

**“Hands off our benefits!”: how participation in the  
comment section of the 2009 Green Paper,  
*Shaping the Future of Care Together*, contributes to  
understandings of online collective action**

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# **Acknowledgements**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Rosemary

I would like to thank my supervisory team for all their invaluable help throughout this process – Dr Sarah Burch, Dr Deborah Holman and Dr Claudia Schneider

I would also like to thank Dr David Skinner for his insightful comments on an earlier draft of this thesis

My research was funded by the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education at Anglia Ruskin University

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY  
ABSTRACT  
FACULTY OF HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND EDUCATION

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

“Hands off our benefits!”: how participation in the comment section of the 2009 Green Paper, *Shaping the Future of Care Together*, contributes to understandings of online collective action

CLAIRE PRESTON  
September 2013

The idea that the internet enables disparate individuals to link together easily has focused attention on characterising collective action under these circumstances. My research looks instead at a situation which mixes the disparate and those united by various forms of shared identity, and material grievance. The case I focus on involves overlapping groups of benefits claimants: disabled people, carers and older people. These groups are under-represented online and their political activity in a digital environment has rarely been researched. The context of my research is a consultation over social care, which provoked a campaign of opposition and the posting online of nearly 3,000 comments on the green paper’s executive summary. This constitutes collective action because it was undertaken for a collective purpose: to defend disability benefits from a perceived threat.

In order to take the focus I want, I develop a conceptual framework that includes all three drivers of collective action that feature in social psychology models - efficacy, injustice and identity. Much comparable research considers just one or two of these drivers. My analytical approach is primarily inductive but I employ a mixed-methods design, including digital tracing, inductive thematic coding and basic statistical analysis. The data is drawn from the campaign and the comments.

I find that most of the comments exhibit a shared sense of injustice. They also frequently include expressions of collective identity made with reference to various groups, rather than to one overarching group. Personal narratives often accompany these collective expressions. The campaign messages spread horizontally among varied, but mostly pre-existing, forums, social networking sites and blogs. The mobilisation also had a vertical element due to the involvement of private company acting, in a hybrid manner, as a campaigning organisation.

My research contributes to knowledge by showing that when online action includes people who are motivated by collective identity, traditional and more contemporary collective action processes do not simply co-exist: there is a dynamic interplay between them. It also demonstrates the value of focusing on lower-level networks. This shows that the role of the drivers can vary among the groups of actors involved and, where the drivers combine, they have a reinforcing tendency.

Key words: collective action, collective identity, digital, online, disabled, mobilisation

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This thesis has been developed through research into a particular ‘instance’ of collective action: the online response to a Green Paper consultation in 2009, towards the end of the last Labour Government’s term in office. This was reportedly “one of the largest consultation exercises the government have ever carried out<sup>1</sup>” and included around 3,000 people posting online comments under the executive summary section of the Green Paper *Shaping the Future of Care Together* (DoH, 2009). The Green Paper webpages were part of a website the Department of Health had set up for ‘the Big Care Debate’ over its proposed National Care Service. It was also clear that the consultation had provoked an online campaign, with a benefits advice organisation at its centre. This encouraged people to comment on a particular aspect of the Green Paper: its perceived threat to disability benefits. The online comments and the campaign to encourage them are the main sources of data I analyse. The subject of the consultation was social care and people who fell chiefly into the overlapping categories of disabled people, carers and older people made the roughly 3,000 online comments. For this and other reasons detailed more fully later, the consultation represented an opportunity to explore online collective action from a perspective rarely taken in other research (see p.83 and p.90).

My research is founded in theories of collective action, particularly as they apply to online settings. As I explain in more detail later (see pp.9-10), at the time I started my PhD, it seemed increasingly to be the case that, in practice, the use of the internet in political participation was associated not so much with measured, rational debate as with assembling and mobilising groups of people. Yet, the models of engagement which informed government<sup>2</sup> policy were based either on notions of deliberation

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<sup>1</sup> This comment was made by then Secretary of State for Health Andy Burnham in his opening remarks at the House of Commons debate on the Social Care Green Paper on 29 October 2009. Available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm091029/debtext/91029-0010.htm#09102935000001> (column 479) [Accessed 10 July 2013]

<sup>2</sup> I use government to denote the use of the word in general, non-specific sense and Government to refer to a specific instance, for example the Labour Government.

inspired by a Habermasian understanding of the public sphere (Habermas, 1962) or on a more liberal-individualist concern for the aggregation of views of the electorate (see p.21-22). This dissonance between the rhetoric and practice of online participation was striking, and a starting point for my research interest. Rather than approach the issue from the perspective of already-abundant literature on the relationship of the internet to deliberative democracy (for example, Dahlberg 2001a; 2001b; Papacharissi, 2002; Dahlgren 2001; 2005; Chadwick, 2006; Coleman and Blumler, 2008) or the critique of government participation initiatives in practice (for example, Barnes et al., 2007; Beetham et al., 2008; Newman and Clarke, 2009; Fox, 2009), my research responds to the spirit of what seemed, and still seems, to be happening in practice. I therefore adopt a collective action frame. As a result of this frame and the particular setting in which it is applied, I am able to contribute to developing research into online collective action in two main areas. (See section 8.6, for a discussion of how my research relates to particular pieces of literature.)

The first area is the debate over the degree to which collective identity and group injustice are still necessary for collective action when it is carried out online. A feature of online collective action which has generated a lot of research interest is that the online environment enables people to link more easily to other people with whom they share only loose connections (or weak-ties, as they are referred to in the network literature, key examples are Wellman 2001; 2002; 2003). This has contributed to literature from various theoretical starting points coalescing around the question of the role of collective identity in contemporary mobilisation (Papacharissi, 2010; 2011; Bennett and Segerberg, 2011; 2012; Earl and Kimport, 2011; Takaragawa and Carty, 2012; Gerbaudo 2012). Some strands of this literature also extend to asking whether group anger is still necessary for online collective action (Earl and Kimport, 2011). I purposefully selected a research setting where collective identity and injustice seemed likely influences in order to understand more about their manifestation in contemporary online collective action. The online political activity of disabled people had rarely been the subject of research and yet groups who fall into this category<sup>3</sup> appeared, at the time, to be using the internet in

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<sup>3</sup> the category “disabled people” is used here as an umbrella term covering a large degree of variation, as discussed in Chapter 3.

growing numbers (see section 3.4). My research is also distinctive from many more recent studies because it looks at collective action performed online, not the online organising of street protest. As a snapshot taken just as the Arab Spring and Occupy movements were taking off, it therefore offers a useful vantage point from which to reflect on those developments.

The second area of literature concerns the realisation that online networks are a rich source of study for those interested in diffusion dynamics (for a review, see Borge-Holthoefer et al., 2013). The diffusion of information through networks is relevant to collective action from a particular theoretical perspective. That perspective argues that people are motivated to contribute to a collective endeavour if they can see that enough other people are doing so for their contribution to be worthwhile or efficient (for example, Valente, 1996; González-Bailón, 2009). Knowledge of other peoples' actions is therefore considered key. The internet enables such information to be readily available: would-be participants can see who in their networks has signed a petition or joined a campaign on Facebook. This analysis also helps understand how certain nodes (usually people) are influential in the spread of information, by virtue of their position in the network (Bakshy 2012; González-Bailón et al., 2012).

One criticism of the idea that knowledge of others' actions is the major determinant of collective action is its basis in an overly-cognitive model of decision-making. It is not clear that this criticism can be leveled at all literature in this area, however. Some literature acknowledges that if a friend advises you to join a cause, you will be more likely to do so than if a relatively little-known organisation tells you to (González-Bailón, 2013). It is, no doubt, helpful to such perspectives that 'friendship' in networks can be measured, for example, by how often people exchange messages, or tag one another in photos (Bakshy, 2012). So friendship can be readily taken into account in network studies of online collective action. But the reason why friendship is thought to influence decision-making is not always clear in these accounts. It is sometimes represented as a cognitive assessment, linked to a desire for social approval, but this is not always explicit.

Social psychology research into collective action in general (rather than specifically

its online manifestation) is useful here as it offers a conception which envisages decision-making as having cognitive and affective elements, and in addition, it considers three motives for collective action: efficacy, identity and injustice (see for example, Van Zomeren et al., 2008). Efficacy refers to the sense that a collective action is efficient or worthwhile, which is an assessment made partially on the basis of how many others are acting. In this way it relates to the network diffusion research just mentioned. It seemed to me, therefore, that it might be productive to apply a social psychology approach online, in combination with an explicitly network perspective. Applying such a model in a reflexive manner was the second way in my research could contribute to the literature.

In sum, my research proposed to build on theories of online collective action by looking at its manifestation under particular circumstances. In order to explore the theoretical areas I wished to, it was necessary to develop a conceptual framework which would enable me to consider certain possibilities, particularly the idea that collective identity, injustice and efficacy may all be interconnected drivers of online collective action and that a network perspective would help understand how this process occurs. An understanding that technology and society are mutually constitutive underpinned my approach. The framework was developed from a synthesis of various perspectives and is explained more fully below (p.12) and in Chapter 2.

As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, it became clear that this framework, modified in the light of my findings, enabled various insights. These are explained in full later (Chapters 7 and 8, and section 9.1) and in essence here. Firstly, in the instance of collective action I was considering, the majority of participants expressed what I described as 'shared feelings of injustice'. This was not the kind of catch-all, customisable expression of injustice which, according to the literature, provided a unifying theme in recent street protests (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012): it was more precisely articulated and expressed in reference to groups. Arguably this is because the meme of injustice in this example of collective action did not have as much work to do in creating a sense of unity – collective identity was also a feature of many of the networks involved. Another feature of this

case of collective action was that the expressions of collective identity made in the context of comments also included personal narratives. In this sense, engagement with the action was not either personalised or collective, so much as both simultaneously, a finding which fits with Papacharissi's characterisation of the convergent nature of democracy in the digital age (Papacharissi, 2011).

So, in this, and other ways, the collective action around the 2009 Green Paper was marked by hybridity: it combined characteristics which are often associated with separate categories of action processes (see p.52 and p.78). The implication from my research is that all three drivers – identity, injustice and efficacy – should explicitly be included in models of on online collective action so as to identify these subtle aspects of action processes. Moreover, by showing the drivers are expressed in one example of 'naturally occurring'<sup>4</sup> data associated with collective action, my research raises the question of how and in which other types of data it might be possible to identify such expressions. My recommendation that all three drivers be included in models of collective action should not be mistaken for an argument that collective action can occur only if all three drivers are present or salient. But I am arguing for an approach that avoids the possibility of overlooking the significance of any of the drivers and, as a consequence, a deeper understanding of their contemporary expression and interaction.

Secondly, my research shows that several different collective identities were expressed rather than one over-riding identity. Literature past and present has tackled the issue of whether and how social movement organisations (SMOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or coalition networks use collective identity frames to motivate collective action (Snow and Benford, 1992; Benford and Snow, 2000; Ackland and O'Neil, 2011; Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). My research shows that although the main organisation involved in this case used a campaigner frame to motivate people to take action, the participants actually referenced various different collective identities in their comments. This feature was also evident at the level of the many small networks enrolled in the action. It follows

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<sup>4</sup> Following Silverman (2011, p.275), this term refers to data which is not "provoked" by the researcher.

that it is equally meaningful to ask whether and how collective identity is relevant in the lower-level networks involved in collective action, as it is to ask whether collective identity matters from the perspective of a particular organisation or networked coalition, or in a particular instance<sup>5</sup> of online action (Earl and Kimport, 2011, Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). The variation at this level of networks is likely to apply to the other drivers too: this perspective therefore appears to be a useful way of distinguishing between the manner and degree to which the drivers of collective action manifest themselves.

My research also finds that the drivers were often expressed in an interlinked manner. This corroborates previous research that has shown the drivers' capacity to reinforce each another (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). So, I propose that the co-occurrence of drivers should also be considered at network level: consideration should not just be given to how many other people an individual can see in their relevant network taking action but also to more affective stimuli - whether they share a sense of collective identity or injustice with those people. Linked to this, my data supports a perspective on collective action as a non-linear process, in which action itself feeds back into the drivers.

Finally, my research demonstrates the problems in taking an individualistic<sup>6</sup> perspective on online collective action or, indeed, on participation. It would be very difficult to reconcile my data with the conclusion that the majority of those participating in the collective action were acting as isolated individuals. The social embeddedness of the participants in this instance of collective action seemed to be a highly relevant factor, affecting whether and in what terms people encountered the 2009 Green Paper consultation and how they understood and responded to it. This has implications for government policy on participation. Three factors stood out from my research: in the response to the Green Paper consultation, people were mobilised and mobilised others into acting; many expressed themselves in emotional terms; and most with reference to groups. These are all factors which are discouraged by the official norms and rules which govern most participation exercises in practice

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<sup>5</sup> See p.12 for an explanation of why I prefer the term an 'instance' of collective action.

<sup>6</sup> I use individualistic here in the sense explained on p.16.

(Barnes et al., 2007; Newman and Clarke, 2009). The response to the 2009 Green Paper consultation therefore seems to be a prime example of what others have referred to as the “disruptive capacity” of social media in regard to the traditional political practices of representative democracies (Loader and Mercea, 2011, p.762). The wider ramifications of such disruptions are still playing out and they are doing so against a steady decline in participation in formal political processes and a marked rise in social-media embedded collective protest (see p.25). The literature which emphasises a shift towards more personalised forms of engagement with politics also needs to be considered in the context of the styles of online participation privileged by government. Official participation discourses based on the engagement of individual citizen consumers in rational debate can marginalise collective and/or emotional styles of expression (Barnes et al., 2007; Barnes, 2008, Beetham et al., 2008; Newman and Clarke, 2009). If this style of engagement is disproportionately practiced by particular groups, there is a consequent risk that these groups are marginalised in the political process. If concurrently, and possibly for quite different reasons, research, too, pays insufficient attention to styles of political engagement characterised by emotional expressions of collectivity, the marginalising potential is compounded.

This section has given a brief overview of my research but in the process of distilling the arguments, various substantial points have been heavily abbreviated. Therefore, in the next sections of this chapter, I return to some of these underlying issues in more detail, also highlighting where they are discussed fully in subsequent chapters. The next section explains more fully the reasoning behind my decision to use a collective action frame and to apply it to an example of collective participation in welfare policymaking. Section 1.3 describes the framework itself and shows how a conceptual framework approach fits with my wider research methodology. I also define my understanding of collective action in this section. In Section 1.4, I look at the policy context in which my research sits. This includes both the context of participation policy and social care policy. The chapter finishes by briefly outlining the structure of this thesis.



## **1.2 The reasons for a collective action frame and a welfare setting**

As I started my PhD in 2009, the growing involvement of the internet in politics in general, and in the policymaking process in particular was becoming more evident. This quote exemplifies the sense at that time that politics was in a new terrain:

“It is not now possible to study a government department, a political party, an interest group, a media outlet or any other policy actor without considering their online strategy and presence. It is not possible to consider how a policy change might bring or has brought about societal change, without being able to analyse online activity.” (Margetts, 2009, p.17)

At a theoretical level, the still-ongoing debate about how to address the relationship between the internet and democracy was developing. Dahlberg (2011) offers a useful way of categorising e-democracy literature. This is drawn from what he describes four digital democracy positions, which are not analytical concepts but empirical instances, arrived at through Dahlberg’s critical interpretive approach to an assessment of e-democracy commentary and practice. The categorisations reflect the different underlying conceptions of democracy on which these positions are based: liberal-individualist, deliberative democracy, counter publics and Autonomous Marxist (Dahlberg, 2011, see Appendix 3 for a fuller account).

The deliberative category is founded in Habermasian understandings of the public sphere. At the time I was beginning my PhD, this body of literature was a major reference point in discussion of the democratising potential of the internet, particularly regarding policy in the UK (Ward et al., 2003; Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Chadwick, 2009). (I discuss the practice of e-participation more fully in section 1.4.2.)

Discussion from the deliberative perspective revolves around whether the internet offers an opportunity for a virtual public sphere freer from the invasive and pervasive influences of a commercialised mass media (Dahlberg, 2001; Papacharissi, 2002; Dahlgren, 2005; Chadwick, 2006; Coleman and Blumler, 2008). The literature has

critiqued various assumptions of the deliberative model, for example, its privileging of rational discussion, its narrow vision of what constitutes political activity, the notion that there is one sphere and not many, its implicit valuing of accord over dissent, its separation between private and public spheres (for example, Graham, 2008; Papacharissi, 2009; 2010; Chadwick 2009). These arguments reflect earlier theoretical critiques of Habermas, made outside the context of applying public sphere theory to the internet (for example, Lyotard, 1984; Fraser, 1993; Mouffe, 2000).

The literature also addresses the deficits of the deliberative model in practice. Chadwick (2009), reviewing the progress of e-democracy initiatives concludes:

“The reality of online deliberation, whether judged in terms of its quantity, its quality, or its impact on political behavior and policy outcomes, is far removed from the ideals set out in the early to mid-1990s.” (Chadwick, 2009, p.12)

Loader and Mercea, (2011) suggest that the idea of public spheres and civic commons met with limited success because the Habermasian model was “incongruent with the contemporary political and social culture of many societies” (Loader and Mercea, 2011, p.760). They contrast the earlier orientation of literature around the deliberative model with what they refer to as the second generation of internet democracy (Loader and Mercea 2011, p.758). This is distinguished by a personalised engagement in politics through self-actualised online networking (Papacharissi, 2010; 2011; Bennett and Segerberg, 2011; 2012). Various other strands of literature also focus on networking and/or mobilising capacity of digital communications technologies and position their arguments in relation to collective action theories (for example, Bimber et al, 2005; Della Porta and Mosca, 2005; Flanagan et al., 2006; Postmes, 2007; González-Bailón, 2009; Margetts et al, 2009; Carty, 2011; Earl and Kimport, 2011, González-Bailón et al., 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012).

As I was beginning my PhD in 2009, it was clear, therefore, that growing bodies of literature rejected the assumption (implicitly or explicitly) that the deliberative lens was the most fruitful way to engage in discussion about the internet and democracy.

The wave of popular uprisings such as the Occupy Movement and the Arab Spring subsequently reinforced the impression that a mobilising frame was more suited to capturing the way in which people were actually using digital communications technologies (for example, Faris and Etling 2008; Hussain and Howard, 2012; Wilson and Dunn, 2011; González-Bailón et al., 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012).

It was also apparent as I began to review both the theoretical and empirical literature on online collective action that consideration of the political activities of welfare recipients, particularly disabled people, could illuminate certain areas of debate. This is because identification with the disability movement and material grievance were likely to be features of such activity. In addition, this area of activity, also appeared to have potential for growth.

In 2009, there was a continuing expansion in internet use<sup>7</sup>. The percentage of people who used the internet in Britain had risen from 67% in 2007 to 70% in 2009 (Dutton et al., 2009). But not everyone had equal access: income, socio-economic group and disability were presented as key sources of exclusion in Dutton et al. (2009).

Disability stood out in this group because the numbers of disabled people using the internet rose: from 36% in 2007 to 41% in 2009. By contrast, there was a decrease in the numbers of those with a basic education using the internet (55% in 2007, 49% in 2009) and the number of users in the lowest income group remained roughly stable over the same period<sup>8</sup>.

Coupled with this, on the social policy front, the persistent pattern of retrenchment in the welfare state suggested that welfare budgets were likely to remain under pressure (for example, Pierson, 2006; Clasen and Siegel, 2007). This raised the question of whether this factor, coupled with increased access to the internet, might lead to more political activity around welfare. This depended on another issue: the relationship between individuals being online and their political activity. Some

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<sup>7</sup> I use figures from 2009 here to illustrate what informed my decision making at that time. More up to date figures (from 2011) and a more detailed analysis of digital exclusion are included in Chapter 3 and Appendix 5.

<sup>8</sup> Van Duersen and Van Dijk (2013) had not been published at the early stages of my PhD, but this Dutch study points to the relatively large amount of time disabled people spend on the internet compared to higher educated and employed people. They also find that disabled people are relatively likely to use the internet for social interaction.

studies had identified a positive correlation between these two factors (Gibson et al., 2005; Mossberger et al., 2008; Boulianne, 2009). More significantly, the UK study found that while female citizens and those from poorer backgrounds are less likely than men and higher social status individuals to engage in activist politics offline, they are equally likely to participate politically online, once existing levels of political involvement and experience on the internet are taken into account<sup>9</sup> (Gibson et al., 2007, p.578).

An emerging question therefore was how the interface between the internet and welfare policymaking might develop. Some literature had already identified the importance of information communication technologies (ICTs)<sup>10</sup> in this regard.

“ICTs now play an indispensable role in social and political organizations online around welfare issues, in state and private administration of welfare, and in processes of identity-formation concerning welfare.” (Goggin and Newell, 2006, p.309)

It seemed likely in 2009 that this trend would continue, especially if welfare recipients had increasing reason and capacity to make their voices heard. As it turned out, these predictions were very prescient in respect of disability rights activism (see Appendix 2).

In sum therefore, a collective action framework applied to online participation in welfare policymaking seemed a productive area for further research. My review of the literature also persuaded me that I should not approach the issue from the perspective of an organisation or social movement but from an instance of collective

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<sup>9</sup> The question of how internet access affects political activity is the subject of a wide body of literature. The debate can be divided broadly into the ‘normalisation thesis’, which argues that the internet does little to change pre-existing patterns of participation and the ‘new mobilisation’ thesis, which argues that it encourages the engagement of citizens who would otherwise remain politically inactive. Relevant examples of this literature are discussed in the context of disabled people in section 3.4, and in relation to carers and older people in Appendix 5.

<sup>10</sup> ICTs is used a generic term for a range of technological applications such as computer hardware, software, digital broadcast technologies, telecommunications technologies such as mobile phones, as well as electronic information resources such as the web (Selwyn, 2004). I prefer the more specific term digital communications technologies.

action (see explanation in next section). My subsequent search for suitable empirical material led me to a major consultation into social care that was attracting an unusually high level of online responses (see Chadwick 2009, p17, for data on the low levels of participation in previous similar consultations). It was clear that this activity was accompanied by an online campaign (this was evident from media reports, p.140, and my own research, p.93). For these and other reasons (see section 4.2), I settled on this example of online collective action as the empirical basis for my thesis.

### **1.3 My conceptual framework and research methodology**

I developed my conceptual framework from a review of the theoretical literature conducted with an orientation towards welfare policymaking in mind. This process is described in detail in Chapter 2. The framework synthesises some existing theories and, in places, applies theorising developed in an earlier era to an online setting. It is essentially a modified version of a social psychology model of collective action (Klandermans, 1997; Postmes, 2007; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). As such, it bridges subjective (psychological) and social (structural) perspectives (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). It builds on this model by drawing on compatible relational sociology literature, which calls for a focus on intermediate entities, such as networks, that bridge micro-macro divides (Diani and Bison 2004; Crossley, 2010). Compared to the social psychology model represented, it is more explicit that collective action is networked, a process, and manifests relations of power. The approach to power is also relational and draws on Clegg (1989): power is a process, and is located in relationships, rather than being something fixed which individuals have or don't have (see pp.57-58). Finally, the framework is designed to accommodate research from the perspective of an instance in the process of collective action. Because collective action feeds back into the factors which drive it, particularly online, where this can happen instantaneously, considering a collective action event as an end point of a sequential process is problematic (see section 8.4). In addition, empirical research demonstrates that the boundaries between, for example, social movement organisations and interest groups break down online (Bimber et al, 2005; Flanagin et al., 2006; Chadwick, 2007). This suggests that it is equally insightful to look at 'instances' of collective action, as it is to look at collective action organisations.

My conceptual framework served as a scaffold for the research, in line with the idea that concepts are “tools which prepare the ground for empirical observation” (Mouzelis, 1993). These characteristics meant my research lent itself to a pragmatic and mixed-methods research design (Rossman and Wilson, 1985; Flyvbjerg, 2006). My approach was primarily inductive, although the quantitative analysis provided information on the prevalence of certain characteristics which I had identified in the comments, and the relationship between them. The data were analysed using digital tracing methods (Bruns and Burgess, 2011), inductive thematic coding (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and basic statistical analysis. The way in which I combined qualitative and quantitative analysis of the comments was informed by Srnka and Koeszegi (2007) and Mayring (2000).

Another departure from the social psychology research was the use of ‘naturally occurring’ data (Silverman, 2011) as opposed to that provoked by the researcher. (Social psychology research usually generates data through surveys or experiments.) My research shows that it is possible to identify expressions of the drivers in this naturally occurring data. (Chapter 4 gives the full detail of my methodology and research design.)

This is significant to the wider objective of building knowledge of the social world by understanding and analysing the vast quantities of data which are now available as the result of digital communications technologies. In this environment, the need to develop new methodologies or explore the limits of existing ones is a growing subject of debate (Manovich, 2011; Bizer et al, 2012; Boyd and Crawford, 2012; Hesse-Bieber and Griffen, 2012). My research not only responds to this opportunity but also to the related one of subjecting theories developed in an offline environment to re-examination in a digital terrain. My objectives were to understand how the campaign had portrayed the consultation and how its message had spread through online networks. I was interested whether in these networks, and in the online comments themselves, there was evidence of the drivers of collective action.

The research questions around which I oriented my research were:

1. How does the conceptual framework extend current understandings of online collective action?
2. What does the research reveal about the involvement of networks in the collective action?
3. What reflections on the drivers of collective action arise from the analysis?
4. What are the implications of the research findings for the initial conceptual framework?
5. What recommendations can be drawn from the research for people contributing to or responding to policymaking?

### **1.3.1 Defining collective action**

My understanding of collective action developed in the course of my review of the theoretical literature (see Chapter 2). From this, it became apparent that there are various perspectives on collective action and the definition depends on which of these is taken. Social movement theorists and social psychologists view collective action in the context of social change or political protest. In this case, definitions take on a group dimension. “The term collective action broadly refers to actions undertaken by individuals or groups for a collective purpose, such as the advancement of a particular ideology or idea, or the political struggle with another group” (Brunsting and Postmes, 2002, pp.290-291).

However from this perspective on collective action, the reference to groups can become pervasive, as is the case with this often-quoted definition:

“A group member engages in collective action any time that he or she is acting as a representative of the group and where the action is directed at improving the conditions of the group as a whole” (Wright et al., 1990, p.995).

Although the group orientation in this definition is justified by its context in an article about disadvantaged groups, its wider use would risk precluding the possibility that the participation of some people in a particular collective action event may not be associated with identifying with any particular group.

Diani and Bison (2004) address this situation. They note that within any empirical instance of collective action, “one can normally detect more than one collective action process” (ibid, p.285). They provide a typology of these collective action processes (or dynamics). Social movement processes are one form, which are marked out by the enduring presence of collective identity. Coalitional processes, on the other hand, comprise instrumental alliances which are not backed by significant identity links. The third type are organisational processes, where collective action is carried out mostly in reference to specific organisations rather than broader, looser networks (ibid, p.281). In regard to defining collective action, this is useful for two reasons. Firstly it makes clear that collective action is a process in which various other distinct processes can occur. Secondly it does not associate collective action solely with social movements and by extension with non-institutional forms of activity.

They also distinguish between whether the types of protest are consensual or conflictual. This overcomes an additional drawback of some social movement and social psychology literature: the tendency for an overly strong focus on extra-institutional activity, such as protests, demonstrations and marches. Postmes and Brunsting (2002) similarly see collective action as varying along a dimension from confrontational to persuasive forms. The other dimension they identify is individual to collectivist. By individual they mean actions undertaken on a solitary basis such as letter writing. They add that “these individual forms of action can be thought of as collective in nature when they are intended as a means for achieving a collective outcome” (ibid, p.291).

Overall, the earlier quoted definition from Postmes and Brunsting (2002) does a good job of encompassing the variety of collective action: “The term collective action broadly refers to actions undertaken by individuals or groups for a collective purpose” (ibid, p.290-291). A collective purpose would be defined as one which cannot be produced by a single individual relying just on his or her own means. This definition needs only to be modified in regard to the examples given. Not only might collective action be for the “advancement of a particular ideology or idea or the political struggle with another group” (ibid) but it could also be for a more instrumental purpose such as lobbying a local MP to prevent a new road being built,



or a more consensual purpose such as contributing to Wikipedia.

The definition and examples of ‘collective purpose’ which I use here draws on another school of thought on collective action. Economists have had a long-standing interest in collective action and view it in terms of a fundamental conundrum. Olson’s highly influential *Logic of Collective Action* (Olson, 1965) asks why rational, self-interested individuals are incentivised to contribute to the provision of a public good when they could “free-ride” and benefit from it anyway. In this context, collective actions are defined as those “taken by two or more people in pursuit of the same collective good” (Marwell and Oliver, 1993, p.4). The examples given of collective goods typically include parks, bridges or libraries.

As Chapter 2 explains, much of the criticism of Olson’s perspective is over his inattention to inter-connectedness. This is associated with a critique of the wider individualistic perspective in which “the authentic self is autonomous, unified, free and self-made, standing apart from history and affiliations, choosing its life plan entirely for itself” (Young, 2011, p.45). My approach is also to reject this individualistic standpoint and to see the self as also social (Postmes, 2007, and see section 2.4.3 for a full explanation of my relational approach).

Another point to note is that I refer often in this thesis to “online collective action” rather than collective action more generally. The implicit distinction this makes between ‘online’ and ‘offline’ is an oversimplification since, in practice, online and offline activities are now widely recognised to be intertwined (see for example, Harlow and Harp, 2012). However my research considers an example of collective action which was largely organised and performed online and, to this extent, the distinction is justified. (Earl and Kimport, 2011, usefully delineate a continuum of online activism in this regard.) It would be an interesting subject of future research to determine whether the perspective I recommend can be usefully applied to collective action in general.

## **1.4 The policy context: participation**

This research focuses on an ‘instance’ of collective action which involved participation in a green paper on social care. This context involves two policy areas, the first concerning participation, in particular e-participation. This is the subject of this section. The second concerns social care and is the subject of the next section. The following sections position my research within these wider contexts, demonstrating, in the process, the inconsistencies and ambiguities which contributed to the particular form that the online comment making took.

### **1.4.1 Participation as part of ‘modern’ policymaking**

When the Labour government came into power in 1997 it was keen to portray itself as ‘modern’; it presented its Third Way as an opportunity to break from the ‘old’ left-right divides of the past. This was as much strategy as ideological statement: the party’s electoral success was attributed its appeal to a ‘middle ground’, pragmatist approach to politics (Newman, 2001, p.45-46).

The White Paper *Modernising Government* formed a central part of this agenda. Within the paper, which listed eight key principles, five focused on policy making and two were particularly relevant to participation. These were “making sure policies are inclusive” (in short, that they take account of the needs of those affected by them) and “involving others in policymaking” (the objective was “to develop policies that are deliverable from the start”) (Cabinet Office, 1999a, Chapter 2 para 6).

A strategic policymaking unit established within the Cabinet Office advanced these proposals in a report *Professional Policymaking in the Twenty-first Century* (Cabinet Office, 1999b). This set out a model for policymaking based on eight core competencies: policy should be forward looking, outward looking, innovative and creative, use evidence, be joined up, evaluative, subject to review and learning lessons (ibid, para 2.11).

These two documents address the subject of public participation most directly in the context of asking *who* should be involved in policymaking and *how* they should be involved. On the question of *who*, the documents indicate a shift towards a broader interpretation of inclusion. Not only do they focus on citizen and user involvement but also on those partaking in other elements of policymaking, such as implementation, feedback and evaluation – for example, people who deliver service, academics and voluntary organisations (Bochel and Duncan, 2007, pp.105-106). On the question of *how* involvement should happen, *Modernising Government* includes references to the People's Panel, the Listening to Women exercise, citizens' juries and focus groups and forums (Cabinet Office, 1999a, p.25). *Professional Policymaking for the twenty first century*, meanwhile, is more vague, restricting itself to general terms such as 'consultation', which is portrayed as taking various forms including steering groups, working parties and seminars (Bochel and Duncan, 2007, p.106 and p.116).

Overall, Bochel and Duncan (2007) suggest that the documents lack clarity about what participation and consultation mean, what policymakers are expecting of people's involvement and how this will inform policy (ibid, p.116). Moving from these documents to Labour's record on promoting inclusiveness over the following 10 years, they conclude, from a detailed review, that it has indeed been placed "at the heart of the public service reform agenda". But they add that it is difficult to ascertain what differences this has made in part because of a lack of clarity about objectives, both on the part of policymakers and stakeholders involved in participatory initiatives (ibid, p.121).

General adherence to the goal of promoting involvement in policymaking is evidenced in the language of numerous policy documents since 1997. These are "replete with concepts of partnership, collaboration, capacity building and local involvement" according to Newman et al. (2004). The paper cites among its examples *Modern Local Government: in Touch With The People* (DETR, 1998), *Working With Others to Achieve Best Value* (DETR, 2001); *Involving Patients and the Public in Healthcare: A Discussion Document* (DoH, 2001); *Getting it Right Together; Compact on Relations Between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England* (Home Office, 1998).

The same concepts continued to be evident in policy documents after the period Newman et al. (2004) cover, for example, the Department of Health's White Papers *Choosing Health* (DoH, 2004) and *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say* (DoH, 2006), the documents on *Public Sector Reform* (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2006), the *Building on Progress: Public Services* report (PM Strategy Unit, 2007), the ministerial concordat *Putting People First a Shared Vision and Commitment to the Transformation of Adult Social Care* (HM Government, 2007) and the Green Paper which is the subject of this research, *Shaping the Future of Care Together* (DoH, 2009).

However, the lack of clarity which Bochel and Duncan (2007) point to is evident in the different emphasises in these documents regarding the purpose of participation. A range of reasons for promoting participation in policymaking has been identified as in play at this time (Bochel and Duncan, 2007, Brodie et al., 2009) and, associated with this, a number of official discourses of public participation (Barnes, 2007). Among the reasons are pragmatic considerations such as avoiding policy failure and providing services that are more efficient and better suited to people's needs. Participation is also seen to bring legitimacy to policy and democratic institutions (Beetham et al., 2008). Another goal is democratic renewal in an effort to counter the decline in the population's involvement in traditional, formal political practices, such as voting and contacting elected representatives (Power Inquiry, 2006, Fox, 2009; Hansard Society, 2012). This diversity of the goals of participation supports Newman and Clarke's (2009) view that: "Participation is not a singular thing: not one process, practice, technology or institutional arrangement. Rather it is politically ambiguous, both in its conception and in its practices" (ibid, p.134).

Other literature, specific to welfare policy-making, also points to a lack of clarity regarding purpose, but in this case not among policymakers so much as between policymakers and stakeholders. Beresford (2008a) describes user involvement as a key ideological battleground, with the same terminology "used by government and service users to mean very different things" (Beresford, 2008a, p.15). For the state and service system it is about intelligence gathering and market research activity; those who are consulted are incorporated but the locus of decision-making does not

change. By contrast, for service user movements, getting involved carried expectations of greater democracy and a redistribution of power (ibid).

Beresford specifies service user *movements* in this account, which helps explain why he feels able to generalise about service user expectations. But if the expectations of service users as a whole were being discussed, it seems probable that they would have been a more varied, in line with the differentiated publics identified in other research (Newman et al., 2004; Barnes, 2007; Newman and Clarke, 2009). The motives of the state, too, are often difficult to generalise, as this section has shown. Forms of governance such as partnerships and quangos makes presenting the state in monolithic terms problematic. However, the lack of change in the balance of power that Beresford identifies is a point made in other literature and one attributed to a mix in Labour's objectives at a more fundamental level - its approach to governance.

Newman et al. (2004) considers how far the increase in public participation initiatives in the UK under New Labour represented a shift from managerial to more collaborative form of governance. The material it considers is from a project that ran from 2000-2002, looking at the development of deliberative forums, including user forums in health. The paper concludes that new forms of governance "do not displace the old but interact with them, often uncomfortably" (ibid, p.218). This conclusion reinforces the argument that the UK Labour government "can be characterised in terms of a number of different, and mutually conflicting, regimes of governance" (Newman, 2001, cited in Newman et al., 2004, p.218). These regimes range from the highly managerial to the collaborative. The managerial style is evident in goals, targets and direct central control and the collaborative in policies which emphasise partnership and co-production. The problem with the co-existence of the regimes is the limits that managerial forms of governance put on the capacity for participatory initiatives to shape policy from below.

The same issue is also remarked on in Barnes et al. (2007) which is based on a review of a series of 17 case studies of public participation. The review identifies the difficulties the participatory initiatives face in overcoming "entrenched institutional or political forms of power" but it also points to their potential for developing social

agency, through, for example, the mobilisation of social identities (Barnes, 2007, pp.184-185). Overall, these new spaces of participation are represented as sites of struggle rather than evidence of political renewal.

One of the areas in which this struggle manifests is in the assemblage of “publics” for participation. Determining who the public is and framing the public’s role as participants can be both an expression of power and an opportunity to resist and contest it (Newman and Clarke, 2009). The notion of ‘counter-publics’ is developed in Fraser (1997), where they are described as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses” (Fraser, 1997, p.81). These discourses enable such groups to resist oppressive norms and assumptions. An example of the development of alternative norms is given in Barnes’ (2008) study into the involvement of disabled people in official participation initiatives in healthcare. The study highlights the way in which emotional responses were presented as an alternative to official, more rational, understandings of what constitutes deliberation.

Counter publics are not only associated with counter-discourse in the literature. They may also be involved in counter agency, which can take the form of revision, resistance or refusal, according to Barnes and Prior (2009). Resistance involves “the deliberate pursuit of courses of action” which can be undertaken at an individual or collective level (ibid, p.30).

In conclusion, the accounts of a range of case studies of participation initiatives suggest a mix of understandings regarding the purpose of schemes both among policymakers and the publics involved. As the next section shows, there is a similar variety in the case of e-participation.

#### **1.4.2 E-participation: policy and practice**

The role of the internet in advancing the participation agenda is characterised by the same apparent mix of intent at government level as displayed in the modernising policy project as a whole. In describing and analysing e-participation, I refer to two

typologies. One is of 'ideal' (in a Weberian sense) models of interaction between the state and citizens which may underpin the practice of e-government (Chadwick and May 2003). The other is Dahlberg's typology of empirical instances of e-democracy which I referred to above (see p.8) (Dahlberg, 2011). A table setting the two alongside each other is in Appendix 3.

An early indication of the Government's interpretation of participation as related to digital communications technologies is to be found in the same White Paper which laid out its approach to participation more generally: *Modernising Government*. This paper contained a section entitled Information Age Government, which with the "possible exception of one point" put it "squarely" within a managerial model of interaction between the state and citizens, according to Chadwick and May (2003). That one point is that "IT will help government become a learning organization by improving our access to, and organization of, information". (Cabinet Office, 1999a, section 5, para 5).

The managerial model is outlined in Appendix 3 but of chief relevance here is its concern with the 'efficient' delivery of government/state information to citizens and other groups of 'users'. The approach in *Modernising Government* also fits Dahlberg's 'liberal-individualist' position on digital democracy. From this perspective, the potential of digital media rests on its capacity for conveying information and viewpoints between individuals and representative decision-makers (Dahlberg, 2011). Another clear case of a managerial or liberal-individualist approach comes from the first report of the Select Committee on Information 2002. In a section entitled 'Public participation in online consultation', the report recommends: "it must be made clear to participants that they are not being asked to make policy but to inform the thinking of legislators". (House of Commons, 2002, p.15)

However there were also signs in 2002 of a less managerial approach developing. The government consultation paper from the Office of the e-Envoy, *In the Service of Democracy* (Cabinet Office, 2002) proposed two tracks for e-democracy: e-participation and e-voting. The stated objective of e-democracy policy was to facilitate, broaden and deepen participation in the democratic process (Cabinet

Office, 2002, p.19). Deepening participation included going beyond single exchanges to more sustained and in-depth interaction. “Deliberation – making the most of people’s ideas” was named as one of the five principles underpinning e-democracy (Cabinet Office, 2002, p.21).

These ideas were carried forward in the Digital Dialogues initiative which the Ministry of Justice set up and the Hansard Society carried out from 2006-2008. It consisted of a review of the ways in which central government was using online communication tools to support public engagement. In its first phase, it involved the Hansard Society helping government departments and agencies to set up websites, from which 25 case studies eventually emerged and formed the basis of the review.

One of these case studies was Womenspeak, an online consultation on domestic violence. Chadwick and May (2003) cite this consultation as an exemplary case of their ‘participatory’ model of e-democracy. Dahlberg (2011) too references Hansard’s e-democracy forums in explaining the ‘deliberative position’, in which democratic subjects develop through the process of rational deliberation in the public sphere. However, Dahlberg’s empirically-based deliberative position emphasises interactivity less than Chadwick and May’s ideal participatory model, in which it is central.

This interactive characteristic of state-citizen relations – which *In the Service of Democracy* refers to as sustained in-depth interaction - has proved, however, to be a rare feature of e-participation in practice, and indeed Chadwick and May acknowledged that the concept had ‘utopian’ leanings (Chadwick and May, 2003, p.10). As a result, Chadwick argues, “the use of digital network technologies to shape public policy is generally met with incredulity by most politicians, public servants and citizens” (Chadwick, 2009, p.9).

A similar tone is present, albeit in an anecdotal context, in the final blog of the then director of Hansard’s digital democracy programme, Dr Andy Williamson, on leaving his post in 2011. After acknowledging that some civil servants and MPs “get” the digital society, he adds, “but still the chain is being dragged and institutionally, despite moves to open up data, there is still significant resistance to transforming



government, parliament and society into a more inclusive democratic and discursive space”<sup>11</sup>.

A version of e-participation which government has more enthusiastically adopted over the last 10 years is e-consultation. By 2012, the Coalition Government’s guidance on consultation principles recommended that consultation should be “digital by default”<sup>12</sup>. The third Hansard report on the Digital Dialogues initiative reported that between 2003 and 2008 Labour Government departments carried out an average of 609 consultations per year (Miller and Williamson, 2008, p.25). But it added that the 2007 Audit of Political Engagement (Hansard Society, 2007) showed that only 4 per cent of the public had responded to a consultation and a further 14 per cent said that they did not feel sufficiently knowledgeable to do so, despite wanting to (note that this refers to consultation in general rather than just e-consultations). Meanwhile, the Coalition Government’s direction of travel in regard to consultations in general does not bode well for advocates of greater public participation<sup>13</sup>

E-petitions, however, have met with remarkable public support. Chadwick (2009) describes The UK Prime Ministers E-petitions website as one of the most successful e-democracy projects of all time, if judged in terms of the numbers of participants. In its first year, 2006, the website published over 14,000 petitions which attracted nearly 5.8 million signatures (e-Petitions Website, 2008<sup>14</sup>, cited in Navarria, 2010). This compares with a yearly average of 327 petitions received by the British Parliament between 1989 and 2007 (House of Commons, 2008, cited in Navarria 2010). In 2010 the Coalition government put the site under review, relaunching it in 2011 as

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<sup>11</sup> From Digital Democracy ‘The last blog’. Available at <http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/edemocracy/archive/2011/08/17/arrivederci.aspx> [Accessed 11 July 2013]

<sup>12</sup> From Cabinet Office 2012 Consultation principles guidance. Available at <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/consultation-principles-guidance> [Accessed 19 February 2013]

<sup>13</sup> In July 2012, then Minister for Government Policy, Oliver Letwin, announced new consultation principles that would replace the 2008 Code of Practice. A key change was to allow Departments discretion to reduce the 12-week consultation period. This was opposed, among others, by the House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee, which called on the Government to launch an external review of its new approach (House of Lords, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> *ePetitions - one year on* was retrieved by Navarria on 30 April 2008 from <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page11051.asp>. The document is no longer available at that address or the directgov address.

Directgov, a move which has been interpreted as evidence of a rethink over how such a site fits with the principles of representative democracy (Navarria, 2010).

The most fundamental change in e-participation, however, is the surge in developments initiated by citizens, as opposed to government. Policymakers are now finding themselves having to respond to increasingly popular forms of digital political engagement and activism. Examples range from discussion-oriented social networking sites such as Mumsnet ([www.mumsnet.com](http://www.mumsnet.com)), to online campaign organisations such as Avaaz ([avaaz.org](http://avaaz.org)) and 38 Degrees ([www.38degrees.org.uk](http://www.38degrees.org.uk)), to protest movements such as UK Uncut ([ukuncut.org.uk](http://ukuncut.org.uk)) and the Occupy Movement (the this is a worldwide movement; one of its best-known incarnations is [occupywallst.org](http://occupywallst.org)). The growing popularity of campaigning sites such as [avaaz.org](http://avaaz.org) presents a stark contrast to the declining levels of participation in more traditional political activities, such as voting and party membership<sup>15</sup>.

The government addressed the less contentious end of this spectrum of digital activism in the policy review *Building on progress public services* (Cabinet Office, 2007a). The review recommended that the Government should support the development of user-initiated websites such as [www.netmums.com](http://www.netmums.com), but they acknowledged that such websites are “outside government’s direct influence” (ibid, p.38-39). The point was reiterated in the Government’s response to the Power of Information Review (Cabinet Office, 2007b, p.4). Since then it has become more common for politicians and policymakers to engage in live webchats on sites such as [netmums.com](http://netmums.com), [mumsnet.com](http://mumsnet.com) and the online versions of newspapers such as *The Guardian*, and *The Telegraph*.

More contentious action targeted specifically at the policy process has also provoked a direct response from government in some recent cases. A particularly relevant example is the #spartacusreport incident in January 2012, during which the

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<sup>15</sup> Avaaz launched in 2007 and by 2013 had 18 million members worldwide. The Hansard Society’s Audit of Political engagement 2012 showed declining levels of support for the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties and the lowest ever level recorded in the Audit series of people saying they are ‘certain to vote’. (Hansard, 2012). Fox (2009) also details declining levels of trust in politicians and participation in formal political activities.

Department of Work and Pensions took to Twitter to respond to the criticism by disability activists of its consultation on the reform of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) (see Appendix 2 for more details). As a consequence #spartacusreport trended on Twitter on 9 January, 2012. This development was described as “significant” by *The Guardian* journalist Patrick Butler because it signaled that the government had entered the debate “on the disability activists’ own terms” (Butler, 2012).

As this section has shown, overall policy towards participation in general and e-participation in particular has been characterised by often-contradictory motivations and a lack of clarity over purpose. Policymakers’ response to the changing digital terrain has been reactive and cautious. This is, perhaps, unsurprising given the challenge that digital technologies present to representative democracy: a fact, as mentioned above (p.7), which is recognised in Loader and Mercea (2011) and which is also noted in this Hansard Report in 2003:

“The internet is likely to increase the pressure on our representative system by facilitating more protest, more ad-hoc campaigns, more expectations of rapid and direct communication between government and citizens. All of this makes it harder for governments to develop a more coherent policy agenda. It seems that democracy in the information age is set to become more difficult and more unpredictable.” (Ward et al., 2003, pp.667-8)

As my research exemplifies (see sections 5.5 and 8.2), such predictions are being borne out in the mismatch between the participation in practice and its ‘official’ representation in policy documents and participative spaces.

## **1.5 The policy context: social care**

This section highlights some of the key themes and developments in social care policy and legislation from 1990-2009 which are most relevant in the context of this research. As such, it starts with this expression of intent from the 2009 Green Paper *Shaping the Future of Care Together* (henceforth ‘the 2009 Green Paper’):

“The Government’s vision for care and support is for a National Care Service: a *fair, simple and affordable* system that gives people the *independence, choice and control* over their care that they want, wherever they live in England.”  
(DoH 2009, p32, italics added for emphasis)

This passage expresses two groups of themes which have reverberated through social care policymaking for many years (for example, DoH, 2001; 2005; 2006; 2009). The themes are expressed in terms that are typical of the “warm, fuzzy, ambiguous language” of policy making (McConnell, 2010, p.126) and as a result are open to interpretation (Beresford, 2008a; Roulstone and Morgan, 2009). The following sections describe their various applications in more detail, while also drawing attention to key stages of policymaking.

### **1.5.1 “Independence, choice and control”**

The idea of independence was a strong component of the disability movement in the 1960s, where it was bound up with the social model of disability. The social model sees ‘disability’ as the negative social reaction that people face as a result of perceived physical, sensory and intellectual ‘impairments’ (Beresford, 2008a, p.14). People are ‘disabled’ by these reactions, which can take the form of attitudinal or social barriers. The notion of care is correspondingly seen as having disempowering and custodial overtones, casting disabled people as passive and dependent (for example, Morris 1993). The emphasis instead is on supporting people through personal assistance. This perspective forms part of the philosophy of independent living, with the guiding principle that “disabled people and service users should have support and access to mainstream opportunities, so that they can live their lives on as equal terms as possible with non-disabled people” (Beresford, 2008a, p.14). In practice, this approach requires that disabled people themselves develop policy so that they can decide the support they want.

The freedom to decide what support you want, however, took on a different complexion in the market-oriented model that characterised Conservative

Government policy from 1990 (Glendinning, 2008). The NHS and Community Care Act of 1990 (NHSCCA) is widely accepted as a defining moment in social care policy, marking a shift in the acceptance of 'care in the community' as a way of addressing the needs of older people and disabled people (Barnes 1997, pvii). It also encouraged privatisation in various ways, based on the idea that 'choice', would promote competition and ensure market-led improvements in quality, efficiency and responsiveness (Glendinning, 2008). The Act devolved to local authorities (LAs) responsibility for assessing people's needs, and planning and providing care. LAs were encouraged to become commissioning bodies and reduce their role as direct providers, so stimulating a mixed economy of social care (Baggott, 2004, p.279).

In practice, the effects of these changes were diverse, with variations between local authorities both in the degree to which commissioning led to a mixed-economy of social care and in the amount of 'choice' actually offered to users and carers (ibid). Disabled people were particularly vocal in complaining that professionals making purchasing decisions on behalf of end users were hampering choice (Glendinning, 2008, p.456). This was a driving force behind the Direct Payments Act 1996, which introduced direct cash payments to working age adults so that they could purchase the care services they required (Newman et al., 2008, p.545). Direct payments were gradually implemented from 1997 but, despite research which showed that they led to high levels of satisfaction and well-being, take-up levels remained low (Newman et al., 2008).

Meanwhile the election of the Labour government in 1997 heralded the introduction of a more consumerist model of public services, with the emphasis not just on markets but on choice for its own sake. Choice was seen as "an intrinsic good in itself" and "fundamental to achieving citizenship, social inclusion and human rights" (Glendinning, 2008, p.458). The idea of citizen-consumers underpinned the modernisation, marketisation and personalisation of public services (Lister, 2011).

The term personalisation was introduced by Charles Leadbetter (2004) to convey the idea that services needed to be less standardised, more flexible and based on greater engagement with citizens (Duffy, 2012). New Labour widely applied the term "to

describe a whole range of its own policy initiatives and enthusiasms” (ibid, p.111). In regards to social care, the idea of personalisation contributed to the development of individual budgets, which were proposed in the Cabinet Office Strategy Report *Improving the life chances of disabled people* (Cabinet Office, 2005), and progressed in the 2005 Green Paper *Independence, well-being and choice. Our vision for the future of social care for adults in England* (DoH, 2005). The main objectives of this paper were to help people maintain their independence and give them greater choice and control over how their needs were met (Newman et al., 2008). This was progressed in the 2006 White Paper *Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services* (DoH, 2006).

Although individual budgets were accompanied by the rhetoric of personalisation, emphasising empowerment and control, some observed that they were sold in managerialist/consumerist terms and on the basis of being cheaper than traditional social care, (Beresford, 2008a). This kind of reinterpretation prompts Morris (2011), looking back over the last 20 years of disability policymaking, to conclude starkly that governments have “colonised and corrupted” concepts such as independent living to the significant disadvantage of disabled people (Morris, 2011, p.3).

### **1.5.2 “Fair, simple and affordable”**

This second group of adjectives describing the vision for the National Care Service form a parallel set of themes which have characterised recent policy (for example, DoH, 2008, 2009; Wanless, 2006). Concern with affordability also goes back to the 1990 NHS Care and Community Act. This legislation was “heavily influenced by the need to rein in the runaway social security bill for residential and nursing home care” at a stage when concern about the ageing of the population was becoming increasingly prominent (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2005, p.2).

Despite large sums being transferred from central government to local authorities as a result of the NHSCCA, there continued to be a gap between needs and funding (Baggott, 2004). Local authorities addressed this shortfall by developing their own systems of eligibility, charges and means tests. The diversity of these systems was one

of the chief sources of criticisms that the system was unfair (Baggott, 2004). Another issue which prompted allegations of unfairness concerned means testing, which meant that people who had saved for their old age were penalised by having to pay for their care, while others who had failed to save paid little or nothing. This remained a focus of concern over unfairness as exemplified in this extract from the 2009 Green Paper (DoH, 2009):

“Despite many improvements over the years, the system is still regarded as unfair. Many families who have saved all their lives find themselves facing high costs for care and support for themselves or their loved ones.” (DoH, 2009, p.4)

The idea that it is unfair for people to face unexpected costs in old age is also tied to the notion of simplicity, which in the same section of the report, is expressed in terms of the need to know what to expect. The geographical diversity in systems, the ‘postcode lottery’ argument, has also remained a focus of discussions about fairness and, similarly, is a key point of the 2009 Green Paper.

Under the Labour government, the issue of affordability was revisited in the Royal Commission into Long-term Care, which reported in 1999. It recommended that long-term care should continue to be funded by general taxation (the NHS model). However, two members of the commission dissented on the basis that providing free personal care at the point of delivery is detrimental to the least well off. The Government also rejected the NHS model but on the basis that it would become unaffordable as the number of older people rose. Debate subsequently became deadlocked over whether free personal care should be funded from general taxation or be means-tested, which would necessitate people with a modest amount of capital having to fund the full costs of their care (Keen, 2008). Keen argues that the deadlock arose because the arguments behind the varied policy proposals were based on different principles of fairness and equity but that this was not made explicit and so the issue could not be properly debated and resolved. This was still a problem, Keen argued, as he was writing in 2008, when he commented on the difficulty of identifying which principles of equity the government supported (Keen, 2008). Keen (2008)

identifies two traditions of equity used in recent discussions of welfare policy: utilitarianism and Rawls' difference principle. By referencing discussion to these principles, he argues, it would become clearer that the choice underlying policy debate is often over whether it improves the overall utility of a population or the circumstances of the least well off. Similarly, for greater clarity, proposals should be considered according to whether the objective is to equalise incomes, outcomes or access to services (Keen, 2008). In practice, however, both following the Royal Commission and more recently, although the question of affordability has been bound up with allegations about fairness, the underlying dilemmas fail to be explicitly debated.

The next major review of funding after the Royal Commission was the 2006 review *Securing Good Care for Older People: Taking a Long-term View*, which the Kings Fund commissioned Sir Derek Wanless to conduct (Wanless, 2006). A concern with demographic imperatives and affordability was at its heart. It forecast that by 2026, 1 in 5 people in England would be over 65, and the number of people over 85 would increase by two-thirds. Further, the review predicted that the number of people needing help with the activities of daily living would double by 2025 (Wanless, 2006).

The review outlined three frontrunners among possible funding options – a limited liability model (a hybrid of means-testing and free personal care); a partnership model (the state financing a guaranteed minimum level of care, and any top-up additional care being funded through matched contributions from the individual and the state); and free personal care (community-based personal care services and the care element of institutional care are paid for by the state from general taxation).

These funding options informed those of the 2009 Green Paper (DoH, 2009). Its favoured options were: a partnership model (a share of costs paid for by the state, that share depending on means), an insurance model (as in the partnership model but additional costs covered through a private or state backed insurance scheme) and a comprehensive model (those over retirement age required to pay into a means-tested state backed insurance scheme). (Appendix 4 contains an extract from the 2009 Green Paper describing these models.) The paper ruled out a pay for yourself option



(no support from the state) and a tax-funded option (all basic care funded from taxes). However the detail of the various models was left open, a point which provoked some criticism (Keen and Bell, 2009, Spiers, 2010).

“Detailed, costed proposals are still needed before any of us can support any particular funding model. The need now is to show in detail how people on different incomes may ‘win’ or ‘lose’ under any new set of proposals.” (Keen and Bell, 2009, p.1)

A lack of clarity over funding was also exemplified in the way a particular detail of the Wanless review was carried over to the 2009 Green Paper. This detail was at the heart of the subsequent online response to the paper. It concerned how the proposed funding changes might affect two non-means-tested cash benefits: Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA). (See Appendix 1 for an explanation of these benefits.)

