as self-checkout desks, which is often achieved by factoring out 'human error' and instead using automated technologies. This is because by doing this, one also factors out the human ability to connect and matter – on a basic level of acknowledgement and care – to others. This desire is evident in city dwellers representations of strangers and acquaintances in the city and cannot be fulfilled by technological solutions that do not take into consideration social factors.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Since humans are fundamentally social animals (Aronson, 1995), it is not surprising that a vast body of research explores the effects of social connection on myriad facets of life, from early development (Bowlby, 1988) to old age (Shankar, Rafnsson, & Steptoe, 2015). The study of social connection is particularly timely as loneliness, a subjective state marked by the gap between the desired and actual level of connectedness (Cacioppo, Capitanio, & Cacioppo, 2014), is rising to 'epidemic' proportions in Western societies and is linked to lower levels of physical and mental wellbeing (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015). It is this association between social connection and wellbeing that has contributed to the popularity of studying social connection within psychology. This relationship marks the starting point of this thesis. For this reason, an overview of past research on social connection and wellbeing will be presented in this chapter, before outlining the rationale and research context within which the work presented in the thesis was conducted. Lastly, the scope of the thesis, including definitions and caveats, will be delineated before ending with a brief outline of the forthcoming chapters.

1.1. Setting the scene: The importance of social connection for wellbeing

Social connection is an important phenomenon because it is one of the most salient factors influencing wellbeing (Diener, 2012, 2013; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Huppert, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2008; Morrow, 2001). The evidence that social relationships are associated with wellbeing is so strong that it is now taken as a 'fact' by leaders in the field of wellbeing research (Kushlev, Heintzelman, Oishi, & Diener, 2018).

The bulk of the existing evidence linking social connectedness with wellbeing comes from research looking at social relationships with family, romantic partners and, to a lesser extent, friends. These are all examples of social connectedness with 'strong ties', which are defined as ties to which one has long-term attachments that are emotionally intimate. People with satisfying relationships feel happy more frequently and sad less frequently than those without satisfying relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Evidence suggests that being with a partner, married or unmarried, is better for wellbeing than being alone (Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008). The degree to which connecting with a partner affects wellbeing is related to how stable the individual perceives the relationship to be (Brown, 2000). Affiliation with other strong ties, such as friends, have also been shown to be associated with better mental health

and life satisfaction (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2000; Ueno, 2005). The more frequently people socialise with friends, the higher their level of life satisfaction (Li & Kanazawa, 2016).

Social connection with weak ties has also been shown to have wellbeing inducing benefits (Dunn, Biesanz, Human, & Finn, 2007; M. W. Erber & Erber, 2001; R. Erber, Wegner, & Therriault, 1996), though a lot less work has been done in this domain. Weak ties are defined as "relationships involving less frequent contact, low emotional intensity and limited intimacy, such as the ones with acquaintances" (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014: 437). While this work is in its infancy, there is a growing evidence base. Simply taking the time to have a social interaction with a barista in a coffee shop increases people's wellbeing (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014). Furthermore, activities that are of a social nature, such as singing in a choir, playing sport or going to church provide people with more positive affect than those of a non-social nature (Pavot, Diener, & Fujita, 1990). Moreover, volunteering to help others is associated with increased positive affect and meaning in life (Greenfield & Marks, 2004). As one's membership of various organisations, such as community or political organisations, increases, so too does life satisfaction (Helliwell, 2003; Pichler, 2006).

Further research by Dunn et al. (2007) suggests that just the presence of another human being has wellbeing benefits. This is because people experience more positive affect in situations where they "put their best face forward". This is likely to happen when people interact with others who they do not know well or need to impress. This is different when with intimate relationships, where people want to share their 'true' self rather than their 'best' self. Earlier research (M. W. Erber & Erber, 2001; R. Erber et al., 1996) implies that engaging in positive self-presentation positively influences an individual's mood both before and after the social interaction. This is because people adjust their moods to meet the expectations of others. This is culturally dependent. This research took place in North America, where positivity and a cheerful attitude is highly valued. During the interaction, exhibiting the appropriate facial expressions (e.g. a smile) can facilitate the corresponding emotional experiences (Laird, 1974). This shows the affective benefits that come from positive face-to-face self-presentation, which occurs across a range of daily social interactions.

Furthermore, the wellbeing effects of strong and weak ties may vary according to demographic differences. For example, the role of age must be highlighted in determining whether people desire to connect with strong or weak ties. Socioemotional selectivity theory proposes that people seek wellbeing through social connection in different ways at different times throughout the lifespan (Carstensen, 1995). It proposes that young adults seek connections for the purpose of novelty and informational support. With age, motivational priorities shift and individuals become increasingly selective regarding whom they connect with. Since time is conceptualised as more limited as people get older, they invest greater

energy in deepening existing relationships that are emotionally meaningful. They prioritise emotional satisfaction over other goals, such as information gathering, which they gain from strong ties. For this reason as people get older they narrow down the number of social connections they have and focus on strong ties that are emotionally satisfying in the present.

Given the wealth of evidence linking social connection to wellbeing, a number of psychological models have incorporated social connection in their explanation of what is needed to obtain wellbeing. For example, the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' (Aked, Marks, Cordon, & Thompson, 2009), which is now supported by a growing evidence base (Anderson, Ruggeri, Steemers, & Huppert, 2017; Ruggeri, Garcia-Garzon, Maguire, & Huppert, 2016), posits that 'Connect', along with 'Give', 'Be active', 'Take notice' and 'Keep learning' are key individual behaviours that foster wellbeing . Another example is the PERMA model (Seligman, 2012) which lists 'relationships' (along with 'positive emotions, 'engagement', 'meaning' and 'achievement') as key to obtaining wellbeing. Lastly, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a model of the social conditions that foster or hinder wellbeing (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). This model is based on a large body of empirical work that sees relatedness, along with competence and autonomy as one of the three basic human needs, the fulfilment of which is linked to higher levels of wellbeing.

SDT shows that not only social connection, but even simply aspiring to social connection is linked to wellbeing. Here social connection is assessed in its ability to fulfil people's need for relatedness, which refers to the need to feel connected to others in one's social environment and to care for and be cared for by others. It includes having a sense of belonging and being valued by other members of a social group (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Cross-cultural studies show that these results are replicated across cultures (Chirkov, 2009; Deci et al., 2001; Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000), supporting the view that these are inherent psychological needs.

Aspirations that fulfil any of these three basic needs - relatedness, competency and autonomy - are referred to as intrinsic aspirations, which have been shown to be linked to wellbeing. An example of an intrinsic aspiration is the aspiration to spend time with family or contribute to the community, because these aspirations fulfil the need for relatedness. In comparison, the theory posits that aspiring to goals that are guided by extrinsic values such as money, image or fame fulfils none of these needs directly and is not positively linked to wellbeing (Kasser & Ryan, 2001). Furthermore, it has been shown that people tend to overestimate the value of extrinsic desires – such as money, status or fame – not sufficiently recognising the value of satisfying intrinsic desires – such as time spent with other people (Frey & Stutzer, 2005).

In sum, a large volume of evidence underpins the link between social connection and wellbeing. Using this established social 'fact' (Kushlev et al., 2018) as the starting point, the next section looks at how this informed the research context and rationale of the work presented in this thesis.

1.2.   Research context and rationale

The researcher became immersed in the above literature as a result of a studentship that was granted to the researcher within the Liveable Cities project: a multidisciplinary project that aimed to facilitate the development of future cities that are simultaneously low carbon and wellbeing enhancing. This is a pertinent area of research as cities are continuing to grow, in both size and number, and it is estimated that by 2050, 70% of the world's population will be living in cities (UN, 2008).

This context impacted the topic of the thesis as a whole, but in particular Part 1 of this two-part thesis: Part 1 is grounded in Study 1, an interview-based study of the personal aspirations of city dwellers living in London and Birmingham, Britain's two largest cities. The interviews conducted for this study were completed as part of the Liveable Cities project before the commencement of the PhD. Therefore the Liveable Cities project greatly influenced the research rationale. Given the interest in creating cities of the future that are wellbeing enhancing, this research looked at city dwellers' personal aspirations for the future. The rationale for Study 1 was two-fold: Firstly, it aimed to capture what city dwellers wanted from their lives in order to let these naturalistically captured aspirations inform the design and organisation of cities. Secondly, studying aspirations offered another avenue to explore wellbeing as Self-Determination Theory links intrinsic aspirations, such as the aspiration for social connection, to wellbeing. Analysis of these interviews allowed the researcher to gain an initial understanding of the salience of social connection within the lives of city dwellers, who they aspired to connect with and how this competed and complemented their other life aspirations.

The work on personal aspirations acted as a spring board from which Part 2 of the thesis was launched. Part 2 consists of two studies, which completed in-depth investigations into two types of relatedness aspired to in Part 1: Friendship and weak ties. These two studies were also interview-based and are referred to as Study 2 and Study 3 within this thesis. The interest in these two ties in particular is linked to a number of factors. One was that within the first study personal aspirations for friendship and for community, a type of weak tie, were found to be the only types of social connection associated with city dweller wellbeing, which

was captured using a widely used 4-item wellbeing scale (ONS, 2015). Furthermore, the study of personal aspirations found that a surprising number of participants mentioned weak ties – community and beyond – within their elaborations of their personal aspirations. It was felt that further research was needed to explore this. Lastly, the social connection literature is dominated by research on family and romantic partners. By looking beyond these ties and instead focusing on friends and weak ties, it was felt that a more interesting and novel contribution to the current literature could be made.

The data gathered in Study 1 on personal aspirations allowed the researcher to look beyond the study of social connection solely in relation to whether or not it is linked to wellbeing. Instead, it provided a holistic picture of social connection that included the representations of connection, how connection is enacted in the city and what motivations underpin it. These aspects of connectedness are important to capture because although overwhelming evidence suggests that social connection is good for wellbeing, not all relationships are wellbeing enhancing (Rook, 1984). For example, children have mixed effects on wellbeing. On the one hand, children have a positive effect on people's sense of satisfaction and meaning (Haller & Hadler, 2006). This positive relationship is stronger when childrearing expenses are covered (Lelkes, 2006). On the other, children can put strain on day-to-day positive emotions, which hampers wellbeing (Dolan et al., 2008).

The qualitative methodology employed within this research lends itself well to this question of *why* and *how* social connection affects wellbeing. In order to answer this question, the study of friendship and weak ties aimed to capture the conceptualisations of social connection and the motivations that underpin people's aspiration for connection. By capturing representations and motivations of connection it allows the researcher to examine what about social connection positively affects wellbeing. Therefore, the research questions that this thesis aims to answer are:

1. What are the different types of social connections aspired to in cities?
2. How do people conceptualise social connection in cities?
3. What are the city contextual factors that impact social connection?
4. What motivates people's desires for social connection in cities?

In sum, the naturalistic method implemented in the personal aspirations study, followed by the in-depth investigation of friendship and weak ties in the follow-up studies, allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of how different ties in the city are

represented, what makes them desirable, what they are motivated by and how they are impacted by the particular contemporary urban socio-cultural context that surrounds them.

1.3.   The scope of the thesis: Definitions and caveats

This thesis examines social connection within Britain's two largest cities: London and Birmingham. As such, it is important to note that this social context uniquely informs the research findings. The British context, an example of a Western individualistic culture (Hofstede, 1980), is shaped by specific norms and values. Even within Western individualistic societies, one must assume that social norms and values will differ. This points to the cultural specificity of the work. However, given the vast volume of empirical evidence showing that social connection is linked to fulfilling basic human needs, and that this has been demonstrated cross-culturally (Deci et al., 2001), there are elements of this research that are likely to resonate in other cultural contexts.

Furthermore, before embarking on the remainder of this thesis, some definitions must be clearly laid out. Firstly, the meaning of the term social connection must be addressed: Social connection in this thesis refers to interpersonal connection, to relationships based on social interaction between people of varying duration and intimacy. A classic example of social connection would be a conversation. However, it also includes smaller interactions such as a smile, a wave or a nod. Throughout the thesis, social connectedness and relatedness are also used to convey this definition of social connection: the terms have been used interchangeably.

Secondly, a definition of wellbeing must be specified. Although the bulk of this thesis focuses on social representations of social connection and what motivates relatedness, it does make reference to wellbeing. This is because the aim of investigating representations and motivations is ultimately to foster social connections that enhance wellbeing. The term wellbeing will be used to denote subjective wellbeing. This concept will be used in terms of three facets: judgement concerning how satisfied one is with life, a sense of life being worthwhile/meaningful (termed eudaimonic) and more emotive states of happiness and anxiety (termed hedonic). The first two facets – life satisfaction and meaning - are cognitive facets of wellbeing, whereas the third facet – presence of happiness and absence of anxiety - is affective. This is captured in the ONS (2015) measure of wellbeing, which is what has been used in Study 1 on personal aspirations.

Lastly, in studying social connections, the thesis distinguishes between strong and weak ties. This terminology originated from Granovetter (1973), who created the distinction

in order to apprehend social ties beyond friends and family. This allows the researcher to capture a more holistic picture of the social network within which an individual is embedded. As already alluded to in this chapter, strong ties and weak ties are distinguished from one another based on the level of contact, emotional intensity and intimacy. Here strong ties have high levels and weak ties low levels of these elements. Drawing on this definition, strong ties will be used to denote social connection with family, romantic partner and friends. In contrast, weak ties will be used to convey social connection with strangers and acquaintances. Some researchers have used the term weak ties to denote only acquaintances (Small, 2013). However, as this thesis examines social connection within cities, it was deemed appropriate to use the broader definition to also include strangers. This broader definition is in line with how Sandstrom and Dunn (2014) use of the term in their study on coffee shop interactions outlined previously. Due to the sheer volume of people in cities and the number of strangers encountered on a daily basis, compared to more rural areas, this was felt appropriate. By doing this, it also allowed the research to capture the continuum between strangers and acquaintances, as strangers encountered on a regular basis in the city may become acquaintances.

Strong and weak tie clearly pertain to specific types of ties. However, participants were not provided with a definition of specific ties, such as friend, acquaintance or stranger. This is because the research aimed to capture their subjective experiences of these ties. Of course, two people may have different words for their relationship to each other – a friend to one person may be considered an acquaintance to the other. However, this is not seen as problematic in this research because the study is interested in subjective experiences and conceptualisations of these ties. This would be different if the aim of the research was to, for example, capture the size of someone's social network, for which a consistent definition would ensure that the same ties are being measured. However, this is not the aim of the current thesis. Furthermore, this ambiguity is useful as it allows the researcher to capture the qualitatively different facets of these ties that make one person think of them, for example, as a friend, whereas another consider them as an acquaintance.

1.4. Thesis outline

Chapter 2 presents the review of the literature that aims to cast light on the underlying motivations for social connection and the socio-cultural context that surrounds connection in the contemporary British city. A critical examination of the belongingness and social support literature highlights empirical voids and limitations of the literature, which mainly focuses on

strong ties and does not include the social context. This is followed by an examination of the two biggest social contexts likely to affect connection in the British city: urbanism and late modernity. This review highlights the preoccupation with behaviour in the study of social connection, and the lack of work done on people's thoughts and feelings about social connection. The chapter concludes by highlighting these gaps and outlining how they will be addressed within the thesis.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework that will guide the research. It introduces Social Representations Theory (SRT), and suggests that by applying it to the examination of lay representations of social connection in the city, individual and socio-cultural factors that shape people's representations can be understood. Furthermore, the concept of themata within SRT will be introduced as a way of understanding the underlying structure of common sense thinking concerning social ties. In particular, the epistemological themata of self/other is presented. The chapter also presents Mattering Theory to shed new light on what motivates people to connect with strong and weak ties in the city.

Chapter 4 outlines the design and method implemented to answer the thesis' research questions. It starts by providing the research rationale for the interview-based studies presented in this thesis. It then continues to introduce the studies on personal aspirations, friendship and weak ties conducted. It includes an outline of the data collection process, the breakdown of participant demographics and the presentation of the research method.

Chapter 5, *Chapter 6* and *Chapter 7* present the results of the three studies. *Chapter 5* presents the outcome of the thematic analysis of the personal aspirations study, which finds that the aspiration for social connection is the most prominent aspiration in the data and that it can be divided into aspirations to connect with strong and weak ties. Furthermore, an analysis of the wellbeing- and ill-being-giving qualities that people attribute to these social ties is outlined as well as an analysis of how these aspirations are associated with participant's current levels of wellbeing.

Chapter 6 and *Chapter 7* present the two follow-up studies that delve into two types of ties that arose from the personal aspirations study: friends and weak ties. The structure of this work is sequential: The aim of these two studies is to deepen understanding about the concepts that were revealed in the first study on personal aspirations, rather than to triangulate the findings from this first study. Thematic analysis of the data collected on friendship reveals four themes pertaining to friendship qualities and two themes regarding the sociocultural context that impacts friendship. Thematic analysis of the data collected on weak ties finds that representations of weak ties can be organised into 'good' and 'bad' weak ties. Within this, seven distinct types of representations emerge. Furthermore, four themes relating to the socio-

cultural context that surrounds weak ties in the city emerge. Each chapter ends with a summary of the research findings.

Lastly, *Chapter 8* consolidates and integrates the findings from the three studies. This is done in order to give a comprehensive answer to the research questions outlined at the beginning of the thesis. To do this, it presents the results in an integrated way and uses the theoretical framework to interpret them and shed new light on the existing literature. Moreover, it clearly states the novel theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions of the work conducted. It then outlines some of the implications of the work, as well as the limitations and areas of future research. The thesis concludes by reflecting on how this work, which captured the interplay between the socio-cultural factors surrounding social connection and the deeply engrained psychological motivations for connection, can inform thinking around social connection in current and future cities.

Chapter 2 Literature review

Over the past century, a vast body of empirical and theoretical research examining social connectedness in the city has amassed. Social connectedness is a topic of concern in a number of social scientific domains. One reason is the strong correlation between social connectedness and wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Diener, 2012; Ruggeri et al., 2016). Having reviewed the evidence that links connectedness to wellbeing, it is evident that there is an association between the two. However, it is less clear *why* and *how* this is the case: what are the wellbeing-giving qualities of social connection? How do these types of social connection take place in the city?

To answer these questions, two things must be considered. Firstly, one must examine what motivates people to want to connect with others. Looking at people's motivations for connection, and for disconnection, is a possible avenue for exploring the underlying mechanism that links the two. This is useful as it allows for the determination of which types of social connection are positively, and which negatively, associated with wellbeing. Two prominent theories that seek to explain the underlying mechanisms linking social connection and wellbeing are belonging and social support. These two factors will be critically examined in Section 2.1. Secondly, one needs to examine the social context within which connection takes place, which may impact people's motivation to connect with others as well as the wellbeing-giving properties of social connection. As this thesis examines social connection with strong and weak ties in cities, the urban context is to the fore. Furthermore, the societal context which surrounds contemporary connectedness also affects every day experiences and conceptualisations of social connectedness. This will be explored in the following sections which will look at the existing work on urbanism and modernity and their effect on connection with strong and weak ties.

Throughout the review of the literature, the thesis argues for a need to take an inductive approach and to study people's subjective experiences in order to disentangle how lay people conceptualise social connectedness, what motivates people to connect and what hinders them. This provides a new avenue by which to explore the mechanisms linking social connection and wellbeing. This allows for better understanding of social connectedness with different groups of people in cities, which is the area of further research identified and developed in this thesis. This has important implications for future cities because it allows one to understand how people think and feel about the types of connection that take place in the city and how these affect city dweller wellbeing.

2.1. Underlying link between social connection and wellbeing

A large number of studies on wellbeing concur that social relationships play an important role in relation to wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Diener et al., 1999; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Seligman, 2012). Though the link between social connectedness and wellbeing is well established in the psychological literature, understanding what links them is not (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Siedlecki, Salthouse, Oishi, & Jeswani, 2014). Furthermore, previous work shows that not all kinds of social connection are wellbeing-giving: So how does one differentiate between wellbeing-giving relationships and those that do not give wellbeing? The two most prominent links between social connection and wellbeing discussed in the literature are belonging and social support. These will be reviewed in turn.

2.1.1. Belonging

According to the 'need to belong' theory, humans have a fundamental 'need to belong', which can only be satisfied by social connections that are positive, pleasant, stable and involve affective concern (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The belongingness hypothesis is that "human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). The need to belong has two main features. Firstly, people need frequent personal interactions with others, which are ideally positive and pleasant. Secondly, people need interpersonal relationships that are stable and involve affective concern. They argue that a casual interaction with a stranger is often not as rewarding as an interaction with a person with whom one is in an ongoing relationship. This is because to satisfy the need to belong, the person must believe that the other person likes and cares about them. Ideally, this regard would be mutual between the two people.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) evaluate a vast volume of social and personality psychological studies that prove that human beings are fundamentally motivated by a desire for belonging. They find evidence for the idea that humans readily form social bonds, without there being any immediate or apparent reason, such as financial reward or ability to complete a task. Moreover, humans are reluctant to break social bonds, particularly with close relationships, even when these relationships create negative affect, as is the case of relationships marked by conflict or even abuse. They distinguish between mere social contact, and contact with people with whom one feels connected, and state that only the latter gives

people the intimate, meaningful relatedness, which satisfies the human need to belong. This distinction is related to varying levels of trust and mutual positive regard, which is key to satisfying the need to belong.

However, the need to belong theory focuses on the importance of social connections with strong ties and their wellbeing giving qualities. The theory relies on the assumption that one cannot get this sense of care, mutual regard and trust from weak ties. In order to validate this assumption, one must measure people's subjective sense of belonging, rather than objective qualities and quantities of relatedness. The evidence from studies that capture subjective feelings of belonging indicates that it is not just long-term, strong and intimate relationships that can fulfil the need to belong. For example, Cruwys, Haslam, Dingle, Haslam, and Jetten (2014) study that explored the correlation between group membership and mental health. Using a representative sample of 4,000 British citizens, the study showed that the number of social groups to which a person belongs is a strong predictor of depression symptoms concurrently and longitudinally (4 years later): the fewer social groups to which one belongs the more depressive symptoms are present or arise in future. In these studies, wellbeing is delivered from these activities not necessarily just from the individual relationships that they entail but the sense of belonging and identity one gains from being part of a group.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Sandstrom and Dunn (2014) participants were approached outside a Starbucks and were instructed to either "have a genuine interaction with the cashier – smile, make eye contact to establish a connection, and have a brief conversation" or to "make the interaction with the cashier as efficient as possible – have your money ready, and avoid unnecessary conversation". After these interactions, sense of belonging was measured. Simply taking the time to have a social interaction with a barista in a coffee shop increases people's sense of belonging and positive affect and decreases negative affect. They also found some evidence that these effects were mediated by the sense of belonging (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014).

All in all, a vast amount of evidence underpins the notion that sense of belonging is a key facet of social connection and accounts for the positive link between social connection and wellbeing. More recent research has expanded this line of inquiry to include weak ties, and shown that a sense of belonging can also be fostered with people with whom one has less frequent contact of a less intimate nature. However, providing a sense of belonging may not be the only aspect of social connection that provides wellbeing. Another well-researched field is the role of social support in providing wellbeing. This is the topic of the next section.

2.1.2. Social support

Social support theory (Turner, 1981) is prevalent in the literature that aims to explain how and why social relationships are positively linked to wellbeing. In the 1980's, when research on social support first began to gain prominence, it was found to act as a buffer to ill-being and thereby enhance wellbeing (Cohen & Wills, 1985). However, since then the literature in the field has grown substantially and researchers now differentiate between several types of social support: social integration or embeddedness, enacted support and perceived support (Barrera, 1986).

Social embeddedness refers to the frequency with which one engages with one's social network. It is a measure of quantity, rather than quality of social ties. *Enacted support* refers to the level of support that has been received. This is different from *perceived support*, which denotes the level of anticipated support. That is, it refers to the level of expectation one has as to how much support one would receive in a given situation, rather than a measure of support one has actually received from others in the past. Both enacted support and perceived support distinguish between emotional support, informational support and tangible support (Barrera, 1986). Emotional support refers to being given a sense that one is esteemed or accepted. This is acquired when one is the recipient of affection, sympathy or approval. Informational support refers to receiving help that enables one to cope or understand a problem better. This includes education and general advice. Tangible support refers to being the recipient of financial or material resources. Lastly, more recent studies have also looked at the role of *provided support*, where the person who's wellbeing is being assessed is the giver, not recipient, of the support (e.g. Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, and Smith (2003). Here again, one can distinguish between emotional, tangible and informational assistance.

Previous studies have linked social support to subjective wellbeing (Newsom & Schulz, 1996; Thomas, 2009). However, others have found negative or no correlation between social support and wellbeing (Lakey, Orehek, Hain, & VanVleet, 2010; Lepore, Glaser, & Roberts, 2008). This discrepancy may be in part due to the different conceptualisations and operationalisation of both social support and wellbeing across studies. However, this does not account for all the variance. Further investigation shows that different types of social support may have different effects on wellbeing. For example, a study by Finch, Okun, Pool, and Ruehlman (1999) found that social embeddedness has a small negative effect on wellbeing but that enacted support has a small positive relationship with wellbeing.

However, this does not explain discrepancies between different studies looking at the same type of social support. For example, Lakey et al. (2010) found a link between enacted support and negative affect, which contradicts Finch et al. (1999) findings. This may be

explained by the idea that enacted support also implies the presence of distress, through which the participant is being supported and that this may be confounding the effect on wellbeing as distress is linked to lower wellbeing (Seidman, Shrout, & Bolger, 2006). To test this, Lakey and Orehek (2011) looked at social support received in the absence of adversity, for example times of opportunity and growth, and found that there was a positive link between receiving social support and wellbeing.

Studies on *perceived support* circumvent this issue as this type of support is hypothetical and not actualised, which is more consistently found to be positively associated with wellbeing. For example, as a negative predictor of depression (Finch et al., 1999) and as correlated with life satisfaction (Newsom & Schulz, 1996).

Another reason for the discrepancy may be that having to rely on others for support may trigger feelings of low self-esteem or being indebted to whomever has given support (Siedlecki et al., 2014). While being given support may not be wholly wellbeing-giving, providing support is linked to wellbeing, increase in positive affect and decrease in negative affect, across several studies (Brown et al., 2003; Gleason, lida, Bolger, & Shrout, 2003; Thomas, 2009). This could be linked to having a greater sense of meaning and purpose from doing something for others, or feeling pride or positive self-evaluation from doing 'good'. However, there are exceptions to this too, like the burden of caring responsibilities, which are linked to ill-being (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2006).

Another issue with the social support literature is that it draws largely on social connectedness with strong ties. Like the 'need to belong' theory, there is only limited attention paid to weak ties. New research emerging from Social Network Analysis (SNA) sheds new light on the role of weak ties in providing social support. SNA, which traditionally also focused on strong ties, examines the structure of social connections through the use of networks (Burt, 1984). Through the use of ego-networks SNA researchers look at the network to which an individual is bound in order to see how these ties influence behaviour, knowledge, resources and attitudes (Martí, Bolíbar, & Lozares, 2017). The traditional focus on strong ties is due to the nature of the research method, which employs a technique called name generation. In order to map out different ties, participants are asked to name one person or a small number of people who are most important to them, either within a particular category (such as work, family, friends) or in general. In contrast, in order to capture connection with weak ties in the everyday a contact diary method is used. Here, participants record all the contacts they have with others within a specific period. This has been used, for example, to capture a persons discussion network – people they discuss important matters with. By asking about the last

experience of discussing a matter of importance, one can probe the relationship between topics discussed and social tie with whom it is discussed.

This allows them to capture weak ties more effectively than network generators because it does not limit the number of names one can list, or ask to prioritise some people over others, thereby prioritises strong ties (Fu, Ho, & Chen, 2013). This is important because it questions the assumption of SNA researchers that only those who people see as their top or most important people are important for support (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006).

This development was informed by the "strength of weak ties" argument purported by Granovetter (1973), which states that people are given information and help by people at the margins of their social network who are not deemed important or crucial to their lives. Studies have shown the instrumental support offered by these ties can lead to opportunities, such as that of social mobility (Harvey, 2008). This is similar to the idea of social capital, where resources inherent to people's social relationships are garnered (Bourdieu, 1986).

Looking beyond the instrumental value of weak ties, researchers have also captured some of the emotional support received from weak ties. For example, work by Small (2013) examined the importance of weak ties in people's core discussion networks and found that 45% of participants core discussion network is composed of people whom they do not consider important to them. He thereby questions the assumption of previous researchers looking at core discussion networks that they are represented by people's close, important trustworthy and socially supportive partners (Burt, 1984). Small's (2013) findings show that important matters are not only discussed with people who are important to one, but also with weak ties.

This builds on past work that found people are more likely to discuss a work problem with work colleagues, or child care issues with other parents they meet at in childcare centres than people who are important to them, like strong ties (McPherson et al., 2006; Small, 2009). Instead, they are driven by the desire to speak to people who understand the topic they are talking about as well as the people with whom they have the opportunity to connect. This last point highlights the importance of social context. Actors do not follow prescribed and purposive procedures to discuss important matters or harness support, but instead they are habitual and responsive to their surroundings (Bourdieu, 1977; Pescosolido, 1992).

The work done by SNA shows that social support is also garnered from connections with weak ties and makes the case for the active inclusion of weak ties in the social support literature. However, it does not help to explain the discrepancies in findings linking social support to wellbeing, as different studies have found contradicting results regarding the link between the two (Brown et al., 2003; Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010) Therefore, it is worth

taking a step back from the social support literature and explore what other mechanisms may underlie the association between wellbeing and social connectedness. Furthermore, it is worth exploring this in a way that puts weak ties and their effects on wellbeing at the heart of the theory, rather than as a later addition to an already theoretically determined explanation.

2.1.3. Critical reflection

This section has outlined the possible links between wellbeing and social connection. This literature sheds light on *how* social connection might be good for wellbeing and *why* people would want to connect with others. However, there are a number of shortcomings as well as questions this literature fails to address. One shortcoming that runs through both the belongingness research as well as the social support literature is the focus on social connection with strong ties and the secondary status attributed to social connection with weak ties. The lack of emphasis on weak ties could mean that there might be other underlying motivations that make people want to connect with others in the city. Furthermore, if social connectedness is overwhelmingly good for wellbeing, what hinders people from connecting with others? This is particularly relevant to contemporary Western societies, which are characterised by growing isolation and loneliness (Linehan et al., 2014).

In order to capture this aspect, one must do two things. Firstly, one must focus on the subjective experience of social connection in order to capture people's motivations. This is different to, for example, the work examined by the 'need to belong' theory, which presents belongings as a fundamental human need. This need is presented as universal and objective. The work therefor does not capture people's subjective experiences of social connection and how this might affect belonging. Secondly, one must include the socio-cultural factors impacting connection in the analysis. This is because social connection does not take place in a vacuum but is deeply shaped by the social context – social norms and values – which surrounds it. The social context affects the way in which people connect with others, how and from whom they expect to gain social support or a sense of belonging. This is the topic of the next section.

2.2. Social context and social connection

Two societal trends are particularly relevant when examining social connection in the contemporary British city: urbanism and late modernity. Previous studies focus on the way in

which urban environments impact relationships. They find evidence that the urban environment has an impact on relatedness with peripheral weak ties such as those with strangers and acquaintances. The chapter then continues to look at the impact of late modernity and technology, which has been linked more strongly to changes to relationships with strong ties – family and friends, but also affects weak ties – in particular, social connection with local community.

2.2.1 Urbanism, place and social connection

The city provides a complex context within which face-to-face connection takes place. A largely theoretical debate exists in relation to the effects of city life on human beings. Key social theorists have argued that city-life is characterised by social conventions that hamper city dweller interactions with others; two classical urban theories that make these points are social disorganisation theory and overload theory (Simmel, 1903; Wirth, 1938). These present urban trends as hindering social connection in cities with strong and weak ties. In contrast to this, work by Jacobs (1961) on the theory of collective effervescence describes the positive impact of urbanism on social relationships. In particular, it examines interactions with weak ties that take place in the public realm, such as city pavements and 'third places' (Oldenburg, 1999). Overall this section demonstrates that changes in the urban environment particularly impact relations with weak ties as these ties are more susceptible to situational influences than those involving friends and relatives (Spencer & Pahl, 2006). However, it also highlights the shortcomings of existing research, such as its focus on observational methods rather than engaging with city dwellers in trying to capture their conceptualisations of others in the city.

Negative impact of urbanism on social connection

There is a rich sociological research tradition that depicts life in the city as profoundly alienating and insular for the individual (Marx, 1978). Furthermore, city life has been linked to the state of anomie – a breakdown of societal bonds between individuals and community resulting in a circumstance in which an individual's relationship to the social whole is weak (Durkheim, 1951; Marx, 1978). This is in line with Social Disorganisation Theory which proposes that city-dwellers, in comparison to people living in rural areas, experience less relationship quality and quantity (Wirth, 1938). This is because, it is argued, growth in population size, density and diversity leads to disintegration of primary groups such as family and friendship groups. This theory is based on Wirth's observations of immigration from rural to urban areas in the 1930s. However, it has been criticised by many scholars who have found opposing results in their studies on urban connectedness. For example, Key (1961) conducted

a questionnaire study with 357 participants in the United States comparing city-dwellers with rural dwellers and showed that there are no significant differences between the two contexts in terms of interaction with immediate and extended family members (Key, 1961).

Furthermore, comparing friendship patterns between urban and rural dwellers also does not support Wirth's theory of social disorganisation in cities. A study by Franck (1980) looked at students moving to New York City and students moving to a small town and found no difference in the number of friends made across an eight-month period. The only difference found was in how quickly these friends were made: New York City students took longer to make friends than students in a small town. This may point to the fact that city dwellers found it more difficult to talk to strangers and acquaintances (weak ties) and transform them into friends (strong ties). However, this study looks only at university students, who exist within a very particular type of social context and institution, and is not representative of the larger adult city population. A study of older city-dwellers found that urban residents were slightly less involved in friendship networks when compared to their rural counterparts (Lee & Whitbeck, 1987). In fact, Palisi and Canning (1986) used large survey dataset of 18-90 year olds and found that urban dwellers had more interactions with friends than rural dwellers. This empirical work suggests that urbanism does not negatively affect quality or quantity of connection with central strong ties (Korte, 1980). In light of this, original findings by Wirth (1938) are more likely to be the result of the people in the study having just moved from the country to the city and not having had time to establish themselves socially in their new environment. It is this recent move that led to them not having had the same number of strong ties as their rural counterparts (Lee & Whitbeck, 1987; Sennett, 1992).

However, the social convention of not interacting with strangers is supported by empirical studies that show that urbanism affects relationships with people at the periphery of one's social networks, such as strangers and acquaintances. This has been linked to weak ties being most susceptible to being impacted by physical/environmental factors due to the unplanned and haphazard way in which they occur within several contexts (Wellman and Tindall, 1993).

Overload theory, put forward by Simmel (1903) and Milgram (1970), posits that the reason for this disengagement with weak ties in cities, particularly strangers, is due to the fact that city dwellers encounter more environmental stimulation than they are able to process and therefore disengage from those around them. Simmel describes this as a blasé attitude which one adopts in order to psychologically and socially protect oneself from the crowds of strangers encountered day-to-day (Simmel, 2002). Similarly, Milgram (1970) argues that this harsh, unfriendly and aloof display of attitude is necessary in order to deal with the stimulus

overload. Proshansky (1978), by way of contrast, argues that this attitude is merely a strategic way of social interaction that allows people to share a public space or service, without getting personal, which would be impossible to successfully navigate given the sheer number of people encountered daily.

Building on the latter argument, these strategies are also a way of gaining control of a space, protecting the self and not feeling threatened by the presence of strangers. This protection of the self from others is why style – tact and manners – in interactions with others is valued: By adhering to certain standards of social conduct people feel more comfortable interacting with others. Thereby behaviour is confined within certain predefined parameters and more predictable (Simmel & Wolff, 1950). This reduces the perceived uncertainty and potential threat of others – thereby allowing sociability to take place.

This point is echoed by Goffman (1983) when he talks about the interaction order, and the role of social norms and rules. He defined social interaction as: 'that which uniquely transpires in social situations, that is, environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another's response presence' (Goffman, 1983, p. 2). According to Goffman, social interactions are based on shared cognitive processes. These consist of a social contract – a given set of conventions that participants follow. They also include 'avoidance relationships' which are designed to minimise negative impacts from unsolicited encounters. By adhering to this convention, one is giving up a small bit of freedom to gain the certainty that it is safe to engage in social interaction even with unknown individuals. These rules are taken for granted and feel intrinsically just.

The aforementioned theories offer two explanations for what potentially causes disengagement: The first is that disengagement in the city is due to the lack of ability to engage with the sheer volume of stimulation. The second is that it is a self-protective mechanism. Both explanations point to the idea that it is the social environment, not personality, that dictates this behaviour.

These explanations are the results of a methodology largely driven by observational studies. Some are the result of systematic ethnographic observational studies (Goffman, 2009; Milgram, 1970) whereas others are based on a freer philosophically driven enquiry (Simmel & Hughes, 1949) . For example, Goffman (1983) created his theory of interaction by looking at fiction. This allowed him to capture and reflect on the micro interactions that formed the basis of how people interact with one another. The lack of a systematic research approach makes it difficult to assess the ecological validity, as well as generalisability, of these findings. Moreover, by focusing on observational methods the research studies do not allow the researcher to capture lay thinking about connection. This is particularly limiting if one is trying

to answer *why* this disengagement takes place: Without asking people about their conceptualisations of others in the city, it is not possible to determine which emotions and orientations towards others shape this behaviour. However, the benefit of observational studies is that it allows the researcher to capture the socio-cultural aspects, which have been shown to influence how city dwellers connect with others. This is an aspect of the social phenomenon that must be considered when studying lay thinking about social connection.

Positive impact of urbanism

In contrast to the negative effects of urbanism on connection with weak ties, others have pin pointed examples of the city enhancing social interaction. This can occur through the casual contact between dwellers in public spaces, which can produce a vivacious atmosphere, a sense of joy and 'collective effervescence' (Jacobs, 1961; Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, 2013; Simmel & Hughes, 1949). Moreover, collective effervescence, which was first introduced by Durkheim (1915), is seen as a psychological experience that occurs when a feeling of connectedness to others develops during a collective activity. This provides a sense of being part of something larger than the self. The experience of effervescence is studied empirically by Gabriel, Valenti, Naragon-Gainey, and Young (2017), who developed the TEAM (Tendency for Effervescent Assembly Measure). This measure contains items such as: "Having giant blizzards or other events that close down a city or area are bad, but the feeling of connection to neighbours and even other strangers going through the same thing almost makes them worth it". Their findings show that TEAM is predictive of decreased loneliness, increased positive feelings and an increase in life meaning.

The notion of 'collective effervescence' was developed by Jacobs (1961) in her work on cities. She saw a healthy city as one that creates physical infrastructure that promotes social street networks. She describes city pavements as public spaces in which casual public contact takes place on a local level. This contact is associated with errands and provides city-dwellers with a public identity that is built on mutual trust and respect. However, this level of contact does not entail any commitments beyond the immediate public interaction. It exists only in public life and is different to social relations that extend to private life. Jacobs (1961) uses the example of public characters – defined as someone who talks to a large number of people – to demonstrate the existence of public life that is possible without any private entanglement. An example would be a shop keeper one enjoys a causal conversation with on a regular basis, but who one would not invite into one's home. This is a social network that is not thrust upon anyone but is a resource that can be used when needed.

This positive form of interaction with weak ties also takes place in 'third places' (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Third places are separate from the usual social environment of home (first place) and work (second place). They provide the space for important experiences and relationships to develop and foster a sense of wellbeing within society. This is because a third place is a space where people congregate primarily to enjoy each other's company. This can be directly, by starting conversations, or also indirectly, by enjoying the vibe or 'buzz' that can be felt in vivacious environments. These third places vary by culture, and include spaces such as the German Biergarten, the French café or the English pub. These are all examples of institutions where informal public life takes place. Third places allow people to relax with people and enjoy but also foster 'social solidarity' (Oldenburg, 1999). This theory is supported by empirical evidence showing that subjective wellbeing is positively correlated with urban infrastructure, such as meeting places and local shops, that allows for personal relationships to form and be maintained (Balducci & Checchi, 2009).

Third places are spaces that are well integrated into everyday life as they are settings in which routine and ordinary activities, such as grocery shopping, take place. Furthermore, they are characterised by conversation in which there is a distinct lack of pursuing rational ends. Conversations in third places create "spiritual" bonds between the participants, rather than contractual ones (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). The type of language used in conversations are ends in themselves, rather than means to a distinct and conscious goal. This is similar to Simmel's concept of 'sociability' which is defined as a "play form"(Simmel & Hughes, 1949: 254) of social interaction, in which pleasure is felt through the sheer presence of the other. Sociability is entirely devoid of content, and thereby frees itself from the substance of life, the material realities of the world that are shaped by social hierarchies and inequalities, leaving only 'togetherness' (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, 2013; Simmel & Hughes, 1949). It is an interaction among equals in which the pleasure of one is contingent on the joy of others. Examples of sociability include the *art of conversation* – defined as talking for the sake of talking (Simmel & Wolff, 1950). Sociability is a theoretical abstraction that allows social interaction to be studied in a way that is divorced from instrumental functions or goals**.**

Not all bars, squares, restaurants or pubs automatically count as a third place. For example a soulless shopping centre versus a lively high street (Oldenburg, 1999). In fact, for Oldenburg, a great deal of third places fail to qualify because they are not places that have lively conversations where people feel the "joy of association". Rather a space may give one the sense of wanting to disengage or leave. If one cannot physically leave the space, another option is to behave in a way which detaches one from one's present surroundings mentally. Such behaviour is often observed in busy areas in cities, such as a crowded space in which all

the people in the room are on their mobile phones or other electronic devices. The opposite of such places are those that make people want to stay, even if there is no particular reason to do so. This is in line with work by Gehl (2013) description of good public spaces, which are characterised by their ability to make people stay – linger – when there is nothing keeping them there, yet still they choose to stay and engage in social interaction, or simply sit watching people go by.

The second overarching benefit of third places, beyond giving sociality, is their ability to give people perspective. Oldenburg (1999) adheres to the social constructivist view that reality is constantly being negotiated and created. By interacting with others, one keeps in touch with the social reality that one has created. Interaction in third places relieves people from the anxiety and insecurity that can reign when one is left to contemplate these actualities on one's own. Only in communication with others, are these fears kept in bounds. This point echoes Simmel and Hughes (1949) view of sociability, which offers a type of escape or temporary relief from the stresses of life. This is contradictory to previously presented theories that linked interactions with unknown or less known figures in the city with fear and apprehension.

Positive social interaction with weak ties is also linked to discovery. Bianchini (1990) notes that "the idea of the public realm is bound up with the ideas of discovery, of expanding one's mental horizons, of the unknown, of surprise, of experiment, of adventure". According to Sennett (1992) people need this kind of novelty and adventure. In fact, the lack thereof is why people, for example adolescence, feel suffocated by typical middle class life, which has in its pursuit of security and orderliness, lost the new and unexpected elements that people crave in their lives. Third places seem to be unmatched in their ability to allow their participants to discover novelty and diversity. This can be attributed to the sheer fact that in third places, unlike the home or work, the participants are constantly changing. This allows participants to see and meet a much larger range of people, including people from different social and economic backgrounds.

These findings are echoed by Cattell, Dines and Cattell (2006). In their study of London, they found that this sense of belonging and community connectedness can be strengthened in spaces that provide people with the opportunity to linger and engage with one another. These spaces can positively affect wellbeing in two ways: routine interactions with weak ties can lend a sense of safety and comfort; and unexpected encounters that are exciting and novel can induce joy (V. Cattell, Dines, Gesler, & Curtis, 2008).

Like the theories presented in the previous section on the negative impact of the city on social connectedness, these theories rely heavily on observational studies (Gehl, 2013;

Oldenburg, 1999). They show the positive reasons for connecting with weak ties in cities as being a way to feel part of something that is larger than oneself, as a way of discovery, as a temporary escape from stress and as a comforting routine. Again, these differences are attributed largely to social and spatial factors. In order to capture these differences, one needs to explore lay thinking about social connection with weak ties in cities, rather than focusing on observation of behaviour. Such lay thinking is shaped by emotional and cognitive responses to others who are largely unknown. The next section looks at societal trends that are the result of late modernity and that affect not only weak ties, but also strong ties.

2.2.2. Late modernity, technology and social connection

Late modernity refers to the period of social, economic and cultural change that has occurred since the 1970's (Allan, 2008). It indicates a development past the period of modernity in which rapid changes, in part due to technological innovation, have altered patterns in economic systems and working life.[1] In order to understand the progression of late modernity, one must first understand the changes of modernity. Modernity is the consequence of Enlightenment and refers to a shift to the market economy, the nation state and mass-democracy (Giddens, 1991) and a belief in 'progress'. It is related to what Tönnies (2001) referred to as a change from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. By the word *Gemeinschaft,* Tönnies is referring to the traditional type of community, one that is place-based and rests on a pre-defined social structure into which one is born. *Gesellschaft*, which is closer to the English word society, refers to a structure that is rational and elected. According to this argument, past communities were stable; people knew their place in society and within the family (based on their gender, age, trade etc.).

Late modernity is a continuation of this direction of change but characterised by larger mobility, due to technological innovation and the process of globalisation. This has led to an increase in flexibility in the construction of the life course (Giddens & Pierson, 1998). For example, higher mobility means that people travel more, and changes in economic systems means that less people have one 'job for life'. Due to this opening up to different options, questioning of previously established beliefs and greater self-reflexivity has occurred on a cultural level. This has led to more uncertainty as knowledge is less fixed and stable. This increase in reflexivity, which Giddens (1991) sees as a form of empowerment, is a process of self-monitoring where individuals constantly and iteratively shape and amend their life

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[1] Late modernity is different from postmodernity, which represents a clear break from modernity, rather than a later continuation of modernity. See Habermas and Ben-Habib (1981) for further details.

projects. However, where in the past people had the choice to construct their own lives and identities Giddens (1991) argues that individuals now have no other choice but to create their own lives.

This has affected many areas of individuals' personal lives including their relationships with others. This has significant implications on people's social relationships with others as individuals are less confined to specific types of relationships. This is most noticeable in the construction and deconstruction of family, partnership and household formation. As the roles of these social relationships change, so too do the roles played by non-kin relations, such as friends and community (Allan, 2008). This notion of choice also affects social relations with strong ties, family and friends. Here family has a smaller emphasis on choice, as one cannot choose the family one is born into. This is contrasted with friends, sometimes referred to in lay terms as 'the family you choose' which is imbued with a larger sense of choice and freedom (Spencer & Pahl, 2006), rather than predetermination and obligation.

The increase in flexibility and choice that accompanies late modernity has made distinguishing between these two types of strong ties less useful and has led some researchers to use the term 'personal community' to refer to both friends and family. The notion of personal communities stems from the work of Spencer and Pahl (2006) who looked at kinship and friendship ties in modern day Britain. They use the term as they argue that it is less useful to differentiate between family and friends because of the process of suffusion between family and friendship ties which leads to the similarities in role that they play (Allan, 2008). They found that some adults rely heavily on kin and keep their friendships at a lighter more causal level, others develop intimate and supportive relationships outside the family and look to friends rather than family in times of need.

However, on a cultural level there is still a clear distinction to be drawn between family and friends, even if the functions they perform have moved closer together. This is illustrated in a study that captured people's friendship and family structures and found that people still talk about a family member which they think of 'like a friend' thereby denoting that they would choose to connect with this person even if they were not related. Similarly, a friend who is 'like family' denotes the closeness and loyalty that one feels towards a friend. This is because of the normative framing of what it means 'to do family' – the cultural understanding of appropriate family behaviour (Allan, 2008). For example, the sense of obligation that give genealogically close family priority (Harris, 1983). This is manifest in the legal responsibilities with which family are imbued, not friends, pointing to the cultural norm

of support giving between family more than friends. An example of this is the material support going down generations, such as in the case of inheritance.

In contrast, the chosen nature of friendships means friendship is culturally imbued with positive interactions that one wants, such as having fun with friends. Furthermore, the symbolism of 'blood' that accompanies representations of family but not friends makes friends more fragile, less certain relationships (Schneider, 1980). Friendships are based on mutuality and reciprocal exchange, which are more difficult to sustain and are more likely to be affected by lifestyle changes, for example, across the life course. As late modernity impacts levels of mobility and the number of options and paths one can take across the life course, it is likely to affect the ability to maintain long-term friendships.

Moreover, the increase of social and geographical mobility is thought of as having disrupted stability and social cohesion (Spencer & Pahl, 2006; Tönnies, 2001; Wirth, 1938). One well-known outcome of this is the 'waning of community' which refers to the decline of old solidarities (social capital), such as membership of associations such as bowling leagues, that are place based communities (Putnam, 2000). Another effect of late modernity is a greater focus on choice, freedom, individualism and consumerism. This is evident in a move from sharing of public goods towards privatisation of possessions and resources. This is apparent in people's aspirations for more space for the self, private means of transportation, or private gardens instead of shared parks (Montgomery, 2008). This can affect the quality and frequency of interactions that people have with weak ties as increasingly less activities take place in public spaces (parks) or semi-public spaces (e.g. buses, laundrettes).

The perceived demise of community is also linked to the rise in technology. This is connected to the popularisation of the Internet, which has made it possible to establish virtual communities and radically reshaped social relations (Delanty, 2003). The rise of technology has led to postmodern communities that are nomadic and communicative rather than based on given relationships or tied to physical spaces due to their ability to create presence across distance. One critical aspect of this debate is whether communicating via technology is a substitute for face-to-face connection or whether it is complimentary.

To study the effect of technology on face-to-face connection, Fortunati, Taipale, and de Luca (2013) conducted a study that investigated forms of social interaction between 1996 and 2009 in Europe. To do this they measured concrete expressions of people's propensity to establish any type of social relationship as a group, social network, association, community or mass. The study, which distributed questionnaires in Italy, France, the UK, Germany and Spain measured the types of social activities that people engaged with in- and outside of the

home, including inviting others to own home or going to visit friends/relatives, or going out to places such as restaurants, cinema, shopping, clubs, political activities etc.