The Wanless review acknowledged that the partnership model would cost more than the current system, but it said that the increase could be offset by changes made to social security benefits, in particular to DLA and AA:

“Under the partnership and free personal care models, direct state expenditure would cover the care-related uses of these benefits, reducing their justification. They could be significantly scaled back or even stopped under partnership or free personal care, especially if their non-care use was small and if claimants would also mostly be entitled to social care support.  
(Wanless, 2006, p.xxxi)

Under this scenario, the review continued, two thirds (2.5 billion) of the total spend on DLA and AA could be “transferred” to social care funding (ibid).

The 2009 Green Paper referenced the Wanless review in its discussion of integrating the support provided through disability benefits and the social care system (DoH,

2009, p.103). But it was ambiguous on the implications of its funding proposals for DLA and AA, merely citing AA as an example of a benefit for which there was a case for integration (ibid, pp.15, 61 and 103). The risk that this approach would provoke opposition was recognised at the time, as this article in *The Guardian* testifies:

“Labour can't pretend it wasn't warned. In the early summer, when it was touch and go whether the care and support green paper would see the light of day, ministers and officials elsewhere in Whitehall were extremely nervous about the Department of Health's intent to propose ‘integrating some disability benefits’ into a simplified care funding system...Nevertheless, the proposal went ahead – courtesy, some say, of the all-powerful Lord Mandelson – and the line was that this would be one of the ‘tough choices’ to be made in the search for a new settlement on care and support”. (Brindle, 2009)

A similar point is also made in an editorial of the *Journal of Care Services Management*:

“Fears that the ambiguity over the future of the Attendance Allowance would dominate the green paper debate, overshadowing other major options within the document, appear to have been substantiated.” (Roberts, 2010, p.103)

A further twist to the complexity of discussions about fairness and affordability in relation to social care policy comes at a more general level in the associations, which are increasingly made, between eligibility and responsibility. This has particular ramifications for carers and disabled people, as discussed below. It is part of the wider shift in the welfare discourse, towards viewing welfare rights as contingent on individuals meeting certain obligations that have chiefly been articulated in terms of work. As Deacon and Patrick (2010) point out, New Labour consistently declared its intention to rebuild the welfare state around work – an intention made clear at an early stage in its command paper *New ambitions for our country: a new contract for welfare* (Department for Social Security, 1998). In 2006, the Green Paper *A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering People to Work*, made clear the Government's intention to

challenge “the assumptions that people with health conditions and disabilities, women with dependent children, and older people cannot work or do not want to work” (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006, p.19, cited in Deacon and Patrick, 2010). This change in discourse effectively elevates paid work as a criterion for adult citizenship, a development which has profound exclusionary implications for those unable or unwilling to engage in formal employment (Lister, 1999; 2002). Such groups may get financial support from the state but the risk is they will come to be regarded as a burden in comparison to the responsible worker citizens (Deacon and Patrick, 2010). This emphasis on paid work also eclipses the contributions to society which are made through activities such as caring and volunteering.

Overall, references to affordability in government discussions of social care, the lack of clarity by policymakers over funding proposals, and the elevation of paid work among the eligibility criteria for benefits are all likely to have contributed to a growing unease among disabled people, carers and older people about whether and how their needs will be met.

### **1.5.3 Social care policy overall: room for interpretation**

This section has placed the 2009 Green Paper in the context of relevant developments in social care policy from 1990-2009. It has shown the variety of understandings associated with two groups of themes which are central to the 2009 Green Paper and which have reverberated through recent policy. It illustrates the room for ambiguity and misunderstanding over policy, both among policymakers and between policymakers and groups such as disabled people, elderly and carers. It also shows the way in which policy themes can be antithetical to one another: notions of independence and putting services users in control sit uncomfortably with concerns about affordability and eligibility. Newman et al. (2008) highlights the tensions between the different representations of modernisation in the 1998 White Paper *Modernising Social Services* (DoH, 1998); and the 2005 Green Paper *Independence, Well Being, and Choice* (DoH, 2005). Concerns with service delivery, efficiency and joint working in the 1998 White Paper are contrasted with the 2005 Green Paper, which made independence and control a priority and carried the message that service

users could be “active agents in the shifting dynamics of care” (DoH, 2005, p.535). This situation and its tensions were echoed in 2009. The attention to demographic issues, affordability and responsibility, which characterise the 2009 Green Paper and preceding papers are similarly at odds with the messages of independence and control that particularly characterised policymaking in the mid 2000s but remained in more current policy documents.

This point about inconsistency also applies to the particular case of the 2009 Green Paper’s implications for disability benefits. The 2009-10 Health Committee report on Social Care lists the criticisms it heard of the proposals to merge AA and DLA into social care funding (House of Commons, 2010). Among these was the following:

“There is an apparent contradiction between the Government’s support for personalisation and potentially excluding some people from receiving benefits that are described as ‘the perfect direct payment’ and ‘the original personal budget’ [those benefits being DLA and AA].” (House of Commons, 2010, p.92)

## **1.6 The structure of the thesis**

This chapter has provided an introduction to my thesis, which the following chapters explain in full. Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical literature on collective action in general, rather than specifically online collective action. In this critical review, I consider the literature from the perspective of my research interest in participation, particularly by disabled people, in welfare policymaking. From this, I synthesise various strands of the literature into a conceptual framework, which is described and illustrated at the end of the chapter. Chapter 3 starts with a brief section clarifying my position that there is a mutually constitutive relation between technology and society. A review of the theoretical and empirical literature which addresses online collective action follows. In the process of this review, the gaps in the literature which my research addresses become apparent. I clarify my contribution further in the following section of this chapter, which looks at the literature on digital communications technologies in relation to disabled people. Chapter 4 describes how

and why I selected the 2009 Green Paper consultation as the site of my research and details my methodological approach and research design. Chapters 5 and 6 report my findings. In the process, I describe in detail how I carried out the research and note some of its limitations. Chapter 5 focuses on the findings from the analysis of the campaign that encouraged people to comment on the 2009 Green Paper. Chapter 6 details the findings from the mixed methods analysis of the comments themselves. In Chapters 7 and 8, I bring these findings together and in doing so, reflect on the wider implications of my research and its points of correspondence and divergence from relevant literature. Chapter 8 also includes a section reflecting on my conceptual framework in the light of my findings. It concludes with a section relating my research directly to specific examples of the most relevant literature. Chapter 9 concludes the thesis, demonstrating its implications for current understandings of online collective action and highlighting the ways in which it could be developed further.

## **Chapter 2: From a critical review of literature to a conceptual framework**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature which forms a theoretical basis for different understandings of collective action. This enables me to articulate the conceptual framework for my own research. In addition, it helps puts the empirical literature on online collective action into context. This review is divided into three sections. Like many divisions, these are not hard and fast categories and individual examples of literature may overlap them. Also, the work included within them is by no means homogenous: it merely shares some defining features.

The first section has its roots in economic theory. It starts with Olson's highly influential *Logic of Collective Action*, which sought to explain why people are incentivised to act collectively when it appears that doing so is not in their own interest (Olson, 1965). The various assumptions underlying this representation of collective action have been widely critiqued and the section goes on to summarise these arguments (for example, Granovetter, 1978; Valente, 1996; Marwell et al., 1998; Baldassarri, 2009). Much of this work is in the analytical-sociology tradition and its findings are the result of experiments which test behaviour under controlled circumstances. An actor is typically assumed to be rational and self-interested. As Chapter 1 showed, this literature defines collective action in a way which encompasses a wide variety of phenomena from being a member of an orchestra to building a public park, or taking part in a demonstration. The section ends with a critique which sits on the boundary between the analytic and empirical traditions of research in this area, and so serves as an introduction to the section which follows (Baldassarri, 2009).

The second section of theoretical literature is more often based on empirical findings. In this case, the interest in collective action arises from the part it plays in social change. Social movements are the context of its study (for example, McCarthy and

Zald, 1973, 1977; Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1982; Offe, 1985; Melucci, 1989, 1996; Inglehart, 1977; 1990). For this reason, the understanding of collective action, or the cases which are considered worthy of study, are more narrowly prescribed. The focus tends to be on protest or non-institutional forms of action; much of the literature was developed in response to the social movements of the 1960s. Some of this literature assumes rational and self-interested actors, other literature emphasises the affective motives for action. I have split this literature into two main sections, broadly along the recognised lines of the 'American' and 'European' approaches (for example, Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Annetts et al., 2009).

The third section brings together literature which overcomes some of the dichotomies and drawbacks of other perspectives. It covers contentious politics perspectives (Tarrow and Tilly, 2006; McAdam et al., 2008), social welfare movements (Martin, 2001; Annetts et al., 2009), network and relational perspectives (Elias, 1978; 1991; Diani and McAdam 2003; Crossley 2002; 2010) and social psychologists (Postmes, 2007; Van Zomeren et al., 2008).

In the course of this chapter, and as a result of critical review, my own conceptual framework becomes clear. It synthesises various perspectives to propose the scaffold for my empirical study. This use of theory to structure empirical research is informed by Mouzelis (1993) and the process is explained more fully on p.96.

## **2.2 The Logic of Collective Action and its critics**

This section reviews perspectives on collective action that originated in the field of economics but which have been exported to other social sciences, in particular as a result of Olson's (1965) seminal work, the *Logic of Collective Action* (Marwell et al., 1988, p.504). Much of the literature reviewed here responds either explicitly or implicitly to arguments made in Olson (1965). This section will therefore start with a brief explanation of why collective action poses interesting theoretical questions for economists, summarising the key aspects of Olson's thesis. It will then look at various critiques of this thesis which are relevant to the research question. This body of literature is immense, so I have taken a focused approach in reviewing it. Because the

research question concerns online collective action, the review prioritises challenges to Olson's ideas, as well as alternative perspectives, which are salient in the context of the development of new digital communication technologies.

### **2.2.1 Collective action incentives and the free-rider problem**

The provision of public or collective goods has provoked a longstanding debate in economics. Traditional examples of public goods are parks or bridges, but less tangible goods, such as public policies or open-source software, also fall within the category. The issue of theoretical interest to economists is how these goods might be provided if individuals are assumed to be rational and self-interested. In the absence of a benevolent individual donor, the provision of such goods will often depend on collective action, defined as "actions being taken by two or more people in pursuit of the same collective good" (Marwell and Oliver, 1993, p.4). But the nature of public goods complicates an individual's incentives to participate in such action. There are two key ways in which public or collective goods differ from private goods. First, they are 'non-rival' or subject to 'jointness' in consumption: an individual's consumption of a good does not reduce the amount available to others. Second, they are 'non-excludable': individuals cannot be excluded from enjoying the good, even if they don't contribute to it.

The second characteristic, in particular, has been seen as constituting a key obstacle to the provision of public goods: the free-rider problem (Olson, 1965). The temptation to free-ride arises from the fact that an individual can enjoy the rewards of public goods resulting from collective action whether or not they contributed individually to that action.

The question of incentivising individuals to act collectively in the provision of public goods was a chief concern of Olson (1965). His thesis claimed that if members of a group have a common interest or objective which, if achieved, would benefit them all:

"unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common



*interest, rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests.” (Olson, 1965, p.2)*

The special devices are selective incentives, such as financial rewards or moral feelings of altruism. Selective incentives are excludable goods that are provided only to contributors.

Olson’s work has prompted a widespread literature in response, concerned both with the fundamental validity of his arguments and, more recently, with the challenges to them from advances in communication technologies.

### **2.2.2 Critiques of Olson’s assumptions**

Very few aspects of Olson’s work have been exempt from criticism but many of the critiques make profound modifications to his assumptions, while still accepting the premise of the free-rider problem (for a more detailed account of these critiques, see Baldassarri, 2009). Formal models of collective action proceed on this basis, treating collective action primarily as a problem of coordination between self-interested actors (Baldassarri, 2009).

One of the main modifications to Olson’s assumptions from this formal perspective is the idea that actors are interdependent. A key source of criticism on this basis is Oliver and Marwell (for example, Oliver and Marwell, 1988; Marwell and Oliver, 1993). They argue that individual decisions are interdependent; people take account of the actions previously taken by others when deciding how to act themselves. The relations between people are structured by social networks, and the nature of connections determines how quickly and easily people can be mobilised. They conclude (from simulation experiments) that, contrary to Olson’s assertions, the costs of collective action vary little with group size. Large groups are as able as small groups to exhibit collective action since doing so depends on the ability to attain a critical mass of activists, and on the relationship among individuals in the critical mass. Moreover, they argue that under certain conditions, large groups are more likely to exhibit collective action since they find it easier to gather a critical mass of

activists (Oliver and Marwell, 1988; Marwell and Oliver, 1993). Critical mass therefore is seen as a more important determinant of collective action than group size: “some threshold of participants or action has to be crossed before a social movement ‘explodes’ into being” (Oliver et al., 1985, p.523).

Writers including Granovetter (1978) and Valente (1996) have developed the idea of thresholds and their relationship to networks. Valente (1996) showed that the point at which a threshold is reached depends on an individual’s networks, specifically the propensity to act among other people they are linked, or “exposed” to. These ideas have been extensively tested and developed with reference to online networks, as discussed in section 3.3.1.

Another body of criticism has moved beyond the free-rider problem, arguing on the basis of experimental research that free-riding is not the default option for a large part of the population. This has led to the proposition that there are different types of individuals: rational egotists, conditional cooperators and willing punishers (Ostrom, 2000). In a similar vein, an assumption of selfishness is questioned by the concept of reciprocity, which predisposes individuals to co-operate if others are co-operating, and to punish defectors (Fehr and Gintis, 2007). A recent example of work in this field is Margetts et al. (2011), which uses a public goods experiment to examine what social influences are at work when a person decides whether to contribute to a collective action.

Evolutionary theory contributes a further alternative to the assumed selfishness inherent in Olson (1965). The idea is that particular personality types or genes have survived by selection because of the advantages of altruistic behaviour (Dawkins, 1976; Sober and Wilson, 1998). Evolutionary and biological psychology also contribute to theories which question the assumption of rationality. The social intuitionist model of moral judgment “de-emphasizes the private reasoning done by individuals, emphasizing instead the importance of social and cultural influences” (Haidt, 2001, p.814).

A final category of work which critiques Olson, also critiques many of the alternative formal models of collective action just described. This is because it takes issue with the assumption that people mobilise for collective action around the goal of a public good. The public good is considered as something given and non-problematic in these models: it is an exogenous factor. By contrast, this body of work argues that for extraordinary forms of collective action, “the definition of what becomes *the* public good is likely to be the *endogenous* product of the collective action itself” (Calhoun 1991; Loveman, 1998, cited in Baldassarri 2009, pp. 402-403). Baldassarri is a key contemporary proponent of this approach and describes a computer simulation she used to develop her ideas. The resultant model shows that a pre-requisite of collective action is the simultaneous development of collective identity and interest (ibid, p.408). “When a single good dominates public discourse, actors segregate themselves into homogenous niches of dense interaction” (ibid). This bolsters their shared commitment and secludes them from alternative views. A collective interest and identity emerge from this process and, as a result, collective action becomes possible. This approach provides a natural bridge to the section on social movement theories because it has been influenced both by the social movement theories and the formal theories described above. Baldassarri (2009) quotes social movement theorist Doug McAdam - “most individuals act routinely to safeguard and sustain the central sources of meaning and identities in their lives” – to argue that the co-occurrence of collective identity and interest is a pre-requisite for collective action (McAdam, 1982, cited in Baldassarri, 2009, p.402).

### **2.2.3 Interdependence, altruism, and a call for consideration of collective identity and interest**

As this section has shown, various assumptions of Olson (1965) have been convincingly criticised. Firstly, the notion of actors as isolated is replaced with models which conceive of interdependent actors. Secondly, assuming that free-riding is a default option rests on that notion that people are selfish as opposed to altruistic. This position is countered by the idea that there are different personality types, for example some people are more pro-social or cooperative than others. These different personality types also form part of the explanation of why individual thresholds for

collective action vary. Thirdly, the positioning of the public good as an exogenous factor in collective action is questioned. Collective action is instead perceived as resulting from a process in which the collective interest and a collective identity develop in parallel.

The final point is made by Baldassarri (2009) and is part of a reconception of collective action which has much to offer in the context of my research. It encompasses some points of other critiques, for example that actors are interdependent. It would be difficult to refute this position in the context of online collective action where actors are demonstrably linked in digital networks and as the section on the literature into online action shows, the majority of contemporary research assumes interdependence. Baldassarri's model is critical of other aspects of literature in this section. For example, it does not conceive of personality types being fixed but argues that people adopt different behaviours according to situation they face. This position is consistent with the assumption of interdependence and reflects a basic tenet of social psychology and of this thesis, that the self is also social (Postmes, 2007). Baldassarri (2009) identifies empirical research from a social movement perspective as among her influences. It is that body of work which is discussed in the next section and which also contributes to my own conceptual framework.

### **2.3: Social movement theories**

As mentioned in the introduction, this literature is often based on empirical research rather than formal analytical models. The perspective is not an interest in collective action for its own sake but as a constituent of social change and in the context of social movements.

A definition of social movements is a contested and difficult proposition for more than one reason. Firstly as Annetts et al. (2009) observe:

“Social movements are heterogeneous, dynamic, constantly evolving social collectivities. By their very nature they make any attempt at hard-and-fast

definition, categorization or classification a rather foolhardy exercise.”  
(Annetts et al., 2009, p.7)

Concepts of social movements vary along a number of dimensions, including some fundamental distinctions between largely US and European literature (discussed below). However, a number of scholars have attempted to bridge or supersede this divide (Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Crossley, 2002; Annetts et al., 2009) and definitions from these sources are therefore likely to be more widely applicable. Della Porta and Diani (1999) offer a good example. Social movements are:

“(1) Informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest.” (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, p.16)

The conclusion that “social movements share family resemblance rather than a fixed essence” (Crossley, 2002, p.7) is also helpful in the context of this research because of the propensity for hybridity in online organisational forms (Chadwick, 2007). Social movement theory has developed in the US and Europe in distinctive ways which reflect the political and philosophical traditions of the two regions (for a full review, see Annetts et al., 2009, Della Porta and Diani, 1999). In general terms, US perspectives have been relatively concerned with the ‘how’ of social movements, focusing on micro- and meso-level issues such as motives for participating in social movements and their organisational dynamics. European perspectives have been more concerned with the ‘why’ of social movements, addressing macro questions such as identifying the social and political factors which prompt their emergence (Della Porta and Diani, 1999).

The following section comprises a brief summary of the main strands of social movement theory, with particular reference to aspects which are most relevant to my research.

### **2.3.1 Traditional theories of collective behaviour**

Early scholarship on collective action in the US was dominated by an interest in what was perceived to be the irrational collective behaviour or “hysteria” exhibited by crowds (Le Bon, 1995). This literature took the view that the normal rational behaviour of individuals was suspended when they became part of a crowd (Smelser, 1962). Collective action is perceived as crisis behaviour. This perspective included the Relative Deprivation Theories (RDT) of Gurr (1970) as part of its focus on anomie, social disconnectedness and grievance. Some portrayed movement participants as people who were not fully integrated into society and therefore gained a sense of belonging from collective behaviour (Kornhauser 1959; Gusfield 1962). Another strand of theorising focused more on observable actions rather than motivations, ie., behaviour rather than psychology (as exemplified by Blumer, 1951). These approaches, as a whole, lost support due to their inability to account for the social conflicts of the 1960s (Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Annetts et al., 2009). However, RDT has been revisited in contemporary theorising for its useful focus on grievance (Crossley, 2002; Postmes, 2007).

### **2.3.2 Resource Mobilisation Theory**

Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) dominated the second phase of US social movement research (for example, Mc Carthy and Zald, 1973; McCarthy and Zald, 1977). This theory developed to counter assertions that collective behaviour was characterised by irrationality and so it emphasised the rational and strategic nature of collective action. The emergence of social movements is conceived as depending on access to organisational resources. Leaders or ‘movement entrepreneurs’ are important in this respect because of their ability to mobilise and use resources (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). This approach also views collective movements as an extension of conventional forms of political action. Because social movements need to acquire resources in order to survive, the assumption is that this will propel them into a process of maturation and institutionalisation, which will lead to their eventual deradicalisation.

### 2.3.3 Political Process Theory

The third phase of US theorising consists of a revision and refinement of RMT and responds to the criticism that it ignored the external political context (for example, Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1982). Successful mobilisation depends not only on the appropriation of resources under external control (as in RMT) but also on the recognition and cooption of existing internal organisational resources, such as pressure and community groups. The emphasis on existing groups was another manifestation of the argument that social movements were not a suspension of normal behaviour but “simply politics by other means” (McAdam 2003, p.282). This view present in both RMT and Political Process (PP) theory reflects the different nature of movements in the US and Europe at the time. In the US, the movement organisations tended to be either quite mainstream, and structured as interest groups, or they were counter-cultural. This contrasts with Europe, where they were more often modelled on workers’ movements, and had a strong ideology (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, p.3).

Later versions of this approach developed into the idea of contentious politics (McAdam et al., 2001; Tarrow and Tilly, 2006; McAdam et al., 2008). This is discussed more fully in section 2.4.1.

US theorists have been criticised for their inadequate treatment of structure and agency (Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Crossley, 2002; Annetts et al., 2009, Carty, 2011). Crossley attributes this to the influence of rational actor theory (RAT) which forms the basis of RMT and PP theory. On the agency side, he says, they fail to look into the origins of movements themselves (Crossley, 2002, p.169). On the structural side, the consideration of the balance of opportunities and constraints is “extremely vague and underdeveloped” and the effort to distance these theories from earlier behavioural theories means that the question of grievance is altogether neglected (ibid, p.170). Others criticise RMT and political process theory as having an overly utilitarian position on human nature and rationality, which precludes an adequate account of mobilising factors such as ideology, identity and culture (Carty, 2011). One of the strengths of European approaches is their attention to such issues.

#### **2.3.4 Critical theory, post-materialism and New Social Movements**

One of the main sources of the European perspective is Habermas' critical theory. Habermas argued that advanced capitalist societies face a crisis of legitimation (Habermas, 1976). This involves the bureaucratic intervention of the state into spheres which were previously autonomous and private. Social movements are a response to this colonisation. They represent an opportunity to resist system intrusion, replacing its instrumental rationality with a value-oriented rationality more suited to the world of family, morality and community. The focus of this perspective is consequently on movements concerned with issues such as quality of life or self-realisation (Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Annetts et al., 2009).

These arguments contribute to a wide-ranging theory of New Social Movements (NSMs). Although there are various strands of this theory, they have in common the idea that NSMs operate in new spheres and are concerned with new values. This stands in contrast particularly to classical-Marxist conceptions of class-based movements. NSMs shift conflict from the political sphere to the civil and cultural realm (Touraine, 1985; Melucci, 1996). This realm is conceptualised by Melucci (1996) as an intermediate public space, in which identity can be reclaimed from the colonising intrusion of the state. Social movements operate in this space, serving as vehicles for the construction and negotiation of collective identity (*ibid*). Empirical studies by Offe (1985) contributed to the picture of NSMs oriented to social, rather than economic change, characterised by a loose, non-hierarchical organisational structure, and challenging the boundaries of institutional politics.

Inglehart's empirical work into the new movements of the 1960s (for example, Inglehart, 1997; 1990) was key to the notion that NSMs were concerned with post-materialist values. He argued the political conflict in advanced industrial societies was no longer centered on class divides but was more concerned with post-material values such as rights, identity and political participation. The anti-nuclear, feminist, disability rights and environmental movements are all manifestations of this shift in values.



### 2.3.5 Synthesising frameworks

Efforts to reconcile the various social movement approaches began to proliferate from the mid 1990s (see for example, McAdam et al., 1996; McAdam et al., 2001; Klandermans and Roggeband, 2007). To take one of the earliest of such approaches as an example, McAdam et al. (1996) developed an organising framework combining three inter-related factors: mobilising structures, opportunity structures and framing processes. Mobilising structures include the social structures which bring individuals together to engage in collective action, from formal social movement organisations to informal activist networks (McCarthy, 1996). Mobilising structures include tactical repertoires. These are recognised forms of protest or collective action but also as “learned cultural creations” that reflect the historical period from which they emerge (Tilly, 1995, p.26). Opportunity structures are the exogenous conditions that favour social movement action, for example particular political situations. Framing processes refer to the construction of a unifying understanding of the purposes and values of a social movement. A frame is an “interpretative schema” which enables individuals and groups to attribute meanings to actions and phenomena (Snow and Benford, 1992; Benford and Snow, 2000). This includes persuading people that issues are urgent, that alternatives are possible, and that there is a worthiness to the cause (Tarrow and Tilly, 2006).

This model is, however, also criticised in regard to its concept of agency. The charge is that the notion of ‘repertoires’ and ‘frames’ violates the basic assumptions of the RAT model on which this approach was founded. This leads to an “unclear” and “eclectic” conception of agency (Crossley, 2010, p.170).

The opportunity structure approach is also criticised for its failure to “distinguish between ‘objective reality’ and its social construction” (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, p.223). What might appear from outside observers to be a political opportunity may not be regarded as such by activists. Attention must therefore be paid to the lens, or cognitive processes, through which activists interpret potential opportunities, according to Della Porta and Diani (1999).

### **2.3.6 Radical theory**

An influential contemporary theory blends postmodern influences with Autonomist Marxism (which emphasises self-organisation and autonomy from systems of centralised power). Hardt and Negri (2000; 2004) conceive of the collective networked subject as the 'multitude'. The multitude includes various groups – social movements, non-governmental organisations, migrants and workers – which are made up of autonomous agents acting in networked concert to resist global 'empire'. The multitude communicate and collaborate by using the same tools of informational cognitive or communicative capitalism developed to exploit them. However this self-organised and inclusive participation in common productive activities bypasses centralised state and capitalist systems (Dahlberg, 2011). This enables the multitude to reclaim the 'common', a participatory realm of commonality that creates goods by material labour, as well as informational, cognitive or immaterial labour (Hands 2010, p162).

### **2.3.7 The drawbacks of the literature in the context of my thesis**

As this review of social movement theories has shown, there are various drawbacks to the literature. The first concerns the degree to which rationality contributes to decision-making. Perspectives such as RMT rest on a conception of decision making as essentially a cost-benefit analysis, whereas the cultural turn in social movement theorising emphasises affective or emotional components such as collective identity. A synthesised model which admits both cognitive and affective elements overcomes this divide. Secondly, as discussed, the treatment of structure and agency in many US approaches is seen as inadequate. Carty responds to this deficit with a call to consider "the cognitive processes which intervene between structure and agency" (Carty, 2011, p.11) but affective processes should not be left out of the equation either. Thirdly, the contention that social movements are concerned with post-material issues and the downplaying of grievance as a motive for action are problematic in the context of welfare, where material grievance may well be an issue. Finally, most of this literature is oriented to consideration of non-institutional activity. The following section reviews literature which addresses one or more of these shortcomings. This

contributes to the development of a conceptual framework more suited to the requirements of my research.

To recap, three of the most central requirements are that the conceptual framework:

1. works from the perspective of an instance of collective action. The framework therefore needs to cover the range of what constitutes collective action. It must be open to the possibility that social movements are involved but it should not assume collective action takes place only in the context of a social movement. For this reason, institutional as well as extra-institutional action needs to be encompassed. Also, the possibility of cognitive as well as affective motivations for collective action should be covered.
2. is able to address the possibility that the action concerns welfare. That is, it must not assume that the issue is post-material or does not involve some kind of grievance and it should take account of the possibility of collective identity linked to a social movement.
3. needs to take full account of the interdependence of actors.

## **2.4 Elements of a suitable conceptual framework**

This section introduces theories that present solutions to the various drawbacks of the approaches described so far. Together these theories provide the elements of a framework that is able to address the nature of collective action as it occurs in an online setting.

### **2.4.1 Contentious politics**

Following McAdam et al.'s synthesis (1996), McAdam and others developed an approach which focused less on social movements in particular and more on identifying the common mechanisms and processes across a range of contentious activities, from ethnic conflicts to social movements to revolutions (McAdam et al.,

2001). In this conception, protest is a cyclical process, and a social movement a series of collectively organised events (Tilly, 2004). This idea of dynamism or process is also present Baldassarri's (2009) conception of collective action coming out of a process of collective identity and interest formation.

Apart from the notion of process, another feature of this approach that makes it useful to my thesis is its challenge to the institutional/non-institutional divide:

“The study of politics has too long reified the boundary between official prescribed politics, and politics by other means.” (McAdam et al., 2001, p.6)

McAdam et al. (2001) call instead for a new division along the lines of whether the episode of contention is “contained” or “transgressive”. Contention is transgressive when it consists of episodes in which: government is a claimant, an object of the claims or a party to them; the claims affect the interests of the claimants; some parties are newly self-identified political actors and/or at least some parties employ innovative collective action. Innovative collective action, in turn, needs to include collective self-representations and/or adopt means that are unprecedented or forbidden by the regime (McAdam et al., 2001, pp.7-8). The previous distinction, they argue, leads analysts to neglect or misunderstand the parallels and interactions between institutionalised and extra-institutionalised actions.

The distinction is also critiqued in the context of the proposition that modern societies are moving towards more networked forms of governance:

“Most writers in the social movement tradition tend to operate with a sharp distinction between state and society – actors are either ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the state – and to view the state itself as a rather monolithic entity ...The focus on a dispersed state or differentiated polity could provide a fruitful line of development.” (Newman et al., 2004, p.220)

However, the position taken by McAdam et al. (2001) is criticised for its tendency to consign social movement processes to the category of just another episode of contention, according to Diani and Bison (2004). They draw attention to the substantial differences between social movement process and “other cognate collective action dynamics” (ibid, p.281). Social movement processes are differentiated by their longevity, basis in collective identity and their extra-institutional repertoires (ibid). In coalitions, interaction and coordination occur at an instrumental level and there is not necessarily any implication of continuity (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, p.20). Whereas with a social movement, the presence of collective identities, which place the action in a wider perspective, makes “revival of mobilisation in relation to the same goals easier” in future (ibid).

A focus on collective action rather than social movements, can still maintain a distinction between social movement processes and other collective action processes. Diani and Bison say that within any empirical instance of collective action, “more than one process can normally be detected” (Diani and Bison, 2004, p.285). Their point is not to deny the existence of other processes but to maintain the distinction between them. This distinction is made at the level of the network. My approach diverges from Diani and Bison (2004) in this respect. They are primarily oriented towards identifying social movement processes and so they are interested in establishing the difference between what they call ‘network identity’ and ‘organisational identity’, the former being a defining feature of social movements. The contemporary phenomena of networked forms of organisation suggests this distinction may be increasingly difficult to maintain. But this is not the most relevant part of Diani and Bison’s argument in the context of my research. My interest is in collective action, so the most useful contribution is the idea that the networks involved in collective action may be categorised according to whether they exhibit social movement or other collective action dynamics. I discuss the subject of networks more fully in section 2.4.3.

Modified by a recognition of what makes social movement processes distinctive, contentious politics is, therefore, useful for its emphasis on process and its consideration of both institutionalised and extra-institutionalised action. Diani and

Bison (2004) and Newman et al. (2004), meanwhile, are useful for their network-level perspective.

#### **2.4.2 Social welfare movements: a combination of old and new movements?**

Contemporary social welfare movements sit uneasily with distinctions between old and new movements, and the focus of this thesis on collective action around welfare makes this a salient point. Considering social movements in the context of struggles over welfare highlights the way in which some perspectives on social movements, particularly those which focus on NSMs, marginalise material grievances.

A struggle over immediate demands for resources is at the heart of welfare politics making it “far from the politics of the symbolic gesture that is supposed to characterise distinctively new social movements” (Annetts et al., 2009, p.257). For example, Shakespeare (1993) argues that the struggle for economic resources is a key theme in the disability movement. One way of bringing material concerns back into the frame is via the concept of injustice. Contemporary social psychologists (for example, Postmes, 2007) identify injustice as among the psychological processes underlying mobilisation for collective action. This subject is discussed more fully in section 2.4.4.

An argument against framing discussion of social movements in terms of opposition between old and new movements is also made in Mayo (2005, pp.90-91). In reference to a study of the Californian unions (Voss and Sherman, 2000), and a joint community and union campaign centered on low wage workers (Needleman, 1998), Mayo suggests that cross fertilisation between old and new movements was very productive, building alliances and drawing on differing pools of knowledge and skills. She argues that to pose old versus new movements is to set up false dichotomies that obscure the way in which useful interactions can take place (Mayo 2005, p.91).

This argument has some echoes of the previous discussion (p.52) about the differences between social movement and other collective action processes. In that instance, the notion of networks presented a way out of the dilemma and I suggest it

is also helpful here. If the collective action process is seen as playing out through networks, this admits the idea that there can be a variation in the mix of what drives the individuals and groups involved. Instrumentalist concerns associated with “old” movements might be more to the fore in some parts of the network and symbolic or cultural “new” movement concerns might be the priority in others.

A networks perspective may be useful in accounting for the different degrees to which identity and material grievance matter to the actors or groups of actors involved in any given instance of collective action. A more thorough exploration of network theory is therefore necessary in order to round out my conceptual framework.

### **2.4.3 Networks and relational sociology**

A focus on networks is often part of a wider relational approach to sociology. This approach contributes to my conceptual framework by emphasising the importance of interrelations in collective action. This is one of the deficits for which Olson (1965) was most criticised, as discussed in section 2.2.2. A relational approach also clarifies the interconnectedness of structure and agency. An inadequate treatment of this issue is a criticism often leveled at ‘American’ social movement theory, see p.49.

Given the ubiquity of the term ‘network’ in accounting for contemporary social forms, it is unsurprising that this is a diverse and contested notion (Hands, 2010; Willson, 2010). The classic view is that networks consist of a set of actors and the set of relations between them (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). Sets of nodes are linked by some form of relationship and delimited by some specific criteria (Diani, 2003a). In the social realm, nodes often represent people, but they can also represent countries or organisations, and the links between them map interactions, such as communications or trade (Borge Hothoefer et al., 2013). Classical approaches are based on mathematically-supported social network analysis (SNA), which focuses on structural forms (Barabasi, 2002; Carrington et al., 2005). In these conceptions, attention tends to be on focused on issues such as the degree to which influence is determined by centrality, or diffusion by weak-ties (see Borge-Holthoefer et al., 2013,

for a review). This approach to networks is central to theories about cascades and thresholds which stemmed from critiques of Olson (1965) (see section 2.2.2).

There is also large body of literature that applies network analysis to social movements (see Diani, 2003a for a review). In some cases, the structure of networks is the focus and formal network analysis is applied. In other work, the interest is more in the symbolic function of networks and, in this case, the broader term 'network studies' is used to make a distinction with network analysis (Diani, 2003a, p.2). For example, Jasper (2009) says that, "networks consist of affective loyalties not mechanical interactions. Networks and culture work together" (ibid, p.93). Similarly, in an approach which emphasises that "agency and social networks occupy centre stage", Passy refers to networks as "islands of meaning which define and redefine individual identities through their interactions with other actors or groups" (Passy, 2003, p.27).

Meanwhile, the spread of digital communications technologies has also focused attention on networks as technosocial forms. Two of the most influential theories in this area are Barry Wellman's networked individualism (Wellman, 2002), and Manuel Castell's network society (Castells 2000; 2001). (The literature on online networks and collective action is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.)

Castells uses the term 'network society' to convey the degree to which, he believes, networks are now integral to the fabric of social life (Castells, 1997; 2001; 2004). He emphasises the horizontal form of networks, contrasting it with vertical nature of hierarchies and arguing that the network society is therefore well suited to the dispersed, informal, grassroots nature of social movements. Wellman's basic thesis is that society has moved away from densely-knit and tightly-bounded groups and towards networked individualism, which is characterised by sparsely-knit and loosely-bounded networks (Wellman et al., 2003).

Literature on technosocial forms is, however, criticised for having an unclear conception of community and networks (Cavanagh, 2007; Postill, 2008; Willson, 2010). Some writers are seen as conflating the two concepts and others using a



postmodern interpretation of networks to replace a modernist conception of community (Willson, 2010, p.4). Willson (2010) suggests, on the basis of a critical review of the literature, that 'community' is useful for its focus on the content of connectivity between people, and 'network' for its focus on form.

This distinction between content and form is echoed in those relational perspectives which call for a conception of networks that goes beyond structure. Here, the solution to focusing on content is not to replace the notion of networks with communities, but rather to recognise that networks embody *both* content and form, (Knox et al., 2006; Edwards, 2010). The argument is that communicative processes establish ties between groups and individuals, which, in turn, shape the processes which occur by virtue of those ties. In this way, networks manifest the interplay of agency and structure.

Norbert Elias, a key figure in relational sociology, conceived social structures as the product of social relations and interdependencies rather than as external to the individual (Elias 1991). The concept of games is useful here and is employed by Elias (1991) and, later, Crossley (2002) to illustrate how the rules of a game form the parameter within which the players act in innovative and strategic ways.

Crossley argues that people act on and shape structural situations, which in turn shape and define agency (Crossley 2002). Crossley (2010) claims that the "much debated agency/structure dichotomy cannot be resolved in general". He paraphrases Marx to identify the purpose of sociology, and especially relational sociology, as being to examine how "inter-actors make history (agency) but not in circumstances of their choosing (structure)" (Crossley, 2010, p.5).

This dynamic conception of the interplay between structure and agency is compatible with an emphasis on process more generally. Elias (1978) argues against what he sees as process reductionism. He illustrates the way in which this is embodied in language by reference to the phrase "the wind blows" (Elias, 1978, p.112). This implies that wind is a substantive thing that exists separately from the idea of it blowing. In the context of collective action, process reductionism can be seen in the

conception of collective action as an end product resulting from a period of mobilisation, rather than as a process in itself, that, in turn, feeds back into drivers of collective action, such as collective identity.

Elias is an enlightening reference point, too, on collective identity, describing the bonds between people as underlying the “I-and-we” consciousness (Elias, 1978, p.137). For Elias, bonds are a blend of impersonal Durkheimian type economic bonds and affective emotional social bonds (Elias, *ibid*). The link between collective identity and action is evident in his notion that these bonds “knit people together for common purposes” (Elias *ibid*). This notion of a relationship between collective identity and collective action is also a key feature in Della Porta and Diani (1999, p.109). (Collective identity is discussed further in the section 2.4.4.)

The relational approach also includes a position on rationality that is more suited to my research purposes than RAT, which is rejected by relational sociologists such as Della Porta and Diani (1999, p.180) and Crossley (Crossley 2002, p.65). Agents cannot be conceived as “minimal calculating machines” if it is accepted they are “social beings endowed with forms of know-how and competence, schemas of perception, discourse and action, derived from their involvement in the social world” (Crossley 2002, p.176). The relational approach admits both a cognitive and affective element to decision-making (Crossley 2002, p.69; Postmes 2007).

Finally, the relational perspective, through the concept of networks, provides a route to conceiving the role of power in the process of collective action. If networks are understood to be an embodiment of interrelations, and power is envisaged as located in relationships rather than being possessed by one party or another (Clegg 1989; Crossley 2010), it follows that networks manifest power. As part of this, networks express inclusion and exclusion, articulating who is linked to whom and who is outside the network altogether. DiMaggio and Garip (2012) review the literature on how network effects have the capacity to amplify or diminish social inequalities. They argue that inequality is aggravated when social networks multiply the effects of individual differences. DiMaggio and Garip (2012) illustrate this point with the example of an individual’s decision about whether to adopt a beneficial practice

(beneficial use of the internet, provides a pertinent example here). An individual's endowments might make adoption unlikely in the first place (individual endowments being an example of individual differences). If in addition to this, their decision about whether to adopt the practice depends on whether those in their social network do, and if those in their network share the characteristic of being predisposed not to adopt the practice (in this sense, the network is homophilous), they too are unlikely to adopt it. Under the same circumstances a heterogeneous network (heterogeneous in the sense of likelihood to adopt) may serve as a bridge to the adoption of such practices. This illustration also fits with a perspective of decision-making not being conceived as an entirely cognitive process; simply hearing about a beneficial practice is not sufficient to persuade people to adopt it (as other research has shown, see Halpern et al., 2004, for a review). As I discuss later, literature has shown that online, homophilous networks can act as a barrier to the diffusion of information, and heterogeneous networks as a catalyst (Bakshy et al., 2102; González-Bailón et al., 2012), yet the same and other (Carty, 2011; González-Bailón, 2013) literature acknowledges, too, the persuasive impact of friendship in regards to whether to adopt an action.

In considering how this discussion impacts on power, an important element to bear in mind is that power is not conceived here as a 'thing' which is static and held or not held, rather, it is a process and only begins to take on a reified form when the relational conditions which constitute it are reproduced (Clegg, 1989). So, to return to DiMaggio and Garip's example, the position of the individual in the network failing to adopt the beneficial practice cannot be assumed to be immutable; networks themselves are not static, and neither is the power located in them. The notion of networks as an 'assemblage', which is recognised as an expression of power (Newman and Clarke, 2009) is useful here. This makes particular sense in the context of a consultation and the question of which publics are 'assembled' (and by whom) to respond to the consultation. However, while people may assemble or be assembled to respond to a consultation, the question of how they respond is also an important facet of power. Again Clegg is relevant here, in his discussion of the strategies and practices which enable enrolling agencies to recruit agents to views of their interests which

align with the “discursive field of force” they have constructed (Clegg 1989, p.17). Knowledge disperses through networks and so, too, does understanding. In conclusion, this section has shown that a relational approach, particularly the concept of networks, is useful to this thesis for a number of reasons. As a conceptual device, networks enable a focus on interaction. A network approach also clarifies the inter-connectedness of structure and agency. And, viewing individuals as part of networks offers a robust counter-argument to the notion of the isolated actor in RAT. Finally, networks frame a discussion of power.

#### **2.4.4 The social psychologist perspective**

Social psychologists see themselves as making an important contribution to the literature on social protest: “to bridge subjective (psychological) and social (structural) perspectives on when, why and how people engage in social protest” (Van Zomeren et al., 2008, p.504). This has led to a body of literature which addresses the determinants of collective action from a social-psychology standpoint. From this perspective, the relative lack of recent attention to objective conditions is attributed to the fact that large-scale analysis of the empirical relation between objective conditions and collective action is “elusive and weak at best” (Green et al., 1998, Tilly et al., 1975, cited in Van Zomeren et al., 2008, p.505).

At the same time, the pervasiveness of digital communications technologies and their part in recent protest events has focused attention on their interface with collective action. Here, the debate revolves around the impact of online, networked relations, and the effect these have on the diffusion of information about others’ actions, beliefs and values. In this environment, the social psychology approach has much to offer.

A cornerstone of the social psychology model on which I base my conceptual framework is “the self is also social” (Postmes, 2007, p.180). The view is that an understanding of the psychological processes underlying collective action must be based on a conception of individuals as social actors. The three variables which have received most attention in regards to collective action are: injustice, efficacy, and social identity (as explained in the next paragraph, social identity is understood here

to be interchangeable with collective identity) (Postmes, 2007; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). These psychological processes combine cognitive, rational calculations with affective factors, and individual and collective beliefs (Postmes and Brunsting, 2002). An integrative social identity model combining all three processes is developed in Van Zomeren et al. (2008). This is the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) and came out of a meta analysis of existing research. It is the approach also used in Postmes 2007, with reference to online collective action in particular.

Of the three processes, social identity is arguably the most central and is found by Van Zomeren et al. to bridge the other variables (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). The classic Social Identity Theory-based definition is:

“that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.” (Tajfel, 1978, p.63)

Some social psychologists prefer the concept of collective identity to that of social identity (Ashmore et al., 2004). In a review of the literature on social and collective identity, Ashmore et al. (2004) argue that definitions of social identity that derive from social identity theory (SIT) differ minimally from conceptions of collective identity. Using the latter concept, they suggest, also overcomes the “more numerous and potentially more problematic” connotations of social identity (p.81). Further, they reference Simon (1997) in arguing that all identity is, anyway, social, making the prefix redundant.

Collective identity can be seen as having similar components to social identity. First is the categorical component which refers to groupings, such as gender or age; shared ideological or cognitive beliefs. This is similar to the knowledge of membership of a social group which Tajfel’s definition refers to. Second is an affective component – feelings about one’s membership of the group (Ashmore et al., 2004) - which equates to the “value” in Tajfel’s definition. The affective component, or emotional bond, is described by Snow as one-ness or we-ness (Snow, 2001).

Collective identity has also been discussed from a more sociological perspective, particularly in regards to its importance in social movements. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) deconstruct the term and recommend abandoning it altogether because of its ambiguity. They break collective identity down into three sub-concepts: commonality, connectedness and groupness. Commonality is about membership of shared categories, connectedness connotes membership of shared networks, and groupness describes the affective component of collective identity. They argue that this breaking apart of the concept enables a distinction to be made between “instances of strongly binding, vehemently felt groupness from more loosely structured, weakly constraining forms of affinity and affiliation” (ibid, p.21).

One way of countering the allegation that conceptions of collective identity fail to articulate the variety of its manifestations is to view collective identity as a process, rather than something static or reified. If collective identity is viewed as a process, the notion that it is a continuum from loosely structured forms of affinity to a strong and binding sense of groupness follows more naturally. This does not suggest that there is a necessary progression along the continuum from weak to strong, but it does permit the possibility. This process approach is taken by Melucci, who, like Brubaker and Cooper, talks of networks, but in this case “networks of active relationships between the actors who interact, communicate, influence each other, negotiate, and make decisions” (Melucci, 1995, p.45). This idea is echoed in the notion that collective identities are negotiated and talked into existence, (Scott et al, 2004, p.445).

The idea of negotiation is also present in this description:

“A collective identity may have been first constructed by outsiders... who may still enforce it, but it depends on some acceptance by those to whom it is applied.” (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, p.285)

They add that collective identity “carries with it positive feelings for other members of the group” (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, p.285). Crossley (2005, p.146), too, refers to the existence of strong emotional bonds in collective identity, referencing Herbert Blumer’s use of the term “*esprit de corps*” to capture the feeling among members of a

group who share a collective identity. This is an important factor in the case of social movements, which as Crossley argues, must always have a sense of “we” (Crossley, 2005, p.146).

The difficulty in precisely defining social or collective identity is well recognised (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Ashmore et al., 2004) but this brief review shows that the basic components of Tajfel’s definition are broadly accepted.

The second of the processes is injustice. A subjective and relative sense of injustice is a key predictor of collective action, according to Relative Deprivation Theory, which informs this perspective (see for example, Walker and Smith, 2002). For a sense of injustice to lead to collective action, it depends on a group having a “*shared* perception of inequality” and inequity (Postmes, 2007, p.196). This requires intragroup interaction. An additional aspect of the argument is that relative deprivation has both cognitive and affective components. These consist in the knowledge that inequity exists and the feeling that it is unjust. Feeling is an emotional, affective factor and, from research on relative deprivation, a more powerful predictor of collective action than the cognitive component (Smith and Ortiz, 2002).

Anger and grievance are perceived as “emotional” motives by Van Laer (2010). A split is made within emotional motives between hard, externally directed and soft, internally directed emotions. For example, “indignation” may be associated with hard, externally directed emotions such as group-based anger, or with internally-directed, soft emotions such as sadness, concern and fear (Van Laer, 2010, p.410). Elsewhere, anger is categorised as an “action-oriented” emotion, which explains why, when it is provoked by unfairness, it can lead to collective action. (Van Zomeren et al., 2008, p.650).

As discussed above, particular bodies of social movement theory, particularly RMT and NSM theory, give little space for consideration of injustice. In RMT, this was prompted by a determination to distance the theory from psychological argument

associated with Relative Deprivation Theory. In the case of NSM, the emphasis on post-material concerns marginalises injustice based on material grievances. However the welfare focus in my research makes the concept of injustice, particularly of a material kind, highly pertinent.

The final process is efficacy. This concept comprises an expectation that collective action is possible and that it is likely to be effective. Part of the reckoning on possibility is about self-efficacy: whether one's own individual participation is worthwhile. This might depend, in part, on a cognitive, group-level evaluation of how many others are taking action. A social psychology approach also points to a more affective component at group level: evaluating whether there is intragroup social consensus (Postmes, 2007, p.169).

The second part of efficacy is effectiveness in terms of outcomes. Hornsey et al. (2006) argue that effectiveness has often been rather narrowly defined in terms of whether the action is likely to influence key decision makers. From empirical research, they find that, in practice, an action is judged effective by a wider range of criteria. These are: whether it will shift the opinion of neutral observers, perhaps persuading them to support the cause in question; whether it leads to strengthened solidarity and strategic connections within the group participating; and whether, on a more simple level, it gives an opportunity for values to be expressed. A similar point is also made in Beetham et al. (2008, pp.59-60), which argues that among the less obvious effect of protests are a change to the calculations under which future decisions are made and to the climate of public opinion.

As discussed earlier, the idea of efficacy has also been developed in formal theories of collective action. Critical mass theory is based on the idea that a threshold of participants or actions has to be crossed for a social movement to take off (Oliver et al., 1985, p.523). Others have developed this idea with particular reference to networks, arguing that thresholds can be measured in terms the numbers of people an individual's network that it takes to behave in a particular way at a particular time before that individual follows suit (Granovetter 1978; Valente 1996). The application of these ideas to online networks has also led to growing body of literature especially



regarding social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (see section 3.3.1).

In conclusion, the SIMCA model of collective action is suitable for my study because of its inclusion of affective and cognitive motivations for collective action and for its relational perspective, which underscores a focus interrelations. However, despite reference to underlying psychological processes in some of this literature (Postmes, 2007), in the main, this approach does not make explicit that collective action can be viewed as a process. This is apparent in the use of terminology such as ‘motivations’ and ‘outcomes’, which suggest that collective action has a linear, sequential form. For this reason, I prefer the term ‘drivers’ in my conceptual framework. This point is made more pertinent in an online setting, where the collective action need not happen after a campaign or mobilisation effort but can be contemporaneous with it. This is in contrast to offline cases where, for example, organising for a demonstration is separated in time from the demonstration itself. However, the potential for circularity in this offline case is evident in the scenario in which onlookers at a demonstration decide to take part. This would blur the boundaries between mobilising for an event and the event itself. Such blurring is likely in internet mobilisation, given the internet’s capacity to work on looser spatial and temporal dimensions than the offline environment. Other social psychology models emphasise the non-linear aspect of collective action more (see section 8.7) but my research focused on online action and in that context, the SIMCA approach was more frequently applied. The idea of non-linearity is also present in Castell’s concept of “timeless time” which “occurs when the characteristics of a given context, namely the informational paradigm and the network society, induce systematic perturbation in the sequential order of phenomena performed in that context” (Castells, 2000, p.494). Such issues, however, relate more closely to the literature on online collective action, which the next chapter addresses.

## **2.5 Conclusion: a suitable conceptual framework**

This thesis seeks to build theory on collective action. Developments in policymaking, coupled with a growing access to digital technologies and new understandings of

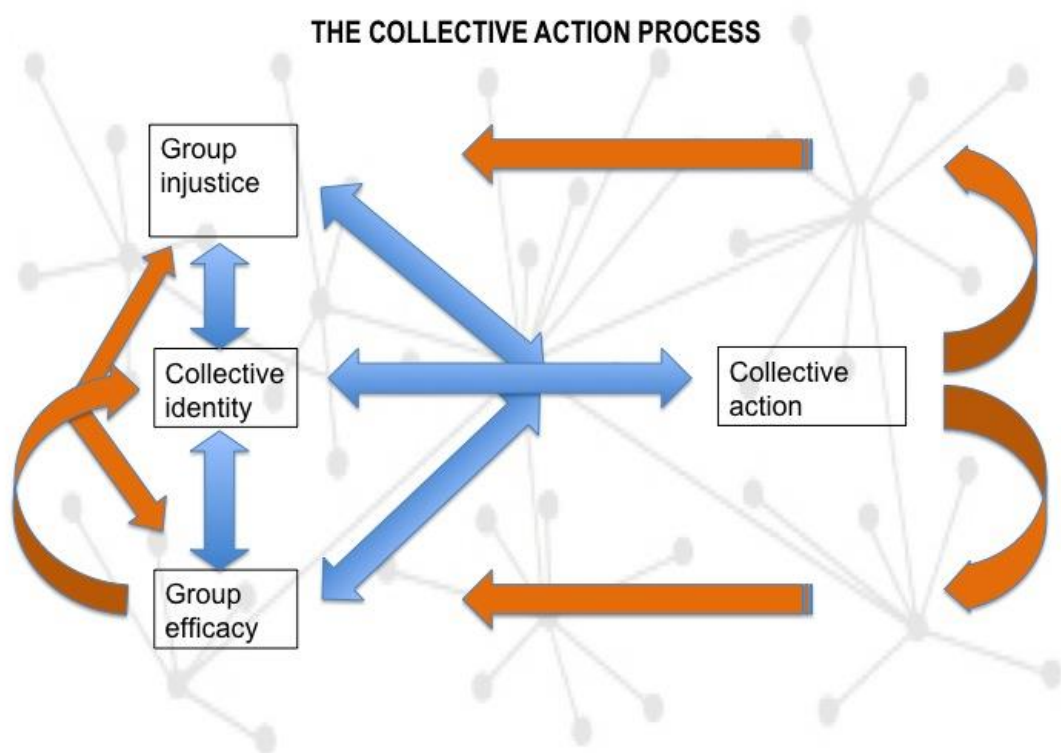
their use, led me to define an area of activity which was under-researched. That area was collective action regarding welfare policy, particularly in relation to disabled people.

This chapter reviewed literature which seemed most likely to provide a suitable conceptual framework around which to structure my research. As the review progressed, it became clear that the proposed subject of my research challenged various distinctions made at a theoretical level, as well as addressing an under-researched example of collective action. I then drew on a set of theories to form the elements of a framework that enabled me to study the 'awkward' case proposed. The framework needed to allow for consideration of a co-existence of factors in collective action which are often confined to separate models. However the framework was a scaffold around which to structure research and therefore open to revision. As such, at the end of my research, I critically reviewed the framework and some of the theories on which it was founded (see section 8.5).

The framework is made up of the following elements. First it is based on the concept of the 'self as social', which is central to social psychology, and underlines the point that actors cannot be conceived in isolation from their social context. Relational sociology makes clear the inter-relationship between structure and agency and the resultant need to focus on interaction in order to understand the social world. Attention to networks puts interaction at centre stage, addressing one of the main criticisms of Olson (1965). A network perspective also makes it possible to focus on what is novel about digital communications technologies – that they vastly increase the range and accessibility of connections between people. Further, this perspective offers a way of navigating the dichotomies between institutional and non-institutional action, between old and new social movements. Conceptual frameworks that uncritically assume these dichotomies run the risk of being unable to account for certain cases of online collective action. Those concerning welfare seem particularly likely to run into these difficulties. The framework's foundations in social psychology are also useful for drawing attention to the cognitive and affective components of decision making. This improves on the overly instrumental and rationalist conception of decision making that feature in alternative frameworks. Another drawback of

many rationalist approaches is to underplay the role of grievance in collective action, a deficit which the concept of injustice in the SIMCA model overcomes. The model proposed here therefore includes grievance but, as with the other drivers, this is not to suggest it need always be a component of collective action, merely that this possibility should not be overlooked. A feature the SIMCA model does not emphasise, but which a contentious politics approach highlights, is the idea of collective action as a circular process. This makes explicit the notion that collective action feeds back in a circular process into the drivers of collective action.

Figure 1: The conceptual framework: relationship between drivers of collective action



Note: the networked nature of the terrain is a fundamental feature of this framework and is loosely represented on Figure 1 by a background web of networks, which also manifest power. This visually addresses the conception that collective action plays out in a reciprocal manner through networks: defined by them and constituting them.

## **Chapter 3: The literature on online collective action, disabled people and digital communications technologies**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter contains a review of the literature on online collective, and of the literature on disabled people and digital communications technologies. To contextualise both these sections, the chapter begins by clarifying the position taken in this thesis on the relation between technology and society – that is that they are mutually constitutive.

The review of literature on online collective action brings together a wide variety of both empirical and theoretical literature. The most basic criteria for inclusion is that the literature addresses or is relevant to collective action, although in many cases it is structured around related questions, such as the effect of the internet on democracy or participation. I have divided this literature into sections which reflect both its own conclusions and the exigencies of my research. The review highlights various areas in which my research supplements current understandings of collective action in an online context.

The section on disabled people and digital communications technologies unpacks the frame of ‘exclusion’, which is the context of most of the literature. It also demonstrates the relative lack of research into disabled people in a political context online. Finally it shows how the perspective this thesis takes avoids some of the drawbacks of other literature.

### **3.2 The relationship between technology and society**

The stance in this thesis is that technology is both socially constituting and socially constituted. To discuss just one side of this equation risks either technological or social determinism.

A plea for researchers to avoid one-dimensional, overly deterministic approaches to the social study of technology is made in Dahlberg (2004), which argues that determinism takes three forms. Firstly, uses-deterministic approaches view digital communication technologies as neutral tools able to satisfy the purposes of agents employing them, tending towards instrumentalist conceptions of the human agent, according to Dahlberg (2004). Social movement based literature framed in terms of how social movements “use” information technologies display this tendency. A clear path to this is evident in the RMT perspective, where the internet is conceived as a resource “used” by social movements. Secondly, technologically-deterministic approaches grant technologies the status of an autonomous causal agent, assuming that the properties of the technology pre-determine social outcomes, in Dahlberg’s view (Dahlberg, 2004). Castells is criticised by some for being implicitly techno-determinist (Hands, 2010, Stalder, 2006). Finally, social determinism places undue emphasis on the social and economic structural context of the technology. Marxist-influenced standpoints risk falling into this category, according to Dahlberg (2004).

Debate about the degree to which the nature of technology is a result of its social and political context is nothing new. The issue of whether technologies can embody specific forms of power and authority is discussed in Winner (1986), who outlines the ways in which artifacts can contain political qualities. This raises the question of challenges to power. While some theorists takes the view that capitalist domination expressed in technology is possible to change only by massive disruption such as revolution, others argues that by identifying the hegemonic values and norms exhibited in technology, it is possible to challenge the form it takes and thereby the dominant system (Hands, 2010). Because this thesis views power as a process, it follows that power relations manifested in technologies may be open to non-revolutionary challenge, particularly, through organising (Clegg, 1989, p.17). Internet protocols and codes, for example, are a level at which the parameters of technological systems are set and can be challenged (Elmer, 2009; Langlois et al., 2009; Hands 2010). This position implies that technology has ‘interpretative flexibility’, that it can be used and read in a variety of ways (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999). Investigation based on this mutually-constituting approach is also a growing area in network science where the term ‘adaptive network’ is used to convey the idea that behaviours

on the web are influenced by network topologies and that the behaviour of users, in turn, influences those typologies (McCabe et al., 2011).

It is clear that debate on the relation between structure and agency in the context of networks has much to offer here. The perspective that the two are closely inter-related (as discussed in section 2.4.3) leads to the conclusion that digital networks are formed by a process of interaction and at the same time shape that interaction, constraining and enabling it in different ways. Questions on the interface between technology and action should not therefore be phrased in terms such as, 'How do organisations use the internet for collective action?'. Rather the subject for debate is, how do the form and development of digital communications technologies affect the process of collective action, and how does that process, in turn, affect those technologies?

This discussion draws attention to the point, already discussed, that separating what happens 'online' from what happens 'offline' risks obscuring the many ways in which the two interact (see p.16). So, while this research is looking at collective action performed online (where this means connected to the internet), it recognises that this occurs against a background of offline activity, networks and power relations (DiMaggio et al, 2004; DiMaggio and Garip, 2012).

Before moving to the next section, I will also define more closely what I mean by the 'internet'. The internet refers to the hardware and set of protocols constituting the electronic network of networks which people use, for example, to communicate via email, engage in instant messaging and visit sites on the web. The 'web', by contrast, is one of the services running on the internet. It is a system of web pages and other digital artifacts (often comprising pictures, video and sound) that are addressed via URLs and hypertext.

### **3.3 Literature on online collective action**

This chapter now turns to a review of literature on online collective action. My purpose here is to focus on collective action itself rather than its manifestation only in

a social movement context. In this respect my approach is similar to the contentious politics perspective (see Chapter 2). The theoretical underpinning of literature on online collective action is not always clear and, in fact, certain fields of online research which cover collective action, namely political communications, have been criticised as being “adrift theoretically” (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008, p.12).

I therefore group the literature broadly according to the questions it addresses. I identify the underlying theoretical perspectives of the research where these are explicit, and in other cases, I point out aspects of the research which suggest particular theoretical influences. A caveat, often made in the context of sorting exercises, and one that also applies here, is that the categories I use frequently overlap or shade into one another. What follows is therefore a route through the literature, where the categorisation primarily helps to identify how my own contribution fits into existing knowledge and addresses some of its gaps.

I have divided the literature into two main sections, the second of which covers a larger and more diverse range than the first. The first group is research which addresses efficacy and does so from a perspective of the argument that Olson (1965) failed to appreciate the inter-connectedness of individuals. It therefore comes out of the first group of literature which I covered in the theoretical review of Chapter 2. The second grouping has its roots in the second and third groups of theoretical literature from Chapter 2: a social movements and contentious politics perspective. In this case, its themes include questioning the role of collective identity, and to a lesser extent injustice, in contemporary collective action. The social psychology-based research into online collective action also fits, in terms of its roots, into this second group but differs from the other literature in this group by virtue of addressing all three motives for participating: injustice, efficacy and identity.

### **3.3.1 Networked diffusion of information about other people’s actions**

Literature in this section is concerned primarily with information that contributes to the cognitive aspects of decision-making, namely how many other people are taking a particular action. It is part of a wider body of work on diffusion dynamics in social

networks more generally (see Borge-Holthoefer et al., 2013, for a review). This perspective draws on earlier literature on critical mass and thresholds (for example, Granovetter, 1978; Marwell and Oliver, 1993; Valente, 1996). It focuses on the facility of the internet to strengthen the interdependence of decision making. Information about other's actions is seen as important to assessing the efficacy of participation (González-Bailón, 2009). This model of decision-making prioritises cognitive assessments over affective influences.

A key theoretical paper in this area is González-Bailón (2009), which points out that online networks both widen the scope of communication and reduce its costs (*ibid*, p.553). González-Bailón argues that RAT is insufficient to explain the processes of collective action unless it is "inserted in a general theory of networks" (*ibid*, p.537). This is because digital information and communication technologies give "greater empirical relevance" to the interdependence of individuals (*ibid*, p.537); it is difficult to maintain a model of decision-making based on the concept of isolated individuals in an online setting. The argument that RAT is inadequate in accounting for collective action has been strongly made by other social network theorists (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, Crossley, 2002), but González-Bailón (2009) revises rather than rejects RAT. She builds on earlier work on thresholds and cascades (for example, Valente, 1996; Gladwell, 2001) to suggest that internet-based interactions provide high-resolution observational data which can contribute to understanding how the structure and evolution of networks prompts informational cascades. The type of information in question concerns the actions of others. In this respect the approach is similar to Margetts et al. (2009), which discusses the effect of the internet on collective action in terms of its facility to improve information about other's actions and as a consequence, the "alignment of incentives between participants" (Margetts et al., 2009, p.3).

González-Bailón et al. (2012) develops knowledge about the online diffusion of information about other's actions in an empirical paper based on Twitter data from the Spanish Indignados movement.



This paper also references threshold theories of action, showing that the question actors pose themselves about joining a collective effort is not whether it is beneficial but if it is efficient, which depends on how many other actors are involved. But González-Bailón et al. (2012) moves more decisively away from attempts to pin the dynamics of collective action down to any individual level attribute or decision-making mechanism and instead views “collective action as a diffusion process driven by two main factors: how many people already joined the process, and how much exposure undecided actors get to those participants”. (González-Bailón et al., 2012, p.28).

The group, rather than individual-level orientation, of this work complements my own approach but the focus is on information about who has already joined, and no consideration is given to group identity or injustice. In other work, González-Bailón (2013) observes that it is more effective to receive a message about a protest from a friend than from an organisation with which you are not particularly familiar. A similar point is made by Bakshy et al. (2012), which looks at diffusion and contagion processes on Facebook. Bakshy et al. (2012) concludes that while strong ties are “individually more influential” it is more abundant weak ties that are responsible for the propagation of novel information. The consideration of whether ties are strong or weak and whether one is receiving a message from a friend, potentially touches on collective identity but this point is not developed. A similar point is present in literature which, based on its theoretical background, should be in the second section but is mentioned here because of this specific overlap. Carty (2011) and Takaragawa and Carty (2012), discuss the tell-a-friend phenomenon in the context of the online campaign group MoveOn and the Obama campaign in 2008. In this study, personal recommendation is also seen to be highly beneficial to the spread of information – “a small gesture to a friend can contribute to a massive multiplier effect” (Carty 2011, p.59).

Overall, literature into online diffusion processes is making substantial progress in identifying which actors trigger the spread of information and how this relates to their embeddedness in networks. From the perspective of my conceptual framework, this can be seen as developing understanding of how a sense of efficacy is

diffused. But it is less helpful regarding the other factors which social psychologists have shown motivate collective action – group level identity and injustice.

### **3.3.2 From social movement organisations online to the online organising of protest**

Literature which addresses collective action from the perspective of social movements was often structured, in earlier phases of research, around questions such as how social movements use the internet or whether the internet widens or reduces participation in social movements (for a review of earlier literature see Garrett, 2006).

More recently, however, it has been recognised that structuring research around this type of question is to miss the point that the digital terrain confounds previous categorisations. Chadwick (2007) argues the traditional distinction between interest groups, political parties and social movements is being challenged by the sharing and adaption among them of “digital network repertoires” which were developed by social movements in their online activities in the 1990s and early 2000s. As a consequence of this spread in repertoires, hybrid forms of political organisation, which overlap previous categorisations, are emerging (Chadwick, 2007, p283).

This contributes to a recognition that the interplay between the internet and organisations has changed the situation sufficiently that the question to be asked is, not “How do organisations use the internet to organise collective action?” but rather “How does collective organising happen online?”

An online organising perspective, rather than an organisation perspective is also present in Bimber et al. (2005) and the related paper, Flanagin et al. (2006). These papers are positioned as challenging two of the central tenets of Olson (1965), firstly that decisions about whether to free ride are discrete and, second, that formal organisation is central to locating and contacting participants in collective action. It is the second that is of most relevance here and the papers develop the argument that digital communications technologies benefit looser, more horizontal forms of action.

Flanagin et al. (2006) propose a model of collective action organising, making the point that organisations may switch between different organising modes within one campaign or between one campaign and the next. Much of the recent research into the online activity behind street protests agrees that formal organisations play a more minimal role in contemporary collective action, although there is more debate about the degree to which organising can be described as non-hierarchical or horizontal (for example, Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Anduiza et al., 2013; Theocharis, 2013). My own research, which preceded these studies, also approaches the task of understanding online collective action from the perspective of an example of its occurrence, rather than from an organisation, but, unlike these later studies, is focused on an example of collective action that occurred online and in an institutional context.

#### A focus on costs

An emphasis on instrumental issues such as costs suggests the influence of Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) in some of this literature. For example, in an earlier paper, Bimber (2003) argues:

“Socio-technological devices do not determine political outcomes, but simply alter the matrix of opportunities and costs associated with intermediation, mobilization and the organization of politics” (Bimber, 2003, pp. 231).

Similarly, Earl and Kimport (2011) use the phrase ‘leveraged affordances’ to describe the two primary types or characteristics of online action which digital technology enables. The first is reduced costs for creating, organising and participating in protest and the second is the ability to aggregate individual actions into broader collective actions, without the need for participants to be co-present in time or space (ibid, p.10).

The claims which some literature makes regarding the way in which political organising is developing also suggests the influence of RMT and Political Process Theory. RMT and Political Process Theory tend to characterise social movements as

“simply politics by other means” (McAdam, 2003, p.282) and some research addressing online political action contains a similar normalising theme.

Bimber (1998) uses the term “accelerated pluralism”, to describe the political opportunities created in the digital environment because of the looser organisational forms it enables. Accelerated pluralism is explained as:

“The ongoing fragmentation of the present system of interest-based group politics and a shift towards a more fluid, issue based group politics with less institutional coherence” (Bimber, 1998, p.133).

The idea of issue-based protest is also used to portray online activism in consumerist terms. Participants are described as choosing between campaigns in a similar manner as they do between products. Earl (2010) suggests the online campaign group MoveOn is more akin to a profit-oriented marketing organisation than a traditional social movement (Earl, 2010); and in an earlier paper Earl and Schussman (2003) note that ‘members’ have become ‘users’, who often chose to move on after supporting a particular action, rather than becoming permanently engaged. The notion that online political participation entails minimal engagement levels is captured in the term “clicktivism” and debate about this point has prompted a separate off-shoot of literature (for example, Shulman, 2009; Karpf, 2010). Earl and Kimport (2011) develop the argument about the ease of online participation to propose that its lower costs means that e-tactical activity does not suffer if there is failure to build or support collective identity. These views are based on the idea that injustice and identity used to matter to collective action, in part, because they provided returns for the substantial costs of participation. In suggesting that the low cost of online collective action makes these motives less of a pre-requisite for action, Earl and Kimport ask: “must one be as outraged or angry to bear low costs of activity as to attend a march?” (Earl and Kimport, 2011, p.96).

### The question of grievance

The idea that grievance (which I take here to encompass what Earl and Kimport term anger and outrage) is not a pre-requisite of collective action harks back to the development of social movement theory in the mid 1970s and the preoccupation at that time with rejecting the idea that crowds are irrational (see section 2.3.1). The growing interest in new social movements perceived to be concerned with post-material issues similarly sidelined the concept of material grievance (see section 2.3.4). However the demands for social justice at the heart of online activism, such as the Zapatista movement, the Battle of Seattle and more recently the Occupy movement (including the Indignados protests in Spain), makes the suggestion that grievance can be left out of the list of motives for online collective action harder to defend (for example, Van de Donk et al., 2004; Kahn and Kellner, 2004; Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010, Gerbaudo, 2012).

Research on the Arab Spring uprisings has also found that the facility for digital technology to communicate a sense of shared grievance between networks of people was a central component in mobilising protest. Hussain and Howard (2012) talk of protesters sharing and learning “a narrative of common grievances” from each other through Twitter and Facebook (Hussain and Howard, 2012, p.13). Acknowledging both the dynamics of the new media environment and the role of grievance, they argue:

“The ability to produce and consume political content was important because it created a sense of shared grievances, and strong political efficacy that had not led to such sizable, diverse, and quick mobilization before the Arab Spring.” (Hussain and Howard, 2012, p.12).

The role of grievance, particularly of a material kind, in online collective protests centered on domestic welfare policy has, however, not been addressed in contemporary literature: a deficit which my research responds to.

It should be noted that the notion of grievance is not synonymous with injustice. As discussed above (p.62), the concept of injustice which I am using draws on the work of social psychologists who conceive it as encompassing affective and cognitive elements. Group injustice covers both the cognitive realisation that your group is unjustly treated as well as an affective response to that such as anger and outrage. Grievance, largely by dint of its association with behaviour theory (see section 2.3.1), conjures the more emotional side of this range.

### The question of collective identity

Earl and Kimport not only suggest that online collective action may be possible without anger or outrage but they also question the role of collective identity. In this respect, they address a more vibrant theme of current debate. An early and key proponent of the view that new technologies enable those connected by weak ties to link up and mobilise more easily is, as mentioned above, Barry Wellman (p.55). Wellman (2002) outlines a typology of community from little boxes, to glocalisation, to networked individualism, the latter form being characterised by the dominance of weak-tie relationships. Although he acknowledges that the various forms of community can co-exist, in summing up the overall impact of living in networks, Wellman (2001) refers to “a reduced sense of palpable group memberships that provide a sense of belonging” and “reduced identity and pressures of belonging to groups” (ibid, p.234). Elsewhere, he says that the internet tends to transform communities, leading to a growing number of “communities of shared interest” (Wellman, 2003, p.7) and, he concludes that, in the developed world, “the modal community is probably a community of shared interests”(ibid, p.5).

A related strand of literature draws inspiration from the work of Zigmunt Bauman (2000; 2001) and Ulrich Beck (1992) (including Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Here, too, the focus is on the individualised nature of contemporary forms of political engagement (Bennett and Segerberg 2011; 2012; Papacharissi 2010; 2011, Gerbaudo, 2012). In traditional social movements an enduring collective identity provided the glue between waves of protest. This raises the question of how much the erosion of such ties in contemporary society is offset by social-media-enabled forms of

connectivity.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) position their discussion as a critique of the logic of collective action. They develop a typology of what they term large-scale *collective* as opposed to *connective* action networks. These are differentiated according to the ways in which action is organised: connective action networks are self-organised, whereas collective action networks are distinguished by strong organisational coordination of action. The other variable separating the categories within the typology is action frames. Collective action networks are characterised by collective action frames whereas connective action networks operate through personal frames. Connective action networks therefore result in action without collective identity framing, or without “the symbolic construction of a united “we” (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p.748). A sense of unity may develop in the course of collective action, as it did through the Occupy protest meme “we are the 99%” but rather than be constructed by an organisation, this emerges in an organic way from the connective action networks.

According to Gerbaudo (2012), in contemporary society where strong collective identities are relatively rare, an emotional sense of togetherness can result from the “choreographing of assembly”, a form of soft leadership. Social media can help harvest feelings such as indignation and transform them into the bodily assembly of people in public spaces, as it did in the Spanish Indignados protests, the Egyptian revolution and Occupy protests. This physical concentration of participants in space and time generates a level of emotional condensation around a common identity which is hard to match by virtual proximity alone (Gerbaudo, 2012). So the argument here is not that collective identity is unnecessary for collective action but that its essence is a shared emotionality which, in contemporary society, can occur in different ways and take different forms.

An earlier paper that tackles the issue of collective identity in online collective action is Della Porta and Mosca (2005). They find that “the internet facilitates the construction of new flexible identities” producing “a growth of weak ties *and* of the social networks in which an individual is embedded” (Della Porta and Mosca, 2005,

p.186. *Italics added for emphasis*). In contrast to Wellman (2003), the thrust of this argument is not that the internet primarily supports weak-tie relations but that it also reinforces existing social networks. Della Porta and Mosca (2005) make the point that the ease of connecting with others online boosts the formation of weak-tie networks but they also acknowledge that offline social networks characterised by a shared identity, such as social movement networks, can be expressed and strengthened online.

Attention to the newer collective action processes which are emerging in the digital environment has prompted some to question whether a new theory of collective action is needed to address its online manifestation. Earl and Kimport (2011) distinguish between 'supersized activism' and 'theory 2.0 activism'. In the first instance, the claim from literature is that ICTs have, in essence, simply augmented or supersized processes of activism that were already understood. Theory 2.0 activism, by contrast, contends that theoretical models need to be changed to understand the full impact of web activism.

Other literature takes a more inclusive line, pointing out that different online collective action formations can and do co-exist (for example, Walgrave et al., 2011; Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). This approach is reminiscent of the typology of collective action processes outlined in Diani and Bison (2004) (see p.52), although the latter was not addressing online formations.

My own research fits into this more inclusive strand but unlike much of this literature, my aim is not to characterise the newer processes in opposition to more traditional social movement processes but rather to understand whether and how the two mesh together. This stance is also informed by an understanding that even if strong collective identities are diminishing overall, in certain circumstances they remain a potent factor. This is particularly the case where social groups have relatively impermeable boundaries and, as a result, identities associated with that grouping take on a more 'fixed' quality. Disabled people are a case in point, and, as already pointed out, research into the online political activities of people who fall into this category is rare (this is discussed in detail in the next section). This is despite



literature which shows the propensity for members of low status groups with impermeable boundaries to engage in collective action.

Drawing on Social Identity Theory (SIT), Postmes (2007) outlines the following as a scenario in which collective action becomes likely: group boundaries are impermeable, ie, individuals cannot abandon the group; the group is low status and this situation is perceived as illegitimate by those within the group (ie., there is a sense of injustice); and the status relations are insecure (ie., there is a sense of efficacy) (page 170). Saguy et al. (2011) refer to a large body of research which shows that a key reason disadvantaged groups engage in collective action is because of their recognition that intergroup inequality exists and that they are unjustly disadvantaged. The argument is that the emotional components related to relative deprivation, such as anger, make it a powerful motivator. In addition, other research has shown that the existence of impermeable barriers increases in-group identification (Wright et al., 1990; Ellemers et al., 2006). Research has also demonstrated that the internet provides a conducive environment for maintaining and building close ties (Bargh and McKenna, 2004) and, in particular, it can provide an important venue for stigmatised groups, such as those with embarrassing illnesses, to express their identity (McKenna et al., 2002, cited in Bargh and McKenna, 2004, p.583). Gold (2008) notes from his review of virtual disability support communities:

“One of the most striking aspects of virtual disability cultures is the use of a collective identity in both referring to long-time members and in introducing outsiders as new members”. (Gold, 2008, p.28)

In conclusion, this suggests that members of an impermeable, low-status group are relatively unlikely to be united *to one another* by weak-ties (where weakness is associated with a lack of collective identity) either online or off but they may, nonetheless, find that the internet offers them collective organising affordances of other kinds: perhaps in building links with other groups, or with the process of identity formation and development, or as a means of communicating and sharing a sense of grievance.

### Social psychology and related approaches to collective action applied online

Postmes (2007) is a key example of a largely theoretical paper which questions whether the online environment changes the nature of collective action from the social psychological perspective (see section 2.4.4). The conclusion, broadly, is that it does not but the process of examining collective action in an online setting illuminates the deficits in some theorising. Chief among these is the failure to conceive individuals as social actors. Postmes argues:

“Implicit individualism is a consistent theme in most analyses and theories of usages of the Internet and a major limitation to our ability of understanding its more complex social effects.” (Postmes, 2007, p.172).

Postmes’ account of how feelings of group identity, efficacy and injustice are affected by the internet focuses on the formation of knowledge and feelings at a group level (Postmes, 2007). He conceives the internet as a web of interactions and exchanges, out of which such knowledge and feelings emerge. However examination of the networked nature of these exchanges is not a prominent feature of the analysis and few studies explicitly question how all three drivers are affected by an online setting.

There is room therefore for a study, like mine, which combines a social psychology approach with an explicit focus on networks. Although the level of attention on each driver of collective action in a study which looks at all three is less than can be achieved by focusing on fewer drivers, such an approach avoids implying that the other drivers are less important.

Some of the politics literature that specifically addresses the online environment also focuses on motivations but takes a slightly different approach. Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) is reminiscent of Chadwick (2007) and Bimber et al. (2005) in that it presents a typology of social movement action repertoires based around two related dimensions. The first is whether the action is ‘real’ ie supported and facilitated by the internet, or ‘virtual’, ie., internet based. The second, is whether tactics have low or

high thresholds for action. The paper describes thresholds as being determined by a mix of risk and commitment (ibid, p.6). Importantly for the context of my thesis, this suggests that thresholds are not just a question of a cognitive calculation but also entail an affective component. This point is further supported by the claim that social movements decide which repertoire of action to choose or individuals decide whether or not to participate based on instrumental (costs) as well as identity or ideological considerations (ibid, p.6). This also highlights another disjuncture with some of the research above. The social psychology literature tends to give more attention than much other literature in this category to the issue of what motivates individuals to participate in social movements or protests. However, Van Laer (2010) compares the motivations of activists who use the internet as an information channel about upcoming demonstrations with those who don't. On this count, the research does not find the same level of contrast between online and offline activists as it does in regard to organisational embeddedness and socio-economic background.

A study which does not address collective action but is relevant here because it covers collective identity is Flanagin et al. (2013). This paper reports on experimental research into the factors governing contributions to and evaluation of information in online information pools. It is based on Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self Categorisation Theory (SCT) and the results indicate that shared group identification positively influences motivation to contribute. This reinforces other findings regarding information contribution in online contexts, according to Flanagin et al., (2013, p.2).

### **3.3.3 Gaps in the empirical research**

This section has reviewed some of the most relevant literature on online collective action and has identified some gaps in empirical research. Firstly, there is a strong theme in some literature of questioning whether collective identity is still a pre-requisite in online collective action. This focus on understanding the newer processes of online collective action risks a relative lack of attention to cases in post-industrial democratic countries which concern the online activities of people who are motivated by strong levels of collective identity. Even if strong collective identities are “the

exception rather than the norm” in contemporary societies (Gerbaudo, 2012, p.30), to overlook the occasions where traditional forms of collective identity may be relevant to collective action risks a lack of understanding whether and how these older processes and the more contemporary forms of togetherness combine.

Secondly and related to this, there is a lack of studies that look at the expression of all three psychological drivers in online networks. Studies tend to focus either on cognitive or affective factors; either efficacy or collective identity. Where literature does focus on collective identity, it is often from the perspective of how SMOs or networks frame identity, rather than whether it is expressed by people participating in collective action. Injustice has been directly addressed less often, although it is recognised as a component of more recent street protests. All three psychological drivers are rarely considered together and where they are, in social psychology research, the role of networks is not a dominant feature.

Research into online collective action by disabled people is a fruitful way of addressing these empirical gaps. The following section expands on this point and looks at the way in which the literature addresses disabled people in the context of digital communications technologies.

### **3.4 ‘Disabled people’ and digital communications technologies**

One of the trends that was apparent in 2009 was that disabled people stood out among excluded groups because their access to the internet had increased in absolute and relative terms over the two years recorded (Dutton et al., 2009). Most studies which look at ‘disabled people’ in the context of literature on digital communications technologies do so under a frame of ‘exclusion’ or the ‘digital divide’. The first objective of this section is therefore to unpack that frame and delineate the research within it.

An influential source of information on access and digital divides is the Oxford Internet Surveys (OxIS), which are published every two years (for example the latest are: Dutton and Helsper, 2007; Dutton et al., 2009; Dutton and Blank, 2011).

As mentioned in Chapter 1 (section 1.2), Dutton et al., (2009) showed that the numbers of people with a disability using the internet rose from 36% in 2007 to 41% in 2009. That level remained steady over the next two years until 2011. This compares to access levels of 73% among the population as a whole (Dutton and Blank, 2011). Disabled people are therefore considered subject to exclusion, which is “structured by social, economic, geographical or physical situation of individuals such as not being able to afford a computer for one’s household”. (Dutton et al., 2009, p.16). However there are a number of problematic issues with the concept of exclusion in relation to ‘disabled people’.

The first is the definition of disability. This is contested and varied so that comparing one set of figures on exclusion to another depends first on establishing whether the same definition has been used. In the OxlS reports disability is identified with the following question:

“Do you have a health problem or disability which prevents you from doing everyday tasks at home, work or school or which limits the kind or amount of work you do?” (Dutton et al., 2009, p.17)

However definitions of disability vary by their degree of medical, legal, and social emphasis. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (c.50 Part 1, Section 1)<sup>16</sup>, for example, defines a disabled person as someone who has:

“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

This legal/medical model of disability contrasts with a social model, for example from a report for the Disability Rights Commission:

“Disability’ refers to the disadvantage experienced by an individual as a result of barriers, such as physical and attitudinal barriers, that impact on people

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<sup>16</sup> Viewed online [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50/section/1](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50/section/1)

with mental or physical impairments and/or long-term ill health. 'Disabled people' refers to anyone who is disadvantaged by the way in which the wider environment interacts with their impairment or long-term health problem. This may vary over time." (Pillai et al., 2007, p.4)

Secondly, disability is applied as a catch-all term. In the context of use of the internet, this glosses over major differences in barriers to access and patterns of use. This is recognised in Dobransky and Hargittai (2006, p.331), who call for the disaggregation of categories of disabled people. Research by, for example, Valentine and Skelton (2009), Ellis and Kent (2008), Barak and Sadosky (2008), focuses on the relationship of people with particular disabilities to the internet.

The recognition that patterns of use vary not only according to disability but also among the population as a whole is a major theme in recent literature (for an early review, see DiMaggio et al., 2004). More recently, Dutton and Blank (2011) identify the emergence of a category of 'next generation users' defined by the fact that these users access the internet from multiple locations and devices (ibid, p4). Dutton and Blank (2011) show how this characteristic is linked to changes in patterns of use and the social implications of use. Overall, the report shows how the next generation user has "a more advantageous relationship with the internet and the resources it can provide for accessing information, people, services, and other technologies" (ibid, p.6). For example, next generation users are much more likely to be producers of content rather than consumers. This includes activities such as posting videos, messages on discussion boards, maintaining a website, writing a blog. Although next generation users accounted for 44.4% of users in 2011 (ibid, p.5), certain groups were under-represented in this category, notably the retired, or those of retirement age, and the unemployed. Among these groups 9% and 41% respectively are next generation users. Household income is also a major factor with fewer next generation users among low-income groups.

This is highly relevant in regards to disabled people since around a third of all disabled adults aged 25 to retirement live in low-income households<sup>17</sup>. That is roughly twice the rate of that for non-disabled adults, and this has been the case since 1999. It is largely due to the fact that disabled people are less likely to be in work than non-disabled people.

It also raises another issue in regards to understanding the relationship between disability and digital divides: that is the problem of disentangling disability from other exclusion effects (see Appendix 5 for a discussion of this issue in relation to age and being a carer). It has also been demonstrated that when socio-economic reasons for lower Internet penetration are disentangled from other factors, those with hearing disability and limited walking disability are not less likely to be Internet users (Dobransky and Hargittai, 2006).

Another critique of the concept of 'digital exclusion' is its implication that the internet is necessarily 'a good thing', which excluded groups, including disabled people, should desire. Various scholars make this point particularly in regard to the term "digital divide" (for example, Adam and Kreps, 2006; Ellis and Kent, 2008). Identifying, more specifically, the ways in which digital communication technologies might benefit disabled people, can break down the issue. This approach is taken in Dobransky and Hargittai (2006) and Barak and Sadosky (2008), who give the example of online communication allowing disabled people the option of removing their disability from the forefront of interaction. Others point to the potential new communications technologies offer disabled people in constructing identities (Hickey-Moody, Wood, 2008; Goggin and Newell, 2010), or for homebound people (including some disabled people) to counter a sense of isolation (Bradley and Poppen, 2003). Other research has shown that disabled people favour communities which cater specifically to individuals with disabilities for the support and information exchange which they offer (Seymour and Lupton, 2004).

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<sup>17</sup> from [www.poverty.org.uk](http://www.poverty.org.uk). The website is no longer being updated and was last updated in late 2011. The data source is Households Below Average Income, based on the Family Resources Survey and available at <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=hbai> [accessed 9 May 2013].

At a more fundamental level, some writers argue that in order for digital communication technologies to enable rather than disable particular groups, it is necessary to focus on and challenge the way the technologies are developed and the norms built into technology systems (Moser, 2006; Stienstra, 2006; Ellcessor, 2010, Watling, 2011). The conclusion from some of these discussions is that digital communications technologies are a paradox: they can be productive for disabled people but they are still disabling in various ways (Annable et al., 2007; Hickey-Moody, Wood, 2008; Trevisan, 2011). This emphasis on the norms built into technology systems is echoed in Autonomist-Marxist discussions about whether technology developed under capitalism is necessarily oppressive (for example, Hands, 2010). These debates, in turn, rest on the conception scholars take of the relationship between technology and society. This is explored above.

Literature has also addressed the issue of whether the internet exacerbates inequality in political engagement and participation. DiMaggio et al. (2004) conclude, from their literature review, that high status people may be more likely than others to be online and use the internet to influence the world around them because they were more politically involved before they went online. But, they also point out, that internet use may have a larger overall effect on the behaviour of socially and politically engaged users with fewer resources, because for them, the advantages the internet brings may be correspondingly more important (DiMaggio et al, p.386). This is backed up by research which finds that the online environment has a leveling effect on the likelihood of women and people from poorer backgrounds participating politically compared to men and higher social status individuals (Gibson et al., 2005, p.578). This is by no means a settled issue, however, and arguments for and against the normalisation thesis (see footnote on p.11) continue. For example, a recent paper by DiMaggio and Garip (2012) identifies a number of network effects which exacerbate social inequality. Yet, a recent survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project finds that in the US, among the 60% of adults who use social networking sites, political participation is more balanced between lower and higher income Americans than it is for the adult population engaging in online and offline political activities as a whole (Smith, 2013).



My search revealed very few studies which consider the political activity of disabled people, in particular, and none which uses a collective action frame. Of the literature I found on the online political activity of disabled people, one example approaches the issue from a social movement organisation perspective (Cheta, 2004) and another two ask how ICTs are used by disabled people to improve community engagement or participation in local governance (Bricout et al., 2010; Baker et al., 2013). A working paper by a PhD student, Trevisan (2011), comes closest to the research subject addressed in this thesis. It discusses whether the internet is an agent of (dis-) empowerment for disabled people. Like my own research, it selects cases on the basis of where participation by disabled people is happening online. Using Google Insights as a search tool, it focuses on spending cuts and disability welfare reform (in the UK). The framework for this study is not collective action but deliberation and empowerment. The influence of a selection of websites is assessed according to whether commentary features two-way communication and user control. The paper looks closely at thebrokenofbritain.org, a website bringing together various disability bloggers which was set up in October 2010 in response to proposed plans for welfare reform announced at the Conservative Party conference (see Appendix 2 for a more detail of this context). It proposes that this type of website is a new category of actor which uses tactics that are neither the more militant tactics associated with some social movements, nor the lobbying techniques of interest groups. This finding corroborates some of my own findings in regards to the hybrid role of Benefits and Work (see p.134), despite the rather different perspective and data set.

### **3.5 Conclusion: addressing gaps in the literature**

This review has unpacked the frame of exclusion which is the context for most studies on the relationship between disabled people and digital communications technologies. One conclusion, therefore, is that statements about disabled people and digital divides need to be suitably parenthesised. So although access to the internet among disabled people appeared to increase from 2007-2009, it is not clear from this broad statement whether access improved among people with particular disabilities or among people with particular income levels, and so on.

Secondly, the review has drawn attention to a second divide: differentiation in patterns of use. It is not clear how these patterns are distributed among disabled people as a whole but it is possible to speculate. Some of 'disabled people', are likely to be first generation users. But Dutton and Blank (2011) showed that among first generation users as whole, three groups are under-represented – those at or beyond retirement age, the unemployed and those on low incomes. It is evident that disabled people are more likely to be in all three categories than the general population (see [www.poverty.org.uk](http://www.poverty.org.uk) and Pillai et al., 2007). So it seems reasonable to speculate that the representation of disabled people among first generation users will be even lower than the population as a whole. However, the typical-profile of first generation users has echoes in another relevant profile, that of disabled people who identify with the disability movement. It is acknowledged that the disability movement tends to attract younger, middle class people (Shakespeare, 1993, p.8). This raises the question of whether, among disabled people, there might be an overlap between being a first-generation user and identifying with the disability movement. My findings support this proposition to some extent (see section 5.4.1).

Thirdly, the review has drawn attention to the lack of research into political activity online by disabled people. This review also shows that the perspective of my own research avoids some of the downsides of the literature reviewed. My research, for example, does not adopt a user-determined perspective by asking how disabled people use the internet nor does it adopt an organisation-centric approach. Rather, it takes the perspective of an 'instance' of collective action, which involves disabled people, among others. This avoids assuming that all disabled people use the internet in one way, or that their use of it is necessarily beneficial to them or to society as a whole. It does however provide an example in which disabled people are engaging in collective political action and, as demonstrated, this is an under-researched area.

Linking these conclusions back to those from the review of online literature, it becomes clear that my research addresses a particular gap in the literature by focusing on online collective action which involves a group, or groups, with impermeable boundaries that are relatively disadvantaged. Research has shown that such groups are likely to engage in collective action and yet there is very little

research into the online political activity specifically of disabled people. This is perhaps because these groups are under-represented in online environments and/or a reflection of the research priorities of existing literature. The conceptual framework, which I articulated at the end of Chapter 2, enables me to consider not only efficacy as a driver of collective action but also collective identity and group injustice. Looking at all three drivers in the context of collective action which is both organised and takes place online is also relatively unusual (see section 3.3.3). The need to include collective identity and injustice among possible drivers is particularly pertinent in the example of action I have chosen because it involves disabled people. The existence of the disability movement, coupled with evidence from the literature (Bargh and McKenna, 2004; Gold, 2008) suggests that some disabled people, at least, may be prone to express high levels of collective identity online.

The next chapter explains in more detail how I came to choose the online response to 2009 Green Paper as the subject of my research. In addition, it describes my methodological approach and research design.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the research methodology, design, questions and methods. The first section discusses why the Green Paper online consultation was considered a suitable vehicle through which to address the gaps in the literature and to build on existing theory about online collective action. The second section discusses the methodological approach: its relational focus on interaction and intermediate entities, rather than micro or macro entities. I explain how a conceptual framework fits this perspective and why I opted for a multi- and mixed-methods design. The third section gives an overview of the stages of data collection and analysis. The following sections describe these in more detail, justifying and describing in detail the methods used. The final section of the chapter addresses the ethical considerations.

### **4.2 Why the Green Paper online consultation?**

My review of theoretical and empirical literature suggested that this research project should focus on an instance of online collective action in the context of welfare, involving disabled people. My starting point was to search purposively for evidence of online such action. The idea was to uncover examples of collective action in the online environment by looking for online networks associated with such activity. I did not want to start from the basis of an organisation, NGO or similar and then ask about their manifestation online or ask how they 'use' the internet; nor did I want to ask how disabled people 'use' the internet (for reasons explained in sections 3.2 and 3.4). But I did want to find an example which involved disabled people (quite possibly among others, such as carers) engaging in collective action of a political kind.

The search exercise (conducted in October 2009) therefore concentrated on online networks that united people around disability. Initially, I reviewed websites listed as members of the Shaping Our Lives Network, a networking website which collates various websites for service users and disabled people and which is oriented towards

disabled people representing themselves. I was already familiar with this network and thought it could link to networks which were active in the area of social policy.

In addition, I searched for groups on Ning and Facebook since these were two of the more high profile social networking hosts in the UK at the time. Both Nings and Facebook groups can be private but, for ethical reasons, I looked only at public groups. My search system was basic and the number of potential sites very large, however this was not a process designed to capture all likely networks but rather to narrow the findings and identify relatively visible and active networks. I filtered the results by numbers involved in the network in an effort to exclude inactive or very small groups. I searched using the following terms to capture sites set up to mobilise response to policy: disabled, disability, campaign, action, voice, welfare, benefits, reform, demonstration, consultation.

### Search results

On Shaping our Lives most links at that time (October 2009) were to older-style websites dedicated to broadcasting information rather than to generating collaborative content. The search of Facebook and Ning revealed a large number of Facebook groups based around particular health conditions or disabilities but there were fewer Ning groups. The majority of the groups I found were primarily dedicated to giving support and information rather than to taking political action. However I found three sites which looked promising in terms of political action.

1. Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance threat. This was a Facebook group which at the time had 4,847 members campaigning over the perceived threat to disability living allowance and attendance allowance entailed in the Green Paper, *Shaping the Future of Care Together* (DoH, 2009). The site was clearly active. It was urging people to sign a petition and contribute to the Green Paper consultation online.

2. Sheffield Parent Voice. This was a forum on Ning set up in 2008 to give a voice to parents of disabled children in Sheffield. It was a grassroots organisation for parents. There were around 70 members.

3. Action for Autism was a networked blog and had 88 listed followers at the time.

I decided to pursue the DLA network for the following reasons: Sheffield parent voice had been quite active in the past but on contacting the organisers, I discovered that activity had waned recently; Action for Autism, as a blog, was more focused on information and deliberation than action, despite its name. Meanwhile, there were characteristics of the DLA group which made it look particularly interesting. The opening message on the Facebook group was attributed to an organisation called Benefits and Work (although this organisation did not appear to have set up the Facebook group). In fact, Benefits and Work is a private company offering benefits advice online but also providing information about benefits policymaking and campaigning around certain aspects of the policy. It therefore looked promising, as it appeared to be a hybrid organisation, straddling organisational categories. The Green Paper consultation was also a suitable example of political participation. It was organised by the Department of Health to debate the future of social care (the policy context is discussed in Chapter 1). The consultation included the option of commenting online on the Green Paper, *Shaping the Future of Care Together* (DoH, 2009). At the time I did my search exercise, there were 580 comments on executive summary of the paper, which suggested a lot of interest. As discussed in sections 1.2 and 1.4.2, most online consultations at the time attracted lower levels of comment by individuals.

There was also evidence that the comment making had a collective element: a preliminary overview of the comments revealed that they appeared to cluster on particular dates and there was clearly an online campaign associated with the action, in which the organisation Benefits and Work played a major part. A further distinctive element was that it was possible for participants to see the comments of previous participants on the website. In most government consultations, individuals are invited to participate and may submit comments online but those comments are

sent to the consultation organisers and do not appear in a thread of comments which everyone can see, as in this Green Paper. Finally the issue seemed to be attracting comments from carers and older people as well as disabled people. These two groups, too, were susceptible to being digitally excluded for various reasons (see Appendix 5). Research into general populations of internet users would therefore similarly under-represent these groups.

These factors combined to suggest that the Green Paper consultation was a suitable choice through which to address current theory on online collective action: it involved disabled people, as well as carers and older people; there appeared to be a collective element to the comment making; and an organisation which was part campaigning group, part private business was clearly involved.

From my preliminary overview the consultation appeared to involve both carers organisations and elements of the disability movement, suggesting that it would be a good vantage point for exploring whether social movement processes might co-exist or combine with other the collective action process in an 'instance' of collective action (Diani and Bison, 2004). The literature has shown theoretical difficulty in reconciling the disability movement with the notion of new social movements, largely because its objectives include achieving improvements in living standards for disabled people as well as challenging the social construction of disability (Shakespeare, 1993). The fact that the Green Paper consultation concerned disability benefits therefore made it relevant to the question of material concerns and grievance more generally.

A further advantage of the Green Paper consultation emerged as the research project progressed. It became clear, after the Coalition government was elected in May 2010 that further activity to oppose proposed cuts to disability allowances was likely, given the new Government's plans to cut public spending. This therefore looked like an issue which was likely to intensify and therefore become more pertinent (and as shown in Appendix 2, this is indeed what happened).

In conclusion, a focus on the Green Paper consultation was appropriate because it concerned groups under-represented in previous literature on online collective

action. It also had a number of characteristics which positioned it at the intersection of various theoretical perspectives.

### **4.3 Methodology**

This section explains the way in which my research focuses on interaction and on intermediate entities rather than exclusively the micro or macro levels of social and political life. It explains that this is theory-building research and, as such, benefits from the use of a conceptual framework to structure the empirical research. The framework is not being tested in a positivist manner but developed and reflected on as part of the process of applying it. The approach is essentially inductive and the research is carried out through a pragmatic multi- and mixed-methods design. The foundations of this research are in relational sociology, drawing on the work of Elias (1978; 1991) and Crossley (2002; 2010). This means that actors are not conceived as existing in general, but always in concrete and historically specific circumstances and they are formed and reformed through interaction (Crossley 2002, 2010, Elias 1978, 1991). Hacking (1999) makes a similar point in the context of classifications of people. He argues that people are made up and make themselves up in an ongoing process. They are aware of which “kind” they are and will interact with that classification and its more material manifestations, such as institutions, shaping and being shaped by them (Hacking 1999).

Crossley argues that the basic unit of analysis should not be individuals or structures but structures of interaction, the relations which emerge from them, and the networks of such interactions and relations (Crossley, 2010 p.14). Many research methods, such as questionnaires and interviews, tend to individualise actors but a relational approach should endeavour to capture the social world in interaction (Crossley, 2010, p.21). He argues that by nesting within each other, network structures bridge micro-macro divides (ibid, p.182).

DeLanda positions networks in the wider category of assemblages (DeLanda, 2004). As with networks, the focus in assemblage theory is on “intermediate entities”,



entities which are not reduced to either a micro nor macro level of social reality (ibid, p.5).

“Interpersonal networks and institutional organisations are assemblages of people; social justice movements are assemblages of several networked communities; central governments are assemblages of several organisations; cities are assemblages of people, networks, organisations, as well as a variety of infrastructural components.” (ibid, p.5)

A focus on providing effective bridges between micro and macro sociology is also a concern of Mouzelis (1993). He proposes that sociologists should address the failure to deal in a satisfactory manner with micro-macro and agency-structure issues by “elaboration of a small number of inter-related concepts” which help understand areas of social life (ibid, p.692). Mouzelis suggests that sociological theory should aim to elaborate conceptual tools which raise interesting questions and prepare the ground for empirical work.

From this perspective, theory serves to organise and structure empirical research, which in turn is used to reflect on the theory itself. The use of theory as a scaffold for empirical research in the context of the internet is endorsed by Castells (Castells, 2004, p xvi; Stalder, 2006). In these approaches, theory is open to refinement in the face of empirical findings. This is also consistent with a pragmatist perspective on research, which views theory in instrumental terms, judging its usefulness by how predictable or applicable it is (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell 2009).

My conceptual framework served as a scaffold in this way. The research is not designed to test the conceptual framework as such. Rather, the framework structures the empirical research, which in turn enables reflection on elements of the framework and their inter-relation. I developed my framework from a critical literature review so it synthesises and builds on previous academic work, rather than starting from scratch. The consideration of the Green Paper consultation through the lens of this conceptual framework also clarifies the focus of the research. The use of conceptual frameworks to specify what is to be studied is recognised as one of the

advantages of such an approach (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.18). In my case, the framework proposes focus on three key drivers and an emphasis on the networks through which the collective action process occurs.

The purpose of identifying drivers is two-fold, one is to deconstruct the collective action process in an effort to better understand it. The second is that drivers serve as comparison points between different collective action processes or across the network of a single process. This is not to suggest that the online setting requires a different set of theoretical tools of analysis but rather that the study of the online manifestation of collective action has the potential to refine analytical tools developed in an era when contemporary digital technologies did not exist (Postmes, 2007).

The use of mixed methods is consistent with this methodological approach, where mixed methods is defined as:

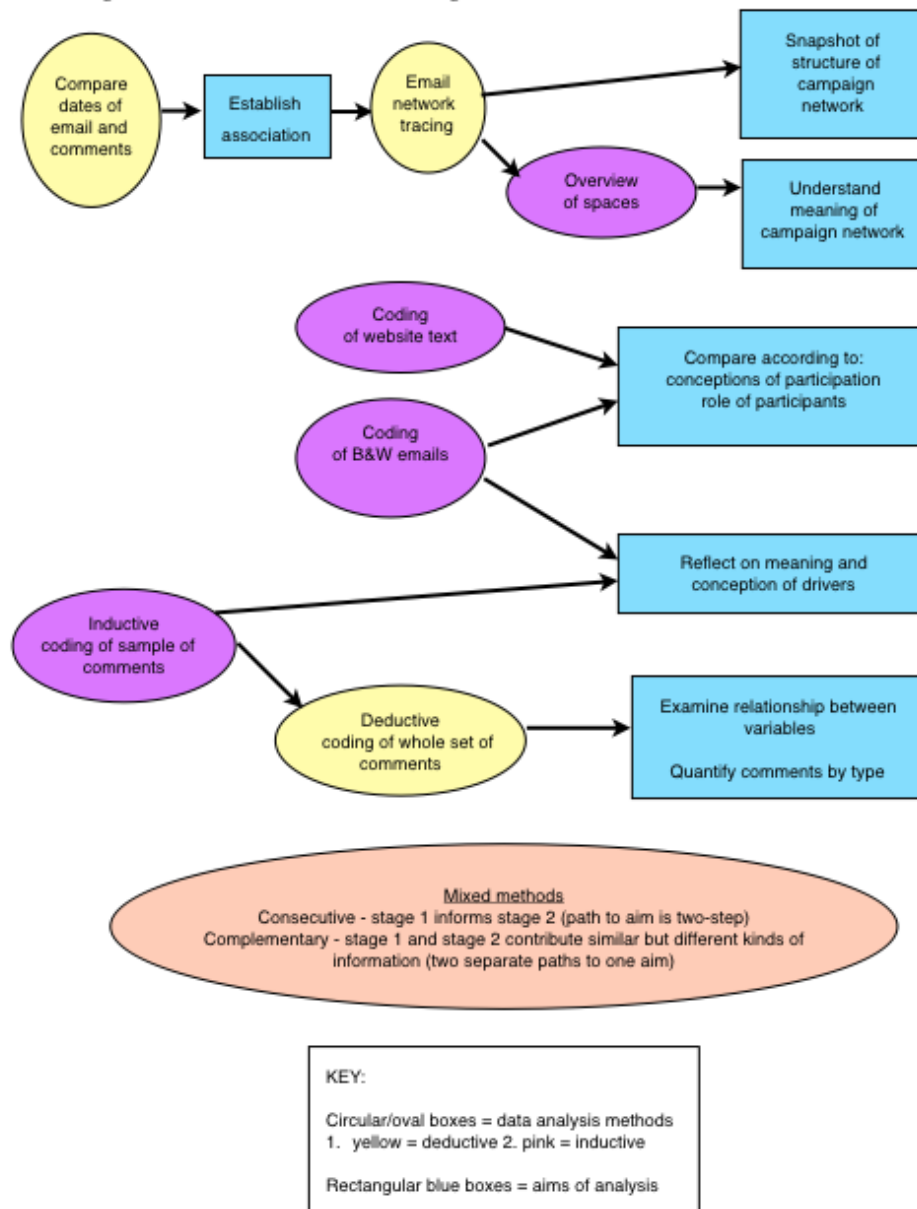
“The class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study.” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.17)

A mixed-methods paradigm aims to draw from the strengths and minimise the weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative methods (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The focus is on conducting effective research by permitting an epistemological and methodological pluralism, with the aim of generating probabilistic evidence or provisional truths, rather than final proof (ibid). This pragmatist approach involves rejecting the idea that qualitative and quantitative research cannot be combined - a view that Howe (1988) termed the incompatibility thesis. Instead, the view is that research can be founded on multiple paradigms and that various methods should be employed in the study, according to which work best in helping answer the research question (Rossman and Wilson, 1985; Flyvbjerg, 2006). In such an approach, the two phases of research can be consecutive and inform one another, for example qualitative research aiding survey question design. The phases may also be used as a control mechanism with convergent results taken as an indicator of validation and

divergent results leading to re-examination and reflection (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Plano et al., 2007). In my case, findings from the different methods were combined in both ways. In the campaign analysis, the email tracing generated a snapshot of the network's structure, and separately, it identified network spaces which I then reviewed to understand their meaning. In the comment analysis, the qualitative analysis of a sample of comments contributed to my understanding of the drivers and it also informed the development of the coding scheme for the quantitative analysis of the whole set of comments. This process of combining methods is illustrated in Figure 2 (below). The application of mixed methods to the design of the campaign and comments analysis is explained in sections 4.5 and 4.6 respectively; and its application in practice is discussed in sections 5.4 and 6.3 respectively.

A number of studies have used mixed-methods combining digital and non-digital data collection and analysis in varying ways (see for example, Nip, 2004; Williams et al., 2006; Biddix and Park, 2008; Feldon and Kafai, 2008; Park and Kluver, 2009; Griffiths, 2010; Ackland and O'Neil, 2011; Clayton and MacDonald, 2013; Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013; Soon and Cho, 2013).

Figure 2: Flow chart of research design



#### **4.3.1 Developing the research questions**

I developed the research questions in tandem with the framework. The expectation was that as the research proceeded, the conception of the drivers and their interaction would be revisited. This iterative, theory-building stance was reflected in the predominantly qualitative nature of the research questions and analysis.

In the process of identifying the online consultation on the Green Paper as a suitable subject of research, I had conducted a preliminary review which made me aware of some of its characteristics. I established there had been an email-based campaign to 'Save DLA and AA' and I knew that the comment space on the executive summary of the Green Paper had attracted nearly 3,000 comments and that this was considered an unusual level of interest (Chadwick, 2009). So, a focus on the campaign and comments seemed a good way of understanding this 'instance' of collective action and reflecting on theory from that perspective. The approach of focusing on the campaign and comments also fitted with my theoretically-informed focus on intermediate entities and interaction.

I hoped my research would help understand how the campaign message had spread, give a sense of the networks involved and the basis on which they formed and reformed. I wanted to know more about the structure of the campaign network but also to look at the content of the emails to get a clearer idea of the campaign's portrayal of the consultation. My review of the policy background (section 1.4) had revealed that it was often the case that consultation exercises lacked clarity about their purpose, or that there was a difference in view on the matter between the participants in the consultation and those organising it. I wanted to see whether this was the case with this consultation too and, in the process, I hoped to understand more about the drivers of collective action.

The comments section of the Green Paper was the second area of focus. An overview of the comments, undertaken as part of the preliminary review, revealed their potential to inform understandings about the drivers of collective action. My

conceptual framework had conceived these drivers in a particular way but my approach was not to be overly deductive and to be open to re-envisioning my conception of the drivers and of collective action, in the light of my findings.

A relevant feature was that the style of comment-making was left open in certain key respects, which suggested scope for analysis. For example, on the question of identification, people could choose how to identify themselves and whether to include information about their personal situation. The overview of the comments showed that some people self-identified as being disabled or carers, while others did not and that this self-identification differed in form and style. The possibility of the comments revealing something about commentators' sense of identity was also backed by other research. A study into participative opportunities, such as deliberative forums in health and social care, cast them as "spaces in which identities are negotiated, constructed and possibly transformed" (Barnes, 2008, p.461).

There were other factors too which suggested that the comments might be a rich source of understanding. Although they were moderated, my overview revealed that the moderation process had come under some pressure due to the number of comments received. There was therefore more room than perhaps intended by the consultation organisers for the commentators to shape their contributions in different ways. Exploring this issue further was an aim of the research.

Another unusual feature of the consultation was that commentators were able to see each other's comments. Although the rules of the space meant contributors were only permitted to comment once, it was reasonable to assume that people might read and be influenced by one another's comments. I was therefore interested to explore whether there were patterns in the comment making, whether particular types of comment were more dominant than others. A related question was whether particular types of comments were made at particular times during the consultation period. This was a rather exploratory aspect of the research and my aim was not for definitive answers but for a fuller picture of the response to the Green Paper. Finally, I hoped that the research exercise as a whole would generate some recommendations for those organising online consultations or other schemes to

involve publics in policymaking. I hoped too that it would be informative to those publics wishing to influence policymaking.

My research objectives were condensed into the following research questions:

1. How does the conceptual framework extend current understandings of online collective action?
2. What does the research reveal about the involvement of networks in the collective action?
3. What reflections on the drivers of collective action arise from the analysis?
4. What are the implications of the research findings for the initial conceptual framework?
5. What recommendations can be drawn from the research for people contributing to or responding to policymaking?

#### **4.3.2 The use of naturally occurring online data**

The social psychological research which contributed to my conceptual framework is almost always based on surveys or questionnaires. The data for my research is, however, “naturally occurring”, in the sense that it is produced independently of the researcher, or is not “provoked” by the researcher (Silverman 2011, p.275). Since this is theory building research, the use of a different form of data collection and analysis is a strength. Methods other than surveys and questionnaires have been advocated by social psychologists: Ashmore and Deaux (2004), for example, recommend observation as a method for assessing collective identity (ibid, p.98). A basic aim of the research therefore was to see whether there was evidence in naturally occurring data of the psychological processes identified by prior research.

Because my research uses naturally occurring data, it does not focus on explicit and consciously-stated motives towards particular outcomes, in manner of some similar research (Walgrave et al., 2010). I was expecting, rather, that underlying motives might be evident in the data I collected. My use of the term ‘driver’ as opposed to ‘motive’ clarifies this distinction. In addition, ‘driver’ is used to convey the idea of

circularity, rather than linearity, in the process of collective action (see p.64). So the term 'process' is also preferred to 'outcomes' in this research.

The use of naturally occurring online data also contributes to the wider endeavour of building knowledge of the social world by exploiting the vast quantities of naturally occurring data produced by digital communications technologies. The opportunities this situation presents to social scientists is increasingly recognised and debated (see for example, Manovich, 2011; Bizer et al., 2012; Boyd and Crawford, 2012).

Hesse-Bieber and Griffen (2012) remark on "the enormous strengths of Internet technologies for asking new questions and getting at subjugated knowledge, especially in accessing hard to find populations" (ibid, p.58). Despite this potential, the discipline of sociology has been particularly slow to respond to web-based research techniques (Farrell and Petersen, 2010) and the large quantities of social data produced incidentally by digital communications technologies (Savage and Burrows 2007; 2009).

Early discussion of which methods suited this contemporary source of social data often revolved around importing standard methods, such as surveys, to the digital realm. These "virtual methods" are being superseded in many cases by "digital groundedness" in which researchers "embrace the methods in the media" (Rogers, 2010, pp.242-243). Rogers has developed tools for hyperlink analysis in his own research. These run automated crawls of networks to identify and quantify hyperlinks in order to understand how 'issues' develop online (for example, see Rogers, 2006; Marres and Rogers, 2008). There is also growing body of work focused on the vast data sets known as 'big data'. This research is usually carried out in a multi-disciplinary teams combining computer scientists and social scientists and uses methods such as recruiting participants via social network applications (for example, Nazir et al., 2008; Stillwell and Kosinski, 2011), and data crawling (for example, Kwak et al., 2010; Gjoka et al., 2011) to produce very large data sets for various forms of statistical analysis, including SNA.