Their results found that visiting friends and family has become more infrequent over time. There was a trend towards social connectedness taking place in public spaces, outside private or domestic settings. This may be linked to it being easier to have a ready-made setting rather than having to make time to prepare for company, or that there are heightened expectations of what a home should look like. With regard to the effect of technology on social connectedness, they found that in the UK, increased internet access was associated with higher levels of social connection. Furthermore, possession of a computer or mobile phone supported all the sociable activities listed above, except going to visit family and friends. Lastly, they found that through the possession of Information and Communication Technologies, housewives and househusbands were less isolated than in the 1990's, and that retired people nowadays are more sociable than workers. This data leads us to think that far from undermining face-to-face social connection, technology is helping people, particularly people who used to be more marginalised or isolated from others, to engage in it.

Another area of investigation in regarded to digital communication technology is the study of virtual sociability, that is, social interaction that is not face-to-face or body-to-body, but that is transmitted via the internet. Here, studies have investigated whether virtual sociability has the same effect on its participants as body-to-body sociability, and how it is different, both in nature and in impact. Grieve, Indian, Witteveen, Anne Tolan, and Marrington (2013) compared the level of social connectedness experienced face-to-face with the level of social connectedness experienced online – on Facebook – to find that both had distinct yet positive effects on wellbeing. However, according to the media naturalness hypothesis (Kock, 2005) a reduction is the ability to express and perceive facial expressions, body language and speech during social connection is associated with higher communication ambiguity and lower physiological arousal. This is because evolutionarily we were designed for face-to-face communication. This suggests that even though both have positive effects on wellbeing, they are qualitatively different and must be studied as such.

Furthermore there is the possibility of a substitution effect, where interaction with or through technology is replacing real world interaction. This has already been observed in earlier technologies, such as the TV. Bruni and Stanca (2008) found that watching a lot of TV was negatively correlated to life satisfaction. They were unable to prove causality but theorised that this was because TV provides an effortless and inexpensive pastime that can be used to substitute real social interaction. However, a study on social media found that people

who use the internet to socialise are also more sociable offline (Zywica & Danowski, 2008). This points to complementarity rather than a substitution effect.

Lastly, one must also look at how technology is hindering social connection. Turkle (2011, 2015) examines the effects of the digital environment where people are constantly faced with others turning away from them to their phones. In this sense, people in one's physical environment are substituted with what is happening on their mobile device – which may be a different social connection or not. Furthermore, she argues that replacing face-to-face communication with technologically mediated connection diminishes people's ability to empathise because people do not turn their full attention to others for long enough to feel their feelings. In her argument, Turkle (2015) focuses on not just how the quantity of social connection has been affected by technology, but also the quality. This negative impact of technology on connection is further supported by experimental work that showed that simply the presence of a mobile phone in one's line of vision disrupts connection between strangers, in particular the creation of trust and closeness (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013). Furthermore, recent survey evidence that showed that 47% of people feel they use their phone too much. This increases to 75% in those aged 25 to 34 (Deloitte, 2017).

In sum, late modernity brings with it two important factors that have been associated with social connection. The first is the change to community and family structures, where the focus on choice has broken down traditional social networks. Focusing on social relationships of choice point to the importance of friendships, which are seen as choice rather than obligation (Spencer & Pahl, 2006). Furthermore, the use of technology, which allows one to escape one's geographical social circle also affects connection with others. This freedom of choice could mean that people are more able to pick the relationships that they enjoy or find meaningful and therefore enhance their wellbeing. However, current findings from loneliness studies in Britain show that levels of loneliness, strongly linked to ill-being, are high (Marjoribanks & Darnell Bradley, 2017). This may be linked to the breakdown of traditional ties as well as the growing pressures of work-life balance, which have been linked to the further isolation of people (Euromonitor, 2014; Linehan et al., 2014).

2.3. Chapter summary

Building on the vast empirical evidence linking social connection and wellbeing across cultures and contexts, this chapter has presented the current research on what motivates and hinders connection, as well as the underlying mechanisms that link social connection to wellbeing.

Two aspects of social connection – sense of belonging and social support – are examined in the first part of this chapter and evaluated in their ability to provide evidence for the link between wellbeing and social connection with both strong and weak ties. Between the two literatures, the inconsistencies in findings and lack of inclusion of subjective experiences lead to a need to look at different types of social connectedness within a particular context. Furthermore, the lack of work done on weak ties may partially explain some of the previous literature's shortcomings. By including weak ties at the centre of the research on social connection, and by using a naturalistic method that analyses subjective experiences of social connection it may give rise to other factors beyond social support and belonging that make sense of the strong positive correlation between social connection and wellbeing.

The second part of this chapter examined how the societal context influences connection with strong and weak ties, as these have been shown to impact people's experiences of social connection. Opposing theories drawn from a rich theoretical tradition as well as empirical studies, show that urbanism affects social connection with weak ties more than with strong ties. Previous research on urbanism and late modernity provide insight into whether people connect with particular strong and weak ties in the contemporary city. However, they do not provide as clear an answer as to the motivation for and hindrances to connecting with different ties as research that has attempted to do this relies largely on observational methods. However, it order to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon one must look at lay representations of strong and weak ties.

In sum, the gap in the literature identified in this chapter is the lack of understanding of what motivates and hinders people from connecting in the British city. Having completed a review of this literature, the aim of this thesis is to examine subjective experiences and conceptualisations of social connection is order to capture the representations and motivations that underpin connection and address this gap. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework created in order to tackle these questions.

Chapter 3 Theoretical framework

This chapter delves into two major theories in order to explore the representations and motivations that impact social connection in the city: Social Representations Theory (SRT) and Mattering theory. SRT provides a robust theoretical tool that can be implemented to examine the way in which lay people think about social connection with specific ties as well as others in general. Mattering theory is an underexplored social psychological theory that has the potential to provide new insights into motivations for social connection in the city.

The function of theory is subject to some debate within social psychology. Some argue that the quality of a theory should be assessed by its ability to predict behavior (e.g. Fishbein & Cappella, 2006). However, other researchers in the social field have argued that predictive capacity may not be an appropriate way of assessing theory designed to study complex and dynamic social realties (Joffe, 1997). From this perspective, the use of theory comes not from its ability to predict behavior in a linear, causal model, but to use it to examine the dynamic interplay between cultural, interpersonal and psychological processes (Joffe, 1997). In this sense, theory is interpretative rather than predictive. This interpretation allows the researcher to explain the complexity of the chosen area of research, rather than generate a framework to explain and predict a particular psychosocial response.

This chapter suggests that Social Representations Theory (SRT) provides an appropriate framework for exploring how people conceptualise relatedness in the city. This section will first give a general introduction to the theory. It will then explore the role played by the individual as well as the socio-cultural context in shaping social representations; the contemporary culture of the social phenomenon examined in this thesis; and how this has been associated with plurality and diversity of social representations. Lastly, it will look at the role played by themata, and the emotionally imbued self/other thema in particular, in underpinning the structure of social representations of relatedness in the city. The chapter then switches to developing 'mattering', an under-explored social psychological concept, to aid understanding of what drives people to want to connect with others in the city. Taken together, the theories provide a strong foundation from which to investigate empirically the underlying structures that explain how people think about social connectedness in the city. Moreover, it allows for an in-depth examination of what motivates and hinders dwellers from connecting with others. By investigating these two areas through these lenses, it will allow for a new perspective to shed light on the underlying link between social connection and wellbeing in a way that captures how these manifest in city dwellers' lives. This is an important aspect of the research

for policy makers and city planners who need a tailored approach to positively impact interpersonal relationships between dwellers.

3.1. Social Representations Theory: Understanding common sense thinking concerning relatedness

Social Representations Theory (SRT) is a social psychological theory that examines the socially shared 'common sense' understandings that permeate the thoughts and feelings of lay people within a particular social context (Joffe, 1999). The theory of social representations was developed by Moscovici (1961/1976, 1984) and is explicitly concerned with the creation, replication and transformation of common sense thinking concerning social phenomena (Moscovici & Markova, 1998).

In terms of relationships, SRT has been applied to examine how others regard and are regarded by particular groups (e.g. Howarth, 2002; Jodelet, 1991; Joffe, 1999). However, it has not been used to look at everyday relationships within people's homes, public spaces and the city-at-large. In line with the aim of SRT, this thesis presents a scientific analysis of 'common sense' (Moscovici, 1973) in regards to interpersonal relationships. To do so, the chapter will look at the SRT work done on understanding common sense thinking in society, including the process by which it evolves, how it is affected by individuals as well as the socio-cultural context and how it helps explains the prevalence of multiple opposing representations of the same social phenomena. Furthermore, the chapter will present the work done on understanding representations of self and other. To do so it will focus on the concept of themata, in particular the self/other thema, in structuring common sense thinking about relationships. Both previous work on common sense thinking as well as work done on the 'other' provide a rich theoretical source from which this study of everyday social relationships can draw.

3.1.1. Social representations, the socio-cultural context and the individual

Social representations arise from everyday social communication (Deaux & Philogène, 2001) and allow for the creation of 'common' understandings between people. This process is the result of thoughts and feelings that originate from individual actors as well as the dynamic interaction between actors and the socio-cultural context within which they operate (Howarth, 2001). Furthermore, the historical context in which people operate plays a role in the creation

and development of social representations. SRT focuses on the symbolic world of social actors (Jovchelovitch, 1996) who wish to understand and master the social and material world around them (Jodelet, 1991). Beyond mastery of the social environment, this shared understanding allows people to communicate and exchange knowledge as it provides them with a shared frame of reference (Markova, 2003).

This dialogue highlights the dynamic nature of representations, which are created, modified and maintained as people communicate with one another. SRT is in line with the assertion of Rychlak (1986) that humans take active positions with respect to sense making and sense creating of their realities. Thus, although SRT emphasizes the socio-cultural context, SRT does not ignore the internal cognitive and emotive state of the individual. Furthermore, social representations emphasizes the dynamics of sense and meaning making, which changes over time and leaves room for innovation and transformation. SRT posits that individuals actively sustain or transform social representations by what Moscovici (1973) terms the "thinking society".

SRT is a useful social scientific tool as it casts light on diverse and multifaceted human minds that are culturally, socially and historically embedded as well as reflexive. This makes SRT a dialogical, rather than a monological, theory; the latter prevail in the natural sciences. It draws attention to the social origins of common-sense knowledge, and stresses the dialogical interdependence between specific socio-cultural conditions and the social representations held by individuals and groups. Methodologically, this means that individual thinking must be examined in conjunction with the representations that prevail within an individuals' social context (Jovchelovitch, 2007).

3.1.2. Plurality of social representations

Social representations build on Durkheim's earlier concept of collective representations, which he saw as 'social facts' (Durkheim, 1951). These 'facts' create a social system of knowledge that is robust and provide people with a degree of certainty, which allows people to act with more secure knowledge of the reaction they can expect. The wish to uphold these social truths can make them resistant to change because people do not want to lose this sense of certainty and are therefore reluctant to accept proof even if this proof is based on experience, argumentation and logic. However, Moscovici's emphasis on social, rather than collective, representations, emphases the diversity and plurality that characterize these representations. He highlighted this in his work on how differences and tensions within the concept of psychoanalysis were diffused within three different groups (Catholics, Liberals and Communists) within French society (Moscovici, 1961/1976) .

This work gave rise to the notion of cognitive polyphasia. Cognitive polyphasia is defined as a type of 'fusion' thinking that can be found in modern societies that are informed by both traditional and modern ways of knowing and thinking (Provencher, 2007). Cognitive polyphasia allows for a plurality of social knowledge in which people can hold multiple (even contradictory) beliefs that are activated by different contexts that relate to the concept in different ways. This is supported by empirical evidence. For example, Jovchelovitch and Gervais (1999) studied the social representations of health and illness among Chinese people living in England. They uncovered a mixed social representation in which contemporary Western knowledge and beliefs co-existed with traditional Chinese medicine.

This is relevant to the study of how social connectedness with different actors is represented within the British city as it allows for the possibility of multiple contradictory social representations within the same actor. The method employed must allow space for these multiple representations to become evident by not confining the participants to a linear way of responding to the researcher. Furthermore, the method must allow the researcher to capture the wider socio-cultural context within which these representations form. This facilitates understanding of how and when people draw on different types of knowledge and how they interpret this knowledge based on their own emotions and social identities (Howarth, 2006). Chapter 4 discusses how this is achieved.

3.1.3. Social representations in the contemporary British city

Given the importance of the socio-cultural context in shaping social representations, this section examines social representations work on the societal context that prevails in the contemporary British city. As previously discussed, late modernity, which is characterized by an increase in autonomy and freedom and a de-traditionalisation of society (Giddens, 1991), has shaped the Western world. This change in people's attitudes also encompasses an increased propensity to question pre-existing rules rather than simply accepting old rules for the sake of tradition. This has brought with it a loss of 'ontological security' of hierarchy, autonomy and belief (Markova, 2003). On a general level, this influence of late modernity opens up the possibility for people to scrutinize, discuss and argue, which broadens the scope of interpretation and creates opportunities for social innovation and transformation of social representations. Looking at social relationships in particular, this influences social connectedness as it breaks down traditional fixed (socially and geographically) ties with family and community and opens up opportunities for chosen, unfixed relationships with, for example, friends or online communities. This is not to say that friendship is a new concept; Indeed, Aristotle philosophized about it more than 2000 years ago (Pangle, 2002). However,

the breakdown of traditional kinship structures has given friendship a new role to play and it is in need of further exploration.

Another socio-cultural contextual factor shown to influence social representations is the media, both traditional and new/social (Livingstone, 2015).The media play a critical role in the development of people's social representations (Joffe, 1999). However, in line with the idea that individuals shape social representations, lay people are not simply vessels that passively receive the messages from the media; they actively shape these messages by drawing on their own ideas, knowledge and understandings (Joffe, 1999). Traditionally, SRT was concerned with the communication of scientific thought to lay people through the use of the mass media. However, the media may also play an important role in shaping common sense understanding of everyday social phenomena such as social connectedness. For example, research has shown the role played by the media in the communication and public understanding of risk (Joffe, 1999). Given that people, particularly those represented as 'other', have been shown to be perceived as dangerous, this may impact the way in which people conceptualize others in the city. In particular, this could be relevant to city dwellers' conceptualizations of strangers, unknown people, as the unknown has been linked to fear and danger in previous social representational studies (Jodelet, 1991; Joffe, 1999).

3.1.4 Themata

SRT not only allows the researcher to make sense of the way in which the content of social representations takes shape, but also the way in which social representations are structured. This structure lies beneath common sense thinking and influences the way in which thinking develops. These implicit underlying structures are themata.

A thema is a basic element of thought usually formed of dyadic opposites (Markova, 2015).[2] These opposites are dialogically interdependent (Liu, 2004). Themata underlie common sense thinking, and therefore the social representations that exist in society. Through their particular dialogical and interdependent structure themata impact how social representations are formed, maintained and transformed. The idea of themata comes from Holton (1975), a physicist, who recognized that a small number of themata play an important role in scientific thinking. The application of the concept of themata in SRT has widened their realm of application from representations of the physical/biological to the social/cultural sphere (Markova, 2017).

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[2] A thema's plural form is themata

Since the themata that underpin them are dynamic entities, social representations are dynamic too. This dynamism is the basis of the socially co-constructed social representation. An example of a thema is self/other. These two polarities that underpin how different types of people are thought of are interdependent and co-exist in complementary rather than conflicting ways. Themata themselves are not immediately visible in the content of everyday conversation as they underpin social representations, thereby impacting the structure of social representations, and only indirectly their content. The same themata manifest in different ways in everyday social thought. Within research, the themes that one picks up in a thematic analysis, for example, are merely manifestations of themata. In order to capture themata themselves, one cannot just look at what is apparent in the data *prima facie*, but explore the deeper social logic underlying the themes.

To illustrate this, Liu (2006) conducted a study of social representations of quality of life in Western and Eastern cultures. He revealed that the themata of having/being underpins social representation of quality of life. Being is apparent in the pragmatic representation of rootedness, connectedness and freedom. These factors give quality of life because they provide people with a sense of belonging as well as direction and purpose in life. Having is manifest in material possessions and is based on an economic logic, whereas being is the result of an existential logic. Like the themata that produce these logics, they are antithetical and mutually interdependent (one cannot exist without the other). This is useful when thinking about social relationships. Take, for example, the parent-child relationship. One category cannot exist without the other, as one would not be a parent without a child, or a child without a parent. These are interdependent complimentary opposites (Markova, 2003).

In proposing the theory of themata as the underlying structure of common sense thinking, it is important to stress that this does not claim to be the only underpinning of thinking. Indeed many different forms of thinking exist, such as inductive, analogical and artistic thinking. However, themata are very useful theoretical tool to understand how humans make sense and give meaning to the world around them. This makes it particularly appropriate for exploring and developing social knowledge, such as knowledge of social connection.

Manifestation and prevalence of themata in society

Themata are implicit and are not immediately apparent in human thinking. The theory of themata is a system used to make sense of and organize how thought is governed, maintained and transformed in society. What is visible in thought and what can be studied to understand themata are 'pragmatic manifesations' of themata, i.e. what is actually said in everyday

conversation. These pragmatic manifestations are revealed in narratives, explanations and rationalizations through the process of thematisation (Liu, 2004).

Thematisation can be viewed on an individual and on a group level. Each individual processes these themata individually, based on their own life experiences, which are unique to each person. On a group level, themata are embedded in culture, institutions and norms and are the basis of collective memory and traditions (Markova, 2003). Looking at themata at an individual level shows the ability for social representations to change, whereas looking at them at a group level explains the stability of themata. This is because it only takes one individual to question or interpret a thema in an innovative way, thereby affecting change. However, for this change to become established on a group level, this innovative way of thinking needs to affect culture, institutions and norms in order to counteract the dominant themata in society (Liu, 2004).

Different cultures produce different types of themata and this affects how people in those cultures think, feel and act. However, themata themselves, rather than just their pragmatic manifestations, are brought to the forefront due to the social and cultural context which surround them. This creates tension and makes people consciously reflect on the underlying and deep structure that is shaping their thinking. Only when themata are brought to conscious attention can behavior change happen. This is relevant to this study, which will be looking at motivations and hindrances for social connection, as determining which social connections are wellbeing-giving could lead to the examination of the underlying themata that are shaping common sense thinking and potentially behaviour around connection in cities.

The self/other thema

> *"selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 3)*

The self/other thema is an epistemological thema that underlies a number of different content themata within common sense thinking (Markova, 2017). An epistemological thema forms the base of multiple daily and common sense ways of thinking and communicating. It forms the basis of content themata, such as trust/distrust, known/unknown. The self/other thema has implications for identity and social relationships and is therefore of particular relevance to this thesis.

The idea of the self/other has been used to explain a variety of intra- and inter-personal phenomena. For example, Farr (1977) found evidence for the self/other concept shaping the

way that people thought about success and failure. Success was attributed to the self, and failure to the other. Another study by Smith, O'Connor, and Joffe (2015) shows that self/other underlies the public understanding of a myriad threats such as earthquakes, infectious diseases and climate change. Here, the self/other thema allows the thinker to create social, spatial and temporal distance from what is finds threatening.

What these studies have in common are that they view themata along positive and negative poles. These elements are hierarchical and one side is valued more than the other within a specific culture. Within the self/other thema, these polarities have a protective factor in that they allow positive elements to be associated with self, and negative/threatening elements to be associated with other or 'not me'. These are positive judgements of the self and negative judgements of others, which are evident in many anthropological and social psychological studies that examine 'us' and 'them' relations (e.g.O'Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007). These evaluations of 'good' and 'bad' reveal the inherent morality of the relationship between self/other (Ricoeur, 1992). Which social ties are represented as self and which as other are also based on ethical considerations such as whether to trust the other or not (Markova, 2017).

This is a self-protective mechanism with a strong emotive aspect. On the one hand, the positive aspects of the representations evoke positive emotions, which are desired. On the other, the negative aspects of the representation evoke negative emotions, which one pushes away and does not allow them to affect the self. How self/other are emotionally laden is relevant when looking at social representations of social connection, since interpersonal connection dynamics are affected by how one conceptualizes other people, and what positive and negative emotions these representations are imbued with.

The role played by emotions is worthy of further attention as it shapes how social representations are taken up and transformed in society. Emotions are complex constructs determined by individual, interpersonal and cultural elements. Furthermore, emotions are made up of experienced feelings, related yet not equivalent to biological factors, as well as unconscious processes (LeDoux, 1998).

Writing about emotions and SRT, Joffe (1999) turns to psychodynamic theory to explain the role played by emotions and protection of the self within the formation of social representations and identities. Here, emotions are modeled on the emotions that resulted from the relationship dynamics between primary caregiver and infant. Bowlby (1988) saw these as shaping an individual's attachment style, which shapes all future interpersonal relationships. Widening this individual view to a group level, his work suggests that trust between people in groups is based on individual biographies. Klein (1929) corroborated this work by looking at

anxiety in individuals. Here too emotions are forged within relationships between self and other. Self becomes associated with positive feelings and others with unwanted parts of experience that one wishes to separate from. In this sense, representations and their emotive aspects become a defense against overwhelming emotions. This is a relational perspective on emotions, which has been developed and applied to the social and cultural realm.

Emotional and identity-based factors may influence how social representations become absorbed and transformed by individuals. Rather than just accepting representations that circulate around them, people actively forge representations in line with their own emotions, identities and positions in society (Joffe, 2003). People cope with negative representations that others may have of them by setting up alternative, challenging social representations that have particular identity protective functions (Joffe, 2002). In setting up these representations, people are able to 'manage' and resist the negativity they are faced with, such as with stigmatized identities. This is a protection for the individual, protection of their identity, but also has implications for the status quo on a larger societal level.

This emotionally driven desire to push away the other because it is seen as a threat to self may be pertinent for the study of interactions with weak ties in cities. It offers an alternative to the classical sociological conception of the uninterested blasé city-dweller as described by Simmel (1903): the self/other themata suggests that it is not a disinterest or apathy that underlies disengagement with strangers, but fear linked to a representation of the other as something that could hurt the self.

Furthermore, it may explain the discrepancy between different urban theories that find evidence for both the joy and 'collective effervescence' that is associated with weak ties in the city, as well as the fear that pushes city-dwellers to disengage from others as a form of self-protection. It points to weak ties as unknown others who's meanings are constantly being negotiated along the self/other spectrum. In particular, it implies that representations of others that are enhancing, rather than destructive, to the self are associated with positive emotions and therefore engaged with, whereas representations of others that are seen as a threat are avoided. Lastly, accounting for the role of emotion also aids understanding of the tension that can lead to cognitive polyphasia, which has been discussed previously.

3.1.5 Social representations in the forthcoming empirical study

This section outlined the basic tenets of SRT. It focused on the elements that have the potential to be strong theoretical tools for the investigation of relatedness in the city. In summary, the work done within SRT casts light on common sense thinking, which has important

implications for the representation of everyday relationships in the city. In particular, it incorporates the socio-cultural context in how these relationships are made sense of, including the late modern context as well as the increased place of technology in communication. Furthermore, it allows for a plurality of socially shared conceptualisations of social relationships that may aid the interpretation of social relatedness. Lastly, this section has discussed the way in which themata underpin common sense thinking and social knowledge. In particular, the self/other thema, which is strongly imbued with emotion, will cast light on how city-dwellers represent others of varying familiarity.

3.2. 'Mattering': Exploring the link between social connection and wellbeing

Having looked at how SRT can aid understanding of how people conceptualise relatedness, the thesis turns to the latent psychological drivers that propel people to want to connect or disconnect with those around them. The majority of the social connectedness literature is based on looking at how social connectedness is linked to other constructs, most notably mental and physical health (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Ruggeri et al., 2016). However, less is known about the mechanism that underpins this relationship. This is an important area of investigation as it facilitates understanding of the types of relationships that are good for wellbeing, rather than assuming that all types of social connectedness are wellbeing enhancing (Rook, 1984).

Furthermore, the work on motivations to connect with others, or to disconnect from them, as reported in the Literature review (Chapter 2), focuses on examining strong ties, such as family and friends. Only a minority have included weak ties in their analyses of motivations and drivers underlying people's desires to connect (Kasser & Ryan, 2001; Small, 2013). Taking into account weak ties has implications for the theoretically driven investigation into underlying mechanisms of connection and wellbeing. One theory that potentially captures the motivations underlying both strong and weak ties is 'Mattering' theory. The remainder of this chapter explores the theory of mattering in order to evaluate its usefulness in explaining the link between wellbeing and social connection with both strong and weak ties.

3.2.1. Introduction to 'Mattering'

> *"one of the main forces binding people to society is their dependence on others. Humans cannot survive, or even be truly human, without other people ... it gives them a feeling of significance, a feeling that they matter to others"* (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 180 p.180)

The notion of 'mattering', as first posited by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) is defined as the degree to which we feel we matter to others. Mattering is linked to one's self concept as well as one's concept of others, where positive representations of both are linked to an increased sense of mattering (Raque-Bogdan, Ericson, Jackson, Martin, & Bryan, 2011). This is because it rests on beliefs that others are aware and care about one and that one is worthy of attention and care. 'Mattering' theory has been used to explain the salience of social connection. In particular, what it is about social connectedness that gives wellbeing and what the motivating factors of social connectedness are (Demir, Özen, Doğan, Bilyk, & Tyrell, 2011; Thoits, 2011). Though mattering research is in its 'nascent stage' (Raque-Bogdan et al., 2011) and has been worked on significantly less than rival theories such as social support or belongingness theory, the theory of 'mattering' is an appropriate theoretical tool to explain the phenomenon of connectedness beyond strong ties.

The concept of 'mattering' consists of three components (Elliott, Kao, & Grant, 2004). The first is that people feel that others are *aware* of them. This feeling derives from being acknowledged and attended to by others. Secondly, people need to feel that they are *important* to others, that others are invested in them and their actions. This component also encapsulates the role of ego-extension, as originally posited by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) as a separate source of mattering. However, this can be incorporated into the sense that one is important to others because others take pride in one's achievements (Elliott et al., 2004). Lastly, people need to feel that others are *reliant* on them, that they are needed in some way (Elliott et al., 2004; Marshall, 2001). This last component emphasises the need to feel able to give, not receive, support in order to achieve wellbeing. Only through connecting with others and featuring in other peoples' minds can people feel that they form a significant aspect of their environments.

As the concept of mattering developed, Rosenberg (1985) made a distinction between interpersonal mattering and societal mattering. Interpersonal mattering refers to how a person matters to another person. Societal mattering refers to how an individual thinks that he or she can make a difference, or have impact, in his or her social environment. For the purpose of

this thesis, this chapter will only look at interpersonal mattering, which is often referred to simply as 'mattering'. This is because by using this theory, one can explain what it is about relatedness that drives people to connect with others and what gives people wellbeing.

In their discussion of mattering, Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) state:

"When others depend upon us, worry about us, expect things from us, we are constrained and inhibited by these expectations. The person who infers that he (sic) is significant may consciously experience this situation as a burden and a constraint; but the unhappy person is the one who is free of the burden" (p. 179)

As the social connectedness literature is a crowded space, it is important to demonstrate the uniqueness of a new concept by distinguishing it from other similar concepts, both theoretically and empirically. From a theoretical point of view, mattering offers a unique insight into the way that interpersonal relationships can affect wellbeing because mattering takes into account the surrounding social context within which relationships take place over time (Flett, 2018). This distinction is particularly visible when comparing mattering to the social support literature, where wellbeing is said to be gained from individual exchanges of instrumental, informational or emotional support between individuals.

Outside of the social connectedness literature, mattering is often also associated with concepts such as life purpose (Brandstätter, Baumann, Borasio, & Fegg, 2012), existential mattering (George & Park, 2014) or making sense of life (Baumeister, 1991). Similar to mattering, these concept all deal with feelings of significance in life. However, although there are overlapping features of these constructs, mattering as defined by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) is worthy of its own investigation, as it examines significance only as far as it is significant in the eyes of other people. Therefore the concept is inherently relational, which the others are not.

Lastly, mattering has proven a useful concept to explain the link between social connection and wellbeing. Here, studies have shown that mattering has a unique effect on positive psychosocial functioning, distinct from the effects of perceived social support, self-esteem, alienation (Elliott et al., 2004) and emotional resilience (Taylor & Turner, 2001). However, Taylor and Turner (2001) have found some overlap in the ability of mattering to explain the wellbeing-giving function of social connectedness with partner/spouse and friends. Here, no unique effects that were not also captured by the measure of social support were identified. However, mattering did uniquely explain the wellbeing-giving function of social connectedness with family and co-workers. This may be linked to family and co-workers being embedded within a larger social network that gives wellbeing on a daily basis by making

people feel that those around them care about them, even if there is no one-to-one social support link between the two individuals.

Mattering research spans across a number of disciplines which look at social and psychological phenomena. Mattering has been applied to examine the internal psychological processes within an individual without disregarding the socio-cultural context (Flett, 2018). It is therefore consistent with Social Representations Theory in that it considers the interplay between the individual and the socio-cultural context. Lastly, two strands exist within the mattering literature: mattering to a 'generalised other' and mattering to specific social ties, such as friends. Previous research on these two types of mattering will be delineated in the next section.

3.2.2. 'Mattering' to generalised other

One strand of mattering research looks at whether people feel they matter to the 'generalised other', that is, other people in general, rather than to a specific person. This is distinct from other studies (presented in section 3.2.3) that examine the extent to which people feel they matter to specific others. Mattering to the generalized other has been measured to examine the link between social connections and mental health, wellbeing and meaning in life. This work has been done by researchers of counselling, clinical and existential psychology, respectively.

To measure mattering to generalized other, these studies used a 24-item scale (Elliott et al., 2004) that assesses sense of connection to others and the belief that one is in the awareness of others and that others care. It is comprised of the three subscales that make up the concept of mattering: Awareness, importance and reliance. It measures the extent to which people feel like they matter to others in general. This scale is found to be valid across a number of different forms of validity: content, construct and discriminant validity.

Mattering has been looked at in clinical populations, such as people suffering from depression. Taylor and Turner (2001) looked at a large urban community sample, and found that mattering is predictive of depression in women, but not in men. This relationship was confirmed both over time and cross-sectionally. These results were explained by the notion that social support, which was also found to be a predictor of depression, was substantially more confounded with mattering among men than women. This compounds findings by Pearlin (1999), who identified sense of mattering to others as a potentially salient factor in distress and depression. The findings on mattering is interesting to counsellors and clinicians not solely from a research perspective, but also because it has practical implications for therapeutic relationships. Rayle (2006) found that patients who feel that their lives matter to their therapists develop greater trust in the therapeutic relationship, are more invested in their therapy and subsequently display better outcomes.

Furthermore, researchers have been interested in how mattering can affect mental wellbeing. For example, one study examined the relationship between attachment style and mattering (Raque-Bogdan et al., 2011) within an undergraduate student population. It found that high attachment anxiety and high attachment avoidance relate negatively to the belief that one matters to other people. They attribute this relationship to the fact that those high in attachment anxiety are likely to negatively evaluate their sense of mattering due to dissatisfaction or worry about their relationships. On the other hand, those high in attachment avoidance are likely to have a low sense of mattering due to their discomfort with intimacy and their tendency to devalue themselves in the eyes of others or think others do not care about them.

The concept of mattering has also been taken up within existential psychology, defined as how humans make sense of and respond to the realities of existence such as death and meaning (George & Park, 2014). A study by Thoits (2011) looked at mattering and meaning in life and found that mattering is related to meaning and purpose in life, and thereby fosters wellbeing by guarding against anxiety and existential despair. These results are corroborated by a study on adolescent suicide ideation that revealed that those who feel they matter more are significantly less likely to consider suicide (Elliott, Colangelo, & Gelles, 2005).

The concept of mattering to a generalized other has also been studied in different social contexts. For example, it has been used to study the effects of work and family roles on individuals' sense of mattering. Mattering is applicable because as people engage with work and family responsibilities across the life span, they develop their sense of place and worth within their social context and the structural conditions that shape their everyday life (Pearlin, 1983). This could have implications for their sense of mattering. Using a representative sample of the paid labour force in Toronto, Canada, a study found that having children, as well as having a job with more autonomy, complexity, fulfillment and supervision responsibilities enhances ones' sense of mattering. However, relationship and parental strains are linked to a lack of mattering, thereby concealing the positive effects that these roles bring. This highlights an important issue when thinking about mattering, as it shows that not all types of others being dependent on one or being needed necessarily makes people feel like they matter. This is also in line with wellbeing research that shows that caregiving can induce stress and therefore negatively affect wellbeing (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2006).

Lastly, this study also found that sense of mattering is greater in females. This finding that females are more likely to feel that they matter is in line with another study that looked at adolescent gender difference in mattering and wellness and found that not only did mattering

predict wellness, but also that females perceived themselves as mattering more to their family and in general (Rayle, 2005). This echoes psychological findings illustrated above that not mattering (versus mattering) predicted depression in women, not men. One might conclude that mattering matters more to women than men, and that other mechanisms, such as social support or doing fun activities, underlie the positive effect that social relationships have on wellbeing in men. This is a more functional view of relationships and different to a more emotional abstract characterization of relationships.

This work shows that mattering may be an appropriate tool with which to explore social connection with weak ties. This is because it captures a feeling that is not specific to any one person but to people in general. Due to the limited intimacy and fleeting nature of social connection with weak ties, this conceptualisation of what it is that is important within social connection may be useful as it does not reference a particular person or a particular relationship.

3.2.3. 'Mattering' to specific ties

The second strand of the mattering research is mattering to specific others. Researchers in the area of positive psychology have used the concept of mattering to examine the underlying mechanisms that moderate the effect of relationships with friends on happiness. For example, the concept of mattering has been applied in the study of friendship. Here, Demir et al. (2011) applied the construct of mattering to investigate the underlying mechanisms at work in the robust correlation between friendship and happiness. They apply mattering as a way to aid their use of theoretically identified variables that might explain *how* friendship is related to happiness. The study looked at an individuals' relationship to their best friend and three close friends and found that mattering did explain how friendship quality is related to happiness. However, one of the limitations of this study recognized by the authors is that the participants in their study were all undergraduates. Friendships during university are highly affected by educational context, and friends might play a particular role during that time in the lifespan that is different from other phases in the life span.

In this study on friendship, mattering was measured using the 'Mattering to Others Questionnaire' (MTOQ) (Marshall, 2001). This measure assesses the degree of perceived mattering to a significant other, in this case, friends. It is an 11-item measure that asks participants how special they feel to their friend, how much they think they matter to their friend, and where they think they feature in their friend's list of priorities. This is different from the mattering measure outlined in the previous paragraphs, as those measured feelings of mattering to a generalized other. The score has strong internal consistency across

adolescents and emerging adults, as well as external validity (Marshall, 2001). It has been found to be positively associated with social support, sense of purpose in life, self-esteem and relationship closeness and negatively associated with rejection. This makes it a good score for measuring mattering for strong ties, but risks losing the aspects of mattering that are more subtle and fleeting, like being held in the awareness of weak ties. It strongly prioritizes the aspect of feeling one is important to others, but does not equally reflect the aspects of awareness and reliance, like the 24-item scale devised by (Elliott et al., 2004).

As illustrated above, work on mattering is heavily based on survey work. The measures developed to capture mattering to the generalized other as well as to specific others have aided the development of the theory, for example by displaying the different emphasis between mattering to specific ties and to the generalised other. Furthermore, the focus on creating measures that are valid and consistent helps carve out a space for mattering research as a credible alternative to social support and belongingness research. However, as mattering research is still in its infancy, it calls for a deeper exploratory study of mattering across different contexts and different actors. The next section outlines how this will be approached in the current study.

3.2.4. Deepening the concept of 'Mattering' in the forthcoming empirical research

Mattering may be a useful tool for the interpretation of the research data collected on social connection as it has the ability to uniquely contribute to the understanding of the underlying mechanisms that drive people to want to connect with both strong and weak ties. Previous research has shown the importance of mattering to the 'generalised other' as well as to significant strong ties. However, as this is still a relatively under-studied area, further theoretical development could be greatly aided by the use of qualitative work. The use of qualitative research could allow for more facets and nuances of mattering to be uncovered.

Furthermore, a rich theoretical tradition exists that could aid the development of mattering theory with regards to both strong and weak ties. One example of this is Erich Fromm's work. In his theoretical work in 'Escape from Freedom' (Fromm, 1994) he argues that people actively engage in activities and create bonds with others that restrain their freedom. Fromm argues that we have a desire to 'belong' in order to not feel insignificant relative to everyone and everything around us. This tie gives individuals the security and rootedness which they crave, while curtailing their freedom. This notion of absolute freedom that people deny themselves is mirrored in Sartre's existentialist philosophy where he writes that humans are 'condemned' to be free (Sartre, 2007). This freedom is linked to existential angst, which results from the thought that one is small and insignificant. Echoing Fromm's work, this

propels people to look for ties to others and the outside world as a route to finding meaning and purpose. In other words, one ties oneself to something or someone external from oneself in order to matter.

However, both thinkers also acknowledge that it is this connection to others that acts as a constraint on the self. Sartre's famous line 'hell is other people', which is explored in his play/novel *No Exit*, highlights the way in which one cannot escape the glare and judgment of the other. This look from the other is a reflection of the self and so the self is not free to be what it wants but confined by the look of the other (Sartre & Gilbert, 1977). This is also discussed by Lacan (1997), who talks about the 'gaze' of the other. Through this act of being gazed at the person who attracts the gaze loses a bit of autonomy as the person realizes that they are an object for the other. Fromm expands on this idea to show that this can also happen on a societal level, where people bind themselves to institutions of oppression. These writings coexist alongside changes in late modernity that highlight this ability to have choice and be free from pre-determined roles and identities.

Moreover, understanding mattering within friendships could be aided by Aristotle's delineation of friendships, in which he differentiates 'perfect' friendship from two imperfect forms of friendship (Crisp, 2000). These two imperfect types of friendship are friendships based on either utility or pleasure. Utility is this sense is similar to support, and pleasure denotes the idea of a friend that brings happiness and enjoyment. These pleasure and utility functions are what the friendship stems from. This is different to 'perfect' forms of friendship, where the friendship is based not on utility or pleasure, though these may very well be incorporated in the friendship, but on a true and mutual care and appreciation for the other person's character. Character is enduring and therefore perfect friendships last longer than that based on the ability to provide utility or pleasure (Cooper, 1977). The perfect form of friendship is close to the concept of mattering as it involves care and concern for the other person, for which time and trust is needed. Furthermore, it is linked to wellbeing as Aristotle believed these types of relationships to be key for the 'good life' or eudaimonia.

Lastly, qualitative work will not only aid the theoretical development of the concept but can also capture how mattering manifests differently across different types of relationships, or how mattering to different types of people changes based on relationship status or age. To date, this research has primarily examined particular populations, such as students and older adults (Dixon, 2007; Rayle & Chung, 2007). Furthermore, no direct investigation of strangers and acquaintances as exemplars of weak ties has been conducted and previous research has focused heavily on mattering to strong ties such as family and friends (Demir et al., 2011; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Qualitative work is also a way

to discover social and cultural differences in how mattering is expressed or what is expected from individuals in order to feel like they matter.

3.3. Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework for the proceeding empirical chapters. It has introduced the main principles of Social Representations Theory relevant to this area of research, including the role played by individual as well as the socio-cultural context in shaping common sense thinking. It has focused on the use of themata, which provides the theoretical tool to aid the examination of common sense thinking on relatedness. The self/other thema in particular, and the emotions with which it is imbued, is relevant to the study of social connection with strong and weak ties in the city. The chapter then introduced the inherently relational concept of mattering, which offers a theoretical perspective on the underlying mechanisms that explain the motivations for social connection in the city. By combining these two theoretical tools, it offers the possibility of a robust and novel study that seeks to understand what structures of thinking and motivations underpin connectedness and how our understanding of these underlying structures can help develop wellbeing in the city.

Chapter 4 Research design and methodology

This chapter describes the method used for the two-part empirical study undertaken for this thesis: an exploration of city-dwellers personal aspirations for social connection and an in-depth analysis of city-dwellers' conceptualisations of friends and weak ties (defined as strangers and acquaintances). It begins by presenting the rationale for interview-based studies, as well as an outline of the main characteristics of interview-based research. It then presents the type of interview-based research conducted: The Grid Elaboration Method (GEM), which uses a free associative task as the basis of the interview. After assessing the benefits of free association and how free association enhances qualitative research methods, the chapter outlines the specific steps taken during the study. This includes the recruitment and data gathering process. Furthermore, it provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the sample obtained, as well as the ONS (2015) measure of wellbeing that was collected using a questionnaire. Following this, the chapter reports the data analysis method used to interpret the data: content and thematic analysis. The chapter ends with a reflexive discussion of the interview process, taking into consideration the context in which interviews were conducted.

4.1. Rationale for interview study

As discussed in the Introduction (Chapter 1) and Literature review (Chapter 2), research has shown that social connection and wellbeing are positively associated with one another. However, what underpins this connection, and how this differs between different social ties and across different social contexts is unclear. In order to add to this field of research, this thesis aims to capture social representations of everyday social connection in a way that captures the structure of common sense thinking, the socio-cultural context that affects how it is manifest and interpreted in the British city, as well as the motivations for social connection. In order to capture these elements of social connection, an interview method was employed.

The interview is widely employed by qualitative researchers to access people's meanings, motives, self-interpretation and common sense theories (Hopf, 2004). Interviews allow the researcher to capture and map out the tools employed by social psychologists such as experiments or surveys (O'Connor, 2013). This is because the interview allows more space for the participant to emphasise their 'lifeworld' (Gaskell, 2000). It is a more naturalistic method of capturing a participant's perspective than traditional and prioritize facets of the topic of study as they see fit, rather than it being predefined by the design of an experiment or

survey. For example, using tick-box exercises in surveys confines participants to a limited selection of possible answers that may not be representative of the way in which this issue takes shape in their minds and thereby potentially distorts psychological data (O'Connor & Joffe, 2014). In contrast, the interview permits people to articulate their thoughts and feelings in a way that allows for the different facets of an issue and how they differ in salience to be recorded. This is a more ecologically valid method of gathering information than questionnaires that use pre-defined response categories.

However, when applying an interview methodology, one must also be aware of its shortcomings. Firstly, the interview is an artificial social situation and therefore is unable to capture the full complexity of a social research issue as it unfolds in the real-world. The issue is important to consider in the study of social connection as the interview does not allow the researcher to directly capture social behaviour in its context. This is different to, for example, focus groups, where meaning is negotiated within the group. Furthermore, even facets of the data that are brought into the interview context, such as behaviours or emotions that are audible and visually presented to the researcher, are lost in the solely textual data that is captured and used for the analysis (Gaskell, 2000). This limitation has led to other criticisms of the research method: that it gives undue priority to the cognitive and more easily verbalized aspects of an issue.

Furthermore, interview methodologies face the challenge of social desirability bias (Grimm, 2010) due to the presence of the researcher, which makes it more vulnerable to this effect than surveys that the participant can fill out in private and therefore is not immediately faced with the presence of the researcher. Although interviews suffer from some limitations that other methodologies do not, all research methods have limitations as all are merely able to capture aspects of socio-psychological realities by tapping into different dimensions to varying degrees (O'Connor, 2013). Understanding this allows a researcher to pick the method that most sheds light on the dimension of interest. In contrast to ethnographic, focus group and survey research, the interview allows the researcher to capture rich, in-depth data on the cognitive and affective aspects of common sense thinking and the meanings that are attached to them. It was therefore chosen as the best option to study conceptualisations and motivations of everyday social connectedness in the city.

4.2. Interviewing as a research method

This section reviews interviewing as a research method. It starts by presenting and critiquing different types of interview design, before elaborating the role of free association in interviews and the how this informs the Grid Elaboration Methodology (GEM). It continues to critically engage in aspects of the interview process that must be carefully considered before undertaking interview research: participant selection, quality criteria and the interpersonal context.

4.2.1. Interview design

Interviewing is a widely-used research method. However, the exact procedures vary across disciplines and researchers (Hopf, 2004). One important distinction between different types of interviews is the extent of which their structure is predetermined. Fully structured interviews are those in which a fixed set of questions that are created ahead of the interview are followed. In contrast, unstructured interviews are those in which the interviewer does not predefine any questions, only the overarching area of interest. Semi-structured interviews lie somewhere in between and follow a set of questions but leave space to deviate from this if the interviewee's response calls for deviation. Which of these strategies are employed depends on the purpose of the study in question: If the researcher is interested in obtaining specific information, a structured approach is appropriate. However, this negates some of the value and reasons for why researchers engage in qualitative research, which is that it allows one to explore an area in the hope of discovering unexpected trends and patterns of meaning. Often, within the SRT tradition, the objective of qualitative work is to explore the emotional, social and cultural dimensions of representation. Direct and pre-set questions are not the best tools to elicit this type of information as they target information that is easily accessible to consciousness and is reason based (Joffe, 2012; Joffe & Elsey, 2014). To do this, something more flexible such as semi-structured or unstructured interviews are best.

4.2.2. Free association and the interview process

The interview technique utilized in all three studies is called the Grid Elaboration Method (GEM) (Joffe & Elsey, 2014). The GEM aims "to elicit subjectively relevant material with a minimum of interference, to elicit 'stored', naturalistic ways of thinking about a given topic" (Joffe, 2012, p. 213). The method consists of a free association task followed by a subsequent

interview in which the free associations are elaborated. The free associative element of the interview is important in analyzing and interpreting the results and must be reflected upon.

Free association was first introduced as a psychological method by Galton (1879) in the late 19th century. He explored their nature by repeating a London walk and recording what thoughts came to mind, noting that certain thoughts were consistently associated with a particular object or idea. Wundt and colleagues built on this work in a more systematic way. Wundt instructed participants in his lab to give one word answers to stimuli as quickly as possible (J. M. Cattell, 1887). However, the method of free association is most commonly linked to the work of Sigmund Freud who aimed to fully explore the meanings with which free associations are imbued. Applying this to his work with patients, he let patients freely express any thoughts they had linked to their symptoms and dreams. Subsequently, free association became an established psychoanalytic technique.

Contemporary uses of free association can be divided into two approaches: semantic or lexical. The GEM takes a semantic approach and uses free association to capture and examine the meanings with which words and concepts are imbued. This is different to studies that adopt a lexical approach and use free association to study how words are linked together and organised within the mental lexicon. The GEM builds on two other approaches that also aim to capture meaning: The SRT approach to core-periphery social representations and the free association narrative interview (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2008). These two are not the only contemporary approaches using free association, however they are the closest to the GEM and therefor warrant brief elaborations.

The first is the SRT approach used by Moloney, Hall, and Walker (2005) who used free association in experimental work to determine the core-periphery of social representations. Within this experiment, participants were asked to free associate to sentences that put the issue that was being examined (e.g. transplantation) in different contexts. The representations which were consistent across sentences was seen as part of the "stable core" of the representation (Guimelli, 1993), which is unchanging. The representations that were only found in response to some of the sentences were deemed peripheral and only a component of the social representation within a particular context.

The second relevant contemporary use of free association is the Free Association Narrative Interview method (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2008) used to uncover subjective and nonconscious meanings. The method draws on psychoanalytic theory and procedure and is used to tap unconscious latent meanings of difficult to access social issues, such as crime. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue that people have defensive mechanisms that guard them from how they think and feel about threatening matters. By use of this method, interviewees

are perceived as revealing unconscious mental material through the choices they make in telling particular aspects of their story. They emphasize the importance of looking at the pathways and order in which stories are told, which are characterized by emotional, rather than rational intentions (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Within the interview situation there is only minimum input from the interviewer in order to not distort the naturalistic structure or content put forth by the interviewee. After interpretation of the interviews are triangulated by two researchers, a list of tailored questions is processed for a second interview which explores the issues raised in the first interview in more depth.

Similarly to the two techniques outlined above, the Grid Elaboration Method aims to capitalize on the strengths of free association in order to tap naturalistic thoughts and feelings that people hold in relations to a particular social or personal issue (Joffe & Elsey, 2014). It thereby sheds light on people's implicit and more emotive dimensions of thinking. It is an appropriate tool for the present study as it is intended to aid those wishing to delve deeper into how human thought systems work (Joffe & Elsey, 2014).

There are two overarching beneficial features of the GEM: The first is that it allows for a naturalistic elicitation of data and avoids being led by interviewer input. It does not contain predefined categories or questions, only a single prompt. Furthermore, it allows for a freer response by not constraining the interviewee to a coherent linear dialogue (Joffe & Elsey, 2014). This allows for emotive and experiential rather than over-intellectualised thoughts. This feature distinguishes the GEM from 'why?', 'how?' and 'when?' questions used in semi-structured interviews, which prioritize reason-based explanations (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Second, by including the elaboration phase, the method allows for the subjective meanings that are expressed to be made clear to the researcher: the single phrase or image that characterises most free associative psychological research that uses this technique, is elaborated. This allows for a richer dataset to emerge in which the complexities and nuances of the representations are revealed (Joffe & Elsey, 2014). All in all, the method is appropriate for uncovering unanticipated facets of an issue. This is beneficial to researchers exploring new research areas of interest, as well as those working in crowded research fields. The latter is in line with the studies presented here as a vast volume of research exists on relationships and social connections. This study attempts to innovate by exploring new and previously overlooked factors that may underlie this social phenomenon.

4.2.3. Participant selection

Selection of participants is guided by different criteria in qualitative as opposed to quantitative social science research. In general, qualitative research does not aim to obtain a statistically

representative sample (Gaskell, 2000; Yardley, 2000), like those found in large survey studies. Qualitative research is more concerned with mapping a range of ideas and examining what underlies them (Gaskell, 2000). The current study is an example of this in that it aims to look at the motivations that underpin people's desires for and representations of social connection. In order to achieve this goal, the researcher must identify the dimensions along which a population is divided in regards to the social issue in question. This ensures that 'typical exemplars' are included in the sample (O'Connor, 2013; Yardley, 2000). For this study, the dimensions are likely to be socio-demographic, such as age, gender, area of residence or socioeconomic status. However, this is not always the case as qualitative work is often used to study a group of people who have had specific experiences, e.g. parents with children with conduct disorder (Roberts, McCrory, Joffe, De Lima, & Viding, 2018). In this case, demographic groups would not need to be considered in participant selection.