My research design responds to the call for digitally-grounded methods by using an email-based form of digital tracing in the first stage of my study. Various forms of digital tracing have been extensively applied in other research (for example, hyperlink analysis is used in Park, 2003; Park and Thelwall, 2003; Marres and Rogers, 2008; Hepburn, 2010, and other forms of analysing digital traces in Leskovec et al., 2009; Bruns and Burgess, 2011; González-Bailón et al., 2012). I considered using hyperlink analysis but it was not suitable given the number of forums in the campaign network. Forums are not conducive to this form of analysis as the inclusion of hyperlinks within comments is often discouraged or disabled.

The second stage of my research focuses on the textual data generated online. The need to develop methods capable of managing and analysing the quantities of this data that results from e-consultation has been noted in other research (Shulman et al., 2004; Biquelet and Weale, 2010). My research involves the analysis of nearly 3,000 comments and uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Various automated tools have been developed to analyse large quantities of text, such as that generated in the digital domain, but there are certain trade offs in its use. For example, automated coding is highly replicable and capable of dealing with large data sets but it loses the advantage human coders have in being able to make subtle inferences and judgments on the basis of context. I concluded, after reviewing a number of the low-cost or free automated analysis tools that my data set was not large enough to warrant the disadvantages that these tools entail. Instead, I chose to use qualitative analysis on a sample of comments to generate a richer understanding of the data and also to inform a coding system for quantitative analysis of the whole data set. This approach to developing quantitative from qualitative analysis was informed by Srnka, and Koeszegi (2007) and Mayring (2000) (see section 4.6 for more detail).

#### **4.4 Data collection and analysis: overview of stages and methods**

The case concerns a collective action process, so I chose to take a loosely chronological approach to exploring it. Data collection and analysis therefore fell into two main phases: the first was the exploration of the campaign with the aim of better understanding the campaign network, the role of Benefits and Work and the

campaign's understanding of participation in the Green Paper consultation. The second was an examination of the comments on the Green Paper to explore what themes they covered and how these related to the drivers of the collective action process, as conceived in the conceptual framework. I took a mixed-methods approach at two points: firstly in the data collection and analysis of the campaign networks and, secondly, in the analysis of the online comments. Figure 3 summarises these stages.

For the campaign, the methods used were informed by the following literature: inductive thematic coding of the emails (Miles and Huberman, 1994); digital tracing (Bruns and Burgess, 2011). For the Green Paper comments, the use of mixed methods was informed by Srnka and Koeszegi (2007) and Mayring (2000), and the inductive thematic coding by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Figure 3: Stages of analysis and research methods

Object of Analysis	Aims	Methods
<b>1. The campaign</b>		
a. Dates Benefits and Work sent emails compared to level of commentary on Green Paper	To understand if there appeared to be any relationship between the emails being sent and peaks in comment making	Collation of dates, numbers
b. Campaign emails and official website text regarding the purpose of the consultation	To understand role of B&W in the campaign, in particular how it portrayed the consultation. To compare this with the portrayal of the consultation in the	Inductive thematic coding, carried out manually

	<p>official website text</p> <p>To consider the content of the emails in regards to the drivers of collective action.</p>	
c. Campaign Network	<p>To generate a snapshot of the campaign network by considering duplication of the first email in other webspaces as representing a tie.</p> <p>To understand the meaning of the networks.</p>	<p>Digital tracing, using LexiURL, and Google searches</p> <p>Key characteristics of the online spaces where the email was replicated were noted</p>
<b>2. Analysis of online comments</b>		
a. Sample of comments	<p>To identify themes in the comments and see how these related to drivers as conceived in framework.</p> <p>To develop a coding system for quantitative analysis.</p>	Inductive thematic coding, using MaxQDA
b. Whole set of comments	To find out more about drivers by looking entire data set. To clarify the relationship between drivers and other comment attributes eg	Systematic content analysis of large data set using deductive coding (but where codes have been developed inductively from the data set). Facilitated by Excel,

	identity markers.  To explore overall patterns in the comment making	SPSS, and R computer programme
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## 4.5 Analysis of the campaign

This phase of research was composed of three stages. Firstly, it provided information about the role of Benefits and Work in mobilising people to comment on the Green Paper. It was known early on in the research that Benefits and Work had attempted to recruit campaign members by sending emails to its existing contacts. The relationship between the dates on which these emails were sent and the level of commentary on the Green Paper website over time was therefore investigated.

Secondly the campaign emails were analysed thematically and the themes compared to those in the official comment space text. The aim was to better understand the role of Benefits and Work, particularly in regard to the way it portrayed the purpose of commenting on the Green Paper. This was compared to the official representation of the consultation, as it appeared in the official text on the website. As part of this process, the themes in the emails were also considered in relation to the drivers of collective action, as conceived in the conceptual framework.

Thirdly, the digital tracing of emails was designed to generate a snapshot of the campaign network. By looking at the content of the emails and by approaching the network tracing from a perspective which paid attention to the communicative processes that form ties, the research did not conceive networks only in structural terms. This is in line with my conceptual framework (see section 2.5) and responds to calls for qualitative as well as quantitative approaches to the analysis of networks (see for example, Edwards, 2010; Ackland and O’Neil, 2011; Larrison and Moe, 2011).

#### **4.5.1 Campaign emails and number of online comments by date**

The aim at this stage was to undertake a preliminary counting exercise by conducting a word search for each date and counting the returns. This established that peaks in comment making did appear to coincide with emails being sent. While this did not prove a causal link – ie., that the receipt of a campaign email had persuaded people to post a comment - it was suggestive of a correlation between the two events and of an organised and collective aspect to the participation. I carried out the same task in a more comprehensive way when I did the qualitative analysis of all comments because this included recording the date the comment was made in an Excel spreadsheet.

#### **4.5.2 Analysis of the campaign emails and official text in the comment space**

The aim of analysing the campaign emails was to gain a greater understanding of the role of Benefits and Work in the campaign and in particular how the emails presented both the Green Paper and the process of participating in the consultation. As discussed above, background research had suggested that there was a lack of clarity about the purpose of many consultations. This suggested that it might be informative to compare the sense of purpose expressed in the emails with that expressed in the official text on the Big Care website.

Since there were only 12 emails, I carried out the inductive thematic analysis without the help of analysis software. As with the qualitative analysis of the sample of comments, this analysis was conducted on an inductive basis but in the context of my conceptual framework. So once I had identified themes in the emails I looked to see what, if any, resonance they had with the drivers of collective action as conceived in the framework.

I looked at the official text in relation to the findings from the analysis of the emails. It consisted of about four A4 pages of text, comprising: the opening post (July 2009) of a blog by the director general of social care David Behan, and a subsequent post (in

September 2009) in response to the large number of comments being received; there were also two pages of terms and conditions.

#### **4.5.3 Analysis of the campaign network**

This research does not regard networks as a fixed phenomenon but rather as dynamic and evolving. It follows therefore that any representations of networks are snapshots rather than an illustration of permanent relations. I identified a snapshot of the campaign network by copying the opening paragraph of the first Benefits and Work campaign email into Google and LexiURL<sup>18</sup> and determining from the results a list of webpages where the paragraph was replicated.

##### Methods in similar studies

Reviewing online research concerned with networks revealed various methods of identifying networks from digital traces. These digital trace methods were relatively new at the start of my PhD but have since become more prevalent due to the development of the so-called ‘social web’ and forms of linking such as friending people on Facebook and following people on Twitter.

In these methods, networks are identified in various ways. For example, Bruns and Burgess (2011) measure interconnections between people in ‘topical hashtag communities’ on Twitter, that is communities defined by a shared use of a particular hashtag. People within these communities who had sent more than five messages were classified as nodes and the ties between them were conceived as formed by retweeting or sending targeted replies (using the @ symbol to direct the tweet to a particular person). Lewis et al.’s (2008) research on Facebook treats users as nodes. Ties between them are made by becoming ‘friends’ or tagging people in photos. Van Zoonen et al.’s (2011) research on You Tube considers videos and channels as nodes and identifies various types of networks by treating comments, subscriptions and friends as ties.

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 6 for more details of the search process

My aim was to identify the campaign network, so a good starting point was to envisage the passage of the campaign emails as constituting a tie. I did not have access to the campaign email database and anyway, using it would have presented considerable ethical hurdles. So, I resolved that a suitable method of identifying a tie was to look for the email being replicated online (this is similar to Bruns and Burgess, 2011, considering a retweet as a tie).

#### **4.6 Analysis of the online comments**

A preliminary overview of the comments had revealed their potential to inform understandings about the drivers of collective action (see pp.93-94). The purpose of analysing a sample of the comments using inductive thematic coding was therefore twofold. First as an inductive method it could establish whether there was a relationship between emergent themes and the drivers as conceived in the framework. Following this phase, which might include a reassessment of elements of the framework, the thematic analysis would form the basis of a coding scheme for the quantitative analysis of all the comments. The purpose of this stage was to explore the relationship between the drivers and other attributes of the comments, such as the date they were made and the form of identification used by the commenter. The analysis also included identifying types of comment or patterns of comment making and again, comparing these to other variables, as appropriate.

##### The use of mixed-methods

One reason for using a mixed method approach in this phase of the research is that it suited the nature of the data. It is argued that the quantitative or qualitative approach applies as much to data collection method as it does to the analysis of that data, ie data gathered by open-ended interview questions is qualitative in nature and that gathered by a survey, quantitative in nature (Bryman, 2006).

Such a clear distinction does not apply to the comments on the Green Paper, which fall between quantitative and qualitative paradigms in much the same way as open-ended survey questions do.

The nature of the data therefore suggests that a mix of methods might be best suited to its analysis. It could be argued that the awkward nature of this data makes it unsuitable for analysis but that is to ignore the point that this data resulted from an e-consultation exercise and that the continuing prevalence of such forms of consultation requires that robust means of analysing such data need to be developed.

This is an argument put forward by Biquelet and Weale (2010) who recommend an automated form of analysis for similar data, see below. Unlike in the Biquelet and Weale research, however, my research objectives do not align with the organisers of the consultation. The point is still valid, however, at a general level that the large amounts of textual data that online social interactions produce presents a both an opportunity and challenge to researchers.

I combined the methods in my study in two ways (see page 98 and Figure 2): consecutive and complementary. In the comment analysis, the consecutive combining consisted in the qualitative analysis informing the coding for the quantitative stage. The complementary combining consisted in the qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis both contributing separate kinds of information to address research question 3 (What reflection on the drivers of collective action arise from the analysis?). The qualitative analysis developed understanding of the meaning and conception of the drivers; the quantitative analysis detailed the relationship of the drivers to each other and to other variables, such as status. It also quantified patterns in comment types. This complementary combining of methods is distinct from triangulation (as a process of verification) because the two forms of analysis produce different kinds of information. However, if there is an obvious inconsistency or contradiction in the findings, this is cause for re-examination and reflection.

In regards to the consecutive combining, the method I use is based on the 'words to numbers', or qualitative to quantitative, approach discussed in Srnka, and Koeszegi (2007). Zhang and Widermuth (2009) also recommend combining qualitative and quantitative data analysis in content analytic studies. Srnka and Koeszegi (2007) stress the need to produce generalisable results, whereas my aim was more focused on theory building - using the whole data set to gain a deeper understanding of



collective action in the context of my study and, from that perspective, to reflect on theory. The type of mixed-methods design I use at this stage also falls into the category what Greene et al. categorise term 'development': using the results from one method to help develop or inform the other method (1989, p259). It is similar, too, to Creswell and Plano Clark's (2010, p.71) 'exploratory QUAL-QUAN' design in that a qualitative data collection and analysis stage is followed by a quantitative stage. But unlike in some examples of this form, all my data collection was complete before the QUAN stage.

Drawing on Srnka and Koeszegi's (2007) recommendations on systematic analysis of qualitative material where the data set is very large, I used a stratified sample of comments for the qualitative analysis and documented my analysis in a detailed manner (see section 6.2). My inductive exploration of the data was informed by extant theory but not determined by it. From this qualitative stage, I developed a pared down coding system for the quantitative analysis of the whole data set. This set the parameters of my investigation for the whole data set but I felt this was an acceptable restriction, given its size. Reliability was aided by my documentation of my qualitative analysis and in addition, I enrolled a colleague with a Masters in Organisational Psychology to develop a coding scheme herself in an inductive manner and I compared her scheme to my own (see Appendix 15). Validity of the quantitative stage was enhanced by the definitions and examples which I detailed in my coding system (see Appendix 16).

### Methods in similar studies

I approached my review of methods that might be suitable for analysing the near 3,000 comments in two steps. First I looked at software tools which automate the process of text analysis and gauged their suitability for my own research. Second, I looked at how other studies had analysed similar data, ie large numbers of online comments made in a similar context. As becomes clear in this section, none of these methods seemed entirely appropriate for context and objectives of my research but a form of content analysis including inductive code development seemed to have most to offer.

The first step revealed that Biquelet and Weale (2010) used the software program Alceste<sup>19</sup> in a rather similar context to my own - an official consultation into social care. This research was based on around 100 comments made in the context of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) consultation on End of Life Medicines, in November 2008. The research objective was not only to understand the themes raised by the commenters but more importantly to provide a methodological solution to the challenge for Government of analysing large bodies of textual contributions to online consultations in a rigorous manner. At the time of its use in Biquelet and Weale's study Alceste worked by applying statistical clustering techniques to large bodies of text. This enabled the researcher to interpret the output to understand what themes within the text it suggests. Alceste was also used to perform correspondence analyses, linking text clusters to, for example, particular attributes of contributors. However there were various reasons this was not a suitable tool in my case. Firstly, for Biquelet and Weale, Alceste's ability to look for words and phrases that recurred frequently in the text and from there to interpret themes was appropriate since they were seeking to find out what respondents thought about the issues raised in the consultation. My research, by contrast, was oriented to exploring the drivers of collective action; I was more concerned with the 'why' rather than the 'how' of responses. Secondly the correspondence analysis required that one knew in advance certain characteristics of the responses for example, the status of the respondent. In my data, these details were embedded in the comments and to extract them would require reading each comment individually. If this were necessary, key benefits of an automated process would be lost. So the efficiencies and therefore benefits of Alceste were less obvious in the context of my research than for Biquelet and Weale (2010). However the correspondence analysis, whereby clusters of comments are linked to particular attributes of contributors prompted my decision to explore whether the comments I was analysing fell into different pattern types and then to see if there was a the relationship between these patterns and other variables such as the date the comment was made.

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<sup>19</sup> ALCESTE stands for Analyse des Lexèmes Co-occurents dans les Énoncés Simples d'un texte (Analysis of the co-occurring lexemes within the simple statements of a text).

I also considered various other software which performs content analysis, rather than assists it. Although there is a quantitative/qualitative divide in content analysis, programs such as Alceste show that this can become blurred. A more applicable distinction is whether you are working with an initial fixed set of coding categories or whether you are taking a more inductive approach and developing a set of codes. In my case, I did not have an initial fixed set of codes. Some programs enable you to develop this on the basis of word frequency but, as explained in the case of Alceste, this was not appropriate for my research. Other programs work on the basis of associating words or phrases with particular codes but these programs fall into the first category of requiring a pre-defined set of codes. Some programs are also being developed which follow and 'learn' the distinctions a human coder is making and then apply these automatically. These kind of programs were, however, rather untried in an academic environment and/or expensive at the start of my research. For these reasons, I decided to use the method described above, developing my codes as part of the qualitative analysis of a sample of comments and then manually applying a pared down coding system to the whole set of comments. However, further research in this area might eventually enable associations to be made between the expression of, say, collective identity and the use of particular words and at this point, software could be useful for the analysis of large data sets of text, rather in the way that sentiment analysis software is currently being used and developed (see for example, Taboada et al., 2011; Thelwall et al., 2011).

The second stage in my review of methods was to look at how others had approached data sets which were similar to mine. Gibson (2009), analysed around 3,000 comments on a BBC forum inviting people to "have their say" on welfare. It was not an online consultation but has similarities with this case study in terms of the number and subject matter of the comments. Gibson, however, applied a linguistic-based methodology based on discursive social psychology (DSP). The analysis involved thematic coding of a purposive sample of just under 200 comments drawing on the principles of DSP. It was supplemented by methods of constant comparison referenced to Glaser and Strauss (1967). The coding proceeded on the basis of the researcher looking for terms which were related to the concept of "effortfulness" (a

theme he had previously identified as relevant from the literature). The linguistic basis to the analysis was evident in the way in which the research established a link between the use of these terms and their link to attribution and accountability. This linguistic focus is a key point of difference in the Gibson (2009) analysis and the focus of my research, which is not primarily on the role of language but on social and political processes. This point is also made in Tesch's (1990) typology of qualitative research, which separates methods based on a concern with language, from orientated towards identifying patterns and regularities.

Another field of research which analyses online commentary of a political kind is the deliberative democracy research I referred to in Chapter 1. The 2009 Green Paper commentary did not suit conceptions of deliberation because the dialogue was one way and people were permitted to submit only a single comment. Neither was there any facility for the organisers of the consultation to reply to individual comments. This situation, contrasts with web forums, which are designed to foster responses to posts (Witschge, 2008) and which, along with other clearly discursive web spaces, generate the data for much of the research from a public sphere perspective<sup>20</sup>. So the deliberative model is not appropriate from a theoretical standpoint but it has some relevance in regards to methods since the data often consists of large quantities of online text contributed by a number of participants. Public sphere research often includes forms of content analysis (for example, Graham 2008; Kies and Wojcik 2010; Trice 2010; Zhang 2012). While some of these are highly quantitative, applying pre-determined sets of codes to the data, others have a qualitative aspect. In the system of qualitative content analysis explained in Mayring (2000), inductive category development and deductive category application are central components. Sandelowski (2000) also distinguishes qualitative content analysis for its dependence on inductively derived codes:

“In contrast to quantitative content analysis, in which the researcher systematically applies a pre-existing set of codes to the data, qualitative content analysis is data-derived: that is, codes also are systematically applied,

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<sup>20</sup> See section 3.4 for a discussion of Trevisan (2011) which, in common with my research, involves data from recent disability activism online, but it uses a deliberative framework.

but they are generated from the data themselves in the course of the study".  
(Sandelowski, 2000, p.338)

Mayring (2000) recommends that once codes have been developed, data is analysed step-by-step, following clear rules of procedure, thereby bringing validity to the process. This approach has much in common with the mixed-methods in Srnka and Koeszegi (2007), described above. In the context of my research, with its large data set, a mixed-methods approach seemed most appropriate, combining an inductive phase in which codes are developed with subsequent deductive coding and quantitative analysis of the whole set of comments.

#### **4.6.1 Analysis of a sample of the online comments**

A stratified sample of 207 comments was selected (stratified by order comments appeared on the website). This was about 7% of the total, or every 15<sup>th</sup> comment (by taking every 15<sup>th</sup> comment I was stratifying them by time). The sample size was determined from a piloting process. I made an assessment of comments prior to sampling, which revealed that comments appeared on the site in a loosely chronological order by date. Comments did not appear in a strict date order due to the moderation process, which interrupted their transfer to the site and they clustered heavily by date (see figure 5, section 6.3.1). So, I started by selecting every 30<sup>th</sup> comment in the order comments appeared on the site to yield a sample that covered the spread of dates. I also assessed the pilot to see if it achieved a mix in terms of the length and types of comments included. Because there were around 3,000 comments and because they varied in length it was difficult, without piloting, to predict how much text a particular sample size would yield. After seeing the amount of text resulting from every 30<sup>th</sup> comment, I decided the final sample size could be doubled so as to maximise the possibility of achieving saturation, while at the same time producing a body of data of a size that was manageable for thematic qualitative analysis.

As discussed above, an important feature of the analytical approach in this phase of research was that it should be inductive and iterative. For the purpose of theory

building, it was also necessary that it focused on the discovery of regularities. Therefore an appropriate method was thematic analysis of a sample of the comments, drawing on the coding system recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). The system works upwards from First Coding, which reflects but is not restricted by the conceptual framework. In my case first coding consisted of line-by-line coding of the text. The next stage is Pattern Coding, in which broader themes among the codes are sought. However memoing throughout makes sure that the process is iterative and reflexive: original coding decisions are revisited and revised as coding proceeds, leading eventually to the drawing of conceptual and theoretical conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.74). MaxQDA was selected to aid the thematic analysis because it is well suited to the coding strategy. Some quantitative-type assessments were possible from the sample, via the facility on MaxQDA to create cases. This informed the analysis of the entire set of comments. For example, comments could be quantified according to whether and by which categories people chose to identify themselves eg, disabled, carer etc. The date each comment was posted was also recorded so that comments could be grouped by this variable.

#### **4.6.2 Analysis of the entire set of online comments**

I set the coding scheme for the whole set of comments on the basis of the qualitative stage of analysis. I then manually coded all 2,834 comments and entered the data into an Excel spreadsheet and also into SPSS version 16.0. I also formulated some research questions specific to this stage of analysis (see section 6.3.1 for the variables and research questions). At this stage, I also deleted a number of comments from the set because they were made on behalf of organisations rather than individuals (I had noticed in my preliminary overview of the comments that this had occurred on a small number of occasions). I also deleted any comments which were made by a commenter who had clearly commented previously. As mentioned above, the moderation process should have done this but there were signs that in a small number of cases it had failed to do so (see pp.149-150).

One objective of the analysis of all the comments was to quantify them according to particular characteristics, for example, whether people had identified themselves as

disabled or as carers. Before the qualitative analysis, it was not clear exactly which variables would be used but the preliminary overview of the comments had suggested that the different forms of identification would be a variable, as would the date the comment was made.

By entering the data into an Excel spreadsheet, I was able to quantify precisely how many comments had been made on each date as well as according to other variables. The relationship between pairs of variables was then investigated using SPSS.

The research also looked at whether there were discernable patterns in the comment making. A simple algorithm was used to transform each comment into a number according to the combination of variables associated with it. The number of comments of each pattern type was then calculated. It was not clear before this analysis was conducted what conclusions might be drawn from the findings but it was hoped it might contribute to exploring the comments from a group, rather than individual perspective.

## **4.7 Ethics**

Literature on the use of data from the internet for research highlights the technology's capacity to blur public/private boundaries (Hudson and Bruckman, 2004; Ess, 2009; Boyd and Crawford, 2012). This study presented various ethical dilemmas relating to whether data might be considered public even if it was publically accessible. Overall I applied the following principles: if data relating to individuals was used, it was assessed what their expectations might be regarding the visibility of that data, even if it was on a publically accessible site. As in many ethical debates, this is a question of the degree rather than a binary calculation. The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) Ethics Working Committee recognises this situation in its recommendation that the greater the acknowledged publicity of the venue, the less obligation there may be to protect individual privacy, confidentiality and the right to informed consent (Hudson and Bruckman, 2004; Ess, 2009).

For this reason, I made a different assessment regarding the use of participants' comments on the consultation website, than those made by people in the forums and so on to which emails were traced. On the consultation website the text introducing the discussions made clear that this was part of a government consultation and not a private discussion. Therefore the ostensible rationale for leaving a comment was to "have your say" publicly. Further, the terms and conditions/privacy statements of the website made clear to participants that their comments would be publically accessible. In addition, there is the question of intent. The main purpose in commenting on the site was to make your views known publicly. This contrasts with data on a publicly accessible forum or social networking site where the primary purpose is to communicate with others and as a by-product publicly available data is produced. This distinction respects calls not to conflate accessibility with publicity (Boyd and Marwick, 2011).

For these reasons, I considered it was ethical to use quotes from the site and to identify the site ([careandsupport.direct.gov.uk](http://careandsupport.direct.gov.uk)). However I took various measures to protect the anonymity of individual commentators: all names were removed after the data was downloaded from the website and quotes were not attributed. The chance of people tracing extracts to the people who made them via a search engine was diminished considerably by the removal of the consultation and comments from the Department of Health's website when the coalition came into power in Spring 2010. In addition, I contacted the government department which hosted the consultation and informed them that I planned to use the data for research purposes.

However, I took stricter measures in regard to the tracing of the email to its destinations. Many of these destinations were discussion forums and although all those visited were open to the public and did not entail the researcher joining in order to view content, the assessment was made that the nature of these forums suggested a more private conversation than the consultation site. Therefore none of the forums are identified by name, no one using them is identified and no direct quotes are used. The same general rule was applied to Facebook groups although in this case accessibility requires membership of Facebook. The main Facebook group



(with around 4,000 members) is effectively named but it no longer exists and no users are identified nor direct quotes used.

I judged the analysis of the emails from Benefits and Work to be ethical both because the content of the emails was in the public domain since they appeared on sections of the website open to any member of the public and permission was given by the email's author to use the emails for research purposes. My university's faculty research ethics board also approved my research.

#### **4.8 Conclusion: a pragmatic, mixed-methods approach**

This chapter has described my methodological approach and research design. It charts the decisions I have made in formulating the design and details how the research and analysis will be carried out. My research is underpinned by a relational approach, which, as applied to this research, amounts to a focus on sites of interaction and the processes which occur in them (Crossley, 2010). It is not only the architecture of networks which is of interest but the processes by which they are formed and reformed.

In order to reflect on the theory of collective action, I have chosen as a starting point an instance of its manifestation online. The spaces where this collective action took place are regarded in this research as online networks and two groupings of such networks are the sites of my data collection. These are the campaign network and the Big Care debate website, specifically the comments section of the executive summary of the Green Paper.

From a review of the theoretical and empirical literature, I articulated a conceptual framework which structures my research. This led to the focus on the drivers of collective action, conceived in a way which emphasises their dynamic nature and the networks through which they operate. By analysing the data with a view to these drivers, the objective is to explore conceptions of collective action. For this reason it is important that the conceptual framework is treated as a scaffold rather than a box, enabling reflection rather than confining it (Mouzelis, 1993).

This stance is in line with my pragmatic and mixed-methods research design (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell, 2009). This approach also fits internet research more generally, in regard to which, Karpf (2012) argues, there is a need to accept a degree of “kludginess” – workaround, or inelegant but effective solutions. For the campaign, the methods used were informed by the following literature: inductive thematic coding of the emails (Miles and Huberman, 1994); digital tracing (Bruns and Burgess, 2011). For the Green Paper comments, the use of mixed methods was informed by Srnka and Koeszegi (2007) and Mayring (2000), and the inductive thematic coding by Miles and Huberman (1994).

The next two chapters detail the findings from the various stages of analysis and, in doing so, give more information on the application of the methods to the analysis. These sections also cover any challenges I encountered and describe the various additional steps I took to ensure validity and reliability.

## **Chapter 5: Findings from the campaign analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter details the findings from the research into the campaign behind the online commentary on the Green Paper. The research was designed to help understand the diffusion of the campaign message through online networks and the portrayal of the consultation process in the campaign emails. Clarifying the role of Benefits and Work (B&W) in both these factors was part of the objective. I also wanted to know what, if anything, this revealed about the drivers of collective action.

The scoping research into the Green Paper case had revealed that there was a campaign involving large numbers of people and that B&W had headed it to the extent that they had sent a number of campaign emails. A preliminary assessment of the online comments showed that they clustered by date: on particular dates large numbers of comments were made and on others far fewer. But at the scoping stage this had not been quantified. It was also clear that some of those dates coincided with a campaign email being sent by B&W. This, therefore, was one of the first issues I sought to understand in more detail. Once this had been done, I conducted a thematic analysis of the emails themselves to better understand what they showed about the role of B&W, the presentation of the issue in the emails and how this related to collective action as conceived in my conceptual framework. I also traced the online passage of the first email to the webpages where it was replicated. This produced a snapshot of the campaign network, which I sought to understand further by investigating the links between those webpages. Finally this chapter includes the analysis of the official text on the Green Paper site. This is not strictly part of the campaign analysis but it is included in this chapter because it enables comparison of the 'official' vision of participation in the Green Paper with that of the campaign emails.

## **5.2 The relation between the campaign emails and comment making on the Green Paper**

Preliminary research carried out at the time the consultation was still running had shown that B&W was central to the campaign to encourage individuals to comment on the Green Paper. I had encountered the campaign via the Facebook Group entitled 'Save our DLA and AA'. On the information page for this group, an email from B&W had been replicated by way of introduction to the issue. A little more research revealed that B&W had indeed launched an email-based campaign to which around 26,000 people eventually signed up. The campaign explicitly encouraged people to comment on the executive summary of the Green Paper. Although the Save DLA and AA Facebook group was large (it had around 4,700 members in September 2009) its level of membership did not match that of the B&W campaign and a review of its pages showed that it concentrated more on channeling members to sign an associated online petition<sup>21</sup> or join the B&W campaign than it did to sending them directly to the comments sections of the Green Paper.

For this reason, I decided to look more closely at the relationship between the dates and content of B&W's emails and the level of comment making on the Green Paper. At this stage, I used a basic word-search method to assess how many comments were made on which dates. Later in the research process, at the stage when I compiled a database to analyse all of the approximately 3,000 comments, I was able to systematically record the number of comments made by date. It is these figures which I have used in Figure 5 since they are the most accurate but they were not substantially different from the first set of figures I produced.

The first occasion a B&W email explicitly asked people to comment on the Green Paper was on 25 August 2009. On this date, there were 414 comments on the Executive Summary, whereas the day before, there were 3. The second request to comment (1 September) coincided with 578 comments being posted, whereas the previous day there had been 21.

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<sup>21</sup> the petition was signed by 23,709 people.

Figure 5 (p.172) is a graphic representation of the comment-making by date. It is in Chapter 5 since it was generated by the quantitative analysis but it serves to emphasise the point, already apparent at this early stage in the analysis, that there was a clear relationship between the dates on which B&W sent emails encouraging people to comment on the Green Paper and peaks in comment making.

This analysis therefore points to a marked co-occurrence between emails being sent and a rise in comment making, but it doesn't show that the emails actually caused the comment making. However the pattern of sporadic peaks in activity mirrors that observed in other instances of public comment making in which a mass email campaign has occurred during the comment period. This pattern stands in contrast to the sharp rise in comments towards the end of public comment period in instances where there is no relevant email campaign running during the comment making period (Shulman, 2009, p.33)<sup>22</sup>. This makes the proposition that there was a causal effect in the case of the Green Paper more justified. Appendix 7 contains a table detailing the dates B&W emails were sent; the numbers of people in the campaign; the key points in the emails; external influences on the consultation, such as ministerial announcements, media reports and parliamentary debates; the number of comments made each day and. This more detailed analysis also strengthens the supposition that there was a causal relation between emails being sent and fluctuations in the rate of comment making.

### **5.3 Thematic analysis of the campaign emails**

I carried out the thematic coding manually since the 13 emails B&W sent comprised only eight A4 pages of text. I started by coding descriptively and this yielded a number of codes. It was soon clear that some of these could be merged and the remainder grouped into three wider categories so that the coding system eventually took the following form:

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<sup>22</sup> Shulman (2009) was critiqued in a detailed manner in Karpf (2010). However the basic association between the existence of an email campaign and patterns in comment making referred to here was not disputed.

1. Who is on our side? 1a) you, the email audience 1b) our friends 1c) role of B&W
2. What is the threat? 2a) the other side 2b) obvious adverse agendas 2c) hidden adverse agendas
3. What can we do? 3a) actions to take 3b) achievements/encouragement

Development of one code fed into others. For example, a code 'who is being addressed' became 'who is on our side' after the emergence of the code 'the other side' (see Figure 4, below, for an example of coding of the emails). These changes also reflected the tendency, as the emails continued, for the issue to be articulated increasingly in terms of conflict. The following sections explain in more detail the findings from this coding process.

I have use many direct quotes from the emails in order to explain and illustrate the codes I used and thereby contribute to the trustworthiness and credibility of my findings (Creswell and Miller, 2000). In addition, Appendix 7 contains several direct quotes from the emails.

### Who is on our side

The first email was clear that the email audience were "claimants" and that this group were under threat. The same email specified who and how many were needed to join the campaign:

"We're looking for a minimum of 1,000 claimants, carers and support workers to join our campaign to save these benefits from being abolished."

By the fourth email, the term "campaigners" was used to describe the email recipients and the sense of threat had turned into the idea that a battle was being fought. This email also referred to "your voice" – the voice of you the campaigners. This signaled a unity among the email audience; it conveyed the idea that rather than the three categories addressed in the first email, this was a united group with one voice.

Figure 4: Example of qualitative coding of emails

Coding key:

Who is on our side – you the email recipients (yellow), our friends (apricot), role of B&W (red)

What is the threat – the other side (maroon), obvious adverse agendas (turquoise) hidden agendas (mid-blue)

What can we do – actions to take (green) achievements/encouragement (lilac)

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Benefits and Work [<mailto:benefitsandwork@googlemail.com>]

**Sent:** 05 August 2009 08:38

**To:** [steve@benefitsandwork.co.uk](mailto:steve@benefitsandwork.co.uk)

**Subject:** 100 days to **save DLA & AA from the axe**

Dear Steve,

**Claimants** **have just 100 days to** prevent their DLA and AA being abolished.

A government green paper has revealed proposals to stop paying 'disability benefits, for example, attendance allowance' and hand the cash over to social services instead.

Under the plan, current claimants would have their disability benefits converted to a 'personal budget' administered by local authorities and used to pay for services – not to spend as they wish.

Once the green paper consultation period ends in 100 days time, if an almighty row has not been raised, it is likely that both major political parties will see the lack of outrage as a green light to end both DLA and AA.

**We're looking for a minimum of 1,000 claimants, carers and support workers to join our campaign to save these benefits from being abolished.**

Find out how you can take part from this link:

[www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/disability-living-allowance-\(dla\)/dla-aa-cuts](http://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/disability-living-allowance-(dla)/dla-aa-cuts)

We know that many people will take false comfort from the fact that, unlike AA, DLA is not specifically named as being for the axe. But if the government was planning only to abolish AA it is extremely unlikely that they would refer constantly throughout the green paper to 'disability benefits', a term which includes not just AA but also DLA.

Others will dismiss this as just another idle discussion document and our concerns as scare mongering.

But it's much more than that.

36 meetings have already been organised around the country for people working

in government and the caring professions to meet to be told about the setting up of a new National Care Service which would oversee the system. In addition, a stakeholders panel of more than 50 voluntary sector organisations, trades unions and academics has been established to offer advice to the government.

Some organisations and individuals, such as RNIB and welfare rights worker Neil Bateman writing for Community Care magazine, have already voiced their alarm.

But not every disability organisation is opposed to the proposals and some even agree with them.

In a press release, Disability Alliance has welcomed the publication of the green paper and said that it 'looks forward to working alongside Government and all the other stakeholders in bringing these plans into fruition.' They have even said that they agree that there is a case for 'integrating disability benefits such as attendance allowance' into the new system.

One thing everyone does seem to agree on is that huge cuts in public spending will have to take place in the next few years as a result of the credit crunch and global recession.

Political parties are desperately looking for the softest targets to be the victims of these cuts. Dismissing the green paper's proposals as hot air and not worth worrying about could be the costliest mistake you ever make.

Find out more about the proposed abolition of DLA and AA and how you can join our campaign to fight back:

[www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/disability-living-allowance-\(dla\)/dla-aa-cuts](http://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/disability-living-allowance-(dla)/dla-aa-cuts)

Good luck,

Steve Donnison



B&W at times merged its identity with the campaigners and there was a sense of 'we' rather than 'you'. But overall, the emails suggested a varied and shifting role for B&W in the process. At one point, B&W explicitly said it was ill-suited to lead the campaign. Its third email, in the context of advising people to contact charities about their stance on the Green Paper, included the following passage:

"You might want to explain that at the moment the campaign against abolishing disability benefits is being led by a private sector company and that you think this is highly inappropriate, it ought to be a coalition of charities leading the way."

It was also careful to point out that it had not profited from its role and it made assurances that the list of email addresses compiled for the campaign would be deleted as soon as it was over. This is an extract from its final email, in which it also made a half price membership offer:

"When we began this campaign we were repeatedly accused by individuals and organisations of inventing the threat to DLA in order to make a profit. In truth, as we've discovered in the past, campaigning costs us money. In fact, whilst this campaign was at its height, subscriptions to the site actually fell. The reason is simple: most individuals and agencies subscribe to the Benefits and Work website when they have a specific benefits problem that needs a solution, not to support a cause. Campaigning takes up a huge amount of time that we would otherwise devote to producing and promoting new material that helps people solve those problems."

A complete review of the emails indicates that B&W encouraged people to act autonomously. The emails were full of suggestions about how people could build the campaign themselves and these were backed by assurances that they didn't need B&W. At one point B&W heralds what it calls "an inspiring example of spontaneous campaigning".

B&W also played the role of broker, where a broker is defined, at its simplest, as an actor connecting other actors which are not directly related to each other (Diani, 2003). From 18 August, B&W's emails began to include, as standard, links to other centres of campaigning, encouraging people to comment on associated forums. It specifically endorsed the activities of Carer Watch, prefacing this with the information that "although set up by carers, Carer Watch is being used by sick and disabled claimants as well". The history of strained relations between sections of the care movement and the disability movement makes this significant (for reviews of the debate over care, see Shakespeare, 2006; Beresford, 2008b).

Addressing subscribers to the emails as "campaigners" is itself an example of brokerage because this overarching category emphasises the common ground that can be occupied by groups which, under other circumstances, might feel distanced from one another. The benefits of acting in concert were also explicitly addressed in this extract:

"What would be really excellent now is if the realisation that there are many thousand of claimants out there who are able to get together and act for a common purpose could be translated into something longer lasting. There's no point in a private sector company like ours trying to spearhead this – we are far too open to the accusation that we are only in it for the money. Is it time for someone to revive the idea of a Claimant's Union?"

### What is the threat

Although, as discussed above, B&W applauded the activities of some disabled and carers' organisations, it decried others: "not every disability organisation is opposed to the proposals and some even agree with them".

Later emails encouraged campaigners to contact charities which had not spoken out against the proposals to persuade them that, in this respect, they were not representing their grassroots membership.

The emails suggested that the main threat, however, was the government and there were frequently references to its untrustworthiness. On September 28, Care Services Minister Phil Hope told a reporter at the Labour Party conference that DLA was not under threat. B&W welcomed this development in a campaign email one day later. But the email the following week pointed out there had been “no corroboration” of Hope’s “‘don’t worry, be happy’ exhortation”. When on October 22, Health Secretary Andy Burnham confirmed that DLA for under 65s would not be brought into the new National Care service, this was greeted with only cautious approval by B&W: “It’s a start but nowhere near enough”. B&W pointed out that the situation for over 65s and regarding AA was still unclear, and a week later it referred to the announcement as a “cunningly worded concession”.

At another point in the consultation, an issue developed over people claiming that their comments had not been published on the Big Care Debate website. B&W reported in a campaign email that it had got in touch with officials running the website to ask why. It relayed their response verbatim:

“We have received an amazing response from the public in regards to the Green Paper, on both the website and via email. We are doing our best to work our way through them, and have them online and ready to view as soon as we can.”

However B&W were circumspect in their reaction to this, saying in the campaign email on October 6:

“We do wonder how hard it can be to read and publish a few thousand posts over several months. Is the sheer volume of communications really the only problem? Rather than, say, the fact that most responses are overwhelmingly hostile to the green paper?”

Another email warned that the Big Care public roadshows “are likely to be carefully stage-managed and positive feedback from them may well be used to justify aspects

of the eventual government decision". This extends the allegation of untrustworthiness from individual government ministers to the consultation process itself, suggesting that it cannot be relied on to deliver a just representation of public reaction to the proposals.

### What can we do

As time passed there were increased references to agency in the course of the emails. In the first email, this extract suggests that the people affected by the Green Paper might be seen as impotent: "Political parties are desperately looking for the softest targets to be the victims of these cuts."

However by the second email, this perception is countered with statements which emphasise the potential influence of the campaign, such as the following:

"We had an astonishing 5,245 people sign up in the first 24 hours of the campaign. I confess this has taken us rather by surprise: we thought it would take most of August just to get 1,000."

"The number of responses on the government's own green paper website has more than quadrupled since we asked you to post there last Tuesday."

"Above all, if there's been a change of heart, it's because you have fought so effectively to protect the benefits of disabled people."

The following extract is from the final email and preceded a detailed list of achievement including numbers who had signed up to the petition, commented on the Green Paper, and taken a number of other actions (the capital letters are in the original):

"WHAT YOU HAVE ACHIEVED: Within hours of our announcing our 100 days campaign, news of the danger to DLA and AA spread across the internet on

blogs, forums and social networking sites and you began to make your voices heard.”

In conclusion, campaigners were assured: “You have forced the government to rule out any hopes it had of snatching DLA for under-65s to fund the National Care Service.”

### **5.3.1 Reflections on the thematic analysis of the emails**

#### Reflection on relationship between themes and conceptual framework

When I reflected back on these themes from the perspective of my conceptual framework, it was clear that some of them could be understood as appeals to the psychological processes which drive collective action. ‘Who is on our side’ and who is ‘the other side’ had links with collective identity. The sense of we-ness and one-ness, particularly in contrast to actual or imagined sets of others, is a defining feature of collective identity in much of the literature (see for example, Melucci, 1995; Snow, 2001).

The concept of group injustice corresponded with the theme of identifying the threat. Injustice is conceived in the literature as a sense that your group is being treated in an unequal, unfavourable way compared to other groups (see for example, Postmes, 2007). Feelings of injustice might be expressed in outward emotions such as anger or inwardly, as fear (Walgrave et al., 2009). There were points in which the emails could be seen as playing to these emotions, for example in the first email, people were cautioned that ignoring the Green Paper could be the “costliest mistake you ever make”. However later emails explicitly countered emerging rumours that DLA was to be abolished on 13 November and made clear that this was merely when the consultation period ended. The emails also referred to campaigners responding angrily to the Green Paper. But the message that came across more strongly in the emails was that government reassurances about the safety of disability benefits should be viewed with scepticism. The notion that government ministers and the consultation process itself cannot be trusted was clear. The message seemed to be

that “they” (ministers, government in general) are not on “your” side. In this way, notions of injustice and identity were bound together through the concept of trust. Trust itself is a contested and multi-faceted notion and has provoked a wide body of literature which argues for different definitions and understanding of the term (for example, Miller and Listhaug 1990; Levi and Stoker 2000; Putnam 2000; Cook et al., 2007). At this point, I kept an open mind regarding my understanding of trust and continued to note its occurrence in the analysis (see, for example, p.155).

The segments coded ‘what can we do’, particularly those which reported back on how much action had been taken, appealed to a sense of efficacy. One of the basic requirements for a sense of efficacy is the knowledge that others are taking action (for example, Klandermans, 2004; Margetts et al., 2009; González-Bailón, 2012). Levels of activity were amply reported in the B&W emails. They carried regular updates on the numbers of people in the campaign, those who had signed the petition, and those who had commented on the Green Paper. This was often expressed in metaphors of super-abundance - there was a “flood” of responses on the Big Care website, charities were “deluged” with emails. In both ways, the message was that many people were taking action against the proposals and that policymakers were being pressured into responding. The literature on efficacy emphasises that there is a rational, calculating aspect to a sense of efficacy, which consists of assessing how many others are taking part, or are going to take part, in an action. This affects decisions, at an individual level, about whether it is worth acting. The internet facilitates such decision making by considerably improving the flow of information about who else is taking action (see for example, González-Bailón, 2009; Margetts et al., 2009).

This has been a brief review of the findings of the thematic analysis in relation to the conceptual framework but a fuller discussion of these points and of the findings more generally is carried out in Chapters 7 and 8.

### The role of Benefits and Work

This analysis also contributes to understanding the role of B&W in the campaign. Although B&W is a private company, it was acting as a campaigning organisation in regards to the Green Paper. Relational research into SMOs, particularly regarding brokerage and leadership is therefore useful in understanding B&W's role. In these approaches, membership size, particularly in-degree ties are associated with network centrality and leadership (see for example, Melucci, 1996, pp.335-338; Diani, 2003, p.106). Additionally, two of the main tasks of leadership (according to Melucci, 1996, p.339) are to define objectives, including specific goals, and to provide means for action. The membership of B&W's campaign was very large and B&W clearly defined the specific objective of Saving DLA and AA in its first email. It later provided the means to comment on the Green Paper in the form of links to the executive summary.

However it was also clear that B&W encouraged people to take action autonomously and was not entirely comfortable with 'leading' the campaign. B&W acknowledged that its position could lead to a clash of interests. This was evident in its assurances about disposing of the email database, mentioned above. In the same email, B&W also stated that the campaign had coincided with a downturn in business activity rather than, as critics suggested, a boost. It also said that other organisations such as charities might be better suited than itself to heading the campaign, and it urged subscribers to its emails to make this point to the charities (see Appendix 7, 11 August email). The analysis of the emails also suggests that B&W played the role of broker by encouraging disabled people to use the Carer Watch website.

Overall, B&W can be characterised as a private company, which in this instance was acting as a campaigning organisation, partly leading the campaign but also encouraging autonomous activity and, in addition, acting as a broker. This kind of hybridity has been remarked on in other instances in the literature, demonstrating the internet's facility for blurring or transcending boundaries (see for example, Flanagan et al., 2006; Chadwick, 2007; Chadwick, 2011). My research therefore stands as further empirical example of this phenomenon. B&W's role can also be seen as an

example of the kind of “soft leadership” associated with other contemporary forms of activism (Gerbaudo 2012, p. 135).

#### The presentation of the purpose of participation

The email analysis also showed the way in which B&W portrayed participation in the consultation as being about saving DLA and AA, rather than responding to the Green Paper as a whole. Recipients of the emails were urged to make their voices heard. The use of this expression rather than, for example, encouraging people to ‘contribute to the debate’ was part of an overall impression that the campaigners were involved in a contentious activity, fighting a “threat”. This language of embattlement against a perceived injustice is reiterated in the final email with the idea that campaigners had “forced the government” not to “snatch DLA” away from them.

I applied qualitative thematic analysis to the campaign emails. In order to improve validity, I have used rich, thick description to convey the findings, giving many examples taken directly from the data (Cresswell, 2009). The small quantity of data reduced the chances of the meaning of codes drifting during the process, thus improving reliability of my findings.

### **5.4 The analysis of the campaign network**

The purpose of this analysis was to generate a snapshot of the campaign network. Websites or webpages were conceived as the nodes in the network and the ties as formed by replicating the email in online spaces. The passage of the first email was traced on this basis, using carefully applied but simple search tools – LexiURL and Google. The sites where the first email was replicated were then assessed against basic criteria (see Appendix 8). This approach to understanding networks begins from the perspective of attention to the communicative processes which form them rather than only to their structure.



### 5.4.1 Tracing the first email

Having established that there seemed to be a relationship between the dates on which emails were sent and comment making, I traced the first campaign email to give a snapshot of the campaign network. This involved copying the opening paragraph of the first B&W campaign email into Google and LexiURL and determining from the results a list of webpages where the paragraph was replicated (see Appendix 6 for a description of how this was carried out and how I addressed validity). I followed returns on the email search up to saturation point, discarded any which were invalid, irrelevant or inaccessible to the public. This resulted in a list of 56 URLs. Of these 73% were forums or message boards, 14% were blogs, 7% Facebook groups. One of the websites was the newpage of a charity and the remaining 2 were miscellaneous news pages.

I visited all of these URLs and compiled a table to report the results (see Appendix 8). The text of the B&W email on the webpage frequently included a link that enabled people to sign up to the campaign. In many cases this posting was followed by discussion among users of the page or website. These discussions were along various themes, including people reporting that they had taken particular actions, for example joining the B&W campaign, writing to their MP, spreading the message further on the internet.

I recorded the information according to the following criteria:

1. What type of website/webpage it was – eg, a news site, the website of a charity, a forum, blog, etc? How the purpose of the webpage was articulated. Where it involved membership, how was the basis for membership articulated?
2. Whether the whole of the first email was replicated or just a part of it
3. The date the email was replicated
4. Where there were indicators of participation such as number of comments, this was recorded

5. Whether comments included people saying they were spreading the message.

As Appendix 8 shows, it became apparent that most of the webpages where the B&W email was replicated were, themselves, online networks. The type of network varied according to the basis for participation or membership, whether those in the network appeared to know each other and so on. In all these networks, the nodes comprised individuals. The links were made by being a visible member of the network and/or posting comments onto the webpage. But the basis for membership of the network, and the nature and purpose of the comment-making varied and for this reason the networks were different in nature. I will explain this point more fully by giving some examples.

Many of the forums were based around members having a shared impairment, although this was sometimes articulated in terms of an illness, or suffering from a condition. In these cases, people appeared to know each other personally and be on familiar terms with one another. The environment was generally supportive and about sharing experiences often an emotional level (note that literature has shown that disabled people favour these forums – for example, Seymour and Lupton, 2004). These are the type of features which are often taken to be indicators of collective identity in relevant literature (see for example, Poletta and Jasper, 2001; Ashmore et al., 2004, p83). Gold (2008) also found that collective identity was a feature of online support groups for disabled people. So it is reasonable to conclude that a sense of collective identity associated with the impairment in question is a characteristic of these environments.

In contrast, other forums seemed to be based on the exchange of practical information in the form of giving tips, for example, on how to save money. In others, the purpose was to discuss current affairs. Here the tone was often more confrontational and people were often on less personal terms. Such environments were less likely to foster or exhibit collective identity associated with disability.

The Save DLA and AA Facebook Group featured lots of posts about action taken, updates on the campaign, links to other campaign centres and so on. A similarly

activist tone was also evident in some of the other forums, and particularly in many of the blogs. Most of the blogs featured a banner to advertise that they were part of the blogging against disablism network. Blogging Against Disablism Day is an annual event started on May 1, 2006, and in the words of its founder is “the day where all around the world, disabled and non-disabled people blog about their experiences, observations and thoughts about disability discrimination. In this way, we hope to raise awareness of inequality, promote equality and celebrate the progress we've made”<sup>23</sup>. These networks displayed a strong activist feel to them. What linked those involved in them was not so much a shared experience of a particular impairment, so much as a shared focus on achieving equality for disabled people.

These examples show that it would be an oversimplification to suggest the networks through which the campaign message spread had a uniform character. In addition, it should be acknowledged, as other literature has shown, that people belong to various networks both online and offline and that these foster a variety of different identities for an individual (see for example, Van Laer, 2010).

A second point was also clear from comments left in the networks: that many people were spreading the campaign message in a horizontal manner to other online networks with which they were involved. Most of these were pre-existing networks but some new networks were set up directly in response to the Green Paper, in particular the Save DLA and AA Facebook group and the B&W campaign network itself. These findings reinforce those of the email analysis, contributing to the impression that B&W's role in the campaign was central by virtue of its large membership base but that this centrality was tempered by individuals spreading the message in a horizontal and ad-hoc manner among many pre-existing networks.

#### **5.4.2 Summary and limitations of the campaign network analysis**

There were some limitations to this analysis. First is a timing issue. The analysis of the campaign network was conducted several months after the campaign, although as

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<sup>23</sup> [From Diary of a Goldfish blog [online] Available at: <http://blobolobolob.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/blogging-against-disablism-day-will-be.html> [Accessed June 2012]

the results showed, many online traces of the campaign were still in evidence. However had the analysis been conducted at the time of the campaign and had data been collected on a number of separate occasions, a fuller picture of the campaign network would have been generated. This was unfortunately not possible because my PhD began just as the campaign was ending so by the time I had ethical approval and had designed the data collection and analysis, the campaign itself was over.

Secondly, in retrospect, it would have been interesting to analyse the exchanges which took place in the online spaces where the email was replicated. Looking at these conversations in relation to the drivers of collective action would also have been a relevant avenue of research and might have revealed differences at network level in, for example, expressions of collective identity and injustice. However, the ethical implications of such detailed analysis would need to be carefully considered since, unlike the online comments area which was clearly a public space, the forums, in particular, have a much more private feel to them (see section 4.7). Therefore directly quoting passages from these forums would have required permission from contributors. As it was, I merely compiled a list of notable features (see Appendix 8), which included recording the way in which the forum articulated who it was for. This served as a very basic proxy for assessing the basis on which the network was formed and this method was sufficient to illustrate a wide diversity.

Overall, this means that it is likely that my analysis missed various spaces where all or part of the first email was replicated and that it was not clear whether and how these online spaces were linked to one another. However, describing the process of analysis in detail and acknowledging its limitations enhances the validity of my analysis. That said, the campaign network analysis shows that part of the first email was replicated, a few days after it was sent, in 56 online spaces almost 75% of which were forums, but also included Facebook groups, blogs and newspages. It also shows that the people who participated in these networks spread the campaign message, in a horizontal manner, to other online spaces.

These findings correspond with extracts from the campaign emails (a factor which lends credibility): the second email (sent on 6 August) says “lots of you have been

posting on forums”, this situation was referred to again in the final email (sent 17 November): “within hours of our announcing our 100 days campaign, news of the danger to DLA and AA spread across the internet on blogs, forums and social networking sites and you began to make your voices heard”. The emails also explicitly encouraged people to spread the message about the campaign on forums and via email (see Appendix 7, the entry for 25 September) and from 6 August, each email included, as standard, the line “Please feel free to forward or publish this email”.

The findings also accord with reports published during or soon after the consultation. The editorial of an issue of *Journal of Care Services Management* focused on the Green Paper noted that “as predicted there has been a huge groundswell of public opposition” to the proposal to alter Attendance Allowance. The article goes on to say that online forums “set up to test public opinion” bore “testament” to this opposition and a footnote identifies the Big Care debate as the “official” forum (Roberts, 2010). It should be noted that the article refers only to newly-created forums and not also to the pre-existing forums that my research identified.

As for non-academic media, *Community Care* magazine, 11 September 2009, also reported a “groundswell of dissent” and identified “blogs and messageboards” as the places where “campaigners” and “service users” expressed their views about the green paper’s potential threat to disability benefits (Hunter, 2009). A report on 25 November 2009 in *The Guardian* newspaper (Brindle, 2009) claimed there was a “vociferous online campaign”.

The campaign analysis not only generated a snapshot of where the message spread but it also showed the variety among those destinations. These were online networks of varying sorts, mostly forums but also Facebook groups and blogs. Most of them pre-dated the campaign to respond to the Green Paper. The basis for membership of these networks varied, some being more likely to foster collective identity than others and some likely to foster a different kind of identity than others.

## 5.5 Analysis of the official text in the consultation space

This analysis was carried out in order to compare the way in which participation in the Green Paper consultation was portrayed in the campaign emails with the way it was portrayed in the official text in the online consultation space. I have used thick description and supplied many direct quotes to enhance the validity of this analysis. This text consisted of the following:

1. The blog of David Behan, then director general of social care at the Department of Health (part of the Big Care Debate website<sup>24</sup>)
2. The news section of the Big Care Debate website
3. The sections of the Green Paper which were most directly related to understanding the official conception of the consultation – The Prime Minister’s Forward, the Executive Summary, Chapter 7, entitled Having Your Say
4. The Terms and Conditions webpage on the Big Care Debate website

The analysis of this text resulted in the formation of three main themes: the purpose of the consultation, the role of participants, and the use of contributions. This section describes these themes, illustrating them with various extracts. These themes came out of a thorough reading and re-reading of the various pages of online text which formed part of the Big Care Debate website and they also reflect the themes developed in the analysis of the campaign emails. As a form of thematic analysis, this is therefore consistent with Miles and Huberman’s (1994) model of carrying out analysis with a set of codes already in mind but in a reflexive manner (see p.96)

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<sup>24</sup> the Big Care Debate website is no longer live but it was available at [www.careandsupport.direct.gov.uk](http://www.careandsupport.direct.gov.uk). I have downloaded versions of all the material referenced here.

### The purpose of the consultation exercise as a whole

David Behan's first blog (28 July, 2009) expresses the purpose of the consultation as helping to create a national care system. The reason people should get involved is because:

"This is something that will affect all adults, people with a disability as well as older people, so it is something that we need to decide together...This is a historic opportunity to help create something which could change the lives of people for generations to come."

The Executive Summary of the Green Paper talks of this being "a difficult issue that has to be decided together". This implies that consultation makes policy less likely to fail and more legitimate. That point is made more clearly in this extract from the News section of the Big Care Debate website on 10 November, 2009:

"We want to involve everyone in creating a National Care Service that works for the good of everyone, for generations to come. Families and carers will be at the very heart of everything we do in this reform process. They must be if we are to get these reforms right...For all of this to happen we must continue to communicate and share ideas – especially those who have direct experience of the care and support system."

The choice of phrases such as "sharing ideas", coupled with the title of the Green Paper *Shaping the Future of Care Together* implies a level of trust and consensus between the citizen and the government that appears to resonate with a deliberative model of participation (see Appendix 3). Behan's opening blog post carries a sense of the nation pulling together to face difficult issues: "these are big questions that we must answer together as a nation".

Another way of understanding the purpose of something is to consider how success is measured. In the case of this consultation, high levels of participation were clearly

considered indicative of success as is evident in this extract from Phil Hope's closing speech (from the News section of the Big Care Debate website, 14 November, 2009):

"The Government and stakeholders have worked incredibly hard to ensure that we got as many views as possible to make this consultation meaningful...The number, and quality, of the responses has been very high. Many thousands of people have told us how they want the new National Care Service to be organised and funded. This has been a very successful consultation, particularly in terms of online responses, and has demonstrated just how important the issue of care and support is in our society."

### The role of participants

The impression the official comment gives of what the consultation offers people is ambiguous, falling somewhere between deliberative and consultative models of participation. (As already noted, mixed intentions were a feature of other participation exercises at the time, see sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.2). The subject is discussed in a range of terms, some of which imply an exchange of views, and others of which suggest simply registering an individual opinion. A section from the Prime Minister's foreword to the Green Paper, illustrates the point:

"This is the start of a process of discussion rather than the end – your chance to shape the new care and support system, to tell us what is most important to you, and to have your say." (Department of Health, 2009, p.3)

The executive summary contains a section entitled 'Having your Say' and here the impression is of registering a view rather than a discussion:

"This is your opportunity to tell us what you think about the difficult choices that need to be made, and to help us to make the firm decisions about how best to create a new system." (DoH, 2009, p.23)



But a few sentences earlier, the role of participants is expressed in more confined terms: “This Green Paper sets out a number of questions we would like to hear your views on” (ibid, p.23). The three main consultation questions (see Appendix 4) are listed both in the ‘Having Your Say’ section of the Executive Summary and in Chapter 7, the whole of which is also entitled ‘Having Your Say’. Overall then, the Executive Summary gives a relatively restricted impression of the role of participants: to submit their views on particular questions.

A looser interpretation of their role features in the David Behan’s blog. In his opening blog (28 July, 2009), Behan refers to “this debate”, meaning the Big Care Debate (which is also the title of the website). Similarly on 25 September, Behan’s blog refers to the consultation as “a nationwide discussion”. Andy Burnham, at that time Secretary of State for Health, also uses the term “discussion”. His speech to National Children and Adult services conference in Harrogate is reported in the News section of the Big Care Debate website on 22 October, where he is quoted as saying, “I do want to stress that the door is wide open for discussion”.

But when it comes to commenting online on the Green Paper (one of a number of ways which people could take part in the Big Care Debate), Behan’s first blog entry (28 July) describes the role of participants in tighter terms and the option of a conversation is not present.

“There are many ways to get involved. Have a look around this website - you will see plenty of opportunities to have your say. Among them is a web-optimized version of the Green Paper where you can leave your comments”

The terms and conditions page of the website make it clear that people are being invited to register a view, rather than engage in a conversation, by the warning that “multiple or repetitive postings will be deleted”. It also makes it clear that comments will be moderated according to rules of conduct (which cover the usual issues, such as no comments that are unlawful, harassing, defamatory, abusive and so on). People are told that “postings should relate to your own personal experience” but that they are permitted to comment on someone else’s experience (the examples given are a

relative or someone you care for) so long as they take basic steps to protect their privacy (for example, not naming them). Overall then, in practice, this amounted to an exercise in gathering and aggregating individual views.

### The use of contributions

The executive summary of the Green Paper makes it clear that “once the consultation has finished we will publish the results of what people told us” (DoH, 2009, p.23). The News section of the Big Care Debate website (12 November) adds that results will be analysed and that “this work will then feed into the care and support White Paper to be published in 2010”. However there is no further detail here or in the other official text covered in this section about exactly how results would feed in. A summary of the analysis of online comments in the official report on the consultation is given in Appendix 9 but although the report says the consultation informed the White Paper, it does not detail how or in what respects (DoH, 2010). As with other aspects of this official text, the failure of consultation exercises to be reflected in policy is remarked on in the literature on participation exercises more generally (for example, Barnes et al, 2007; Bochel and Duncan, 2007; Beetham et al., 2008).

### Comparing the official text with the campaign emails

The objective of this stage of analysis was to compare the way in which participation in online comments section of the Green Paper was conceived in the B&W emails, as opposed to in the official text. It is clear that there were many points of divergence between the two.

Firstly, the official text portrayed the purpose of consultation as an opportunity to contribute to the creation of a National Care Service, a grand endeavour which was described as affecting future generations. The campaign emails however portrayed participation in terms of saving DLA and AA, a much narrower objective, with the emphasis on defence of the status quo. The official text carries the message that the nation must pull together to deal with the difficult issue of social care. There is an assumption of consensus about what the problem is and that sharing ideas can solve it. By contrast the B&W emails emphasise conflict, the need to fight, the presence of a

threat. The sense of unity is not between citizens and government but rather between claimants, carers and support workers. The purpose of participation is not to share ideas but to make the voice of campaigners heard. The emails also carry a strong sense that government is not to be trusted, exemplified in phrases such as “a cunningly worded concession” (see p.130).

There is also divergence over the role of participants. Although there is some variation in the official text about whether overall The Big Care Debate is a discussion or a chance to register a view, in regards to the online comment section, participants are explicitly told the opportunity is to “leave your comments” in Behan’s introductory blog post. B&W’s emails convey a sense of collective protest rather than individual comment making. Finally there is the issue of what counts as success. In the official text and in Andy Burnham’s speech to the House of Commons (referred to on p.1), the success of the consultation is expressed by reference to the numbers of people who got involved. In B&W’s emails, success is seen in terms of forcing the government to abandon the threat to DLA.

## **5.6 Overall conclusions from the campaign analysis**

These overall conclusions result from considering the stages of the analysis in combination, they contribute to three of the research questions: firstly, the issue of what the research reveals about the involvement of networks in the collective action, secondly, what reflections on the drivers of collective action arise from the analysis and, thirdly, what implications there are for the conceptual framework as a whole.

Regarding the involvement of networks in the campaign, the picture that emerges is that the message about the campaign was dispersed through a multi-level online network comprising vertical and horizontal, ad-hoc and long-term elements. B&W can be seen as broker between some of the networks comprising the campaign network as a whole and also as a leader, by virtue of its central position which enabled it to send regular emails to around 26,000 campaign members. However its role of leader was softened by replication of the emails in various other online networks and the way in which participants in those networks spread news of the

campaign in a horizontal manner to other online spaces. This structure undermines assumptions that protest networks are characterised by horizontal structures, a tendency which is criticised in González-Bailón et al., (2012, p.26). The email dispersion network can be envisaged as comprising a central network connecting a number of other, mostly pre-existing and more horizontal networks. The networks making up this dispersion network were of a varied nature. Most were forums, but Facebook groups and blogs were also involved. Almost all of them pre-dated the Green Paper consultation.

This depiction of multi-level networks distinguished in part by temporal differences has parallels with recent research into Twitter. Bruns and Burgess (2012) characterise Twitter as comprising “a social networking site and ambient information stream”. These are two overlapping and independent networks: one long term and relatively stable, based on follower and followee relationships and the other communities which form on an ad-hoc basis around hashtag discussions. In an earlier paper, Bruns and Burgess (2011) articulated the process by which hashtags bring people together to discuss a particular topic as the formation of ad-hoc publics. The idea of assembling publics is similarly referred to in Newman and Clarke (2009) in the context of characterising official participation initiatives as sites of struggle. Gerbaudo (2012) also characterises contemporary forms of activism as the choreography of assembly. My own findings suggest that the campaign network can be depicted in a similar manner to Bruns and Burgess’ view of Twitter as comprising two independent and overlapping networks. In the case of my data, the more long-term and stable network consists of the networks through which the campaign email dispersed and the ad-hoc public network comprises the B&W-centered campaign network set up to ‘Save DLA and AA’. The longer-term networks were sometimes, but not always, characterised by a politicised collective identity associated with being disabled, the kind of enduring collective identity associated with social movements. The B&W-centered network, by contrast, was more concerned with assembling diverse publics, under the umbrella frame of ‘campaigners’, to comment on the Green Paper.

This brings the discussion to the issue of what reflections on the drivers of collective action this analysis enables. A significant contribution is that it highlights the benefits of a network level conception of the collective identity. The impression that the dispersion networks varied in regard to collective identity came from looking at how those running the networks articulated their purpose. Some of these articulations seemed strongly associated with a politicised disabled identity, particularly where they carried the 'blogging against disablism' widget, while others were based on sharing the experiences of having a particular impairment or illness and so would foster an identity related to this. Other networks seemed designed to attract a wide variety of people who shared an interest in common, such as saving money or practicing a particular hobby. Overall the conclusion is that it would be misleading to imply uniformity among the dispersion networks in regard to their association with particular forms of intensity of collective identity. The email network, meanwhile, with B&W at its centre, fostered a unifying, campaigner identity, as the analysis of the emails shows. This variety in collective identities among the networks therefore supports the idea not only of taking a network perspective to assess identity but also that identity should not be regarded as a fixed phenomenon.

The email analysis also enabled reflection on the other drivers. The reporting of the numbers signing up to the campaign and the recording of its achievements seemed based on the idea that a sense of efficacy would encourage recipients of the emails to take the actions recommended. This implies, at least, a belief on the part of the author of the emails that group efficacy motivates collective action. In addition, the way in which the emails framed the Green Paper consultation conveyed a combined sense of collective identity and injustice.

Another central finding from this stage of analysis was the divergence in the way participation was presented in the official text as opposed to the campaign emails. This relates to one of the understandings underpinning the conceptual framework as a whole: that the institutional/extra-institutional divide in some social movement approaches to collective action is both difficult to sustain in an online environment and risks obscuring the potentials for subversion in institutional action.

Understanding this divergence in the conceptions of participation between the official text and the campaign emails is helped by referring to Dahlberg's (2011) typology of conceptions of digital democracy and Chadwick's (2003) models of interaction between the state and citizen (see Appendix 3).

The analysis of official text suggests that it was informed by model of interaction between the state and citizens that has much in common with Chadwick's consultative model (Chadwick, 2003). This conception is based on an expectation of "better" policy resulting from citizens communicating to government what "real people think" (Chadwick, 2003, p.8).

The official text can also be understood by reference to Dahlberg's typology (Dahlberg, 2011). It reflects an underlying view of democracy that falls between what he terms the liberal-individualist and deliberative positions. In the liberal-individualist position, the potential of digital media rests on its capacity for conveying information and viewpoints between individuals and representative decision-makers (Dahlberg, 2011). It follows that participation by individuals consists in getting and staying informed and making their views known. The deliberative position sees the value of the internet in improving citizens' capacity to "scrutinize and guide" official decision making processes (ibid, p.860). Democracy, from this perspective, is about arriving at a consensus as a result of deliberation.

The campaign emails, on the other hand, portrayed a different purpose to the consultation than the official conception. They also envisaged participants as collective protesters, rather than the official vision of individuals contributing answers to the consultation questions. This has more in common with Dahlberg's counter-publics position, in which contest and confrontation, rather than consensus, characterises democracy (Dahlberg, 2011). Dahlberg's counter-publics position rests on those publics developing counter discourses. But, counter publics can also be associated with counter agency and acts of collective resistance (Barnes and Prior, 2009, p.30). People's capacity to act in unity to oppose the Green Paper was a strong theme of the campaign emails. This also resonates with the notion of assembling ad-hoc publics as form of resistance (Newman and Clarke, 2009, Gerbaudo, 2012).

The next chapter details the findings from the analysis of comments and assesses the contributions these make to answering the research questions.

## **Chapter 6: Findings from the Comments Analysis**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the findings from the analysis of the online comments responding to the 2009 Green Paper consultation. The first section covers the findings from the qualitative analysis of the sample of comments and the second section details the findings from the quantitative analysis of all the comments. The first stage of analysis aimed to see how the themes in the comments related to the drivers. The purpose was not only to deepen understanding of the drivers but also to develop, inductively, a coding system for the next stage of analysis. The second stage consisted of applying this coding system deductively to the whole set of comments. For this stage, research was oriented around a sub-set of research questions, which addressed the incidence of variables and the relationships between them. I also wanted to explore, from this stage of analysis, whether the comments could be categorised into particular types or patterns. This was to help understand the relationship between expressions of the individual drivers.

### **6.2 Findings from qualitative analysis of a sample of comments**

This section describes the qualitative analysis of a stratified sample of 203 of the Green Paper comments using MaxQDA software as a data management tool. This sample comprised 7% of the total, or every 15<sup>th</sup> comment (see section 4.6.1 for more detail on the sampling process). I rejected comments from this sample that were only one sentence long on the basis that they were too brief to be suitable for thematic analysis. This applied to 9 comments which I would otherwise have selected.

As I selected comments, various other factors also became apparent: firstly that the total number of comments listed on the website did not tally with the number actually there; and secondly that some of the comments had been submitted on behalf of an organisation, rather than on behalf of an individual. These comments should not have passed through moderation, since the Terms and Conditions of the comments



pages stated that comments should relate to “your own personal experience”. The fact that these comments had got through the moderation and the fact that the number of comments recorded and those actually present did not tally supported the message in the campaign emails (see Appendix 7, 6 October) that the site moderators were not prepared for the number of online comments which the Green Paper provoked.

Finally, the impression, which I had gained from my preliminary overview of the comments, that most of them addressed the issue of benefits rather than the wider Green Paper agenda was reinforced in the early stages of the qualitative analysis. Almost all the comments were about benefits, highlighting their use and necessity and voicing opposition to any proposal to remove them. The quantitative analysis further corroborated this impression by making it clear that only 2% of the comments were not opposed to either the Green Paper in general or its perceived threat to disability benefits. David Behan’s blog of 25 September 2009 also acknowledged this situation by saying there have been “over 3,000 responses to the website” and continuing:

“Among the responses, the issue of benefits is the one getting the most attention. Many of the responses we have received are passionate in their defence of the current system, spelling out how a large number of people rely on Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance to maintain their quality of life. We have also heard from a lot of working age people who are worried that their DLA will be taken away from them.”

The official report of the consultation, which was based on coding all the comments, also characterised the responses comments in a similar manner, stating that concern about how the proposals would affect benefits was one of the major themes in consultation responses (see Appendix 9, which gives extracts from DoH, 2010).

### **6.2.1 Development of the coding system**

I initially coded the comments line-by-line with descriptive codes, following the Miles and Huberman model of first level coding which suggests beginning descriptive

coding with a start list (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.58). It drew on, rather than replicated, this approach because I had in mind some areas of interest as opposed to a start list of codes. These were three of the drivers of collective action developed in my conceptual framework: collective identity, group injustice and group efficacy. However I did not want my analysis to be deductive, so this start list served as a more generalised orientation towards indications of what, at this stage, I termed 'groupness' in contrast to an individualist or objective tone. A sense of groupness was identified by the use of collective pronouns, such as 'us' or 'we', or by discussing the issues by reference to named groups such as carers, disabled people and so on. An individualist tone was expressed by the use of 'I' or by reference to a single person 'my husband' and by discussion proceeding with reference to these singular examples. These distinctions are made clearer where they are discussed in reference to extracts from the comments, below.

This approach resulted in the early development of a list of descriptive codes, which can be seen in my code systems dated 10 October 2011 (at which stage I had coded 7 comments, see Appendix 10). The descriptive codes which began to emerge were for example "alternative policy/solution recommended", "have paid way", "works against independence and choice". These codes were applied not to entire comments but to varying lengths of text which I refer to as 'extracts' and which conveyed either factual information or an opinion. This approach is based on the use of 'thought units' or 'units of meaning' - a text chunk that communicates an idea - in Srnka and Koeszegi (2007).

As I coded and distinguished between extracts with a group or individual orientation, it became clear that the same tone did not necessarily apply to an entire comment. It seemed that it was quite common for parts of the comment to be expressed in an individualistic or personalised tone and others in a collective tone. A typical example of this kind of comment clarifies the point: one woman begins her comment with a personal narrative, describing how she cares for her disabled son and uses the money from DLA to provide resources not covered by social services. She then opens out into a more generalised and emotionally-laden criticism of the Green Paper proposals, no longer restricting the terms of the discussion to her son's needs but suggesting that

the government is going “below the belt” and taking money away from disabled people as a whole. Her collective tone is also evident in her subsequent allegation that the government does not have “our best interests at heart”.

As I continued coding, I refined my coding system, adding new descriptive codes and rethinking existing ones as I proceeded. (Memo 13, Appendix 11, is an example of the recording of this process.) After about 40 comments, I decided to introduce some meta codes in line with Miles and Huberman’s recommended coding practice (Miles and Huberman, 1994). They suggest that a phase of pattern coding should follow an early phase of purely descriptive codes. Pattern codes are “explanatory or inferential codes, one that identify an emergent theme, configuration or explanation” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.60). I was interested particularly in whether the drivers – collective identity, group injustice and group efficacy – might work as meta codes. But in line with my inductive rather than deductive approach I did not want to use these three drivers as overarching categories into which I manipulated all the descriptive codes I had developed. So, I used colour coding to pick out codes which resonated with the drivers (see Appendix 12, which shows a screen shot of the new coding system from October 31. Memos 17 and 18, Appendix 11, also record this decision.)

It was clear that some of the descriptive codes did not relate to the drivers and were more reflective of the context in which the collective action took place. These contextual codes were: ‘description of use of DLA/AA’, ‘this policy makes no sense because it is impractical or inefficient’, ‘system administered by social services would not cover the same expenses’, ‘social services are not up to the job’, ‘alternative policy/solution recommended’. The extracts they were applied to often had an objective tone.

For example, this extract was coded ‘policy makes no sense’: “Government services will be stretched to beyond capacity within a short period of time therefore making the service inadequate and losing money”. The following two extracts were coded ‘alternative policy/solution’: “I think that benefits should be assessed on the amount of national insurance you have paid during your working life.” “These benefits could be maintained, even in recession, by re-ordering financial priorities.”

Other extracts had an individualistic tone and did not therefore resonate with the collective orientation of the drivers as conceived in my conceptual framework. For example, compare the individualist tone of: “I am totally appalled at the thought of this”, with the group tone of: “Please just leave us alone - you are causing far more damage than good”.

Several of the codes did seem to combine a sense of groupness with an expression of identity or injustice. A sense of collective identity came through strongly in the use of shared group language: for example, one person described themselves as “a wheelie”, another as a “spoonie” and another talked in terms of “we cripples”. Gold (2008) also remarks on the use of these kinds of terms as a signal of collective identity in online disability support groups. He says that such terms are used in referring to long-established members and in introducing new members. He cites the examples of people with rheumatoid arthritis referring to each other as Rheumies, people with Crohn’s-colitis referring to each other as CD’ers, and those with fibromyalgia as Fibroids. Collective identity is also identified in the literature by the use of collective pronouns and explicitly associating oneself with a group (Walgrave et al., 2010).

A sense of collective identity was expressed in many of the comment sections I had coded ‘hard life for group I belong to or group the person I care for belongs to’. Extracts from this code also showed examples of a group identity related to being a carer<sup>25</sup>:

“We have to do all the dirty unpleasant work to keep the country afloat, people should have better pay for being a carer either outside doing a job or at home caring for love, which most families do with so little help or understanding.”

There were also examples of group identity being related to a particular age group, which in this case is elderly since the person says they are in receipt of AA and AA can only be claimed if the person concerned is 65 or over (see Appendix 1): “Like many others in my position, the AA is very important part of my income.”

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<sup>25</sup> In the majority of cases where commenters made it clear they were carers, they appeared to be informal carers rather than professional carers.

The group feeling of these extracts becomes more evident when seen in opposition to individualistic phraseology, where the tone is personal and singular. The following is an example of an extract which by way of personal narrative describes an aspect of this person's identity:

"Just over a year ago I was diagnosed with epilepsy, as a result I am no longer able to drive."

Sometimes the position of the commenter relative to the group was ambiguous, as in the following case, where the comment moves between an objective and subjective tone:

"Disabled people can't magic away their disabilities and pretend they don't affect them (as with shoving us into any old work)."

The use of 'us' persuaded me this extract exhibited collective identity, but it was not a clear-cut case. The literature also backs up the practice of taking the use of collective pronouns to be a marker of collective identity, for example, Walgrave et al. (2010, p.10). Some extracts, I decided on reflection, did not exhibit collective identity because it was not clear that the commenter themselves was part of the group and this seemed intrinsic to definitions of collective identity in the literature (for example, Poletta and Jasper, 2001; Ashmore et al., 2004).

Another recognised marker of collective identity in the literature is othering (see for example, Snow, 2001; Ashmore et al., 2004; Postmes and Baym, 2005). There were many instances where this was exhibited in the comments. Sometimes it was bound up in an argument that other groups should be targeted instead. This extract is illustrative of the type and, here, collective pronouns add to the impression that collective identity is being expressed:

“Try looking towards the higher paid people who earn more than enough to enjoy life and live comfortable, with thousands in the bank. I can not even say them people have worked hard for it. Like pop stars, footballers, some corrupted politicians, film stars. Think about it a whole population could live nicely on just one of their wages. Not all of us are lucky to fall into that category.”

In other cases, collective identity is less explicitly expressed but is implied by othering that entails a sense of mistrust of some groups and the idea others are being treated unjustly:

“The sticky fingered MPs who are ‘living on rations’!!!, who propped up the banks to the tune of hundreds of billions of pounds can divert a billion for the needy, instead of the obscenely overpaid bankers.”

This kind of comment illustrates the difficulty of disentangling expressions of collective identity and injustice: a point I reiterate below. It is also reminiscent of the observation I made when analysing the campaign emails: that mistrust is a concept which is bound up in expressions of collective identity and injustice (see p.160). In the comments it was typically expressed as the idea that ‘they’ (government ministers and civil servants) cannot be trusted to treat ‘us’ (variously understood) justly.

Another notable feature of identification in the comments was that in many cases, it confounded the neat boundaries, such as disabled or carer, that often characterise policymaking in this area.

“I am in a similar position to many other people in this country. I am disabled with severe mobility problems but I am also the main carer of my husband who has cancer, severe cognitive problems and a heart problem. I also care for my son who has autistic spectrum disorder and rapid cycle bipolar disorder.”

An overlap between being a carer and being disabled has been remarked on in other literature. For example, Barnes (2006) finds that “care giver and care receiver are not fixed identities which can *in fact* distinguish one group of people from another” (Barnes 2006, p.152.). Campaigning group Carers UK also quote figures from the 2001 Census and the Scottish Household survey indicating that carers are more likely than non-carers to suffer ill-health or be disabled and report that their own research in Scotland corroborates this (Carers Scotland, 2011). An earlier report finds that carers providing a high quantity of care were twice as likely to be ‘permanently sick or disabled’ than those not caring (Carers UK, 2004) Other research has also shown that carers tend to be older than average (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

Another observation I made during this phase of coding was that people rarely seemed to identify themselves as campaigners or activists. There could be various explanations for this but it is interesting to note that, in this setting, the campaigner identity fostered by B&W in its emails was not evident. A possible exception to this occurred in the calls on others to take action, which I describe below (see p.162).

Another of the drivers in the conceptual framework which resonated with the codes was group injustice. For my understanding of group injustice I referred to Van Zomeren et al. (2008) who distinguish between affective and non-affective measures of injustice in their research (Van Zomeren et al., 2008, p.512). The non-affective measures include perceived unfairness of procedures, perceived undeservingness of collective disadvantage, and perceived collective mistreatment (e.g., group-based discrimination). The affective measures include dissatisfaction, fraternal resentment, and group-based anger. On the whole, affective or emotional expressions of injustice seemed predominant.

The code “proposal is wrong plus groupness” contained the following example which seems to combine an expression of collective identity with group injustice:

“But now the days of bust are here, there was nothing put away for a rainy day, and tiny tim has to pay. We are the easy target, sitting ducks like the pensioners, and the most vulnerable.”

A more succinct expression of these two sentiments combined is “Hands off our benefits!”: a phrase which occurred in a number of comments and which I have used in the title of this thesis to capture the emotive and group level tone of many comments.

The collective tone of expressions of injustice/identity can also be appreciated by setting it in contrast to the individualist tone in other extracts. This one was coded as ‘proposal will make life even harder for me’:

“The loss of the allowance would cause me considerable hardship and indeed preclude me from my attempts to return to the workplace albeit in a sedentary occupation.”

The code ‘works against independence and choice plus collective tone’ also contained many expressions of group injustice, again often combined with collective identity. Indeed support for the issue of independence, which has been a key theme in the disability movement, is indicative of affiliation with that movement and thereby a group identity. Mentioning independence was not taken as indicative of collective identity or injustice on its own, although this example does combine all three features:

“Now you want to give us another kick in the teeth and take away what little independence we have, take away our right to choose, how or who we want to hire or spend the DLA!”

Two other descriptive codes also yielded examples where group injustice was expressed. The first was ‘lack of understanding/caring for us or an identified group’.

“Do you people live in the same world as ordinary people? Well I can answer that for you, no you do not what with all your perks etc gold plated pensions I could go on. I say to you live as we do”



This extract is another example of a situation in which injustice is tied up with collective identity and othering. A sense of mistrust is again also clearly present.

The other code where group injustice was commonly featured is 'we have paid/contributed/saved our way'. The underlying message in these kinds of comments was that people deserved to be looked after in return for paying taxes, caring for others and doing voluntary work. This is exemplified in the following examples:

"A lot of us have paid quite high amounts in N.I. all our working lives, and now it seems we are required to go cap in hand to the local councils."

"I am able to perform tasks such as youth justice panels, give talks and join in debates [...] It allows others to realise that the world belongs to everyone, it challenges the ideas that disabled, disfigured or simply missing a limb or two means that you should not be locked away and forgotten and most importantly that, with minimal financial support, we can give back to our communities."

"Many genuine claimants are unable to work so may take the flexible option of volunteer work or study (when able!) in order to build self esteem and to have some kind of positive input within society."

These arguments have in common the theme of deservedness, which reflects the wider setting of welfare retrenchment (see for example, Newman and Clarke, 2012, p.92, for recent discussion of this point and Gibson, 2009, for an empirical study of deservedness and welfare being expressed in an online forum.)

While many of the extracts that expressed group injustice combined it with a sense of collective identity, in many others it was ambiguous whether the commenter was themselves in the group referred to. Sometimes it was clear the commenter was indicating that they identified *with* the group rather than were *in* the group.

“It seems neither right nor fair to make their situation worse by forcing them to have to apply to social services and or their local authority for what is rightfully theirs.”

“A ‘raid’ on non-means-tested benefits which the terminally ill, elderly and disabled rely upon is making a political issue of the needs of the most vulnerable in society as a revenue-saving measure.”

Here injustice is clearly being expressed and at a group level. This indicated that to restrict the idea of expressing group injustice to situations where it was clear the person themselves was in the group would exclude many group level expressions of injustice. (This issue was noted in Memo 26 and the memo related to Fem63, see Appendix 11). This raised the question of whether group injustice needed to be thought of as a wider category. This idea contrasted with the position I took on collective identity, where being part of the group seemed so intrinsic to the concept.

Overall, I concluded that several of the codes did include extracts which expressed collective identity and/or collective injustice but it was often rather difficult to disentangle the two. So I did not rename codes as collective identity or group injustice but rather conceived of these sentiments as a feature of many of the groupness codes. The table in Appendix 13 conveys this idea through the use of coloured shading. The decision to abandon the use of blue to signify injustice and red to signify identity and instead use a blend of colours for each shows the interconnectedness of the two sentiments: a purple for codes which carried a stronger sense of injustice and a blue-ish red for those with a stronger sense of identity.

Efficacy was the driver least clearly exhibited in the comments. There seemed to be very little indication of group efficacy related to people’s decision to post a comment on the Green Paper. Some sense of collective efficacy, linked to a campaigner identity, was apparent in talk of further collective action. The following extract illustrates this point:

“We're easy targets, you might say sitting ducks, but we're not silent, we're not going to live in silence or live in fear of politicians looking after themselves.”

The way further action was discussed seemed more often to show people using the comment space for their own ends, rather than expressing efficacy. For example, a couple of extracts make outright appeals to people to join forces and oppose the Green Paper:

“I would suggest that everyone who is able, contact local MPs by any means, email, letter or even by visiting the next MPs surgery.”

“We all need to make our voices heard in a reasoned and sensible way.”

A few commenters also referred explicitly to other people's comments within their own, a feature which is associated with forums. One person also embedded a link to B&W in their comment. I decided that it would be interesting to explore at the quantitative stage how often this kind of appropriation of the space occurred.

Overall, these examples show that the notions of collective identity and group injustice from my conceptual framework did seem to resonate with the comments made in the Green Paper. Two provisos should be added. Firstly that at this stage, the coding suggested the initial conception of group injustice might need revising. Secondly, it also started to become clear that ascribing extracts to a single driver was often difficult, because in many cases the extracts seem to exhibit two or more drivers entwined.

After I had coded about 100 comments, I looked to see if the data suggested any further meta-codes. I observed that my coded sections could be grouped according to whether they were situational, reasons or solutions. ‘Situational’ extracts are those where the commenter contextualises their comment by describing personal details of their lived experience or that of a person they care for. This might cover, for example, their use of DLA or the difficulties they face in daily life. The ‘Reasons’ category

encapsulates extracts which deal with why the commenter objects to the proposals (see Appendix 14). As the detailed coding table shows, these might consist of a claim that the proposals are morally wrong, or that they make no sense, or that they are unfair, that the process for having decided them is questionable, and so on (see Appendix 14). Finally, I observed that some extracts of comments took the form of a 'Solution'. In these, the commenter suggests an alternative to pursuing the proposals in the Green Paper. This may take the form of an alternative proposal for example: "raising taxes rather than cutting benefits", or it may be a suggestion that the commenter intends to oppose or respond to the proposals by, for example, voting against the government, encouraging others to do so too, or fighting back in some other undefined way. (Although almost all the comments in this sample of 203 opposed the proposals, not all offered alternative solutions.)

As I conceived these overarching codes and divided the other codes between them, it became clear that there was a relationship between these meta codes and the lower level codes, where the drivers of collective action manifested. Expressions of identity tended to occur in the situational extracts and injustice within reason extracts. On reflection, this also made sense intuitively. It was likely that if a commenter was expressing feelings of injustice at a group level it might be situated in an extract dealing with why they opposed the Green Paper. Likewise, expression of their sense of identity, whether made in a collective or individual tone, might well be found in a passage which described their own personal situation in regard to the Green Paper's issues.

After revising my coding system in this way, I continued coding the remaining comments. When all 203 comments had been coded, I reflected further on my analysis in order to revisit and interrogate my understandings. It was clear at this stage that most comments (rather than extracts) featured some expression of groupness in the way that I had conceived it.

It also became clear that some comments had another common feature: they widened out the group referred to into a more overarching category that encompassed carers, disabled people and older people. This was something which I had observed earlier

within some of the comments so I decided to explore this feature further by coding extracts of this type as having an 'additional group descriptor'. I also noted that the widening out often seemed to be in the context of claims of injustice. Some examples illustrate the point:

"Once again the government is hitting the poorest and most vulnerable."

"Disadvantaged people are easy targets for cost cutting by stealth tactics."

"The vulnerable often do not have a voice."

"We understand that public cuts are going to come – but this suggestion is aimed at the ill and less powerful."

"Just shows we're looked upon as second, no not even second class citizens. I'm disgusted!!!"

### **6.2.2 The use of variables**

At the same time as coding extracts of the comments, I also recorded certain characteristics of the comments by assigning variables to each comment. I recorded the date each comment was made and, where possible, the gender of the commenter. I worked out the gender from the names attached to each comment. It was notable that the majority of commenters chose to preface their comments with their first and surname, although the rules of commenting allowed them to identify themselves less clearly, ie by use of just part of their name. I later looked to see whether the comments varied by gender but there was no particular evidence of this.

I also looked at how people chose to self-identify with regard to what I termed "status": whether they were disabled, a carer or did not make it clear which. In the case of carers, it has been noted in previous research that people who are informal

carers do not always use this term to describe themselves (for example, Ipsos Mori, 2012). So I took the view that if someone made it clear that they were an informal carer, that was sufficient to put them in the carer category. I started the research with the assumption that these three alternatives would be sufficient categories but as I proceeded it became clear that the variations on self-identification were more complex. As I analysed the comments I compiled the following list: disabled; carer; disabled and carer; disabled or carer but not clear which; elderly but doesn't say they are disabled or a carer; other, which includes a familial relationship with a disabled person but one in which the commenter seems not to be the main carer and also includes those who work in sector; not declared.

This information also helped build the picture regarding the collective tone at the level of a whole comment. A commenter may, for example, state that they are disabled and then go on to talk in purely objective terms about disabled people. This might contrast with a commenter who identifies as a disabled carer and then goes on to discuss the injustice in terms of the proposals' effects on "vulnerable people". It was clear that the quantitative analysis would enable me to investigate the relationship between variables such as status and expressions of collective identity and group injustice for the whole set of comments.

### **6.2.3 Reliability, validity and limitations**

The detailed account of the way in which I developed my coding system, the recording of these decisions in coding memos, and the thick description I used to convey the findings are recognised as indicators of reliability and validity in qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2009, pp.190-191). My presentation of information which runs counter to the themes also added validity.

As I developed the coding system, I chose comments from within my sample which were mixed according to whether they had been submitted by a male, female or undeclared commenter. I also chose comments from a spread of dates. This step was taken to ensure that if subsequently it became clear that comments differed according

to these variables I would know that my coding system had not been prejudiced for having been developed from an unrepresentative mix in this regard.

I was explicit in my orientation towards particular concepts developed through a critical literature review but I took steps to ensure that this orientation was not overly deterministic in the early development of my coding system. Beginning with descriptive, rather than interpretive codes, is a key part of an approach which favours the data “speaking for itself”.

After I had coded about 100 comments, I asked a colleague, a PhD student with a MSc in organisational psychology to code a selection of 10 comments. This was in order to enable me to reflect on my own coding. I selected comments for her that, according to my coding, had a large number of coded sections. I gave her a very brief description of my orientation (see Appendix 15) and then asked her to develop some descriptive codes from the data. The results of her coding were broadly in line with my own descriptive coding. Notably, many of them would have fitted into the broader categories of injustice and collective identity. However, there were some interesting divergences. Where I had coded sections as “works against independence”, she coded them as being about “control”. This perhaps indicates that I was influenced in the choice of the word independence by the knowledge that this is a key theme in policy in social care and also in the disability movement. It was interesting to reflect that the word independence would perhaps be a more comfortable one for policymakers, having weaker connotations with power than the term “control”.

However there are limitations to my analysis. The comments were not made in response to a question or questions about drivers of collective action. It was clear therefore that other themes would predominate in the data and that only parts of it might be relevant to the research questions. It was also the case that, where present, indicators of drivers could not be assumed to prove, for example, that the commenter *has* a sense of collective identity, merely that the rhetorical style of their comment *exhibits* a sense of collective identity. In this sense the comments should be considered as a form of self-presentation online (literature on this issue includes Bargh et al, 2002; Ellison et al, 2006, Papacharissi, 2011). For this reason I have been

careful to use terms such *exhibit, show, indicate* and avoid saying that commenters *have* a sense of collective identity, injustice and so on. Interviews with the commenters could delve further into their psychological disposition but this method, too, would need to take account of rhetorical style and the interview process.

The open-ended nature of the comment process had advantages and disadvantages. The comments were moderated, although as my research revealed the moderators were overwhelmed by the number of comments and moderation was patchy as a result (see pp.149-150). I took out of my sample comments which were clearly submitted on behalf of organisations and those made by commenters who stated they had already made a comment. However commenters had a free hand in various respects, they could choose whether to identify themselves with their full name or not and they could say what they liked within their comment so long as it met basic rules regarding offensive remarks and so on. Therefore some people chose to style their comment in a personal, subjective way and others in a more objective and impersonal manner. Many mixed both styles, as the analysis shows. This mixture of styles adds another level of variation to the data and so makes it richer and more interesting, however it makes quantitative assessments tricky because different amounts of personal information are available in relation to the commenters and the comments need to be read one by one to extract it.

#### **6.2.4 Summary of qualitative findings and implications for quantitative analysis**

Various points emerged from this analysis. The first is that there were clear indicators, within the comments, of at least two of the underlying psychological processes which are believed to drive collective action, according to social psychology models. Those two drivers are collective identity and group injustice. This finding vindicates the position at the start of the research that analysis of naturally occurring data would provide a useful supplement to the surveys and questionnaires used in research from a social psychology perspective. It was also clear that many of the comments combined expressions of collective identity and group-level injustice with personal narrative, describing their own lives and the challenges they face. This is an interesting factor to reflect on from the perspective of literature which draws



attention to the increased propensity for people to engage in online political action from a personalised but networked manner (for example, Papacharissi, 2010; Bennett and Segerberg, 2011; 2012). My research did indeed find many examples of personalised expression but they frequently appeared in conjunction with expressions of collective sentiment.

A key point which also emerged is that the groupings evident in the comments were complex and numerous, more so than is commonly reflected in policymaking. Naming groups and suggesting identification with them took place in two ways. Firstly, people often self-identified at the beginning of their comment with a simple statement such as I am disabled, or I care for my husband. Sometimes the identification was implicit rather than explicit, for example by a person saying they are in receipt of DLA. The frequency with which people said they fell into one or more of these categories challenged boundaries between disabled people, older people and carers. Secondly, groups were often referred to within various other sections of the comments. In this case, the boundaries of groupings were even wider and included categories such as vulnerable people, second-class citizens, benefit claimants, the poor and sick. As mentioned, the identity of activist or campaigner was notably absent from this list, despite it being the way in which B&W framed identity in its emails.

One issue these wider identifications raised is whether people need to be part of a group themselves in order to feel injustice in regard to that group. Collective identity is the sentiment which requires most strongly that the person it applies to is part of the group. The literature on collective identity is based on an understanding that membership of the group is a pre-requisite for feeling a sense of collective identity (see for example, Poletta and Jasper, 2001; Snow, 2001; Ashmore and Deaux, 2004). However, it is conceivable that people might feel group-based injustice with regards to a group to which they have affective bonds. Or it may be that in this case people perceive the group in such a way as to encompass themselves within it. For example, a spouse and carer for a disabled person might phrase their opposition to policy by suggesting that it targets “vulnerable people”, as opposed to “disabled people”. This is one of the issues which I also explored in the quantitative stage of my analysis by using the code ‘additional group descriptor’ (see pp.168-169).

It was also clear that quantitative analysis could address other issues that I had encountered in the qualitative analysis in a different way. For example, in the qualitative analysis it was often difficult to ascribe a particular extract of a comment to just one of the drivers, even if one seemed to predominate. The quantitative analysis could address this by coding at the level of a whole comment with the criteria being for example - is collective identity exhibited? Is group injustice exhibited? Where both were intertwined, the comment could be coded as affirmative in both cases.

The qualitative analysis had also shown that expressions of efficacy in the comments were not widespread however there were a number of commenters who interacted with other commenters. This occurred either by them saying they had read other's comments or by directly addressing other commenters in their comments. I decided to record these instances systematically as 'interacting in the comment space' in the quantitative analysis so that I could see how widespread the phenomenon was. These instances were of interest because they indicate that people were appropriating the comment space for their own uses. This corroborates findings from the first stage of analysis that the campaign emails re-cast the consultation as being about 'saving DLA and AA' rather than responding to the Green Paper as a whole or to the consultation questions. The qualitative analysis shows that this was the tone of almost all the comments. The presence of comments which address other commenters and, in particular, which urge people to take actions can be seen as a further example of people using the comment space in a way which suited them. I also took the decision not to pursue the concept of trust as a separate theme in the quantitative analysis since expressions of distrust were encapsulated within the wider themes of injustice and identity (see p.160) and for this reason it ranked as a sub-theme. But I do return to the concept of trust in Chapter 7 (see p.202).

I also used the quantitative analysis to look systematically at the relationship between variables and the other codings. For example, whether people who described themselves as disabled were more likely to express collective identity. I had an impression from the qualitative analysis that this might be the case but this

was only a sample of the comments and had not be selected in such a way as to be representative of the whole set of in all aspects.

### **6.3 Quantitative analysis of whole set of comments**

This phase of analysis built on the qualitative stage. The detailed coding scheme was developed with reference to the findings from the qualitative analysis, as recommended in Srnka, and Koeszegi 2007 (see section 4.6). (Appendix 16 details the scheme.)

At the qualitative stage it had become apparent that expressions of collective identity and group injustice were a common feature of the comments but were often expressed within the same phrase or sentence. Quantitative analysis could address this by simply recording whether either had been expressed in each comment. The qualitative analysis had also contributed to the issue of how to identify expressions of collective identity and group injustice. This built on existing literature (for example, Walgrave et al., 2008; Van Zomeren et al., 2008), but in the case of group injustice, the qualitative analysis had pointed to the need for a wider definition.

The qualitative stage had also highlighted the usefulness of recording two other variables: use of an additional group descriptor and interaction in the comment space. It had also indicated that a range of categories would be needed to capture the various ways in which people described their own situation or 'status', for example, whether they were a carer, disabled and a carer and so on. Quantitative analysis would facilitate a better understanding of the relationship between the variables. Analysis of the patterns of comment making would also improve understanding of the relationship between four central variables.

The following research questions were developed to guide the quantitative analysis:

1. What is the incidence of various characteristics of the comments, for example, how, many are made on various dates, how many people identify themselves as disabled etc.

2. Is there a significant relationship between any of the variables?
3. Are there discernable patterns to the comments according to the combination of variables that they display? If the answer is yes, do these patterns vary by date?

The data resulted from coding all 2,834 comments submitted in response to the Green Paper. The comments needed to be human coded because they contained varying data, for example in some there was no expression of status and in others a degree of judgment was required to determine coding. The data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and also into SPSS version 16.0. The comments were coded according to the following variables:

1. The date the comment was made
2. The "status" of the commenter - of which there are 7 categories. This records what the commenter said about their status.
3. Whether the commenter exhibits collective identity (yes, no or null). The null applies because anyone who falls into category 6 on status cannot exhibit collective identity by definition so they are coded 3 for null.
6. Whether the commenter uses an additional group descriptor (yes or no)
7. Whether the commenter exhibits group injustice (yes or no)
8. Whether they interact in the consultation space (yes or no)

Appendix 16 shows the detailed coding scheme. A number of status categories was needed to capture the variety in this area, so for some of the analysis, this was simplified by amalgamating the more detailed categories. There were two instances of these groupings:

- 1a. Commenter makes clear they are disabled
- 1b. Commenter does not make clear they are disabled
- 2a. Commenter makes clear they are a carer
- 2b. Commenter doesn't make clear they are a carer.

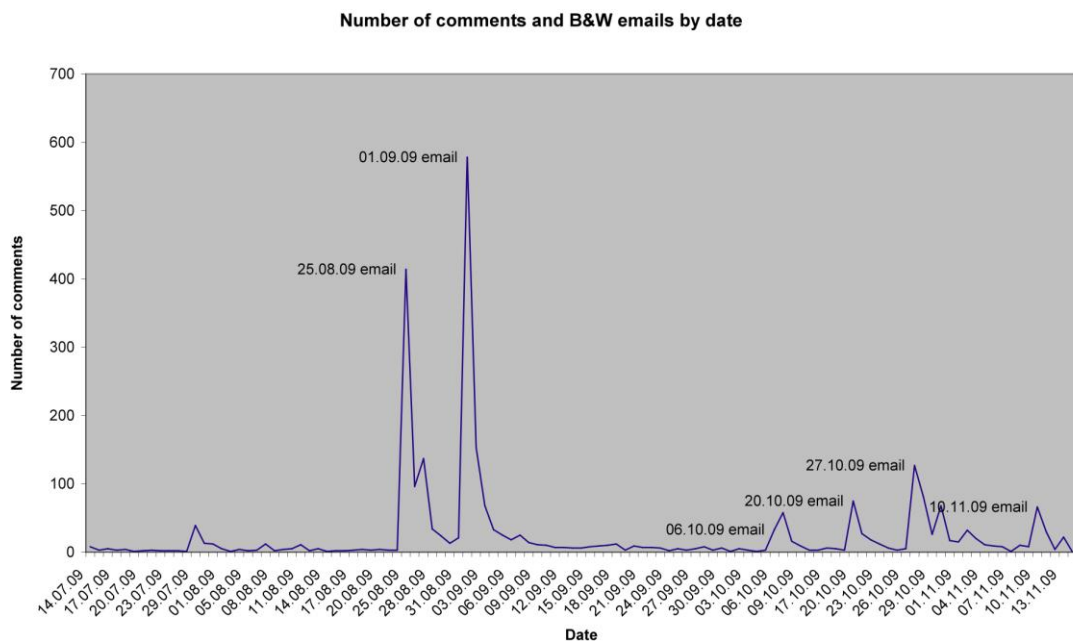
### 6.3.1 Variables by number of comments

This section details the output from running descriptive statistics analysis on the data using SPSS. It describes the relationship between the number of comments and the variables and, where appropriate, relates the findings to the research questions. Figures are rounded up to whole numbers in the written sections but more precise figures can be seen in the tables here and in Appendix 17.

#### Number of comments made by date

The number of comments made by date shows clear peaks in comment making. This feature was also discussed in the section on campaign analysis (p.122). The coincidence of large peaks in the comment making with the dates on which Benefits and Work sent emails is shown by way of illustration in the histogram below. A more detailed table showing the number of comments made on each date, the date and content of all Benefits and Work campaign emails and relevant external events can be seen in Appendix 7.

Figure 5: Number of comments and Benefits and Work's emails by date



### Number of comments made, by status

The number of comments by status is shown in Table 1. This shows that 41.6% (39.4 + 2.2) of comments included the information that the commenter was disabled and 17.3% (15.1 + 2.2) that they were a carer. About one third (31.4%) of commenters did not include information on their own status.

Table 1: Number of comments by status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	disabled	1117	39.4	39.4	39.4
	carer	427	15.1	15.1	54.5
	disabled and carer	61	2.2	2.2	56.6
	disabled or carer	133	4.7	4.7	61.3
	elderly only	20	.7	.7	62.0
	not stated	891	31.4	31.4	93.5
	other	185	6.5	6.5	100.0
	Total	2834	100.0	100.0	

The relationship between the number of comments and the remaining four variables are simpler to report since there are fewer subcategories. Collective identity was expressed in 43% of comments and not expressed in 26%. Collective identity could not, by definition, be expressed in 31% of comments since the status was not stated. An additional group descriptor was used in 29% of comments and not in the remaining 71%. Group injustice was expressed in 74% of comments and not in the remaining 26%. This reflects the coding decision that a person *can* express collective injustice, unlike collective identity, even if it is clear that they are not themselves in the group to whom the injustice is being perpetrated. In 4% of comments, there was evidence of explicit interaction in the consultation space.

Table 2: Number of comments by expression of collective identity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	no	739	26.1	26.1	26.1
	yes	1204	42.5	42.5	68.6
	null	891	31.4	31.4	100.0
	Total	2834	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Number of comments by use of an additional group descriptor

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	no	2022	71.3	71.3	71.3
	yes	812	28.7	28.7	100.0
	Total	2834	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Number of comments by expression of group injustice

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	no	739	26.1	26.1	26.1
	yes	2095	73.9	73.9	100.0
	Total	2834	100.0	100.0	

### **6.3.2 Relationship between pairs of variables**

#### Status and Collective Identity

First, people whose status was unstated were removed from the data set. This category of people was, by definition, unable to express collective identity (people cannot be coded as exhibiting collective identity unless they have made it clear that

they belong to the group in question). Then the data was separated into two groups regarding status - those who made it clear they were disabled and those whose status was ambiguous or it was clear they weren't disabled. In cases where it was unclear if commenters were disabled or carer, they were counted as not disabled for the purpose of this analysis. Note also that not *saying* you are disabled is not the same as not *being* disabled: this data focuses on what is *said* in comments.

Table 5: Expression of status (disabled) by collective identity

		Collective identity exhibited		
		Yes	No	Total
Status expressed	Disabled	839 (75.1%)	278 (24.9%)	1117 (57.4%)
	Not disabled/ not clear	365 (44.2%)	461 (55.8%)	826 (42.5%)
	Total	1204 (62.0%)	739 (38.0%)	1943

(N=1943,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2=1.927E2$ ,  $df=1$ )

There was a highly significant association between people expressing that they were disabled and whether or not they exhibit collective identity. This seems to represent the fact that based on the odds ratio, people were 3.81 times more likely to exhibit collective identity if they make it clear they are disabled than if they don't make it clear they are disabled. (See Appendix 17 for calculation of the odds ratio.) Next a similar calculation was carried out in respect of carers.

Table 6: Expression of status (carer) by collective identity

		Collective identity exhibited		
		Yes	No	Total
Status expressed	Carer	157 (36.8%)	270 (63.2%)	427 (22.0%)
	Not carer/ not clear	1047 (69.1%)	469 (30.9%)	1516 (78%)
	Total	1204 (62.0%)	739 (38.0%)	1943

(N=1943,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2=1.474E2$ ,  $df=1$ )



There was also a highly significant association between people expressing that they were a carer and whether or not they exhibited collective identity. However in this case, the situation regarding expressing disability and collective identity was reversed: people were much *less* likely to exhibit collective identity if they made it clear they were a carer than if they did not make it clear they were a carer. Based on the odds ratio, people were 3.84 times more likely *not* to exhibit collective identity if they made it clear they were are carer than if they didn't.

Calculations to assess the relationship between other pairs of variables were also carried out as the following tables show.

Table 7: Group injustice exhibited and collective identity exhibited

		Group injustice exhibited		
		No	Yes	Total
Collective identity exhibited	No	446 (23.0% <sup>26</sup> )	293 (15.1%)	739 (38.0%)
	Yes	24 (1.2%)	1180 (60.7%)	1204 (62.0%)
	Total	470 (24.2%)	1473 (75.8%)	1943 (100%)

(N=1943,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2=8.505E2$ ,  $df=1$ )

Table 8: Group injustice exhibited and additional group descriptor used

		Group injustice exhibited		
		No	Yes	Total
Additional group descriptor used	No	469 (24.1%)	999 (51.4%)	1468 (75.6%)
	Yes	1 (0.1%)	474 (24.4%)	475 (24.4%)
	Total	470 (24.2%)	1473 (75.8%)	1943 (100%)

(N=1943,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2=1.971E2$ ,  $df=1$ )

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<sup>26</sup> All percentage figures are % of the total

Table 9: Collective identity exhibited and additional group descriptor used

		Collective identity exhibited		
		No	Yes	Total
Additional group descriptor used	No	633 (32.6%)	835 (43.0%)	1468 (75.6%)
	Yes	106 (5.5%)	369 (19%)	475 (24.4%)
	Total	739 (38.0%)	1204 (62.0%)	1943 (100%)

(N=1943,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2=65.905$ ,  $df=1$ )

Note that these tables demonstrate that of the 475 people who used a group descriptor, 99.8% expressed group injustice, whereas 77.7% expressed collective identity.

### **6.3.3 Conclusions from analysis of relationship between pairs of variables**

People who made it clear they were disabled were more likely than those who did not to express collective identity. Conversely, people who made it clear they were carers were less likely to express collective identity than those who did not. Regarding other pairs of variables, there is a significant relationship between expressing collective identity and expressing group injustice. The propensity for collective identity and group injustice to be expressed together, often within a single extract of a comment, was a feature remarked on in the qualitative analysis (see p.157). Additionally the analysis showed that a greater percentage of people who used an additional group descriptor expressed group injustice than expressed collective identity (see tables 7 and 8). Again, the qualitative analysis suggested this feature (see p.164).

### **6.3.4 Patterns of comment making**

This stage of analysis addressed the question of whether there were discernable dominant patterns in comment making. A 'pattern' refers to a particular combination of variables. The idea was to go beyond looking at the co-occurrence of two variables

to consider patterns of four variables. To explore this issue, a simple algorithm was used which transformed each comment into a number representing the combination of variables associated with it. (For a description of this process see Appendix 17, which also features a table detailing all combinations of variables observed and the number of comments to which they applied.)

This analysis revealed that nearly 80% of the comments followed one of eight patterns. These patterns are detailed below and, for each one, the combination of variables is given. The variables appear in the following order in each case:

- Status: 1=disabled, 2=carer, 3=disabled and carer, 4=disabled or carer, 5=elderly, 6=not declared, 7=other
- Collective identity: 1=expressed, 0=not expressed, 3=null
- Use of additional group descriptor: 1=use, 0=absence of use
- Group injustice 1=expressed, 0=not expressed

At the end of the text description of each pattern, there is a sentence in quotes. This 'comment synopsis' gives a flavour of a comment that conforms to the pattern in question. These illustrative sentences are included simply to aid understanding and should not be understood as statistically relevant "mode" or "mean" comments. The section on qualitative analysis gives actual extracts from comments.

#### 1. Pattern 1101. Accounts for 21% of total comments

These comments made it clear that the person writing was disabled, exhibited collective identity as a disabled person and expressed group injustice.

Comment synopsis: "We disabled people find the proposals<sup>27</sup> unjust. They will adversely affect us."

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<sup>27</sup> 'Proposals' means the threat to benefits or any other aspect of the Green Paper. It includes perceived threats as well as actual threats.

## 2. Pattern 6311, 11.6% of total

People who did not declare their status but whose comment featured additional group descriptors and expressed a sense of group injustice. Among the additional descriptors are for example, vulnerable people, taxpayers, the poor.

Comment synopsis: "These proposals will hit vulnerable people/taxpayers/the poor and that is unjust."

## 3. Pattern 6301, 10.3% of total

People who did not declare their status and did not use additional group descriptors but who did express a sense of group injustice.

Comment synopsis: "These proposals are most unjust for disabled people and/or carers and/or elderly people."

## 4. Pattern 6300, 9.2% of total

People who did not declare their status nor express any of the other indicators. These comments might, for example, use an objective rhetorical style. In common with all the comments, the vast majority disagreed with the proposals.

Comment synopsis: "These proposals make no sense and will not work."

## 5. Pattern 1000, 8.8% of total

People who made it clear that they were disabled but whose comment did not feature any group indicators. Typically these comments would take a personal, individual tone. Disagreement with the proposals was expressed but not at a group level.

Comment synopsis: "I am disabled. My life is hard enough as it is, these proposals will only make it worse."

## 6. Pattern 1111, 8.2% of total

People who made it clear they were disabled, expressed collective identity as disabled people, used additional group descriptors and expressed group injustice.

Comment synopsis: "We disabled people are poor and/or vulnerable and these proposals will affect us badly. That is unjust."

#### 7. Pattern 2000, 5.4% of total

People who made it clear they were carers but whose comment did not feature any group indicators. These are comments couched in very individual terms and can be seen as the “carer version” of group 5.

Comment synopsis: “I am a carer. My life is hard enough at the moment. These proposals will only make life harder for me and/or the person I care for.”

#### 8. Pattern 2101, 3.7% of total

People who made it clear they were carers and exhibited collective identity as carers and also expressed a sense of group injustice.

Comment synopsis: “We carers think these proposals are unjust. They will adversely affect us and/or people such as those we care for.”

This pattern analysis corroborates some of the earlier findings. Five of the eight most common patterns express collective identity or group injustice, reiterating the finding that the majority of comments had a collective tone. The most common pattern consisted of people making clear they were disabled and expressing both collective identity and group injustice. This underlined the inter-relationship between these three variables. The presence of only two ‘carer’ patterns in the top eight also reiterated the earlier finding that people who indicated they were carers were less likely to exhibit collective identity. The most common of these featured neither collective identity nor group injustice. In absolute numbers there were roughly five and a half times more comments of the type “We disabled people find the proposals unjust. They will adversely affect us” than of the type “We carers find the proposals are unjust. They will adversely affect us and/or people such as those we care for”. The observation that informal carers do not readily identify themselves as such is supported by other research (O’Connor, 2007; Ipsos Mori, 2012), which is discussed in more detail on p.191.

The pattern analysis also helps quantify the number of comments which have an individualist or objective style – ie, where there is no expression of collective identity or of group injustice. The following table lists the patterns which fit this category. They accounted for 25% of all comments.

Table 10: the individual/objective comments

Pattern and status	Frequency	Percentage of individual/objective group	Status group as percentage of whole data set
1000 (disabled)	249	34.8	39.4
2000 (carer)	153	21.4	15.1
3000 (disabled and carer)	13	1.8	2.2
4000 (disabled or carer)	9	1.3	4.7
5000 (elderly)	1	0.1	0.7
6300 (not stated)	262	36.6	31.4
6310 (not stated)	7	1.0	
7000 (other)	21	2.9	6.5
Total	715	99.9	

The table shows that people who make it clear they are carers are slightly over-represented in the group, which supports the earlier finding that these commenters are proportionately less likely to express collective identity.