With regards to size of sample, there is no correct number of participants. Furthermore, a larger sample size is not always necessarily better within qualitative research. This is because there exists a trade-off: On the one hand, a sample needs to be large enough so that one can have confidence that one's findings are more than arbitrary or idiosyncratic observations. On the other, too large a sample risks losing the nuances of an individual's subjective experience as it is becomes diluted by the sheer volume of data that requires analysis (O'Connor, 2013). Some researchers recommend a sample in which equal numbers of individuals from the various demographic groups are included in order to for group-based variation to be examined (Joffe, 2012). Moreover, a comparative analysis is preferable so that one can match two different groups along the same demographic variables. For example, by using equal number of London and Birmingham city dwellers. This creates a manageable data set that is able to assess how meanings are socially shared across individuals and groups.

Within the context of the current study, the aim was to recruit a sample that allowed the researcher to explore adult city-dweller aspirations and types of social relationships in Britain's two largest cities, London and Birmingham. Previous studies have found that aspirations vary along age, gender, socio-economic and ethnic divides (Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010; Johnstone, Lucke, & Lee, 2011; Patterson & Forbes, 2012). Similarly, previous studies have found that relationship trends vary according to age, gender and culture (Carstensen, 1995; Demir, Özen, & Doğan, 2012; Spencer & Pahl, 2006). For this reason, the original sample was chosen so that equal numbers of each of these groups were represented. Furthermore, in order to compare across cities, equal numbers of Birmingham and London participants were chosen. More details of the sampling process will be discussed in section 4.3.1.

4.2.4. Quality criteria

Qualitative research often faces criticism from quantitative researchers for being subjective and non-generalizable, which is portrayed as problematic as objective and generalizable results are key goals for the majority of quantitative research. However, qualitative research rejects the idea that 'objective' research can or should be achieved (Nagel, 1989). Within the qualitative research tradition, interpretation is seen as a resource rather than as a problem in gaining insight into a population's or subsection of a population's experience of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). This is not to say that qualitative research does not need to be held accountable, though it does suggest that standard statistical tests that measure validity and generalisability are not always the appropriate measures of rigour and should be replaced with measures in line with a qualitative methodology that proves that the research findings are valid (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000; Joffe, 2012).

In order to ensure rigour and accountability during both the gathering and analysis of the research data, a number of steps were taken. The first was the use of an inter-rater reliability check in which inter-coder consistency in the application of the coding frame was ensured. While this measure does not provide assurance that a different researcher would not have applied a different coding frame altogether, it shows that the coding frame that was devised by the researcher is robust, specific and clearly communicable outside of one individual. Once the coding frame has been applied, the use of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), the continual re-referral to quotes and raw materials in the data, ensures that interpretations are justified and warrant the conclusions drawn from them. Moreover, it is important to ensure accountability through transparency of the research process by keeping a record of each step and the rationale that informed that step. Lastly, one step that is often taken to ensure quality that was not taken was the 'triangulation' of data, which means drawing on multiple data sources or types of analysis (Flick, 2004). This decision was taken due to the aim of the study undertaken for this thesis being to delve deeper into a phenomenon found within Study 1 on aspirations, rather than triangulating that finding.

4.2.5. The interpersonal context

Another aspect of the interview that must be managed is the interpersonal context within which it takes place. All interviews are a type of conversation with the aim of gathering data. Conversations come with expectations and norms as to how they are supposed to 'work' (Grice, 1967). These can hinder the research aims as, for example, the interviewer may wish to add less content to the 'conversation' than the interviewee in order to capture naturalistic expressions. However, being expected to dominate the conversation and speak without

interruption may make some participants uncomfortable and less willing to openly express their thoughts and feelings, or actively try to make the interviewer speak more. Furthermore, interviewers are advised to present themselves as naïve deliberately so that their knowledge does not bias the interviewees' response (Kvale, 1996). This continued show of ignorance on the part of the interviewer may stifle conversation and interrupt the flow of conversation in an unnatural way (Oakley, 2005). Generally it is the mismatched or mismanaged expectations in regards to the purpose of the interview that can impede the progression of the interview.

There is no one solution to managing this interpersonal context and as such interview guidelines or manuals rarely allude to them. With regards to the studies presented in this thesis, both interviewers received formal training in interview techniques. However, the most important tool to manage these issues is researcher reflexivity which can be applied to manage discomfort or unease within the interviewee. This is particularly salient for the type of interview conducted within this study where the interviewers deliberately said very little and offered only short sentences to mirror the content back to the participant and encouraging them to elaborate further. To ensure this form of interaction felt comfortable, interviewees expectations were managed before the beginning of the interview, encouraging them to 'take the floor', assuring them that there were no wrong or right answers and that any queries they had would be answered at the end of the interview. Furthermore, tone and non-verbal cues of encouragement (smile, nods) were implemented to make the process less robotic and more comfortable for the interviewee. Another way in which the interpersonal context was managed was by keeping a research diary written directly after the interview in which personal impressions were recorded. This helped throughout the interview process as well as in the analysis stage.

4.3. Study methodology

This section outlines the data collection process. It presents the participant recruitment procedure, including an outline of the demographic criteria that determined the choice of participants, an overview of the interview process and a description of the questionnaires which was administered alongside the interviews. Study 1 was conducted from April 2013 – April 2014 by another researcher on the Liveable Cities project. Study 2 and Study 3 were conducted simultaneously by the author between September 2016 and March 2017. The research process for Study 2 and Study 3 are very similar to each other and as such they will be presented together to avoid repetition.

4.3.1. Participant recruitment and demographics

Study 1: Personal aspirations

Using a recruitment agency, a purposive sample of 96 city dwellers was recruited. Participants were approached by the agency by telephone and an initial screening questionnaire was used to establish participants' demographic details. An equal number of British born participants were drawn from London (n=48) and Birmingham (n=48). The matched sample was chosen according to age, gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity. The three age groups (18–35, 36–54, 55–67) were each split evenly between male and female dwellers. The two younger age groups contained equal numbers of White British and British Minority Ethnic (BME) dwellers. For the 55–67 age groups only White British dwellers were recruited because there are limited numbers of British born ethnic city dwellers from this generation living in London or Birmingham.

Half of the participants were of higher socio-economic status (A, B, C1) and half of a lower socio-economic status (C2, D, E). This is a social grade system based on type of occupation, used by the Office of National Statistics (UK), among other organisations (Ipsos, 2009). The descriptions of each grade is described in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Socio-economic grade classification

GRADE	DESCRIPTION
A	Higher managerial, administrative and professional
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional
C1	Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional
C2	Skilled manual workers
D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers
E	State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only

Local authority boundaries were used to determine which areas constituted London and Birmingham, cities containing over 12 million and just under 2 million people respectively (OECD, 2014). This ensured that the sample was not only demographically inclusive but also relatively equally spread across each city. London has 33 boroughs spread between Inner (15 boroughs) and Outer London (18 boroughs). Two dwellers were sampled from each Inner London borough with one dweller selected from the remaining 18 Outer London boroughs. Birmingham is comprised of ten wards and 4–5 dwellers were selected from each of these wards. This is outlined in Figure 4.1. below.
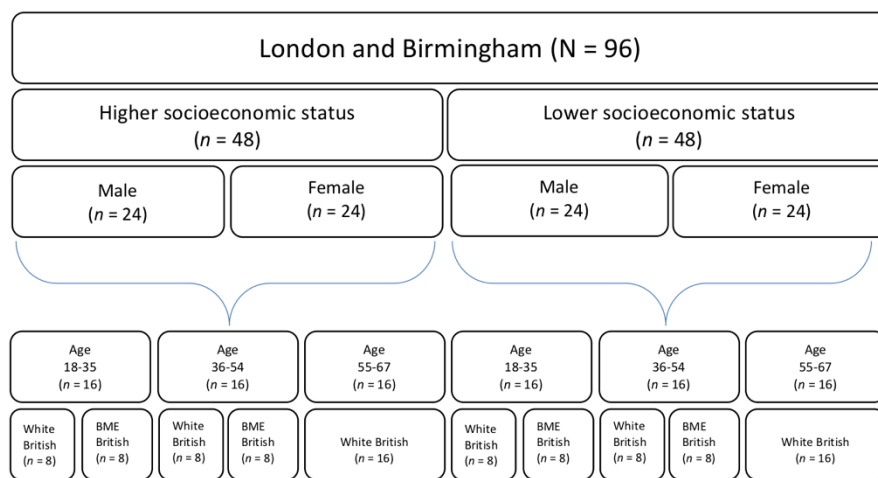
Figure 4.1. City dweller demographics Study 1

Study 2 and Study 3: Friendship and weak ties

For Study 2 and Study 3, the previously presented sample of Birmingham and London city-dwellers were re-approached and asked to take part in this follow-up research. Using the contact details held by the recruitment agency, previous participants were contacted via telephone between August 2016 and January 2017. This contact was initiated by the researcher who asked participants if they were interested in taking part in a follow-up research study. Only participants still living in London and Birmingham were eligible to re-participate. In order to determine this, the same local authority boundaries as outlined above were used. The researcher succeeded in recruiting equal number of participants from London (n=26) and Birmingham (n=26). This is the equivalent of a 58% response rate.

The demographics of the participants that agreed to partake in Study 2 and Study 3 are outlined in Figure 4.2 below. Participants were again divided into three separate age

categories (21 – 38, 39- 57, 58 – 70). As participants were now three years older than they were during Study 1, the categories were altered to reflect this change. The sample included 15 participants in the youngest age category, 18 in the middle age category and 19 in the oldest age category. In terms of gender, 24 males and 28 females were interviewed. Of these participants, 30 were higher socioeconomic and 22 lower socioeconomic status, according to the grade system previously outlined. Lastly, 34 participants identified as White British and the remaining 18 as British Minority Ethnic (BME).
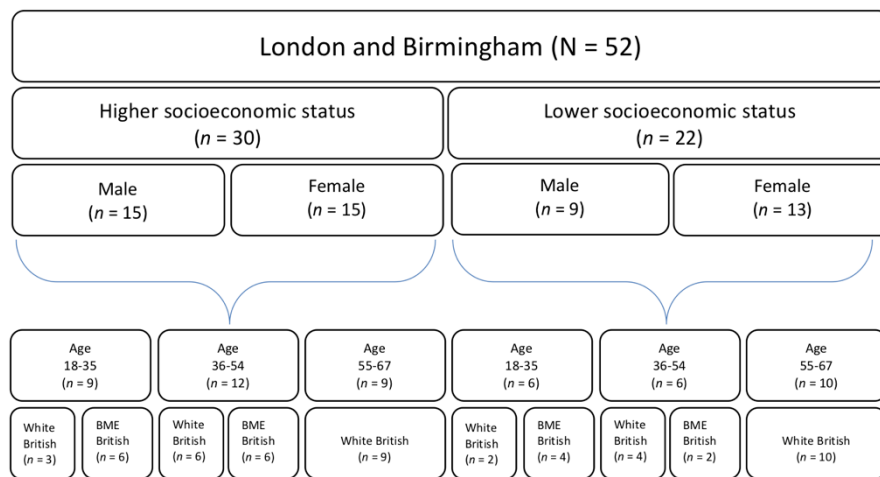
Figure 4.2. City dweller demographics Study 2 and Study 3

4.3.2. Interview procedure

All three studies were covered by the ethical approval received for Non-Invasive Research on Healthy Adults from the UCL Division of Psychology and Language Sciences Ethics Committee (REF number CEHP/2013/500). Study 1 will be outlined first, followed by a joint outline of Study 2 and Study 3 as these were conducted at the same time and followed the same interview procedure.

Study 1: Personal aspirations

Study 1 on personal aspirations was conducted by a different researcher on the Liveable Cities project prior to the start of this PhD. Details of the project and the rationale for the initial study are outlined in the Introduction (Chapter 1). Following a trial phase in which the grid and interview process were piloted, the interviews were conducted between

April 2013 and April 2014. All interviews for Study 1 were conducted by the same researcher in the participants' homes. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

Before completing the interview, the interviewer provided all participants with an information sheet that outlined the nature of the study: a research project to explore people's thoughts about the future. All participants signed a consent form agreeing to be interviewed and audiotaped and were assured of the interview's anonymity and confidentiality. In line with the Grid Elaboration Method (Joffe & Elsey, 2014), a free association task was administered before the interview. City dwellers were provided with a piece of paper with a grid that outlined four blank boxes. The instruction above the grid informed participants to write or draw the different words and images showing "your aspirations for the future".[3] Figure 4.3. displays an example of a completed grid. Participants were told that there were no right or wrong answers and to write down "whatever came to their mind".
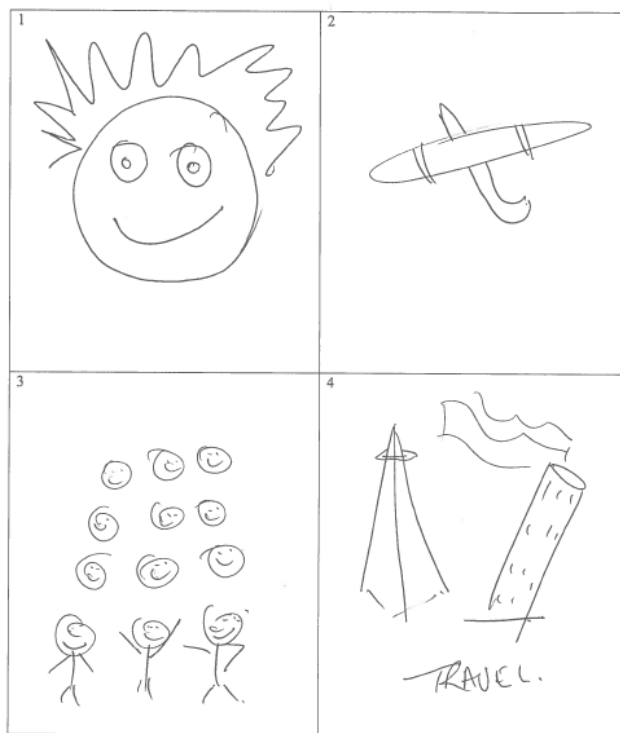
Figure 4.3. Example of personal aspirations grid

[3] After completion of the interview on "aspirations for the future", participants completed a second grid with the prompt of "the kind of city you would aspire to live in" (See Joffe & Smith, 2016) which they were then asked to elaborate. However, only the first grid and elaborations of their personal aspirations are analysed in this thesis.

Having provided their four associations, dwellers were then asked to elaborate on the content of each box in an interview that followed the free association task. This began with "can you talk me through what you have drawn/written in box 1?" Once participants had elaborated on the first free association, the process was continued until the content of all boxes had been addressed in sequence. Prompts such as 'can you tell me more about that' were used to ensure dwellers' thoughts and feelings emerged naturalistically without insertion of content via researcher questioning. Furthermore, before moving on to the next box, or ending the interview after the elaboration of the fourth box, the researcher always asked if there was anything else that they would like to say about that association. The researcher moved to the next box only when the participant felt they had covered everything. Participants were free to introduce new topics that they had not included in their free association grid responses.

After the interview, each participant completed a questionnaire that asked for demographic details and measured their current level of wellbeing using the standard ONS 4-item wellbeing scale (ONS, 2015). They were then debriefed on the purpose of the research interview and received a cash payment of £30 for participating. The interviews were recorded using an unobtrusive digital audio-recorder. The interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim and, alongside a scanned copy of the grids, imported into the ATLAS.ti software package for analysis.

Study 2 and Study 3: Friendship and weak ties

From the previous sample of city dwellers that was recruited, 52 agreed to participate in Study 2 and Study 3. The demographics of the participants is outlined in Figure 4.2. above. Like in Study 1, the interviewer provided all dwellers with an information sheet that outlined the nature of the study: a research project to explore people's thoughts on social relationships in the city, before the commencement of the interview. All participants signed a consent form agreeing to be interviewed and audiotaped and were assured that confidentiality and anonymity would be upheld.

In accordance with the Grid Elaboration Method, participants were asked to complete a free association task before each interview. As Study 2 and Study 3 were conducted within the same interview timeframe, participants first completed a free association task with the prompt "experiences of friendship", followed by an elaboratory interview on their associations. An example of a grid on friendship is given in Figure 4.4.

I am interested in your experiences of friendship. Please write or draw the different words and images that come to mind when you think of your friendships. Please give only one thought/image per box.

LOYALTY	COMPAIGNSHIP
TOGETHERNESS	FUN

Figure 4.4. Example of friendship grid

After completion of this interview participants were asked to complete the next free association task, which used the prompt "interactions with strangers and acquaintances in the city". This was again followed by an elaboratory interview on their associations. An example of a grid is given in Figure 4.5.

Warmth | Suspicion

vulnerable | hostility

Figure 4.5. Example of weak ties grid

In line with GEM methodology, participants were prompted and encouraged to elaborate fully on their free associations using responses such as those outlined in the previous section. Like in Study 1, the interviewer was careful not to use any words that were not first used by the participant, so as to not introduce any new content or ideas into the interview. Each interview lasted between 20-50 minutes. After the interview, each participant completed a survey that asked for demographic details and measured their current level of wellbeing by using the standard ONS 4-item wellbeing scale (ONS, 2015). They were then debriefed on the purpose of the research interview and received a cash payment of £30.

Like in Study 1, the grids were scanned in order to ensure an electronic copy was recorded and the audio recording of the interview was subsequently transcribed verbatim and imported into the ATLAS.ti software package for analysis.

4.3.3. Questionnaire design

A questionnaire was administered after the interview for Study 1. The questionnaire included the measure of personal wellbeing developed and used by the Office of National Statistics. By including a quantitative measure, a mixed-methods approach is achieved. The benefit of mixed-methods is that it offsets the weaknesses and capitalises on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), thereby allowing the researcher a wider range within which to analyse and interpret the data.

The measure defines personal wellbeing as 'people's thoughts and feelings about their own quality of life' (ONS, 2015).

The four questions used to measure personal wellbeing were:

(1) Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
(1) Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
(2) Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
(3) Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Participants were asked to answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely'. The questions allow the researcher to capture city dwellers' assessment of their lives as a whole, as well as their day-to-day emotions. Upon completion participants were debriefed about the nature of the study and thanked for their participation. The questionnaire also included questions regarding demographic variables, including age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. This allowed for the researcher to report some basic demographic differences in order to capture who was saying what within the interview[4]. The questionnaire took 10 minutes to complete and the data were entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. A copy of the survey is in Appendix A.

4.4. Data Analysis

In qualitative research, there are a number of analytic approaches, including thematic analysis, narrative analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis and grounded theory. These offer social scientists the interpretive frameworks that facilitate a more conceptual understanding of the participants' accounts. For the three studies outlined above, content analysis was chosen as most appropriate to analyse the content of the free associative task, and thematic analysis

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[4] Due to the small numbers, demographic differences were reported when found to be statistically significant after a chi-square analysis, as well as if a certain theme was twice as likely to be held by a particular demographic group.

was chosen as the most fitting analysis for the elaboratory interview. The following section will briefly present these two types of analyses and why they were most appropriate for the data that was being analysed.

4.4.1. Content analysis

Content analysis is an empirically grounded method that examines manifest content that is communicated through materials such as text, film or pictures. The analysis occurs through the categorization and evaluation of key symbols or themes (Wester & Krippendorff, 2005). With the increase in the amount of digitalized text available, content analysis has become an increasingly popular mode of analysis (Krippendorff & Bock, 2009). Within qualitative research content analysis allows the researcher to analyse a large amount of data by converting it to a number of set categories. This makes working with a large data set more manageable than if one were converting the data into a new analytical narrative (Krippendorff & Bock, 2009).

Content analysis has been applied to different data sources. Though it is most frequently applied to textual data that exists naturalistically in the real-world such as media content, it's inbuilt flexibility allows for many different applications. This is one of the key strengths of content analysis as it allows the nature of the data and the research question to dictate the categories utilized (O'Connor, 2013). As in other types of qualitative analysis, coding can be approached inductively or deductively. In inductive coding, the researcher avoids being confined to pre-determined categories and allows for the data to shape the categories. In deductive coding, the researcher uses existing code categories, drawn from previous research or theory, to organise the data. The current study adopted an inductive coding strategy for the free association grids. This was done for two reasons: Firstly, previously defined categories in regards to aspirations and social relationships were found to be unhelpful in handling the content of the free associations. For example, previous research on aspirations differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations (Kasser & Ryan, 2001). According to this work, social connection is described as an intrinsic aspiration and money as an extrinsic aspiration. However, the naturalistic data collected in this study found these categories unhelpful as many aspirations could fall into either or both, such as an aspiration to have money to send one's children to university. Secondly, the inductive strategy allowed the researcher to react to novel and unexpected content brought forth by the participants in the free association task, which is in line with the aim of the studies to innovate and uncover new facets of social connection in the city.

4.4.2. Thematic analysis

The current studies employed thematic analysis, an increasingly popular form of analysis, which revolves around thematising the content of data in order to identify the most salient patterns of meaning therein (Boyatzis, 1998; Joffe, 2012). It is an established form of analysis and there are clear and explicit guidelines a researcher must follow. It's clear and explicit nature makes it more transparent and it is therefore regarded as a systematic form of qualitative analysis (Joffe, 2012). Although thematic analysis is not wedded to a particular epistemology, is works particularly well with the 'weak' social constructivist epistemology of Social Representations Theory (SRT). This is because thematic analysis uncovers how meaning is constructed and shared without having to reference the 'reality' of a phenomenon. Within the present thesis, for example, it allows the researcher to explore the subjective experience and conceptualization of the phenomenon of friendship, without having to answer whether or not a participants, or a samples, conceptualization of friendship is correct. Instead, it allows the analyst to uncover and explore the latent, symbolic dimensions of people's lay understandings of an issue, and how these differ across demographic lines, in a systematic way.

Thematic analysis requires a coding frame that captures the analytically significant aspects of the data. A coding frame is a conceptual tool with which the raw data is categorised, examined and understood. Codes can be derived via deductive or inductive strategies, but a combination of both is often most effective. Deductive strategies are particularly useful in recognising theoretically interesting latent content (for example, instances of anchoring and objectification), while inductive coding allows the researcher to uncover new and unexpected data features. Therefore, thematic analysis facilitates an analysis that is both theoretically informed and grounded in the data.

Lastly, although thematic analysis is used in order to uncover latent meanings and conceptual nuances that are unique to qualitative research methods, its systematic nature also lends itself well to a quantitative way of thinking about data as it includes code frequency and prevalence of themes as an important aspect of the data collection. Although it also allows for the researcher to capture and report themes that are only represented in a small proportion of participants' interviews, it reports this difference in frequency, which allows one to ascertain which the most prevalent themes are. Moreover, Boyatzis (1998) notes that due to this frequency count, the interviews can be analysed in a quantitative manner. For example, the relative frequency of a particular code across a particular subsection of the data can be captured using a chi-square or logistic regression analysis. This aspect of thematic analysis is, however, only infrequently exploited (O'Connor, 2013). However, it lends itself to qualitative analysis' aim to uncover in-depth and nuanced meanings of phenomenon, thereby prioritizing ecological validity. However, it is not in line with many statistical tests because, for example,

the lack of statistical power that they hold, which prioritizes generalizability. Therefore, in practice, as in this thesis, the usefulness of this type of quantitative analysis does not hold the same power as a larger representative sample, but it adds to the understanding of the qualitative data in an important way. This is because it is analytically meaningful to determine whether a particular conceptualization is widely shared amongst a population, or whether it is only mentioned infrequently or only by a particular subsection of the sample, or only as the result of an idiosyncrasy in the data. The quantitative aspect of the analysis that captures frequency is useful to capture subtle patterns may otherwise go unnoticed by the researcher. Lastly, by capturing the prevalence of a theme or code, it acts as an informal assessment to ensure that the analyst has not inaccurately inflated or deflated a particular aspect of the data (Gervais, Morant, & Penn, 1999).

4.4.3. Analysis procedure

The analysis procedure was very similar for the three studies as all three implemented the Grid Elaboration Method and were followed by a questionnaire. All three studies used both content and thematic analysis, though each analysis was conducted separately and using a separate coding frame. The way in which this coding frame was developed and implemented is very similar and as such this section will cover all three studies, denoting any differences as they occurred.

In order to conduct the content analysis of the grids, the content of each grid was first recorded using excel. Here, the exact words used by participants were copied and any pictures drawn were described in parentheses. These were then read through multiple times and categories were created which matched a minimum of 3 grids. These categories are directly linked to the words used in the grids as very little conceptual categorization could be undertaken. This is because not a lot of information can be gathered from only one word, phrase or picture in the grid. All three grids were content analysed and the categories chosen captured 81% for the study on personal aspirations (Study 1), 91% for the study on friendship (Study 2) and 85% for the study on weak ties (Study 3) The uncategorized grid responses were recorded within an 'other' category.

Following this, a thematic analysis of the interview data was performed (Joffe, 2012; Joffe & Yardley, 2004). The transcripts were initially read through and salient concepts and patterns identified. Emerging ideas for analysis and questions were recorded in a notebook. These notes became the basis of a preliminary analytic coding frame that gradually developed. This process was completed three times and three separate coding frame were developed: corresponding to personal aspirations, to friendship and to weak ties. The development of the

code was largely inductive, meaning that the research was responsive to the patterns that emerged from the data. Given the vast amount of research that has been done on social connectedness, it was felt that the best way to add to the existing literature was to allow for unexpected patterns and trends to emerge. Furthermore, the effort to use a more deductive analysis strategy proved difficult, particularly for Study 1 on aspirations. This is because the most dominant theory of aspirations is theory that differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations (as outlined in Chapter 2). However, the data that was collected during the interview proved impossible to separate into intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations as it was often difficult to distinguish between the two. For example, the aspiration for money, which according to theory is an example of an extrinsic aspiration, was linked for a number of city dwellers to the aspiration to provide for family (e.g. to send children to university), which is seen as an intrinsic aspiration. The existing theory was not equipped to deal with the complexity of what emerged from the interviews naturalistically. Using ATLAS.ti the corresponding coding frame was applied to all 96 interviews in Study 1 and all 52 interviews in Study 2 and Study 3, with segments of the data ('quotes') corresponding to a particular code electronically marked as such.

In order to assess reliability, approximately 10% of all interviews were double coded (12.5% of interview transcripts from Study 1 and 9.6% from Studies 2 and 3). The interview transcripts were independently coded by the candidate and an independent researcher who was not otherwise involved in the project. To evaluate inter-coder consistency, the second coder's data was compared with the primary coding. This was achieved by exporting both coded datasets to SPSS and preforming a Cohen's Kappa analysis. For Study 1, inter-coder reliability revealed an average Kappa of 0.64 across all codes, indicating that 'substantial' reliability had been achieved (Landis & Koch, 1977). For Studies 2 and 3, inter-coder reliability was achieved with an average Kappa of 0.72 and 0.66, respectively, also indicating that 'substantial' reliability had been achieved. For all three coding frames, discrepancies were resolved following discussion between coders. All interviews were then coded using the revised coding frame. The final coding frame for Study 1 on aspirations contained 88 codes. The coding frame for Study 2 on friendship contained 75 codes the coding frame for Study 3 on weak ties contained 125 codes. The coding frames can be found in Appendix B, C and D respectively.

Once all transcripts were fully coded, a code frequency table was produced. This table indicates the proportion of interviews in which each code appeared. This gives a first indication of the patterns of meaning that appear across the dataset and thereby extend beyond the idiosyncrasies of a single interview. In order to broaden the analytical focus to a theme level, links and trends across codes were explored. To explore the connections within the

data, ATLAS.ti's query tool was implemented. This tool allows the researcher to explore how codes interact. For example, they allow for the examination of code co-occurrence: This helps identify how different facets of the concept under examination fit together. On a more conceptual level, ATLAS.ti allowed for the retrieval of all quotations of a particular code in one action which was used to gain a deeper understanding of the facets of each theme uncovered in the data. Thorough examination of the data allowed for a rich set of results to emerge.

ATLAS.ti's network function was used to visually represent the interconnections between the different themes and subthemes that exist within the data (O'Connor, 2013). These networks are web-like structures that visually represent how the different codes link together. It gives an overarching first picture of what trends are visible in the data and allows for the details as well as the context within which a theme sits to be explicitly presented. This is seen as an important step that allows the researcher to move from text to interpretation (Attride-Stirling, 2001). They typify the themes that emerged from all three interviews and are presented alongside the results in Chapters 5,6 and 7.

In order to understand the meanings emerging from the interviews, different sections of the sample were investigated in line with demographic differences (i.e. gender, age, socio-economic status, city of residency and ethnicity). In order to do this, the frequency tables exported into SPSS were used and amended in order to include these demographic differences. Furthermore, within the ATLAS.ti data file, primary document families were created so that not just absence or presence of a code or theme could be recorded, but the content of these codes could also be examined along demographic lines.

Finally, the ONS measure for personal wellbeing was analysed. Where a maximum of 10 can be obtained, the median level of wellbeing for the sample was 7.25, and this was used as the dividing point between higher and lower wellbeing. In order to look at the correlations between wellbeing and the various aspirations for connection, chi-square analyses were conducted using SPSS statistical software.

4.5. Reflections on the interview process

The interviews took place in the participant's home, rather than a university building, so that participants felt at ease and were not being impacted by an unfamiliar setting. However, there are a number of aspects of the interviewer that may have impacted on the findings of the research in Studies 2 and 3. The first is the accent of the interviewer, which was perceived by some participants as American. This imagined identity affected Study 3 in particular, which

looked at people's representations of weak ties in the city. It may have affected the way in which people presented and explained their experience of weak ties. For example, by participants comparing interactions with strangers in Britain with those in North America. Furthermore, having a non-British accent may have effected participants' accounts as they may have seen themselves as responding to a cultural 'outsider'. However, this impact on the interview process can also enhance the data that is extracted as it may give participants the impetus to explain everyday common sense thinking in more explicit terms.

4.6. Chapter summary

This chapter presents the design and methodology of the three studies that form the empirical basis of this thesis. It introduces the interview as a research technique and specified the types of procedures that were used within the three interview studies. Specifically, it presents the GEM and outlined the usefulness of the free association tasks in combination with an exploratory interview. Furthermore, it presents the two types of analysis that were conducted and are presented in the three upcoming chapters on the results of the aspirations study (Chapter 5), the results of the friendship study (Chapter 6) and the results of the weak ties study (Chapter 7). These three chapters present the outcomes of this analysis and outline the themes that were obtained from the interview data.

Chapter 5 What city dwellers want

This chapter presents the outcome of the first study, an interview based study of city dwellers' personal aspirations. The chapter begins with the results of the free association task, which gauges the participants' immediate associations to being asked about their 'aspirations for the future'. The chapter then continues with the reporting of the themes that arose from the subsequent interviews that elaborated their free associations. Thematic analysis of the interviews reveals that social connectedness is the most prevalent personal aspiration and includes connection with both 'strong ties' and 'weak ties'. Strong ties are connections with family and friends, with whom one has emotionally intimate, frequent and lasting relationships. Weak ties are relationships characterised by limited emotional intimacy and less frequent contact (Granovetter, 1973). Examples of the latter include interactions with acquaintances and work colleagues (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014). In line with the research questions, the focus in this chapter will be the analysis of people's aspiration for social connection. Other prevalent aspirations stated will be reported and analysed according to their relevance to the aspiration for social connection. Lastly, this chapter examines the associations between the different types of social connections aspired to and wellbeing. Here wellbeing is reported using both a quantitative measure from the survey as well as a qualitative analysis of the interview data. Lastly, a chapter summary will be provided outlining the most important findings and their relevance to the succeeding chapters.

5.1. Free association task

The free association task was completed by the 96 participants and yielded 367 responses in the form of words and/or images. The responses to the free association were recorded and all were examined for recurring concepts and ideas. The results of the content analysis are that 81% of all free associations can be classified into 16 distinct categories. These 16 categories and the frequency with which they appear are outlined in Figure 5.1. below.
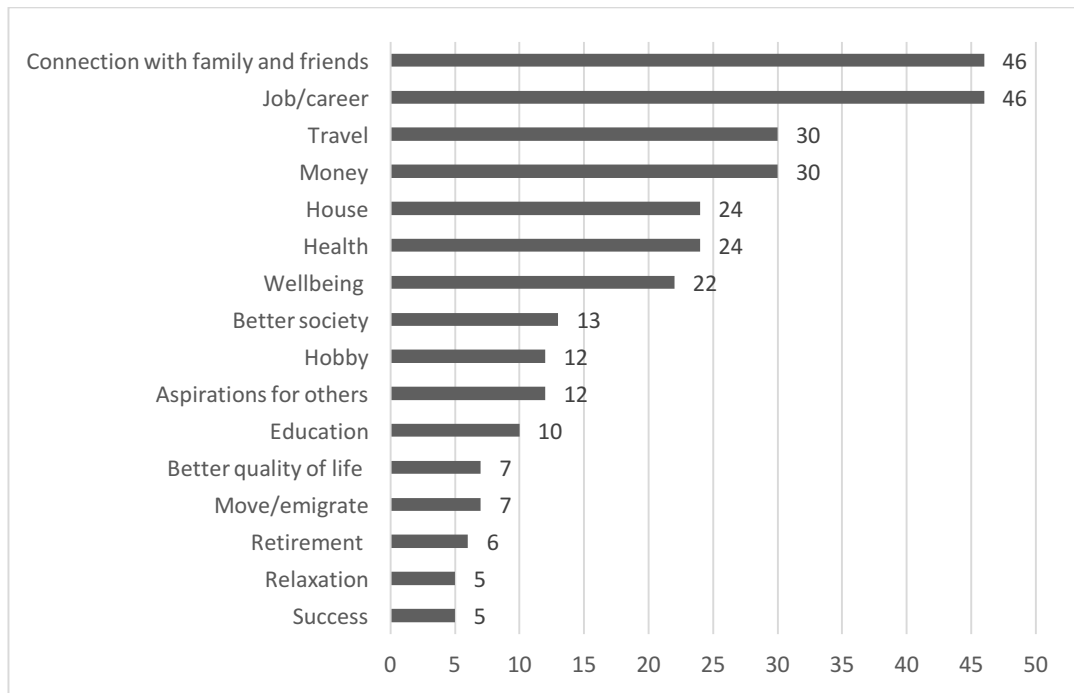
Figure 5.1. Results of 'aspirations for the future' free association task

Of the 16 categories, aspiration for connection with family and friends is the most prominent, along with aspiration for job/career. Aspiration for connection is made up of two types of aspiration: aspiration for connection with family and partner and aspiration for connection with friends. Of these two, aspiration for connection with family and partners is the most prominent. Almost half (44 %) of city-dwellers have aspirations involving family and marriage/partner, with the main aspirations being getting married, starting a family or making sure one's family is adequately supported and happy. Friendships are substantially less prominent in the free association task. Only 5% of participants stated connecting with friends as an aspiration. These are examples of aspirations for connection because they all refer to an aspiration to form or maintain a bond with another person.

Furthermore, city-dwellers mentioned having 'aspirations for others', such as children, and 'better society'. This further highlights social connectedness to others and interconnections between self and others in the way in which participants visualise their futures. Other aspirations, such as for house or money, for relaxation and success are also noted. Another prominent aspiration from the free association data is the aspiration for wellbeing ('wellbeing', 'health' and 'better quality of life'). This content analysis offers only a sparse picture of what people aspire to. The way in which these aspirations are interconnected, and the different facets they encompass, are explored in the thematic analysis of the interviews which is presented in the next section.

5.2. Interview themes

The aspiration for connection is far more prominent in the interviews, in which participants elaborate their own free associations. City-dweller aspirations can be divided into two broad categories: tangible and intangible aspirations. Participants raise a range of aspirations in their interviews and the categories are therefore not mutually exclusive. Thematic analysis reveals that the most prevalent three tangible and intangible aspirations are:
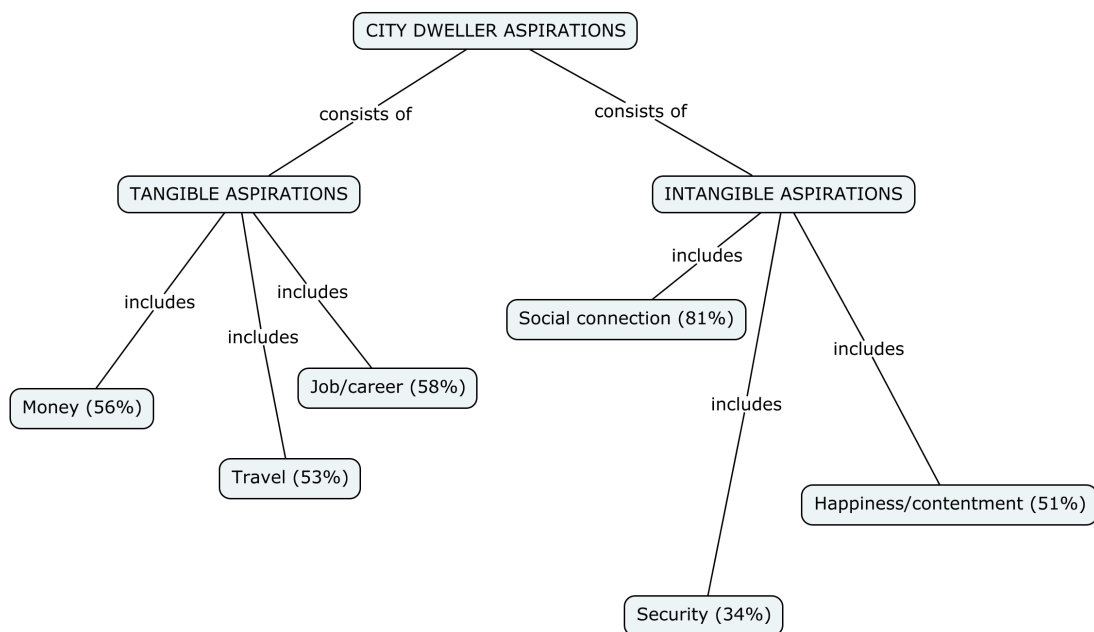
Figure 5.2. Most prominent aspirations in the interview data in percentages

Social connection is by far the most prevalent theme in the interview data, with 81% of participants expressing an aspiration for social connection (See Figure 5.2.).

Family connections tend to be mentioned in the discussion of the first or second box in the grid, thus they are highly salient for participants. Family is also talked about in relation to other aspirations, for example money. Here, the underlying aspiration is the desire to be comfortable and to not feel stressed by the pressure of having to provide for a family. Another prominent aspiration linked to family is travel, which is desired in order to spend time with family. 'Security' and 'happiness/contentment' are also highly correlated with aspiration for family, as family is seen as key for happiness and security. Though security is more often associated with job/career, the need for security within job/career is linked to it being seen as

a necessary foundation on which to build a family. When raised, friendships usually appear in the third or fourth box in the grid.

The aspiration for connection with weak ties does not appear directly in the free association boxes and is revealed gradually as other aspirations are explored in the interview. The majority of aspirations to connect with weak ties are connected to aspiration for job/career, travel, better society and being happy.

The interconnected nature of the data shows that simply looking at frequencies and overall associations is not enough to make sense of city-dwellers' aspirations for connection. The section below presents the findings of the thematic analysis of the aspiration for social connection in the city and highlights the underlying meanings and context in which different types of social connection are aspired to.

5.3. Aspiration for social connection

Table 5.3. breaks down the aspiration for social connection to show the different types of actors with which city dwellers aspire to connect. They are divided into aspiration to connect with 'strong' and 'weak' ties. These categories are not mutually exclusive since many participants mentioned multiple actors they wished to connect with.
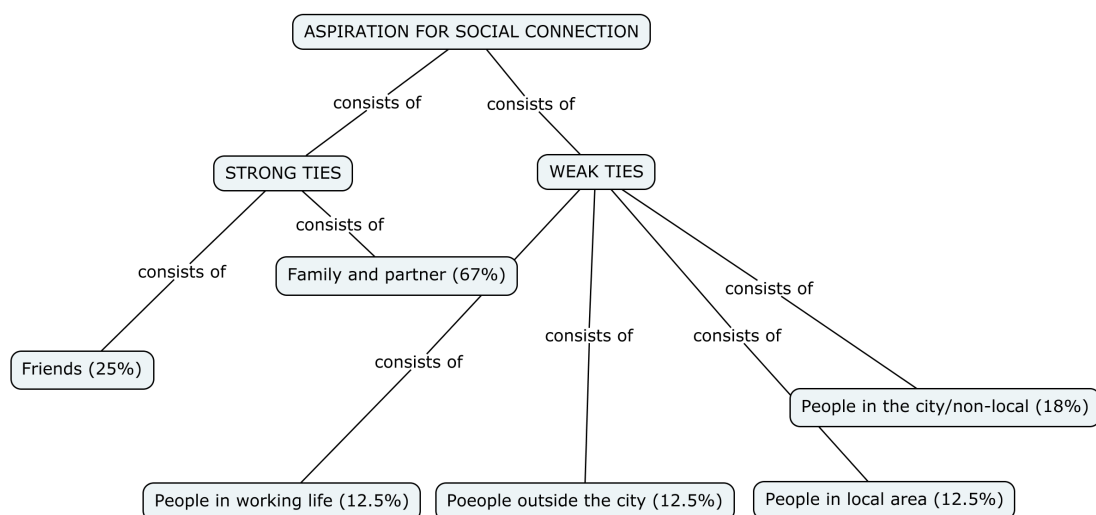
Figure 5.3. Most prominent connection types aspired to

In the data, examples of aspiration for connection with strong ties revolve around family and partner as well as friends. Aspiration for connection with weak ties includes people in their local area, people encountered in the rest of the city (non-local), people in working life and people outside of the city. Family members include partners, children, parents, siblings, and grandchildren. Friends refer to friends other than acquaintances. People in local area include neighbours and other local community members. People in the city (non-local) refers to those people met outside of one's local area in the city. People in working life refers to both people one works alongside (e.g. co-workers, employees and employers) and people one works for (e.g. clients and customers). People outside the city refers to people the participants aspire to connect with while traveling. The data were examined for demographic differences along gender, age, socio-economic status and city of residence lines. Only salient differences are reported. When not reported, no demographic differences were manifest.

5.4. Aspiration for connection with strong ties

Aspiration for connection with strong ties is the more prominent type of connection aspired to. It includes the aspiration to connect with family and partner (67%) and friends (25%).

5.4.1 Family and partner

Family is seen as the most important thing in life and a necessary foundation to building a happy and successful life. City-dwellers speak about the special bond that they have with their family, the feeling of unconditional love and the benefit of never feeling alone. Family is thought to make the good things in life better as it facilitates shared experiences with others. It is also conceived as making the bad things in life more manageable because of the support system that it provides. All in all, family is seen as a number one priority:

> *You know, you don't need money, do you, if you've got your family, so you don't need a nice house as long as you've got your family ... at the end of the day, I come home to my family. I don't really care about other people, the main people I care about is the circle around me, which is your family* (Male, 36-54, lower SES, White British, Birmingham)

The vast majority of city-dwellers' who have not yet started their own family spoke about doing so in the future. The type of family they aspire is nuclear: a stable bond between two married adults and their children:

> *if I put my life down it would just be like school for however many years and then uni and then work and get married, buy a house and have kids, just like it's all standard life in a story book that you might have but yeah, somewhere I might have got it from* (Female, 18-35, lower SES, White British, London)

This quote demonstrates the 'ideal' family that people aspire to and that 'you see on the telly'. These families are seen as comfortable, stable and supportive. The desirability of this is not questioned or reflected upon. Rather, it is taken as a given.

Waiting to start such a family is associated with needing to put other things in place beforehand. It is closely related to people's aspiration for security – both financial and emotional. Financial security, for this sample, is having a stable and well-paying job to live comfortably and have the resources to provide children with a good life:

> *I would like to start a family because I've recently got married so we're thinking about that but obviously you need finance for that as well so that's why aspirations-wise, I want to do that and have enough money to be able to raise a family. So we haven't started a family yet because we don't have that much money yet* (Female, 18-35, higher SES, BME British, Birmingham)

In addition to financial security, emotional security is related to being in a stable and loving relationship, which is aspired to but seen as hard to create:

> *Finding someone that you can spend the rest of your life with, have children with, you can't just go out and say I'm doing that today, you can't, you just can't do it so there's a bit of difficulty in that one* (Male, 18-35, lower SES, White British, Birmingham)

Some of the younger city-dwellers do not feel ready to settle down and start a family. Common reasoning is a desire to be free, have fun, do what one wants to do and be 'selfish'. This lifestyle is conceptualised as the antithesis to a lifestyle with children where one acts responsibly, and puts others people's needs before one's own.

For those who have already started their family, spending more quality time with family is a prevalent aspiration. In particular, participants express a desire to spend time with their children outside of their daily routine and talk to them about important issues, rather than the mundane routines of everyday life. For some city-dwellers, this aspiration is connected to an aspiration for travel:

> *on holiday to me it's all about family, do you know like I get time to do stuff with my daughter, my sons, my wife, we're a, we're round each other 24 hours a day, it's nice, you know like you go on holidays you go to the beach or the swimming pool, you do*

more kind of thing in that short little block that I, I personally find I make more an effort then. Because I have the time to make the effort (Male, 36-54, lower SES, White British, London)

In order to spend time with their family, city-dwellers aspire to a job/career that allows them to spend more time with their children, either by going part-time or having hours that match school hours. This is a particularly salient aspiration for female dwellers. For most dwellers, spending more time with family revolves around their children, as only a couple of city-dwellers expressed a specific interest in spending more time with their partner. Spending time with family is closely associated with wellbeing. Older city-dwellers who are approaching retirement look forward to relaxing and spending more time with their families. In particular, the aspiration to be a grandparent and to spend time with grandchildren is associated with fun and relaxation, which is different to parenthood.

Technology is mentioned by just a few city-dwellers: it is seen as both an enabler of and a hindrance to communication and connection. For some, it is a great way to stay in touch with family members overseas. For others, it takes people's attention away from those around them and is seen as distracting, particularly for children, making it harder to spend quality time with them. A common comparison is made between the role that technology plays today and the role it played when interviewees were growing up, or even 'the olden days' for younger city-dwellers.

The support-giving function is another aspect of family that makes city-dwellers deem it as fundamental:

I mean tomorrow's another day, you know, if you're, if you're struggling let's do it as a family, let's see if mummy can work out this puzzle, you know, just try to be happy, just do things together, that's what family is, family is coming together and doing something (Male, 36-54, lower SES, BME British, Birmingham)

In particular, participants associate family with the aspiration to support and provide for other family members. Dwellers worry that they may not always be able to do this and financial woes leave people stressed and pressured. There is a general aspiration to be stable and have the resources to deal with any challenges life could throw at one but people worry that this would not always be possible. This aspiration is slightly more prevalent in male than female participants. This is related to people's aspiration for money, which is associated with security, as they perceive the cost of living rising and a responsibility and desire to give their children the best:

Yeah so I, I just want tons for my kids, you know, I want them to just have the best out of life, I want them to do fantastically well at school, you know, I want them to go on and have great jobs … I want them to be grounded and happy and travel the world and have tons of great experiences and be able to do everything (Female, 18-35, lower SES, White British, London)

Alongside wanting the best for one's children there is a desire to 'hand something to the next generation' so they are provided for. Feeling able to support family gives life purpose and allows one to feel needed and fulfilled. By making their family members happy, city-dwellers feel happy 'by osmosis'. Providing for a family is strongly anchored to representations of participant's own childhood. Participants who think fondly of their childhood talk of the sacrifices made by their own parents and express a desire to be able to do the same for their children in the future. Furthermore, city-dwellers who feel inadequately taken care of by their own parents, want to be able to give their children everything that they do not have as children. Overall, giving, rather than receiving, support is presented as the key motivation for wanting to connect with family members.

5.4.2 Friends

A mention of the aspiration for friendships is held by a quarter (25%) of city-dwellers. Participants aged between 55-67 are more likely than any other age group to state this as an aspiration. Furthermore, city-dwellers in the higher socio-economic bracket are twice as likely to aspire to connect with friends than city-dwellers in the lower socio-economic group.

Of the sample who aspire to friendships, the majority want to continue to value and maintain the friendships that they already had. Half point out the enjoyment gained from activities with like-minded friends, such as going to the theatre. Going with friends is seen as better than going on one's own:

*But I just love knowing that if I want to go out every night of the week I can ring 7, at least 7 people up and say, you know, fancy doing something. And weekends if I want to do something I've always got someone to do something with … I want to continue to have my friends around me so that I can share experiences. (*Female, 55-67, higher SES, White British, London)

For city dwellers approaching retirement, activities with friends are seen as the reward for a long, hard-working career.

Friends are also seen as providing support, by acting as a sounding board or a sympathetic ear to which stresses and problems can be expressed:

Well sort of the cliché of a problem shared is a problem halved, I think if you sit and let things fester in your mind you don't get anywhere and if you have a problem and you talk to, you know, a close friend, you know, they might not give you advice but they might just listen to you and that helps (Male, 55-67, lower SES, White British, London)

Emotional support from friends substitutes support from other strong ties, like family:

I've got a lot of experiences that I want to share with them and I like listening to their situations as well and if they've got problems they will come to me and if I've got an issue I'll know who I can ring up to discuss a certain issue and I just think that friends, my family all live up north you see so of course I don't see them very often so the friends that I've got down here, at work and outside of work, are really important and I've still got friends from when I was 5 years old. (Female, 55-67, higher SES, White British, London)

Unlike any other type of social connection mentioned in the data, friends are used as substitutes for other meaningful relationships that are lacking in city dwellers' lives. For example, they are able to compensate for a life partner by acting as travel companions and can substitute for family members that lived too far away to help on a day-to-day basis.

Moreover, friends are associated with relaxation and momentary escape from everyday responsibilities, stresses and worries at work and at home:

I think I'm very, very lucky in a very nice group of friends who all live locally and … I met a casual, a very casual acquaintance one day … she said this is a group of us, she said, bring your sewing, bring your knitting, and we sit and chat, you know. And it's turned out to be a very, very enjoyable experience and I've met a lot of people (Female, 55-67, higher SES, White British, Birmingham)

The above quote illustrates that the distinction between strong and weak ties can be fluid: friendship, a strong tie, can evolve from acquaintance, a weak tie, met casually in the city.

5.5. Aspiration for social connection with weak ties

Aspiration for connection with weak ties is prevalent in the interview data, though it does not manifest in the free association task. Aspiration for weak ties – which includes people in the

local area, non-local people in the city, people in working life and people outside of the city – was slowly revealed as other aspirations, such as work, house and travel, were reflected upon.

5.5.1. People in local area.

A substantial portion of the sample talked of the importance of weak ties in describing their aspirations. Aspiring to connect with weak ties includes the expression of aspiring to connect with neighbours and others in the local area. In terms of demographic differences, Birmingham city dwellers were more likely to aspire to connect with people in their local area than Londoners were, as were dwellers aged 36-54 when compared to the other two age groups. Lastly, lower SES dwellers were almost twice as likely to aspire to connection with people in the local area.