The following are some examples of such comments. These are entire comments (apart from the omission of a small section detailing needs in the second comment). They were coded as not exhibiting collective identity or group injustice. The first two have a rather individualist tone and are based on personal narrative and the third is more objective.

“I am completely against any changes to the disability living allowance. I would be lost without it, it allows me independence that I would otherwise not have.”

“My father has dementia and refuses to accept a care package because he mistakenly believes he can cope alone at home. Therefore I travel over 100 miles distance to cover his needs...He pays for my travel out of his AA and if this payment was sent to the LA and as he owns his property, yet has no savings, I guess we would end up well out of pocket for caring.”

“It is the individuals right to allocate their own care and the processing of the finance for this appears to be at stake?? [punctuation as in original]. Giving their DLA or AA to social work takes away this person’s right to choose.”

### 6.3.6 Analysis of patterns by date

This section looks at the question of whether patterns in comment making were uniformly distributed across the dates. The expectation would be that any given pattern of comment would conform to the distribution of all comments by date. If this analysis is conducted with the date measure being a single day and all patterns are taken into account, predicted and actual numbers become too small to be meaningful. Two steps are taken to address this. Firstly the date is measured in months rather than days; counts of comments made are for the whole month. Secondly, regarding the distribution of comments by pattern, the dominant eight patterns are considered rather than all patterns. This analysis produces the two graphs shown in figures 6 and 7<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> This analysis was carried out for me by a statistician at my university using the R computer program R - Development Core Team, (2012), “R: A language and environment for statistical computing”, R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria, ISBN 3-900051-07-0, URL <http://www.R-project.org/>

Figure 6: Number of comments by month: all comments

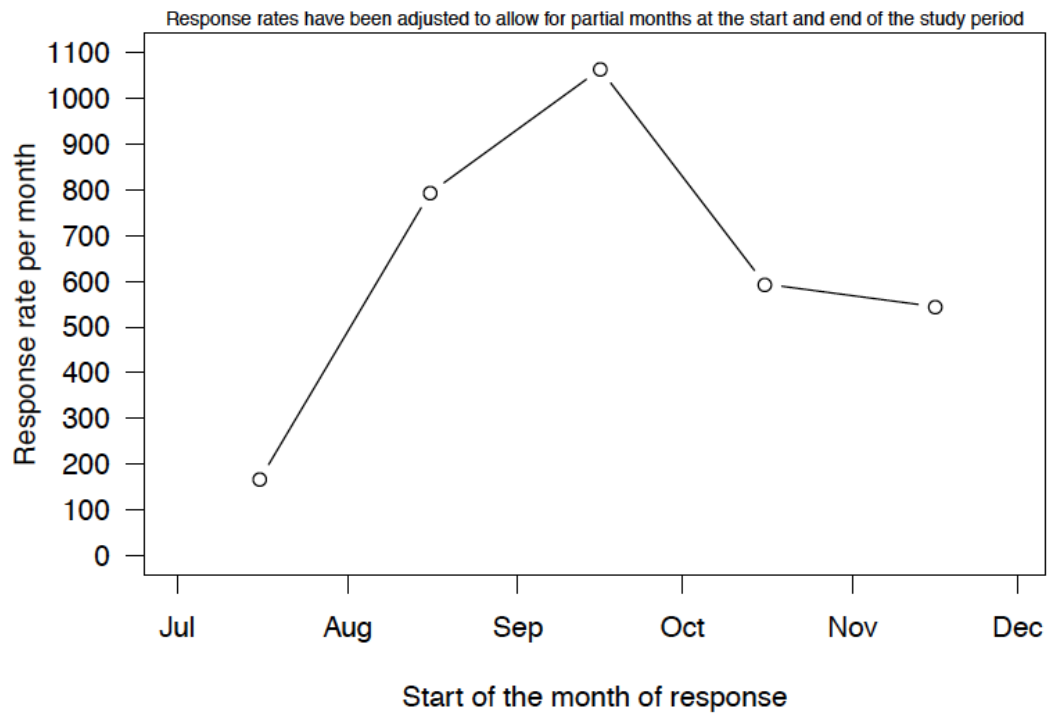
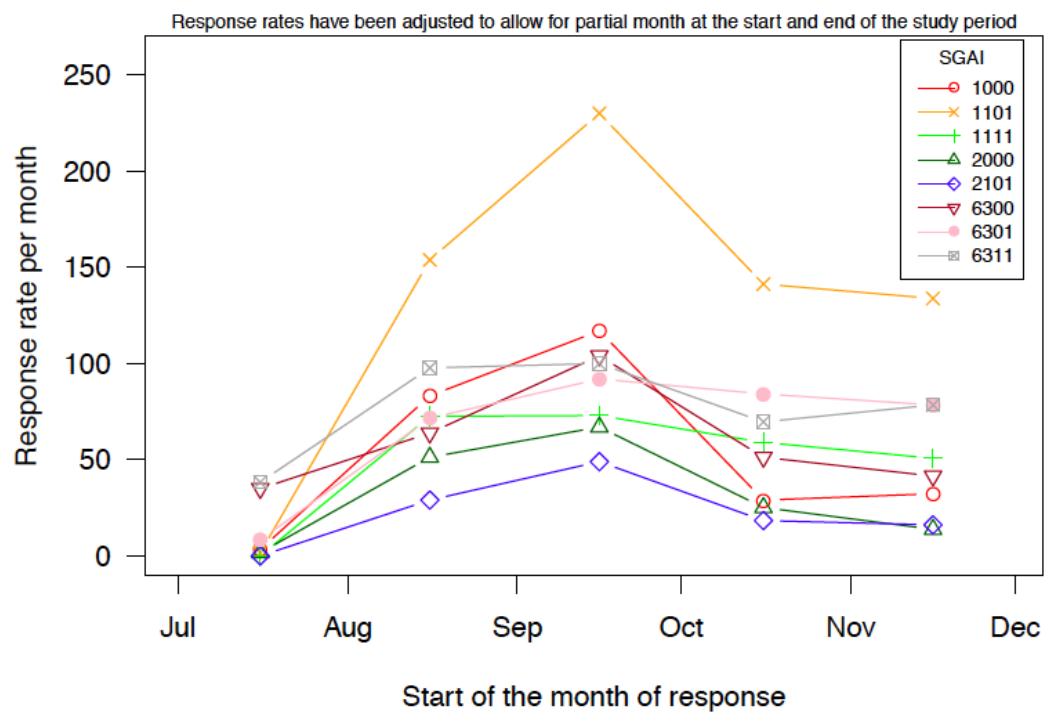


Figure 7: Number of comments by month: by comment pattern





These graphs show that the distribution of comment making did vary by the pattern of comment. For example, in September, the most numerous type of comment was 1101 (disabled, exhibits collective identity and expresses group injustice) followed by 1000 (disabled, doesn't exhibit collective identity or injustice), 6300 (status unstated, cannot by definition express collective identity, does not exhibit group injustice) 6311 (status unstated, cannot express collective identity, uses group descriptor, exhibits group injustice). In October the most common comment was again the 1101 type but this was now followed by 6301 (status unstated, cannot exhibit collective identity, exhibits group injustice), 6311 (status unstated, no collective identity but uses group descriptor and exhibits group injustice) and 1111 (disabled, exhibits collective identity, uses group descriptor, expresses group injustice). The 1000 type had dropped down to 6<sup>th</sup> place and the 6300 down to 5<sup>th</sup> place.

This point can be further illustrated on a day- rather than month-basis. For this analysis, dominant patterns were selected as well as days on which large numbers of comments were made. Table 11 shows the expected and observed counts for three patterns of comments on three days. Expected counts are calculated on the basis that the distribution of comment counts by pattern for the whole time period will hold for any given day.

Table 11: Number of comments made by day for three pattern types

Date (day)		Comment pattern		
		1101	6301	6311
	Number in whole set	594	292	330
	% of whole set	21	10.3	11.6
27/08/09	Count as % of total	17.5	8.8	8.0
	Observed count	24	12	11
	Expected count	28.7	12	16
28/08/09	Count as % of total	32	5.9	.0
	Observed count	11	2	0
	Expected count	7.1	3.5	4
28/10/09	Count as % of total	14.8	19.8	18.5

	Observed count	12	16	15
	Expected count	17	8.3	9.4

The graphs shows that patterns 6301 and 6311 were disproportionately high on 28/10/09. These are comments where the status of the commenter is unclear but group injustice is exhibited.

### **6.3.7 Conclusions from analysis of patterns**

As discussed above, the nature of the top eight comment patterns is in line with various other of my findings, highlighting the preponderance and inter-relationship of expressions of collective identity and group injustice and demonstrating that the most common style of comment consisted of people identifying themselves as disabled and expressing both sentiments. The pattern analysis was also helpful in quantifying comments which expressed neither collective identity nor group injustice and showing how these were distributed among the various status categories.

The analysis also showed that particular styles of comment were more common at particular times. It is only possible to speculate from the analysis why this might be. For example, towards the end of October it became clear that DLA would not form part of the funding for the national care service. Secretary of State Andy Burnham announced this on 22 October 2009. On 27 October B&W sent an email campaign informing people of Andy Burnham's comments but cautioning that the situation for over 65s in receipt of DLA and AA was still unclear and urging people to comment on the Green Paper (see Appendix 7). The same day the number of comments spiked (see Figure 5, p.172). There was a relative rise in October in general, and on 28 October in particular, in comments by people who did not declare their status but who expressed group injustice. This may reflect a change in emphasis toward the situation for the over 65s, as opposed to disabled people in general.

Such an effect could be prompted by any one or a combination of various factors, the sending of the email, the spread of the message to online networks concerned with the over 65s, people observing other people's comments in the comment space and

aligning the style of their own comment accordingly. Determining which factor was most influential would however be speculation. While some studies have used contemporaneous behaviour among connected individuals as evidence for social influence, Bakshy et al. (2012) caution against this, citing the confounding possibility of exposure to outside influences. So the intention of this section is to raise questions rather than answer them but the analysis does indicate the potential for further research in this area.

## **6.4 Limitations and conclusions of the comments analysis**

This stage of analysis contributed most to the research objective of deepening understanding of the drivers of collective action. Firstly, it was clear that collective identity and group injustice were exhibited in a large number of comments. This suggests that analysis of these comments is a useful contribution to research using a range of different methods but which shares a focus on understanding the drivers of collective action. Expressions of efficacy were by comparison rare showing that analysis of these comments was not a useful route to greater knowledge about this driver.

The most common pattern of a comment was a person declaring they were disabled, expressing collective identity and group injustice. This pattern accounted for 20% of comments. The next two most common patterns shared the feature that the commenter's status was unclear. The system of coding I had devised meant that these comments could not, by definition, exhibit collective identity. However they did include expressions of group injustice. This is further evidence of the predominance of a group sentiment in comments. It also shows that the data might have been more informative if people had been asked to express their status as part of the comment making.

Two thirds of the comments contained information about the status of the commenter, for example whether they were disabled, a carer and so on. People who made it clear they were disabled were far more likely to express collective identity

than those who made it clear they were carers. This is a finding which is borne out in other research (see p.80, in regard to disabled people, and p.191, in regard to carers).

The analysis also showed that the expression of collective identity often occurred in conjunction with an expression of group injustice. Use of an additional group descriptor was less common than an expression of collective identity but where it did occur, it was very likely to be accompanied by an expression of group injustice.

Group injustice was expressed in around 70% of comments. This in part reflects the decision after the qualitative analysis to allow comments to be coded as expressing group injustice in cases where it was not clear that the person expressing it was part of the group affected themselves. The use of additional descriptors seemed to be related to this, indicating that people were widening their conception of groups affected by the proposals, perhaps to emphasise the negative impacts or as part of identifying with affected groups. This phenomenon could also be interpreted as injustice being more of a unifying theme than identity. This point is revisited in section 7.4.

Another feature which came through strongly from the qualitative analysis was the variety of ways in which people identified themselves and groups; the large number of collective identities exhibited. These classifications supplemented and transcended the policy-driven boundaries of disabled and carer. This kind of identification added to the overall picture that the majority of people responding to the consultation expressed themselves in collective terms, either explicitly by the use of collective pronouns or by referencing a group in identifying themselves or discussing why they opposed the proposals. These collective expressions were also often accompanied by a more personalised, narrative style. It was also clear that the collective identity of 'campaigner' which B&W promoted in its emails was rarely expressed within the comments. The analysis revealed that 25% of commenters did not use a collective tone at all. Reference to the literature suggests this is lower figure than might have been predicted (see pp.186-187).

There are limitations, however, to this analysis of the comments. Many are associated with the tension between the challenges and opportunities which arise from the vast pool of data that online interactions produce (Boyd and Crawford, 2012). In this case the decision to use the comments made on the Green Paper, rather than, say, discussion in the forums was largely ethically based. The comments, however, did not constitute an 'ideal' data set: their content varied and it was only possible to extract and understand certain information by reading each comment individually. This made automated analysis difficult and instead a fairly lengthy and less replicable method of human coding was required.

In addition, the comments did not directly address the research subject. They were not, for example, responses to a question such as, 'Why are you engaging in this action?' Clearly asking a question in this manner has its own drawbacks (Walgrave et al., 2010), but the downside of using 'naturally occurring' data is that its analysis can be more time consuming.

It was also the case that the comments did not reveal much about a sense of efficacy. This was more evident in the campaign emails, as the previous chapter showed, but the emails made appeals to efficacy rather than constituted expressions of it.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion, part 1**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter and Chapter 8 serve a similar purpose. Both bring the findings from the different stages of research together to arrive at some overall conclusions. These conclusions take the discussion beyond the immediate research questions (p.100) to look at their wider implications. I also relate the points I make to existing empirical and theoretical literature to clarify how my research contributes to knowledge of online collective action; this forms the concluding section to the two chapters.

This chapter looks firstly at the way in which two of the drivers of collective action – collective identity and group-level injustice - are particularly evident in the data. This supports the idea that a social psychology approach is applicable to naturally occurring data, as well as to its more traditional domain of data generated by surveys or experiments. More importantly, it backs up the notion that collective identity and injustice should be included in models of collective action. In this first section, I also give a brief summary of the manner in which collective identity and group-level injustice were exhibited in the comments. In the second section, the chapter shows that a network perspective reveals differences in the nature and intensity of collective identity within this ‘instance’ of collective action. It also supports the idea that identity is a process. Next, the chapter reconsiders the concept of group injustice. The data showed that people often expressed injustice at a group level but left unclear their relationship to the ‘group’. Two concepts were useful in understanding this phenomenon: the notion of empathy, and the idea that people have differing identities, which can become salient under particular circumstances.

### **7.2 The drivers of collective action in naturally occurring data**

A key point about my data is that it met a basic expectation underpinning the research. My research demonstrates that in naturally occurring data there are indicators of the psychological processes which social psychological research has

shown motivate collective action. My mixed methodology research design enabled me to reflect both on the meanings associated with the expressions of these drivers and to quantify their occurrence.

Social psychology research into collective action is typically conducted through surveys and questionnaires, often given to participants at protest event (for example, Postmes and Brunsting, 2002). This methodology has yielded the robust models on which this research is based. My research does not aim to show that the drivers motivate collective action but rather it builds on previous work that has demonstrated causality (Van Zomeren et al., 2008), considering collective action in an online setting.

The data that featured the drivers most clearly was the online comments on the Green Paper. As Chapter 6 showed, 75% of comments exhibited collective identity or group-level injustice. My research is the only study I have come across which considers all three drivers in naturally occurring data, so a direct comparison with other research is difficult. However, insofar as comment on other research in relation to my own is possible, it seems my data revealed a surprisingly high degree of expression of the drivers.

One piece of research which is relevant in this context is Walgrave et al. (2010). This study asked participants at 12 street demonstrations, which varied by issue and by the country where they occurred, the direct question, 'Why are you participating?'. One of the bases on which the answers were analysed was whether responses were collective or individual. Where there was uncertainty over how to code a reply, the default category was collective. In addition, the coding was multi-response, in other words a single protester could refer to both individual and collective motives. Against this backdrop of conditions which were rather conducive to finding high levels of collective sentiment, the study found that 85% (cross national data) and 82% (cross issue data) of respondents gave a collective response and 28% (cross national) and 36% (cross issue) an individual response.

By contrast, the circumstances of my research mitigated against the drivers of collective action featuring, for various reasons. Firstly, my data was not generated by asking people directly why they were participating in collective action. Secondly, the space where people commented was designed to elicit their response to the Green Paper, rather than address the question of why they were participating. In fact, as the analysis of the official comment showed, the space was geared towards the idea of individual citizens registering with the government comments on the Green Paper, made on the basis of their own personal situation or experience. It was not conceived officially as a space for collective action. Finally this was an online space and, as much of the literature argues, the low costs of collective action in such a situation contrasts with the higher costs of, for example, attending a march or demonstration (Earl and Schussman, 2003; Earl and Kimport, 2011). In the latter case, collective identity or a sense of group injustice motivates people to participate despite the high costs but, the argument runs, where costs are lower, collective action is more likely to take place in the absence of these motivations (see p.76). This argument prompts Earl and Kimport (2011) to question the extent to which collective identity or anger are even necessary for online collective action. Despite these countervailing features, my research showed large numbers of people exhibiting shared feelings of injustice and collective identity in their comments. This finding is reflected in the title of this thesis by the phrase “Hands off our benefits!” which sums up the tone of many comments.

The finding that collective identity was exhibited in a large number of comments supports the claim in other literature that group identity has been found to motivate contributions in a variety of online settings (Flanagin et al., 2013). Other research also corroborates my findings in respect of injustice. The argument that internet use might be associated with high levels of group-based anger among activists is made in Van Laer (2010). He suggests that using the internet is related to sustaining and reinforcing particular motivational elements, with ‘online activists’ showing higher levels of group-based anger than people who did not use the internet to inform themselves about demonstrations. He goes on to say that this “might have a positive effect on future commitment and participation” (Van Laer, 2010, p.413). This conclusion, he argues, undermines other research which suggests that the internet diminishes commitment, creating protest “users” rather than “members” (Earl and



Schussman, 2003). Gerbaudo (2012) and (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012) also draw attention to the unifying frame of injustice in recent street protests (see pp.76-78).

In contrast to group injustice and collective identity, efficacy was not a common feature of the comments. This finding emerged at the qualitative stage of analysis and so efficacy was not included as a variable in the quantitative coding. The idea that actions were efficacious was, however, a strong feature of the campaign emails.

As a whole, the campaign data was substantially different from the comments data in regard to exhibiting the drivers. In the campaign data, the drivers were not exhibited, so much as fostered. Fostering is not the same as the drivers being expressed directly. Nonetheless, the presence of these appeals reinforces the argument that the drivers are meaningful analytical concepts in the context of collective identity. Most of the fostering occurred in the campaign emails, which as the analysis showed, appealed to a sense of collective identity as a campaigner, to a sense of injustice via the idea of lack of trust, and to a sense of efficacy, through frequent references to how successful the action was and, specifically, how many people had joined the campaign, commented on the Green Paper, signed the petition and so on.

The effect of demonstrating group size is recognised in other literature. "For most people group size is the most prominent evidence of a group's efficacy" (Van Laer, 2010, citing Marwell and Oliver, 1993, p.409). Van Laer argues that the internet strengthens motives such as efficacy because people can "actually 'see'" the number of supporters growing on social networking sites such as Facebook (Van Laer, 2010, p.409).

So, a significant finding from my research was that indicators of the drivers of collective identity, group injustice and, to a lesser extent, group efficacy were indeed present in the naturally occurring data. The comments data featured direct expressions of collective identity and group injustice and the campaign emails fostered all three drivers. This indicates that there is potential for developing methodologies which analyse naturally occurring data in respect of all three of these drivers. It also shows that models of collective action should include all three drivers,

even if there is an expectation that some may be less important in online protest. The following sections discuss some conclusions in regards to my findings on collective identity and group injustice in more detail.

### **7.3 A network level understanding of collective identity**

The conceptual framework for this research suggested that it would be useful to view the drivers through the lens of networks. Haidt et al. (2008) refer to this process as “putting on the network glasses” (Haidt et al., p.134). This section discusses the way in which my research illustrated the benefits of this perspective in understanding collective identity.

One purpose of considering the campaign and comment through a network lens is to focus on the relationship between actors, with regard both to the structure and nature of the ties between them. This approach stays true to the origins of my conceptual framework in relational sociology and the aim of capturing the social world in interaction (Elias 1978; 1991; Crossley 2001; 2010). The notion that networks are central to understanding collective action underpins a large body of literature, as already discussed (see sections 2.4.3 and 3.3). So, the objective of this section is not to demonstrate the novelty of a network approach but to demonstrate how it elucidates understanding of collective identity in the context of this research. It does this in two ways, firstly by highlighting the differences in the manner and intensity of collective identity within this instance of collective action and secondly by drawing attention to the way in which a sense of collective identity emerges and develops from interaction.

The campaign analysis revealed a relatively long-term and stable network of networks among which the message of the campaign emails was dispersed (ref to chap 5). All or part of the first B&W email was replicated in a number of mostly pre-existing, and some newly-formed forums, blogs and Facebook groups. The analysis identified 56 such destinations and it was clear from visiting these websites and

pages that many of them were social web 2.0<sup>29</sup> spaces (the forums and blogs) or they were social network sites, such as Facebook groups. I established a basic understanding of the role of collective identity within these various networks by looking at how the website hosts articulated the purpose of the site. This was shown to be quite varied. In some cases, membership was articulated in terms of common, or shared, circumstances, such as living on a limited budget; in others it appeared to be based on demographic factors, such as being in the same age bracket; in others, it was articulated in terms of a shared impairment, illness or condition; in others this was broadened out to “living with a disability” or being a carer; and in others, as stated above, it was about being an activist or campaigner (see section 5.4.1).

The literature distinguishes particular types of identity associated with particular types of commonality. As discussed in Chapter 2, collective identity is a concept open to interpretation but there is widespread agreement that it has both categorical and affective components (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Ashmore et al., 2004). The categorical component is usually understood to depend on a commonality such as gender, race, or disability and the affective or emotional component refers to feelings about being a member of that group. So, a forum which articulates its purpose as supporting people who have a particular impairment is likely to foster a sense of identity among members related to that impairment. This type of shared identity has been termed ‘experiential identity’ (Barnes, 2007, p.172). A forum based around being disabled in general and challenging prejudice about disability is likely to support what has been termed ‘politicised collective identity’ (Simon and Klandermans, 2001; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). Politicised collective identity is defined as people engaging as self conscious group members in a power struggle on behalf of their group (Simon and Klandermans, 2001, p.319).

In my research, ethical considerations prevented a more in-depth analysis of expressions of collective identity in the various networks involved in the campaign.

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<sup>29</sup> The term web 2.0 is rather overused and under defined but is perhaps best understood as describing “a set of principles and practices” (O’Reilly, 2005). In the context of this research, one of the most relevant characteristics of web 2.0 is its facility for peer production. For early development of the term, see O’Reilly 2005. Chadwick (2009) also includes a detailed assessment of the term based on O’Reilly’s set of principles.

But the variety of ways in which the purpose of the networks was articulated made it clear that, in this case, a network-level assessment of collective identity gives a much more nuanced and informative picture of its role in collective action than estimations made at the level of the protest event as a whole.

The analysis of the comments reinforced this conclusion, although here, the distinctions I made were not at the level of networks but in regard to what I termed 'status' (which is a form of commonality). Commenters who made it clear they were disabled were nearly four times more likely than those who did not to express collective identity. Conversely, commenters who made it clear they were carers were much *less* likely than those who did not to express collective identity (for figures see pp.172-173). The analysis of patterns of responses, which brought together all the variables also confirmed this relationship between status and collective identity. This showed that the most frequent style of comment made it clear that the commenter was disabled, exhibited collective identity and expressed group injustice. A far less frequent style of comment consisted of commenters making it clear they were carers and in addition exhibiting collective identity and collective injustice (see section 6.3.4).

Other research corroborates my findings regarding carers. A recent report for MacMillan Cancer Support found that a high proportion of carers do not identify with the term (Ipsos Mori, 2012). This research, which consisted of a survey of 386 people caring informally for people with cancer found that less than half (43%) identified with the term carer. A similar but more in-depth picture emerges from O'Connor (2007). This research, based on qualitative interviews with 47 family caregivers, found that most did not identify themselves as carers early in their experience of caregiving but those who later began to identify themselves as carers reported that it fostered a sense of community. The study also found that all the participants "who positioned themselves within a 'we' community appeared to find it empowering" (O'Connor, 2007, p.170).

So, my analysis of the comments revealed significant differences in collective identity according to status and other research, particularly in regard to carers, backs up this

finding. This observation raises the question of whether such differences might also be observed at the level of networks. On the basis of my research, it would be reasonable to postulate that networks formed on the basis of people being disabled would be more likely to feature expressions of collective identity than those formed on the basis of being a carer. Similarly, it seems likely that networks formed on the basis of being a carer might be less prevalent than those formed on the basis of being disabled. My analysis did show that the first campaign email was replicated far more often in online networks which defined themselves primarily as being for disabled people (or people with a particular impairment) than those which defined themselves as primarily for carers. Beyond this, the contribution my research makes is to raise questions rather than provide a definitive answer: are there fewer online networks based around being a carer than being disabled; where carer networks do exist, do they tend not to feature expressions of collective identity?

The second area in which the network perspective of my research is illuminating is in demonstrating that collective identity should be viewed as a process, rather than something reified or fixed. Although a sense of collective identity as a campaigner or activists was fostered at various points in the B&W emails (see Chapter 5), a network perspective draws attention to the interaction involved. As my research demonstrates, the recipients of the emails belonged to other mostly pre-existing networks, which were formed on various bases, and implied various identifications. Where recipients copied B&W emails into these networks, they were reproducing messages about identity contained within them, but in those networks, people were in a position to respond to those messages in different terms. There was also a forum on the B&W website where email recipients posted their own comments. The fact that these various networks were linked to one another through the collective action process meant that people were exposed to the variety in ways of identifying. In addition, in the official comment space itself, people were in a position to read one another's comments and, indeed, my analysis demonstrated that some commenters even made it explicit that this is what they were doing. The pattern analysis and clustering of similar comments on particular dates also suggests a level of interaction among the commenters, or at least that people were subject to similar influences and phrased their comments accordingly (see section 6.3.6).

In view of these observations, it is clear the sense of identity of those involved in the campaign and those who commented on the Green Paper was open to influence from the campaign emails, discussion in associated online networks, and the comments of others in the official comment space.

Other research supports the idea that identity is a process and emerges from interaction. Melucci (1995) discusses the way in which networks generate a sense of belonging and shared definitions of “us” and “them”. The idea that networks are spaces where identity is negotiated and defined is widely supported among social movement theorists (for example, Passy, 2003; Jasper, 2009). Research in a similar context to my own also accords with this view: Barnes’ (2008) study found that deliberative forums in health and social care operated as spaces for the negotiation, construction and even transformation of identity (ibid, p.461). My research builds on these studies by making a similar point in an online environment. Identity is not simply framed by organisers of online collective action but, rather, emerges from interactions within the networks involved in collective action.

The network level approach to collective identity taken in another offline study, Diani and Bison (2004), is another useful reference point here. They view social movement processes as a particular type of collective action and contrast them with other “cognate collective action dynamics” such as coalitional and organisational processes (Diani and Bison, 2004, p.281, also see a fuller discussion of this point in Chapter 2). One feature that distinguishes social-movement-type collective action in their model is the presence of strong and enduring collective identity, which they term ‘a strong network identity’. This brings “a sense of common purpose and shared commitment to a cause” (Diani and Bison, 2004, p.284). They contrast these types of networks with networks that operate at an instrumental level. These involve actors trying “to maximize their outcomes by establishing alliances with other actors” (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, p.10). They term the identity in these networks ‘organisational identity’.

My research, demonstrates that assuming an association between instrumental networks and organisations is problematic. My campaign analysis showed that online networks which were formed on a relatively instrumental basis included, for

example, forums based on shared interests, which were not associated with organisations. Chadwick (2007) also demonstrates the blurring of boundaries between social movements and interest groups in an online setting. But leaving the organisational identity distinction aside, Diani and Bison is still useful in differentiating the types of identity at network level. In an online setting, this network-level approach to gauging collective identity stands in contrast to overarching accounts of how the internet transforms the balance of social relations and community as a whole (for example, Wellman 2001; 2003).

It was clear from the comment analysis that those involved in the 2009 Green Paper collective action identified themselves in a wide variety of ways: some in an individualist manner but most in a collective way. Those identifying collectively did so by reference to a wide range of different and overlapping groups. A disabled collective identity was the most common type exhibited and a collective identity associated with being a carer was relatively rare. The email dispersion networks which were involved in mobilising people to comment on the Green Paper suggested a similar variety in identification, with some networks appearing to operate at a more affective level and others at a more effective level. Meanwhile, the campaign network, which was formed by B&W sending emails to recipients, fostered another form of collective identity – that of campaigner. Because these networks were connected and overlapping, people were exposed to a variety of ways of identifying. This supports the idea that collective identity is not a fixed phenomenon but rather it has the capacity to develop and change in the course of collective action, and this process occurs via the interactions in online networks. As I argued in Chapter 3, the facility of digital communications technologies to connect people who are linked by weak-ties has generated a lot of research interest. However my research, highlights the way in which identity is a process and emerges from interactions in networks, so where strong-identity and weak-identity networks combine in collective action it is likely that understandings of identity will change and develop as a result.

#### **7.4 A need to consider the ‘group’ in group injustice**

At a theoretical level, there is a lack of clarity over what the ‘group’ in group injustice means. The social psychology literature I drew on implies that the ‘group’ is one’s

own social group (for example, Postmes 2007; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). This reflects the concept's roots in Relative Deprivation Theory, which concerns the perception that your group is being treated unjustly compared to others (Postmes, 2007 p.169). The situation is complicated, however, by the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of social group. According to Iris Young, the concept is not clear in either social theory or philosophy, (Young, 2011). Young herself specifies that shared identity is one of the defining features of a social group. If this stipulation is accepted, and it is assumed that group injustice can be felt only in respect of one's social group, it follows, by definition, that social (or collective) identity must precede group injustice. Yet social psychologists also seem to treat social identity and group injustice as dynamic, overlapping and mutually constitutive processes. Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner et al., 1987) conceives of people having various identities, which are capable of becoming salient under certain circumstances. One of these circumstances is a situation that is perceived to be unjust (Van Zomeren et al., 2004, p.650).

In my own research, in response to the data rather than as a result of prior theorising, I decided to conceive of group injustice in a way that included the possibility of it being expressed even when it was not clear that the people expressing it were part of the group concerned themselves. The same approach is taken in other literature: Walgrave et al. (2010) work on the basis that collectivity is exhibited when people express themselves in relation to a group or in the name of a group. I conceived group injustice in a similar way, reflecting the inductive nature of my coding at that stage. Extracts of comments were not coded from the outset from an assumption that group injustice would be a meaningful category, however it was clear that 'injustice' coupled with a sense of groupness was expressed in many of the comments. In some cases, it was unclear whether the person commenting felt himself or herself to be part of that group, in others, it seemed that the commenter merely shared an emotional or professional bond with the group. This raised the question of why people were expressing group injustice in situations where they did not appear to be part of that group.

When the analysis was complete, I turned firstly to the social psychology literature for an explanation of this phenomenon. This literature seemed an appropriate



starting point because social psychology research was the foundation behind the conceptions of the existing drivers, including group injustice. From a review of the literature, it was clear that the concept of empathy was relevant. Empathy is variously understood in the literature, as I discuss below, but the following description seems particularly applicable to my research:

“Some speak about a personal relationship they have with an individual from an oppressed group, of how they can relate from their own experiences to the experiences of others, or how they feel a sense of connection or ‘we-ness’. I call this type of response empathy.” (Goodman, 2000)

In clarifying what is meant by empathy, most of the literature agrees that it has a cognitive and affective component (Goodman, 2000; Batson et al., 2007). Cognitive empathy refers to taking another person’s perspective, or having the ability to imagine the way the world looks from their vantage point. Affective empathy, sometimes also called emotional empathy, refers to sharing in the emotional life of another. A further division of each of these types of empathy is given in Batson and Ahmad (2009). This typology is based on their review of how the term has been used in recent theoretical and research literature. However they also point out the various forms of empathy are “distinct but not unrelated” and that “one may lead to another” (Batson and Ahmad, 2009, p.146).

In the context of collective action, it is relevant that much of the literature agrees that certain types of empathy are associated with increased readiness to help others (see for example, Batson and Ahmad, 2009). Batson et al. (2007) also argues that empathic anger, which is a form of empathic concern, is evoked by people witnessing unfair treatment of a cared-for other. The term cared-for is important here since Batson et al. are careful to point out their experiment showed that in the absence of empathic concern, “unfair treatment of another evoked little anger” (ibid, p.1272).

From this focused review of the empathy literature it seemed reasonable to propose that many of the instances of group injustice expressed on behalf of another group

were motivated by empathy, particularly of the kind which leads to a readiness to help the other group.

In addition, the empathy literature offered possible interpretations of the feature that my research termed 'additional group descriptors'. At the qualitative stage of analysis, this was the category given to words which widened and/or overlapped statuses such as carer, elderly or disabled. Relevant examples are 'poor' and 'vulnerable'. At the qualitative stage, it appeared that the use of these terms was associated with expressions of group injustice. The quantitative analysis confirmed this and also showed that these descriptors were less commonly used in conjunction with expressions of collective identity (see section 6.3.2).

The idea of vulnerability is mentioned by Batson and Ahmad (2009), who suggest that empathic concern may be paternalistic or maternalistic: "It may lead one to see the target or targets of empathy as metaphorically childlike – as vulnerable, dependent, and in need of protection." (ibid, p.158). So the use of the term 'vulnerable' could be a marker of empathic concern<sup>30</sup>.

An alternative interpretation is that because the additional descriptors serve as wider categories which encompass, for example carers and disabled people, they could evidence a deeper underlying feeling of oneness. Some literature suggests that what appears to be empathic concern is, in fact, evidence of feelings of oneness. Oneness is defined as "a sense of shared, merged or interconnected personal identities" (Cialdini, 1997, p.483). According to this argument, it is primarily commonality not compassion that motivates action on the part of the 'other'.

The idea that comments reflected a sense of one-ness resonates with arguments about carers' identity: the notion of one-ness could explain how care givers relate to care receivers. Barnes (2006; 2012) cites her own empirical work which demonstrates a blurring of identities between carers and disabled people, arguing that people exist in social networks in which they give and receive care at various times in their lives. This resonates with the idea that people have a range of social

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<sup>30</sup> The condescending overtones of the term 'vulnerable' also make it the kind of concept eschewed by those in the disability movement who wish to avoid impairments being associated with powerlessness (see pp.27-28)

identities with differing groups, and that circumstances determine which becomes salient (Van Zomeren et al., 2004).

In summary, a likely explanation of the more loosely defined expressions of group-level injustice in the comments data is that on some occasions they reflect a sense of one-ness and on others, a sense of empathy but it would require more research to confirm this. For this reason, the term 'a shared sense of injustice' seems more appropriate than 'group injustice' to capture the range of expressions of group-level injustice. This allows the possibility that those who express a shared sense of injustice may not themselves feel part of the group affected. Another advantage of using 'shared' rather than 'group' is that it can be interpreted in two ways regarding networks, one which emphasises the instrumental and the other the affective. Shared as a verb connotes the idea that online networks facilitate the passage between people of ideas and information; the links in networks serve a primarily instrumental purpose. Secondly as an adjective, shared connotes 'in common', the sharing has more of an affective, emotional feel.

This approach also admits the idea that where collective identity backs a shared sense of injustice, this may be a more powerful drive to collective action than feeling injustice on behalf of another group. Social opinion support is a useful concept here, since it is the mechanism that helps define experienced unfairness as collective and shared (Van Zomeren et al., 2004). The term refers to group members' appraisal that their fellow group members share an opinion, in this case about an experienced unfairness. This in turn validates that opinion and promotes collective action on the basis of group-based anger. This also draws attention to the dynamic nature of the shared feeling of injustice. As with collective identity, people would have been exposed to others' views about injustice through the campaign network and in the comment space. The 2009 Green Paper online consultation and the associated campaign can be seen, therefore, as providing spaces in which participants' sense of injustice and identity were formed and reformed.

The concept of trust, which I noted at the qualitative stage was a feature of many comments, also comes back in here since it typically appeared in combination with

expressions of identity (particularly othering) and injustice (see p.169). As already mentioned, there is a large body of literature on this issue (see p.133) and various contested understandings of trust. One which is consistent with my conceptual framework is Cook et al.'s relational definition of trust (Cook et al., 2007). They argue that "trust exists when one party to the relation believes the other party has incentive to act in his or her interests<sup>31</sup> or to take his or her interests to heart", this involves one party "encapsulating" the other party's interests within their own (Cook et al., 2007, p.2). The way in which distrust, particularly of politicians, was expressed in the comments was very much along these lines: the point often made was that 'they' cannot be trusted to treat 'us' justly, or that 'they' don't understand or care about 'our' lives. Cook et al. say that, by their definition, it is "virtually impossible to trust institutions, governments and large collectivities" (Cook et al., 2007, p.5). More reassuringly, perhaps, they also argue that distrust has its benefits. Chief among these is that it "grounds" social structures that help to limit exploitation (ibid, p.2). A similar idea is also present in Della Porta (2011, p.803), where she discusses the role of social movements in realising the "democratic potential of mistrust". The notion of mistrust being beneficial to democracy is corroborated by empirical work from Jensen (2009), which finds, somewhat controversially<sup>32</sup>, that a lack of trust encourages, rather than discourages, political participation. If this is so, it also helps account for the sense of distrust, expressed at a group level, which I observed in many comments.

## **7.5 Conclusions: a dynamic mix of shared injustice and identity**

Bringing together the strands of discussion in this chapter, my research finds that, in particular, expressions of collective identity and a shared sense of injustice characterised the collective response to the 2009 Green Paper and that these expressions were often intertwined with one another. The findings support the notion that group-level identity and injustice are themselves processes and the group around which these sentiments cohere may be defined and redefined as part of that process. These ideas are consistent with viewing collectivity as a question of degree;

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<sup>31</sup> The concept of interests is also contested and some see individuals' understanding of their interests as part of the process of power (Clegg, 1989, and see earlier discussion of this point on pp.57-58).

<sup>32</sup> This is described as a controversial idea since it stands in opposition to Robert Putnam's influential argument that the foundation of democracy is generalised trust (Putnam, 2000).

there is a gradual rather than absolute distinction between individual and collective motives (Walgrave et al., 2010, p.4). This perspective also helps explain how expressions of collectivity and personalisation co-existed in many of the comments. My research makes use of networks as a device for conceiving the way in which these sentiments develop through interaction. It shows that the online networks involved in the Green Paper consultation were spaces in which expressions of identity and injustice were being shared. In addition it is clear that the networks themselves would have developed structurally in the course of the collective action as the action of copying the campaign emails made new links and so on. This, in turn, would have affected the discussions taking place in the networks, demonstrating that networks both structure and are structured by the interactions which form them. A sense of group efficacy was also communicated via these networks since they enabled people to 'see' how many others were taking action and to share ideas about the impact of action on policymaking and policymakers. My research purposefully focused on a case where collective identity and injustice were likely to be factors in online collective action so that I could contribute to understanding how they operate in this context. My research shows that where expressions of collective identity and a shared sense of injustice do occur in the course of online collective action, they feed into and through that process, changing it and being changed as a result. In the 2009 Green Paper consultation, a shared sense of injustice seemed to provide more of a unifying theme overall than identity, which although frequently collectively expressed did so in reference to a variety of groups. The following chapter builds on these findings.

## Chapter 8: Discussion, part 2

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter starts by building three arguments based on the relationship between my findings and the conceptual framework. The idea of the research was not to 'test' the framework but to explore the research questions through the framework lens in a reflexive manner (see pp.96-97). This approach enables discussion about which aspects of the findings correspond (or not) with the framework but it also facilitates reflection on the ways in which the framework lens helps interpret the findings, and so contributes to understanding collective action.

The first section demonstrates how the conception of power in the example of collective action I research is enhanced by reference to networks and process. Discussion of power is often left out of accounts of collective action but is included in my framework. In the second section, I show the difficulties in maintaining an institutional/extra-institutional divide in regard to my findings. Such a divide characterises many social movement approaches to collective action but I aligned myself at the start of my research with literature which argued that this divide was questionable (see section 2.4.1). Linked to this, I argue that protest should not be associated only with extra-institutional activity and I show that my research supports the idea that collective action should be seen as a continuum from confrontational to persuasive forms of action. Finally I use my research to defend the view that collective action should be conceived as a circular rather than linear process.

These three sections culminate in a summary of the insights that the conceptual framework brings to understanding the Green Paper consultation. This section also describes the ways in which the research findings led me to review some aspects of the initial framework and I discuss the limitations of my perspective.

The framework, however, is not an end in itself. As discussed in the methodology chapter, it is a means of structuring and reflecting on the research. So, the concluding

section of this chapter returns to the fundamental purpose of the thesis: to contribute to understandings of collective action. At the root of most theories of collective action is the question of why people engage in collective acts. The literature tackles this question in various ways, from answering it directly, to taking issue with its assumptions. I demonstrate how my research relates to these bodies of work and in doing so, I show where its contributions lie.

## **8.2 Networks and power in the Green Paper consultation**

The conceptual framework for my research includes the proposition that networks are an embodiment of inter-relations and, as a result, manifest power (see pp.57-59). Applying this understanding to the Green Paper consultation enables reflections on power in this context.

Situating the Green Paper consultation on the Big Care website is an example of New Labour policy at that time to develop new spaces for participation (see section 1.4). The literature on these kinds of spaces in offline environment suggests that, in practice, they became sites of contestation (Newman et al., 2004; Barnes 2007; Newman and Clarke, 2009). This idea holds true for the Green Paper consultation for a number of reasons.

As the creator and designer of the space and moderator of the comments, the Department of Health, had the upper hand in regard to determining what the consultation was about and who was being consulted. As the analysis in section 5.5 shows, the official message was that the aim of the consultation was to “share ideas” and create a National Care service “together”. However it was rather ambiguous as to how far the idea of “together” went. The executive summary of the Green Paper made it clear that citizens were being invited to “help us make the decisions” [us, one can assume, being the Department of Health]. And the message regarding the online comment space was that this was not a place for a conversation so much as an opportunity to “leave your comments”. The executive summary and the Green Paper also listed a number of consultation questions around which to structure the debate. The official report into the consultation was also organised with reference to these

questions (see Appendices 4 and 12). As for who was being consulted, the impression in the official text was that as many people as possible were welcome to leave comments. However, the terms and conditions page and the general tenor of the text clearly envisaged the online comments being made by individuals and being related to their own personal experience (see p.144).

Yet, the analysis of the comments showed that most participants did not follow the official guidance regarding the purpose of the consultation. They did not respond explicitly to the consultation questions or to the idea of shaping a new National Care Service together. Instead, comments were more defensive, often phrased in terms of 'protecting our benefits'. Rather than exhibiting the trust implicit in the phrase 'Shaping the Future of Care Together', many commenters expressed a strong distrust of MPs, social services, civil servants and the consultation process. Comments also challenged the official version of what could be included among the 'solutions' to the problem of social care by suggesting that taxes should be raised to cover funding shortfalls. As the analysis showed, many of the comments included personal narratives but most of the comments were also phrased in terms of groups or collectivities. This is at odds with the official representation of the 'individual' participant. In combination, these features suggest that commenters effectively co-opted the space, questioning and recasting the terms of the Big Care debate. The idea that spaces for participation may be created with one purpose in mind, but that social actors can renegotiate their boundaries is discussed in various literature (see for example, Cornwall 2007; 2008). Other literature cites specific examples of this phenomenon, including participatory spaces involving disabled people that have challenged the norms of deliberation (Barnes, 2008).

These observations all contribute to the conclusion that the comment space was one of contestation and struggle. Another aspect to this argument concerns who was invited to participate. From this perspective, Benefits and Work's use of the campaign email network to assemble an 'ad-hoc public' or 'counter public' to respond to the Green Paper was a way of challenging the power of the consultation organisers (see section 5.6). This is in line with the concept that power is relational and a process which organised resistance can interrupt (Clegg, 1989).



A closer examination of the role of B&W contributes to understanding the dynamics of power in the consultation. B&W's ties to 26,000 campaign members gave it a network centrality which the literature associates with influence<sup>33</sup>. It was the only actor in the campaign email network which had access to the email database. The assurance by B&W at the end of the campaign that it was going to dispose of this database indicates the value ascribed to this kind of resource<sup>34</sup>. B&W's position in this network can be compared to some extent with the 'influentials' or 'broadcasters' identified in the Twitter networks active in the Spanish indignados movement (González-Bailón et al., 2012). These two Twitter categories had good network connectivity defined by their large numbers of followers and, in the case of 'influentials', additionally by the fact that they receive more messages than they send. When users in these categories send a tweet, it is automatically widely disseminated by virtue of their large number of followers. This is akin to the position of influence B&W had in the campaign network. Their network connectivity meant that when they reported in their emails that large numbers of people were taking action, this had the capacity to trigger action by people on the basis that they knew others in their network were acting (this is a basic understanding behind the idea of cascades – see González-Bailón et al., 2012). The analysis also showed that B&W acted as a broker, providing a bridge between carers and disabled people. This again highlights the power B&W gained from its position in the network (see section 5.6).

However it would misrepresent my findings to imply that B&W had sole influence in the campaign network. As the analysis showed, individuals spread the email in a horizontal manner among a number of mostly pre-existing networks. There was also evidence, in those networks, that people were spreading the message further to other networks with which they were involved. All these spaces provided an opportunity for people to interact with the email's portrayal of participation in the Green Paper, possibly rejecting, reinterpreting or assimilating it with understandings of identity or participation already present within those networks. This process of interaction

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<sup>33</sup> There are many ways to measure actors location within networks and therefore their potential influence but one of the simplest is the number of ties which actors receive from other actors in the network (Diani, 2003b, p.107)

<sup>34</sup> The assurance was made in the context of countering criticism that B&W might benefit commercially from leading the campaign (see p.125 and Appendix 7, 11 August email).

diluted B&W's influence.

The campaign emails and the responses to them can, therefore, be seen as central to the dynamic processes that make and remake the networks identified in this research. This remaking of networks occurred at a structural level because the email linked the other networks to the campaign and the green paper networks. But because a communicative process (in this case the email) formed the link, it carried particular meanings. As Jasper (2009, p.93) points out, networks do not just consist of "mechanical interactions" but also of cultural understandings.

In order to fully understand power relations in this process of collective action, consideration must also be given to the ways in which these networks were bounded. Some were more spatially bounded than others, for example many of the forums require participants in discussions to register as members. Boundaries of perception were also present in the basis for membership of such networks, which framed the issue in subtle ways. For example, encountering the campaign via a charity articulating disability in terms of vulnerability would give a different impression than if it was encountered via a blog written by an activist articulating a social model of disability. The networked power relations of a blog also differ from those of a forum. The blogger, compared to a forum participant, is more centralised both in terms of their position in the structure and in the format of discussion. The disparity between those who produce content online and those who consume is highlighted in Dutton and Blank (2011). Producing content consists of creative activities such as updating a personal profile on a social networking site, writing a blog, or posting messages. These activities put producers in a position of greater influence over others than passive consumers experience. Writing a blog is still a fairly minority pastime, carried out by 23% of all users but by only 0.2% of retired people (Dutton and Blank, 2011, p.27). Overall, retired people are less likely to produce content than students or employed people and, as a result, miss out on this form of influence. The ability to produce content rather than simply respond to it brings a greater potential for agenda setting. This relates to the discursive facet of power discussed earlier (see pp.57-59). The Green Paper consultation can indeed be envisaged a struggle between various parties to set the agenda. This struggle took place at least partly in an online

terrain, so the power relations inherent in the internet, as a network of networks, are a highly relevant factor.

One of the major constraints to participation in the online response to the Green Paper was access to the internet itself. The analysis of the campaign and the comments shows that most of those who contributed to the online consultation were in one or more of the following categories, they were disabled, elderly or carers. As discussed in Chapter 3 and Appendix 5, these groups are subject to various physical, social and economic barriers to internet access. In particular being disabled means a person is more likely to be poor (see p.86). Not only is a low income one of the most enduring barriers both to access and to patterns of use, it is also strongly associated with people becoming ex-users of the internet. Dutton and Blank (2011, p.56) report that a “striking” result of their research is the continuous steady rise in the proportion of people who have become ex-users as a result of the cost of the internet. In 2011, 62% of ex-users of the internet said it was too expensive, compared to 50% in 2009, and 35% in 2007 (Dutton and Blank, 2011, p.56).

In reaching a conclusion to these points, it is useful to draw on the analogy of a football game to describe the interplay of structure and agency, which Elias (1991) and later Crossley (2002) reference. This captures the way in which ‘rules’ bound the activity of ‘players’ but those rules are a social product in the first place, and they may be changed over time.

The capacity of people to participate in the online commentary was bounded in multiple ways. First, factors such as poverty and education constrain access to the internet. Second, the architecture of the internet determines what is ‘visible’ to those who can access it. Also, people’s online networks shape the way in which they encounter an issue such as the Big Care debate in a digital context. The argument that network effects can either exacerbate or ameliorate existing inequalities is discussed in DiMaggio and Garip (2012) and was outlined on p.58. This includes consideration of the way in which decisions about whether to adopt beneficial practices is affected by, for example, social learning and normative pressure - influences which operate via networks. In the context of my research, such arguments would apply to the

decision about whether to participate in the comment making on the Green Paper and the manner of that participation. Also relevant to my research, is the question of how people use the internet, whether they are producers or consumers, and the power implications of these roles (Dutton and Blank, 2011). Another set of constraints exists in the bounds of perception. This affects people's understandings of everything from the purpose of welfare to the meanings attached to being disabled. All of these boundaries are fluid to a greater or lesser degree and conceiving of power as a process, rather than something fixed or reified, captures this (Clegg, 1989).

Clegg (1989) does, however, make the point that power can achieve a fixed quality where relations are habitually reproduced. It is clear that while the consultation process created a space where power could be contested, the next steps in the policy process were less open to influence. For example, the "public" was not invited to influence the manner and degree to which the consultation informed the White Paper. Differentiating participatory opportunities according to how it is determined who attends, what is on the agenda, and whether policy impacts are realised is a central part of many critiques of the participation (see for example, Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006; Bochel et al., 2007; Lister, 2007; Beetham et al, 2008; Cornwall, 2008; Fox, 2009).

But aside from direct influence on policy, the process of collective action develops both the structure of the networks involved and the understandings of the actors who comprise them. A view of power which considers it located in relations helps clarify this point:

"Interaction shapes actors making them capable of more sophisticated and complex interactions which both shape them further and shape the wider network of interactions and relations comprising the structures of the social world." (Crossley, 2010, p.103)

The importance to governance of self-organising networks of actors is a key point made by Guibernau (2001, p.29-30). Governance is differentiated from government by the increased relevance of non-government actors such as pressure groups and

social movements (ibid). Set in this context, the expansion of online networks that occurred in the course of the Green Paper can be seen to have the potential to disrupt the power relations of policymaking, although full consideration should also be given to the substantial forces working in favour of maintaining the status quo.

### **8.3 Challenging the institutional/extra-institutional divide**

As Chapter 2 showed, a binary division between institutional and extra-institutional action underpins many social movement perspectives on collective action. My research is an addition to the literature which suggests that this is questionable (see also McAdam et al., 2001; Barnes, 2009; Newman and Clarke, 2009).

The previous section showed that viewing power as a networked and dynamic phenomenon enables various observations to be made regarding its manifestation in the consultation. These include the idea that B&W was central to assembling an ad-hoc public to participate in the online consultation. The analysis of the campaign emails and the official text shows the contrasting ways in which the purpose and meaning of participation was presented. The campaign emails portrayed the consultation as a “fight” in which people needed to come together to save their benefits from a threat. Reference to the literature on e-participation helps illustrate the understanding of democracy underlying this presentation (see Chadwick and May, 2003; Dahlberg, 2011). B&W’s stance accords with a perception of democracy as comprising a struggle between groups with opposing interests. Collectivity and contest replace the notions of individuality or consensus which distinguish liberal-individualist and deliberative notions of democracy (Dahlberg, 2011). This counter-publics perspective raises the possibility that participation can be subverted or re-interpreted so that it challenges the balance of power, rather than reinforces it.

From this point of view, assuming that real change is only associated with extra-institutional is to overlook the possibility of subversion. The idea of subversive citizens is developed in Barnes (2009). The argument is that new participative spaces can offer opportunities to challenge policies and the power of those delivering public services through autonomous action among user groups, community groups and

social movements. Barnes argues that such groups have to make decisions about whether to “take advantage of” the opportunities which more participative approaches to policy making open up, or to remain autonomous and exert pressure from outside (ibid, p.9). “In practice many do both and experience suggests that it is too simplistic to associate subversion solely with action outside the official sphere of participation” (ibid, p.10).

A further cause to question the institutional/extra-institutional dichotomy arises from taking a network perspective. Viewing the state as a networked phenomenon, rather than a monolithic entity, helps illustrate the way in which many of the new spaces for participation opened up under New Labour transcended the clear boundaries between institutional and extra-institutional spaces and became sites of struggle (Barnes, 2009; Newman and Clarke, 2009). The comments space on the Big Care website fits the criteria of an institutional space because it was part of a website the Department of Health created and controlled. However, links between this space and the campaign network blurred the boundaries between institutional and extra-institutional. A stark example of this is the hyperlinks that one commenter included within their comments, connecting the official space with the Benefits and Work’s website (see p.162). Links to the Big Care executive summary comment page were also included repeatedly in the campaign emails and appeared on the B&W website, as well as those in other parts of the campaign network. In this way, the Big Care comment page became part of the campaign network.

The boundary between institutional and extra-institutional politics was also blurred by the fact that the campaign to enroll people to comment on the green paper was closely linked to the campaign to sign the petition to protect disability benefits. Petitions fit more comfortably into notions of extra-institutional politics. The analysis shows that the same online networks were associated both with the consultation space and the petition site. These structural links were also reiterated in the framing of the two activities. The campaign emails portrayed participation in both the petition and on the comment pages in similar terms, as part of the campaign to “save benefits” from the threat the Green Paper posed. Because the same networks were involved in both types of activity, those participating in them were exposed to the same online

conversations and representations of collective identity and injustice.

If, as my research suggests, it is accepted that the boundaries between institutional activity and extra-institutional activity are blurred, it is difficult to maintain the notion that collective action in institutional settings must be of a conforming nature: a binary distinction between conforming and conflictual activity is difficult to apply at the point where institutional activity shades into extra-institutional. A more compatible perspective is to view participation as a continuum, stretching from conforming to confrontational activity (Postmes and Brunsting, 2002; Diani and Bison, 2004). My research is an empirical example of the point. The online comment-making on the Green Paper was a boundary crossing phenomenon. It does not fit neatly into traditional understandings of protest, and at the same time it displays a degree of subversion that is not associated with the apparently conforming activity of commenting on a government consultation. Not only did the consultation extend associated networks in structural terms, it also initiated exchanges within those networks which developed understandings of injustice, identity and participation. Overall, the campaigners can be seen to have claimed this participatory opportunity but there were also various dynamics which limited the degree to which this constituted a challenge to the power of policymakers.

#### **8.4 Collective action as a circular process**

Convention dictates that the description of a process be styled chronologically, proceeding from the beginning to the end; collective action has often been described in this way (for example, Passy, 2003). But my conceptual framework suggests that online at least, collective action should itself be regarded as a driver, in the sense that taking part in such a collective act has the capacity to feed into the other drivers. This idea is touched on in Van Zomeren (2008) (not in an online context) but not fully developed: “one can also wonder how participation in collective action itself affects identity, injustice, and efficacy” (ibid, p.525). Klandermans (2002) is more decisive on the point but only as applied to group identity and protest: “Group identification fosters protest participation and protest participation reinforces group identification.” (ibid, p.887). Diani and Bison (2004) also recognise the dynamic

nature of collective action in their typology of collective action processes but this is also with particular reference to collective identity rather than all three drivers.