Weak ties are associated with enjoyment, wanting to share with others and to have impact beyond the family unit. They also enable escape from everyday stress and improvement of quality of life. Saying 'hello' to people on the street or in a shop, and stopping for a quick chat is seen as making everyday activities more enjoyable. This 'neighbourly' attitude is anchored to a representation of neighbourliness found in smaller towns or villages:

> *when we go up to the local shop they know us by name ... I always read the headlines and they always ask me, just jokingly, oh what's in the headlines today, do you want a report back. And it's just because they know us, it's neighbourly, it's really neighbourly, it's like a, the feeling of a small little village or town but ... in the middle of the city* (Female, 36-54, higher SES, BME, Birmingham)

Beyond enjoyment, aspiration for social connection with local people is linked to knowing the names of neighbours and helping one another: '*It's a matter of knocking on your neighbour's door and saying I'm just going to the shop, do you need anything, it takes 2 minutes*' (Male, 36-54, lower SES, White, Birmingham).

The majority of dwellers who want to connect with people in their local area speak of wanting to connect and be part of a community. City dwellers with this aspiration use the words community, local area and neighbourhood interchangeably. Sharing with the people living around them is seen as important to city-dwellers:

> *So if you're happy within your home and family you can share it, share it with your neighbour, you know what I mean. If sometimes you're very joyful you, you bake a cake and you say you know what this cake tastes really good but I want to share it, give the neighbour a piece of the cake. You understand me, you have an idea you can*

share with your neighbour and you can build on it, extend it to the community, you know, and it is important (Male, 36-54, lower SES, BME British, Birmingham)

Being a part of a community is equated to having a support system. There is a particular interest in supporting others in the community, either financially or by volunteering time. An aspiration for social solidarity is also present in the data. In particular, this aspiration is related to working together to have an impact:

takes I would say a community effort to change a lot of things that needs to be changed. You know, so you as a father, individual, a man, you're doing your best within your home, you know, within your little area but if you didn't want changes, serious changes within politics, government, community, it's then going to take a big effort so I guess to live in a good community is important (Male, 36-54, lower SES, BME, Birmingham)

The aspiration for local community is linked to a general sense of nostalgia, a longing or desire for a time that had passed. A common comparison is made between neighbourhood connection nowadays and that of yesteryear. There is a consensus that people who do not know many of their neighbours in the present would have known their neighbours in the past:

Unlike perhaps in the 50s, 60s, and I'm old enough to remember that, where if you lived in a cul-de-sac like this, you knew everyone that lived in the road. Even after 20-odd years, we know the people in the immediate few houses here and perhaps a couple of houses down there but I can't say I could put a name to more than one or two people, whereas I think back to the sort of 60s we lived in a, I lived in a cul-de-sac then with my mother and father where there were probably 50 houses and I could tell you the name of every person that lived there. (Male, 55-67, higher SES, White British, Birmingham)

This sense of togetherness was also associated with people in the past experiencing hardship on a wider societal level, such as war, which caused people to have to 'stand strong' together. This is seen as different from the hardship that people are currently faced with:

I think we have an awful lot of stress. And then I think about the people in the wars, God what stress was that, that was horrendous but the camaraderie that was there or that you read about, that you hear about, that you still had the odd granny that's left over from the wars, was people's strength and I think we've lost that completely. I think people are totally selfish, totally into themselves, totally not pulling together like they used to. (Female, 55-67, higher SES, White British, London)

This demonstrates the idea of society as consisting of selfish individuals who do not care and look out for others. Lack of interest in others is also associated with lack of trust in others. This is seen as different to the past, as people knew each other and therefore felt more trusting towards them. This representation of the past is associated with a purported feeling of safety that prevailed in the past and allowed children to play happily on the street, and people to leave their front doors open or unlocked without worrying about themselves or their children.

> *I mean I guess maybe 20 years, even maybe 30 years… ago, people, you know, neighbours used to interact quite freely, your neighbours were your friends, things like that. In this day and age, you know, if it doesn't concern me then I'm not really that bothered. I mean we see people that are being beaten up on the street, mugged and we turn a blind eye like we didn't see it. Twenty years ago people would intervene, you know … I feel like society, we're so egocentric* (Male, 18-35, higher SES, BME, London)

This view is equally distributed among all age groups and is not limited to participants who have experienced this time period for themselves.

5.5.2. People in the city (non-local)

City dwellers also wish to engage with others in the city outside of their local area. One avenue for connection is via group activities and clubs. This aspiration is only present in the London data. Londoners aspire to join group activities such as cycling, dog walking or running with other like-minded city dwellers. Here conceptions of connecting with weak ties are closely related to achieving a particular goal, such as health:

> *I've spent years before in the past joining a gym and it's just solitary. I mean what I do now is outdoors, its boot camps and running but it's with a group, you know, with people and realizing that that's what I've needed, and that's what I've always needed, you know, and more of a social element* (Female, 36-54, higher SES, BME, London)

This 'social element' increases both the enjoyment of the activity and the motivation to persist. Like the aspiration to connect with people locally, the aspiration to connect with non-local weak ties was found mostly within the 36-54 year olds.

Beyond the wish to engage directly with others through activities, there is a strong desire for small-scale interactions with people in public spaces (shops, third places such as pubs, parks and streets) that were pleasant and enjoyable:

I just, you know, people will come and say hello and we chat and how are you doing and as I said to you, it's lovely, it's the way I think life should be. There's enough stresses without us adding to them. Enough stresses in life. And it's nice to be nice (Male, 36-54, lower SES, White British, Birmingham)

City dwellers aspire to connect with these weak ties by adopting a positive attitude towards others. In Birmingham, this attitude is further defined by the desire to be friendly, kind and show concern for others. In London there is a slightly stronger emphasis on being respectful and polite, rather than friendly:

I think just for me I just think well if you've lived on the Earth, you've lived in this world, you've interacted with maybe millions of people on a daily basis consciously or sub-consciously, purposely or, you know, by accident, and you want to feel like you've made a mark somehow in a strange kind of way, whether, you know, it's just opening a door for someone or just being polite (Male, 18-35, higher SES, BME, London)

Dwellers spoke of the visceral feelings of enjoyment that come from low intensity and positive connection: *'my nature is just to say hello to people because if people, if somebody says hello to me that I don't know, it kind of gives me a nice, just a nice feeling'* (Male, 36-54, higher SES, BME, Birmingham)

However, such connection is not always seen positively, particularly regarding travelling around large cities:

I think just it's a, I feel living in London it can be quite, quite stressful. Day to day, you know, commuting, getting around, there's a lot of people here, you know, sometimes you have encounters with people and it's not, it's quite negative, you know, because everyone's just trying to get to their own place and I hate travelling on the Tube, I absolutely hate it (Female, 18-35, lower SES, White British, London)

This aversion is linked to the unpleasantness of crowds. Despite being surrounded by people, these situations are characterised by a lack of interaction.

Lastly, this desire for face-to-face connection with others in the city also extends to the way in which city dwellers wanted services to be provided in the city:

I'd rather walk up to someone in a ticket office and say excuse me, how do you get there, than being on a machine ... it's a shame because we are humans and it's nice to see a face if you're talking to someone but everything seems to be going away from

that and talking to screens and things like that (Male, 36-54, lower SES, White, London)

This aspiration for face-to-face connection highlights the way in which connection with others is seen as part of humans' inherently social nature.

5.5.3. People in working life

Social connection with weak ties is also sought in working life. City dwellers aged 18-35 are more likely to aspire to connect with people at work than any other age group. This may be linked to young dwellers having more job/career related aspirations. The aspiration for social connection at work is primarily related to two types of goals. The first is to achieve something positive by having an impact on others and the world around one. The second is to enjoy oneself through interpersonal connection at work.

The vast majority of those who aspire to social connection at work do so to have an impact on others. This is associated with an aspiration to create a form of positive change. Young people, for example, aspired to being teachers in order to help children achieve their potential:

> *But ultimately yeah I want to teach kids first, 14+, get that age where they go off the rails, do that for a couple of years, make a difference, get my place in heaven and then see where it took me really* (Female, 18-35, lower SES, BME British, London)

This is seen to give meaning and purpose to their lives and is linked to a sense of achievement, as well as success:

> *Yeah, success like in the sense that you feel satisfied … I feel obviously I've achieved, a sense of achievement maybe. And then obviously the aspiration is to be successful in the future with what I'm doing for others and that makes me feel that maybe this is, there's some success, successfulness there maybe (*Female, 36-54, higher SES, BME, Birmingham)

Having a positive impact on other people's lives is described as inherently rewarding, which is seen as a qualitatively different type of success to financial success.

Social connection at work is also associated, by a small number of people, with enjoying one's work. Interacting with others is seen as pleasurable and active, as opposed to 'static', sitting behind a computer and not speaking to anyone in the office all day:

> *It's just like it's always fun, like with the kids you can have a laugh and a joke with the kids and all the players… it's just nice to always talk. Rather than be, like if*

you're sat in an office all day sometimes you don't, you're on a computer all day you don't speak to no-one and it's just, I just love interacting with people and having time for people and sort of talking to people (Male, 18-35, higher SES, White British, Birmingham)

In sum, the aspiration for social connection to others at work is centred around finding meaning and purpose by having a positive impact on others and having fun with them.

5.5.4. People outside of the city

Finally, city dwellers aspire to connect with weak ties outside of the city. This type of social connection is linked to the aspiration to travel. The oldest cohort (55-67) is more than twice as likely to state this as an aspiration than any other age group. This may be linked to the finding that this is also the age group that express the desire to travel the most.

Connecting with other people from different places is seen as part of an authentic experience that allows for learning about different ways of living. City dwellers are keen to travel and become part of a new social environment. To achieve this goal, interacting with local people is seen as key:

By travelling you meet people as well, you can have good, you know, relationships with people abroad in which you can exchange, you can say you know what, come and spend some time with me over here and see how we live in England, you know (Male, 36-54, lower SES, BME, Birmingham)

5.6. Aspiration for disconnection

Lastly, a tiny proportion of city dwellers expressed an aspiration to disconnect from other people and to be alone. This aspiration is associated with two things. The first is that city dwellers saw other people, either at work or at home, as a source of stress and ill-being.

Well I mean it is just time for yourself, for me really just to walk in the park with the dogs, you know, and have some time to yourself, I don't have to answer to anybody, I haven't got to please anybody (Female, 55-67, higher SES, White British, Birmingham)

The second is that some city dwellers who had experienced 'quite a bit of solitude' had become accustomed to the sense of freedom and peace that it provided:

> *I love being on my own, I really enjoy it. Not, I mean I've been married twice and this is just so much better. I please myself, I can get up what time I want.. I can read in bed till the early hours without bothering anyone, it just, I love it, I just love being on my own* (Female, 55-67, lower SES, White British, Birmingham)

This was very different to the dominant narrative around social disconnection in the data, which presented being alone or disconnected from others as lonely, boring or embarrassing.

5.7. Wellbeing and the aspiration for social connection

This section looks at the association between wellbeing and the aspiration for social connection. Social connection is examined through the thematic analysis of the interviews reported above. Wellbeing is recorded in two ways. Firstly, a survey including a 4-item measure of subjective wellbeing, as used by the ONS (2015), was administered. This measure combines positive affect, lack of negative affect, meaning and life satisfaction to calculate an overall subjective wellbeing score. Secondly, wellbeing (which includes mention of positive emotion, negative emotion, purpose and life satisfaction) was coded throughout the interviews described above. However, it is worth noting that this data comes from asking about people's aspirations and therefore it is reasonable to assume that the responses are skewed toward positive assessments of social ties, as it is only the positive types that are aspired to. Here different types of social connection are related to different aspects of wellbeing. Looking at aspiration for connection with strong ties, weak ties and aspiration for disconnection in turn, this section reports the findings of the survey as well as the ways in which respondents reported wellbeing and ill-being and how the measure of wellbeing and the interview data on wellbeing/ill-being correlate with aspiration for connection.

5.7.1. Strong ties and wellbeing

Looking at aspiration for connection with strong ties and the survey measure of wellbeing, only aspiring to friendships correlates with wellbeing: those who aspire to having friendships have significantly higher levels of wellbeing than those without this aspiration ($\chi2 = 5.976$, df = 2, p = 0.05). No significant relationship is found between wellbeing and aspirations for family-based social connections.

Looking at the interview data, wellbeing and friendship are closely associated with one another primarily through enjoyment. Friends are seen as people with whom one can share activities that are exciting and fun. They are like-minded people who enjoy similar activities to oneself. Socialising and spending time with friends is seen as a way of gaining 'quality of life'. Spending time with friends, alongside family, is sometimes included as the key to a happy life. Friends are seen as the antidote to stress and a good way of temporarily forgetting ones troubles at home or at work. Having friends is also seen as wellbeing inducing due to their ability to support one through difficult times. Friends do this by simply listening or by giving advice. This gives city-dwellers strength and helps combat stress and gives support throughout negative life events and is therefore seen as wellbeing enhancing.

For family and wellbeing, the interviews paint a more mixed picture. On the one hand, family is seen as fundamental to life and key to happiness. Children, in particular, are key for wellbeing and some dwellers equate their happiness with their children's happiness and find making them happy very rewarding. They take pride in their children's achievements. Children are seen as giving meaning and purpose to their lives. They give people a reason to do well, to take care of themselves and to try and succeed in order to make their children proud. Having this sense of purpose positively affects wellbeing. City-dwellers gain satisfaction and fulfilment from being of use to their children, for example, by helping them with their school work or driving them to activities. It makes them feel needed which gives them a sense of wellbeing. This is different to the hedonic types of happiness associated with friends. This sense of fulfilment from family is also recognized by city-dwellers who have not had a family yet, but imagine that hedonic happiness, such as having fun and going out with friends, becomes less wellbeing giving as one get older.

On the other hand, having children is also related to stress and ill-being. Many dwellers speak of the constant balancing act between family and work, the pressures of having to support everyone both emotionally and financially and the guilt that they experience when they do not get enough time to spend with their children.

Furthermore, the constant focus on the needs of others can leave some dwellers feeling like they are not meeting their own needs and do not have time to take care of themselves. As children grow older, they are seen as negatively influencing wellbeing by creating worry for parents. Dwellers worry that their children will get hurt, will make a bad decision or be negatively influenced by others. Furthermore, dwellers worry that they cannot support their children in the right ways and that they will feel let down or not get the best from life due to their mistakes. This sense of responsibility is associated with stress and anxiety for city-

dwellers. Parents worry particularly when their children are facing difficulties, such as mental or physical health problems or joblessness or relationship stress.

5.7.2. Weak ties and wellbeing

Looking at aspiration for connection with weak ties and the survey measure of wellbeing, only city dwellers who aspired to connect with others in their local area had significantly higher levels of wellbeing than those who did not ($\chi2$ = 0.557, df = 2, p = 0.008). No significant relationship is recorded between wellbeing and city dwellers' aspiration for social connection in the city (non-local), in working life or outside of the city.

Wellbeing and community ties in the interview data are characterised most by small positive interactions such as smiling at people that walk by, which is seen as a way of 'spreading happiness'. These micro interactions made dwellers feel like the world was smiling with them, making them cheerful. Being known by name by people in the local shop, and joking with them, gave dwellers a sense of neighbourliness and gave them a sense of visceral joy. Being social with others in one's local area was seen as fun and gave dwellers 'a nice feeling'. Lastly, a sense of togetherness and social solidarity in the local area was seen as a way of buffering stress. However, reporting's of crime made dwellers fearful and less likely to seek out these wellbeing inducing interactions.

In the city at large, positive micro interactions were also related to feelings of wellbeing. However, the city, particularly city centres, are also associated with crowds, busyness and stress which are ill-being inducing. Dwellers mention that there are so many people living in one space and that this crowding is likely to lead to conflict. This is contrasted with meeting people outside of the city, for example on holiday, in environments that are experienced as less hectic and in which others enhance one's experience through positive short term interactions.

Lastly, people in working life are seen as being able to make a job more fun. Dwellers gain enjoyment from working with people. Laughing, chatting and having people at work who make work more enjoyable is seen as a central aspect of a 'good job'. Furthermore, doing work that helps people, for example teaching children or helping a client solve a problem, is seen as wellbeing-giving because it provides dwellers with a sense of achievement and satisfaction. For some, working for others is seen as giving them a sense of purpose.

5.7.3. Disconnection and wellbeing

Of the small number of city dwellers that aspired to disconnect from other people, all reported low levels of wellbeing on the survey measure. However, those that state it as an aspiration describe it as wellbeing -giving because it allows them to escape stress and gain autonomy. This deviates from the dominant narrative around disconnection in the data which presents being alone as boring or sad. Dwellers speak of not seeing people during the day at work and feeling bored and depressed. Others state not having a partner or family to come home to makes them feel sad. Those without romantic partners feel they have to 'put up a charade' in front of others because they feel embarrassed about being alone and feeling lonely.

5.8. Chapter summary

This chapter presents the results from the first interview study on city-dwellers' aspirations. The chapter began by analysing the responses from the free association task. This analysis was followed by the delineation of themes that resulted from the interview exercise that was based on the free association task. Here thematic analysis revealed that aspiration for social connection is the most prominent aspiration of British city-dwellers and that the aspiration for social connection can be divided into aspiration for strong ties and weak ties.

Strong ties consist of family, romantic partner and friends. The aspiration for family and partner was an immediate and prominent association in the data, which was linked to wanting to provide and spend quality time with them. However, dwellers also expressed the aspiration to connect with weak ties, though this aspiration was revealed more gradually across the duration of the interview. Weak ties are people one does not know that well, such as strangers and acquaintances. Dwellers stated an aspiration to connect with these people, which are characterised by the area in which they are encountered, such as the local area, in the city at large, at work and outside of the city. The chapter ends with an analysis of wellbeing and the aspiration for connection, in which wellbeing is measured using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative data shows that family is linked to a eudaimonic vision of wellbeing which provides fulfilment and life satisfaction. Friends are more closely associated with fun and therefore fit a hedonic description of wellbeing, though they are also seen as providing support. This is similar to weak ties which are associated with joy as well as a sense of social support and solidarity. Analysis of the quantitative measure of wellbeing

finds that only aspiration for friendship and aspiration for community are associated with wellbeing.

Based on these findings, a further study explored connectedness in more detail, returning to the same participants. They were asked to focus on friendship and weak ties. These subsequent studies aim to provide a more in-depth understanding of how these two social ties are conceptualised, what social factors they are influenced by and how this is connected to city-dweller wellbeing.

Chapter 6 What friendship means to city dwellers

This chapter presents the results of the second interview study, a study of friendship. It begins with an overview of the free association task, which records participants' immediate associations with the concept of 'friendship'. It moves on to the themes that arose from the interview which followed, where free associations were elaborated. A number of themes emerge from the interview data. Four concern the conceptualisation of friendship as fun, support-giving and based on trust and understanding. A further two themes regard the contextual factors, time and technology, that impact friendships in the British city. After delineating the content of themes, the chapter ends with a summary.

6.1. Free association responses

The free association task completed by 52 participants yielded 208 distinct responses in the form of words and/or images. The subject of each free association was recorded and all were examined for recurring ideas and concepts. Of the associations provided, 91% can be divided into 20 concepts. These 20 concepts and the number of times they were recorded as a response to the free association task is outlined in Figure 6.1.
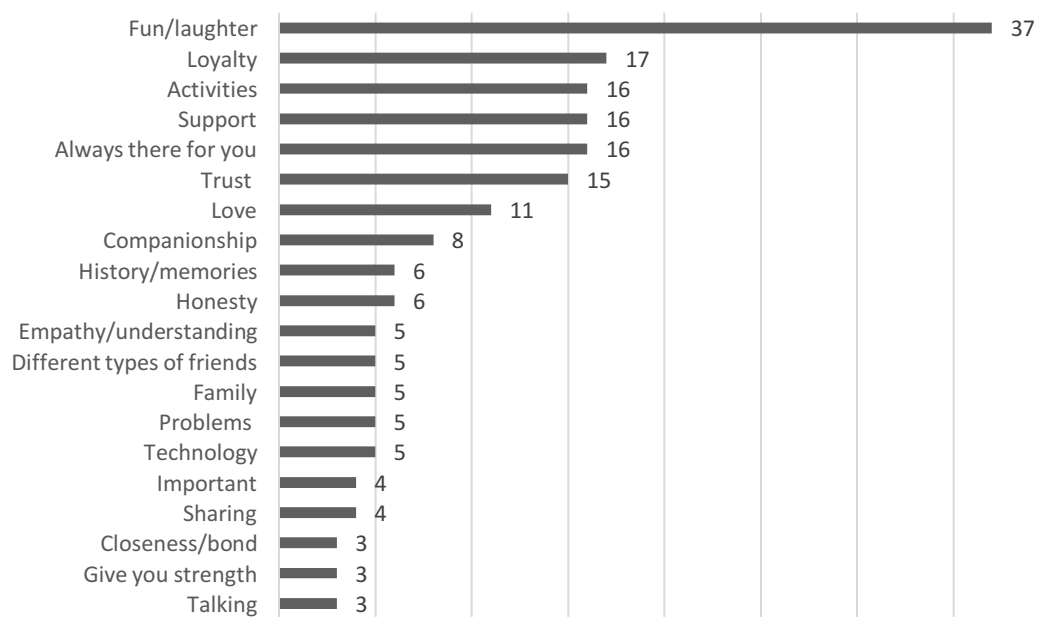
Figure 6.1. Results of 'friendship' free association task

The above figure displays participants' stored, naturalistic responses to the idea of 'friendship'. Though the content of these associations offers only a sparse depiction of how friendship is conceptualised, some overarching trends can be observed.

'Fun/laughter' is the most frequent association concerning friendship, with participants stating it twice as often as the second most common association, loyalty. This idea of fun and laughter amongst friends refers to a hedonic type of wellbeing, where friends bring happiness, joy and visceral (denoted by the idea of laughter and smiling) pleasure. This association with friendship also ties in to the third most prominent association: 'activities' – doing things with friends that one enjoys. The aspects of friendship that bring positive experiences to life are different to the other prominent associations of 'loyalty', 'support' and 'always there for you', which appear to have a non-hedonic function, though this can only be established through further analysis of the interview data.

The other noticeable trend is the high number of emotive categories associated with friendship. Friendship is associated with a plethora of positive emotions, including 'fun/laughter', 'love' and 'empathy/understanding'. Furthermore, concepts such as 'trust', 'support', 'loyalty', 'always there for you' and 'honesty' at least in part, relate to feeling emotionally secure and at ease, though some of these features, such as 'support', may also have practical implications. The importance of this in participants' conceptualisations of friendship is also evident in the associations of 'closeness/ bond' and the ability of a friend 'give you strength'. These emotional elements may be linked to a sense of shared history, shared experience and a sense of togetherness and companionship, which also shines through in the content analysis of the free associations.

The subsequent interviews were based on each participant's own free associations. The extent to which these associations are present in each of the interviews varies. Whilst elaborating the different meanings behind these associations some participants stayed with their initial associations, whereas others departed significantly, giving rise to entirely new content. The remainder of the chapter delineates these varying themes and looks at the ways in which they are structured and interconnected.

6.2. Interview responses

Thematic analysis reveals that friendship is conceptualised by four interrelated themes: 1) fun, 2) support, 3) trust and 4) understanding. Fun and support were the most prevalent themes,

both mentioned by 83% of participants, followed by trust (54%) and understanding (39%). This section will outline these four themes and indicate demographic trends. This will be followed by an outline of the different 'types' of friends – good and bad – present in the data. Lastly, the two contextual factors impacting friendship - use of technology and time - are reported.

6.2.1 Friendships are characterised by fun

The most prevalent theme in the data is the idea that friendships are relationships characterised by fun. The desire for fun in friendship is slightly more pronounced in the middle age group (39-57). This mirrors the findings of the free association task, where fun/laughter dominates. The following analysis illustrates the multifaceted representation of what fun means within friendship.
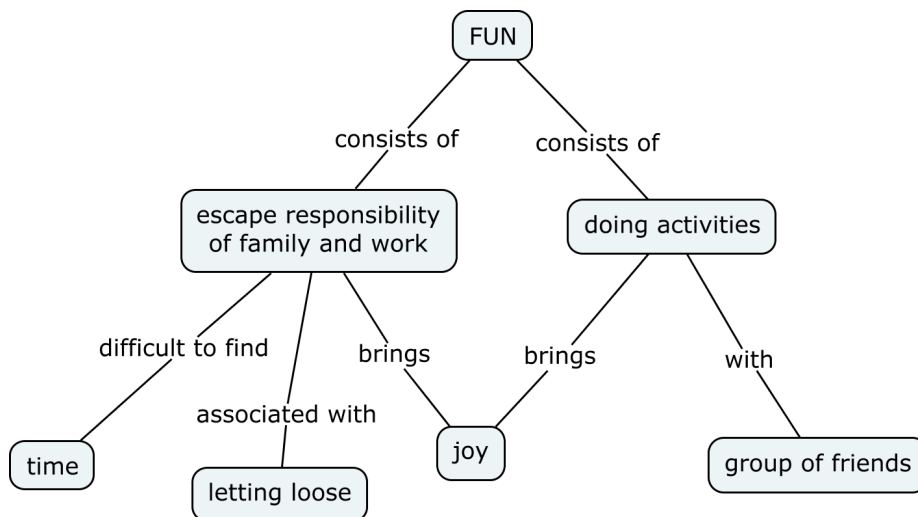
Figure 6.2. Friendship theme 1: Fun

Friendships are primarily seen as spaces in which to let loose and have a good time as well as escape stress and worries.

No, just sometimes you just, again work gets you down, family life gets you down and you just need to go out and have fun and have a laugh, so yeah, no, they are fun (Female, 39-57, lower SES, White, London)

Friendships are particularly well suited for this, when compared to other social ties, for two reasons. Firstly, friendships are voluntary associations that are 'obligation free'. Friends are people one actively wants to be around and people who bring one joy. This element of choice is more pronounced within friendship than other social ties such as family or work colleagues where one is brought together by factors outside of one's own choosing. This means one has more choice over who one wants to call a friend based solely on how much one likes being around that person. Secondly, friendships can occupy a space that is separate from work and home life and is therefore removed from the worry and stress that result from their accompanying obligations, duties and responsibilities. This distinguishes friends from other social relationships, such as a parent, a partner or a colleague.

Friends are considered good company and help create an 'everyday fun factor'. These types of interactions with friends are not serious and do not involve 'deep conversations'. Friends use humour and laughter to cheer one another up, lift each other's moods and make each other feel refreshed, like 'the sun is shining':

> *I always have fun with my friends. We are always laughing. Happy, again, whenever we are together it's, we are never really miserable or dwell on anything in life. We are just happy and like to have a good time* (Female, 21-38, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Although there are other factors needed for friendship, sometimes simply having fun together is enough:

> *I've got friends who I wouldn't be too concerned about them being loyal but I think they're a bit of a hoot and you know that they're good to go out with for that element of fun, not necessarily people that I'd share confidence with* (Female, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

City-dwellers like to meet face-to-face with friends outside of work and home, as it allows them to focus on being with their friends and be more actively engaged in conversation. This is seen as better 'quality time' than, for example, speaking on the phone whilst also doing things around the house or dealing with children. These interactions often revolve around activities, which is another key element of having fun with friends. City-dwellers want to share nice moments and experiences with friends through a range of activities, such as playing sports or going to concerts, the cinema or on holidays together. These types of activities are fostered by friends having shared interests. Although these activities are often seen as fun in

themselves, they are enhanced and more highly valued when completed with friends. Even activities that limit social interaction can be more fun when shared with a friend:

> *I can't imagine sitting in a movie theatre and watching a film with popcorn, just on my own, got no-one to kind of have a little whisper to about the film, just that seems a bit odd to me* (Male, 21-38, higher SES, BME, London)

> *Yes, well as I said we've got lots of festivals here and we have Mexican festival, South American, you can't stand there on your own, you're dying to join in but you can't on your own* (Female, 58-70, lower SES, White, London)

Furthermore, doing activities with friends is often seen as more fun than doing things with other strong ties such as family and partner, who are perceived as more mundane:

> *… it will be nice to see my brother and mum and aunties and cousins, bit of a nice chat and a bit of a laugh but on the flip side I'm going to a barbecue with my friends or a weekend or a night out with my friends, you know it has a propensity to be amazing, you know, like a lot of belly laughs and sort of a lot of memories* (Male, 21-38, higher SES, White, London)

> *Like with other relationships you can just be like, like with your boyfriend you're just sort of sitting there watching telly, not necessarily doing anything in particular whereas with my friends we always try and do something, make it a bit more interesting* (Female, 21-38, lower SES, White, London)

Sharing activities and doing things that both people enjoy is crucial to friendships; this is the foundation of some friendships. Breakdowns or endings of friendships can be seen when people are no longer able to enjoy the same activities together. For example, friends that used to like going out together to drink and dance struggle to maintain that friendship when one person does not want to or is not able to do this anymore, usually because of new partners or family and the resulting shift in priorities.

Drinking alcohol – often talked about in relation to meeting friends in pubs – is also associated with having fun with friends. Alcohol in seen as something that helps dwellers lose inhibitions and facilitates relaxation and open conversation between friends. It enhances the fun had with friends and allows dwellers to really 'let their hair down'. This is epitomised by the prevalence of 'banter', where friends poke fun at each other in a light-heartened manner. This fun results in laughter that is seen as more 'genuine' than the polite laughter had in other

interactions with, for example, weak ties. Furthermore, it allows people to try things that they would not ordinarily do. This is a way to broaden one's horizons, with friends giving people the confidence to move out of their comfort zones:

> *I think one of the things you have to do, it goes back a bit to the trust, is if they suggest something that you're a bit unsure of, trust their perception of whether it will be fun or not because if you're, if you're wrong it's a shared experience that you'll still have in the future but if you're right it's going to be a fun shared experience anyway* (Male, 39-57, higher SES, White, London)

Activities are seen as the things that maintain friendships by facilitating shared experiences and making memories.

6.2.2. Friendships provide support

Equally as prevalent as the notion of fun in friendship, support was mentioned by 83% of participants. Support was seen as more important to lower SES than higher SES participants and those in London mentioned support slightly more than those in Birmingham.
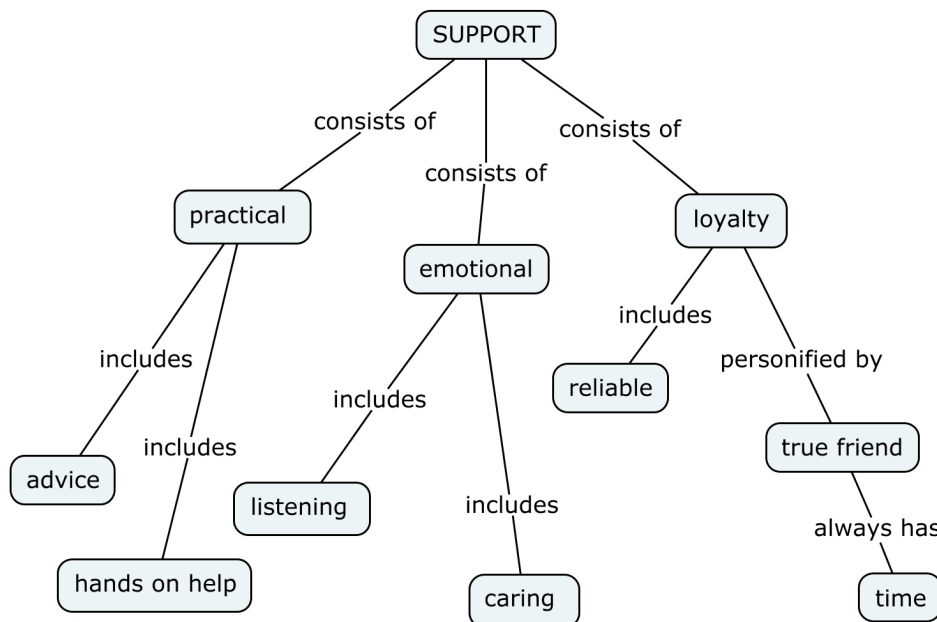
Figure 6.3. Friendship theme 2: Support

The support one gets from friends is different from the support one gets from family. This is because friends are usually a similar age and gender and therefore have similar experiences. Furthermore, close friends are integrated into one another's lives. They know each other's families and work, and are therefore more able to help effectively. Friends help one through all of life's milestones and offer 'unwavering' support:

> *So I've got a friend Martin who I've done work with from the age of 19, we work really closely together, he was best man at my wedding, I then got divorced, he helped me through that and we're still friends now and we still ring up and go for beers and stuff like that* (Male, *58-70*, lower SES, White, London)

Supporting friends is done because of genuine care for the friend's wellbeing. There is no ulterior motive. This is the basis upon which support in friendship rests:

> *I think like with friendships you've got people that care about each other. I think fundamentally, you know, they are concerned about whether you're happy or whether you're having fun or everything's ok with you and, you know, vice versa, everyone's sort of, I mean that would be, that's why someone's a friend I would say, rather than just somebody you meet in the street or interact with. I think they care sort of maybe beyond just the interaction at the time with each other* (Female, 39-57, higher SES, BME, London)

Friends always have an 'open door' and give each other support however and whenever they can. To function, this support must be mutual. 'Genuine friends' are selfless, and drop everything to help one another, making their friend a priority. This selflessness is the 'pinnacle' of friendship because a friend is supporting another for the sake of that person, not as a function of anything else.

> *I've got a friend that I have had for 30 years. No actually, might be a little longer than that now. 35 years. And you know, you know that she is always there to help me like I am always there to help her. Always there, means that you know you can phone that person up if you are in a bad mood. Or you need help. Or you are just depressed. They are there to help you* (Female, *58-70*, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

Giving and receiving support is crucial to friendships and it is what elevates someone from an acquaintance to a friend. Friends do not always need to be told that they are needed for support,

but friends look out for one another and know when they are needed. Sometimes friends do not even have to be asked:

> *.... it just comes sort of automatically I think with friendship. Yeah and different people do that in different ways but it's, you know, about being aware that they're there for you* (Female, 39-57, higher SES, BME, London)

From the data, support in friendship broadly falls within three categories: practical support, emotional support and loyalty. The first two denote explicit examples of providing and receiving support. The third, loyalty, refers to a more implicit underlying sense that friends would always be there to offer support, even if this is never actualised. Though all three reference support, these categories highlight different nuances that prevail throughout the data.

Practical support

> *Supportive is like I would say supporting somebody that's a good friend or a family member, if they need something ... financial, if you can. Or it's physically doing something or listening to them or giving them something to help them (*Female, 39-57, lower SES, BME, London)

Practical support was talked about by 64% of participants. Females and lower SES participants were more likely to talk about the importance of practical support in friendship. These include small acts of kindness such as driving a friend to the airport or cooking them a meal when they are ill. Particularly in times of hardship and family breakdown, when usual family structures and routines are disrupted, friends are there to step in and fill the gaps, being 'life-savers'. For example, friends can help share lifts or watch the children if one friend is struggling.

Friends also support each other financially – though this type of support is reserved for very close friends. If needed, friends can lend or give each other money or make small gestures, for example, buying one a week's worth of food or buying a small gift for one's child, when one is struggling financially. Helping friends is something one wants to do, rather than feels one has to do. This is because one would not want to see a friend 'go without' or suffer. Furthermore, it is a testament to a friendship if a friend seeks this kind of help.

Friends are also conceptualised as people who give informational support, most commonly in the form of advice and guidance. This can be anything from advice on which car insurance to choose to what to do when faced with a challenging work or family situation.

Friends act as a sounding board with whom to throw ideas around and give honest feedback on how they think one has reacted or should react in a given situation. Friends allow one to see things from a different perspective. They can play devil's advocate or give critical advice, which is appreciated.

Although dwellers distinguish between emotional and practical support, they do not speak about them in isolation. When dealing with difficulties, or even tragedies, friends are people who will support in whatever way they can:

> *… my dad passed away more than a year ago and that was a time where you're not really thinking about the real world around you, you're just kind of locked in your own emotions… So people sort of just do, they kind of find what it is that they need, the role they need to play in this sort of support that's needed, whatever it is… there's different kind of things where you don't necessarily notice at the time but you might realise later on that that person did all these things… They can kind of work out the best way to handle it and support you in whatever it is that's needed* (Female, 21-38, higher SES, BME, London)

Emotional support

Emotional support was talked about by 46% of participants and is symbolised by the idea of having someone to 'hold your hand' through difficult times: someone to 'walk beside you'. Friends accompany, encourage and guide. When someone has made a wrong or bad decision, friends do not judge but are there to help one through any consequences of a decision.

Emotional support provides a sense of 'togetherness' and companionship that gives strength:

> *I could not live in a lighthouse with not a soul and not see anybody. I would not be happy. I am happy in my own company and with my husband but outside that I still need the strength that I have within my friends* (Female, *58-70*, higher SES, White, London)

One way of providing emotional support is by listening and showing empathy when friends are sad. Giving emotional support to a friend is seen as something one does automatically, as when a friend is in pain one 'feels their hurt'. Therefore, making a friend feel better makes one feel better too. Some friendships are perceived as so close and deep that they are referred to as a 'marriage of the soul'. Particularly in times of crisis, such as death or divorce, friends

are crucial. Furthermore, going through testing times together cement the bond of friendship even more:

> *I hadn't realised how much I appreciated my friends being at my mother's funeral* (Female, *58-70*, higher SES, White, London)

> *... support is massive in life because I think if you are on your own, often there's plenty of times in my life, even if I haven't realised it at the time and you look back and you think well that person supported me ... they helped you get from one low, if you like, over to the next bit. And that's great* (Male, 39-57, higher SES, White, London)

Emotional support is not about a friend proactively fixing anything, but being a 'shoulder to cry on'. By doing this, friends allow the focus to be on the individual, and their emotional wellbeing, rather than the issue itself. This is seen as different from, for example, a partner who may be focusing more on the problem rather than how one is feeling about the problem. One female participant spoke of her female friends being better at lending this type of support:

> *So I think women understand ... just make sympathetic noises really and just be there to listen and I think once you've got it off your chest you just feel better anyway* (Female, *58-70*, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

Both men and women in the study thought that asking and receiving emotional support was more difficult in male friendship. Men are perceived as more likely to keep their issues hidden and not tell anyone they are upset:

> *The other side is the support and especially with fellers, fellers don't really open up so you only get a few people that you talk to, other than them you don't, you stay quiet (*Male, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Opening up to a friend is sometimes easier to do whilst going 'for a pint'. Here, again, alcohol is used to loosen inhibitions, not to have fun, but to be emotionally open and honest with friends. Talking can help release some pressure and blow off steam. This aspect of emotional support is not about dealing with sadness, but with anger. Friendships provide a safe space away from the troubles of home and work in which to rant and be honest, without having to worry about any further consequences. This is seen as a more effective way of dealing with issues than, say, keeping quiet or joking about them.

Emotional support is related to signs that friends love and care for one another. Participant's spoke of small displays of this care, such as letting someone know that they are thinking of them or praying for them:

> *'For me like certain songs remind me of my friends, you know, my friends will ring me up and they'll be like oh I've just heard your song or whatever and that's really nice that they, you know, that they have a tune that they know I love ...and they hear it and then they ring me straight away. That's really cute, you know. And it makes you feel nice that someone's thinking about you* (Female, 21-38, lower SES, BME, London)

To show a friend one is thinking about them, technology (discussed in depth in Section 6.7) can be used. For example, instant messaging or interacting on social media platforms (like Facebook) allows one to let people know one is thinking about them by posting comments or interacting in small, low-commitment, low time-intensive ways:

> *...you know what they're doing and even though they may not have called you up or you haven't seen them recently you know what they're up to and you can do a like on their comments which is just a very simple little interaction but it is something, it just shows you're thinking of them and they know you are* (Male, *58-70*, higher SES, White, London)

Having fun, as discussed in the previous section, also lends itself to emotional support by cheering friends up when they are down. For example, by making them laugh or taking them somewhere where they can be temporarily distracted from the source of their upset:

> *Well, literally, obviously when I am with my friends, they will kind of pick me up and if I am upset they kind of change my mood because I feel like they support me and I feel that they don't want to see me upset they want to see me happy. So they get me back in that happy place, sort of thing* (Female, 21-38, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

Lastly, emotional support is not just about supporting friends through times of difficulty. It also includes being there to cheer friends on and celebrate with them. This can be literally, like when friends are running a race, or making the time to celebrate achievements or birthdays with friends.

Loyalty

Beyond overt support, the most common way in which support was talked about by dwellers is the feeling of implicit support that comes from loyalty and being able to rely on friends. This kind of 'unwavering' support, may never be actualised, however, the sense that it is there is highly prized in friendships. This form of friendship, mentioned by 65% of participants, was particularly valued by lower SES and BME participants.

This facet of support is particularly important for long-term friendships. Loyalty is what allows friendships to stand the test of time and makes them 'ever-lasting'. Being loyal is a sign of a good friend, not a 'fair-weather friend'. These are people who stick by one when things are tough. Loyalty must be mutual and allows two friends to come out the other side of a difficult situation together. It is compared to the commitment felt in romantic relationships. This in turn allows the friendship to grow deeper and the bond to strengthen. Best friends are the most loyal and would back each other '100%'. Loyalty is unconditional and justifies certain behaviours that might, at other times, be considered immoral, such as lying to protect a friend or taking their side even when they are wrong. Friends stand by each other even if they think one is making a mistake.

Women with children, in particular, express the importance of 'real' friends that are loyal. This type of friend is one that continues to show an interest even after circumstantial change. For example, when one has had a child and is not able to go out or has moved abroad. This is related to a sense of consistency: no matter what, friends are there.

> *If it's a true friend it doesn't matter what time of the day it is, if you phone them up they're going to accept your call as such, or whatever it is, they don't do 9 to 5 or whatever it is, whenever you need them they'll be there* (Male, 39-57, higher SES, White, London)

This is a type of commitment shown by friends, who would be willing to put their lives on hold for the other. This is connected to a feeling of security, that one has someone one can count on to help so that even when circumstances are trying, one does not have to go through them alone.

6.2.3. Friendships are based on trust

Trust was mentioned by 54% of participants as a central ingredient of friendship. Trust becomes increasingly important to adults with age, with the oldest age group (58-70) finding it the most important. Trust is seen as something that 'elevates' someone from being an acquaintance, or a social friend, to someone who is a close, true or real friend. Trust exists mainly between the participant and a small number of friends, for example their 'inner circle'. Trust takes time to develop – and for some it is difficult to develop – but is 'very easy to break'.
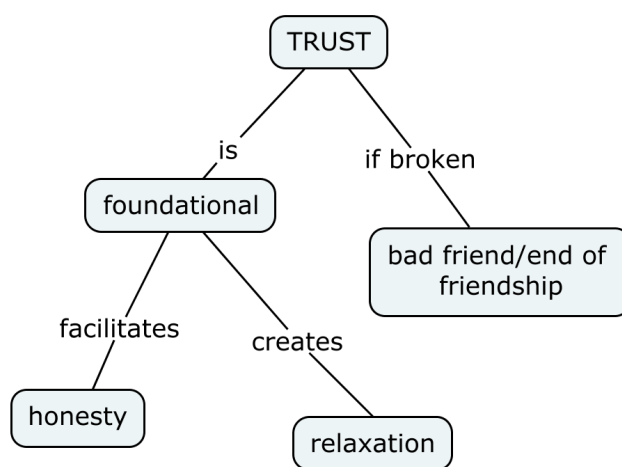
Figure 6.4. Friendship theme 3: Trust

Trust is described as the 'superglue', the 'anchor' or the 'foundation' of friendship. Without trust, one cannot call someone a friend. Trust includes knowing that friends will keep secrets and that they understand not to share personal information with others. Participants trust friends with their children, family and in their home, which means they can 'lean on' them for support.

> *I think trust in friendship is the most biggest and most important factor in a friendship… Companionship you can have with your neighbours but they might not necessarily be your friends, they are acquaintances. I see the lollipop lady, she says hello to me, we give her chocolates and cards every holiday …. but the trust is with a friend that you are closest to, you have a bond and you share all your secrets with …. your secrets are like a possession you've handed over to them for them to look*

after and put in a safe place and keep for you (Female, 39-57, higher SES, BME, Birmingham)

Trust allows an openness in which people can be honest about how they feel and speak freely. Furthermore, trust is necessary to feel comfortable enough to confide in a friend, to be vulnerable and tell them something personal, safe in the knowledge that that information will not be used against one.

Moreover, friends need to trust that the other person will be there to support them when they need it. They need to feel certain that they will make time for them in the same way that they would if the situation were reversed. Trust also allows one to come out of one's comfort zone, for example, by embarking on new activities that one would otherwise not have the courage to try. This is because a friend's judgement can be trusted and that they believe one will gain something positive from the experience.

Furthermore, one trusts friends' judgement because they know one well and have one's best interests at heart. Trust also allows one to feel like one can go to a friend for advice on a personal matter, like a relationship or a financial issue. It also creates a space in which 'difficult truths' can be divulged because a friend can be trusted to say these things out of care rather than malice.

Lastly, trust is seen as an 'all or nothing' quality. This is different from the other three themes that shape city-dwellers' conceptualisations of friendship. This is because friendships can be maintained despite providing varying degrees of fun, support and sense of identity/understanding. However, it is hard to sustain a friendship without trust.

6.2.4. Friendships are characterised by understanding

The final theme pertaining to people's conceptualisations of friendship is understanding. Understanding in friendship is mentioned by 39% of participants. Women are more likely to talk about understanding within friendship than men, as were the youngest age group (21-38) and BME dwellers. Participants describe feeling understood by friends due to the closeness and authenticity of the relationship.
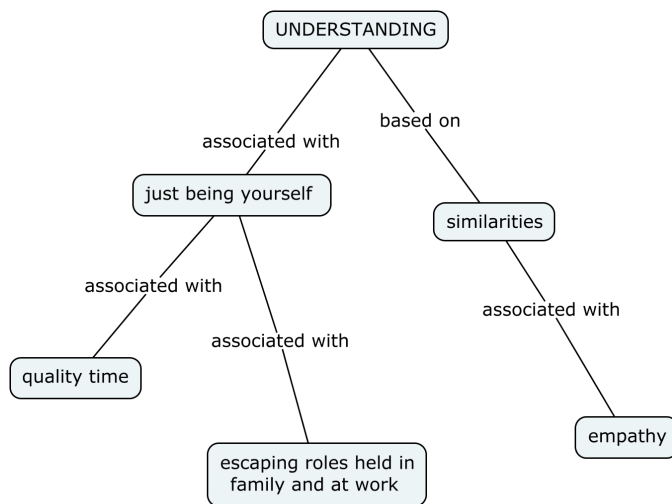
Figure 6.5. Friendship theme 4: Understanding

City-dwellers see friends as people who know them well and who understand their point of view. This is especially salient in friendships when one is dealing with issues of a personal or sensitive matter and one is coming to a friend looking for empathy. The desire for empathy highlights the emotive component of feeling understood. Talking to friends is not just about receiving advice, though this is a common desire (see section on support), but about feeling listened to. This is seen even more positively when the friend has had similar experiences:

> *And it's just nice to talk to someone who's been where you are… so we can relate to things, yeah it's nice to just have that one person who you can always talk to who actually cares* (Female, 21-38, higher SES, BME, Birmingham)

> *Yeah I think only a friend could actually understand, if I said that to a total stranger they would probably, they could commiserate with me and say well I'm very sorry about that but they wouldn't understand anything further* (Male, *58-70*, lower SES, White, London)

Understanding for friends can be seen to come from having similarities, on which the friendship is based. For example, childhood friends have a great understanding of who the other person is not only because they have known them for so long, but because they come from a similar background:

> *You know, my closest friend … we don't see much of each other, but we're still very, very close friends, … we've got similar views on things, you know, we come from similar backgrounds so we have more of an understanding of each other. And, as I*

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say, people that you've met more recently don't have that, that relationship with you (Female, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

This highlights the level of shared understanding that stems from similar background, values and beliefs. Furthermore, demographic differences such as being the same age and gender as a friend means being exposed to the same social pressures which fosters understanding of one's experiences. Sometimes having a friend who has already been through similar experiences is also helpful:

> *Yeah I think it is easier sometimes. Like you have friends there that understand you that are the same age. Or even sometimes a bit older because they have more experience and they can talk you through things* (Female, 21-38, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

Although similarities cement friendships and allow for a common base on which the friendship can be built, this is not a necessary condition for a good friendship:

> *...it doesn't matter about age, creed, colour, size and all the things that they go on about. A friend is a friend, if it's a green man from Mars it really doesn't matter, if you connect with that person on a level that is of a great understanding then that is who is going to make a friend* (Female, *58-70*, higher SES, White, London)

Another facet of understanding in friendships is the sense that two friends know each other 'inside out; or 'to a T' and can 'read each other's minds'. This allows a friend to consider the other person's needs without having to say anything. They know what they are sensitive to and can therefore look out for them. This understanding is particularly great when it comes from a long-shared history, like childhood friends:

> *We're kind of very familiar with each other's lives… you know their history really, you know what you've been through with them as a friend, you know what they've been through … almost knowing what someone's going to say or how they're going to be, what kind of attitude they're going to have to things. And that's it really, just, just kind of having shared a lot over the years and the comfort of that really* (Female, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Furthermore, they understand the limitations or pressures of their lives and therefore understand that, for example, they might not have time to see them because of, for example, children and only have enough time to talk on phone or send a quick message. Friends know each other well and know that lack of contact does not mean lack of interest, thereby not allowing such periods to dent the friendship.

Lastly, a best friend, in some cases more so than a partner or a family member, is someone who knows one better than anyone else. These can be long-term friends who have known each other since childhood, who have grown up together and shared milestones in life, like getting married or buying their first car. There is a closeness and understanding here akin to a family member.

Beyond understanding, friends are accepting of one's values and resulting behaviour and lifestyle choices. This is very important particularly for friends from other cultural backgrounds. Feeling accepted allows people to be at ease and 'just be yourself'. This allows city-dwellers to relax, be authentic, genuine and open. There is no need for pretence and façade or the need to worry about how what one is saying is being interpreted. One does not have to worry about being judged:

> *... you don't have to put up a pretence and pretend to be somebody else, you're yourself and they know you as you are and you know them as they are. That's friendship* (Female, 21-38, lower SES, BME, Birmingham)

Furthermore, being with friends allows particular facets of one's personality to come to light that otherwise might not. This could be related to a shared history with a friend, something that can be reminisced about and allows city-dwellers to reconnect with their former selves:

> *Yeah, like having a drink and being really silly and just, you know, I'm 36 now and some of my friends I've known since I was 19 and we used to get up to some really silly stuff, especially on holiday. And we, you know, we talk about it and we can still laugh and not feel embarrassed about it, you know, because at the time it was great fun, you know* (Female, 21-38, lower SES, BME, London)

This is particularly pertinent for mothers who see going out with friends as a relief from their family responsibilities. It is a way of letting loose. Having 'girly time' makes mothers feel like their old selves, before they had children. Although friends can go out together with children, going out without the children is a different and desirable experience:

*...if me and my friends went out and we'd all be identified as mothers because we've got the children with us so we do things like go to the park with the children... But then if we're not with the children ... that's her just stripped back without the children.... You're even just having a good time, just to have that time to yourself because I think what happens to a lot of people, they get lost in their identity as a mother (*Female, 21-38, higher SES, BME, London)

6.2.5. Types of friends

Having outlined the four factors that constitute people's conceptualisations of friendship, and before moving on to look at contextual factors that impact friendship, one needs to point out that different types of friends were characterised within the data. In general, the term 'friend' is positively weighted and tends to connote the 'good' friend. However, there are examples of a 'bad' friend in the data. These different types of friends are differentiated by way of emphasis of either the absence or presence of the four elements seen to constitute friendship.

The two most common ways of referring the 'good' friend is a close/best friend or a true/real friend. Both refer to friends who support each other, trust one another and understand each other. The only characteristic that is not highlighted in this description is the notion of having fun with this type of friend. Furthermore, a close/best friend usually refers to a long-term friend, often stemming from childhood. This type of friend can be someone who one does not see as regularly as other friends, but still feels very close to. Sometimes a family member, a sibling or a parent, is described as a best friend. The conceptualisation of a true/real friend emphasises selflessness, authenticity and loyalty over other friendship characteristics.

In contrast, a 'bad' friend is characterised as being untrustworthy and unsupportive. Untrustworthiness includes speaking badly about someone or sharing friends' secrets. The 'bad' friend is characterised by a lack of support and the feeling of being let down or even betrayed by a friend. Characterising someone as a bad friend is often synonymous with the end of a friendship, which is experienced as very painful.

6.2.6. Technology and friendship

Beyond the four themes that shape people's conceptualisations of friendship, two prominent contextual factors impact upon how friendships are represented. The first is technology. Technology plays an important part in how city-dwellers interact with their friends and was mentioned by 59% of participants

*There's so many ways to like communicate with people, like by email, WhatsApp, anything, text message, phone call, yeah. Or in person (*Male, 21-38, higher SES, BME, London*)*

Technology is primarily used to maintain friendships, though it does also aid the establishment of friendships for a small minority. This section will discuss the use of technologies to connect with friends. It highlights the way city-dwellers think about these technologies, their advantages and limitations and how the use of these technologies impacts on friendships. Lastly, it will look at how technology is used in different ways to both substitute and complement face-to-face interaction with friends.

Audio and video communication

in the event you need to get through to somebody you've got mobile phones, you've got household phones… on a daily basis I speak to my friends often, … just how I am, what I'm up to, so it's sometimes just nice to hear, you know, somebody that you know and speak to, a friendly voice (Male, 21-38, higher SES, BME, Birmingham)

The most frequently mentioned technology in relation to friendship is the telephone. It is presented as the traditional way to communicate with friends. A 'true' friend is like a family member and is someone one can call unannounced and at *'any time of the day'*. Friends pick up the phone when one calls and have time for one another:

I'm always the one that gets calls and people calling me like 3 in the morning, oh I've just broken up with my boyfriend or whatever, and I'm like ok I'm here, despite having no sleep because of the kids I'm still like on the phone, you know, talking to them (Female, 21-38, lower SES, BME, London)

A friend is 'always at the end of the phone' and having a friend to call symbolises having a support system that is unconstrained and easily accessible. Calling up a friend is seen as 'making an effort' and investing in the friendship. Phone contact symbolises a loyal and committed friend that still wants to talk, even when paths in life separate. A small act like calling someone is seen as more important for friendships than any expensive gifts or grand gestures.

Calling is seen as more 'intimate' than texting, and shows a level of dedication

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because people are taking the time to make a phone call. Furthermore, calling does not require typing, which is arduous and feels like work. Important news is something that is shared over the phone, not via text. Due to the immediacy of the response, speaking to a friend on the phone feels more personal. It also allows for an instant reaction, which makes the interaction less disjointed. Lastly, city-dwellers feel they can obtain more information from hearing someone's voice than from merely reading what they have written. These audial nuances, such as tone and pace, are seen as giving city-dwellers a better understanding of how that friend is doing and feeling at that moment:

> *I think phoning is better than writing or texting because … it's really difficult to pick up emotion or you can misinterpret the written word if there's nothing behind it to back it up. And so phone calls are far, far more important because you can get your emotion, you can get your sense of urgency, you can also interact instantly on a phone call. You can't do it with a text or email or letter. They have their place but for me voice to voice contact, not face to face but voice to voice, I suppose with a tablet face to face contact as well, it's so much better…* (Male, 39-57, higher SES, White, London)

The intimacy created via the phone can create closeness that counteracts the distance felt if a friend lives far away. Picking up the phone and calling someone is also seen as a way to reach out to a friend one has not been in touch with for some time. Hearing their voice is deemed as nice and after a short while of chatting one does not realise how long it has been:

> *You can pick up a phone after not speaking to somebody for a long time and what I love is that first opening sentence, how lovely to hear from you… because non-communication can go on for a long time but you've still got a friendship. Just because you don't see them doesn't mean to say that you're not really, really close friends* (Female, *58-70*, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

> *There are other people that you don't need to see every day and they go back a long way and I, I'm thinking of one person in particular, I could phone them and at the drop of a hat it would be like yesterday. And I love that, I love that sort of friendship, that's very, very, very strong* (Female, *58-70*, higher SES, White, London)

Others use the telephone on a daily basis to keep in touch with their closest friends. Particularly if someone is feeling lonely or socially isolated, the phone can help them feel better. This is particularly helpful for people with limited mobility caused by age or physical health issues:

> *To isolate yourself, not to speak to anybody, not to phone anybody, that's when a lot of these mental health issues and health issues occur so speaking, talking and being a part of, you know, of something, it's, I would recommend it* (Male, 21-38, higher SES, BME, Birmingham)

Lastly, the choice of which technology people decide to use to communicate with friends is also a way of differentiating between the different types of friends. For example, close friends are those who one calls, whereas more 'social friends' are those who one would occasionally text. Both complement face-to-face meetings as they are also used as a tool for making arrangements, for example, deciding where and when to meet in person.

Written messages

Text messaging, such as SMS or WhatsApp messaging, is another common way to communicate with friends. These short interactions allow friends to let each other know that they are thinking about them and that they are important. It is a 'sign of love', a way of showing friends that they have not been forgotten.

> *to be able to just text them and WhatsApp or whatever, it's, I know people laugh about it but it's wonderful to keep people together. Because they may not have the time to answer the phone ... Fantastic invention, once I got the hang of it*! (Female, *58-70*, lower SES, White, London)

City-dwellers feel 'really happy' when they see a message from a friend. However, there is a general consensus that the depth of conversation and interaction one has via this medium is different:

> *... you're not going to get into a deep conversation on WhatsApp, that's more like something funny has happened and you send it to them rather than how do you feel about life!* (Male, 21-38, higher SES, White, London)

This low level of intimacy means that communicating via text is more casual and one would not be offended or feel disrespected if a friend did not text back for a couple of days. It allows one to pick up where the communication left off at a time that is convenient for both. This is particularly useful when life is very busy.

Communication via text message is scrutinised for being less 'real' or honest because one does not have access to subtle cues or instant reactions that one would be able to read when meeting face-to-face or speaking over the phone.

Lastly, group message chats are seen as a highly effective way of connecting with multiple friends at the same time and give participants 'a happy feeling'. This gives a feeling of consistent low levels of interaction, where there is a seemingly constant strand of messages from friends. However, these are seen as qualitatively different from the types of conversations that take place face-to-face. One participant noted that the development of this technology has also changed the way that one communicates with friends, compared to only a few years ago. WhatsApp, for example, has made it more time efficient:

Like the one is called BoysBoysBoys and it's silly stuff, one's about football, there's all different ones .. I can keep in contact with weekly, more than weekly actually, bi-weekly that otherwise I wouldn't see. And where I used to call them up for chats like when I was younger ... I'd spend half my life on the phone and you'd be ringing somebody from up North that you hadn't seen then you're like spending 45 minutes on the phone before you know it. I haven't got as much time these days so it's a lot easier just to send a quick couple of funny messages and you're still in contact. And then when you see them face to face then you can have the real chats (Male, 21-38, higher SES, White, London)

Lastly, email was mentioned by only a few city-dwellers as a good method to keep in touch with people who live abroad. This was a way of communicating a longer message in order to give more detailed updates to friends.

Social media

Social media, Facebook, Instagram, twitter, I suppose there are others as well. I have put that because in this day and age most of your interaction with your friends is through them (Male, 39-57, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

Social media is seen as a means of keeping in touch with friends. However, they are different to messages as they are generally used to connect with more peripheral friends. However, these are not always considered 'real' friends. Platforms, such as Facebook, are seen as an effective way in which to reunite with past friends, for example, people from school or university:

... the last day of school everyone says oh stay in touch, stay in touch and you get given the mobile numbers or email addresses or whatever. But no-one really does ... but since Facebook's been about you think oh my God I went to school with that person and you start talking again so it's quite strange (Female, 21-38, higher SES, BME, Birmingham)

Social media is also a casual, less intimate and unimposing way of staying in touch with people one meets when out and about in the city – for example, at a concert. This is an example of establishing a friendship in the physical city, but using technology to maintain or develop this friendship.

Social media platforms allow friends to stay in touch without interacting directly. Just by seeing what a friend has posted, one can keep an eye on them and feel like one knows what is going on in their life. It also allows for low-key levels of interaction, such as commenting or 'liking' something they have posted, which often can pave the way a more meaningful interaction:

*One girl, I say girl, they're all a lot younger than I am, she's got something going on with her family at the moment so she's put some status, feeling upset or something, so I then private messaged her and said what's up, you know. So that's another way that we do it (*Female, *58-70,* lower SES, White, Birmingham)

A minority of participants referred to friends that they had made online and never met face-to-face. These friendships develop due to overlapping interests (that are discussed in online groups) and give a sense of belonging. This is particularly useful for adults with niche interests who may not have many people who they meet in their physical environment that are interested in the same thing:

I don't know, maybe the number is 10, 20 or so, of people who I just keep interacting with through the groups, whether it's film-making or whatever or the drone. And I feel I know them quite well, ... I think it takes probably a year before you could fairly call somebody an online friend but that certainly exists, that's certainly something that I value. I mean I recognise the limitations of an online friendship but it does give you a sort of grounding in the world. It means if I log on to the computer and I can see oh Stewart's posted something funny, ha ha, or I can put up a question and I know that I'll get intelligent answers (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, London)

However, city-dwellers noted clear differences between establishing online friendships and other types. For example, in online friendships one only sees a narrow and carefully crafted facet of someone's person.

Even though they are thought of as friends, suggesting to meet up in person for the first time would 'be crossing boundaries', as the friendship has been built on the online personas that one has shared with the other person, which might be a different impression than the one given when meeting face-to-face. This highlights that there are different norms and customs that surround online friendships. This can also be linked to the fact that they are connecting with a general community and not necessarily individuals on a one-to-one basis.

> *... it gives me a feeling that I do have a community and it's somebody to talk to, it's entertaining and sometimes it's of genuine value if I have a question that I want to put out there about such and such a topic* (Male, *58-70*, higher SES, White, London)

In fact, social media was viewed more critically than any other communication technologies. Many mentioned that it engendered 'goods and perils' for connection in modern living. The ease of connecting on a casual level with many people as well as the ability to use it to share pictures and thoughts with a wider audience of (Facebook) friends, saved time and allowed a wider platform in which one could share facets of one's life. However, there were comments that those who are not on those platforms are automatically excluded. Furthermore, participants pointed out that 'social media it is actually antisocial' because it makes people 'lazy'. It means that it is so easy to get in touch with people that one can stay indoors and focus on screens rather than going outside and socialising with friends face-to-face 'as much as we should'.

> *Instead of going to visit, you don't need to now. I have just been on holiday, you just post your pictures and you know, I suppose you miss out on that social element even though it's called social media (*Male, 39-57, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

Comparison to face-to-face
Though communication technology is overwhelmingly seen as an asset, it is not regarded as a substitute for face-to-face contact. This was emphasised by a small minority of participants:

> *Yes, because on the phone you're not face to face so it's different ... you can talk easily on the phone but if you're face-to-face with someone or they can put their arm round you or that sort of thing, it's different* (Female, *58-70*, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

This highlights not only the importance of visual and auditory information when communicating with friends, but also the tactile aspect of face-to-face communications. Others are very resistant to technology and question its ability to 'really' connect them to others:

So coming to communication we are losing it with the age of technology, in my opinion. They say oh yes but we text each other all the time, yes, yes you do. But that's not communicating. I do as well when I don't particularly want to have a long conversation, I would just text them because you can end it after a 3rd text, ok yes, kiss, kiss, kiss. So I think it's making us very, very much more insular… I think people don't pick up the phone anymore, they will text, they will email, they will do anything rather than actually having to face the person. I think it's sad (Female, *58-70*, higher SES, White, London)

In addition to a perception of communication via technology as not being as social as face-to-face connection, it is also seen as a hindrance to 'real' face-to-face connection. This is imbued with a sense of nostalgia for a time where children played on the streets and enjoyed the company of other children through direct physical interaction:

…when I was a kid we played down the street until night time, run outs, football, play over the park and now, you know, people just come in straight from school and just go straight to their computers …rather than actual going on sleepovers they sit in and play computer all night sort of thing (Male, 21-38, higher SES, White, London)

Rather than using technology, city-dwellers value seeing friends face-to face because this is when 'real' conversation takes place – conversations that are more important and in-depth. This is preferred to conversations that take place over the phone. However, the two are not always seen as competing with one another as communicating via technology is seen as a way of facilitating face-to-face contact, directly by making arrangements or indirectly by maintaining contact in between face-to-face meetings.

6.2.7. Time and friendship

The second contextual factor that is salient in the data is time: Time, and lack thereof, impacts the friendships of adult city-dwellers. Time is perceived as a valuable and scarce resource and 37% of participants mentioned struggling to make time for friendships. This is particularly true for the young and middle age group, as well as in the higher SES group. City-dwellers specifically mentioned the need to make time for friendships. One city-dweller in his 20s mentioned the paradox of being older and finally having more money to do things with friends but no longer having the time or flexibility needed for them.

Participants feel that it is more difficult to find the time to spend with friends than it used to be when they were younger, due to difficulties in trying to coordinate competing work and family schedules:

When you're at school you don't realise how easy it is, so yeah, so I definitely found that. And even from uni you're like yeah we'll stay in contact, but then you just get busy and you just don't and then the longer you leave it the worse it gets (Female, 21-38, lower SES, White, London)

Unlike in childhood, everyday tasks and responsibilities typically draw one away from seeing friends, which makes finding time for friends more difficult. These everyday tasks ordinarily revolve around family and work. City-dwellers work long hours and want to spend the little time they have outside of work with their families, as 'family comes first':

… actually finding time that suits us all because we're all either working mums or mums with kids at home, you know, it can be quite hard to hook up at times that suit everybody (Female, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Women in particular report feeling guilty if they were to go out with their friends and leave their children at home. This is most pertinent for parents of young children who worry about their children at home without them. Spending time with friends is seen as secondary and needs to fit around responsibilities at home and at work. There is a consensus in the data that one cannot always keep in contact with everybody because one would be far too busy. This clearly limits the number of friendships one can maintain:

But I don't believe that you can have hundreds of friends, I really don't, I think you can probably more than I've got but I think it does take a lot of energy and you've got your own family and problems and concerns (Female, *58-70*, higher SES, White, London)

As mentioned above, technology such as the phone can be used to save time allowing friends to catch up with one another whilst at home. This allows one to talk to friends whilst dealing with home matters, such as cooking dinner. Social media is also a way in which to connect with friends in a non-time-intensive way. This is particularly useful for parents who are time-poor and feel like 'there aren't enough hours in the day'.

Combining seeing friends with spending time with one's partner is another way to combine family and friends. However, if that is not an option, spending time with friends becomes more difficult:

I've had that situation in the past where I've got on with somebody and my partner hasn't got on with them or their wife and that does affect the relationship, it becomes quite different because you feel you have to kind of steal time to see them and spend time with them (Male, *58-70,* higher SES, White, London)

However, lack of time does not always translate to lack of closeness in friendships. As previously touched upon 'true' friends understand that one may not have time because one is busy with work and family. There is an understanding that the friendship continues even when regular contact in not maintained. However, when contact is resumed, friends still feel close, as you can just 'pick up where you left off':

You know, my closest friend I don't see very often but when we do see each other it's as if we see each other every other day, you know, it's as close as it could be even though circumstances in terms of where she lives and our lifestyles and our commitments, we don't see much of each other, but we're still very, very close friends (Female, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

*... she actually sent me a thing on Facebook yesterday saying that, something like oh if we don't see each other every day you just pick up as if we'd seen each other 5 minutes ago, it was one of those like silly pictures that you send people. So yeah we're just really, really close (*Female, 39-57, lower SES, White, London)

Londoners were more likely to highlight the importance of making time for one's friends. This was seen as difficult to do because of London's hectic culture and sheer size, which makes it feels like one is 'miles away' from friends.

...especially in London everyone's always, well everyone's always in a rush so then it's just sort of, I think it's that kind of mentality that you're doing this and you're doing that so it's just like where are you going to squeeze things in (Female, 21-38, lower SES, White, London)

Busyness of others was highlighted by older retired city-dwellers who felt that everyone around them is busy and does not have time for contact:

...people are so busy they really haven't got time to sit and listen – (a), they don't want to or (b) they haven't got time to (Female, *58-70*, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

However, even those lacking time see that there is a need to make an effort to find time to spend with friends, have fun and recharge. Time is seen as a precious commodity, something finite that should be spent carefully. Giving time to a friend is a sign that the friend is valued, cared about and prioritised.

Although it takes effort to maintain friendships, nurturing friendship is seen as worthwhile. Beyond time, it is an investment of love and one gets out what one puts in:

When I say invest I don't mean sort of you consciously go well I'm going to invest in this friendship because I'll get a payback or something, but it's just that actually friendships deepen or become more lasting because you share experiences, time spent, you know, otherwise they're acquaintances until you get to know them more (Female, *58-70*, lower SES, White, London)

Furthermore, one needs to have quality time to spend with friends. It's important to make time to sit around a table and have a conversation with people. This is different from phoning someone because – as previously mentioned – people's attention is more likely to be divided on the phone. Another way to get away from home and work is to go on holiday with friends. By being taken out of one's everyday context one can focus on one's friends and have fun. Time off is rare so one has to use it well and make the most of it to create happy memories.

Lastly, dwellers differentiate between investing time in old friends and investing time in making new friends. Old friends are seen to be less time intensive because they have a history and shared experiences that maintains the bond of friendship, even if they do not see each other frequently. New friends, on the other hand, need more time in order to develop. If one moved away, or did not see new friends anymore, they might fall by the wayside.

6.3. Chapter summary

This chapter presents the results from the second interview study conducted for this thesis. The chapter began by categorising the responses to the free association task and then continued to delineate the content of the findings from the interviews. Here, thematic analysis was used to reveal four themes which form the basis of adult city-dwellers' conceptualisations of friendship. These themes pertain to having fun, providing support and are based on mutual

trust and understanding. Furthermore, two external social factors, time and technology, which impact the way in which friendship is realised by people in everyday life are revealed. The following chapter follows a similar structure and outlines the third interview study conducted, which investigates city-dwellers' representations of strangers and acquaintances.

Chapter 7 What strangers and acquaintances mean to city dwellers

This chapter presents the results of the third interview study on weak ties, where weak ties are defined as strangers and acquaintances. These are encountered in a variety of places such as public spaces (e.g. city streets or local neighbourhood meeting places), semi-public spaces (e.g. shops and cafés) or private spaces (e.g. work place). To study weak ties, the lay terminology of 'strangers and acquaintances' was used as it was felt that this would be easily understood and would cover relationships that are temporary, infrequent and that have limited emotional intimacy. In this chapter, the two are presented together, as although they are separate concepts, they exist on a continuum of distance from the self, where, for example, a stranger that is encountered multiple times can turn into an acquaintance.

The chapter begins with an overview of the free association task, which records participants' immediate associations to the concept of 'strangers and acquaintances'. It then moves on to the themes that arose from the interview that followed. The majority (79%) of participants spoke about both strangers and acquaintances. The remaining 21% only talked about strangers. The findings from the thematic analysis show that conceptualisations of strangers and acquaintances fall into seven distinct categories each of which are characterised by either the 'good' or the 'bad' strangers/acquaintances. The 'good' stranger/acquaintance is one that is friendly, supportive, a potential strong tie or interesting. The 'bad' stranger/ acquaintance is conceptualised as dangerous, rude or unwanted. The chapter delineates the different emotive and cognitive facets of these representations.

Following the delineation of the different types of conceptualisations of strangers/acquaintances, an outline of four social factors that came to light in the interviews and impact on city-dwellers experiences of strangers and acquaintances. These are 1) technology 2) time 3) society and culture and 4) the past. After delineating their content, the chapter ends with a summary of the results presented in this chapter.

7.1. Free association responses

The free association task completed by 52 participants yielded 206 distinct responses in the form of words and/or images. The subject of each free association was recorded and all were examined for recurring ideas and concepts. Of the associations provided, 85% can be divided

into 13 categories. These categories and the frequency with which they appear are outlined in Figure 7.1. below.
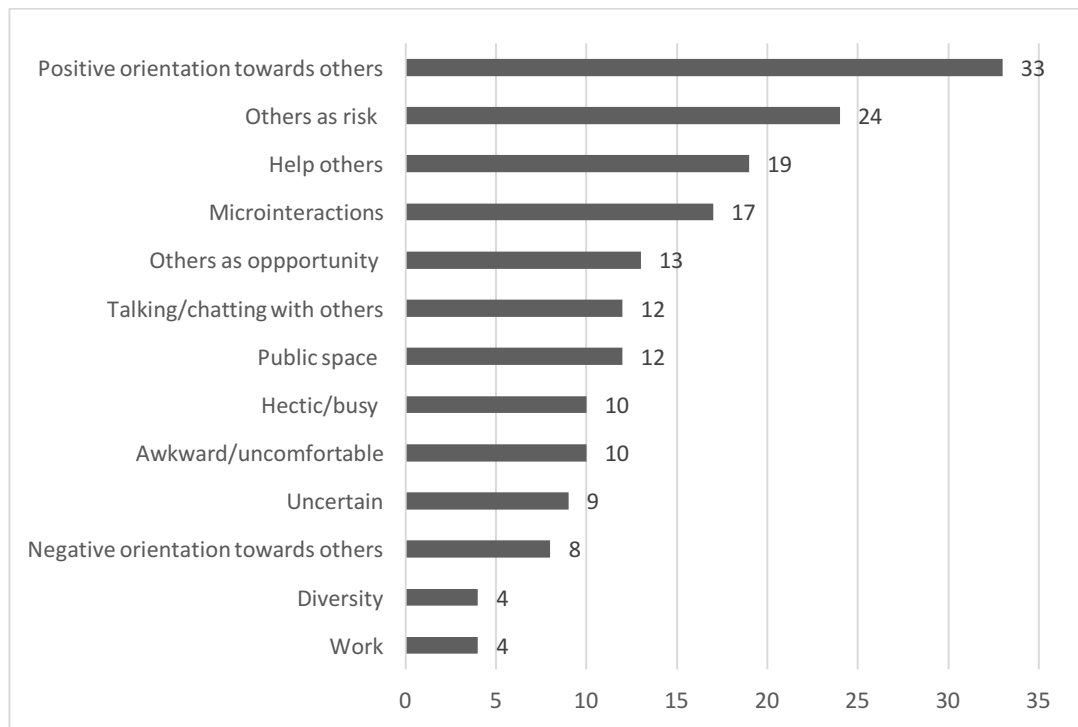
Figure 7.1. Results of 'strangers and acquaintances' free association task

The most prominent association in the data is 'positive orientation towards others'. The category consists of different positive ways of approaching others, such as friendliness, that participants felt characterised their interactions with strangers and acquaintances. This positive orientation towards others is further reflected in the categories of 'others as opportunity' and 'help others', which shows a positive and open orientation towards others, as well as 'micro-interactions', which were mainly positive gestures such as a smile, wave or handshake. On the other hand, the second most prominent category, 'others as risk', shows that a negative view of strangers and acquaintances was also present in the data. This negative point of view is also reflected in other categories such as 'uncertain' and 'negative orientation towards others'. This touches upon the idea of fear and danger. Another negative view of strangers and acquaintances visible in this data is the rude and uncomfortable characterisation, which is also linked to 'hectic/busy' environments in which these interactions take place.

7.2. Interview responses

The following section denotes the different themes that emerged through the thematic analysis of the interview data. The main two themes are the negative and positive representations of strangers/acquaintances, reported as the 'good' stranger/acquaintance and the 'bad' stranger/acquaintance. These can both be divided into multiple sub-themes, some of which pertain to both strangers and acquaintances (e.g. the friendly stranger/acquaintance) and some solely to strangers (e.g. the dangerous stranger) or solely to acquaintances (e.g. the unwanted acquaintance). These alternative representations of strangers/acquaintances are characterised by different beliefs, feelings, orientations towards others, micro-interactions and spaces. To enlighten on possible demographic differences, survey responses are reported.

7.2.1. The 'good' stranger/acquaintance
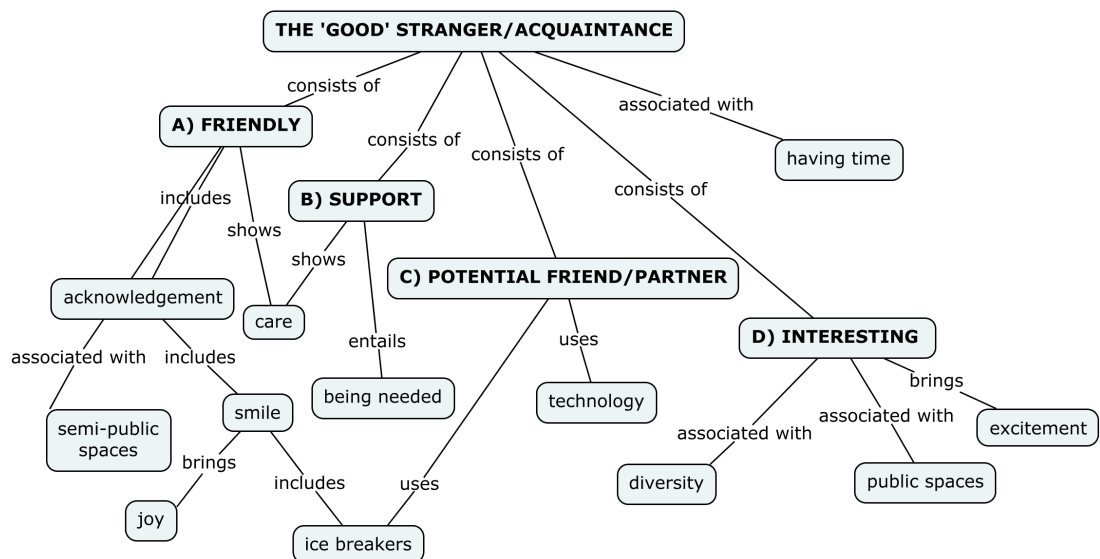
Figure 7.2. The 'good stranger/acquaintance

The 'good' stranger/acquaintance can be: 1) the friendly stranger/acquaintance (71%) 2) the supportive stranger/ acquaintance (52%) 3) the stranger as potential (29%) and 4) the interesting stranger (23%).

The friendly stranger/acquaintance

The friendly stranger/acquaintance is mentioned by 71% of city-dwellers. High SES city-dwellers were more likely to characterise strangers and acquaintances as friendly and BME participants were more likely to characterise strangers as friendly. The friendly stranger/acquaintance is a person who is warm, has a happy demeanour and is someone with whom one has pleasant and enjoyable interactions. They can be found in a multitude of spaces outside of the home. Interacting with friendly strangers/acquaintances makes everyday necessities, such as taking children to school, commuting, working or grocery shopping more enjoyable. They are seen as 'nice' and make one feel good:

> *If you're in the supermarket and someone says hello or, you know, it's just nice to have that interaction, you know. And again you get to know the postman, you go 'oh anything for me' or 'have you got this for next door' and it's just nicer than just dropping it through the door, yeah, makes you feel you've got that sort of connectedness* (Female, 58-70, lower SES, White, London*)*

Interactions with friendly strangers/acquaintances are deemed as 'nice' moments that are random and unplanned. These types of interactions, like chatting to a neighbour, a dog-walker or the postman near your house are seen to be particularly important as one gets older and one's 'world shrinks' and the people in one's immediate surroundings become more important.

Friendly strangers/acquaintances are characterised by their smile, which has multiple functions. The first is that a smile brings happiness to others. It is seen as a natural, positive and human action. It 'makes you feel that the world is full of nice people'. It lifts the atmosphere in a room and spreads happiness, love and joy and has the ability to cheer people up if they are not having a good day. It is seen as the antidote to many 'horrible things' that are going on in the world, such as violence and war, as well as everyday stresses concerning family or finances. This makes the 'world feel like a better place', that things are not so bad and restores faith in humanity. Smiling 'doesn't cost a thing' and exchanging smiles is seen as something that helps one get through the day because it makes one feel happier. Sometimes, a smile can act as a conversation opener and can lead to pleasant chats with strangers/ acquaintances, which is another way to spread joy.

Smiling is also seen as a positive form of acknowledgement, particularly from strangers:

I just think it's a friendly thing to do and I don't know, it just gives people a sense of well-being I think, just being acknowledged, I think it's always nice if someone says hello to me walking down the street so I do the same. It can't cause any harm but it can be positive so that's how I view it (Male, 58-70, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

These quotes demonstrate the wellbeing giving qualities of being smiled at. It represents care, and feelings of comfort and warmth from the other person.

Beyond smiling, there are other small behaviours that show that one has been noticed by a stranger and that one is being thought of, even in a minor way, such as 'press[ing] the lift button for you or hold[ing] the door open for you'. They are perceived as little acts of kindness that make one feel good because it recognises and values one's existence and shows respect. Furthermore, they make one feel accepted by others which gives one a 'boost'.

For friendly acquaintances, as opposed to friendly strangers, acknowledgement is also key. For example, walking by an acquaintance on the street and saying a 'quick hello' makes city-dwellers feel special and gives them an identity above the many other people walking down the street. It makes one feel like a recognised part of that space. This gives a warm feeling and leaves one feeling good and cheerful for the rest of the day. These types of interactions can come from people one vaguely knows through friends or work or they can be people one sees on a regular basis as one walks through the city, such as the lollipop lady or the newspaper salesman.

It's an acknowledgement, a quick catch-up, an amusing anecdote ... but you don't expect them to suddenly say 'hey what are you doing tomorrow, do you want to come round to dinner', that's not going to happen (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, London)

Another difference between friendly strangers and friendly acquaintances is where they are encountered in the city. Friendly strangers are most often found in semi-public spaces, such as shops, restaurants or cafés:

... pop into shops where they've got a really lovely attitude ... or in environments like cafes or restaurants, you know, it's always, it adds pleasure to whatever situation it might be ... somebody takes the time to show warmth and who they are and be bothered about the tasks they are carrying out. I think it has such a major effect on the experience that you have (Female, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Making an effort to be friendly is sometimes attributed to people taking pride in what they are talking to you about. For example in a shop, the feeling of warmth comes from feeling like

they care about their work and that the customer has a good experience. This gives people a sense of pleasure and has an important effect on their experience. This is why dwellers prefer to go to places where people are friendly:

> *And that makes you walk away feeling that was nice, that was a good place and he was pleasant and friendly and courteous and it just makes you feel warm rather than just nothing at all, pushing the coffee across the counter at you without saying a word. It's how you hope a shopping encounter would be* (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, London)

Sports matches, such as cricket or football, were highlighted as spaces in which strangers are very friendly. This is attributed to a sense of camaraderie and community feeling because a group has come together for the same reason. This creates an environment where everyone is laughing and having a good time. Even if one's team is losing, the sharing of the experiences and the sense of togetherness makes it more enjoyable. Shared interests also make it easy to start conversations with people. Even if two people support different teams, the love of the game can still be something positive that is shared and can therefore result in a positive interaction. This sense of togetherness is also found during other events:

> *I think if there is an event people are very united, just thinking of the poppies at The Tower. It was really, really crowded but people were fine, they just kind of were very united and would wait their turn to see or whatever, without getting irritated at all* (Female, 58-70, higher SES, White, London)

Having chats with strangers whilst travelling is seen as an enjoyable way to make time pass. Examples include talking about one's children or making a comment about something one is reading in the newspaper. Dwellers value having a pleasant interaction for a short amount of time, without thinking it has to lead to anything else. Even these small, fleeting interactions are perceived as important as they can ease loneliness:

> *even if it's just the man on the train collecting the tickets, how are you, are you having a nice day, this sort of thing. He knows that you're there and you're not alone. And it goes back to that thing where lots of people are by themselves, not just old people, there's lots of young people who live lives, quite solitary lives. If they spoke to strangers or a stranger or a couple of people then they're contributing to easing their loneliness* (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

When strangers are perceived as friendly strangers, the risk of interacting with them is seen as very low or non-existent:

> *I love strangers. The best part of it is, yeah, even if you like say the wrong thing, you're never going to see them again (*Male, 21-38, higher SES, BME, London)

This type of 'social risk' is a very different assessment when compared to the 'physical risk' discussed in 'Section 7.8. Dangerous strangers/acquaintances'. However, even when discussing the strangers/acquaintances, there is an acknowledgement that this is not always the case:

> *There are a lot of bad people about but the vast majority of people are really, really nice. When I say the vast majority it's probably 99.9% are lovely* (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

A common place to meet friendly acquaintances is in semi-public spaces, such as bars or cafes, or in private spaces such as parties or gatherings at someone's house. Friendly acquaintances are people one knows but not well enough to call them friends. This is the type of acquaintance one socialises and has a good time with. In these cases, the acquaintances are people who one knows, for example, friends of friends. It is a relaxed, pleasant and comfortable atmosphere that makes connecting with people enjoyable and not awkward. Having fun and jokey conversations whilst having a drink is seen as thoroughly enjoyable and makes 'time fly'. This is something that cannot be mediated by technology and happens face-to-face.

Interaction with acquaintances at work is also important as it can act as buffer against negative feelings towards a stressful or demanding job:

> *But it's just even with learning mentors or the cleaner, you say hello to them in the morning or, hiya, bye, thanks very much, care-taking staff, you just, you have a chat with them, everyone's important, it's just to say hello, you can't ignore someone as they walk past. Or, you know, as you're walking past them, if they look like they want to talk more you stop and chat and if they don't you just carry on… Just be nice to everyone* (Male, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

This quote also highlights the universality and lack of hierarchy that is associated with friendliness. Being friendly is seen as a universal and automatic attitude one should have towards others and is associated with being respectful and polite. This is particularly highlighted in reference to strangers.

Friendliness also denotes a certain level of distance that separates acquaintances from friends. For example, acquaintances one has a good time with at work are not the people one would meet up with outside of work or invite home. One participant outlined a friendly interaction with an acquaintance as 'hi how are you doing this week, oh yeah it's been good, ok great catch you later'. He stated that any more of an interaction than that would be excessive or even a nuisance.

Lastly, the benefit of friendliness when interacting with strangers/acquaintances in the city also extends to awareness that one should adopt a friendly attitude towards others. It involves smiling and 'having a nice aura' that makes people feel comfortable and puts them at ease. This type of attitude is seen as easier to enact if one is not in a rush:

> *Yeah I always make sure that um, whenever they walk away they're like gosh isn't she really friendly. Doesn't she have good manners? Wasn't she really really nice? And that's my mission (*Female, 39-57, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

Adopting a friendly attitude is also seen as a way to facilitate better relationships with strangers and put others at ease. For some, this is used to combat perceived negative stereotypes concerning themselves:

> *… when it comes to me meeting a stranger there are things I like to do especially If I'm in a room full of strangers is make sure that everybody knows how I am. So that's as far as I know I've broke the ice there because now you're not wondering who that big guy is in the corner, he's got a name too, he's not the big Black guy, he's not a thug* (Male, 21-38, lower SES, BME, Birmingham)

Being friendly and polite to strangers/acquaintances is regarded as even more important than being friendly and polite towards people one knows better like family and friends. Dwellers want to contribute to a pleasant atmosphere, put people at ease and let others know that they are a good person with whom one can have a chat or make jokes.

Support and strangers/acquaintances

Both strangers and acquaintances are conceptualised by over half of city-dwellers (52%) in terms of support, but in different ways. The vast majority of strangers are thought of as people in need of help. However, when discussing acquaintances, dwellers emphasise the ability of

acquaintances to be helpful and useful by offering support. This section will first look at the stranger, before elaborating on the role of support for acquaintances.

The stranger in need of support refers to the people encountered in the city that are perceived as struggling or vulnerable. BME participants were more likely to characterise strangers in need of support. City dwellers talk about the need to wander around the city with open eyes, taking notice of those around them. There is a general understanding that the first step to being of assistance to someone else is to be aware that they exist:

> *if somebody fell over in front of me, if someone was hurt in front of me, I could not walk away from that person… I couldn't ignore somebody in need. And maybe if everyone was just a tiny little bit like that … if you made sure that person was all right* (Female, 39-57, lower SES, White, London)

The struggling stranger also presents themselves in emergency situations in the city, for example, if someone is unwell and needs an ambulance. City-dwellers recognise the need to stop what one is doing and help until that person is safe.

Helping someone is a way of making a contribution and of being 'worth something in this world', particularly for the oldest age group (58-70). City-dwellers speak of how it is nice is to be a 'Good Samaritan' and that being needed by others makes one feel good. These small acts of kindness are not particularly time-consuming and are seen as rewarding and positive. A common example is helping homeless people who live in the city. There is a feeling that if everyone were more willing to help people, the world would be a better, happier place:

> *...people need to be aware of giving to anybody, it's important, not just their family members, not just their friends, to anybody* (Female, 39-57, higher SES, BME, Birmingham)

Being a helpful person leads to positive interactions with others. For example, helping someone find the right bus to catch may lead to a nice conversation whilst travelling on the same bus. Talking to others, giving advice or recommendations is seen as a type of support and leads to interactions that are more fun or make a given day more interesting.

Older people are a group often seen as strangers in need of support. They are seen as vulnerable and at risk within fast-paced city life. Interacting with them might involve offering them a seat or help with bags. They are also seen as potentially lonely or isolated and invoke feelings of pity. One form of helping can be merely taking the time to have a chat.

Children and young people are also categorised as a type of stranger in need of help. For example, giving a young girl a lift because she is carrying heavy bags. This is a way of

looking out for those around you even if you do not know them, which is seen as inherently rewarding. Ultimately, there is a shared conceptualisation that being helpful to people is a good way of interacting because one would want them to look out for one as well.

Lastly, strangers are also seen as sources of support:

I was stranded on the motorway one time and I think I phoned everybody in my family to come and get me and not one of them picked me up. But then somebody driving down the motorway seen us and dropped us to the nearest service station where we could get a lift... I phoned about a million people including friends and family and like I can't expect people to sometimes to drop everything that they're doing to come and get me but somebody who you don't know, say mate I'll drop you up there (Male, 21-38, lower SES, BME, Birmingham)

There is the perception in the data that 'nothing [is] as sweet as the kindness of strangers'. Acts like the one showed in the excerpt above, or someone going out of their way to return a phone or a wallet makes one feel like the world is a nice place, full of 'genuinely good people'.

However, being supported by others is more commonly associated with acquaintances than strangers. Acquaintances are seen as useful to know and the interaction goes beyond the regular niceness and pleasantness of having a conversation with a person and includes an exchange or sharing of information. One result is that it gives city-dwellers the sense that they are keeping up-to-date with things they need to know about. Although these types of acquaintances are not limited to the people one works with in an office, they do frequently revolve around work:

Well yeah because sometimes you might have a snippet of information that could help them with something that they're doing or vice versa. Because again Birmingham itself, although we think of ourselves as the second city, in terms of the way work goes on it's more of a village. Everybody pretty much knows everybody else in one way or another and so you can exchange information that could be helpful (Male, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

These are the types of people it is good to catch up with or have a quick coffee with. Being open to connecting with acquaintances, for example through networking, is seen as important because one never knows how they might positively influence one's life. Equally, city-dwellers feel that being useful themselves and supporting someone at work is also rewarding and enjoyable. Moreover, feeling like one can be of use to someone is also a reason to spend time with an acquaintance. At work, such interactions also contribute to a generally positive and pleasant working environment.

The supportive acquaintance is also found in neighbours. They are noted for practical support such as taking turns bringing out the bins and help each other out due to proximity. If one needs anything one feels one can go and knock on a neighbour's door and ask for it. Another example is that one can share lifts with neighbours. It is seen as useful to have that level of support which is mutually beneficial:

> *I helped my other neighbour next door who's an elderly woman, I helped her with an insurance claim which meant signing forms, getting online for her because she doesn't have the internet ... So it's a bit more of an investment of time because they, the fact that they are neighbours moves them up one little level because they're not going anyplace soon, you're going to be with them a long time and it's of a practical kind of value... but it's not necessarily an emotional bond. It's more practical and newsy* (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, London)

Even though dwellers do not keep score of who did what when, support between acquaintances is based on reciprocity and usually 'works itself out'. It is a pleasant 'give-and-take' that is beneficial for both people or for the community. This sense of support is linked to an enjoyment that comes from being of use to others and feeling like others care enough about one to look out for one.

The stranger as potential

Strangers are also seen as a potential pool of people to draw from if one wants to meet new people. This was mentioned by 29% of participants. As one participant pointed out, no one would ever get to know anybody if they did not talk to strangers. This conceptualisation of stranger is one where an unknown person is 'just a friend you haven't met yet'.

Meeting new people as potential partners is viewed as fun and enjoyable, and can happen when one is out in the evening, having a good time. Part of this fun is due to the spontaneity and unplanned nature of these encounters. They happen when one is relaxed and open about where the conversation might lead. Strangers are seen as better potential for close relationships than acquaintances because one does not know them at all and therefore they have the potential for forming a great friendship or relationship. A minority of participants mentioned technology as a means to turn strangers into potential friends or partners. New apps that are designed to facilitate meetings with others who are similar to one are seen as a more efficient ways to meet strangers than going out in the city.

Furthermore, there is an awareness of the snap judgements and decisions one must make when interacting with strangers. Beyond deciding whether to talk to them in the first

place, one also has to decide whether one feels comfortable in their company and whether one wants to convert this relationship into something more by, for example, by giving contact details.

For some, these strangers take on new forms of connectedness enriching their day-to-day lives. For example, by making 'train buddies' or getting to know people one sees on the way to work:

> *I used to go into work very early and I found that I was having to leave earlier and earlier because, and I had these friends ... I used to wait at the bus stop and I met a lady and we used to get on the bus every morning and we would have conversations. Then we ended up knowing each other's names and we ended up knowing each other's family... I made good friends with the Big Issue seller to the point of I gave him, he had a dog which probably was the reason I got quite friendly with him, but I gave him an old Freeview box of ours, one day his back was hurting so I gave him some painkillers...* (Female, 39-57, lower SES, White, London)

Strangers can become close ties through conversations. To do this, certain 'ice breakers' are seen as helpful. Sometimes, all that is needed is a smile and a friendly attitude or even 'cracking a joke' that puts people at ease. However, the most frequently mentioned ice breaker is having a dog. This is seen as a great way to meet people because when one is walking the dog, people start conversing about the dog and one may even end up 'standing there for 45 minutes' chatting to a stranger. Children were also seen as good ice breakers, particularly when both adult strangers are looking after their children. This was linked to children being more open to making eye contact with strangers or making contact with other children and wanting to play. Furthermore, having children is seen as a shared experience over which adult city-dwellers can chat and bond.

Lastly, alcohol was also mentioned as a way of breaking the ice and making one more open to strangers by making one feel at ease:

> *I met a lot of my friends from when I was doing that clubbing stage of my life, and they are people that I'm friends with now and, you know, you're obviously drunk and you speak to strangers then but sober on a Tuesday queuing up in a post office, you don't want to be talking to someone in there (*Male, 21-38, higher SES, White, London)

These are all examples that show how different ice breakers, such as dogs, children or alcohol, are ways of facilitating interactions that would otherwise not be seen as necessary or desirable.

The interesting stranger

The interesting stranger is the unknown person that intrigues city-dwellers. This type of stranger was mentioned by 23% of participants. Men are more likely to characterise strangers as interesting.

Interesting strangers are seen as life enriching and interactions with them, even just a smile, is viewed as a 'ray of sunshine'. Interesting strangers are a source of variety and diversity. Particularly speaking to people from different social and cultural backgrounds is particularly valued as city-dwellers are interested in learning about cultures, countries, languages and outlooks on life that are different from their own. Cities are particularly good for this as they bring together a variety people, which is seen as a positive thing. Diversity also comes from talking to others of different age groups:

> *Sometimes if a couple of young people are going into the train, into Birmingham on the train, speak to them, ask them where they're going, anywhere nice, and they just say yes we're going to blah-di-blah nightclub or music or whatever and they'll laugh that you're interested … and you've made these little friends, it might not be a lifetime relationship but when the train pulls in at the city centre you can go your way and they can go theirs and hopefully they will have enjoyed your company and you probably enjoyed theirs* (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

These conversations are seen as rewarding, sometimes even more rewarding those with family or friends. People want to talk to interesting strangers, learn about them, or even just watch them and wonder about them (i.e. people-watching on the bus) to satisfy their 'natural' curiosity. Meeting new people at work is also a way to make work more enjoyable as new people 'bring new life', fun and energy to a situation:

> *And you might learn something because people like to have conversations sometimes, they're not robots, they don't just want to have the answer and move on, they want to, you know, that exchange of information is kind of like if they've got information from you, say for directions, they might want to give something back and say oh by the way I really recommend, I don't know, the ice cream over there or something* (Female, 39-57, higher SES, BME, London)

Here strangers are interesting because they offer informational support. This type of support is seen as useful and as something that is reciprocal and mutually beneficial.

An interesting stranger is associated with unpredictable and spontaneous positive moments. This brings with it a surprise element and a sense of novelty, which city-dwellers

enjoy. These types of interesting encounters happen with street characters, such as buskers, who are doing unusual things that get people's attention.

Lastly, these interactions also happen outside of the city, for example on holidays. Meeting people and exchanging stories with them is seen as a way to enhance a holiday, learn and get to know a place better and make experiences more memorable.

7.2.2. The 'bad' stranger/acquaintance
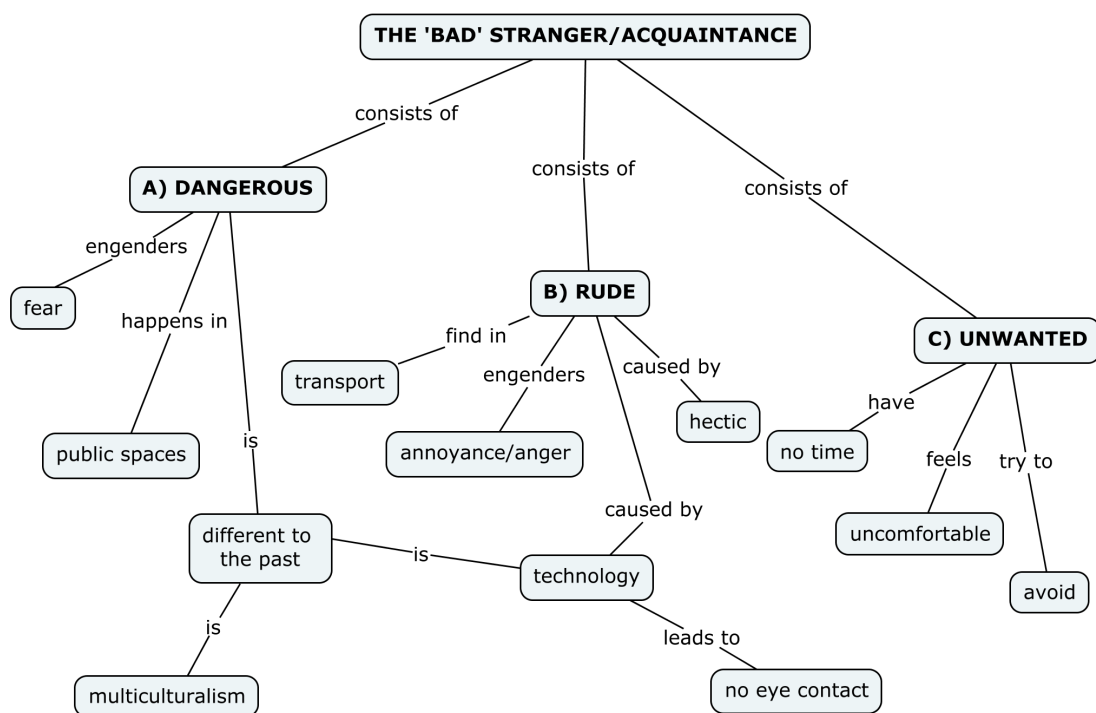
Figure 7.3. The 'bad' stranger/acquaintance

The 'bad' stranger/acquaintance can be divided into three subthemes. These are: 1) the dangerous stranger (50%) 2) the rude stranger (35%) and 3) the unwanted acquaintance (21%). These three types evoke a range of negative emotions, including fear, anger, annoyance and discomfort.

The dangerous stranger

The dangerous stranger is one that cannot be trusted and was mentioned by half of participants (50%). These strangers are seen as people who could be violent and harmful. Dwellers are wary of and afraid to interact with dangerous strangers and they are avoided. This view of strangers was held by men and women equally. Lower SES dwellers stated this type of conceptualisation slightly more often than higher SES dwellers.