My research findings support the view of collective action as a circular process in a number of ways. Firstly there is ample evidence of a lack of temporal linearity regarding the process of collective action. Unlike a demonstration or many other forms of collective action which have been the subject of similar research, the collective action in this case took place contemporaneously with the campaign, enabling feedback loops to operate during the course of action. For example, people made comments and then reported back into the campaign networks that they had done so. The number of comments was also reported by B&W in its emails which would have been received by people who had not (possibly, yet) commented themselves. An individual was, by the rules of the consultation, supposed to make a comment only once, but this would not have precluded them revisiting the comment space, reading and being influenced by others' comments. The consequent lack of temporal linearity is the characteristic of the networked digital environment which Castells called "timeless time" (Castells, 2000, p.494).

In addition the research showed that the campaign promoted more than one form of collective action, for example, signing the petition. So it seems reasonable to judge that people would have taken a number of actions over time through their involvement in overlapping networks. There was evidence that once individuals had taken actions, including making comments on the Green Paper, they frequently reported back to the campaign network that they had done so (see Appendix 8). This would have enhanced the sense of efficacy of those in the network and perhaps contributed to collective identity and a shared sense of injustice. This could have encouraged others to take the same act as the individual reporting back or it might have encouraged that individual to take another act. Research based on Facebook has found that friends who are exposed to friends' sharing behaviour are several times more likely to share than same information and share sooner than those who are not exposed (Bakshy et al., 2012).



The existence of the comment space also materially extended the networks of those involved in comment making. As the campaign unfolded in the background, links between pre-existing and newly formed networks were continuously formed. In this dynamic process, the comments space became part of an unfolding network of online networks.

The ongoing development of parts of those networks is evident in much of what has occurred since the Green Paper consultation. Some of the bloggers and campaigners involved in that consultation have gone on to be part of an developing online network which has succeeded in challenging both government policy and mainstream media representations of disabled people (see Appendix 2). Peter Beresford sums up these developments:

“Service users are blogging, vlogging, podcasting, tweeting and communing within their own Facebook groups. More and more they are both a physical and virtual presence, from flash mobs to pickets and demonstrations. These are not isolated instances but the vanguard of new kinds of activism and collective action.” (Beresford, 2012, p.76)

An open question is how much these new activist networks are linked into the networks which my research suggested were based on an experiential identity, as opposed to a politicised collective identity (see pp.190-191). It would be hard to deny that the online networks of disabled people have not developed (see Appendix 2) and this lends credence to viewing collective action as a process, but more research would be necessary to determine the detail of the networks’ developments since the end of 2009.

## **8.5 Reflections on the conceptual framework**

To recap, the framework was a modified version of a social psychology model of collective action, and as such envisaged the drivers of collective action as collective identity, group injustice and group efficacy. These drivers are seen as inter-related

and have the capacity to reinforce one another. The action itself is also a driver in that it feeds back into the process. I modified the model by being more explicit that online collective action is a process, takes places via digital networks and that these networks manifest power. The framework was designed to structure the empirical work, which it did by directing attention towards its constituent parts. This enabled me to focus on the meanings of the drivers, their inter-relation and the networks involved in the collective action.

The research shows many instances where collective action and a shared sense of injustice were expressed in the course of the collective action on the Green Paper. Not many participants in the consultation directly expressed efficacy but the belief that a sense of efficacy drives collective action was implicit in the many references which Benefits and Work made to the numbers of people signing up to its campaign and making online comments on the Green Paper (see p.130).

The analysis also reinforces the idea that there is a close relationship between the drivers. Although at an abstract level it may be useful to distinguish between the drivers, my research shows that, in practice, they were frequently exhibited in combination. This supports the idea that collective identity, in particular, has the capacity to enhance the other drivers (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). While my research revealed that identity and injustice were most usually expressed in relation to a group, it also raised the question of what 'group' means in the context of injustice, in particular. Two concepts prove useful here: empathy and the other one-ness (see section 7.4). It is also helpful to conceive the relationship of the commenter to a 'group' and what defines that group as a dynamic phenomenon.

In Chapter 1, I drew attention to tendency of definitions of collective action based on social movement theory to be formulated with strong reference to groups. My research suggests that it is useful to make a distinction between social groups and networks in understanding collective action (where the presence of a sense of collective identity defines social groups, following Young, 2011).

As I argued in Chapter 7 (sections 7.4 and 7.5), when an individual feels that a particular group is being treated unjustly, this might make salient feelings of collective identity with that group. In that case, collective identity and group injustice occur together: a sense of one-ness is felt with those suffering the injustice. By contrast, it may be that, the expression of shared sense of injustice is better characterised as a form of empathy. In this case, the person expressing empathy may not also feel a sense of collective identity with the group.

When the notion of networks is introduced into this argument, it becomes clear that there may be a mutually reinforcing relationship between a person empathising with a group and them sharing the same networks. My research suggests the following scenario is likely. In an online setting, people who are carers and people who are disabled may well both be members of a network based around the experience of living with a particular impairment. In this case, the network may not overlay a social group so much as overlap it.

The same reasoning could be applied to 'group' efficacy. Use of the term group could be taken to mean the feeling is shared with one's social group - that is, in relation to people with whom you share a collective identity. While a sense of (social) group efficacy was likely to have been felt among some of those involved in collective action, in others the sense of efficacy seems more likely to have been shared on the basis of people being in the same networks; in other words, the sense of sharing was more instrumental than affective.

This reasoning follows a particular insight from my research: that is, that lower-level networks are a meaningful vantage point to assess collective identity and its role in driving collective action. My research suggests that some networks involved in the dispersion of the campaign email were strongly based around collective identity, while others were less so. This was one of the benefits of taking a network perspective. However the discussion also highlights the reflexivity of my approach: in the course of my research I improved on my original conception of 'group' in the context of online collective action.

The network perspective of my framework also highlights the way those involved in the collective action process were exposed to the views and actions of others. Because the action took place over an extended timeframe, those involved in the campaign networks were open to influence from the knowledge that others were making comments, as well as to the content of those comments. In this way feedback loops were a feature of the action. The concept of networks is central to capturing the nature of this activity because it sensitises the observer to the spaces and manner in which information spread and ideas were shared.

The conceptual framework also proves a useful lens for considering the manifestation of power throughout the process and the ways in which it determined who participated and how. The online networks which were involved in the collective action were bounded in various ways. Within these constraints, however, participants were able to redefine the purpose and constituency of the consultation. This contributes to the conclusion that a strict distinction between institutional and non-institutional activity is difficult to maintain in an online setting. Networks overlap such boundaries and they also develop, in the course of collective action, in ways which present possibilities for cross-fertilisation between instances of collective action.

Another theme which came through from my qualitative analysis was that of trust, which was bound up in expressions of injustice and identity. I proposed in Chapter 7 that Cook et al.'s (2007) 'encapsulating interests' definition of trust dovetailed with my research (see p.203). If one takes the view that interests are not fixed, and, as Baldassarri (2009) argues, that shared interests emerge along with collective identity in the course of collective action, a relationship between trust, interests and collective identity is apparent. Looking in more detail at this issue is one way in which my research could be developed.

As demonstrated, the framework approach enabled me to reflect on aspects of my framework in the course of my research. However, at a more fundamental level, there were assumptions behind my framework which meant that my research took a particular direction. I now turn to considering those limitations.

One of the most basic was the decision to focus on collective action. Had I taken a deliberative democracy approach, my research would have been concerned with evaluating my data on the basis of how it measured up against some criteria of deliberation. Which criteria to use is a key point of debate in this literature and sympathetic critiques of it (for example, Graham 2008; 2009; Chadwick, 2009). One area of difference among these approaches is over the place of rationality. The more liberal deliberative perspectives have been criticised for privileging reasoning as the only relevant form for deliberation, thereby underplaying the importance of emotion, rhetoric and testimonials. I agree with the need to conceive of deliberation in this wider sense, but my framework de-emphasises private reasoning altogether in favour of attention to social and cultural influences. In addition, as I made clear in Chapter 1, I was less interested in the internet as a space of either deliberation or alternative discourse, than I was in its capacity for assembling or mobilising people. My orientation towards collective action was based both on where I felt there were gaps in the literature and on what seemed to be happening in practice (see sections 1.2, 2.3.7, 3.3.3 and 3.5).

My focus on the social and cultural influences of decision making reflects another set of assumptions inherent in my framework. These result from its basis in relational sociology (Elias, 1978; 1991; Crossley, 2002; 2010). They include a particular view on the interplay between structure and agency, an emphasis on the need to view actors as embedded in social relations and an avoidance of what Elias termed process reductionism (Elias, 1978 and see section 2.4.3 for a fuller discussion of these points). This means that I focus on structure, agency and the relationship between them in my research. My orientation was towards how the campaign message spread among online networks and the relationship between those networks, as well as on the indicators of a sense of collectivity within the comments. As a result, I was relatively inattentive to the motives of those individuals who made comments but did not demonstrate that they felt a sense of groupness. Although I quantify the numbers of commenters who did not express collectivity, I do not explore the explanations behind this. The particular relational approach I take also entails viewing decision-making as having both cognitive and affective components and in this way it dovetails with the social psychology model of collective action which is central to my

framework. Rather than a limitation of my framework, this aspect marks its breadth, especially when compared to other perspectives which conceive decision making as a purely cognitive process.

The same broadening applies to my inclusion of injustice, efficacy and identity in my framework. That said, by focusing on the psychological processes underlying collective action, exogenous factors such as the political environment are included through the prism of their interpretation rather than directly. This is a characteristic, however, which is seen as a strength of the approach (see p.59). But, one limitation in this regard is that including injustice as a driver for collective action orientates my research towards confrontational rather than consensual action. In understanding a collective effort to build a park or bridge, for example, the concept of 'interests' might be a more appropriate concept than that of injustice, although this would involve further theorisation since the notion of interests is highly contested. This point is discussed further in the next section, where rather than reflect on my framework as such, I discuss how it contributes to existing literature on collective action.

## **8.6 The place of my research in literature related to online collective action**

Much of the literature on online collective action is oriented to understanding why people engage in collective acts. Olson's highly influential framing of this issue as a question about why people decide to do something which does not appear to serve their own interests has been heavily critiqued (Olson, 1965). Many agree that one of its central problems is that it underplays the interconnection between individuals. This, as I have just discussed, is one of the assumptions underlying my own research and is a first step in delineating the literature and showing where my contribution sits.

Within this rather wide subdivision, the literature has taken a number of paths. Some focus on questioning other assumptions made by Olson (Bimber et al., 2005; Flanagin et al., 2006; Baldassarri, 2009). Others look more closely at particular motivations for collective action, showing how they operate in the context of interconnections

between people (Diani and Bison, 2004; González-Bailón, 2009; 2012); or in regard to the social individualism which characterises contemporary society (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). Others still, subdivide motivations into the underlying psychological processes which drive them, focusing either on understanding the set of processes (Postmes, 2007; Van Zomeren et al., 2008,) or particular parts of it (Ashmore et al., 2004). It is this last group of social psychology literature which my conceptual framework draws on most closely. The sections above which are structured around aspects of the framework have therefore focused most closely on the relation of my research to that body of literature. Section 8.7 looks in detail at other social psychology literature, reflecting on my findings in relation to that wider body of literature. This section, meanwhile, expands the discussion of the relation between my research and other particularly relevant literature.

One conceptual approach that has a lot of resonance with my work is Baldassarri (2009). A basic tenet of this paper is that:

“Collective action is made possible by the co-occurrence of individuals’ interest and group identity by first producing a shared representation of the collective good and second inducing a consistent course of action”  
(Baldassarri, 2009, p.394)

The idea is that the public good is not exogenous to the collective action, as many theories of collective action assume, but that the juncture of shared interest and group identity define the public (or collective) good. Applied to the Green Paper consultation, this suggests that shared identity and interest defined the collective good as participating in the consultation. On superficial consideration, this seems to fit with the way in which participants re-defined the purpose and constituency of the consultation. The consultation became not about social care in general but about “protecting DLA and AA”. This ‘shared interest’ attracted groups with differing identities to enroll in the cause and as they did so they became privy to others’ understandings of identity and injustice. Baldassarri’s (2009) portrayal fits with the notion from my conceptual framework that online collective action is a circular process. In such a setting it is possible to see how the co-occurrence of interests and

identity could “produce a shared representation of the collective good” (ibid p394). However, as already mentioned (see footnote p.199), the concept of interests is contested so this issue would need further examination, particularly in relation to injustice, before it was clear how compatible Baldassarri’s model is with my research.

Another key point Baldassarri makes is that conflict has a central role in shaping the “formation and transformation of collective identities and interests” (Baldassarri, 2009, p.394). The argument is that the essence of politics lies in the inherently conflictual nature of social choices and that defining a collective good involves actors segregating along the lines of their social identities. This aligns with a counter-publics view of democracy (Dahlberg, 2011) and my own emphasis on counter agency, drawing on Barnes and Prior (2009). My research differs from Baldassarri in a key respect however. It considers not only collective identity, and, via injustice, covers some of the ground which Baldassarri consigns to interests, but my research also includes efficacy among the potential drivers of collective action. Baldassari’s model does not directly address efficacy (2009).

Another approach which my findings partially support is Bimber et al. (2005). Bimber et al. (2005) reconceive collective action as a phenomenon of boundary crossing between private and public domains. In this view, traditional collective action theory is a special case of this wider theory. Bimber et al. (2005) use evidence from the digital domain to challenge two of the central tenets of Olson’s Logic, firstly that decisions about whether to free ride are discrete and, second, that formal organisation is central to locating and contacting participants in collective action. Regarding the free-riding decision, Bimber et al. (2005) argue that it is misleading to suggest there is a binary choice between participating or not in a public good. Instead a “second-order communality” exists whereby people contribute towards information repositories “without a clear intention or knowledge of contributing to communal information with public goods properties” (ibid, p.372). They cite contributing to discussion on bulletin boards or blogs as examples of this genre. Chadwick (2007, p.290) makes a similar point by referring to the creation of information in this manner as a “happy accident”.



This idea resonates with some of the activity behind the Green Paper. Only a small minority of those involved in the campaign network posted a comment on the Green Paper website. But the campaign as a whole forged connections, offered spaces for discussion, and built repositories of individual narratives about living on disability benefits, all of which can be seen as contributing to the collective good of participation in policymaking (Appendix 2 details developments in activism over benefits cuts since the Green Paper). Wider conceptions of efficacy also recognise that the benefits of collective action are not confined to influencing policymaking on the issue in question, as discussed on pp.63-64 (Hornsey et al., 2006; Beetham et al., 2008).

However, the way in which Bimber et al. privilege the internet's benefits regarding collective action organising presents problems in the context of my research. Their stance that socio-technological devices simply affect the mix of opportunities and costs associated with political organising has been critiqued elsewhere (Hussain and Howard, 2012, p.15). This perspective on organising can also be seen as exemplifying of a utilitarian view of human nature and rationality associated with theories inspired by RMT and political process theory (Carty, 2011). These accounts fail, as a result, to provide an adequate account of other, more affective, considerations such as identity or group-based anger.

A piece of literature which is compatible with aspects of my research is Diani and Bison (2004). Their paper distinguishes social movement processes from other "cognate collective action dynamics" (ibid, p.281), the former being characterised by the presence of collective identity. The other processes they identify are coalitional processes, which are instrumental processes where collective identity does not play a role and organisational processes, in which people identify mainly with the organisation. Diani and Bison observe that within any empirical instance of collective action, "one can normally detect more than one collective action process" (ibid, p.285).

My findings support both of these points. I found that the expression of collective identity was not uniform across the 'empirical instance' of the Green Paper,

suggesting, as Diani and Bison do, that various processes were at work. Making a general statement about collective identity at the level of this instance or event would therefore be misleading. My research suggests it would make more sense to characterise collective identity at network level. The exposure of people to others' views of identity and injustice during the collective action process also suggests that different collective action processes did not simply co-exist but also intertwined – a point which Diani and Bison do not address. My research also differs from Diani and Bison in regard to their interest in establishing the difference between what they call network identity and organisational identity. This implies that networks cannot represent organisations: an assertion which is difficult to maintain in an online environment. This perhaps reflects the fact that Diani and Bison formulated their typology at a time when digital communications technologies were less prevalent. Their orientation towards social movement processes and the fact that these are defined by collective identity operating at a network level also means that they do not give attention to a sense of injustice or efficacy in relation to networks.

Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) typology of large-scale action networks has a certain amount in common with Diani and Bison's (2004) typology of collective action processes. They describe what they term 'ideal' types of network, which are differentiated by whether the logic of action is collective or connective, although they point out that, in practice, various formations of collective and connective action may occur within an ecology of action (Bennett and Segerberg, p.754, also see my discussion of this literature on p.78-79). The network distinctions they make resonate with my research, although I suggest a meaningful level at which to differentiate the networks is at a small, rather than large, scale. If my research is considered with reference to their typology, it becomes clear that the 2009 Green Paper collective action, considered as a whole, is very much a hybrid; it shares characteristics with various categories across the divisions in Bennett and Segerberg's typology. First of all, many of the Green Paper comments simultaneously combined personal narrative and expressions of collectivity, a feature which Papacharissi (2011) observes as a characteristic of the way people present and promote their identities on social networks. Secondly, people expressed a variety of collective identities in their comments, rather than the overarching collective identity of campaigner which B&W

used as a frame in its emails. The pattern of organising was both vertical and horizontal: B&W had a centralised role in its ad-hoc campaign network but that network was formed from many pre-existing networks. So the understandings of identity, injustice and so on present in any one network would have interacted with the understandings of other networks in a dynamic process. This interaction would also have occurred within the comment space, where people were free to read one another's comments. The sense of collective identities did not occur as a result of framing by an SMO or similar organisation, therefore, but rather is best conceived as a process that takes place via interactions within networks. Meanwhile, the sentiment most commonly expressed in the comments was what I termed a shared sense of injustice. This seemed to be more of a unifying theme than any single collective identity.

It is instructive to compare the way injustice was expressed in the 2009 Green Paper consultation with its role in the recent Occupy, Indignados and Egyptian protests. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue that a key factor in the Occupy and Indignados protests was their framing in such a way that people could personalise their engagement. The memes of "we are the 99%" and "los indignados" (the indignants) united politically divergent and socially individualised activists. Gerbaudo (2012) emphasises the necessity of emotions for building a sense of solidarity, arguing that the notion of indignados created a platform of "emotional condensation" which transformed "individual experiences of frustration and indignation into a collective political passion" (Gerbaudo, 2012, p.83). In the 2009 Green Paper consultation, there was arguably less work to be done in building solidarity since, as my findings show, collective identities were expressed in many online comments. However, the shared sense of injustice expressed in 75% of comments did seem an important unifying theme across commenters who identified themselves with reference to various groups, including disabled people and carers. These were not, therefore, expressions of individual experiences of indignation so much as a variety of collective ones.

A key point of divergence between the 2009 Green Paper consultation and the Occupy, Indignados and Arab Spring protests is that the former was an online protest and the latter culminated in protests in squares and streets. According to Gerbaudo

(2012), the bodily assembly in public places provides a sense of physical communion unmatched by social media interactions. As I said in the introduction, my research is a snapshot taken just as these latter movements were taking off. Beresford (2012) draws attention to the way in which more recent activism over cuts to disability benefits has included physical protest (see p.216). But many individuals falling into the category of disabled people face particular challenges in regards to participating in marches and occupations. A compensating factor, my research shows, is that people who identified themselves as disabled were also particularly likely to express collective identity. The implications for disabled people of collective protest becoming both more embedded in social-media and more prone to be enacted in the streets is therefore an important area for future research.

Diani and Bison (2004), Bennett and Segerberg (2012) and Gerbaudo (2012) all, however, give relatively little direct attention to efficacy. This subject is addressed in another body of work I have mentioned over the previous chapters (for example, Granovetter, 1978; Valente, 1996; González-Bailón, 2009; 2012). This research is consistent with mine in its appreciation of the centrality of interconnections to understanding collective action. The emphasis on thresholds in such approaches focuses attention on the more cognitive elements of decision making, however. Knowledge about how many others have taken action is considered key to tipping an individual into taking action themselves. Actors are understood to be heterogeneous in their inclination to participate in that they have different thresholds. Different thresholds mean that two actors might be exposed to the information that the same specific numbers of people in their network have taken action. For one of the actors this is sufficient incentive to persuade them to act and for the other it is insufficient. These studies suggest or imply that exogenous factors lie behind differing thresholds but these are not fully explored. González-Bailón (2013) says that it is more effective to receive a message about a petition from a friend than from an organisation you don't know, but it is not clear if she attributes this to an individual-level, cognitive response to social pressure or to an affective response such as collective identity. My research suggests a group rather than individual level approach is appropriate here and that collective identity is a candidate for explaining different thresholds. A question for future research would be to see whether lower thresholds are associated

with higher levels of collective identity and whether these higher levels can be demonstrated by reference to online networks. A pertinent question would be whether an individual told about a petition through a network of people with whom they share collective identity would be more likely to sign (all other things being equal) than if they heard about it through a network with a more instrumental basis. This suggestion is founded in my conception of decision making as a part-cognitive, part-affective process that evolves out of social interactions.

Another way in which my research diverges from studies which focus on thresholds is that I do not consider efficacy just in regards to knowledge about how many others are taking part. I also consider it as encompassing an evaluation of whether action is worthwhile in its effect, which as argued above is not just confined to its influence on policy. This enables my research to highlight that it was clear during the consultation process how government ministers and civil servants were responding to the level and nature of comments. This was possible both because the consultation process took place over a few months and because online connections helped share this information. By positioning efficacy as one of a number of inter-related drivers in a circular process, it is possible to reflect on its role in collective action in a broader manner than some other literature on efficacy allows.

## **8.7 Discussion of my research in relation to the social psychology literature on collective action**

This research has at its heart a model of collective action drawn from social psychology. The most relevant social psychology literature was reviewed briefly at the start of the thesis but this section returns to a wider selection of that literature in order to reflect on it in more detail from the perspective of the research findings.

At the time this thesis started, there had been “a new generation of interest and vigor in the social psychological study of collective action”, as Wright (2009, p.859) discusses in a review of that literature. Over the previous 20-25 years, much of the social psychology literature on collective action has sat within a broader category of literature termed the social identity approach, which is a theory of group processes

and intergroup relations that extends beyond the confines of social psychology. Although not exclusively focused on collective action, social identity theory has helped challenge and refine accounts of collective action that conceive actors in the relatively rational and individualistic terms typified by Olson's Logic of Collective Action (Olson, 1965).

Two theories comprise the social identity perspective: social identity theory (SIT) and its extension, self-categorisation theory (SCT). SIT is based on the understanding that part of our sense of self derives from the groups to which we feel we belong (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). There are multiple possible selves or identities corresponding to the multiplicity of our social relations, and context determines which social category becomes salient at any given time. Self categorisation theory (SCT) (Turner et al., 1987), elaborates on this approach, specifying the interaction between inter- and intra-group psychological processes. There are various interpretations and applications of these theories, one cluster of which focuses largely on prejudice and another on collective action. Within the collective action cluster are a number of models built on SIT and SCT. One of these is the social identity model of collective action (SIMCA). This was developed in Van Zomeren et al., (2008) and was one of the main contributors to my original conceptual framework.

### **8.7.1 The place of group identity in the definition of collective action**

In his review of the social psychology literature on collective action, Wright highlights the lack of clarity over the definition of collective action itself. My own discussion of the meaning of collective action in Chapter 1 (p.14) refers to Wright and colleagues' much-referenced definition, noting its emphasis on groups.

“A group member engages in collective action any time that he or she is acting as a representative of the group and where the action is directed at improving the conditions of the group as a whole” (Wright et al., 1990, p.995).

Wright (2009) clarifies his approach further saying that for an action to be categorised as collective, the group identity needs to be the salient self-categorisation

and group concerns need to motivate the action. He adds that, as a result, “some joint actions by large groups don’t qualify as collective action if the individual actors are motivated by personal self-interest” (ibid, p.861).

The distinction between personal self interest and group interest is not one on which my research focused directly but it is a key issue in social psychology literature on collective action (see Blackwood and Louis, 2012, for a review). Bernd Simon, Stefan Stürmer and colleagues developed a dual pathway model to collective action (Simon et al., 1998), building on earlier work by Bert Klandermans and Dirk Oegema (Klandermans, 1997; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987). It proposes that there are two independent pathways to a willingness to participate in collective actions in social movements. One is based on cost-benefit calculations (including normative considerations) and the other is based on collective identification as an activist (Simon et al., 1998, p.646). Collective identification as an activist is a group level psychological process, whereas cost-benefits calculations are associated with the activation of personal identities. As this strand of thinking has developed, proponents have been careful to emphasise that the dual pathway should not be taken to imply that rational or instrumental motives should be associated only with personal level processes and irrational or emotional motives with group level processes. The notion of group efficacy, for example, contradicts a separation along these lines (see for example Van Zomeren et al., 2012). Another strand of this research has developed the idea that strong and/or salient social identity (typified in political activists) is associated with identity-related motives overwhelming instrumental considerations at group or individual levels (Stürmer and Simon, 2004, 2005, 2009; Van Zomeren et al., 2008, cited in Blackwood and Louis, 2012). In this case, social identity related motives may provide a pathway to collective action, independent of the involvement of group efficacy.

One problem with specifying dual-process models of collective action is the risk they are interpreted in such a way as to lend support to the idea that the self and group are fundamentally opposed or antagonistic. The social identity approach critiques this classic dichotomy but early formulations of SIT, and superficial interpretations of SIT and SCT can appear to support the notion that individual and social identities are

mutually incompatible: when one is switched on, the other is switched off. Postmes and Jetten (2006) present a body of literature which challenges such binary thinking, exploring instead the role of the individual in the group. Blackwood and Louis (2012) build on this and related work to argue that, in the context of activists' involvement in collective action, individual cost-benefit calculations and social identity based emotional or unconscious motives become intertwined (Blackwood and Louis 2012, p.89).

The literature on collective action in a digital context tends to engage with these issues indirectly and only implicitly, via the concept of collective identity. Particular positions on collective identity are, however, consistent with particular positions on the issue of group versus personal interests. Following Wright, only if collective identity is salient in joint actions by large groups can the action can be considered collective. However, if it is accepted that individual and collective motivations are not antagonistic, demonstrating the salience of personal identity alone is not sufficient to rule out the joint action being categorised as collective.

This distinction helps show the implicit understandings of collective identity which underlie some strands of reasoning about online collective. An example concerns the argument that online action does not rely on collective identity to the degree that social movement theory predicts for traditional collective action. It follows that new theories of 'collective' action are required to account for online action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2011; 2012; Earl and Kimport, 2011). Where such arguments are based on counter posing the role in online action of personal identity processes and collective identity processes, the thinking echoes the non-compatibility argument: the joint action cannot be categorised as collective action because personal identity is salient, which implies that collective identity cannot be salient.

In the light of these controversies surrounding the understanding of collective identity, my stance at the start of the research was to proceed by defining collective action sufficiently widely to admit a range of types of collective action process within a broader category. This meant defining it with reference primarily to collective purpose rather than collective identity (see pp.14-15).



A similar approach is taken by sociologists Diani and Bison's (2004), who present a typology of collective action processes. Their typology comprises: coalitional processes, which are instrumental alliances not backed by significant identity links; organisational processes, in which collective action is carried out in reference to specific organisations; and social movement processes, which are unique in being defined by the enduring presence of collective identity. All of these sub-categories qualify for membership of the wider genre of collective action processes because they involve individuals and groups acting together and sharing a purpose.

Social psychologists Brunsting and Postmes (2002) also focus on purpose in their description of collective action, where they say that it refers to actions "undertaken by individuals or groups for a collective purpose, such as the advancement of a particular ideology or idea, or the political struggle with another group" (Brunsting and Postmes, 2002, pp.290-291).

My definition similarly focused on purpose but also referenced more economically-derived definitions of collective action, to make explicit that a collective purpose could also be instrumental as well as symbolic, for example lobbying an MP about road building, or contributing to Wikipedia (see pp.14-15 for earlier discussion on these points).

### **8.7.2 Applying definitions to the Green Paper data to clarify understanding**

In order to begin to explore the conceptual components of collective action in more detail, it is useful to apply the different understandings of collective action to the Green Paper research data.

In the first instance, the question is whether the response to the Green Paper can be described as collective action, when that concept is defined primarily with reference to collective purpose. Preliminary research revealed that Benefits and Work was central to a campaign to encourage people to comment on the Green Paper in an effort to "Save DLA and AA" from the perceived threat of the policy proposals. The

campaign name articulates a common purpose. Further analysis shows that the distribution of campaign emails coincided with peaks in comment making (see p.172) and that the emails themselves consistently framed participation in collective terms (see section 5.3). This suggests that those who subscribed to the campaign, and were therefore in receipt of the emails, would have been exposed to this version of the purpose of comment making. In addition, the analysis of the comments showed 98% were opposed to the Green Paper and that 75% exhibited a collective tone (ie., collective identity or group injustice were expressed). David Behan also commented in his blog that the issue of benefits was the one getting most attention in the comments; and the official report on the consultation included the issue of benefits as a major theme in the consultation responses generally (see respectively p.150 and Appendix 9). It is reasonable to conclude therefore that a majority of those commenting on the executive summary pages shared the sense that they were resisting a threat to disability benefits. That said, a minority of individuals' comments exhibited no collective language or sentiment and it is possible these individuals encountered the consultation knowing nothing about the campaign and not sharing the idea that commenting on the Green Paper was about protecting disability benefits. For this reason, one cannot conclude, on the basis of a collective-purpose definition, that all of those responding to the Green Paper were engaged in collective action. But a majority do appear to have been.

If collective action is defined by collective purpose, then, the Green Paper action can be described as an example of collective action but sitting within a wider instance of online political participation. The fact that the definition does not describe all of what happened does not, in itself, prove it inadequate or not useful. Rather, it suggests that, in practice, collective action might not always occur in a discrete manner but may occur in tandem with action that of a more individual kind. This reasoning is also consistent with the idea that within any empirical instance of collective action, more than one process usually features (Diani and Bison, 2004).

On the other hand, applying Wright's more stringent definition to the Green Paper action: for the action to qualify as collective requires that the commenters were demonstrably group members, acting as representatives of the group, with the

purpose of improving conditions for the group as a whole. On this basis, only a small number of commenters could be said to have engaged in collective action. The others would be split between two categories: those engaging in joint action and those engaging on their own independent basis. The smaller number eligible for the collective action group reflects my decision during coding that people could be considered as exhibiting collective identity only if they expressed that they belonged to the group in question (see section 6.2.1). Comments were open format and there was no obligation for people to reveal anything in particular about themselves, so only 43% of comments qualified as exhibiting collective identity. But even in this smaller group, it wasn't always clear from the comments that people were trying to improve conditions for "their" group. Many people seemed to be identifying with more than one group, or a rather amorphous group. In the larger category of comments expressing some kind of groupness, it was often ambiguous who commenters were representing, for example disabled people, vulnerable people, and second-class citizens were all referenced (see section 6.2.1). In short, there was often a strong sense of "we" in the comments but the boundaries of "we" were unclear. In addition, within single comments, personal narratives often accompanied group-oriented expressions, so it would be difficult to decide whether that these participants were acting exclusively to improve conditions for the group as a whole or whether personal level motivations were also in play. Following Wright, a large number of participants would therefore have to be categorised as participating in joint action rather than collective action, due to the rather ill-defined (but nonetheless evident) sense of groupness in their comments.

This exercise in applying definitions is useful in drawing attention to the existence of a grey area: collective action which is characterised by a shared sense of purpose and which appears motivated by a sense of groupness but maybe not, under the strictest definitions, by collective-identity. Putting aside for the moment what to term this form of action, its existence suggests the need for deeper analysis of 'groupness' in collective action. The next section demonstrates that dynamic conceptions of collective identity are useful in this regard.

### 8.7.3 Making sense of the collectives in collective action

Craig McGarty, Emma Thomas and colleagues (McGarty et al., 2009) argue that a failure to distinguish between social categories and psychological groups undermines the abilities of researchers to specify the collective identities that “actually underpin many instances of collective action” (ibid, p.839). The failure to understand the nature of the collectives in collective action, they argue, leads to a failure to understand collective action. This misunderstanding, they suggest, does not come from scholars working in the field of collective action research but rather “has been imported” from other areas of work on intergroup relations (ibid, p.841).

In order to address this deficit, they return to the theories at the foundation of social psychology collective action research: SIT and SCT. Turner’s (1982) definition of a social group included an important adjunct, according to McGarty et al. (2009). Turner defined a social group as “two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves or, *which is nearly the same thing, perceive themselves to be members of the same social category*” (Turner 1982, p.15, cited in McGarty et al., 2009, p.842, with emphasis added). “Perceive themselves” are the important words here and are key to what distinguishes the subjectively-felt in-group (the psychological group) from the objective social category, according to McGarty et al. This emphasis on perception, also introduces the notion of dynamism. McGarty et al. argue that SCT further underlines the subjective and dynamic nature of group membership, via the construct of category salience. Overall, McGarty et al. (2009) emphasise that group memberships are not invariant aspects of social structure because in-groups are not based on objective and static social categories.

McGarty, Thomas and colleagues are not alone in arguing that the interactive relationship between social structures and psychological processes is a fundamental element of social identity theory that is too often overlooked<sup>35</sup>. Drury, Reicher and colleagues also re-explore some of the key concepts of the social identity tradition but, in this case, it is part of an examination of psychological change in crowd and

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<sup>35</sup> Indeed, McGarty and Thomas (2009) make clear they are following the lead of Hopkins and Reicher (1997) in developing their ideas.

social movement events (Drury and Reicher, 2000; 2005; 2009). One of the key concepts they consider is the notion of context. Drury and Reicher (2000) argue that context should not be seen as external to and determining of identity and action. Rather, the understandings and actions of one group form the material reality which other groups face and which frame their understandings and actions.

Their research was based on an environmental protest during which the radicalisation of some protesters was associated with changing perceptions of the police and their reportedly increasingly violent actions. In this context, Drury and Reicher observed that it was clear that, “the ‘external reality’ confronted by campaign participants is constituted by the perceptions of the police as translated into their actions” (ibid, p.595).

These discussions are consistent with my own emphasis on viewing the relationship between structure and agency as mutually constitutive (see pp.56-57). In particular, the references I make to Ian Hacking’s description of the interactive relationship between individuals and the categories in which they find themselves are pertinent here (see p.95).

If once accepts the point that in-groups are subjective and therefore dynamic, the question arises: which commonalities might foster the formation of an in-group? McGarty et al. (2009) suggest that sharing an opinion is a central example. This is not to say that those who share an opinion necessarily share an identity. Rather, the argument is that recognition of sharing an opinion can lead to a form of shared identity. “People can come to perceive and define themselves in terms of their opinion group membership in the same way that they would with any other psychologically meaningful social category” (ibid, p.846). The examples which McGarty et al. (2009) give of this phenomenon are: the widespread collective action taken in response to the US invasion of Iraq, in which no social category bound people together; and union action, in which union members can be at odds with the social category of workers. McGarty et al. (2009) say that opinion based groups often form around opinion about the relations between social categories and groups, and in this regard they cite feminists. But they are also careful to distinguish their argument from those which suggest that developing a political consciousness is a necessary

step in collective action. They suggest that it is a mistake not to see the collective processes behind relatively rapidly formed protests such as the opposition by residents to the closure of a library, or by students to the change in an exam format. In these cases, there is merely agreement about a common cause rather than a politicised collective identity.

My own research supports the notion that an in-group might also form around a shared experience. The concept of experiential identity was useful in differentiating among the networks involved in the Green Paper action and also among the expressions of identity in comments (see p.194 and p.237). As with opinion-based group identity, it cannot be assumed that those who share an experience will necessarily share an identity but the notion of experiential identity relies on accepting the possibility that people can come to define themselves in terms of a group with whom they share experiences. Central to this argument is the understanding that psychologically meaningful groups are subjective, variable and context dependent.

#### **8.7.4 Reflecting on the collectives in action from the perspective of my data**

My initial conceptual framework drew on the work of sociologists, such as Melucci (1995), to suggest that collective identity should be conceived as a process (see p.61). But the idea that understandings of what constitutes the “group” is flexible, and may not align with social categories, developed from observations I made during the course of my inductive coding. This happened not only in regard to the concept of experiential identity (as just described) but, more profoundly, in the course of making sense of the “group” in “group injustice” (see pp.195-199). During the inductive thematic coding of the comments, it became clear that many of the commenters expressed a sense of injustice at a group level but it was not always clear that the group concerned was one that they felt themselves to be included in. I also observed that within comments, the groups mentioned often widened out into other, broader, categories, for example a commenter maybe first talked about “the disabled” and then about “the vulnerable”, “the poor” or “disadvantaged people” (see p.162). I responded to these phenomena at the subsequent deductive coding stage. First, I used the code

“a shared sense of injustice” to capture those instances where injustice was expressed at a group level but where it was not clear whether or not the commenter felt themselves to be part of the group concerned. Second, I used an “additional group descriptor” code to capture the broader categories (see p.162). Reflecting later on these issues, and on the observation that expressions of injustice and identity were often bound together in the comments, I concluded that the group around which shared feelings of identity and injustice cohere can be defined and redefined as part of the collective action process (see p.203).

Overall, this was a case of the data analysis prompting me to rethink aspects of my initial conceptual framework (rather than the reverse). In respect of the work of McGarty, Thomas and colleagues, I cannot claim that my data “proves” that psychologically meaningful groups are dynamic but I can say that such a conception is a useful way of accounting for various characteristics of the data from the Green Paper consultation.

My research also contributes to this discussion by linking it to the concept of networks. The network is a useful concept in this context for two reasons. Firstly, in an online environment, it is relatively easy to demonstrate that the architecture of networks changes over time and therefore that depictions of the architecture of networks should be thought of as snapshots (see section 4.5.3) in a dynamic situation. In line with the contention that identity is context dependent, it follows that as the structure of networks changes, their meaning may also be subject to change (see p.55). So perhaps membership of an online network based around a commonality other than a shared identity might provide an environment out of which collective identity develops, in much the same way that McGarty, Thomas and colleagues argue that it can develop from an opinion based group. Secondly, I found that smaller networks were a meaningful level at which to distinguish between the collectivities involved in the collective action. At this level, distinctions were clearer than in the more diverse networks of networks (such as the consultation space, or the B&W campaign membership), or than at the level of the action as a whole. From preliminary analysis, it appeared that some of these networks could be characterised as representing social categories, others as opinion-based or experience-based

groups in which a collective identity was salient and others as more instrumental groupings in which collective identity was less salient or seemingly absent. Further analysis of these networks might have enabled these distinctions to be established more clearly and perhaps also demonstrate that they were subject to change during the course of the action.

A point which Klandermans (2002) makes is a relevant caveat here. The salience of group membership is not sufficient to stimulate political activism. That depends on what evokes the salience. So although shared commonalities (perhaps expressed in online networks) can foster the emergence of psychologically meaningful groups, it does not follow that this process alone will necessarily foster collective action. As mentioned above, McGarty et al. (2009) modify the notion that identifying as an activist or having a politicised collective identity is a pre-requisite of collective action. They argue that a shared commitment to a cause may be sufficient.

From the Green Paper analysis, one candidate for provoking a salient identity inclined to collective action might be a shared sense of injustice: it was after all the attempt to make sense of the group in group injustice which helped lead me to a more dynamic conception of the group. But before accepting such an argument, it is necessary to revisit the issue of causality in models of collective action.

#### **8.7.5 Conceptions of group identity, injustice and efficacy, and their inter-relation**

The question of causality is tackled in Thomas et al., (2009) and Thomas et al., (2012) and is a key difference between SIMCA and their encapsulation model of social identity in action (EMSICA) model.

“One way of understanding these different models and the role of social identity processes is to ask whether the group membership *facilitates*, or gives rise to, the experience of injustice and efficacy (as per SIMCA); or whether the group membership *encapsulates* it, in the sense that those experiences of injustice and



efficacy come to inform who “we” are (as per EMSICA)” (Thomas et al., 2012 p.77).

In the case of EMSICA, the argument isn’t that injustice and efficacy precede or cause identity but that they are built into it or captured by it. In this way, EMSICA builds on SIMCA rather than being entirely at odds with it.

McGarty, Thomas and colleagues development of the EMSICA model is set within a discussion of how collective action might translate into social change. This, they suggest, requires an alignment between a salient social identity and relevant pattern of norms for emotion, efficacy and action. Their idea builds on previous theories of group emotions and collective efficacy by proposing that emotion and efficacy responses will be most important in motivating action when they are accepted as norms of the group that is to take that action. In this way, they are arguing that long-term social and political change requires the motives of action to be understood not merely as interlinked but as forming a single process: the meanings provided by identities need to be conducive to sustained action. By talking of a single process, this conception can also be seen as a challenge to the notion that pathways to action are dichotomous and independent.

The argument also raises the question of which emotions are relevant to collective action and of the relationship between emotion and injustice. My own stance, following Postmes (2007), was to view injustice as having both cognitive and emotional elements: the knowledge that inequity exists and the feeling that it is unjust (see p.62). Based on the literature, I identified anger as the emotion most often associated with action (see p.62). Anger at another agent or out-group is evoked when a group is acting on its own behalf. However, McGarty et al. (2009) focus their discussion on pro-social behaviour on the part of the advantaged for the disadvantaged in the context of international development, specifically anti-poverty. In this domain, they suggest, the emotion most likely to promote action is moral outrage, which is a distinct form of anger and is directed at a third party or system of inequality.

The work of Drury and Reicher on crowds and psychological change extends the discussion of emotion beyond the sphere of injustice and into that of efficacy (Drury and Reicher, 2000; 2005; 2009). This challenges the notion that efficacy is a cognitive rather than emotional pathway to action; it also addresses the issue of causality. Their concept of empowerment is central to these two points and straddles notions of both identity and efficacy. Empowerment is the realisation not only that something is possible at a rational level but it also includes a joy or delight associated with this realisation and its associated sense of social identity. The degree to which an action is understood as an expression of social identity determines how empowering it is. They cite the environmental protests by way of illustration: as a result of this action, participants became more confident not just in their personal selves (self-efficacy) but also in themselves as campaign participants. Drury and Reicher use the term collective-self objectification to describe this process.

They also invoke the concept of legitimacy, which straddles the notions of identity and injustice, but like empowerment, helps fuse all the elements of collective action that SIMCA distinguishes. Social identity, they argue, should be regarded as “a model of one’s position within a set of social relations along with the actions that are possible and proper (legitimate) given such a position” (Drury and Reicher, 2000, p.581).

In the context of the environmental protests, they describe the way in which one group of protesters saw themselves at the start of the action as responsible citizens and that as such, it was legitimate for them to protest. The subsequent aggressive actions of the police changed understandings of what was legitimate and their consequent self-understandings. There are similarities between this conception of legitimacy and McGarty’s notion of moral outrage, both standing in opposition to conceptions that a sense of injustice is a purely cognitive process.

Indeed, as part of their propositions, Drury and Reicher (2009) explicitly reject the dualism of symbolic versus instrumental determinants of collective action, arguing instead that emotion and reason are always interwoven as causes of collective action. They also take this argument a step further by distinguishing between cognitive and

strategic aspects of behaviour, both of which combine emotion and reason. The cognitive aspect is exemplified in the perception that the status quo is unfair and illegitimate, and the accompanying sense of shared grievance or outrage; and the strategic aspect is exemplified in the calculation that something can be done about the situation and this is related to the positive feelings associated with a sense of empowerment.

The concept of empowerment also supports and develops the notion that collective action is a non-linear process. Klandermans et al. (2002) demonstrates the bi-directional relations between identity and protest; Drury and Reicher extend this to include, via the concept of empowerment, the bi-directional relations between efficacy, injustice, identity and protest. This position is also consistent with Thomas and colleagues' observation that causality in collective action "can flow in all directions" (Thomas et al., 2009, p.206)

One consequence of establishing this non-linear causality is that it demonstrates the drawbacks of the phrase 'motivations for collective action'. The risks of 'motives' suggesting a linear process informed my preference for the term 'driver' (see p.64 and p.101). The term motives also suggests something that precedes action, which is at odds with the idea that norms and understandings may be expressed *in* action.

Overall then, the work of Drury and Reicher and McGarty, Thomas and colleagues highlights the interrelations, or fusing together, of what SIMCA conceives as three inter-related but more distinct processes – identity, injustice and efficacy (Postmes, 2007; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). However it is important to reiterate that this fusing is demonstrated within the context of a focus on longer-term social change rather than on collective action per se. The process characterised is therefore more akin to that which Diani and Bison term a social movement process. The ideas also resonate with the argument in Baldassarri (2009) that collective action is made possible by the coalescing of individual interest and group identity, and that this forms and transforms during protest (see my discussion of this point on pp.218-291). But, as pointed out, efficacy does not form a central part of Diani and Bison's nor Baldassari's representations (see section 8.6).

### **8.7.6 Inter-relations between drivers vary by type of collective action process**

As with SIMCA, my focus in the Green Paper consultation was on collective action rather than specifically on social change or social movements. The research was therefore oriented towards differentiating between possible variants of action, which might fall into the category of collective action conceived in its widest sense. So while I was alert from the start to the possibility of interrelations between what Postmes (2007) described as the underlying psychological processes, it served my purposes to avoid presumptions about interconnectedness.

However perhaps the most significant conclusion from the conceptual advances described in the previous sections is that while most were developed to characterise what occurs in a process of social change rather than in wider variants of collective action, their underlying premises help account for the collective processes behind a variety of forms of action. To dismiss any of these forms of action from the category 'collective action' is to risk overlooking their shared basis in these collective processes. Reflecting on my own findings from the perspective of this literature review, I conclude that it is useful to think of the interconnectedness between the drivers of collective action as a question of degree. The level of interconnectedness varies according to the type of action, which itself is on a spectrum.

At one end of the spectrum, there is the kind of collective action which seems most conducive to social change. This is characterised by a strong interconnectedness between the drivers: an aligning of what might otherwise be thought of as efficacy, injustice and identity into a single pro-action process of the sort discussed by Thomas and colleagues. It is conducive to the enduring psychological transformation which Drury and Reicher observed in the environmental protests. Indeed, the interconnectedness between the drivers at this end of the spectrum is sufficiently intense for other conceptualisations to be more appropriate for capturing the psychological processes involved (for example empowerment and legitimacy). At the other end of the spectrum is a type of collective action characterised by correspondingly weaker interconnectedness between the drivers. Here, the concepts

of justice, identity and efficacy are more appropriate and some of these processes may play a rather minimal role. Participants may, for example, share a sense of purpose but the strength and salience of group identity is likely to be limited. In this situation, acting together could even lessen feelings of affinity. Hornsey et al., (2005), for example, demonstrates that under certain circumstances exposure to a potentially salient grouping might constitute a categorisation threat, provoking feelings of resentment or discomfort. This may be a particularly relevant observation in regard to action in a digital terrain because of the ease with which diverse groups can assemble online. Action at this end of the spectrum is less likely to endure and is founded on a relatively instrumental and dispassionate appraisal of the benefits of acting together.

Between these two ends of the collective action spectrum is the grey area noted at the start of this review. In understanding the role of the drivers in this area, it is necessary to freeze what is a dynamic process: as the action unfolds, certain identities may be becoming salient and this may either provoke or be the result of a sense of injustice or efficacy felt in relation to others. Who those others are will, in turn, affect which identities come to the fore. There is the possibility of group identities and group senses of efficacy and injustice coalescing and thereby driving longer-term change or of them failing to do so. The direction the processes are taking will determine where on the spectrum they fall at any given point and correspondingly, whether the drivers are coalescing into a single process or are more distinct.

This raises the question of which units are most suitable for this form of analysis. The danger of approaches which take an “instance” of collective action and attempt to classify it as one type of process or another, or even of approaches which acknowledge that various processes may be present in a single event, is that they fail to fully capture the fluidity of the phenomenon: the way, for example, in which an individual or group of individuals with a particular set of understandings about who they are and why they are engaging with others in this form of action may find that those understandings are changed in the course of that action.

My research suggests that a network level focus makes more sense than attempting to

characterise an instance of collective action (or a collective action event) in this way (see section 7.3). This, in part, is due to the online nature of my study, which made networks relatively discernable, particularly in the campaign analysis. Drury and Reicher characterise the process of action they study by reference to the social and psychological groups involved in the action. In both cases because the process is considered to be dynamic, it is necessary to overlay this with temporal distinctions. Drury and Reicher (2000) for example describe the way in which the 'good citizens' and the 'activists' fused into one more cohesive group in the face of the police response during the environmental protests. Other examples of research track organisations or organisational networks through the course of action (Diani and Bison, 2004).

This time-sensitive approach could be replicated in an online setting, by taking a series of snapshots of the architecture of a campaign network and supplementing it with analysis of text generated in those networks at the different points, ideally both during and after the collective action 'event'. It might then be possible to illustrate the changes during the collective action process both in regard to understandings about identify efficacy and injustice and the structural context of those understandings.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusions**

### **9.1 The implications of my research for understandings of online collective action**

The purpose of this research was to explore what the participation in the online comments section of the 2009 Green Paper contributed to understandings of online collective action. It sought to build understanding of collective action by looking at its manifestation in a digital environment, and with regard to various groups who are under-represented in such an environment and whose political activity online has rarely been researched. It did this from the perspective of ‘an instance’ of collective action rather than, as others have done, from an organisational perspective (for example, Schumate, 2008; Ackland and O’Neil 2011). The wider backdrop of this thesis is the ongoing debate about the relationship between the internet and democracy. My research contributes indirectly to this broad field of literature by helping achieve a more comprehensive conception of online collective action as it occurs in practice.

In this section, I directly address my main research question (and in the process the lower-level questions identified on p.100). I do this by identifying two central implications of my research, positioned in reference to relevant understandings of collective action. I give examples of the ways in which my empirical findings support these points, although a more detailed account of the findings is contained in Chapters 5 and 6.

#### **9.1.1 A dynamic interplay between collective action processes**

Strong collective identities are arguably “the exception rather than the norm” in contemporary society (Gerbaudo, 2012, p.30). But, considering a case where groups who do exhibit such identities are involved in online collective action gives a fuller picture of how collective action is manifesting in the digital terrain. It shows the way

that 'traditional social movement processes', in which collective identity plays a central role, interact with newer online mobilisation processes. The conclusion from my research is not that these processes ran in parallel but rather that they interacted with one another in a dynamic manner in the course of collective action. As a result, the 2009 Green Paper collective action presents as a hybrid in various respects. This became clear thanks to a conceptual framework that considered all three drivers of collective action.

My research shows, for example, that various collective identities, rather than one over-riding identity were exhibited in the comments. Traditional conceptions of collective action conceive of social movement organisations framing collective identity and thereby providing a unifying and enduring element to counteract the costs of action (see pp.47-48 and pp.74-78). In the 2009 Green Paper action, Benefits and Work (not in fact a social movement organisation) framed participants as campaigners and welfare recipients but participants expressed identity in their comments with reference groups such as disabled people, vulnerable people, older people, carers, people with a particular impairment. Some comments expressed an experiential identity, others a more politicised identity.

These expressions of identity were also often made in combination with a personal narrative. Again, this demonstrates a mix of the more personalised forms of identification which have animated much recent research (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012) and more traditional notions of collective identity. This co-existence of forms of identity has been remarked on in other research looking at expressions of identity in contemporary digital environments (Papacharissi, 2011).

My research also concludes that rather than the term 'group' injustice, the phrase 'a shared sense of injustice' better captures the sense of unity in the face of injustice which a large majority of comments expressed. This is therefore not the 'my-group'-based expression of relative deprivation which characterises traditional collective action, according to some literature (see p.62). Nor were these expressions of individual experience of indignation. The prevalence of the expressions also stands in contrast to the proposition that anger may be becoming a rarer feature of online



contemporary collective action (Earl and Kimport, 2011). In addition, the fact that the injustice involved a material grievance makes some NSM theorising inappropriate in this context (see p.47 and section 2.4.2).

The role of Benefits and Work was also something of a mix. Although a private company, it was acting as a campaign organisation. It was also less of a leader than a facilitator, bringing together many pre-existing networks into an ad-hoc public responding to the consultation. Alongside this vertical feature of the organising, a lot of horizontal mobilising, framing and re-framing of issues and identities also took place. This example therefore counters traditional conceptions of centrally organised collective action (Olson, 1965) and also the over-emphasis on horizontal forms of organising in some characterisations of contemporary online action. (This over-emphasis is remarked on in other literature such as González-Bailón et al., 2012, and Gerbaudo, 2012.)

My research also challenges the dichotomy between institutional and non-institutional forms of action, the latter traditionally being associated with social movements and confrontational action. It shows that despite the apparently institutional setting for the action, the campaign and commenters co-opted the space, assembled publics to contest the Green Paper, and recast the terms of the debate. Characteristics of the internet itself did limit the capacity for groups and individuals to protest about the Green Paper: both in regard to access in the first place and through the prism of the internet's topology (Elmer, 2009; Langlois et al., 2009; Hands, 2010). Nonetheless, my research shows that, to a degree, the institutional comment space became part of the campaign protest network. The campaign network was, in turn, oriented to the petition, which is a less obviously institutional form of action. It has been remarked on in other literature that the participation spaces opened up under New Labour became spaces of contestation; my research comes to a similar conclusion in the context of an online setting.

Overall then, the 2009 Green Paper collective action was a case where traditional collective action processes met and merged with newer mobilisation processes,

where horizontal and vertical forms of organising co-existed, where activists and non-activists came together and where protest took place in an institutional setting.

### **9.1.2. The value of a lower-level network perspective and a process approach**

A lower-level network level perspective is valuable in understanding and illustrating these observations. As mentioned, the variety of expressions of identity in the comments was also reflected in the networks involved in the mobilisation. While some of the blogs indicated a politicised collective identity consistent with social movement processes, many of the forums were based on an identity connected to the shared experience of living with a particular impairment. Other networks were based around being a carer or having a particular hobby. It was clear that given this variation in expressions of identity, it would be misleading to generalise the nature or degree of collective identity at higher levels, such as the collective action as a whole.

My research also suggests that the group around which sentiments of shared identity and injustice cohere is defined and redefined in the course of collective action and that networks are a valuable conceptual device in explaining this. If the understanding of social group is conceived as dependent on the presence of shared identity (following Young, 2011), it becomes clear that online networks may overlay social groups, overlap them, or be quite distinct from them. Networks may unite people around a collective identity or around other shared feelings, attributes or interests. The 'group' in group injustice or group efficacy may therefore not coincide with a social group but may instead be primarily defined by some shared commonality other than identity. However the situation is dynamic, and shared identities may emerge or become salient in the course of individuals acting together over a perceived injustice. If, as the literature claims, collective identity reinforces a sense of injustice and efficacy (Van Zomeren et al., 2008), it follows that where an online network overlaps a social group, and knowledge of others' actions is spread via that network, collective identity can reinforce the sense of group efficacy. This could form part of the explanation behind different thresholds for action remarked on in work such as González-Bailón et al., 2012. (I expand further on this point below, see pp.234-5).

My findings also show that not only did the meanings of networks change in the course of action but their structure did too. For example, the campaign network linked people involved in various other associated networks. The emails also explicitly encouraged the breaching of barriers between disabled people's and carers' networks.

In various ways, my data suggests that it useful to conceive collective action as a non-linear process. For example, my data included instances of people reporting back to the networks involved in the campaign that they had taken particular actions; the campaign emails continued to encourage people to comment on the Green Paper after many people had clearly done so, and the figures the emails provided on the numbers taking action had the capacity to boost the sense of efficacy among those who had not yet acted. The comments data also included explicit references to reading one another's comments and it seems likely that this happened on more occasions than it was reported since other contributors' comments were easily visible on the webpage where they were submitted. This would have meant that people leaving comments were open to influence by other contributions. As discussed in Chapter 8, this illustrates the way in which the collective action of commenting, fed back into these understandings of identity, injustice and efficacy and their expression at group level. The practice of reifying phenomena which are more usefully understood as processes, is a tendency Elias termed process reductionism (Elias, 1978 and see earlier discussion of this point on p.57).

## **9.2 Policy implications: when 'debate' ends in collective protest**

The policy implications of my research centre on the ambiguities both over policy regarding participation and policy regarding social care. As Chapter 1 showed, literature has highlighted the way in which the ambiguity of consultative spaces has rendered them sites of struggle on various occasions (Newman et al, 2004; Barnes et al., 2007; Barnes, 2008; Newman and Clarke, 2009). Such literature identified a mix of intent on the part of the Labour Government regarding such spaces and a related lack of clarity in communicating the aims of consultations to those participating in them.