This conceptualisation is often spoken about in moralistic terms: participants talk about strangers as 'good' or 'bad' people. Though they recognise that not all strangers are dangerous, their thoughts focus on the uncertainty and possibility that an unknown person could have bad intentions:

> *you distrust them 'til you know them, you don't trust them 'til you know them. I think one would be very stupid to trust a total stranger* (Female, 21-38, lower SES, White, London)

There is a shared conceptualisation that there is not a lot of information available when assessing whether an unknown person is dangerous or not. One source of information is their physical appearance – what they are wearing or whether they look hygienic. The second source of information is the behaviour that can be observed. Strangers lingering in public spaces, particularly at night time, make dwellers suspicious and evoke worry that they might be dangerous. Dwellers are generally on high-alert when it is dark and worry if someone is walking too close to them, or too slowly. Other behaviours indicative of a dangerous stranger are those deemed anti-social. Young people were often associated with this type of behaviour, which includes drinking, shouting, smoking, littering, playing loud music and swearing. These make city-dwellers wary and fearful. The feeling of fear also stops city-dwellers from engaging with these people or telling them to stop acting in an anti-social way. Furthermore, dwellers talk about displays of 'mad' or drunken behaviour – for example people smiling or talking to themselves – which scares them. However, there is a conceptualisation that this information is insufficient to make a correct judgement and that one can never be sure of who is dangerous and who is not, because 'a bad person can come with a smile on their face'.

When confronted with this type of behaviour some use a brief smile as a technique to evaluate whether someone is a dangerous or safe person. If the stranger smiles back, it is an indication that they are a 'good' person and safe to be around. However, if they look back in a strange way or do not smile, the fear of that person worsens and city-dwellers will 'walk very quickly' to get away from that person. Others avoid people completely by deliberately not making eye contact, keeping 'themselves to themselves'. Some wear their wariness as a 'suit of armour' and are very guarded. If dwellers have to talk to someone, they keep

conversations 'very brief' and do not reveal too much about themselves. This form of disconnection acts as a safety mechanism.

This fear is instilled at a young age and is commonly referred to as 'stranger danger':

> *As in like you're taught in schools, obviously they teach that to the little children and saying keep away from strangers, obviously strangers are like out and forcing children to take sweets and all that and then obviously kidnapping them so it's been built in at a young age, yeah, to keep away from them* (Female, 21-38, higher SES, BME, Birmingham)

This sense that children are particularly vulnerable persists across the data. Some strangers that seem too interested or 'too friendly' are perceived as 'strange' and potentially dangerous. Participants explain that they do not know what people are capable of and that thoughts of people doing things to harm them or their family 'creep' into their mind.

This fear is partially attributed to negative first-hand experiences, after which they have become very wary of people and less likely to engage with strangers in the city. A larger source of negative information about strangers comes from the media. This includes gang-related violence such as stabbings, as well as terrorist attacks. Both types of crime elicit high levels of fear because they are perceived as senseless and random. However, there is also a questioning of the media:

> *Yeah I think the newspapers have an awful lot to answer for. They're only interested in sensational and disasters and fiascos and they point out the risks …So I think people are completely unfairly and unreasonably terrified of almost doing anything* (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, London)

This is seen as a modern phenomenon and linked to the idea that children no longer play out on the street or explore outside of the house because parents are afraid something terrible might happen to them. This links to a sense of nostalgia: that the way things used to be was better than they are now. One middle-aged city dweller expressed the idea that 'not everyone is nice anymore'. This view is in line with a representation of the general external city world as 'big' and 'scary' and something to be wary of.

> *you wouldn't meet someone and say oh yeah come back to my house for a cup of tea, you know, not now, not in this day and age, no. Like maybe 20 years ago, maybe, I don't know* (Female, 21-38, lower SES, BME, London)

Lastly, dwellers describe that nowadays, unlike in the past, people move around a lot more and people do not know those who live around them in the city. This adds to the fear of the unknown and makes people 'alert' and wary of people encountered in the city.

The rude stranger

The second negative characterisation of strangers is that of the rude stranger, which was mentioned by 35% of participants. This type of stranger displays inconsiderate and selfish behaviour towards others and is not someone one wants to meet in the city. Londoners talked about rude strangers slightly more than Birmingham dwellers. Unlike with the dangerous stranger, the rude stranger is not associated with uncertainty or seemingly unlimited negative consequences. Instead, the rude stranger is represented as rude because of their behaviour. This is linked with emotions of annoyance and anger, rather than fear. It is associated with a belief that people do not care about other people, that they are selfish and inconsiderate and are only interested in their own lives:

> *I think the majority of people just don't care about people around them and the environment around them, which is sad, very sad* (Female, 39-57, lower SES, White, London)

This is partially attributed to lack of resources. A London example of this is lack of space on the underground. Here strangers are just looking out for themselves, occupying space and trying to dissociate themselves from the many people around them. It is perceived as quite a 'nasty' environment because people push, barge past and knock others over:

> *They try and push, they try and get in, they'll be all for themselves and not for anyone else and it is that their time is so, so precious to them that they've got to spend every moment of it looking after themselves and they don't seem to care about anybody else* (Male, 39-57, higher SES, White, London)

This rude behaviour is also associated with a perceived lack of time, which makes people impatient, particularly when travelling around the city. Dwellers describe scenarios where everyone is in a hurry and people are increasingly confrontational and impatient when things go wrong or are not on time. The rude stranger is impatient if they feel one is holding them up, for example by looking for an oyster card or asking the bus driver a question. Annoyance is displayed by rude glances, 'like the piercing stares', the 'raising of the eyebrows' or 'sighing'. In extreme cases, this leads to aggression, as seen in road rage.

This expectation for immediate gratification is attributed to expectations and advances in technology, which is discussed frequently in relation to rude strangers. Most notably, people mention the impact of the mobile phone:

> *I'm aware of my surroundings and I do take other people's opinions into consideration but I feel that there's so many people that are so inconsiderate ... people walking along the street just looking at their mobile phone and expecting other people to move out of the way of them...* (Female, 39-57, lower SES, White, London)

> *Like I've seen people out in the middle of the street and nearly get knocked over looking for Pokémon but half of the people nowadays with these phones they're just, they're just rude. There's no interaction between, like you catch eye contact with someone and they think you're staring at them like you're going to rob their phone* (Male, 39-57, lower SES, White, London)

Rude strangers walk through the world with 'blinkers on', oblivious of what is happening around them. They do not take notice or are not interested in others, even if another person needs help. People are deemed as too busy to help others and are seen to not care. This type of behaviour is often associated with young people. Young people are seen as people who have not been raised to respect others, do not know how to have a conversation and act as if the 'world owes them something'. Youth is associated with selfishness and preoccupation with their own life:

> *some people now are more interested in their own lives and half the time in what is in their hand which is their iPhone, than what is actually going on in front of them* (Male, 39-57, lower SES, White, London)

Rude behaviour is seen as having increased in recent years, which is deemed to have affected people's local areas in negative ways. A number of dwellers mentioned that their areas used to be 'quiet' and 'pleasant', but are now crowded with people who walk 'like a herd of elephants' pushing and shoving and stepping over people if they have to, rather than helping another person. This is particularly prevalent in London where such behaviour is seen as the norm because it is so common. Dwellers note that one would not expect an apology if another person runs into one and that Londoners are used to this behaviour. They compare this behaviour to how people behave in smaller towns and villages, where people are seen as friendly and kind to one another and imagine that those people would be shocked or even traumatised by how Londoners interact with each other.

The unwanted acquaintance

> *So I've been there before, like walking around with like friends and like walking through the city with like your girlfriend and you see one of her like friends that she knew 10 years ago from school, you just have to listen to this really boring conversation and sometimes you just like sort of, like I take myself out of my head sometimes and think, like I notice myself like rolling my eyes back, like falling asleep listening to this kind of stuff* (Male, 21-38, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Unwanted acquaintances are people dwellers know because circumstance has brought them together, such as living nearby, attending the same school or working in the same office. They are depicted as 'acquaintances for a reason' - because they are the people dwellers do not like enough to be friends. Acquaintances were conceptualised in this way by 21% of dwellers. Male participants mentioned unwanted acquaintances twice as often as females. They are characterised by superficial interactions that one would like to avoid but cannot.

Moreover, these interactions are unwanted because they come at inconvenient times when one would rather be left alone. For instance on an early morning train, when one is tired and does not want to talk, particularly when there are only unimportant things to talk about. These conversations are dreaded as they are deemed annoying, boring and pointless. They involve 'going through the motions' which dwellers would rather not do because they have 'better things to do' and leaves them thinking 'I've just wasted 10 minutes of my life'. When meeting unwanted acquaintances, city-dwellers feel obliged to ask questions about them and their life (e.g. 'where do you live these days?' 'How's the family?') although they do not care what the answer is. Some settings, like the train, are particularly unhelpful for interacting with unwanted acquaintances as they add to the sense of discomfort:

> *You can't talk about anything personal ... you may as well both just admit that neither of you want to be doing this conversation, just put your earphones back in. But you can't really say that* (Male, 21-38, higher SES, White, London)

Some dwellers do not mind these acquaintances as much, as long as they can keep them 'at an arm's length'. However, they still perceive them as unimportant and as not adding much to their lives:

> *at the train station you can usually see we're all heading off for meetings and whatever else and again, yeah, you might get a 5 or 10 minute quick chat...it's*

transient. And again you might not see them for ages and it doesn't really matter that
much (Male, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Others go to great lengths to avoid running into this kind of acquaintance. For example, if they see them in a shop, they turn around and go the other way in order to avoid 'getting stuck' in awkward conversation and an uncomfortable situation.

7.2.3. Technology and weak ties

Technology is seen as having both a positive and negative influence on weak ties and was mentioned by 44% of dwellers. The negative effects, which make up the vast majority of talk about technology, revolve around the idea that technology creates a distraction from what is happening in one's immediate environment and thereby hinders face-to-face connection with strangers/ acquaintances. As marked in section 7.2.2., this is related to the rude stranger, and therefore it is not surprising that again Londoners mention technology in relation to weak ties more than Birmingham dwellers. The oldest cohort (58-70) mentioned the negative impact of technology more than any other age group. The positive aspects of technology revolve around its ability to facilitate the connection of weak ties who would otherwise not be able to interact with each other due to physical distance. This section will first outline the negative impacts of technology and then move on to the positive conceptualisations of technology in the data.

The perceived negative impact of technology on social interaction with weak ties pertains to the amount of attention technology demands and its ability to isolate people from one another. Focusing on technology instead of people around one is seen as a way of disengaging from one's environment and is perceived as rude and anti-social. The most common device mentioned in these terms is the mobile phone, which people are 'glued to'. One thing seen as particularly rude is being on the phone whilst interacting with another person:

You're having a sort of interaction with the girl behind the till or the lad behind the till, it is so rude just be, you know, ignoring them and talking to other people. I don't know, as much as they are a wonderful tool they're also a bit of a curse, I think. And if people knew how stupid they look when they're talking to nothing they probably wouldn't do it (Female, 58-70, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Being on the phone is also associated with being rude because it shows that people are not interested in others, only in themselves and their own world:

Rude. When I say rude it's like you can walk down the street, people will step over

people in the street, they are more interested in their phone .. I want to get into heaven
but some people now are more interested in their own lives and half the time in what
is in their hand which is their iPhone, than what is actually going on in front of them
(Male, 39-57, lower SES, White, London)

Another type of technology that is associated with hindering connection with weak ties is the use of headphones:

I walk my dogs and I will nearly always speak to whoever I walk past, even if it's just
to say good morning or hello or, but I just think, I have no idea why people go outside
wearing earphones, it just baffles me completely because they don't have any
interaction with people around them, you'll speak to them and they'll just ignore you,
they're in a completely different world, I don't know why they don't just stay at home
(Female, 58-70, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Wearing headphones and not engaging with those around is seen as rude, annoying and anti-social. Lack of interaction due to technology leaves dwellers frustrated with other people's behaviour and is particularly associated with young people who are '*extremely reluctant to interact with you, very reluctant to smile, very reluctant, they won't catch your eye*' and '*completely self-absorbed*' (Female, 58-70, High SES, White, Birmingham).

Dwellers felt that technology was particularly damaging to fulfilling people's social needs:

Digital economy again, it is dehumanising. ... anything I want now, going back to
this, I don't have to speak to anyone, I just go on Amazon, it will be on Amazon,
whatever you want, even food now. And you don't have to speak to anyone (Male, 58-70, lower SES, White, London)

The impact of technology on relationships leads some city-dwellers to question how good this is for the induvial and for society. This is shaped by the worry that changes to society through the invention of new technologies are moving faster than that of human nature which is seen as fundamentally social.

Those who pointed out the negative impacts of technology on connections with weak ties also pointed to the practical benefits, such as the informational capacity of technologies such as phones. This highlights the ambivalence about technology that runs through the data that it is 'a blessing and a curse in equal proportion'.

A way in which technology can facilitate interactions with weak ties is by allowing people to get to know each other slowly and build trust before a face-to-face encounter:

I do quite a lot of trading on e-bay… So that's interaction with somebody who is obviously a stranger. With e-bay you kind of know something about the person, you know that they've done 50 trades or whatever and they've got 100% approval rate so you know that they're not a scoundrel … So that's somebody who is a stranger but you build up a little transaction history, you meet them, all goes well, shake hands and that is almost certainly the end of that. (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, London)

Lastly, technology is a way to meet strangers one would otherwise not come across day-to-day. This allows one to meet people with very similar interests and very similar backgrounds even if they are not in one's immediate physical environment:

Yeah I would say I was in a relationship recently, for the last 6 months, it ended so my barriers went up and that's when I joined Tinder just because it's hard because when you're working long silly hours it's hard to basically meet people (Male, 21-38, higher SES, BME, London)

Though this is primarily a way of making new acquaintances in the hope that they will become strong ties, other social media platforms allow one to join online groups to interact with people around certain special interests and hobbies. These are seen as highly beneficial. However, even those who recognise the benefits of technology in connecting them with weak ties do not think of technology as a substitute for face-to-face connection, which is described by some as a 'proper social interaction'. In particular, this was related to technologically mediated interaction being seen as a lower quality interaction when compared to face-to-face. This was particularly related to the instantaneous reaction that comes from face-to-face conversations, as well as the amount of information communicated through eye contact, tone and facial expressions.

7.2.4. Time and weak ties

Over a third (37%) of city-dwellers mentioned not having enough time to commit to engaging with strangers and acquaintances. Time is a precious resource for city dwellers, particularly for Londoners and is only to be used for things that are deemed important. Unless someone is in need of help, interactions with weak ties are seen as 'hold ups' one does not have time for. This is most mentioned by the youngest (21-38) and middle age (39-57) cohort group. This is due to the haphazard nature of these encounters with strangers/acquaintances, which usually

happen whilst travelling to get somewhere or whilst needing to be doing something else. This is particularly the case during the day when people are busy.

Dwellers are conscious of spending time with people who are not friends or family. Time is a way of measuring how important that person is in your life.

> *I think life in general is just busy and fast-paced. I find it is anyway. I just find I get, I go to work, get up in the morning, go to work, rush around work all day, come back rush around again to get ready put Louie to bed and then I can do a bit more rushing and then I can have an hour to myself. I think, so, sometimes strangers and acquaintances, if I am in a rush, then I don't have time to speak or I wouldn't necessarily think about anything to ask them or have that time to sit and have a conversation with anybody. Cause um, my life, is just one big rush* (Female, 21-38, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Getting stuck in a conversation with someone for longer than desired is seen as negative. Someone else 'may have all the time in the world', but busy city dwellers do not. Given the lack of time, non-verbal interactions are preferred. For example, a smile, a nod or a wave, are used as ways of acknowledging people without losing time. Neighbours are seen as weak ties for whom one has slightly more time because good relationships with them are seen as having instrumental value.

As time is seen as a resource, spending your time with people is seen as an investment. Spending time with weak ties – people you do not know well – is a risky investment because one does not know whether one will like this person and this risks it being a waste of time.

> *I've got certain people now that I do know that I like spending time with, so the idea of meeting an acquaintance and then starting going for drinks with them and that's another Thursday taken up* (Male, 21-38, higher SES, White, London)

Lack of time is not only something experienced on an individual, but also on a city level. This is epitomised by discussion of the 'hustle and bustle' of the city. Cities themselves, not just the people in them, are seen as busy, hectic and fast-paced.

> *Life is just so fast paced and everybody is constantly on the go. There is just no time to talk* (Male, 39-57, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

In contrast to the prominence of the lack of time felt by many city-dwellers, a small minority of dwellers spoke of the importance and benefit of having time for weak ties in the city.

Then there's different types of like being in the city as well, so you could be in the city on like a night out with friends and meet strangers and acquaintances where it's less rushed and that's when you probably have better conversations because the people, you actually want to talk to them for a reason (Male, 21-38, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Having more time for weak ties was associated with different settings. Setting is important and defines whether people are in a rush or not. For example, in a social setting, such as a club or a bar, people would have more time to talk to strangers. Another example would be in a park, because people are not there to go from A to B but are there to spend time and 'hang around'.

If you're on a night out, you're at like a bar or a restaurant or a nightclub or whatever, you want to talk to those people more probably because you have nowhere to be, you're in a social setting. But then there are different like circumstances so you could be in a park ... that would be a daytime version of where it wouldn't be rushed (Male, 21-38, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

Interactions with weak ties are encouraged in these situations as they add fun and novelty to the experience of the city. Some city dwellers felt so strongly about these interactions that they account for the time they will take out of their daily lives.

Overall, the city is seen as a place where people do not have time. In contrast, time is seen as something that people outside of the city have more of. People's sense of time is altered when they leave the city and this sense that they have more time is linked to being more open and receptive of others:

Very different talking about a city like London because I think I'm very different down in Devon because in Devon you go for a walk along the cliff by the sea and people say 'morning' and you go, they talk to me, you know. It's a whole different ball game so people are much more open, they're far more trusting, you're much more on your guard in the capital city so I would react differently in Devon. It's more free, it's nature, it's beautiful air that's not polluted, I think people are just generally more open. But these are the minuses of living in a capital city because you cannot go around being open to everything, you can't (Female, 58-70, higher SES, White, London)

For city-dwellers, spending time outside of the city is linked to being on holiday or taking time out. Therefore, people are relaxed and have more time to connect with weak ties.

7.2.5. Society, culture and weak ties

A fifth of participants reflected on society and culture in contemplating interactions with weak ties. Society was characterised as selfish which is seen as negative, and multicultural which is seen as both positive and negative. This section will explore these representations in turn before looking at the idea of 'London' which was discussed as the epitome of both these types of societies.

Participant's associations to weak ties included different characterisations of society at large. The most common description used to characterize society is as 'selfish'. This perception of society stems from a belief that individuals living within the British city are selfish and only care about themselves. It is related to the idea that city-dwellers live highly disconnected from one another, in 'siloes' and not being affected by others. The insular nature of society is due to everyone living in their own world or 'bubble', unaffected by and not noticing what is happening to others around them:

> *This area where I live, most of us live in this room which is the back of our house. I probably know the people either side of me and the two people opposite and that's it, because none of us have made the decision to communicate with each other because we don't see each other, we live at the back of our house and that's it. Quite an insular world really* (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

This feeds into a larger criticism of modern people's values, which are seen as misguided because they focus on the self and material items, rather than others.

This type of society is attributed to the fast-paced and time-poor nature of city living, where people put up barriers to be able to navigate through it. This is seen to be different from the past, when there was a sense of community and 'people looked out for one another'. This is felt to make society impersonal, complicated and 'darker in some senses'. The insular nature of society is also reflected on in relation to technology, as nowadays it is perceived to be possible to survive without ever leaving one's own home – as everything can just be delivered to the front door. One participant who reported lacking mobility stated:

> *I just started ordering more and more on-line, I thought I won't go to the shop because it's too much effort, I can't carry the stuff, it's too heavy anyway and before I knew where I was I actually realised that I can live here in this flat without leaving, I can ask my neighbour to take my rubbish down for me and the only time I have to leave is*

twice a year to go out to see my doctor to get a review of my medication. Otherwise I wouldn't need to leave the flat (Male, 58-70, lower SES, White, London)

Another common characterisation of society was multiculturalism. On the one hand, multiculturalism and diversity is seen as a good thing for society, a change for the better, providing a great opportunity to learn from other cultures from first hand experience. This is related to being interested in different types of people and being curious about different lifestyles:

You look at people and try and work out what they're like and what they're doing and, you know, it's just a natural interest in people and if you're in a city you'll see a whole different, you'll see different people all the time, won't you. Different people behaving in different ways and that's just interesting (Male, 58-70, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

However, being outside of one's regular local city environment, for example going into the centre of town, can make encountering diversity more fear inducing:

The other thing on that is sometimes one comes across, particularly in London, language barriers and so I tend, if I'm going to ask somebody, to ask somebody who looks English and so I don't meet that, hopefully don't meet that language barrier. It's probably to do with my age and my upbringing but I ask, I tend to only interact mainly with older White who I think are English people so therefore, whereas round the corner where I live here, it's very mixed race but I know most of the people and I'm more in my comfort zone (Male, 58-70, lower SES, White, London)

This quote highlights that diversity is not always seen as easy to navigate in the city. Some participants worry about the effects it has had on society as they fear that multiculturalism is being 'forced' on them and that it is threatening their British values and identity. City-dwellers dislike walking down highstreets in London and Birmingham and hearing 'all languages other than English'. This creates fear for city-dwellers as they do not understand what is going on around them. In particular migration is associated with a number of negative social changes. Conceptualisations of migration included people coming to the UK to misuse the system, to take advantage of free services such as health and education but not contribute themselves.

London is picked out by city-dwellers as the epitome of a culture that is both selfish and insular, as well as diverse and multicultural. Londoners are described by others and by themselves as being distant, unfriendly and always in a rush. This is closely associated with

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rudeness, which is seen as part of the 'fabric of what it is to live like in London'. This culture of busyness means that dwellers expect everyone to be in a rush, to only focus on themselves, 'have their head in the clouds' and to be in their own little 'bubble'. This contributes to the silo effect that living in the capital is said to have on people, although it is the 'natural thing to do, when you're kind of overwhelmed', Londoners recognize that it can be difficult or even 'traumatizing' for people who are new to London. This is seen as a contrast to stereotypical British manners.

Diversity is seen as one of the factors that makes London a great and vibrant city. This stands in contrast to the idea that Londoners are insular, and highlights that city-dwellers like meeting people from diverse backgrounds, hearing their stories and learning from their experiences. Coming together with different groups and forming diverse communities, at work or in the local area, is seen as interesting and important; Being open-minded, respectful and non-judgmental is highly valued and seen to make others feel comfortable and accepted.

London's city culture is contrasted with different cultures: those in which people are more open to interactions with weak ties. Firstly, it is compared with British countryside culture which was seen as more open, friendly, slower and pleasant, as mentioned previously. Secondly, it is compared to northern British culture. In a similar vein to countryside culture, Northerners are seen as less reserved and chattier. Thirdly, it was compared with US American culture which is seen as more talkative, cheerful and 'smiley'.

7.2.6. The past and weak ties

Over a third of participants compared how people interact with strangers and acquaintances in the city nowadays to how things were done in the past. Overall, the past is perceived as having been better than the present. This was associated with several factors, including crime and disrespect, as well as the lack of manners and community, changes to the urban environment and the increase in migration. There were no noticeable age differences in the data. However, lower SES male and London participants mentioned the past as a positive thing the most.

In relation to crime and feelings of safety, there is an overarching sense in the data that the world has changed, it has become a 'more complicated' and 'darker' place:

> *... you just don't know who you are saying hello to and what their motives are. Not everyone is nice anymore* (Male, 39-57, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

This fear leads to a society where children no longer play on the streets or go anywhere on their own, whereas in the past children took the bus alone and 'nobody batted an eyelid'. More generally, children today are perceived differently:

> *You know children are not children anymore, have you noticed it, have you got any toddlers or anyone in your life, they're so advanced, they're so advanced. They're not like, they're not like children, they're like little old people, you know, kids should be laughing, they should have fun, they should go out and do things, not be stuck on a computer in the house. I think my last son, who's 23 now, was the last generation that played out on that street, you don't see kids playing out there no more. All that's ended, which is sad* (Female, 58-70, lower SES, White, London)

This is related to children now being more preoccupied with technology, which is seen as passive playing, rather than active playing on the street or going over to a friend's house.

Lastly, a society that is more dangerous than it used to be is related to a state and other social institutions that are not holding people to account:

> *I suppose it's the fact that the police have got no power, parents have no power, teachers have no power. Which is unfortunately bringing up a load of disrespectful gits. .. If you misbehaved the police would give you a clip round the ear and send you on your way and if that happened you would go home and your mom and dad would give you a clip round the ears just for being in trouble so. And that doesn't happen anymore. Because of you know, it's not nice. But it worked* (Male, 39-57, lower SES, White, Birmingham)

This is also related to a perceived lack of respect and manners. For example, 'basic manners' and 'common courtesies' like holding the door open for a stranger are not said to be absent in the present city. In particular the youth are seen as having been raised to be 'ferrel', 'arrogant', 'entitled' or even criminal:

> *... when you go back and watch these old-fashioned programmes there was a code and people always stepped outside the code but it was a big shock to the community. Whereas now it seems to be so normal to hear kids telling people to fuck off and kids fighting in front of everyone or to hear about old people being mugged and sometimes it's kids that do it. I find it terrifying really* (Female, 39-57, higher SES, White, Birmingham)

This conceptualisation of youth makes city-dwellers worry about the future norms and culture in their city. It is contrasted with the behaviours of older people, those raised in 'the past', who

are seen to be more chatty than young people, and are deemed as slightly more likely to interact with strangers in a communal, friendly manner:

> *So I found like certainly in the last 6 weeks since I've had this injury and I've had a lot of old people speaking to me, oh how did you do that, oh I hope you get better soon and it's just like there's no reason why they need to do that but it's friendly and there are people like that, not so much younger generation, I don't think I've been approached by anybody under the age of 40 that's just said hello and started making conversation at a bus stop* (Male, 21-38, higher SES, BME, London)

This is also related to a sense of community which is felt to have been stronger in the past.

> *Apparently in the war everybody, in the second world war everyone used to speak to everybody* (Male, 58-70, lower SES, White, London)

Changes are attributed to a higher number of people frequently moving in and out of cities. Furthermore, the salience of the local area is seen to have decreased over the years, and people do not have their local shop or local services in which they know the people running them and have interactions with them. For example, having 'banter' with the newspaper salesman is not seen as part of the modern world:

> *Newspaper vendors to my mind go back almost to black and white films, they're always there outside the station, outside the Tube station, going "E'en Standard, Standard!" And of course they see a lot of the same people every day and so they go, here you are, how's the wife, you know, couple of oranges for her ... The salesman type people and part of their salesmanship is banter so it's probably quite false, thinking about it now. Probably quite false, the sales banter, is them pretending to be your friend, well not necessarily your friend but at least they're being polite and cheerful and happy* (Male, 58-70, lower SES, White, London)

These depictions of the past shape the way in which participants think about today's society and how this affects their interactions with strangers and acquaintances in the city.

7.3. Chapter summary

This chapter presents the results from the third interview study on weak ties. The chapter began by categorising the free association task responses and was then followed by an outline of the themes that emerged from the subsequent interview exercise. Here, thematic analysis revealed that the conceptualisation of weak ties revolved around the 'good' and 'bad'

stranger/acquaintance. These conceptualisations are impacted by four contextual factors that dwellers linked to weak ties. Like in the previous chapter, time and technology played a role. Furthermore, a specific type of society was linked to the way in which people connect with weak ties, as well as a certain representation of the past and present. The following chapter aims to bring together the findings of this chapter with the two previous results chapters, using the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3, to discuss the findings and shine light on the existing literature.

Chapter 8 Discussion

The aim of this thesis is to understand how social connection is conceptualised in the British city and what motivates everyday interpersonal connection. Furthermore, it aims to examine how both conceptualisations of and motivations for social connection are impacted by the social context within which they are embedded. Encompassed within this aim are four specific research questions: 1) What are the different types of social connections aspired to in cities? 2) How do people conceptualise social connection in cities? 3) What are the city contextual factors that impact social connection? and 4) What motivates people's desire for social connection in cities? The purpose of this final chapter is to summarise the key findings and discuss how these shed light on the research questions by integrating and consolidating the research findings. Furthermore, the chapter presents the novel empirical, theoretical and methodological contribution to knowledge put forth in this work. It then progresses to look at the implications the findings have for city policy and planning. Lastly, before concluding the thesis, limitations and directions for future research are presented.

8.1. Integration and consolidation of research findings

This section presents the key findings of the research with reference to the four research questions presented in this thesis. It draws on the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3 to interpret the results of the aspirations study (Chapter 5), the friendship study (Chapter 6) and the weak ties study (Chapter 7). Furthermore, it draws on the literature to assess the way in which this work enhances and enriches previous research on social connectedness in cities.

8.1.1. What are the different types of social connections aspired to in cities?

This thesis offers a nuanced understanding of city dwellers' aspirations for social connection in Britain's two largest cities, London and Birmingham. In particular, Study 1 on aspirations shows that social connection is highly prized in the city and that social connection is the most prevalent aspiration when people elaborate on their desires for their futures. From the range of what could have been said, not only does social connection prevail but aspirations for two types of social connections can be detected: aspiration to connect with strong ties such as family, partners and friends and aspiration to connect with weak ties, such as people in the local area, the city (non-local), working life and outside the city.

Family is the most prominent type of social connection aspired to. Family is seen as fundamental to life as it gives meaning and purpose is aspired to by all. Part of city-dwellers' aspiration for connection with family is the idealisation of the nuclear family. This represents a desire for more stable, known family units. Idealisation is also present in people's desires for connection with weak ties, in particular ties with local community. Both aspirations are shaped by a strong sense of nostalgia - an imagined and idealised past that is compared to a non-ideal present. Here, the aspiration for social connection in the *future* harks back to an imagined ideal *past*. Nostalgia manifests itself in city dwellers' longing for a time when community was strong and close-knit, when people knew their neighbours, looked out for one another and offered support. This stands in stark contrast to people's representations of the society that the British city exists within: One that is selfish and individualistic.

Both the aspiration for local community and for a nuclear family are out of kilter with the highly mobile communities and variegated family units found in contemporary society (Sweeney, 2010; Urry, 2000). Instead, they echo Tönnies (2001) vision of *Gemeinschaft, a* traditional type of community: one that is place-based and rests on a pre-defined social structure into which one is born and which existed prior to modernity. These longings for stability are associated with feelings of emotional and physical security.

In contrast, nostalgia was not present in city-dwellers' representations of friendship. This shows that while ties with family and community are represented as breaking down, this does not pertain to friendship. This is due to the fact that these are not seen as stable ties that are predetermined by the family or community one is born into (Giddens, 1991). Instead, friendship it is a tie based on individual preferences and choice. This is in line with arguments put forward by late modernity theorist (Allan, 2008) who argue that friendships present 'hidden solidarities' in these postmodern times due to the focus on choice, freedom and individuality.

Lastly, the types of social connection one wishes to connect with, other than family which is desired by all, is largely dependent on age. Working life ties are most sought after by the youngest cohort (18-35 years). For the middle-aged (36-54 years), connection with people in the city (local and non-local) is most aspired to. This is associated with inherent enjoyment, support and impact. The oldest cohort (55-67 years) are less likely to focus on connecting with weak ties. Instead, emotionally rewarding interactions that give purpose and enjoyment with friends are desired. This augments socioemotional selectivity theory, which states that as people get older, they are motivated to connect with strong ties – such as friends - that give them an immediate emotional reward (Carstensen, 1995), rather than weak ties – such as

people in working life or community – that are less emotionally intimate and focus more on novelty and exploration.

8.1.2. How do people conceptualise social connection in cities?

This thesis presents an examination of how people conceptualise social connection. Specifically, the last two studies provide a detailed account of lay thinking about weak ties and friends in the British city. By applying Social Representations Theory, the findings in these studies cast light on the way in which people think about everyday social connection in the city, as well as the structure that underpins this thinking. This section will first outline the contents of the representations of weak ties and friendship by looking at how they are shaped by the sociocultural context as well as the individual. Following this, the concept of themata, particularly the self/other epistemological thema, will be applied to reveal the structure that lies beneath common sense thinking about relatedness.

A number of different representations of weak ties exist in the data. On the one hand, strangers/acquaintances are represented as friendly and sources of kindness and support, as well as interesting people who one wants to get to know further. On the other, strangers/acquaintances are perceived as dangerous, fear-inducing people one must avoid, or rude and annoying people that cause discomfort and frustration.

Who these representations are held by differ along demographic lines. This points to the role of the individual in shaping and re-working the representations that are socially shared across society. For example, BME dwellers characterise strangers as people in need of support more than White British respondents do. Here giving support is linked to a sense of being needed and increasing one's own as well as others' wellbeing. This may be explained by the presence of collectivist cultural values, such as the desire for cohesion and solidarity, held by BME city dwellers (Hofstede, 1980). Moreover, the representation of the 'dangerous' stranger was held by lower SES dwellers more frequently than higher SES dwellers. This may be related to findings from the risk literature that show that those with less power, including lower SES, female and less educated adults, are found to have higher risk perceptions (Dosman, Adamowicz, & Hrudey, 2001).

Beyond demographic differences, it is evident that the context in which weak ties are encountered impacts people's representations. For example, the role of place is particularly salient within people's representations of strangers. The 'friendly' stranger is often conceptualised as someone met in a semi-public spaces, such as a shop or a sports stadium. This setting makes people feel like they have something in common with the stranger, making

them less of an unknown and unpredictable entity. Furthermore, common ice breakers, such as children or pets, show similarities between people. These are particularly powerful tools in making people feel safe as pets and children act as symbols of people who are nurturing. This produces feelings of safety and facilitates opening up and 'letting your guard down' in order to engage in positive social interactions.

This is in line with the notion of third places, put forth by Oldenburg (1999), which are semi-public in nature and facilitate interactions that are intrinsically enjoyable. Furthermore, it corroborates previous research on 'collective effervescence' in which people crave the 'joy of association' (Gabriel et al., 2017; Jacobs, 1961). Lastly, it provides evidence for Simmel's idea of sociability in the city (Simmel & Hughes, 1949). However, it adds to these findings by showing that it is the perception of commonality between people that facilitates pleasant and friendly interaction. In particular, this has implications for the idea of 'sociability' as it is presented as a way of erasing social hierarchies (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernandez, 2013). However, the findings presented in this thesis indicate that sociability is most commonly held with people one has things in common with. Therefore, the ability for sociability to rid of hierarchy is not as powerful. This is because it is not as prevalent in situations where difference is encountered.

In contrast, the 'dangerous' stranger is often associated with public spaces, such as parks or streets, particularly at night. Open space, as well as darkness, make people feel less in control of the space and therefore more vulnerable, which leads to being alert and suspicious of others. This was associated with uncertainly and the possibility that anything could happen. The marking of strangers as 'dangerous' and as people one wishes to avoid is associated with such spaces. This shows that one of the factors leading to social disconnection from weak ties in the city is fear for one's physical safety and that this propels people to ignore others in the city. Beyond the physical unknown, the data also shows the social unknown – linked to multiculturalism –is also linked to fear.

Apathy, which is also present in the data, is another reason disconnection from weak ties occurs in the city. This is evident in the representation of the 'rude' stranger. However, apathy forms part of dwellers' representations of other people's orientation towards fellow dwellers, not their own orientation towards others. This apathetic stranger is encountered in busy and hectic environments when people are in a rush, like for example on public transport. This representation was particularly salient in the London data, which is likely to be linked to the sheer size and population of the city. Within this representation, disconnection is the result of other people's actions, not one's own. This is different to the 'dangerous' stranger where participants report actively wanting to disengage. This distinction highlights the benefit of

looking at social representations of strangers, rather than just relying on observational studies as done in past research (Goffman, 2009; Milgram, 1970). It highlights the distinction between feelings and orientations towards people held by people themselves and orientations that they see other people holding, both of which are leading to disconnection in the city.

However, apathy and blasé attitudes towards others, as described by Simmel (1903), are also present in the representation of the 'unwanted' acquaintance. This is the example of the 'bad' acquaintance and is someone who is seen as a time-waster. These interactions are avoided as they are not enjoyed or useful. This type of acquaintance is represented as a person one had the chance to be friends with but did not choose to pursue and would rather not be connected to. This stands in contrast with the 'good' acquaintance as friendly and supportive, which is dominated by people which are encountered by chance in the city. These are represented more as 'elevated' strangers than 'lessened' friends as they are strangers encountered throughout the city on a regular basis with whom one has frequent small scale interactions, such as the barista or employee at one's local supermarket.

Having discussed the content of the representations of weak ties, the social representation of friendship is delineated next. The most prominent theme within the representation of friendship is fun. Fun is a defining feature of a friend as family or work colleagues remain family or work colleagues even if they are not liked or their presence enjoyed. This echoes the findings from the first study, where friendship is seen as a connection that allowed one to escape the roles and responsibilities that come with other social actors, such as family members. This is further supported by participants who speak of family members (e.g. mothers, brothers) as 'like friends' because they are people they want to spend time and have fun with. This is in line with the different cultural specificity noted by Allan (2008) where family and friends are seen as different types of bonds. In this sense, friendship is an example of the type of chosen, obligation-free tie that is associated with late modernity (Spencer & Pahl, 2006). This is different to family, which is culturally still portrayed as a 'blood' tie that is not easily severed or necessarily desired.

Cutting across the four themes identified as characterising friendship, the idea of the 'true' and 'close' friend emerges. This type of friend is associated with trust, support and understanding, rather than fun. Close friends are linked more to friends one has a history with, and are more closely associated with friends who know one and one knows 'inside out'. This corroborates the argument put forth by Allan (2008) that friends are chosen ties that are deeply linked to one's sense of self. This closeness is similar to closeness felt with family, where the relationships is seen as unconditional, which allows people to let their guard down.

This is also linked to loyalty. The use of loyalty is used to justify behaviour that would otherwise be considered as morally 'bad'. For example, lying for a friend is seen as a positive act of friendship, despite the recognition that it is morally wrong in other circumstances. These aspects of friendship show that true friends are not ties that are continually chosen and easily rejected. Characteristics such as loyalty show that friends form an integral part of one's identity and that losing friends is portrayed as very painful.

However, friendships do end when friends are perceived as having broken trust, not supported one in a time of need or not been loyal. This highlights the tension at the heart of relationships with friends: On the one hand, they are chosen and create deep and meaningful bonds that are desired to be maintained. On the other, as friends are not bond together by obligation, they can be more freely 'un-chosen'. This shows the fragility of the bond. This fragility is made worse by changes in society in late modernity that make people less confined within particular social and geographical boundaries, making ties less permanent (Urry, 2000). This means that friends are more likely to move a way or adopt lifestyles that are different to one's own. This makes spending time with friends something that has to be actively fostered, rather than something that happens automatically as one goes about one's day.

Beyond the impact of late modernity and urbanity that impacts the representation of friendship, demographic differences are also present in the data. This points to the role of the individual in shaping the social representation. For example, the theme of fun is most pronounced in the middle aged group (aged 39-57). Fun in friendship is associated with escaping the responsibilities of home and work and is seen as a way to let loose and feel joy. This is sometimes facilitated by alcohol. The prevalence of this in the middle-aged group may be linked to the many responsibilities held at both home and at work during this period. Previous research, for example, shows that this age group is often stretched as the responsibility of taking care of children and aging parents, alongside working, is difficult to manage and stressful (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2006). Moreover, the theme of support was a more prevalent representation of friendship for lower SES city-dwellers. This may be linked to a lack of financial resources that make people more likely to resort to informal types of support, such as friends.

Both demographic differences pertaining to fun and support highlight the flexibility with which the notion of friendship is imbued. At different times, the focus and function can shift – to be more about support if family is unavailable, or more about fun. This flexibility is in line with work by (Allan, 2008) on suffusion of personal network, where the function of family and friends has become more intertwined.

Moving beyond the content of the social representations of friendship and weak ties, the data shows that representations of these social ties are based on themata: A dialogical structure that lies beneath common sense thinking and influences the way in which thinking develops (Markova, 2003). In particular, social ties in the city are shaped by the good/bad thema. The role of themata is most evident in dwellers representations of the stranger, where the unknown person is made sense of through the interdependent representations of 'good' and 'bad'. However, the use of 'good' and 'bad' permeates the data beyond strangers, and was included in people's representations of acquaintances and friends as well.

Representations of weak ties, strangers and acquaintances, as 'good' include friendly, supportive, interesting and someone one wants to get to know further. On the other hand, 'bad' weak ties are dangerous, rude and unwanted people one wishes to avoid. Representations of friendship are skewed towards the 'good' friend, who is supportive, trustworthy, fun and makes dwellers feel understood. The representation of a 'bad' friend is present in the data as someone who does not display these characteristics. However, the representation of a good friend is much more prominent in the data as the 'bad friend' is someone who is no longer a friend. This shows the dialogical nature of common sense thought. Furthermore, the use of moralistic language such as good/bad provides further evidence for Ricœur's (1992) idea that relationships between self and other are tied together by ethical considerations.

The good/bad themata is built on the self/other epistemological thema, where 'good' is associated with self, and 'bad' with other. This is evident in the representation of a friend, where a friend is seen as part of the self. This corroborates the findings of Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson (1991), who found that friends are others that are included within the self. They distinguish this from people's conceptualisations of strangers, who are not.

Friendships are seen as ties that are connected to one's representation of self. This is evident in multiple aspects of the data. The first is the role of understanding within friendships. Here friends are viewed as people through which the self is revealed and true understanding is gained. For example, by interacting with friends it allows dwellers to reconnect with their former selves, or aspects of their selves that do not come to the fore outside of those interactions with friends. Here friends are represented as people who know and understand one well, who know one's 'true' self. Furthermore, friends share experiences that are linked to shared values, identities and beliefs, which bring them closer to the self. Lastly, characterisations of friendship - as fun, supportive and based on trust and understanding - are all seen as 'two-way streets'. These are characteristics one expects of people one calls friends,

as well as oneself within a friendship. Taken together, this shows the close association between people's representations of friends and self.

However, the findings presented here also show that representations of strangers, and weak ties in general, are associated with the self. This is most evident in city dwellers' discussion of the 'friendly' stranger/acquaintance. More than any other representation, the discussion of this type of weak tie switches between representations of strangers and representation of self. This is similar to representations of support within interactions with strangers and acquaintances, where participants moved between themselves and other people in their description of the value of supporting and being supported by weak ties. Moreover, the realisation that others also perceive one as a stranger/acquaintance is only present in the representation of the 'good' stranger/acquaintance. Dwellers want to be seen as friendly, interesting and supportive by others. Furthermore, there is a consensus in the data that it is important to be nice to others and to treat them with respect because one would want others to do the same.

Representations of weak ties as self, is linked to whether these ties are felt to be known. The feeling of being known, for example, comes from by adhering to the same customs and norms, such as smiling as a person walks by, which make people less feared and viewed more positively. Furthermore, by presenting themselves as having something in common with a stranger makes this stranger feel more 'known'. For example, meeting a stranger at a sports match or shop one likes makes people more likely to represent the other positively as the stranger is felt to be closer to the self.

In contrast, the 'bad' representations of social ties are seen as not containing qualities that are felt to be possessed by the self. Within the representations of weak ties, the 'bad' weak tie is much more prevalent. For example, the 'dangerous' stranger, acts in ways that are different from the self. The behaviour that they are displaying cannot be explained with reference to known behaviour that one understands. This not knowing results in uncertainty and this is linked to fear. Furthermore, the depiction of the 'rude' stranger or 'unwanted' acquaintance is an 'other' which breaks the rules and norms that respondents attribute to the self.

These representations of 'bad' weak ties are linked to negative emotions – most prominently fear and anger/annoyance. Fear is sparked by the dangerous stranger, the actions and intentions of whom are unknown and therefore could be harmful. The unknown comes from the presence of behaviour that is unknown and hard to access and the absence of behaviour – such as a smile - to which positive emotions are linked. Furthermore, they are

exacerbated by physical spaces which are unknown or make one feel vulnerable– such as the open streets or empty spaces at night.

In contrast, representations of 'good' weak ties and friends that are closely associated with representations of the self are associated with that which brings positive emotions, such as joy, excitement and contentment. Imbuing representations of self with positive emotions and representations of other with negative emotions is a way of protecting the self from negative emotions by pushing these emotions away. This is line with Joffe (1999) who finds that representations linked to self are associated with positive emotions and representations linked to others with negative emotions. What is novel about this contribution is that it shows how a stranger, someone who is by definition unknown, can be represented in a way that is associated with self, rather than with others.

8.1.3. What are the city contextual factors that impact social connection?

City dwellers' conceptualisations of social connection are impacted by two contextual factors: time and technology. Time is seen as a scarce resource and impacts people's ability to connect with strong ties – family and friends – as well as weak ties – strangers and acquaintances. Technology is seen as something that fosters connection with strong ties and mostly hinders connection with weak ties. These two factors will be discussed in turn.

Time in the data is conceptualised as a precious resource, which city dwellers do not have enough of. Dwellers felt they did not have the time they needed to connect with family and friends in meaningful ways. In particular, city dwellers felt they lacked the time they needed and wanted to spend with their children. Time was also a salient category for the representation of friendship, particularly for young and middle aged, as well as higher SES dwellers. This was due to the priority given to work and family responsibilities. Time spent not doing these things, such as not looking after family, was associated with guilt, particularly by female participants. In comparison to family, friendship is seen as less important and therefor people prioritise spending time with family over spending it with friends. This shows that there is a qualitative difference between family and friends for people and a need to distinguish between them: family is the more primary relationship. This shows that family is seen as a stronger bond than friendship and the strong cultural norms around taking care of 'one's own blood' sit at the core of representations of social connectedness, even in these late modern times.

This lack of time is also more prevalent in the London sample, which may be linked to the hectic and busy atmosphere felt in London, as well as the sheer size that make seeing people more difficult and time intensive. Time is represented as something that must be 'spent' efficiently. In order to do this, time saving practices such as speaking to a friend on the phone whilst cooking dinner are used. However, this did not fully substitute the undisrupted 'quality' time that was craved and that is seen as wellbeing giving. This shows that efficiency comes at the cost of quality of connection with friends. This is in line with research which has found that being rushed for time has been found to be a common experience (Johnson & Glover, 2013), as people are pressed to meet their obligations and responsibilities. As friendships, unlike family, are not represented in terms of obligation and responsibility, less time is found to spend with friends. Furthermore, increases in mobility and choice of lifestyle (Giddens, 1991) means that dwellers that became friends years ago may not be in the same geographical place or everyday routine as they were when the friendship was established. This makes seeing friends more time intensive, rather than something that happens organically as one goes about one' day.

However, with regard to friendship, the lack of time was seen as something that could be accommodated as 'true' friendships were able to be maintained despite infrequent contact. This is different from new friends, where the bond of friendship is being formed and this is seen as happening through shared experience that require time. However, for old friendships this bond has already been formed based on shared history and values. This allows dwellers to 'pick up where they left off' when they do eventually spend time with friends. This is further strengthened by closeness in friendship, the understanding that friends have for each other and the demands of life that take priority. This aspect of the data is in line with work on friendship in late modernity where flexibility in quality and function of the relationship is built into the conceptualisation of friendship (Spencer & Pahl, 2006).

Findings from the study of weak ties also found that lack of time was a reason given for not interacting with strangers and acquaintances met in the city, particularly by young and middle aged dwellers. People felt that if they had the time to 'stand around and chat' they would prioritise spending time with strong ties – family and friends – over weak ties. This shows a clear hierarchy of social ties in which time is seen as a scarce resource that is given firstly to family, then to friends and then to weak ties. Sometimes micro-interactions with weak ties in cities such as a passing smile, greeting or a wave are conceptualised as a time saving interactions that substitute for the more time intensive act of talking. However, these are not the only functions of micro-interactions as sometimes they are used as conversation openers.

As shown here, the resource of time is spent carefully and strong ties are seen as more worthy of one's time. This has implications for the practise of sociability (Simmel & Hughes, 1949) - a play form of interaction that connects people across socioeconomic status levels. Evidence for the presence of sociability was outlined in the previous section in which friendliness was seen as something that erased hierarchy between people. However, as previously shown, its effects are minimised as these types of friendly and supporting interactions are more likely to be with those perceived as similar to oneself. As weak ties are given the least time to be engaged with, this further limits the number of possibilities for sociability to take place.

Overall, the prevalence of the concept of time in effecting conceptualisations of relatedness was unexpected and is an under- researched area. However, there is work on the perception of time in cities and the rush that prevails in mega cities that is in line with the data presented in this thesis that lack of time hinders connection with weak ties (Levine & Norenzayan, 1999). Furthermore, the findings are in line with work that sees modern Western society as focusing on having and producing (Giddens & Pierson, 1998; Liu, 2006; Wajcman, 2015), rather than being. The aims of producing do not align with social connection, as relationships are fostered by sustaining rather than producing, and as such help explain the lack of time that is felt to hinder social connection in cities.

The second city contextual factor impacting relatedness is technology. Technology is seen as overwhelmingly positive regarding connection with strong ties – family and friends. It allows one to connect with family who are far away. Furthermore, within conceptualisations of friendship, technology is praised as a way of fostering social connection that would otherwise not exist or be as frequent. Like family, one aspect of this is the ability of technology to be used by dwellers to connect with friends who are not geographically close. However, another benefit is the ability to connect with friends who may live in the same city but whose paths do not organically cross on a regular basis. This is contrasted to, for example, when the friendship first developed, such as at school.

Telephone calls are represented as the most intimate and 'traditional' way in which connection is mediated via technology. This intimacy is only something one has with close friends, and is associated with an authenticity that is craved in friendship. Calling a friend is represented as a deep form of connection and is a sign of care as it is a sign of making an effort to speak to them. Texting is also seen as a positive form of communication with friends as they act as little pick-me-ups that make people smile. This is in part related to the above point where due to lack of time, this form of interaction is preferred. In this sense, technology is used as a bridge to reconnect with friends who are not automatically present in one's everyday

routine. This change is again linked to the effects of mobility and larger choice of lifestyle choices, for example, higher frequency of job changes, across the lifespan (Sweeney, 2010; Urry, 2000).

In contrast to phone calls and text messages, social media had a mixed representation. On the one hand, it allowed dwellers to connect with people and make friends with those that share similar interests and that they otherwise would not have met. Here technology allows one to make new acquaintances that they would otherwise not have met. In this sense, the role of technology to connect others with a larger group of people than one would normally be exposed to is positive. Moreover it allowed for efficient communication with multiple friends who one could communicate and share things with all at once. On the other, social media is portrayed negatively as it was seen as replacing more intimate one-on-one connection such as via telephone or face-to-face. Compared to technologically mediated connection, face-to-face connection is represented as more 'real'.

The findings point to a hierarchy related to the quality of the connection, and therefore the quality of the friendship. Here face-to-face is the highest form of connection, followed by phone calls, then text messages and then social media. Although overall technology was viewed as positive in facilitating social connection with friends, as one moves down this hierarchy of connection it appears that each level of technology creates a barrier due to the inability to sense the other person fully, as would be the case face-to-face. On the phone, verbal cues are not lost in the instant back and forth that makes one feel connected, however facial cues and physical forms of connection - touch, hugs - are lost. Text messaging further loses the verbal cues, and social media is the least directed and private connection between two individuals as it prioritises connection to a larger audience. This supports the argument purported by Kock (2005) that a reduction in naturalness in connection (that is, to express and perceive face, body and voice of the other) is linked with diminished physiological arousal because humans are evolutionarily designed for face-to-face communication.

A different representation of technology in relation to weak ties exists in the data: Technology is represented negatively for its ability to distract people as they move through the city, which causes city-dwellers irritation. Technology is seen as a way of people distancing themselves from others and the physical environment they were in. Headphones allow one to block out others from one's experience of the city, whereas telephones focus one's attention elsewhere. This idea of being ignored by others due to technology was linked to frustration and linked to a representation of a selfish society in which people only care about themselves and do not even notice the existence of others. This is linked to ill-being and gives people the sense that they do not matter.

Particularly in London where the representation of the 'rude' stranger prevails, this representation of technology as negatively impacting social connection and therefore the overall experience of the city is salient. This is linked to a lack of courteous, caring and helping behaviour as well as an increase of pushing and being run into and is particularly negatively represented in older dwellers. Londoners saw this type of behaviour as characterising their own city, and although they were used to it, recognised that it could 'traumatise' someone new to the city.

However, for those dwellers that mentioned their own use of technology, primarily young men, technology was a way of making an unpleasant social or physical situation more pleasant by mentally removing themselves. This indicates that it is the experienced unpleasantness of spaces that fosters the use of technology to disconnect from the social and physical environment of the city. In this sense, technology is a way of avoiding spaces in the city that are experienced as unpleasant. These types of spaces are the opposite to third places (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982) in which people enjoy the company of others – the types of spaces in which people linger, not because they are fulfilling any rational ends or activities but because of the 'joy of association' (Gehl, 2013; Jacobs, 1961).

This shows that the impact of technology on weak ties is not based on connecting via technology but using technology to disconnect from those who are sharing of space in the city. This representation of technology is in line with the argument brought forth by Turkle (2015), which states views the mobile phone, in particular, as a barrier to connection with people, as it hinders the level of engagement with those around one. Furthermore, this thesis shows that technologies do not just lead to disengagement but to negative interactions with weak ties. This is because the person with the mobile phone or headphones does not become non-existent for city dwellers, but has a negative effect on those around them by not paying attention to them. This gives people the sense of not 'mattering' which will be discussed in the next section.

8.1.4. What motivates people's desires for social connection in cities?

The studies presented in this thesis identified a number of thoughts and feelings that motivated social connection with strong and weak ties in the city. In particular, the research finds that people's motivation to connect with strong and weak ties are shaped by a desire to 'matter': Dwellers want to enter the awareness of and be known by others, be relied upon by them and feel important to them (Elliott et al., 2004).

With regards to family, city dwellers desire to be able to fulfil the needs of dependents, mainly children but also aging parents. This is motivated by the impetus to *give*, rather than *receive,* emotional, instrumental and informational support. Though wanting to receive support is also present in the data, wanting to give support is more prominent with regards to family. In comparison to the volume of research examining the benefits of receiving support, the benefits of giving support have been under-explored. The findings are in line with mattering theory that states that people want to be relied on by others (Elliott et al., 2004) Furthermore, the data corroborates the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' theory not only in providing evidence for the need to 'Connect', but also the need to 'Give' (Aked et al., 2009). However, the bulk of this work however focused on social connection outside of the family, with friends, acquaintances and strangers. Motivations to connect with these ties outside of the family will be the discussed in the remainder of this section.

In regards to friendship, evidence for the desire to matter can also be found in the way people want to feel important and cared for by friends. Firstly, the facet of *awareness* is present. Within the conceptualisation of friendship captured in this thesis, the function of friendship as feeling understood displays the need to be truly known by another. Within the data, respondents speak of friends as people who know who they 'really are' and who truly understand them. Friends know what one is thinking and have a deep awareness of one. This is different to basic awareness which is defined as acknowledgement and recognition of the other, which is the way the facet of awareness is usually presented in the mattering literature. Stretching the definition of awareness to include this deeper awareness of the other is in line with mattering because mattering aims to capture care for another through awareness. True awareness of a person is linked to the idea of genuine authentic care for that person as they are, not for the role or function they perform. Furthermore, city dwellers speak of interacting with friends as a way of connecting with their 'former' selves, a part of their identity that they feel connected to due to friendships that carry these representations of them within them.

Friendships are seen as relationships that do not serve an instrumental purpose, but are based on a mutual and chosen association between two people. The freely chosen aspect of friendship means that they are based on genuine care for that person. Once this genuine care is established, represented by the ideal of a 'true' or 'real' friend, these ties are not easy to sever. This feeling of care for a friend is linked to the enduring nature of friendship. This acts against the freely chosen, obligation free aspect of friendship which would make it an easier tie to sever, than for example family. This is evident in the salience bestowed on long-term friendships and shared personal history that indicates that friendships are stable. It is also evident in the way in which dwellers speak about ending friendships, which is seen as very difficult and painful.

The idea of care is linked to the idea of authenticity, which appears in the data. Friendships are associated with authentic care because they are seen as voluntary associations where people only bond because they genuinely want to. This is in line with Aristotle's definition of true friendship, which is based on valuing the other's inherent attributes or resources. Aristotle contrasts these types of friendships with those that are based on providing the other person with utility – support – or pleasure (Cooper, 1977).

However, this is not to say that support and fun are not valued aspects of friendship. Indeed, offering support is a prominent aspect of friendship and is seen as something one wants to do, rather than as an obligation. This is similar to family in the sense that a friend is seen as someone so close to the self that one 'hurts when they hurt'. This level of empathy and understanding leads to a strong willingness to provide support for the other. Dwellers talk about support in friendship and wanting to help friends and feeling good if a friend relies on them. This is in line with mattering theory that sees reliance – along with awareness and importance – as one of its key tenets.

However, dwellers also speak of wanting to receive support from friends. Here perceived support – the level of support one would expect to get in times of need - is key in friendship (Haber, Cohen, Lucas, & Baltes, 2007). This is linked to feeling important to someone, which makes them look out for one. The data brings to light other facets of perceived support, which is not evident in the largely survey-based social support literature (Barrera, 1986; Chu et al., 2010; Cohen & Wills, 1985). These facets are loyalty, reliability and trust within people's conceptualisations of friendship.

By picking up on these nuances, the data sheds light on a new phenomenon that offers an alternative explanation to why perceived support may be so important: Within the social support literature, the role of perceived support as a predictor of wellbeing is explained due to its reflection of how much support one has to draw from, without being influenced by the negative events that are pushing an individual to utilise this support. However, another way of thinking about perceived support is as a way of capturing how much one believes others care about one. This is much closer to the concept of mattering than to social support.

Lastly, fun and enjoyment is a clear motivation for friendship. Dwellers are motivated to connect with friends because it provides escape, fun and excitement away from mundane tasks. This is characterised by the desire to engage in activities with friends in preference to doing them with a partner or family or on one's own. Fun allows for two positive emotions: excitement and relaxation. There is a sense in the data that if one did not enjoy spending time with someone, one would not be friends with them. Fun provides relaxation and a degree of 'silliness' that allows one to let loose with friends. Excitement is linked to daring to do new things and venture beyond one's comfort zone but still feel safe and able due to being with a friend. This is in line with the literature on the 'joy of association' which highlights the role

of positive emotions in social connection (Gabriel et al., 2017). Furthermore, fun is most associated with groups of friends than any other facet of friendship, thereby providing further evidence for the notion of 'collective effervescence' (Ehrenreich, 2007).

Fun, compared to the other three themes identified within friendship, is the only aspect that is not linked to the ideal 'true' or 'real' friend. Furthermore, although it is clear that fun is a key aspect of friendship, friends that only provide fun but not trust, support or understanding, are not as deeply connected. In this sense, having fun at some times in the friendship is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for friendships. This again echoes Aristotle's conception of friendship where genuine care – based on trust, support, loyalty and understanding – is a better form of friendship than those that are only based on utility or pleasure (Crisp, 2000).

Mattering also features in people's aspiration for connection with weak ties. In particular, the salience bestowed on small scale, face-to-face, pleasant interactions on the streets and in third places shows that city dwellers aspire to be held in the awareness of, and acknowledged by, others. The data show that people desire to live in cities that foster the opportunity for interactions that are friendly and polite. This is fulfilled by acts such as saying hello and smiling at others. This study found a representation of the 'friendly' stranger/acquaintance as one that acknowledges the other person with small acts of kindness, such as a smile or holding the door open for the other. This is associated with a 'basic level of care' based on a shared humanity that people extend to one another.

These simple acknowledgements and fleeting interactions give people a sense of the world as a good place. The smile, for example, is a symbol of warmth, which is associated with care. In comparison to friendship, this form of acknowledgement and awareness is not as deep. Instead, it is similar to the existentialist gaze in which the self is revealed through the look of the other (Lacan, 1997; Sartre, 2007). Furthermore, the positive reaction to this look is linked to subjective experiences of wellbeing. In the city, not being seen, being ignored, for example, by having a door hit you in the face rather than someone holding it open, makes dwellers feel like they do not matter – that they are unimportant.

Furthermore, the conceptualisation of the stranger/acquaintance as 'supportive' builds on the idea of acknowledgement in that one is important enough that others would offer assistance: This is also linked to showing care to weak ties. This is linked to the idea of the 'kindness of strangers', which makes people feel seen and not ignored. It also provides dwellers with a sense of safety. This comes from the knowledge that if something happened to them when surrounded by people they do not know or know well, someone would step in and help, just because they are human. This is reflected in a general attentiveness to others that is friendly and courteous to strangers. However, this motivation to show care is felt to be inhibited by a lack of time and a focus on obligations and responsibilities one already has;

City dwellers are busy and feel they have limited time to stop and interact and help other if it does not clearly benefit them. However, if someone is in need of help, this level of care is extended to weak ties just because of their shared 'humanness'.

Moreover, being of assistance to others in the city allows people to feel needed, which is linked to the concept of *reliance*. It is a way of adding value and applying oneself to the world one inhabits. This is seen to be the case with weak ties found in the local community as well as at work. This shows that city-dwellers are motivated to engage and notice others as a way of feeling of use to others and think well of themselves. This is linked to self-esteem, the area of research from which mattering initially developed (Flett, 2018). Furthermore, it adds to Goffman's (1983) theory of the interaction ritual and performance, which looked at ways of behaving as a way to enhance self-esteem due to being highly esteemed by others. Furthermore, it corroborates work within the Self-Determination Theory research area which lists competence as one of its three basic human needs (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Deci et al., 2001).

Lastly, as with friendship, the desire for social connection with weak ties is also commonly motivated by enjoyment. Even when talking about services in cities, face-to-face connection is not aspired to because it is seen as more efficient, but because it is regarded as more pleasant and enjoyable. In line with Jacobs (1961) and Simmel & Hughes (1949), these aspirations point to a conception of the city as a place of 'collective effervescence' – a state in which joy is felt by the sheer presence of the other. While visceral pleasure is gained from connectedness in both cities, Londoners value politeness and aspire to connect with people in the city at large, whereas Birmingham dwellers aspire to friendliness and focus on connecting with people in their local area. The relative sizes of the two cities may underpin these differences. Furthermore, enjoyment is fostered by interactions with those represented as 'interesting' strangers. Here the enjoyment derives from the novelty and exploration. This in line with Sennett's (1992) theory of the role of diversity and novelty in attracting people to the city. Having observed the centrality of this aspiration, and corroborating V. Cattell et al. (2008) findings, there is a need for urban spaces in which people feel they can linger and connect with others in ways that are exciting and joyful.

8.2. Empirical contributions

This thesis makes several unique empirical contributions to knowledge in relation to both weak ties and friendships. With regards to weak ties, it shows the salience of this type of connection and the prominence it plays in people's lives. This is demonstrated by the fact that weak ties were mentioned by almost half of the participants, and is shaping city-dwellers'

aspirations for the future around work, family, travel and wellbeing. The findings challenge the status quo in relationship research that focus on strong ties, such as the 'need to belong' theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) as well as the social support literature (Cohen & Wills, 1985). This is a valuable contribution as the study of weak ties, which has been neglected in relationship research (Small, 2013).

The work reveals both positive and negative representations of weak ties in the city. The positive consist of representations of strangers/acquaintances that are friendly, supportive, interesting and people one wants to get to know further. Motivations to connect with these 'good' weak ties are motivated by the desire to 'matter'. The data shows that people want to be acknowledged and cared for on a basic human level. This gives a sense of comfort and ease when moving around the city. This challenges the classical sociological tradition that portrays cities as full of 'blasé' and disinterested strangers (Milgram, 1970; Simmel, 2002). However, the data also captures the negative representations of strangers and acquaintances, which are seen as dangerous, rude or unwanted. Furthermore, it shows that fear is the most prominent hindrance to social connection in the city, and that blasé attitudes towards strangers is not something that people associate with themselves but with rude others. This is a unique contribution that was able to be accessed due to looking at people's social representations, rather than relying on observational studies.

Lastly, this research shows that in cities, people see value in weak ties much beyond their own local community, but also at work and in the city-at-large. This adds to the existing literature on weak ties which is dominated by work on community (Ryan et al., 2008). This is an important contribution as these findings are likely to resonate for other major cities internationally, though the way in which they are displayed will be culturally specific.

The work also makes a novel contribution by capturing the representation of friendship in the modern day British city. It shows that friendships are conceptualised in terms of fun, support, trust and understanding. Furthermore, it adds to the evidence of the importance of 'mattering' in friendship. Moreover, by capturing the social context, in particular the effects of late modernity, it sheds light on a tension between a period marked by more freedom and choices, and a desire for stable and meaningful friendships.

Previous researchers have argued for the salience of friendships in late modernity. Here it was argued that friendships are flexible ties that form around the activities and social identity that individuals choose. However, the research presented here has shown that aspects of late modernity also make friendships more difficult. This is because obligation free relationships are not given the same priority as those imbued with responsibilities, such as those at work and at home. Furthermore, mobility and openness to different life courses means

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that friends one has made in the past and that deeply matter to one are not always present in everyday routine life. This is seen as different to family ties where connecting with family happens whilst completing every day obligations. This point is further corroborated in the thesis' findings on family, where dwellers seek more 'quality' time outside of the daily routine.

Looking across both weak ties and friendships, the thesis makes a number of unique contributions in relation to the city contextual factors that impact social ties in the city. The first is the role played by technology in fostering and hindering connection in the city. A large body of research exists looking at how quality of connection is impacted by being technologically connected (Kock, 2005) as well as a body of literature on whether technological connection positively or negatively affects face-to-face connection (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013). However, only a few studies (e.g. Turkle, 2015) examine technology devices and how they divert attention away from physical surroundings and thereby hinder connection with those around one.

Moreover, the use of screens in cities is usually seen as a positive as it allows for 'smart' services that are faster and more reliable. However, in cities that are densely populated being surrounded by many other people who are using screens is a common occurrence and this has strong negative effects and leads to lack of engagement or negative forms of engagement. Lastly, the research shows that technology does impact connection but in opposite ways depending on the actor in question. For friendship, a form of strong tie, the impact of technology is largely positive as it allows for access to people one wants to actively engage with but otherwise could not. However, for weak ties, technology is seen to disconnect from strangers and acquaintances within one's immediate physical environment.

Furthermore, the findings uniquely highlight the way in which time is represented by dwellers and how this impacts representations of both weak ties and friends in the city. The importance of time does feature in previous research on the hustle and bustle of the city. However, this research makes a unique contribution to knowledge in showing that perceptions of time affect social relationships with friends and weak ties. To the knowledge of the researcher, this has not yet been investigated further.

Lastly, the unique role played by fun and enjoyment in social relationships is another finding of the work. Enjoyment is an important motivating factor for social connection with both weak ties and friends. The experience of positive emotions is a facet of wellbeing and therefore it is not surprising fun and enjoyment is a key motivation for social connection. However, this is an underexplored, perhaps taken for granted, element of people's motivation to connect with others. Particularly when compared to the amount of research on support, the

role of fun and enjoyment has largely been overlooked in the study of underlying motivations for connection. This thesis points to the importance of enjoyment and positive emotion is social relationships as it is found to be as prominent within the data as support. This is something other psychological theories, such as social support or 'need to belong' that aim to explain what motivates social connection, need to be cognisant of.

8.3. Theoretical contributions

This thesis has used two theories to inform its theoretical frame work: Social Representations Theory (SRT) and Mattering theory. In this section I argue that this work has made an original contribution to both theories.

This thesis makes a unique contribution to SRT by applying its concepts to the everyday 'other' – friends, acquaintances and strangers. It has drawn on and combined two areas of exploration that SRT has often been applied to, common sense thinking (Moscovici, 1984) and the 'other' (e.g.Jodelet, 1991). However, never has the 'other' been explored from the point of view of everyday relationships. The research finds evidence for the use of themata, the self/other thema in particular, in structuring common sense thinking on this social phenomenon, thus supporting the contention of Markova (2003) that themata underpin common sense thinking of social phenomena. Moreover, the studies presented in this thesis support the previous work done by Farr (1977) and Smith et al. (2015) that self is imbued with positive qualities and negative qualities are pushed on to the 'other'. This also pertains to relationships with other people, where 'good' others are associated with self and 'bad' others with not self. The moralistic language shows that these relations are inherently ethical, thereby providing empirical evidence for Ricouer's idea of self/other as tied together by ethical considerations (Ricoeur, 1992).

With regards to mattering theory, this thesis made a significant contribution by using mattering to explore motivation for connection within the general population, as prior to this thesis mattering theory had been primarily to the study of adolescents and the elderly (Demir et al., 2012; Dixon, 2007; Marshall, 2001; Rayle & Chung, 2007). Though previous work has looked at the role of mattering within friendships (Demir et al., 2012; Demir et al., 2011), this thesis makes a unique contribution to this theory by taking a qualitative approach. This allowed for more depth in exploration of the facets of mattering and how they might be linked to other concepts, such as social support. Furthermore, it drew a link between mattering and Aristotle's conception of a true friend, which draws out the importance of genuine care and

mattering within friendship, and goes beyond friendships as solely sources of fun and support (Crisp, 2000).

Moreover, this work builds on previous work that looked at the 'generalised other'(Dixon, 2007; Elliott et al., 2005). By way of contrast, in this thesis mattering has been applied to understand people's motivations to connect with specific weak ties, strangers and acquaintances. The data shows just how much people value being in the awareness of others, even people one does not know, and the basic level of care that can be felt between strangers gives a sense of comfort when travelling through the city. Qualitative analysis allowed the micro interactions with which this level of care manifests itself to be captured. Furthermore, it captured hindrances to connecting with others, such as fear, that need to be set alongside motivations to matter in order to create a comprehensive picture of how and why people connect with others in the city. Though this work has focused on the British city, it may be generalizable to other contexts, particularly culturally similar contexts such as a host of Western cities.

8.4. Methodological contributions

A methodological contribution provided by this thesis is another expansion of the use of the GEM (Grid Elaboration Method) beyond the social issues that it has tended to be used for, to personal issues. For example, it has previously been used to explore the role played by neuroscience in society (O'Connor, Rees, & Joffe, 2012), the way in which climate change, emerging infectious disease and earthquake risks are represented by lay publics (Joffe, 2003, 2011; Joffe & Elsey, 2014; Joffe, Washer, & Solberg, 2011). These are different social concepts as they pertain to areas for which expert knowledge exists. The GEM has been applied to other issues outside the realm of scientific expertise (See Joffe & Smith, 2016), however the application of the GEM in this thesis relates to issues of a more personal and private nature. The GEM has proven a fruitful methodology in this domain as it allows the participant the freedom to explore and reflect in a less restricted and linear fashion than much of the survey work that dominates the wellbeing and aspirations fields.

8.5. Implications

The work completed for this thesis has two clear implications for future city design and policy. Firstly, it can be applied to conceptualising city spaces that need to be designed in such a way that they foster rewarding social connection. This work shows the content of lay people's representations of 'good' strangers and acquaintances, what these connections are motivated by as well as the city contextual factors that play in to their desire for social connection. In particular, it shows that spaces need to be designed in way which allows people to have fleeting positive interactions, are able to look out for one another in small ways and show interest in the other. By looking through the findings presented in this thesis, one can identify the types of spaces that engender these kinds of relationships – semi-public spaces such as cafes, shops, cultural and sporting events - that make people feel safe and engender collective effervescence.

Secondly, the importance of mattering has an impact on the types of services offered in cities. The findings presented in this thesis go against the current emphasis on 'smart' services that prioritise quick and efficient services, such as self-checkout desks, which is achieve by factoring out 'human error' and instead using automated technologies. However, by doing this, one also factors out the human ability to connect and matter – on a basic level of acknowledgement and care – to others. This desire is evident in city dwellers representations of friendly and supportive strangers/acquaintances and cannot be fulfilled by technological solutions that do not include social factors. The desire to matter also pertains to strong ties and therefore also has broader implications outside of connection with weak ties in cities. One example of this is care responsibilities that are taken over by agencies that substitute family care and focus more on practical support rather than types of care – acknowledgement, importance and reliance - between ties that foster feelings of mattering.

8.6. Limitations and future directions

The design of any research project involves the setting of parameters that exclude certain aspects of the phenomenon under study. These must be reflected on by any conscientious researcher. Reflection on these limitations also directs attention forward, as the remaining empirical gaps offer fertile ground for future research. The first limitation of this thesis is that it is an in-depth study that did not triangulate its findings. Triangulation, which is common practice within qualitative work, refers to using multiple methods to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Patton, 1999). This limitation was due to the nature of the

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research questions, which sought to delve deeper into the findings of the first study on aspirations, rather than triangulate these findings. This limitation is made worse due to the findings from Study 2 and Study 3 resting on small samples. These samples aimed to be roughly representative of British dwellers in London and Birmingham but were not matched like in the original sample used in Study 1. Further research would be needed to investigate the generalisability of the findings. Doing this might shed more light on social representations and motivations for social connection in cities.

Another limitation is the lack of a quantitative measure for 'mattering'. This is because 'mattering' theory was only found to be relevant to the research after the studies had been carried out, in order to interpret the findings. Although the qualitative nature of the study makes a valuable and unique contribution to the mattering literature, implementing the established measures for mattering to the generalised other and mattering to friends would have provided an interesting comparison and may have shed more light on how mattering affects city dwellers, and in particular, their levels of wellbeing.

Furthermore, in order to complete the work on representations and motivations for connecting with all social ties, another study on family and romantic partners would have been beneficial. It would have allowed the researcher to look across the ties and draw out differences and similarities. It would have provided interesting insights that could have been assessed in relation to the self/other thema.

Beyond further research that rectifies the current limitations, the thesis has given rise two new questions and areas for future research. The first is related to the social representation of the 'interesting' stranger. This is a type of 'good' stranger that is represented as such due to their difference and novelty. Here the unknown is imbued with positive emotions and is not seen as a threat but as an opportunity. This representation may be particularly prevalent in cities where difference is encountered and proven to have a positive impact. This is difficult to interpret as within SRT the unknown has been linked to negative emotions that is felt to be 'other' and pushes away.

A further area of study is the moral aspect of relationships – displayed by the presence of representations that are thought of as good/bad - that exists across social representations of strong and weak ties. First impressions from the data suggest that morality of strangers and acquaintances is represented in terms of behaviour, whereas morality in friendship is represented in terms of good character. For example, a 'good' stranger/acquaintances acknowledges one with a smile, helps someone less able to carry luggage up the stairs or spends a bit of time helping their neighbour. In contrast, morality in friendship is linked to a

person's character, such as displaying traits such as loyalty and honesty. This difference falls roughly along the lines of consequentialism (Mill & Bentham, 1987) – where morality is based on the outcome of one's actions – and virtue ethics – in which morality is judged a person's character (Crisp, 2000). This is an interesting avenue for future research.

8.7. Conclusion

"My subject is a familiar chaos. Nothing is more familiar to men than their ordinary, everyday behaviour .... They have been at home with the evidence since childhood and have every right to an opinion. A physicist runs no such risk that the particles, whose ... behaviour in the atom he describes, will talk back... Social experience is apt to come at us too fast to leave us time to grasp it as a whole. Nevertheless the purpose .... Is to bring out of the familiar chaos some intellectual order" – (Homans, 1961)

The aim of this thesis is to complete a comprehensive analysis of ordinary relationships that often remain under-recognised in everyday life (Williams, 1975). Specifically, it aims to look at the role that social connection plays for people living in cities: what types of social connections they aspire to, what motivates their desire for connection and how the city impacts these factors. By capturing the social representations of weak ties and strong ties, in particular friends, acquaintances and strangers, it allowed for the motivations of the individual as well as the effects of the socio-cultural context to be captured. This showed that social connection is highly prized in the city.

Furthermore, it shows that everyday ties are conceptualised along moralistic lines of 'good' and 'bad'. The full breadth of this distinction was particularly stark in people's representations of strangers, where representations lay along the spectrum from 'dangerous' and 'scary' to 'friendly' and 'joyous'. Drawing on work by urban theorists, evidence for both collective effervescence, blasé attitudes and desires to avoid others are found. However, the research was able to distinguish between orientations towards others felt by dwellers themselves – such as fear – and orientations towards others that dwellers associated with other people – such as disinterest. This is linked to the understanding the underlying self/other thema that structures common-sense thinking around relatedness. Themata help make sense of the underlying structure that shapes common sense thinking as well as the emotional aspects of the representations.

Looking beyond the role of fun and support in social connection, the research uncovered the notion of 'mattering' as the latent driver propelling city dwellers to connect. Here evidence for wanting to be acknowledged, important and relied on by others was found. This differs from the mainstream literature that focuses on social support as the main reason for social connection. By studying mattering in a way that also captured the social context surrounding it, the thesis was able to disentangle the effects of late modernity and the urban environment on people's desire to matter to strong and weak ties. All in all, the research enhances understanding of how current and future shifts in societal trends relating to urbanisation and technology will affect social representations of strong and weak ties, and the implications this has on the deeply engrained human desire to matter. Taken together, these findings have wide-reaching and tangible implications for how people relate to each other, within and outside of the British city.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey from aspirations study

Please can I ask you to complete the following questionnaire, which should take no longer than 15 minutes. This is a confidential questionnaire and the information you give will not be able to be traced back to you.

1) How long have you lived in London?

_____months/years

2) Do you think you will be living in London in ten years time?

☐ Very likely

☐ Quite likely

☐ Not very likely

☐ Not at all likely

☐ Don't know

3) Please read through the following items. Please rank the five that are most important for you. Do this by placing a 1 next to the most important, a 2 next to the second most important, and so on until you place a 5 next to the fifth most important.

☐ Having a job that pays well

☐ Being physically healthy

☐ Having access to green space

☐ Protecting the environment

☐ Owning the latest fashions

☐ Being successful in my career

☐ Having a happy family life

☐ Living a low carbon lifestyle

☐ Spending time with friends

☐ Having a sense of community

☐ Travelling as much as I can

☐ Spending time in nature

☐ Owning the latest technology

☐ Seeking new challenges

☐ Other (please specify) ....

4) Below are some questions about your feelings on aspects of your life.

Please circle your responses from 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely)

	Not at all									Completely
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

5) How strongly do you identify yourself as a "rural" person or an "urban" person? Please circle your response from 1 (strongly rural) to 10 (strongly urban)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly Rural				Both rural and urban					Strongly urban

6) How often do you visit public gardens, parks, commons or other green spaces?

- [ ] 6-7 days a week
- [ ] 3-5 days a week
- [ ] 1-2 days a week
- [ ] Once a fortnight
- [ ] Once a month
- [ ] Several times a year
- [ ] Once a year
- [ ] Less often
- [ ] Never
- [ ] Don't Know

7) How do you rate the *access* of the following within a 5 minute walk of where you live? Please circle your responses.

	No access									Easy access
Parks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Waterways	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Green spaces	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

8) How could your access to local green spaces be improved? Please write any responses on the lines below.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

9) How do you rate the *quality* of the following within a 5 minute walk of where you live? Please circle your responses.

	Low quality									High quality
Parks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Waterways	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Green spaces	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

10) How could the quality of local green spaces be improved? Please write any responses on the lines below.

_____
_____
_____
_____

11) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements?

I don't really give much thought to saving energy in my home	5	4	3	2	1	0
People have a duty to recycle	5	4	3	2	1	0
I don't pay much attention to the amount of water I use at home	5	4	3	2	1	0
The so-called 'environmental crisis' facing humanity has been greatly exaggerated	5	4	3	2	1	0
	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know
I find it hard to change my habits to be more environmentally-friendly	5	4	3	2	1	0
We are close to the limit of the number of people the earth can support	5	4	3	2	1	0
It would embarrass me if my friends thought my lifestyle was purposefully environmentally friendly	5	4	3	2	1	0
It's not worth Britain trying to combat climate change, because other countries will just cancel out what we do	5	4	3	2	1	0
The Earth has very limited room and resources	5	4	3	2	1	0
The effects of climate change are too far in the future to really worry me	5	4	3	2	1	0
It's not worth me doing things to help the environment if others don't do the same	5	4	3	2	1	0

If things continue on their current course, we will soon experience a major environmental disaster	5	4	3	2	1	0
It's only worth doing environmentally-friendly things if they save you money	5	4	3	2	1	0
For the sake of the environment, car users should pay higher taxes	5	4	3	2	1	0
I would only travel by bus if I had no other choice	5	4	3	2	1	0
People who fly should bear the cost of the environmental damage that air travel causes	5	4	3	2	1	0
Being green is an alternative lifestyle, it's not for the majority	5	4	3	2	1	0

12) As far as you know, do you personally think the world's climate is changing or not?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

13) Thinking of the causes of climate change, which best describes your opinion?

☐ Climate change is entirely caused by natural processes

☐ Climate change is mainly caused by natural processes

☐ Climate change is partly caused by natural processes and partly caused by human activity

☐ Climate change is mainly caused by human activity

☐ Climate change is entirely caused by human activity

☐ I think there is no such thing as climate change

☐ Don't know

14) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Most of the journeys I make by car could also be made on foot, on the bus, train, metro or by cycling	4	3	2	1
I want to increase my use of alternative means of transport - including car-sharing	4	3	2	1
I am satisfied with the quality and accessibility of public transport in and around London	4	3	2	1
I am satisfied with the facilities for cycling in and around London	4	3	2	1
Walking in my neighbourhood is easy and safe	4	3	2	1
Many of my friends live in this neighbourhood and we enjoy meeting up in this area	4	3	2	1
I want to buy more local food from local businesses	4	3	2	1
Increasingly I meet my friends, do my shopping and other day-to-day practices online (via internet)	4	3	2	1

15) Please indicate how often you do the following things:

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
I travel/used to travel by car for getting to and from work in the London area	4	3	2	1
I do my food shopping in my neighbourhood/local centre	4	3	2	1
I travel by car for most of my food shopping	4	3	2	1
I buy my food from supermarkets	4	3	2	1
I buy locally produced food	4	3	2	1
I grow my own food	4	3	2	1
The food I eat is prepared and cooked by myself or someone else in my family	4	3	2	1

16) What is your gender? ☐ Male ☐ Female

17) What is your age? _____ years

18) What is your ethnic group?

(*please specify if other)*

☐ White (British)

☐ White (Irish)

☐ White (Other, please specify) …………………

☐ Mixed (White & Black Caribbean)

☐ Mixed (White & Black African)

☐ Mixed (White & Asian)

☐ Mixed (Other, please specify) …………………

☐ Asian / Asian British (Indian)

☐ Asian / Asian British (Pakistani)

☐ Asian / Asian British (Bangladeshi)

☐ Asian / Asian British (Other, please specify) ………………….

☐ Black / Black British (Caribbean)

☐ Black / Black British (African)

☐ Black / Black British (Other, please specify)……………….....

☐ Chinese

☐ I'd rather not say

☐ Other (please specify)……………….....

19) Please indicate your *highest* qualification.

☐ O level/GCSE

☐ A level (please state number obtained) ………………

☐ Vocational Qualification (please state type and level) ……………………..

☐ Degree/Professional Equivalent

☐ Postgraduate degree

☐ None of these

☐ Other (please specify) ....

20) What best describes your current situation?

☐ Employed/self-employed full time

☐ Employed/self-employed part time

☐ Unemployed and seeking work

☐ Unemployed and not seeking work

☐ Retired

☐ In full-time higher education

☐ In part-time higher education

☐ I'd rather not say

21) If you are employed, what is your occupation? Please specify: _____

22) What is your annual household income?

☐ Less than £15,000   ☐ £60,000 - £69,999

☐ £15,000 - £19,999   ☐ £70,000 - £99,999

☐ £20,000 - £29,999   ☐ £100,000 - £149,999

☐ £30,000 - £39,999   ☐ More than £150,000

☐ £40,000 - £49,999   ☐ I'd rather not say

☐ £50,000 - £59,999

23) Broadly speaking, what are your political leanings?

☐ Conservative   ☐ Green

☐ Labour   ☐ I don't have political leanings

☐ Liberal Democrat   ☐ I'd rather not say

                                       ☐ Other (please specify)…………….........

24) What is your religion? Please tick the box that best reflects your religion.

☐ Buddhist   ☐ Sikh

☐ Christian   ☐ No religion

☐ Hindu   ☐ I'd rather not say

☐ Jewish   ☐ Other (please specify)……………………..

☐ Muslim

25) What is your home postcode? _____

(We are interested in proximity to transport links and green space in the area which you live. We will NOT use this information to contact you)

Thank you for completing the questionnaire

Appendix B: Aspirations interview analysis coding frame

Code	Definition	Example
Aspiration for connectedness		
Family - partner	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have to a partner (girlfriend/boyfriend, husband/wife, fiancé etc.)	_"And you need to have a union with that person so I think having a person you can kind of rely on and start a family with is very important"_
Family - parent	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with someone whom they consider to be their parent	_"I retired really so I could spend more time with mum and look after her a bit more"_
Family - child	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with someone whom they consider their child	_"Yeah I, I think it's important to give your children, especially when they're younger, the time that you can give them"_
Family - sibling	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with someone whom they consider their sister or brother	_"My brother, I see my brother at work all the time which is nice but again it's in the work environment, he's got 4 kids so he's doing, so I would just like to spend more time, because sometimes I go to see my family and they're, they're watching TV"_
Family – general	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with their family in general (no specific members or names listed)	_"And I know that if you had, you know, if you come out of hospital or something if you've got friends or family your recovery rate is meant to be better because you've got those relationships. But I think it's really, yeah, really important"_
Family - grandchild	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with someone whom they consider their grandchild	_"We've now finally managed to get her a flat not too far away from here, which we've managed to set up, because there are tensions, you know, if you've, if you're living in a house with your daughter who's_

		got a child and it's difficult. But we've now got that minimum of space between us and her, she's now living in her own flat and, you know, we're hoping to be able to support her and him and to make sure that she gets all the advantages she needs to be able to carry out this great task really, which is bringing somebody up"
Family – other	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with any other kind of family member, such as cousin, aunt, uncle etc.	*"So that's really like something I would, I want to be able to, you know, tell my cousins, my friends, my family, you know, oh well I went to, you know, an African desert and stuff like that, do you know what I mean"*
Work - client	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with a client at work	*"I think ultimately as a human being I, I think the most, kind of the ultimate thing that you might want to aspire to is to leave a mark in the world that you live in ...I guess that is probably why I'm in probation at the moment, because doing stuff like that is meaningful"*
Work - co-worker	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with a co-worker	*"Yeah so that's, it's really the route I want to go down on. I love football, I enjoy coaching and the main thing I enjoy is the social interaction in it, with the players or the children, I love the social interaction from it and just, rather than sitting behind a desk all day I'm out there running around, rather than being static, I just love being on the move and the football, obviously it's a great industry to be in. There's a chance to earn good money, be stable, you work your way up, so"*
Social – close friend	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with someone they consider to be a friend or a close friend	*" I don't mind going to the theatre or the cinema on my own because you don't talk there but to, to share things, I want to continue to have my friends around me so that I can share experiences"*

Social - acquaintance	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with someone they consider an acquaintance	*"So I do get a bit itchy if I don't do anything after a couple of days but I also think for me for hockey I played with a team so besides the fact that I'm exercising, I'm socialising, speaking to other people, getting out and about. If I'm feeling stressed it's a good way to just let it all go, bash a hockey ball around, so rather than just having a bit more of a balance, there's a lot more things that it can offer you, so"*
Community – neighbour/community member	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with a neighbour or a member of their community	*"You have an idea you can share with your neighbour and you can build on it, extend it to the community, you know, and it is important"*
Community – general	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have to their community in general	*"... in volunteering and things like that and go to different organisations in the community and things like that. That's, that's what I want, you know, my aspirations I suppose are for the future, for my job"*
Othering - like me	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have someone who is similar or the same as them	*"Somebody, you wouldn't discount just because they weren't of a similar, it sounds really snobbish to say, but a similar social standing and, you know, hadn't, but at my age the alarm bells would start to ring a bit"*
Othering - not like me	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with someone who is different, not like them or other.	*"I like meeting people and I like the pleasure of actually meeting new people and discovering people in other countries"*
Unknown people – in the city	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with someone who they do not know, i.e. a stranger, that they encounter in their city	*"I've recently taken to cycling so I would perhaps like to do more of that I'm going to join a cycling club, when I get a bit more proficient I'm going to join a cycling club, I've looked into one that has a mixture of age groups, I don't want to be with all young people or all old people but I think that young people who mix with old people get"*

		a lot from it and the old people who mix with younger people get a lot from that as well"
Unknown people – outside the city	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with someone who they do not know, i.e. a stranger, that they encounter outside of their city	*"I like meeting people and I like the pleasure of actually meeting new people and discovering people in other countries"*
No one	Any an aspiration for separating themselves from others and doing something alone or being alone	*"You know, one wants one thing, one wants another, can you do this, can you do that, you know, there's never sort of times when you sort of think oh I'll just sit here and do nothing all day. No, I don't, I can't remember the last day I've done that, that's what I mean by more time for me"*
No actor specified	Any reference to a connection they aspire to have with another person where no actor is specified	*"You can have a bit of happiness and fun. You can also definitely help others. So that, I suppose that's probably the key thing for, maybe that should be up there and link with everything. Maybe that should be at number one then"*
Experience of connectedness		
Family - partner	Any reference to a connection they have to a partner (girlfriend/boyfriend, husband/wife, fiancé etc.)	*"I've got, I've got a partner, a husband, you know, and, you know, family of my own to sort out and, you know, they're all coming from all directions"*
Family - parent	Any reference to a connection they have with someone whom they consider to be their parent	*"... because I've been brought up in a family environment, I've got 2 sisters who I don't live with but my dad's always brought me up to, you know, we've been going to the seaside and going on holidays"*

Family - child	Any reference to a connection they have with someone whom they consider their child	*"Yeah, yeah, I've got two children so being able to be here, be at home more for them because I feel quite guilty when I go off to work"*
Family - sibling	Any reference to a connection they have with someone whom they consider their sister or brother	*"My brother, I see my brother at work all the time which is nice but again it's in the work environment, he's got 4 kids so he's doing, so I would just like to spend more time, because sometimes I go to see my family and they're, they're watching TV"*
Family – general	Any reference to a connection they have with their family in general (no specific members or names listed)	*"My brother, I see my brother at work all the time which is nice but again it's in the work environment, he's got 4 kids so he's doing, so I would just like to spend more time, because sometimes I go to see my family and they're, they're watching TV"*
Family - grandchild	Any reference to a connection they have with someone whom they consider their grandchild	*"We've now finally managed to get her a flat not too far away from here, which we've managed to set up, because there are tensions, you know, if you've, if you're living in a house with your daughter who's got a child and it's difficult. But we've now got that minimum of space between us and her, she's now living in her own flat and, you know, we're hoping to be able to support her and him and to make sure that she gets all the advantages she needs to be able to carry out this great task really, which is bringing somebody up"*
Family – other	Any reference to a connection they have with any other kind of family member, such as cousin, aunt, uncle etc.	*"... even like my, my nephew, he plays football at the moment and because I was the one who was giving him encouragement a few years ago, tried to help him out as well"*
Work - client	Any reference to a connection they have with a client at work	*"Because I mean sometimes I can be doing, I mean I had an event last weekend, it was like 2500 people we had and that's a lot of people, you know, to deal with"*

Work - co-worker	Any reference to a connection they have with a co-worker	*"I've got a lot of good friends that surround my job, there's a group of us that go and do jobs and we pass jobs to one another and it involves a lot of really close friends"*
Social – close friend	Any reference to a connection they have with someone they consider to be a friend or a close friend	*"There was meself and the 3 girls and then my friend and her daughter and then we got a chap friend, he came with us as well and we went to Morocco"*
Social - acquaintance	Any reference to a connection they have with someone they consider an acquaintance	*"Because I find it quite a pleasant thing to do and to go down the gym for an hour, two hours, and then go for a coffee or go, so tonight you've even got the opportunity of there might be a few of us go down the pub, then I find it quite a social sort of thing to do"*
Community – neighbour/community member	Any reference to a connection they have with a neighbour or a member of their community	*"And in the summer we can go and sit out there, we've got our neighbour Karen, she's making it look lovely, she welcomes neighbours to go and sit down and chat"*
Community – general	Any reference to a connection they have to their community in general	*"It's quite a nice community, we all see them, they see us. You know, my sons look out and they can see them trampolining in the garden, look mum they're on the trampoline, and it's quite nice, you know, it's quite a nice mix, it's quite a nice mix"*
Othering - like me	Any reference to a connection they have someone who is similar or the same as them	*"You come to London because you're ambitious. You come to London because you want to be with like-minded people and it's exciting when you're young, you know"*
Othering - not like me	Any reference to a connection they have to someone who is different, not like them or other.	*"I like meeting people and I like the pleasure of actually meeting new people and discovering people in other countries"*

Unknown people – in the city	Any reference to a connection they have to someone who they do not know, i.e. a stranger they encounter in their city	*"I'll walk down the road, I'll talk to anyone, I'll sort of be social with someone but some people find it a bit weird, you know, or a bit scary if you're talking to someone you don't know"*
Unknown people – outside the city	Any reference to a connection they have to someone who they do not know, i.e. a stranger they encounter outside of their city	*"I like meeting people and I like the pleasure of actually meeting new people and discovering people in other countries"*
No one	Any reference to an experience of separating themselves from others and doing something alone or being alone	*"No I don't think so, I think that's quite heavy, isn't it, initially, but it's really important to me actually because I just don't want to be on my own, that's quite sad but you put up a charade and then you come back and then you hide behind, I'm quite chatty with my customers and all that sort of carry-on, only you just think, ah"*
No actor specified	Any reference to a connection they have experienced to another person but they do not specify who this person is.	*"Well basically I mean I get up in the mornings and I sort of have to basically put my time around everybody else. I work through the night sometimes and my hours are long and I have to work constantly to please everybody else, everybody else has to come first"*
Tangible Aspiration		
Home/house	Any reference to aspiring for a home, in the physical or emotional sense.	*"I want my own house that me and my husband or whatever have kind of bought together and just have your own space"*
Job/Career	Any reference to an aspiration of finding a job, changing job or progressing in a career	*"Ok basically because I've done a degree and at the moment I'm not finding any jobs, my aspirations would be to actually find full-time employment"*
Money	Any reference to aspiring to have, make or win money.	*"their demands get more and more and we just feel that to fulfil all their needs, more money would be helpful"*

Education	Any reference to aspiring to gain further education	*"Well I've put children's education which, you know, obviously we've been talking about but that's, I don't know whether that's appropriate, that's just something that came straight to my mind"*
Family	Any reference to an aspiration of having, starting or growing a family	*"The 2nd one I put family. I mean I guess that's the same for everyone. You know, you get to a stage in your life where you do want to settle down"*
Marriage/partner	Any reference to wanting to get married, or have a partner	*"So it's just, it's just timing really when we do that because I think it's, it might be very old-fashioned and traditional but it's what we both, it's the one thing I've always wanted, which was a happy marriage like my parents had"*
Health	Any reference to aspiring to good health, often related to having a heathy diet, doing enough exercising, fighting a disease or preventing any illnesses that may happen in the future. Often talked about in relation to aging	*"A healthy lifestyle and by that I mean free from serious illnesses. I've got to be, I'm 65"*
Garden	Any reference to aspiring to have any kind of garden or make any changes to the garden they have (often talked about in relation to having more garden space)	*"And I've seen like my friends and that, they've got houses with gardens and I quite like that idea of having that little extra bit of private outside space which you can call your own and that, and not have people looking in and all that"*
Nature	Any reference to an aspiration to spend more time in nature, or to have a closer connection to nature	*"Doing something near to nature, I think that's what I mean. Because I do a lot of gardening, I grow me own vegetables and so, you know, back to nature"*

Retirement	Any reference to an aspiration related to retirement.	*"So all that wraps up together really, your pension, your retirement, your holidays, your leisure time, it all comes together, you know, you can't do one without the other"*
Helping others	Any reference to aspiring to help anyone else. This includes, but is not limited to, family members, members of the community, and strangers.	*"So I mean my focus in my life I find is supporting others. Obviously I support myself and my own needs before I can, fulfil my own needs before I can fulfil other people's needs but my aim in life is to kind of support others and help others"*
Material good	Any reference to aspiring to a material good, such as a new car or a new pair shoes.	*"It's a new car, we drastically need a new car"*
Activity	Any reference to an aspiration for learning or participating in an activity. This includes sports and hobbies.	*"So that, that was an aspiration really, I mean I just, I think I'd be happy just to dive again now"*
Travel	Any reference to wanting to travel, go on holiday or see other parts of the world	*"I probably want to go travelling before I, you know, have a family and settle down"*
Emigration	Any reference to wanting to live and/or work abroad	*"I'd like to emigrate to New Zealand. My partner's from New Zealand, funnily before we met I'd always wanted to emigrate to the southern hemisphere, whether it be Australia or New Zealand"*
Good society	Any reference to wanting a better society for themselves and others. This includes both social and political aspirations	*"To have a stable society. Just to have, to know what's going to happen because at the moment I don't think we've got a stable Government"*
Aspiration for others	Any aspirations that they have for other people. This could include a good education for their	*"Yes so I would like my, an aspiration for the future is for my children to be healthy and happy"*

	children, or higher level of wellbeing for their parents or more jobs for young people in general	
Space	Any reference to an aspiration for more physical space	*"No not really just the, just a bigger house would be nice really. Just more space (more space), yeah more space. Yeah, a nice area and more space I think, yeah."*
Intangible aspiration		
Relaxation/leisure	Any reference to wanting to relax or participate more in leisure activities	*"I want to, you know, go out for a nice bottle of wine and have a nice holiday and stuff like that, you know"*
Comfort	Any reference to aspiring to be comfortable (financially, physically, etc.) or for more comfort in their lives	*"Enough money to live comfortably. Yeah I want to be able to do all that and not lie awake at night thinking where's the money coming from"*
Security	Any reference to wanting more security (financial, job, physical etc.)	*"...I'm now thinking of going into teaching because it's kind of a safe career"*
Autonomy/ independence	Any reference to wanting to do something on their own, or for themselves (such as working, or living etc)	*"I've just started my own AV business as well so I work for myself which was an aspiration of mine. If you'd have asked me a few years ago I would have said to work for myself so I've got that far"*
Freedom	Any reference to wanting to be free of someone or something	*"I like quiet times as well, I mean Tuesday nights I really enjoy because Ray goes out and I just get to be able to sit here and not have to do anything I don't want to"*
Challenge	Any reference to wanting to be challenged, to work hard at something.	*"...when you're actually at home I think you're worse than if you're actually working because if you're working you, you do your job of you do your college thing and you come in and you feel invigorated"*

Success/achievement	Any reference to wanting to be successful or to achieve something	*"I always like to look back at the end of the day and think I've achieved something, I've got my work done"*
Fame	Any reference to an aspiration for fame	*"That's another thing, you know, possibly do I want to become a writer because I want to get that sort of side of fame that comes with it rather than sort of my own personal achievement, I'm not sure"*
Self-development/ growth	Any reference to an aspiration of self-development, learning or personal growth	*"before I start a career because I, also yeah I think an apprenticeship is another good way to, or an internship, is another good way to learn something because I don't quite feel ready, you know, just to jump into a job"*
Balance	Any reference to wanting more balance in life	*"... so there is a constant guilt and trying to get that balance I suppose of, you know, keeping all the balls juggling in the air really"*
Creation	Any reference to wanting to create something, for example something related to art, design or technology	*"I guess the first thing that came to mind was painting, I like painting and I do paint but I just never have the time or never, you know, I sort of start things and then I don't finish them"*
Novelty	Any reference to wanting to experience something new or different. For example, new cultures, or wanting to meet different people	*"... you're social, you have fun, you don't spend a lot of money and it's something that you enjoy and then you meet new people. And that's something that I really do like"*
Status	Any reference to wanting to achieve a certain status in life	*"we live in a time where status is everything in society, you know, if you can't contribute, if you're not doing something towards the benefit of society then you're kind of like frowned upon or deemed"*
Time	Any reference to an aspiration for more time for anything they want to do	*"Oh God, I don't know whether it's just being a parent but you always feel like there isn't any time for you, there really isn't that much time for me"*

Impact	Any reference to having an impact or making a difference to something or someone outside of themselves	*"With teaching obviously you get something out of it as you see children succeed"*
Wellbeing	Any reference to aspiring to be happy or content or having high levels of wellbeing	*"I've put well-being and peace, and peace of mind because I think, you know, we're all guilty of just rushing around and not"*
Connection type		
Sharing	Any reference to aspiring or experiencing mutual support or sharing of resources or experiences with others.	*"Like it's all good to have all the money and, you know, the success and stuff like that but to have no-one to share with and to have no-one to, you know, to be with"*
Supporting	Any reference to supporting or aspiring to support others, such as children, either financially, emotionally, physically etc.	*"I retired really so I could spend more time with mum and look after her a bit more"*
Being supported	Any reference to receiving or aspiring to receive support from others, with financially, emotionally, physically etc.	*"Because they can, they can be very, very supportive as well and you need them so definitely I feel like family's definitely a key thing in becoming further in life"*
Being acknowledged/ recognised	Any reference to being acknowledged or recognised by others, or aspiring to be acknowledged or recognised by others	*"I'm earning more than I was when I used to work in sales so acceptance is a big thing for me and knowing that people appreciate what I do, especially at work"*
Wellbeing		
Negative	Any reference to any negative wellbeing, such as stress, sadness, anger, dread or worry	*"...gets you away from all the stresses of life (stresses of life), yeah, yeah. Stresses of going to work, paying the bills, that's where you come into that one, work"*

Positive	Any reference to any positive wellbeing, such as happiness, contentment, excitement or hope	*"I'm not expecting nothing from helping others but I feel happy when I'm doing that, maybe"*
Wellbeing as the absence of illbeing	Any reference to positive wellbeing that results from a lack of illbeing	*"I know it's not a secure job so I'd like to just have a job that I really enjoy doing and getting paid enough money to, to survive as well as probably to go on holiday and not to worry as much as where the, you know, just not worry about where the next penny's coming from or if I can afford to, to do this or if I can afford to do that"*
Place		
Home	Any reference to the physical home (such as a house or flat), either an experience or an aspiration that has or might take place there	*"I like quiet times as well, I mean Tuesday nights I really enjoy because Ray goes out and I just get to be able to sit here and not have to do anything I don't want to"*
Workplace	Any reference of the physical workplace, either an experience or an aspiration that has or might take place there	*"I want to be able to go to work and enjoy my job, which I do, that's the one thing in my life I really, really enjoy doing"*
Public city space	Any reference to public space within the city, and any experience or an aspiration that has or might take place there	*"I'll walk down the road, I'll talk to anyone, I'll sort of be social with someone but some people find it a bit weird, you know, or a bit scary if you're talking to someone you don't know"*
Outside city space	Any reference to spaces outside of the city (i.e. on holidays), and any experience or aspiration that has or might take place there.	*"Well first is a picture is just of some hills, trees and animals, I just want life outside of the city, I'm not a big city fan really. I was born outside of the city and one day I want to move back"*
Miscellaneous		

Nostalgia	Any sign of nostalgia in their description of experiences, such as the idea that things used to be different or better in the past	*"in the olden days you wouldn't get your mum and dad scrounging on benefits, you'd just, they'd just be at work and so would your nan and granddad be at work"*
Weather	Any reference to good or bad weather	*"I think that the history of Rome, the architecture, and the weather's good over there as well, the weather's quite important really, if you're going to live in a city it's nice to have a bit of sunshine and you can walk around, you know, if it's raining it's miserable"*
Other	Any other extract that might be significant but does not fit under any other code	*"I don't know. I think in a lot of ways it's the growing food is the job, I want to do that somewhere, I want to do that out in the wild a bit more, sort of out of the city and in wild countryside. I can see them, they go hand in hand. A family, I see that as a bit more, it's not something I can make happen, the other two I can make happen, that one, you can't make it, can you. Obviously you have to make the family but you can't set that as your goal to do so I think that's the hardest one of all of them to achieve"*
Schedule/time frame	Any reference to the order or time frame of aspirations	*"Yeah, because basically yeah everything that I do it's like a plan so I basically I think to myself if I'm able to do number 1 then number 2 and 3 will be able to follow after that. So it's basically setting those targets, I've already go those targets in my head so those are the things that I think of, that I will be able to pursue once I've committed to number 1"*

Appendix C: Friendship interview analysis coding frame

Code	Definition	Example
Quality		
Reliable/there for you	Any reference of friendship and being reliable, being able to count on friends or friends that are available to you.	*'Basically what I think about companionship is having a friend always, even if they're, you're not speaking to them or you're not with them or around them, you know that they're there for you'*
Honest	Any reference to honesty in friendship or between friends	*'They are very honest. If I were, for example, if I was at work and something had happened that I didn't like. If the boss had asked me to do something or if the boss had said no way. You know if what I was doing was wrong or whatever or if... A friend I would run the scenario through them and they would be extremely honest you know [name] your boss is right or she is not right they would just be honest'*
Trust	Any reference to trust in friendships or between friends. Includes trusting that a friend has your best interest at heart, trust that they will tell you the truth or trust that they will keep a secret for you	*'That trust comes in as well, that comes into the trust, being selfless, that you can trust that they will be there for you whenever you need them and it's that companionship that they give you and the understanding that they have about your needs, all of this combined in that selflessness'*
Help/support	Any reference to supportiveness and helpfulness being a part of friendship. Being on your side, giving you support you no matter what. Also	*'And then the last box I put helping each other out, so I think that's quite an important thing of like friendships really, not just like the ones that I have but for everyone, it's good to have people who can help you in times of like need'*

	includes the idea that friends can empower you or support you by giving you confidence or strength	
Loyal	Any reference to loyalty in friendship or between friends	*'Loyalty in one to one is extremely important, you'd almost go to war for your friends, that's the strength of feeling, I've got five friends who I know would go to war for me if I really needed them to'*
Loving/caring	Any reference to a friendship and having love and care for that friend. Includes mentions of selfless actions done for friends	*'So you feel that love and that closeness and that selflessness from them'*
Empathy/ understanding	Any reference to a friend being empathetic or understanding	*'Yeah, understanding, I think for someone to understand you, even if they've not lived in your life or walked in your shoes they understand what you mean and just to be there to understand'*
Thoughtful/ respect	Any reference to a friend being thoughtful, respectful or considerate of your needs or situation. Also includes reference to being thought of, remembered by a friend or held in someone's thoughts or prayers.	*I've got all my friends who are texting me and saying how is your cousin, how is he, how are you guys, you know, it's really nice, it's that companionship that you know they're remembering you, you're in their memories, you know, you're being remembered by somebody, somebody has that longing for you, that yearning, you know, about you and feels that for you.*
Likable	Any reference to a friend being someone you like/ get on with/ gel with	*'You have to actually like them as people'*
Activity		
Doing things	Any reference to doing things with friends, i.e. leisure time activities (cinema, concerts, travelling)	*'you do things together, so you might go to concerts or go out to dinner or go to the pub or watch football games which I do quite a lot'*

Fun	Any reference to having fun, laughing and enjoying oneself with friends	*'I'd just say like even like on the holidays we go on, we just spend the whole time laughing really, so, yeah. Not really too much detail but that's just what we do'*
Talking/listening	Any reference to talking to and being listened to by a friend. Includes the role of friends as sounding boards, or ability to give another perspective. Often related to hearing about or talking things through that might be difficult. Also includes confiding in and venting to friends	*'Like whether it's with work and you're a bit stressed so you've got somebody that you can kind of vent to or if you're in a relationship and you're having rough times you can vent to and talk bad about your partner and all of that stuff'*
Banter	Any reference to having banter with friends and making fun of each other (for example, taking the mick, taking the piss or ripping into someone)	*'Well I think especially with lads, like we like to take the piss out of each other a lot and don't let each other live stuff down so yeah we just tend to really rip each other really'*
Socialising	Any reference to socialising with friends or within friendships	*'when I'm not tired I want to be socialising really, making the most of my free time and yeah, I've got a good group of mates to do that with'*
Type		
True /real	Any reference to real, genuine or true friend	*'Now I've got friendships that are really, really strong and they have stood the test of time for 50 years and true friends strengthen, bit like stars, can't always see them but you know they're there'*
Best/close	Any reference to a close friend or a best friend	*'Just because you don't see them doesn't mean to say that you're not really, really close friends'*

Bad	Any reference to someone being a bad friend or displaying bad friend behaviours such as gossip, betrayal, bad influence, rivalry	*'Well, obviously I have had a few friends and then some friends have turned out not to be good and some have turned to be really good. It make you look, obviously, if you have a bad friend and they do something behind your back or upset you or something. It just makes you doubt, like, for you to trust your other friends'*
Different types	Any reference to different types, levels or tiers of friends/friendship	*'So it's different types of relationships that require different types of, I can't think of the word really but they require different levels depending on the situation, of support I guess'*
Family/partner	Any reference to a partner or a family member (e.g. sibling, mother) being a friend	*'It can be with family members but, you know, I've got a brilliant friendship with my sister, you know, I've got three more sisters but with one of them especially I have a brilliant friendship and again in that there's, you know, every time I need to call her or, you know, like some of my closest friends she's similar to them, she doesn't feel like a sister, she feels more like a best friend'*
Group	Any reference to a friendship group or being with or having a group of friends	*'when I'm not tired I want to be socialising really, making the most of my free time and yeah, I've got a good group of mates to do that with'*
Process		
Reconnecting	Any reference to reconnecting with friends, talking after not having been in touch for a long time, sometimes linked to picking up where you left off	*'You can pick up a phone after not speaking to somebody for a long time and what I love is that first opening sentence, how lovely to hear from you, instead of why haven't you rung me'*
Mutual	Any reference to a friendship that is mutual, where things go both way	*'And yeah I should have put something else in there which was like I guess two-sided, so reciprocal so most relationships in terms of friendships, they're quite reciprocated. They may not be, I don't*

		think any relationship is evenly balanced, there's always kind of one person that's slightly invested more than that other in any sort of relationship but I do feel like there is some sort of reciprocation'
Support		
Practical	Any reference to giving or receiving practical support. For example, help with childcare or getting a lift	*'So it's those sorts of things that are, that's like practical, like physical support, but then you've got friends that provide like emotional support say if you're going through a difficult time'*
Informational	Any reference to giving or receiving informational support such as advice	*'Help. Its, if you need them to help you. If you need them to, not necessarily to loan you money but to give you advice'*
Emotional	Any reference to giving of receive emotional support. For example, a shoulder to cry on	*'So it's those sorts of things that are, that's like practical, like physical support, but then you've got friends that provide like emotional support say if you're going through a difficult time'*
Companionship	Any reference to companionship and friendship. Includes having someone to do things with or to spend time with. Also includes a type of support that comes from just someone's physical presence	*'Companionship you can have with your neighbours but they might not necessarily be your friends, they are acquaintances. I see the lollipop lady, she says hello to me, we give her chocolates and cards every holiday when we break up and she's really loving and yet she's like company, I see her, she smiles and she says hello, we talk, we have a little bit of banter but the trust is with a friend that you are closest to, you have a bond and you share all your secrets with and you trust them with what you've given them'*
Without asking	Any reference to receiving or giving support that without asking for it or having expected it	*'I thought it was so sweet, how lovely is that, you know, she walked in minutes after I'd walked in and came to see me and then brought me a big meal for the whole, my husband and all the children to have, it was just so selfless, it was so lovely. She didn't have to and I only*

		called her just to keep, you know, just to tell her how I was and what had happened and it was just so lovely'
Identity		
Role/responsibility	Any reference to a social role played and/or the responsibility that comes with that role. For example, parent/boss/employee etc.	*'So yeah time without responsibility, when I don't have the children so obviously I have to be responsible for myself but it's just me, I don't have to think ok I need to make sure that I've got this lunch ready or that dinner ready or I've got to change that nappy'*
Being yourself	Any reference to being able to just be yourself, see you for who you really are and are able to disclose personal feelings and thoughts	*' I think with friends, they know you for who you are and they see beyond superficial things like, I don't know, fashion or maybe you don't want to dress up or maybe you just don't really want to have a tidy house when they turn up, you know'*
Know you well	Any reference to friends being people that know you well, not just superficially.	*'Because a friend knows something a bit more personal about you, he's kind of ingratiated into your life and like your family'*
Absence of others		
Loneliness	Any reference to feelings of loneliness. This is a subjective state	*'Well like my best friend, she lost her dog after ten years a week ago and she was really upset so I was kind of having a conversation with her most days about this, you know, asking her if she was all right, she was saying that she was feeling really lonely'*
Alone	Any reference to being or others being alone, not having other people around to talk to or being isolated. This is an objective state.	*'I can't imagine sitting in a movie theatre and watching a film with popcorn, just on my own'*

Lack of friends	Any reference to not having any friends or many friends around. For example, moving to a new place and not having friends there	*'I know people around me who have, just recently a friend came yesterday and she's new to this city and she hasn't got many friends'*
Source		
Childhood	Any reference to friendships established in childhood	*'I've got a friend that we've been friends since we were 12 so it's like 16 years, 16 years of friendship so when I see him graduate from university and buying his first car, things like that, it's just like wow, I remember you being 12 years old and now you've got your car, now you've got a degree, so it feels good, those sorts of things'*
Education	Any reference to friendships established during education, for example, at school or at university	*Then also I have female friends I went to school with that I am really close with*
Work	Any reference to friendships established at work	*'you've demarcated them in that sort of your work friend'*
Family	Any reference to friendships that are based around the family. Either family friends or friends met through their children	*'And family, family friends actually and we've just kept in touch, so it's that sort of, the inner circle is the actual core people that I would always think of if I'm arranging something'*
Community/group	Any reference to friendships being established through a community or interest group	*'I'm a film maker, I do film making and photography and so is the other friend, we started off a film club together, we made a few film projects together and the increasingly we were working together quite closely, which means we're spending a lot of time with each other and criticising each other's work and working on projects together and sharing equipment, ideas etc. So he's a very nice guy, so we became beyond just a project partner, he's become a very close friend'*

Time		
No time	Any reference to struggling to have enough time to cultivate friendships. Often due to work and/or family commitments	*'All my friends are lovely, they understand things if I say oh I've got the three children, mum's not well so I can't leave them so might not be able to catch up for a few months, even small things like that so I can talk to them with Facebook, we can text each other, we can, you know, we talk on Facebook or WhatsApp and all of that but we can't meet up as often as we'd like to'*
Investment	Any reference to connecting with friends as being an investment, to taking time which could be needed or used for other purposes	*'I just have, like my wife, she has, she's got friends that go back years and I've seen, you know, I've observed people who have had really long friendships going back to when they were kids and I suppose a little part of me kind of thinks, well I suppose envious in a sense but for me personally I find them quite a lot of maintenance. You know, I put all my effort into my family and I don't have much time left over for maintaining friendships'*
Have time	Any reference to having the time or making the time to spend with friends or be there for them	*'Yeah just for them to be able to give me time if not, for example, the moment I phone them, to say I'll call you back very shortly and even just that, that in itself again is giving me time, making time out of their time to be there for me. Really I think that's a true friend, really true friendship'*
Technology		
Not the same	Any reference to connecting with friends via technology not being the same as face to face connection	*'Oh well I don't know, I just think you can meet face to face or have a conversation, as opposed to emails or Facebook is similar, I know it's not an email but there is more to it but I still don't think it can replace conversation as such. Conversation is instant, reactions are instant and you can, you can judge from people's body language,*

		faces, if they're enjoying the conversation etc., where in the other mediums I don't think you can'
Mention	Any reference to any type of technology, such as mobile phones, Facebook, WhatsApp, voice calls, emails etc.	*'All my friends are lovely, they understand things if I say oh I've got the three children, mum's not well so I can't leave them so might not be able to catch up for a few months, even small things like that so I can talk to them with Facebook, we can text each other, we can, you know, we talk on Facebook or WhatsApp and all of that but we can't meet up as often as we'd like to'*
Sharing		
Experience	Any reference to sharing experiences with friends	*'And then it's quite cool because people experience things differently because everyone is different so somebody might like go to the Beyoncé concert, like we went to the concert and someone might be wowed by the visuals and someone else might be wowed by the musicians and then other people might be wowed by Beyoncé sort of thing, so it's quite nice when you go somewhere and then you get other people's perspective on the same experience that you're enjoying'*
Interest	Any reference to sharing interests or hobbies with friends	*'Like often I've had friends where we have very much lots of stuff not in common but then there seems to be one channel of something that you can both identify with, so maybe a hobby or something like that, that brings you together'*
History	Any reference to a shared history with friends	*'And as you get older that carries on, carries over into your 30s, carries over into your 40s, that's what I call shared history'*

Values	Any reference to sharing the same values as friends	*'And I think there's something about, sometimes if you've got shared values and outlooks but also sometimes slightly shared backgrounds, you know, you've come from the same types of communities and things like that I think gives you a, you know, you've gone through similar experiences'*
Humour	Any reference to sharing a sense of humour with friends	*'Well obviously you'll have say similar interests and little things like that, you know, like have the same kind of sense of humour, all those kind of peripheral things I suppose, things that aren't, they aren't fundamental'*
Feelings/emotions		
Negative – worry/stress	Any reference to the feeling of worry, stress or anxiety	*'in times of difficulty or, you know, like stressful situations that you feel like this person is somebody that can be trusted, that can be relied upon'*
Negative – cold/distant	Any reference to the feeling or being cold or distant to others	*'There are those people. Fortunately I have met plenty of them from experience but yeah now I don't keep too many friends, I keep about 5 friends, like my hand, and those 5 friends I keep distant and enemies closer'*
Negative -uncomfortable	Any reference to the feeling of being uncomfortable, on edge or feeling awkward or being embarrassed or feeling shame	*'she said you might feel awkward there because it's in a church and she said it's very religious so you might feel awkward and I trusted her when she said that, instead of feeling left out I trusted her, thinking it was better that she'd rather me not feel awkward there'*
Negative – sad/upsetting	Any reference to feeling sad or upset or feeling pain	*'If you look unwell, if you look sad, oh you know how are you feeling, just to keep, you know, but not to badger but just to be there for you and just in spirit that you can feel the sense that they're around'*

Negative – jealous	Any reference to jealousy	'*A real friend won't be jealous, they'll want you to see you blossom, they want to see you do as well as you can possibly do*'
Positive – nice/good	Any reference to something feeling or being nice, good, lovely or pleasant	'*It was just that lovely, and they just help you get through things which otherwise you couldn't, you know*'
Positive – comfort	Any reference to the comfort	'*Comfort. Well, you know, I don't think you can place too high an (sic) importance on the feeling of comfort that you and any individual gets from a friendship*'
Positive – happiness/joy	Any reference to the feeling of happiness or joy	'*Well it's a joy to have friends who do that. There are many people without friends and you think well what is it about you, well it's about human nature*'
Positive - relaxed	Any reference to feeling relaxed	'*It could be more relaxed and yeah, just make you feel more at ease*'
Positive - excited	Any reference to the feeling of excitement or positive anticipation	'*I wouldn't trust to tell her certain things because, I don't know, she could tell my mum or, you know, maybe go and tell her friends because she's like just a teenager age so they're quite excited about all the new experiences that they're going through and stuff*'
Positive - connected	Any reference to the feeling connected to others, or accepted or welcomed by others	'*So it's just a feeling of connection and, you know, knowing that person very, very well*'
Diversity		
Intergenerational	Any reference to intergenerational contact, for example between young and old	'*I've got some good friends who are a bit younger, a bit older, but those that are the same sort of age you've gone through the same stuff. Yeah*'

Intercultural	Any reference to intercultural, inter-religions, international or inter-ethnic contact	*'I've got friends who are Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, all sorts, and I think because Birmingham is so multicultural and it's just brilliant, you know, that everyone can understand one another and have that understanding'*
Closeness/distance		
emotional	Any reference to being emotionally close or distant with others. To having a level of openness and emotional intimacy or not having that	*'Or they show emotions if you're upset, they might be upset or, you know, or if you're happy they're happy so they have that sort of emotional connection with you I think, friends'*
geographic	Any reference to being geographically close or far away from friends. For example, living on the same street	*'And I've drawn a picture of a globe, my house, other people scattered around so I've got friends in America, somebody who was in the Philippines although he's now back in England and friends scattered around the UK as well so there's probably five people in that category. And because they're scattered sometimes they're people I see once a year and yet because they're long-term friends'*
Lifespan changes		
Less/worse friends	Reference to having fewer friends as one gets older. Often related to having sifted through friends and only keeping those that are good friends. Reference to it being harder to make friends at a certain stage in life	*' God the amount of stuff I've seen and heard and I think when you get older you want less drama so you kind of hang on to the good ones and you kind of detach yourself from the bad ones and if it's a messy kind of break-up as it were with the friendship then so be it'*
More/better friends	Reference to the idea that social connections improve with age or that you have more friends as you get older or better quality friendships	*'Now I've got friendships that are really, really strong and they have stood the test of time for 50 years and true friends strengthen'*

Other	Reference to any other changes across the lifespan	*'I guess that kind of trait in friendships develops as you get older so when you get older you kind of, you still have that sort of, that sort of trait or attribute in your mind about how you pick the people that you're close to, so you kind of think oh yeah I've got to be able to trust this person with this secret'*
Breakdown		
End of friendship	Any reference to friendships ending or breaking	*'if they don't show me loyalty or if there's disloyalty of any sort I'm afraid friendship is broken'*
Breakdown in family	Any reference to a breakdown within the family. For example, divorce or death	*'And I remember they were lovely, they kept that trust even though they came down and saw my mum regularly because of my dad passing away, they kept that trust and didn't mention it and didn't act strange around me or, you know, and it was just lovely that they could do that'*
Other relationships		
Family	Any reference to a family member. For example, wife/husband, brother/sister, mother/father	*'friends that know you but I would say like a lot of the friends that I know, they know a lot about me so they know about my family, they know my family so those are people I consider friends'*
Partner	Any reference to a romantic partner. For example, husband/wife, fiancé/fiancée, boyfriend/girlfriend	*'I mean I've been with my wife for 8 years and I, you know, my loyalty is with my wife'*
Other	Any reference to any other type of person. For example, work colleague, acquaintance, neighbour etc.	*'They're very rare to find, people who actually listen and not voice their opinion when not asked but that's counselling, isn't it, you can't make a friend of a counsellor'*

Miscellaneous		
Sayings/clichés	Any mention of clichés or sayings. For example, you choose your friends not your family or you can count your true friends on one hand.	*'But it's like the old thing, you don't choose your family, you choose your friends, you know, you want to spend your life with so there's different areas of friendship, yeah'*
Gender	Any mention of friendships in which gender is specified. Includes perceived differences between male and female friendships.	*'Yes, in the 1st box, the first thing that sort of sprung to mind was fun. The reason I did that is most of the things I do with my friends tend to be fun, whether that's sort of like going out or watching football or playing football so it's always something, yeah or like we go on like lads holidays and all that kind of thing, so it's all pretty fun really'*
Alcohol	Any mention of alcohol	*'Yeah it's like when you drink you tend to lose your inhibitions, you tend to not, well it depends, some people react differently depending on what they drink but me, I personally when I drink I tend to sort of chill out'*
Important/essential	Any reference to friends being important, essential or life-enhancing	*'friendships within the workplace is extremely important'*

Appendix D: Weak ties interview analysis coding frame

Code	Definition	Example
Acquaintance		
Positive	Reference to any kind of positive conceptualisation of acquaintances. Often refers to acquaintances being interesting, knowing things you don't. You can learn from them or you can have fun with them. Also includes any reference to acquaintances being of positive value i.e. important	*"So I always find acquaintances quite interesting because with your friends you know their stories, they've been friends for some period of time but with acquaintances you don't know their stories, you don't know they're from, you don't know the sorts of things that they do"*
Negative	Reference to any kind of negative conceptualisation of acquaintances. Often refers to acquaintances being boring, uninteresting people. Often spoken about in relation to pointless or awkward small talk. Also includes any reference to acquaintances being of negative value i.e. unimportant	*"And yeah, or like sometimes I don't drive to work, sometimes I get the train and then you see someone that you know a tiny bit but you don't know that well and there's a reason for it and like you have to talk, you're sat next to them for the whole journey and it's just annoying"*
Not friend for a reason	Acquaintances are people you know and that you have decided are not going to be your friends	*"So with strangers it's always quite interesting to meet someone new or whatever, might turn out to like them, but in terms of acquaintances, they are people you kind of already know a little bit about already and there's a reason you're not really friends with them"*

Appropriate	Reference to keeping an 'appropriate' (physical or emotional) distance from acquaintances	*"So it's an appropriate level of interaction of two or three sentences and that's all it's going to be. And I think if somebody suddenly starts pigeonholing you and engaging you in big long conversations then it almost becomes embarrassing"*
Don't know each other	Reference to the superficial nature of a relationship with an acquaintance or that you don't really know each other	*"I'm probably not that polite to my friends, like we were just discussing before, because you don't really need to be, you know, you just know each other and stuff. But with people that you don't know then yeah, it's better just to be nice to them really"*
Mention of acquaintance	Any other reference to an acquaintance	*"Like an example would be last week one day I got the train to work and saw an acquaintance on the train who I didn't really like, not a very nice person sort of thing, gets in a lot of trouble and I was a bit wary because I know what he's like."*
Stranger		
Negative	Reference to any kind of negative conceptualisation of strangers. Often due to them posing a threat, a risk or being perceived as scary and dangerous. Or sometimes just an as an unpleasant or inconvenience when you have to speak to strangers. Also includes any reference to strangers being of negative value i.e. unimportant	*"we're constantly in a rush, anybody stopping to speak to us, we just feel like, we feel like affronted, oh why is she talking to me, oh why is this old man talking to me"*

Positive	Reference to any kind of positive conceptualisations of strangers. Often in relation to strangers being an opportunity to make life more interesting, fun and/or pleasant. Also includes any reference to acquaintances being of positive value i.e. important	*"So with strangers it's always quite interesting to meet someone new or whatever, might turn out to like them"*
Novelty	Strangers bring novelty to life. They allow for an element of surprise and allow unexpected things to happen	*"if you're just walking down the street but then you could see someone, and like even if they're a bit loud or something but then you think oh no, actually they're just having fun. Or if they talk to you and they're really nice and then you're just like oh yeah you're just having fun, like having a night out or something so then it's just sort of surprising"*
Potential	Reference to meeting a stranger and then keeping in touch and being a potential other strong or weak tie, such as friend, partner, work colleague	*"But with strangers you could be friends or it could be like, it could lead to like a relationship or anything like that"*
Mention of stranger	Any other reference to stranger	*"So in terms of like strangers, you don't know them at all so I think you sort of, well I personally make a point of being maybe more polite than I would to people that I actually know"*
Society		
Insular	Reference to society being insular. People are isolated or cut off from one another	*"Yeah, so I mean I just think that we're more kind of preoccupied and more siloes, with the things that affect us personally and less about the things that affect other people"*

Selfish	Reference to society being selfish and people just looking out for themselves, or being preoccupied with themselves	*"We're just, to be quite frank we're just selfish and we just think about ourselves, we think of what we're going to do, everything is like centred around our own sort of benefit"*
Materialistic	Reference to society being materialistic or consumer focused	*"Your days are spent not helping people or not thinking of others and not, you know, just about yourself, I think we live in a materialistic world anyway and to be, you know, all absorbed and all-encompassing yourself only"*
Multicultural	Reference to society being diverse and/or multicultural	*"And the 3rd one it's very multicultural. When I was in primary school, you know, we didn't have so many faiths, you know, in primary school, there was just a handful of faiths that were in my classroom as I was growing up throughout secondary school, college. However my children growing up now, you have, I'm learning more about faiths, you know, even now and all the different cultures that are coming in"*
Social issue – too many people	Reference to having too many people being in the country (often referencing immigrants) or the country being full.	*"My reaction is, again, this is the sort of country we are, we are too full, there are too many people on this tiny island"*
Social issue - homelessness	Reference to homelessness	*"So yeah sad about the loneliness, and the homeless people, you know, but drugs and alcoholism has taken them completely over now"*

Conceptualisation of social self		
Shy	Reference to being a shy person that keeps to themselves	*"I remember my daughter was too shy and wouldn't say hello but they say morning and hello and you think that's nice"*
Outgoing	Reference to being an outgoing person who likes to talk to other people.	*"Speak to anyone, don't like silence, oh my God yes so I will speak to anyone, I don't like a silence"*
Characterisation of other		
Young people	Mention of young people	*"I will often sort of acknowledge younger people but they are extremely reluctant to interact with you"*
Older people	Mention of older people, the elderly	*"But if you're elderly and you're, you know, in a way your sort of circle is smaller then you have more interaction, need more interaction maybe"*
Foreign/non-white people	Mention of people who are foreign and/or non-white	*"And this is worry actually, I'm really concerned, at the moment particularly the last two nights at Wimbledon Station there have been two huge gangs of youngsters and I'm sorry to say and I am quite racist now, they're all black, youngsters"*
Other	Mention of any other group of people	*"A couple of years ago David Cameron went on record in public saying that it is not for the Muslims to accept the way of life in England but it is the English to accept the way of like the Muslims, like it's their way of life. Um, hold on a second, I don't live in Saudi Arabia or Qatar, from what I*

		remember, from what I still understand, this is still England, yeah, you need to come to terms with respecting and understanding the norms and values of this country"
Absence of others		
Loneliness	Reference to feelings of loneliness (subjective)	*"anybody who's, who's lonely or who would like to sort of expand their circle of friends or who wants a reason to go out should get themselves a, they should go and rescue a dog"*
Alone	Reference to being or others being alone, not having other people around or having contact with others (objective)	*"sometimes actually you've got your kids you think actually I want to talk to somebody, you know, I found it actually when I haven't had sort of much contact, you think it's really nice to talk to the postman"*
Culture		
UK north and south	Reference to north UK and/or south of the UK culture	*"I come from Yorkshire and I think people tend to sort of chat more, you know, you'll hear that about northerners that people here are a bit more reserved."*
Manners	Reference to manners or etiquette	*"refers to manners as not costing anything so for me I've always had the thought that, you know, it doesn't hurt me to say please or thank you"*
London	Reference to a "London" culture embodied by "Londoners"	*"very often that you at London Victoria or somewhere, someone will be walking with their*

		head in the clouds and just bump into you then there's no apology, there's no, they just get on with it. And you've kind of come to expect that about London and about the people who live in London"
Non UK culture	Reference to other, non-UK cultures	*"Or we have this, in particular West African culture, they have a tendency if something bad happens to you they'll say sorry, obviously we're not responsible for it but we're saying sorry because we're sorry that this has happened to you"*
Micro interactions		
Verbal – greeting	Reference to verbal greeting or being greeted. For example, saying hello or hi	*"And if you say hello, not only just smile, just say hello, people start talking to you and all of a sudden you think oh this is really, really good"*
Verbal – how are you	Reference to saying or being asked how are you or how is it going?	*"whereas in football people are a bit more open to kind of hey, how are you doing, do you want a drink, things like that"*
Verbal – small talk/chatting	Reference to making small talk with someone or just chatting or talking to someone	*"Then there's different types of like being in the city as well, so you could be in the city on like a night out with friends and meet strangers and acquaintances where it's less rushed and that's when you probably have better conversations because the people, you actually want to talk to them"*

Non-verbal – smile	Reference to smiling or being smiled at by someone	*"But it's really good for people to just smile at each other, it changes everything"*
Non-verbal – body language	Reference to body language. For example, posture	*"So sometimes in people's body language you can always tell if they feel uncomfortable or if they feel a little bit tense so just giving someone a smile if you're in the same room as them or walking past them or, I don't know, some people can feel intimidated by others"*
Non-verbal – wave	Reference to waving or being waved at by another person	*"Politeness means that if you're interacting in the city, say with acquaintances you stop or you wave an acknowledgement"*
Non-verbal – handshake	Any mention of a handshake or shaking hands	*"Firm handshake. I don't like it when I meet someone and they give you a wishy-washy handshake"*
Non-verbal – eye contact	Reference to making eye contact with another person	*"I think it's very, you know, you find it very, very difficult to interact with people if they won't meet your eye and they won't sort of acknowledge you"*
Other	Reference to any other type of small interaction (verbal or non-verbal) you can have with another person	*"Well you might give a few hand gestures, a bit of road rage, but you're never going to have a deep and meaningful conversation"*
Avoid	Reference to avoiding interaction with others. For example, by keeping your head down	*"Although sometimes you can sort of, if you're wanting to be on your own then that can feel a bit of an invasion of space and privacy and sort of, you know, if you just want to be on your own and*

		thinking and they start talking then you think oh just go away please"
Ice breakers		
Dog	Reference to dogs as ice breakers, openers for conversation	*"The 3rd one I put a dog lead because as you can hear I've got 3 dogs and it's probably the most sociable thing you can do, if you want to get to sort of chat to people and meet people"*
Child	Reference to children as ice breakers, to opening up opportunities for connection. Sometimes referring to something you haveing common with others that facilitates connection	*"I mean that could be the kids thing, it could be, you know, where something happened, it could be where people have the same type of illness or support, you know, those are the sorts of things, it could be anything that's a sort of common shared experience."*
Emergency/break down/injury	Reference to emergency situations or some form of system breakdown leading to interaction with others. Also includes peoples injuries (for example, being on crutches) as a conversation starter	*"I don't know, a plane and it's very delayed or God forbid some sort of accident, do you know what I mean, but where you're in a situation that becomes less than the norm and you have that shared experience"*
Common interest	See code "Sharing – interest"	*N/A*
Humanness		
Concrete/ human presence	Reference to human to human contact, being in another person's physical presence and the human contact that results from it. Only use when the word human is used by the respondent.	*"I suppose it's like that human thing where you've not got a lot of interaction, it's just nice"*

Abstract	Reference to humans being unique in their humanness, different from animals or all connected because of our humanness	*"They think it can be, could be as well, a selfish world where people just think about themselves and they shouldn't really because if you think about it, we're all one. And when we're all one, we should help each other to serve and that's what people don't realise and that's what I mean by approachable"*
Diversity		
Intergenerational contact	Reference to intergenerational contact, for example between young and old	*"Sometimes if a couple of young people are going into the train, into Birmingham on the train, speak to them, ask them where they're going, anywhere nice, and they just say yes we're going to blah-di-blah nightclub"*
Intercultural contact	Reference to intercultural, international or inter-ethnic contact	*"I'm a people person so I like to meet new people and hear that they're from different places and got different stories and hear their stories"*
City as multicultural	See "conceptualisation of society – multicultural"	*N/A*
Language	Reference to other languages, different from English, being spoken	*"my sister lives in a city, in Spalding in Lincolnshire and there's I suppose 40% of the population are Eastern European so there's a language barrier up there. And one is very wary about even speaking to somebody who's White up there because invariably they're not English"*
Time		

Rush/hectic	Reference to being or others being in a rush, short for time and/or impatient. Reference to a hectic environment in which everyone is rushing	*"So yeah people are often with each other or if they're not with each other they're on the way to doing something important so it's rushed, you can't really take time to talk to someone that much."*
Have time	Reference to having time for others, or others giving you time to chat or help with something	*"Yeah, you're out and you're out for a reason so you're out, you've got like, you've got probably down time and you're not on your way anywhere or in any specific rush. And anyone that you talk to in the night time is probably a bit more sociable, especially in the city."*
No time	Reference to not having time to connect with other people	*"you're probably going somewhere or you're with someone so you probably don't really have the time to talk to strangers or acquaintances"*
No time – get from A to B	Reference to moving or other people moving around the city just in order to get from A to B	*"so you're just rushing from one place to another and you repeat the same thing"*
No time – family and work	No time to connect with weak ties due to family or work responsibilities	*"you know, busy working and you have your friends as well, you don't really have a need to talk to people"*
No time – investment	Connecting with weak ties is an investment that you don't have time for	*"And investment is a bit of a risk, isn't it, you don't know someone so if you invest time to get to know somebody and they turn out to be a bit of an arse"*
Technology		

Barrier to connecting with others	Reference to technology being a distraction or interference or having any sort of negative effect on connecting with others	*"I have no idea why people go outside wearing earphones, it just baffles me completely because they don't have any interaction with people around them"*
Improves connection with others	Reference to technology allowing for communication between two people who would otherwise not be able to connect. For example, connecting with people who live far away	
Mention of any technology	Reference to any specific types of technology, such as mobile phones, Facebook, WhatsApp, voice calls, headphones, car, emails etc.	*"I like being in my little bubble and I'll potter along with listening to the radio or chatting on my phone or whatever"*
Sharing		
Environment	Reference to sharing a physical space or environment with others	*"Certainly, you know, more mature people, you know, I would say hello to every single one of them that I, you know, I'm outside, I'm sharing an environment, why wouldn't you say hello or perhaps that's just me."*
Experiences	Reference to sharing experiences with others	*"it could be where people have the same type of illness or support, you know, those are the sorts of things, it could be anything that's a sort of common shared experience."*
Interest	Reference to sharing interests with others	*"I'm an Arsenal fan so all of the people that sit at the Arsenal side of the stadium they're all Arsenal supporters so, you know, you share a common*

		interest in Arsenal winning so because of that, that creates an environment where everyone's friendly"
Humanity	See code "humanness – abstract "	*N/A*
Community	Any reference to community and sharing of community	*"there's no sense of community, very little sense of community"*
Past vs. present		
Nowadays	Reference to any comparing between the past and the present. Often denoted by the term "nowadays"	*"my parents' generation, everybody, and this is even in London, everyone locally for the last part at least the people who lived on your street, you knew who they were, you knew their kids, you knew what they did. Now I live in this building and I don't know anyone"*
Support		
Practical/instrumental	Reference to giving or receiving practical support. For example, help in an emergency or getting a lift	*"it's like offers of support and then sometimes you get a neighbour saying oh can you take a parcel in so it can be very low level support and help"*
Informational	Reference to giving or receiving informational support such as getting advice or learning something useful from someone else	*"I ask people for directions and stuff, like I did it yesterday, I was driving somewhere for work and I needed to"*
Intention		

Good intention	Reference to having good intentions or not harmful intentions	*"I mean providing on first impressions they seem honest and of no harmful intentions to me, I'm quite ok"*
Bad intention	Reference to others have bad intentions. For example, an intention to hurt you or someone you love, i.e. children. Or just an intention that might not be good for you or get you into trouble	*"And those kind of things can creep into your mind really because you have to be alert and you have to be aware that, sadly, not everybody that you encounter in any environment, be it city or in a park, is he a good person or has he good intentions"*
Trust		
Have trust	Reference to trusting other people	*"So yeah, completely different from a friend because a friend you'd be able to communicate, you know you've got that trust, with a stranger you don't do"*
No trust	Reference to not trusting other people	*"So at first when I came in here obviously I've never met you before, you think is this like real or not, because you're just thinking well there's no trust there because you don't know this person"*
Ambivalent/uncertain	Reference to not being sure whether to trust someone. Often due to lack of knowledge and/or uncertainty	*"Ok so I was talking more about strangers rather than acquaintances and then the 1st one was uncomfortable because you don't know who they are, whether you can trust them"*

Safety		
First-hand experience of crime	Reference to any first-hand experience of crime. For example, being robbed	*"Well the two guys part and the guy with the hood just stands there so there's a gap so I push through and then the guy with the hood runs off at which point the two guys with rucksacks turn round to me and they're Scandinavian and he was, I didn't even notice, he'd got a knife out but it was, you know, I couldn't see it from the way they were standing and basically he was mugging them"*
Second-hand experience of crime	Reference to any second hand experience or stories heard from others about a crime.	*"I've heard lots of stories from some of my clients before, I work in probation of, you know, people getting into fights"*
Media	Reference to crimes heard about through the media	*"So I think it was the other day when some lady from America got like stabbed in London, wasn't it, and that was random, wasn't it, so those things make you suspicious of the people around you"*
Anti-social behaviour	Mention of engaging in or observing anti-social behaviour	*"people getting into fights or just attacking people on the London Underground unprovoked, you know, so it's such a volatile environment"*
Police	Mention of the police or of police presence	*"There's never any policemen ever to ask, like there used to be, I always used to ask a policemen, well you'd feel safe with a policeman, that is something I think is terrible, our lack of policemen in the streets all the time"*

Safety practices	Reference to ways of staying safe in the city. For example, not walking alone at night or smiling to diffuse a situation	*"in a confrontational situation sarcasm will get you nowhere, negotiating, well ok it's got to be done in a certain way, anger won't get you anywhere, smiling's about the only way you can disarm"*
Mention of crime	Mention of any crime such as gang related violence or terrorism	*"So just to know that somebody has decided to take out a knife and kill somebody for no apparent reason"*
Mattering		
Take notice	Reference to taking notice of others or of what is happening in your immediate surroundings	*"The moment you take notice, that's when you can then do the second step of going and helping but if you don't take notice and you're oblivious to what's happening around you, you can't be kind"*
Acknowledgment/ being seen	Reference to being acknowledged by another person. Often related to being seen and made to know that one has been seen by someone else	*"Acknowledgement, yeah, acknowledgement that you're either doing something or you're there,"*
Caring about others /interest in others	Reference to caring about others or just generally showing interest in other people	*"Yeah, well I just think the world would be like a bit better of a place if everyone was more helpful. A lot of people are in too much of a hurry to do things or like, yeah they don't really care that much about like other people and if no-one cared about that guy that day like he might have died"*
Not taking notice	Not taking notice of others and what is going on in your immediate surrounding	*"And they're so unaware of their own surroundings, you know, they're just completely oblivious"*

Being ignored	Reference to ignoring or being ignored by others	*"you'll speak to them and they'll just ignore you, they're in a completely different world"*
Not caring about others	Reference to not caring about others	*"So that's what I believe and it happens in the context of, you know, that we're living in kind of apartments like this, everything is fine, if somebody's plumbing doesn't work but your plumbing is fine, you actually you're not bothered"*
Being needed	Reference to being needed, the feeling of being needed or being of help or useful to someone	*"she'll complain if you don't offer her a seat, oh chivalry is dead and all of that. And then there's that phrase is chivalry is dead and men rebut oh well women killed it or whatever but yeah I just, those sorts of things don't cost a lot and they're not difficult to implement or difficult attitudes to have. And it makes people feel good"*
Being known	Reference to being known or recognised by someone else	*"It's the fact that I go out with the dogs that I see them and speak to them and everybody knows me because I'm out and about with my dogs"*
Judgment		
What others think of you	Reference to thinking about the impression you are making on others. Refers to both positive and negative judgments. What others may think of you, often referred to as a worry.	*"Just that like if it was someone that you wanted to get to know more than you'd want to be friendly to them because you'd want them to like you really I suppose, and hang around with you"*
Misconceptions	Reference to having misconceptions about other or being misconceived themselves	*"I thought to myself, that was a misconception of somebody, wasn't it, really. You know, they were*

		really nice lads and yet they looked like the typical person on the TV that you'd see on Crimewatch"
Setting		
City centre	Reference to the city centre, for example, the city centre	*" I mean I like going into Birmingham city centre for a walk, you know, sometimes on a Sunday when it's quiet Alan"*
Local area	Reference to things that happen in your neighbourhood or local area. Often refers to people interacting with their neighbours.	*"I mean this road I don't tend to talk to my neighbours as much, I know quite a lot of people at the top because at one point we all had kids the same age"*
Outside city (suburb and country)	Reference to things outside of the city. For example, the suburbs or the countryside	*"Well I don't know how true that is, I think, I don't know, I mean I think probably in villages people talk a lot"*
Public space - street	Mention of the street or the pavement	*"if you're walking down the street no-one will pay you any mind and step on your shoes and push you over by accident, you know"*
Public space - park	Mention of parks or green spaces	*"But then there are different like circumstances so you could be in a park, that would be completely different because you'd be in a social setting but that wouldn't be in a city, so a park, that would be a daytime version of where it wouldn't be rushed, yeah."*

Public transport	Mention of things that happen on public transport. For example, on the train, tube, bus etc.	*"Especially on the Tube and things like that and those sorts of things happen all the time. I had an experience where a guy had grabbed my bag and pulled me off the Tube just so they can get on"*
Semi – public space	Mention of semi-public spaces such as in a shop, gallery, beauty salon or at a party , doctors office, football match	*"But again at the till, you know, people are helpful. I can remember with my kids and they dropped something and he was so nice, oh don't worry, we'll clear that up"*
Work setting	Mention of the workplace. For example, the office	*"It won't always go away, a confrontational situation, because the person, it's really the person who is confronting you with all these problems is really quite ill, I'm talking about my workplace and so just try to smile"*
Orientation towards others		
Positive – friendly/kind	Reference to a friendly, nice, kind, open, empathetic, approachable or warm towards others	*"Yeah, so the 1ˢᵗ box I put like being friendly/polite, just because it's about acquaintances and strangers."*
Positive – polite	Reference to being polite or respectful of others	*"Yeah, so the 1ˢᵗ box I put like being friendly/polite, just because it's about acquaintances and strangers."*
Positive – helpful	Reference to being helpful towards others	*"So yeah I think it's important to be like friendly, polite and helpful"*
Positive – non-judgmental	Reference to having a non-judgmental attitude towards others	*"The 2ⁿᵈ box I put non-judgemental, I think it's important to be non-judgemental with like*

		acquaintances and strangers, just because you don't really know them that well, you don't know anything about their life really"
Negative – unpleasant	Reference to being not nice or unpleasant towards others	*"But if you're going to be rude then they're just going to be rude back to you so you might as well be friendly and then see what happens and then if they're still not nice then you can just give up, so yeah"*
Negative – aggressive	Reference to having an aggressive attitude towards others	*"I've heard lots of stories from some of my clients before, I work in probation of, you know, people getting into fights or just attacking people on the London Underground unprovoked, you know, so it's such a volatile environment"*
Negative - rude	Reference to being rude or dismissive to others	*"I don't want to initiate the conversation because then she might be rude and then I don't want to feel embarrassed"*
Negative – selfish/inconsiderate	Reference to being selfish, only think about self and be inconsiderate towards others and their needs	*"And that's where I think selfishness comes into it, when you're thinking I'm ok in my little life, but if you just extend it out a little bit and say we can help others, it's really important, that we can make a bit of a difference"*
Negative - wary	Reference to being wary, suspicious or cautious around others	*"So I think it was the other day when some lady from America got like stabbed in London, wasn't it,*

		and that was random, wasn't it, so those things make you suspicious of the people around you"
Negative – cold/distant	Reference to the feeling cold or distant towards others	*"So in the 1ˢᵗ box I put cold and distant, grumpy, always in a rush"*
Negative - disinterested	Reference to being disinterested in others	*"The reason that I'm uninterested is like I mentioned before I've got a really good group of friends, sometimes I'm just really not bothered about talking to anybody else."*
Feelings		
Positive - happy	Reference to the feeling of happiness, joy or excitement	*"because I want to create a happiness for them, I never want them"*
Positive - relaxed	Reference to the feeling relaxed or comfortable	*"Yeah it does, it relaxes them, doesn't it, it makes them, it makes them feel more relaxed with you and as I said it makes it more superficial so you can, it makes them feel good"*
Positive - connected	Reference to the feeling connected to others	*"And again you get to know the postman, you go oh anything for me or have you got this for next door and it's just nicer than just dropping it through the door, yeah, makes you feel you've got that sort of connectedness"*
Positive - safe	Reference to the feeling safe	*"I always used to ask a policemen, well you'd feel safe with a policeman"*

Positive - rewarding	Reference to the feeling of something being rewarding	*"Give, giving is a powerful thing. When you give to others it's very powerful because I know you don't want to give to receive but believe me, when you do give it's such a rewarding journey"*
Positive – good/pleasant/nice	Reference to feeling good, something making you feel nice or feeling pleasant. Similar to happy but a slightly weaker positive emotional reaction	*"It's easy, isn't it, I could ask you which school did you go to, what university, what do you do, there's so many fabulous questions to ask people. People go away feeling quite, oh that was nice"*
Negative – fear/worry	Reference to the feeling of fear, afraid, scared, worried or alert	*"Yeah, I think quite often I look around me when I'm out and about and there's certain characters that you instantly feel sorry for or worried for"*
Negative - stress	Reference to the feeling of stress or anxiety	*"I get on quite well with my colleagues and I find it quite a happy environment in some ways. It can be stressful but it's happy"*
Negative - pity	Reference to the feeling of pity or feeling sorry for someone	*"Yeah, I think quite often I look around me when I'm out and about and there's certain characters that you instantly feel sorry for or worried for"*
Negative – annoyed/fed up	Reference to feeling annoyed or fed up	*"you're sat next to them for the whole journey and it's just annoying really"*
Negative - uncomfortable/awkward/embarrassment	Reference to the feeling of being uncomfortable, on edge or feeling awkward or embarrassed	*"I don't want to initiate the conversation because then she might be rude and then I don't want to feel embarrassed"*
Negative – unsafe	Reference to the feeling unsafe	*"Yeah, that's more to do with strangers so you're walking past, especially if it's getting later at night,*

		I don't know, must be watching all the old horror films when I was a kid but if it's dark and there are footsteps behind you, you begin to think, hello, and if you turn a couple of corners and the footsteps are still behind you then you start to wonder"
Negative – bad/ unpleasant /not nice	Reference to feeling bad or something feeling not nice or unpleasant. Not something that makes you feel positive	*"So I think ultimately people being rude, that dampens other people's experience but it also dampens their own experience because ok, maybe they're a fair person, fair enough, but then they may enter into an altercation with somebody else that makes them frustrated and annoyed and that's not a positive experience for them either"*
Miscellaneous		
Sayings/clichés	Any use of clichés or sayings that people mention i.e. the kindness of strangers	*"And it's quite odd because the British known for being well-mannered to the point of irritation to other cultures so I mean in particular Americans, they're get very annoyed"*
World would be a better place	Reference to things that could make life or the world a bit better	*"Yeah, well I just think the world would be like a bit better of a place if everyone was more helpful"*
Circumstance/ randomness of contact	Randomness and uncontrolled nature of contact. For example, bumping into a neighbour on the street. Unplanned, random, circumstantial	*"And again you might not see them for ages and it doesn't really matter that much."*

Talking for the sake of talking vs talking for a purpose	Reference to talking for the sake of talking (end in itself) vs talking to achieve another purpose (means to an end)	*"I could sit at the bus stop, maybe I've got a friendly face, I don't know but I could sit at the bus stop and an old lady will come sit next to me and she'll start having a chat with me like for no reason"*
Changes throughout the lifespan	Reference to things/attitudes changing as one gets older.	*"That sounds really sad but do you know what I mean, it's still that, and you actually think, I mean my mum used to say as she got old, you know, your world shrinks, you know, in terms of who you do have interactions with, so those interactions become potentially more important. Yeah."*