My analysis showed that the Big Care Debate comments space was a case in point. Despite use of terms such as 'debate' and 'discussion' in the Green Paper and on the website, in the comment space itself, people were invited to leave comments and to comment only once. So, in practice, the solicitation of online comments on Green Paper amounted to an exercise in aggregating individual opinion.

The Green Paper also contained contradictory messages about fostering independence, on the one hand, and the possibility of removing the disability benefits which people felt gave them independence, on the other. At a wider level, the idea of 'shaping the future of care together' sat uneasily with the sense that resources were limited and that, as a result, the interests of one group might need to be offset against the interests of another.

Given this lack of clarity over plans for disability benefits, and the restrictions of the comment space, it is unsurprising, and was in fact foreseen (Brindle, 2009; Roberts, 2010), that expressions of collective indignation over this detail of the plans for a National Care Service would dominate the online consultation.

Insofar as governments are seeking to promote deliberative democracy, one solution to the lack of clarity regarding social care policy specifically is, as Keen (2008) suggests, for government to be more explicit about the principles of equity which it is applying in discussions of fairness (see p.31). Discussing priorities and trade offs in a more transparent and systematic way would increase the chances of reaching agreement over a policy solution which people understand and broadly accept. It would also have the additional benefit of educating people more fully on the underlying issues of policy development and/or have the effect of helping people understand the role of governance and feel they have a voice, which are key to developing deliberative democracy.

However, although it was not really clear what the Labour Government believed the purpose of participation to be (see sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.2), the indications are that the subsequent Coalition Government (which was elected in May 2010) favours a less deliberative model. This is evident in its decision to abandon online consultations

where people can see one another's comments and to attempt, more recently, to introduce shorter periods of consultation. This less transparent approach also has its drawbacks, as demonstrated in the #spartacusreport protest and the vigorous opposition to the shortening of consultations (see p.24, p.26 and Appendix 2).

Meanwhile, as various literature has pointed out, the challenge in reconciling representative democracy with the realities of online participation persist (Ward et al., 2003; Chadwick, 2009; Loader and Mercea, 2011). The 2009 Green Paper consultation took place in an institutional setting, yet it shared many characteristics associated with extra-institutional protest: people were mobilised, expressed themselves in emotional terms and with group feeling. "Hands off our benefits!" sums up the style of many of the comments and demonstrates the appropriation of the consultation space as a place to defend groups from a threat rather than as a space where individuals were engaging in a consensual debate. Since then, the incidence of social-media embedded forms of protest has continued to grow. Against this backdrop, the risk for governments is that if consultation exercises are viewed as opaque or tokenistic gestures, greater numbers of people will turn to protest.

Such observations are reflected in wider debates over the potentials of digital democracy and 'open government' (as already mentioned there is a large body of literature on this issue, see for example, Chadwick, 2009; Loader and Mercea, 2011; Lee and Kwak, 2012; Meijer et al., 2012). Some of the more optimistic recent literature has moved away from an e-democracy agenda discussed in terms of a dichotomy between direct and representative democracy to suggest that complementary information-structuring techniques can facilitate large-scale deliberations and the negotiation of interests between members of a group (Hilbert, 2009). There are two drawbacks to this proposition, however. First, it assumes that the government favours a deliberative approach, which, as demonstrated, is not evident in the UK at present. Secondly, it is not clear how these ideas accommodate the realities of e-participation, including collective action, since they appear to rest on a mixture of what Dahlberg (2011) categorises as deliberative and liberal individualist conceptions of e-democracy. A central objective of my research has been to contribute to understandings of online collective action as it occurs in practice on

the basis that a comprehensive appreciation of this phenomenon can further these wider debates.

My research also has implications regarding those participating in online campaigns of the sort involved in the 2009 Green Paper. Firstly, it demonstrates that many of those affected by the proposals were already members of online networks based around relevant factors, for example, having a particular impairment or identifying with the disability movement. Future campaigns can build on this base, as the campaign behind the 2009 Green Paper did. As González-Bailón (2013) observes, it is more effective to activate pre-existing networks for a political cause, even if those networks are not political in nature, than to construct or revive ad-hoc communication structures. She stresses that the key to this is that it is more effective to receive a message about a protest from a friend than from an organisation with which you are not particularly familiar: a claim which prior research on social movements backs up (for example, Jasper and Poletta, 2001). My finding that people commonly expressed collective identity and a shared sense of injustice in the Green Paper comments supports the idea that pre-existing networks played a role in the Green Paper comment making. But my research also found much lower levels of expression of collective identity among those who revealed themselves to be carers, and a lower incidence of the campaign email being replicated in networks formed on the basis of being a carer. There are various, overlapping ways these deficits could be addressed: fostering a carer identity, building wider identities which unite carers, disabled people and elderly. Further discussion of this point is outside the scope of this thesis but is another way in which this research could be built upon.

However, close-knit networks are not the only relevant factor in the spread of information relating to political action. Bakshy et al. (2012) found that on Facebook, although strong ties are individually more influential, their effect is not large enough to match the impact on propagation of information that results from the sheer abundance of weak ties. This adds to a body of research which has built on Granovetter's seminal work on the strength of weak ties (1973). The message for those working to build widespread campaigns related to social care is therefore to aim for a combination of reaching out to and nurturing existing networks, as well as

forming bridges to other networks which may not necessarily be 'about' being disabled, elderly or a carer. There is evidence that this has been occurring in the context of disability activism on Twitter, where disability activists have established relationships with journalists, resulting in a mass-media reports about changes to disability benefits including disabled peoples' perspectives (see Appendix 2).

A related point arising from my research for policymakers and participators alike is to reiterate the need to focus on tackling the multi-dimensional barriers to digital equality (see section 3.4 and Appendix 5), given the increasing importance of the internet as a space where policy is communicated, debated, and consulted on.

### **9.3 The limitations of my research**

One limiting factor of my research is the necessary but artificial distinction it makes between online and offline activities, which are, in practice, closely intertwined and reinforcing (Harlow and Harp, 2012). This meant that it did not have the scope to address questions such as how far the campaign email or its message spread to offline spaces and networks. It also did not consider the degree to which offline or face-to-face interaction founded, or reinforced, the collective identity and shared sense of injustice exhibited online.

It also focused on the psychological drivers of collective action and did not consider other factors such as the political situation. There has, however, been considerable criticism of attempts to take political opportunity structure into account and as pointed out (p.59), this was one of the reasons for the turn to social psychological perspectives on protest. The main basis for such criticism is that the objective political situation may differ from the way that participants understand or interpret it, and approaches which do not recognise this may therefore miss an important factor in the determinants of collective action (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, p.223). Social psychological approaches do, meanwhile, give some attention to the political situation via the concept of efficacy, which relates to perceptions of the effectiveness of action. My research was not however very illuminating in regard to efficacy since it was not commonly expressed in the comments. The role of efficacy is perhaps better

addressed through studies such as those reviewed in Borge-Holthoefer et al. (2013), which look at the way in which the knowledge that others have acted trigger action.

My findings were more conclusive in demonstrating that collective identity and injustice were exhibited in the comments, however caution needs to be exercised in this regard too. Firstly, as stated, these 'expressions' should be treated as such and, in line with literature about self presentation in online and offline settings, are best conceived as part of the process of constructing and projecting an image (see p.61 and pp.164-165). The idea that identity is expressed rather than possessed is consistent, however, with viewing it as a process. For ethical reasons I had to limit my research in regards to looking at these expressions within the networks where the campaign emails were replicated.

Despite these limitations, as I have demonstrated, my research makes a meaningful contribution as a result of the perspective I take in a previously under-explored setting for collective action. There are also various ways of building on my research to develop the ideas further.

## **9.4 Ways in which my research could be extended**

My findings could be built on in two main ways. Firstly, mine was not a big data study (see p.102) but some ideas arising from it could be pursued in such a study. It would be interesting to explore how to identify expressions of collective identity and a shared sense of injustice in large bodies of textual data. This would enable further investigation of the exogenous factors which might affect thresholds. One route towards this would be to find out whether expressions of collective identity and injustice are associated with the use of particular words. Advances in sentiment analysis and automated content analysis, more generally, make this a more achievable goal (see discussion on this point on p.113). But quantitative methodologies of this sort require attention to the principle of understanding what it is you are analysing. I addressed this in my own methodology through my mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative stage in my analysis enabled me to explore the meanings of the drivers of collective action which my conceptual



framework had identified. This subsequently informed the coding scheme I used for the whole set of comments. Before applying my research to the automatic analysis of larger data sets, further work on identifying the markers of collective sentiments would therefore be necessary. Another aspect of my research which big data analysis could pick up on is to investigate the way in which certain types of comment clustered on particular dates. My pattern analysis revealed this characteristic (see section 6.3.4) but it was beyond the scope of my thesis to look into this further. However it would be interesting to explore whether this clustering was caused by people seeing adjacent comments (a form of copying) and/or whether it resulted from people from the same lower level networks making comments on particular dates.

Another way in which my research could be developed concerns its overlap with Baldassarri (2009), who argues that a shared sense of interests emerges, along with collective identity, in the course of collective action. Juxtaposed with my conceptual framework, this raises the question of the relationship between interests and injustice. A starting point for exploring this is a theory of power which does not attempt to identify 'real interests' but rather regards their identification as a process (see p.199 and p.215). With regards to the 2009 Green Paper, this would mean asking questions such as whether the concept of injustice was involved in the emergence of a sense of shared interests, and if so, how this operated at a network level. It also raises the question of whether the campaign emails and/or Green Paper could be portrayed as attempts to enroll people to a particular view of their interests, in the manner outlined by Clegg (1989). An interests-based definition of trust would also fit into this framework and, as argued (p.199), exploration of the relation of trust to the drivers of collective action would be another way of extending my research.

Finally I return to the wider context of this thesis on collective action. At a theoretical level, an understanding of online collective action as it occurs in the context of welfare is an important component of a comprehensive conception of this form of political engagement, particularly if, as my research suggests, it has features which differentiate it from collective action in some other contexts. One of these features is a greater propensity for expressions of collective identity to be a factor in online

collective action, where groups associated with social movements are concerned. In the 2009 Green Paper consultation, disability activists were a case in point. In this regard, another avenue for research would be to consider the implications for disabled people of the increased incidence in physical forms of protest such as marches and occupations. More generally, the interplay between the online manifestation of social movement-type collective action processes and newer forms of digitally embedded action processes is an area ripe for further research.

A related point coming out of my research is that some groups involved in online collective action regarding welfare are in a position to benefit from the commitment and solidarities associated with traditional social movement networks, in addition to experiencing the low costs of organising online and the greater ease in forming alliances across ideological barriers. For this reason and because of continuing welfare retrenchment, digitally-embedded collective action in this context is likely to be a growing and broadening trend. Paradoxically, however, welfare recipients are also among those most at risk from the various forms of digital exclusion. So some of those in the best position to reap the benefits of digitally-embedded collective protest may also be among those most likely to be denied that opportunity. A full appreciation of this situation is an important first step for those working to alleviate it.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance

The following explanations relate to the status of the two benefits at the time of the 2009 consultation on the Green Paper *Shaping the Future of Care Together*.

#### Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

DLA provides a weekly fixed sum for the purpose of assisting a claimant with the extra costs associated with disability. It is non-means-tested, non-contributory and tax-free. DLA is made up of a mobility component and a care component. The mobility component (for help with walking difficulties) is paid at two different levels. The care component (for help with personal care needs) is paid at three levels. A person can receive a care component along with a mobility component. Although DLA can be paid indefinitely, there is an upper age limit for making the first claim. Claims must be made before a person's 65th birthday. Otherwise, AA may be claimed instead.

DLA was introduced in 1992. DLA merged and extended two existing benefits: Mobility Allowance (MobA) and Attendance Allowance (AA). It was introduced in recognition of the limitations of AA and MobA in not meeting the needs of some groups of disabled people, e.g. people with learning disabilities and people with visual impairments (Kennedy, 2011).

A major objective of the 1992 changes was the introduction of 'self-assessment', enabling disabled people to describe the impact of their disability rather than relying on routine medical assessments as was the case with AA and MobA (ibid).

DLA for eligible people aged 16 to 64 began to be replaced with Personal Independence Payment (PIP) from 8 April 2013.

#### Attendance Allowance

AA is a flat-rate, tax-free, non-means tested, non-contributory cash benefit for people

aged 65 or over who need help with personal care. A person can receive AA regardless of whether they are receiving care and support. AA is intended to address “extra”, i.e. non-care, costs resulting from frailty or disability (such costs are many and varied—including special diets, incontinence pads, additional laundry, special clothes, extra heating, special bedding, extra lighting). However, it is entirely up to the recipient what they choose to spend the money on.

AA has no mobility component, but the disability tests are the same as for the middle and higher rate care components of DLA (this means that someone who qualifies for the lower rate of DLA will not qualify for receipt of AA).

Note: This appendix takes its basic information about DLA and AA from House of Commons (2010). The information about the reasons for the introduction DLA is from a House of Commons Library note (Kennedy, 2011), which cites an earlier select committee report (House of Commons, 1998).

## **Appendix 2: Key developments in the online response to changes to disability benefits, May 2010 to March 2012**

6 May, 2010	General election resulting in Coalition Government.
22 June, 2010	Emergency budget statement (HM Treasury, 2010) Includes changes to welfare designed to save £11bn in 2014-15 and announcement of a new medical assessment for DLA from 2013 for new and existing claimants.
3-6 Oct, 2010	Conservative Party conference. Announcement of proposed benefits cap and other benefits cuts.
Oct 2010	Broken of Britain website set up <a href="http://www.thebrokenofbritain.org">www.thebrokenofbritain.org</a> , bringing together various disabled people who had been blogging and tweeting in an individual capacity.
3 Oct, 2010	Protest in Birmingham against austerity cuts and their impact on disabled people. Leads to the setting up of Disabled People Against the Cuts, represented online at <a href="http://www.dpac.uk.net">www.dpac.uk.net</a> .
6 Dec - 18 Feb, 2011	Public consultation period on DLA reform, which entails replacing DLA with Personal Independence Payments (PIPs). The proposals for DLA reform are part of the Welfare Reform Bill, 2010 <sup>36</sup> .
Jan 14 - Jan 16, 2011	Blogswarm entitled One Month Before Heartbreak, organised by Broken of Britain: a mass blogging event to mark the DLA reform consultation period.
24 Jan, 2011	National Day of Action against cuts organised by campaign network including National Protest Against Benefits Cuts blog and a Facebook group entitled Benefits Claimants Fightback. The day of action comprises a number of protest events across the country focused on

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<sup>36</sup> The various iterations of this bill, including the final Welfare Reform Act are available at <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-12/welfarereform/documents.html> [Accessed 19 July 2013]

	Atos Origin, the company contracted by government to carry out work capability assessments for benefits claimants.
16 Feb 2011	Welfare Reform Bill first reading in House of Commons.
Feb 2011	Disabled charities and organisations set up a web-based campaign called Hardest Hit <a href="http://www.thehardesthit.wordpress.com">www.thehardesthit.wordpress.com</a> . Organisers are the Disability Benefits Consortium (a coalition of 40 charities and organisations) and the UK Disabled People's Council (an umbrella body for 300 organisations).
26 March 2011	DPAC organises an online protest as part of the TUC-led march against cuts, held in London. The online protest enables people who could not attend the march to record their views online.
9 May, 2011	Start of a week of action against Atos Origin: street protests organised and publicised online.
11 May, 2011	Hardest Hit march takes place in London, attended by somewhere between 3,000 and 8,000 people <sup>37</sup> . Digital recording of the event through tweeting, posting of videos to YouTube, photos to Flickr, blogging and so on.
1 Nov, 2011	Pat Onions, who is blind and a carer, launches Pat's Petition, on the government's e-petition website, opposing cuts to benefits and services. News of the petition is spread over online networks bringing together disability rights activists, carers and others.
9 Jan, 2012	The launch of <i>Responsible Reform</i> (Campbell et al., 2012) <sup>38</sup> , a report written in response to the government consultation on DLA reform, which closed on 18

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<sup>37</sup> Police estimates out numbers between 3,000-8,000 according to press reports <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/may/11/hardest-hit-march-disabled-people> Gentleman, A., 2011, Hardest Hit march brings disabled people out onto the streets [Accessed 3 June, 2011]

<sup>38</sup> *Responsible Reform*'s lead author is S.J. Campbell and a number of other authors, some of whom are anonymous, also contributed. The report is available at: <http://wearespartacus.org.uk/spartacus-report/> and at: [http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/files/response\\_to\\_proposed\\_dla\\_reforms.pdf](http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/files/response_to_proposed_dla_reforms.pdf) [Accessed 19 July 2013]

February 2011 and was part of a wider series of proposed changes to welfare contained in the Welfare Reform Bill, 2010. After using a Freedom of Information request to obtain the consultation responses, the authors of Responsible Reform demonstrate that they showed “overwhelming opposition”<sup>39</sup> to nearly all the government’s proposals. Responsible Reform was written by disability rights activists, many of whom have a significant presence on Twitter. #spartacusreport trends on Twitter. Later the same day, the Department for Work and Pensions press office takes the unprecedented step of going onto Twitter to justify the government's reforms and they do this using #spartacusreport.

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|-----------------|--|
| 11 Jan, 2012    | Some clauses of the Welfare Reform Bill defeated in the House of Lords.  |
| 12 Jan, 2012    | Work and pensions minister Chris Grayling and one of the principle architects of the Spartacus campaign, Sue Marsh, debate the welfare reform proposals on BBC Newsnight.  |
| Jan - Feb, 2012 | Further debates on Welfare Reform Bill in House of Lords and House of Commons.   |
| 8 March, 2012   | Welfare Reform Act receives royal assent and becomes law. Key points of relevance to disabled people, their families and carers are the introduction of PIPs to replace DLA and the limitation of the payment of contributory Employment and Support Allowance to a 12-month period. |

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<sup>39</sup> Campbell et al., 2012, p.4

### Appendix 3: E-democracy typologies, extracted and adapted from Chadwick and May (2003) and Dahlberg (2011).

Note: Typologies that share characteristics are in the same horizontal row.

Dahlberg	Chadwick and May
<p>These typologies are the result of Dahlberg's critical-interpretative analysis of "popular commentary, research, policymaking and practical initiative" in the field of e-democracy. Dahlberg points out, these are not positions in the sense of pure analytical concepts but rather "a general categorization of empirical instances", the result of his own readings and reconstruction of the material.</p>	<p>These are 'ideal' (in a Weberian sense) models of interaction between the state and citizens which may underpin the practice of e-government</p>
<p><b>Liberal-individualist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• democratic subject is rational, instrumental, self-seeking utility maximiser who knows their own interests</li> <li>• democracy serves to aggregate the independent interests of subjects</li> <li>• digital democratic affordances – aggregating, calculating, choosing, competing, expressing, fundraising, informing, petitioning, registering, transacting, transmitting, voting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Managerial model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'efficient' delivery of government/state information to citizens and other groups of</li> <li>• 'users'/information dissemination</li> <li>• improving flows of information within and around the state</li> <li>• 'control' as defining logic</li> <li>• importance of 'service delivery'</li> <li>• speeding up of information provision is 'opening up' government</li> <li>• regulatory, law making; responding to the needs of the 'new economy'</li> <li>• user resource issues (ability to receive and interpret information) largely absent</li> <li>• unilinear model of information</li> </ul>
<p><b>Deliberative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• democratic subject develops through the process of rational deliberation in the public sphere. This transforms them into 'publicly-oriented democratic subjects interested in the common good'</li> <li>• model of democracy is deliberative and consensual</li> <li>• digital democratic affordances - agreeing, arguing, deliberating, disagreeing, informing, meeting, opinion forming, publicizing, reflecting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Consultative model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• polling, access of voters and other interested parties to government, representation of views,</li> <li>• advisory referendums</li> <li>• 'push-button democracy', 'e-voting' - direct democracy - instantaneous opinion polling</li> <li>• access as a technical issue - problems of self-selection of citizen respondents</li> <li>• direct and unmediated contact between citizen and state</li> <li>• 'electronic town meetings'</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• agenda framing as critical issue</li> <li>• technological lag among citizens and their representatives</li> <li>• unilinear model of information</li> </ul> <p><b>Participatory model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• civil society exists away from the state and (will be) mediated electronically</li> <li>• organic emergence of democracy</li> <li>• voluntary associations, spontaneous interactions within cyber-space</li> <li>• access is enough to encourage wider political participation</li> <li>• state protects free speech and rights of expression</li> <li>• participatory model will replace the other two through the <i>logic</i> of information society</li> <li>• discursive model of information</li> </ul>
<p><b>Counter-publics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• democratic subject is a person who feels linked to others and is therefore open to affective considerations such as a sense of injustice and exclusion. This is in contrast to the much more rationalist conceptions in the liberal-individualist and deliberative positions</li> <li>• democracy is contestationary - relations of inclusion and exclusion are inherent to social formations and entail discursive contestation</li> <li>• counter publics are 'critical-reflexive spaces of communicative interaction' in which counter discourses develop in opposition to dominant discourses</li> <li>• digital media technologies can support both dominant and counter publics</li> <li>• digital democratic affordances - articulating, associating, campaigning, contesting, forming groups, identifying, organizing, protesting, resisting</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Autonomous Marxist</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the subject is collective and networked. The 'subject' is referred to as 'the multitude' in order to reflect its irreducible plurality, a 'community of singularities'</li> <li>• digital communication networks enable a radically democratic politics in the</li> </ul>	

<p>sense of self-organized and inclusive participation in common productive activities that bypass centralized state and capitalist systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• democracy is understood as self-organization, autonomous from systems of centralized power</li> <li>• Digital democratic affordances - collaborating, cooperating, distributing, exchanging, giving, networking, participating, sharing</li> </ul>	
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## **Appendix 4: the consultation questions and funding options as described in the Green Paper *Shaping the Future of Care Together***

The three consultation questions in the 2009 Green Paper (DoH, 2009, pp.130-131) for funding National Care Service were:

1. We want to build a National Care Service that is fair, simple and affordable. We think that in this new system there are six things that you should be able to expect:

- prevention services
- national assessment
- a joined-up service
- information and advice
- personalised care and support
- fair funding.

a) Is there anything missing from this approach? b) How should this work?

2. We think that, in order to make the National Care Service work, we will need services that are joined up, give you choice around what kind of care and support you get, and are high quality.

a) Do you agree?

b) What would this look like in practice?

c) What are the barriers to making this happen?

3. The Government is suggesting three ways in which the National Care Service could be funded in the future:

- Partnership – People will be supported by the Government for around a quarter to a third of the cost of their care and support, or more if they have a low income.
- Insurance – As well as providing a quarter to a third of the cost of people's care and support, the Government would also make it easier for people to take out insurance to cover their remaining costs.
- Comprehensive – Everyone gets care free when they need it in return for paying a contribution into a state insurance scheme, if they can afford it, whether or not they need care and support.

a) Which of these options do you prefer, and why?

b) Should local government say how much money people get depending on the situation in their area, or should national government decide?

The three funding options put forward were (DoH, 2009, p.95):

**Partnership** – Everyone who qualifies for care would be supported by the Government for a proportion of cost of their basic care and support costs (for example a quarter or a third) or more if they have a low income. Under this system only those who develop care needs contribute to the system and then the contribution is only towards their own care. However, those with high care needs, for example long term residential care, may still have to pay high contributions.

**Insurance** – Like the Partnership model in that people would be entitled to a share of care costs but with a further element of insurance to cover additional costs. To develop this approach the state could work closely with the private insurance market to create its own insurance scheme. This approach offers people a choice and flexibility over whether they want to pay to insure themselves. The disadvantages are that those that choose not take out insurance would, like the partnership approach, still face high care costs.

**Comprehensive** – Everyone over retirement age, who can afford to, would be required to pay into a state insurance scheme whether or not they need care and support. The advantage of the system is that it would provide peace of mind – once people had paid their contribution they would know that their care costs would be paid for. The disadvantage is that even those who may not need care and support themselves would have to contribute.”

## **Appendix 5: The relationship between being an older person and/or a carer and experiencing digital exclusion**

Digital exclusion is structured by social, economic, geographical and physical factors, according to Dutton et al., (2009) but, as discussed in Chapter 3, it is widely acknowledged that digital exclusion consists not just in differential access to the internet (or digital communications technologies) but also in different patterns in use and skills reflecting wider relations of inclusion and exclusion (Van Dijk and Hacker, 2003; DiMaggio et al., 2004; Dutton and Blank, 2011, Clayton, 2013).

In order to establish how carers and older people are affected, it needs to be recognised that carers tend to be older than average (Dahlberg et al., 2007) and that, according to research by carers organisations, they are more likely to suffer ill-health or be disabled (Carers UK, 2004; Carers Scotland, 2011). So, these are not discrete categories of people.

It is clear that age is related to digital exclusion in access. Dutton and Blank (2011) show that patterns of use by age in the UK did not really change much between 2009 and 2011, with usage at about 85% for people in prime working years, age 25-55, and hovering at around 25-35% among over 65 year olds. Sourbati (2009), meanwhile, observe that internet access among older adults is stratified along similar lines to the population as a whole – ie, according to income and education.

Figures on the use of the internet by carers are harder to come by and this is not a category distinguished in the OxlS reports.

From a cross-sectional survey of 3,014 adult carers in the UK, Blackburn et al. (2005) report that half of all carers had previously used the internet and half had never previously used it. Some comparison can be made with the relevant OxlS report at that time (Dutton et al., 2005). In response to the question, 'Do you use the internet (at home work or school) or have you used it in the past?', of the whole population 60% said they were current users in 2005, compared with 59% in 2003 (p10) and

32% said they had never used the internet in 2005, compared with 35% in 2003. The remainder answered that they were not current users but had used the internet in the past.

The suggestion is then that around 2005, carers were rather less likely than average to use the internet. However a recent report carried out by Ipsos Mori for MacMillian Cancer (Ipsos Mori, 2012) found that of the 386 people caring for someone with cancer who they surveyed, 82% responded to the question, 'Do you have access to the internet?' with the answer yes and 13% with a no.

A complicating factor here is understanding the term carer, however. The Ipsos Mori report says it uses the term 'carers' "to refer to people who currently provide support to someone with cancer. This support is **not** part of a paid job or voluntary work. Also, they must either (1) care for that person for more than five hours per week or, (2) give one to four hours a week and say this affects their life in some way e.g. financially or emotionally" (Ipsos Mori, 2012 p.9, emphasis in original). This also highlights the room for variation in defining carers and the situation is made more complex still by the propensity among 'carers' not to identify with the term (O'Connor, 2007; Ipsos Mori, 2012).

In regards to the digital exclusion by virtue of patterns of use and skills rather than access, as discussed in Chapter 3, Dutton and Blank (2011) show that the retired and those of retirement age, the unemployed and those with a low household income are under-represented in the category of "next-generation users". It is also clear from Dutton et al. (2009) and Dutton and Blank (2011) that low household income is a major and enduring determining factor in digital exclusion, both in patterns of use and access.

The best approach is therefore to take a similar stance to digital exclusion as Levitas et al. (2007) take to social exclusion: that is to consider it as multi-dimensional phenomenon. In this case, the more of categories associated with digital inequality in access, use and skills which people or groups fall into, the greater their propensity to be digitally excluded. This is the perspective taken in DiMaggio et al., (2004). In

regard to the subject of this thesis, the most relevant categories to consider are: being a disabled person, being an older person, being a carer, having a low income (being in receipt of means-tested benefits), being unemployed.

## **Appendix 6: Searching using Google**

The data collection for my study relied to a degree on the use of the Google search engine, which has been criticised for its partiality (Thelwall et al., 2005). So, in the data collection for the Green Paper campaign, I supplemented its use with other search engines in the manner described below. However returns on the Google searches were more comprehensive than those from the other mode of searching in this instance but I remained aware that its returns are merely one representation of what is on the web and should be evaluated as such.

The exact way a Google search operates and the algorithm it uses is not in the public domain. However, in general terms, it relies on hyperlink analysis: finding and ranking URLs (addresses of pages on the web) on the basis of how many other high profile sites or pages link to them. Results from a Google search therefore represent an approximation of a population of reachable sites (Earl, 2006), rather than a complete list of every webpage that relates to the search terms. Another drawback of Google is that it has been shown to tailor search results to the IP address from which the search is launched and to return different results on different days (Thelwall et al., 2005). For this reason, I conducted the search on more than one occasion and from more than one computer. To further mitigate against Google bias, I employed a second search tool in the analysis. This tool was LexiURL searcher which uses the Yahoo search engine. However, as noted above, the results from the second search method turned out to be very similar but less extensive than those from the Google search in the case of my research.

**Appendix 7: Table showing date and content of Benefits and Work emails, number of comments on associated dates and other relevant activity on those dates**

Date	B&W's reports of numbers in its campaign	B&W email sent: key points	Ministerial, departmental and media activity, discussion in House of Lords and House of Commons	Number comments made on comments section of executive summary
JULY 14			Green Paper published, reported by various media outlets	8
15				3
16				5
17				3
18				4
19				1
20				2
21				3
22				2
23				2
24			Joint letter by 15 learning disability charities (the Learning Disability coalition) published in Guardian newspaper says that Green Paper "concentrates almost exclusively on how to fund social care for older	

			people".	
25				
26				
27				1
28				
29				
30				39
31				13
AUGUST				
1				12
2				5
3				1
4				4
5		The first B&W email sent. Opens with the sentence: "Claimants have just 100 days to prevent DLA and AA being abolished". It provides links to B&W's website and states "We're looking for a minimum of 1,000 claimants, carers and support workers to join our campaign to save these benefits from being abolished."		2
6	5,245	Reports that "we had an astonishing 5,245 people sign up in the first 24 hours of the campaign. Says that they will send an email each week asking people to do one thing in relation to the		3



		campaign “it might be writing to your MP, submitting a response to the green paper, contacting a local disability group. It says that “lots of you have been posting on forums, contacting your MPs, writing to papers, emailing TV and radio programmes and generally making an enormous fuss. Finishes by saying: “please keep up the good work – you don’t really need us at all”.		
7				12
8				2
9				4
10				5
11	13,815	Email asks people to put pressure on disability charities. Among various points it recommends people make is the following: “You might want to explain that at the moment the campaign against abolishing disability benefits is being led by a private sector company and that you think this is highly inappropriate, it ought to be a coalition of charities leading the way.”		11
12				2

13				5
14				1
15				2
16				2
17				3
18	Over 19,000	Says it has been “an extraordinary fortnight since this campaign began”. Clarifies that DLA and AA won’t end on November 13 but that is end of consultation period. Says disability charities have been “deluged with emails”. Tells people about a forum on the Carer Watch website which people involved in the campaign can use for free (makes it clear they don’t have to be B&W members). Says: Although set up by carers, Carer Watch is being used by sick and disabled claimants as well. We’ve heard a lot from Carer Watch in recent weeks about the work they’ve done to try to get carers organisations to be more assertive in relation to benefits and to consult more with members and we’ve been very impressed, particularly as they are an entirely unfunded group.” Asks people to contact their MPs and tells them various ways of doing this (includes a link to writetothem.com). Says have		4

		now dropped the plan of sending an email each week asking people to do one thing since “the campaign has grown so quickly and spread awareness so widely”. Urges claimants to unite and act together and asks if its time to revive the idea of a claimants’ union		
19				3
20				4
21				0
22				0
23				3
24				3
25	21,000	First request to comment on the Green Paper website: “This week we’re asking you to take the argument to the government by posting your opinions on their official green paper website. By doing this you will be contributing to the consultation process and your views – according to the government – will be taken into account when they begin work on drawing up the white paper due out next year.” Suggests that people use the Executive Summary page or the subsection of the Executive Summary, Having Your Say page and		414

		provides a link to both. Recommends that people joining the “newly established” Welfare Watch forum page.		
26				96
27				137
28				34
29				24
30				13
31				21
SEPTEMBER 1	22,692	Reiterates request to comment on Green Paper and says that a lot have already done so: “The number of responses on the government's own green paper website has more than quadrupled since we asked you to post there last Tuesday. The number of posts on the executive summary page - where the vast majority of responses are published - has risen from 133 to 640 in the course of the last week. The overwhelming majority of posts are strongly against any changes to disability benefits.” Links again to the Executive Summary page. Says they will be on annual leave for the next two weeks. Links again to the Welfare		578

		Watch forum and the Carer Watch campaign blog		
2				153
3				68
4				33
5				25
6				18
7				25
8				14
9			Guardian newspaper publishes supplement on the Green Paper “looking in detail at the Green Paper’s vision”.	11
10				10
11			Community Care magazine reports “a groundswell of dissent” in response to the Green Paper.	7
12				7
13				6
14				6
15				8
16				9
17				10
18			Andy Burnham speech to healthcare professionals in Manchester about the Big Care Debate, warning of a	12

			“healthcare timebomb facing aging Britons”. Coincides with release of survey by Department of Health survey covering expectations on the cost of residential care in old age. Reported in various media including the Telegraph, Mail and Guardian newspapers	
19				3
20				9
21				7
22				7
23				6
24				2
25	Almost 26,000 (last mention of a figure)	Reports back from annual leave. “Urges” people to sign the DLA AA petition on No 10 website (posted 7 September). Hyperlink to petition. Addresses concerns about petition signing (lack of effect and need to give email). But underlines power of petitions: “politicians know that virtually every signature on a No. 10 petition belongs to a voter”. Reassures people that signing up to the B&W campaign is not like signing a petition – details will not be passed on to anyone. Details numbers in campaign. Asks people to spread news of petition on	David Behan’s blog responds to the large number of responses to the Big Care Debate website, saying that “the issue of benefits is the one getting most attention”  Guardian newspaper report claiming there is “a vociferous online campaign” in response to the Green Paper.	5

		forums and via email.		
26				3
27				5
28				8
29		<p>Reports that Care Services Minister Phil Hope yesterday told a reporter at the Labour Party conference that DLA is not under threat by the care green paper. Says that: "The reality is that, if the government have now stepped back from an attack on DLA before the care consultation has even ended, it is because of the literally thousands of angry responses on the Big Care Debate website, the thousands of signatures on petitions, the torrent of angry letters to MPs, the motions before the Scottish and Welsh assemblies and the growing pressure from disability charities who were themselves under enormous pressure from outraged claimants."</p> <p>Ends by focusing attention on AA: "Here at Benefits and Work we don't know if the fight is yet over for DLA, but we do know for certain it's only just begun for AA."</p>		3
30				6
OCTOBER 1				1

2				5
3				3
4				1
5				3
6		<p>Says that there has not yet been confirmation about whether DLA has “been saved”: “One week on and there has been absolutely no corroboration of Care Services minister Phil Hope’s off-the-cuff statement that DLA is not being considered for the axe.”</p> <p>Reports that in response to queries from B&amp;W about missing comments on the Big Care website, the website replied that they were “amazed at the response” and “doing our best to work our way through them”. Email questions whether the “sheer volume of responses is the ‘only problem’ or whether it is the fact that most of the responses are overwhelmingly hostile. Reports that the petition is “grinding to a halt” and urges people to sign it (links provided). Asks again that people respond to the Green Paper and gives a link to the Executive Summary</p>		33
7				58
8				16



9				9
10				
11				
12				
13			<p>House of Lords debate in which Lord Ashley of Stoke asks Lord McKenzie of Luton, the parliamentary under secretary of state for work and pensions, “which elements of disability benefit” the government “are considering integrating into the wider social care budget in England”.</p> <p>Lord McKenzie replies: “At this stage, we do not want to rule out any options and so are considering all disability benefits.”</p>	
14				
15				3
16				3
17				6
18				5
19				3
20		Email reports about Lord McKenzie of Luton’s comments in House of Lords question on disability benefits (see		75

		<p>October 13). Says the petition “has perked up again”. Says: “the Big Care debate website continues to be swamped by people protesting about the threat to disability benefits. From a feeble 130 posts when we began this campaign, there are now 2,219 responses on the Executive Summary page and 606 on Having Your Say. The total is far higher than that achieved by any similar government consultation and the responses are overwhelmingly hostile.”</p> <p>Links to executive summary and calls for people who have not yet commented to do so</p>		
21			Yvette Cooper, the DWP secretary of state, tells a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on ME that DLA for people of ‘working age’ is not under review.	27
22			Announcement by Andy Burnham at the National Children and Adults Services conference in Harrogate that DLA for people aged under 65 will not form part of the funding for the National Care service.	18

23				12
24				6
25				3
26				5
27		<p>Title of email: "DLA saved for some". Reports on announcement that DLA will not be affected. Says "it's a start but nowhere near enough". Says Mr Burnham wants to "shut people up". Comments disapprovingly on charities lauding Mr Burnham's announcement. Warns that it is only DLA for working age people which is "not under review" but alerts people to status of AA and situation for over 65s. Says there is a "real worry" that Burnham will claim now that comments made before this announcement will be discounted. Calls on people not to let the government "get away with it". Points out the consultation has only two weeks left to run and includes link to the executive summary. Calls on people to sign the petition and includes link to that.</p>		127
28				81
29			House of Commons Debate on the Social Care Green Paper. Secretary of State for Health Andy Burnham opens saying: "This has been one of	26

			the largest consultation exercises the government has ever carried out: there have been more than 91,000 hits on the website, 17,500 consultation responses received and 35 stakeholder events held."	
30				68
31				17
NOVEMBER				
1				15
2				32
3				20
4				11
5				9
6				8
7				1
8				10
9				8
10		Title of email: "You're not so easy to silence". Says "posts have continued to pour into the Big Care debate website". Also says people have "continued to sign" the petition. Mentions that at end of October there was a members' only article on the B&W site about "the fact that the government proposes to send everyone a £20,000 tax bill on their 65 <sup>th</sup> birthday". Makes clear that tax will		66

		be means-tested so that “not everyone will have to pay the full amount”. But warns about various things the tax will not cover. Concludes: “So, you still facing losing your disability benefits at age 65, you’ll still get handed a £20,000 tax bill and yet, if you do have to go into residential care for two years, the green paper estimates that you will still have to pay half of the estimated £50,000 cost from your own pocket.” Says MPs were “not fooled into silence” by Andy Burnham’s DLA announcement. Reminds people they have “until Friday” to make their contribution to the Big Care Debate.		
11				30
12				4
13			Consultation closes at midnight	22
14				
15				
16				
17		Title of email: “Final newsletter and unmissable half-price offer”. Says all emails will be deleted from B&W list “on Friday afternoon”. [Friday 20 November.] Says can sign up for free fortnightly newsletter “if you want to		

		<p>stay informed about government plans for DLA and AA". Gives details of half price offer on membership of B&amp;W. Includes section entitled "What you have achieved": Within hours of our announcing our 100 days campaign, news of the danger to DLA and AA spread across the internet on blogs, forums and social networking sites and you began to make your voices heard.</p> <p>Says that there have been almost 4,000 comments on the website, that 22,000 people signed the petition and concludes section: "You've also finally forced them to disclose, even if only by omission, that DLA for people aged 65 and over, as well as AA, is still under threat.</p> <p>"All this whilst proposals are still at the green paper stage, when ministers would normally expect only a few professionals and specialist organisations to even notice their existence, let alone express an opinion."</p> <p>Offers half price membership deal, saying: "When we began this campaign</p>		
--	--	--	--	--

		<p>we were repeatedly accused by individuals and organisations of inventing the threat to DLA in order to make a profit. In truth, as we've discovered in the past, campaigning costs us money.</p> <p>"In fact, whilst this campaign was at its height, subscriptions to the site actually fell."</p> <p>"The reason is simple: most individuals and agencies subscribe to the Benefits and Work website when they have a specific benefits problem that needs a solution, not to support a cause. Campaigning takes up a huge amount of time that we would otherwise devote to producing and promoting new material that helps people solve those problems."</p>		
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**Appendix 8: Table showing detail of sites where the first Benefits and Work email was replicated**

Site description	whole or partial email	date posted	indicators of participation	comments include reports of spreading message
Blog about living with a specific impairment. Activist indicators	whole	05-Aug	n/a	n/a
Blog based around home educating	partial	26-Aug	n/a	n/a
Blog based on living with a disability. Activist indicators	whole	05-Aug	n/a	n/a
Blog by local government councillor	partial	07-Aug	n/a	n/a
Blog by person describing themselves as disabled. Activist indicators	whole	06-Aug	n/a	n/a
Blog by person describing themselves as suffering from a specific syndrome	whole	Aug-11	n/a	n/a
Blog by person who describes themselves as disabled. Activist indicators	whole	05-Aug	n/a	n/a



Blog by person who describes themselves as impaired. Activist indicators	whole	06-Aug	n/a	n/a
Facebook group for people living in specific European country	whole	n/v	61 members	n/v
Facebook group representing regional branch of charity for disabled people	whole	10-Sep	238 members	yes
Facebook group set up to fight threat to DLA and AA	whole	Aug-06	4,600 members	yes
Facebook group to fight perceived threat to benefits	whole	Aug-08	205 members	yes
Forum and community for people suffering a specific condition and their friends family and supporters	whole	05-Aug	9 posts 8 posters	yes
Forum attached to website run by person with a specific illness	partial	05-Aug	4 posts, 3 posters	no
Forum based around a specific interest/hobby	partial	n/v	1 post 1 poster	n/v
Forum based around a specific interest/hobby	partial	n/v	20 posts 6 posters	n/v

Forum based around age of members. General interest	partial	05-Aug	10 posts, 10 posters	yes
Forum based around living in specific geographical area	whole	14-Sep	1 post 1 poster	no
Forum based on having a specific impairment	whole	05-Aug	1 post 1 poster	no
Forum for a charity for people whose lives are affected by a specific disorder	whole	06-Aug	9 posts, 5 posters	yes
Forum for carers	whole	05-Aug	8 posts 4 posters	no
Forum for charity supporting people suffering from specific disease.	whole	n/v	12 posts, 6 posters	yes
Forum for charity supporting people suffering from specific illness	whole	05-Aug	75 posts	yes
Forum for charity for people suffering from a specific condition.	partial sim framing	05-Aug	15 posts, 10 posters,	yes

Forum for charity led by disabled people. Based in a specific geographical area	whole	03-Sep	28 posts, 23 posters	no
Forum for charity supporting people affected by a specific condition	whole	05-Aug	15 posts, 12 posters	yes
Forum for community offering support to people suffering a specific condition	whole	05-Aug	22 posts 20 posters	no
Forum for disabled people with particular interest	partial	Aug-06	12 posts, 8 posters	yes
Forum for organisation dedicated to consumer protection	whole	05-Aug	11 posts 7 posters	yes
Forum for organisation run for and by people with a specific condition and their carers	partial	10-Aug	2 posts 2 posters	n/v
Forum for peer support of people affected by a specific injury	whole	07-Aug	1 post, 2 posters	no
Forum for people with a particular condition	whole	05-Aug	2 posts 2 posters	no

Forum for people with a particular condition	partial	n/v	n/v	n/v
Forum for people with a particular condition, their friends and carers	whole	07-Aug	30 posts 5 posters	yes
Forum for website supporting people affected by a specific condition	partial		10 posts 6 posters	n/v
Forum for website supporting people affected by a specific condition	whole	11-Aug	2 posts 1 poster	no
Forum for welfare rights organisation	whole	05-Aug	12 posts, 10 posters.	yes
Forum for welfare rights organisation	partial	n/v	n/v	yes
Forum linked to magazine for older women	partial	07-Aug	5 posts, 4 posters	no
Forum linked to media programme which reflects lives of disabled people	whole	05-Aug	214 posts, 46 posters	yes
Forum linked to online news service	whole	05-Aug	54 posts, 21 posters	yes
Forum of carers campaigning group	partial	05-Aug	n/v	n/v

Forum of charity for people who have a specific disease and their carers	partial	n/v	n/v	n/v
Forum of charity supporting individual service users, plus their friends and carers	whole	06-Aug	n/v	n/v
Forum of website based around living within a limited budget	whole	05-Aug	41 posts 25 posters	yes
Forum of website based around living within a limited budget	partial	06-Aug	2 posts 1 poster	n/v
Forum of website based on people living in a specific country outside UK	partial	07-Aug	9 posts 7 posters	n/v
Forum of website based on people living in a specific country outside UK	whole	06-Aug	4 posts 4 posters	no
Forum thread on saving DLA and AA in general interest bulletin board	whole	19-Aug	n/v	n/v
Forum thread on saving DLA and AA in host site	whole	05-Aug	7 posts, 4 posters	no
Forum thread on saving DLA and AA in host site	whole	05-Aug	3 replies	no

Forum thread on saving DLA and AA in host site	whole	13-Aug	27 posts 8 posters	yes
Forum thread on saving DLA and AA in parenting forum	whole	05-Aug	2 replies	no
News pages for regional political party	partial	27-Jul	n/a	n/a
News service focused on health and campaigning	whole	05-Aug	n/a	n/a
News service for people who have a specific impairment	partial	n/v	n/v	n/v

Key: n/a= not applicable n/v=not visible

## **Appendix 9: Extracts from the official report on the consultation**

The report on the consultation gives the number of online comments, saying there were 3,257 on the Green Paper, and 465 on David Behan's blog (DoH, 2010, p.8)

In the executive summary, it says: "the evidence from the consultation, coupled with independent research, has informed the development of the Government's White Paper" (ibid, p.11). It then discusses the findings under three headings, which refer to the three consultation questions. Under the third of these headings, 'Consultation question 3: Funding and managing the National Care Service', it says: "participants were generally opposed to benefit reform" (ibid, p.11).

The report says that 28,188 direct responses were received overall (ibid, p.14). Most of these came from the open consultation, which is described here:

"The largest group, 27,474 participants, responded to the open consultation, via various means. This group comprises both the general public and individuals who may be engaged with the care and support system in some way – they may care for a friend or family member, work in the sector, receive care and support or have an interest in the sector for any other reason. Unfortunately it is not always clear what category the participant falls into, therefore we are unable to break this audience down any further. There may also be participants who responded more than once." (ibid, p.14)

The online comments is one section within this 'open consultation' category of responses. This section entitled 'Interpreting the Data' describes the analysis of the open consultation data:

"Responses from the open consultation were coded to categorise and group together similar responses and identify the key themes. Some of these figures are reported in this document, although they must be treated with caution. While some figures may seem small given the scale of the overall consultation, all those reported on have been highlighted due to their importance relative to other themes, and despite small figures can reflect important themes." (ibid, p.16)

In a section on the key themes is the following extract, which is headed 'Benefit reform: Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance':

"Overall, one of the key themes that emerged from the consultation responses (and especially the open consultation) was strong opposition to the reform of benefits – in particular Attendance Allowance (AA) and Disability living Allowance (DLA) – in order to fund care and support. This was mentioned by a large number of respondents across all audiences. Opposition to reforming DLA was mentioned by 1,811 participants in the open consultation, and against reforming AA by 933. Benefit reform was therefore one of the most consistently cited concerns across the consultation as a whole. Many were disappointed that there was not more detail given in the Green Paper about benefit reform. However, the announcement on 22 October 2009 that the Government was not considering integration of DLA for the under 65s into the national Care service was welcomed by some stakeholders. Those in receipt of these benefits to help with their care needs were often angry that the Government would consider taking away these payments from some possible future recipients, for a number of reasons:

- Both AA and DLA were generally seen as strengths of the current care and support system, because these benefits allow users to have choice and control over some aspects of their care.
- A number of participants pointed out that these benefits represent a source of support available to users irrespective of whether they have low, medium or high care needs, and as such were viewed by some as important to prevent greater reliance on formal care services and to enable people to stay independent for longer.
- There was therefore some concern that removing these benefits could bring more people into the care and support system who currently manage well. Furthermore, AA and DLA were seen as representing value for money because formal care services were perceived as more expensive.
- Many participants were worried that removal of these benefits may not be balanced by equivalent or greater support on a similar basis (to all those



who would currently be entitled to it), and some felt that the most vulnerable users may be harmed as a result.” (ibid, pp.47-48).

## **Appendix 10: Early coding categories, codes on 10 October, 2011**

Description of current use of DLA (person describes what they do with their DLA)

Works against independence and choice

Other groups should be targeted instead

Life is hard enough already

Life hard for people like us

Life hard for me/person I care for

Proposal is wrong (moral type judgment/use of emotional words/anger)

Proposal is wrong plus groupness

Have paid my way

Intention to fight change

Plus groupness

This makes no sense

Social services not up to the job

Policymakers don't understand our life/my life

System administered by social services wouldn't cover the same expenses

## **Appendix 11: Key memos made during qualitative analysis**

### **Memo 13**

Author            ccp109  
Creation date    17/10/2011 14:25:43

merged not fair have paid way as comment on current system with same as comment on proposed system into subsection of proposal is wrong. And renamed that proposal is wrong system is wrong

### **Memo 17**

Author            ccp109  
Creation date    20/10/2011 13:40:03

Try new coding system after coding about 40 (note had to do some recoding from Fem 23-40 because of computer error). Try introducing new umbrella codes of collective identity, group based efficacy and group based injustice - these will be represented via colour only so that codes stay in their existing places but can be picked out on a colour basis. Also and separately - text will only be attached to bottom level codes. Will also try coding some of the male and uni comments too at this point incase there is a difference on this basis.

### **Memo 18**

Author            ccp109  
Creation date    20/10/2011 14:50:42

Bright RED=group injustice  
Bright BLUE=collective identity  
Bright YELLOW=group efficacy

### **Memo 26**

Author            ccp109  
Creation date    02/11/2011 12:24:06

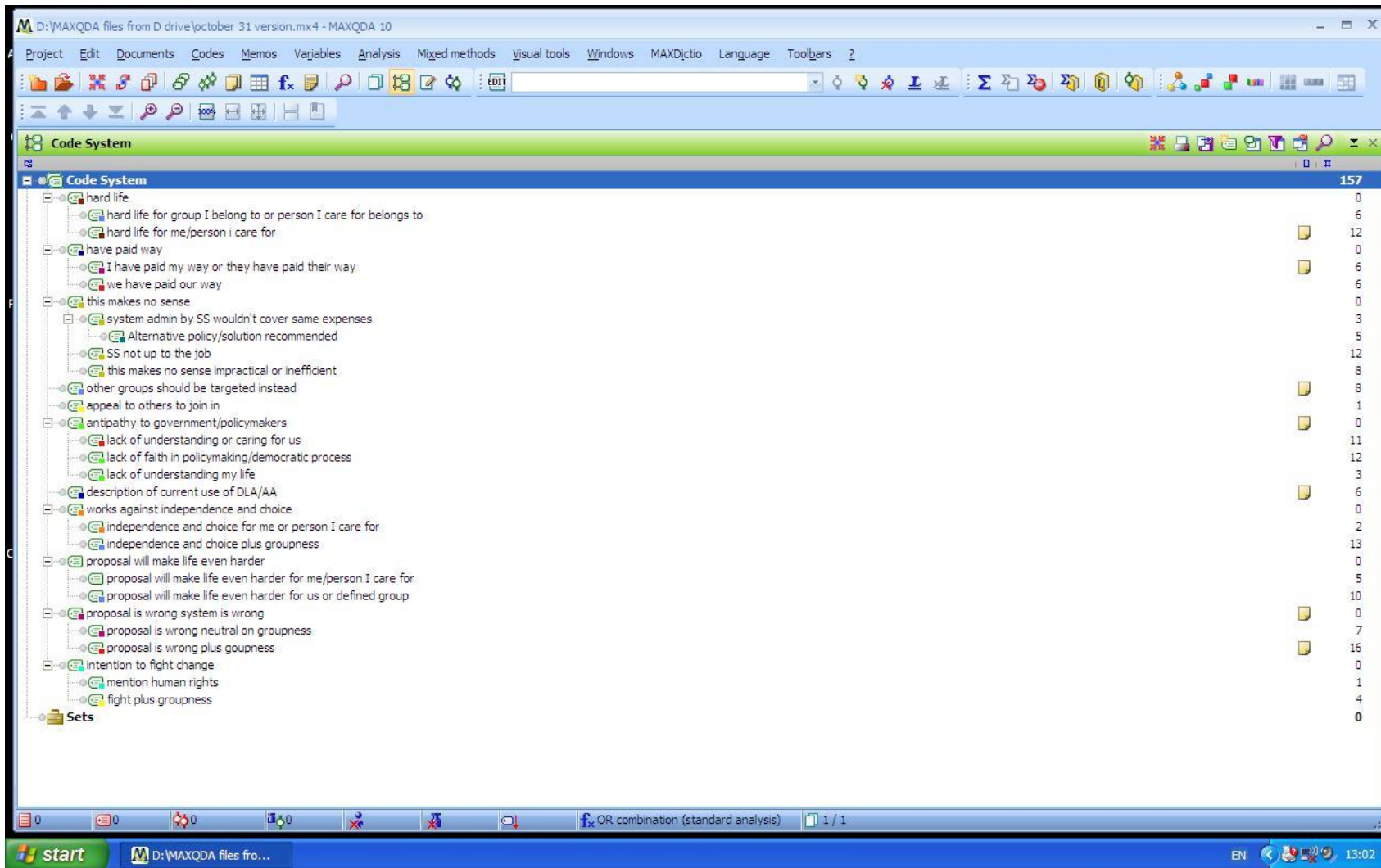
Note there is important difference in groupness between people defining the group they are talking about and doing that PLUS saying they are a member of that group

### **Female63**

Document            Female63  
Author            ccp109  
Creation date    09/12/2011 11:03:54

note this person is talking on behalf of her mother but uses "we" so is good case of extending group to fit herself.

## Appendix 12: Coding system 31 October



## Appendix 13: The relation of the codes for qualitative analysis to expressions of collective identity and group injustice

Table showing other code groupings and presence of collective identity and group injustice. Colours are used for indicative purposes only. The pinker shades indicate expressions tending more to injustice and the bluer shades more to identity. Grey indicates codes which are particular to the context of the Green Paper.

Groupness codes	Individualist or objective codes
	Description of current use of DLA/AA
Hard life for group I belong to or person I care for belongs to	Hard life for me/person I care for
Othering	n/a
Proposal is wrong plus groupness	Proposal is wrong, neutral on groupness
Proposal will make life even harder for us/defined group	Proposal will make life even harder for me/person I care for
Independence and choice plus collective tone	Independence and choice for me/person I care for
Lack of understanding for us or identified group	Lack of understanding of my life
	Lack of faith in policymaking/democratic process
	This makes no sense – impractical or inefficient
	System admin by social services wouldn't cover same expenses
	Social services not up to the job
We have paid/saved/contributed	I or they (person I care for) have paid saved my way
Appeal to others to join in	Expressed at individual level
Fight with collective tone	Mentions human rights/discrimination act
Other groups should be targeted instead	n/a
	Alternative policy/solution recommended
Additional group descriptor	n/a

## Appendix 14: Development of coding system for qualitative analysis

Meta codes	Mid-level codes	Sub codes
Situational	Description of current use of DLA/AA	Description of current use of DLA/AA
	Hard life	Hard life for group I belong to or person I care for belongs to
		Hard life for me/person I care for
Reason for opposition	Proposal is wrong, system is wrong	Othering
		Proposal is wrong plus groupness
		Proposal is wrong, neutral on groupness
	Proposal will make life even harder	Proposal will make life even harder for us/defined group
		Proposal will make life even harder for me/person I care for
	Works against independence and choice	Independence and choice plus collective tone
		Independence and choice for me/person I care for
	Antipathy to government/policymakers	Lack of understanding for us or identified group
		Lack of understanding of my life
		Lack of faith in policymaking/democratic process
	This makes no sense	This makes no sense – impractical or inefficient
		System admin by social services wouldn't cover same expenses
		Social services not up to the job
	Not fair have paid/saved way/contributed	We have paid/saved/contributed
		I or they (person I care for) have paid saved my way
Solution	Intention to fight change	Appeal to others to join in
		Expressed at individual level
		Fight with collective tone
		Mentions human rights/discrimination act
	Other groups should be targeted instead	
	Alternative policy/solution recommended	

## **Appendix 15: Coding by a second coder**

I selected approximately 5% of the total comments (ie 10 comments). I selected these comments purposefully, choosing comments to which I had applied a large number of codes. Prior to her coding I gave her the following information:

“I have selected 10 comments for you to look at. As you know I am interested in collective action. There is a model from social psychology which I am using which identifies 3 psychological processes which are drivers of collective action. These are: collective identity, injustice and efficacy. However I am not only interested in finding these drivers. I am looking at what the comments show more widely. Perhaps they indicate the presence of these drivers, perhaps other drivers and other themes that don't appear to be connected. In so far as I am interested in the drivers, I will explain them a little more. They are experienced at a group level. For collective identity this clearly makes sense and is about identifying with a group with whom you share attributes, characteristics, interests, ideology etc. Identification with that group might be displayed by “othering” of groups you don't identify with. Injustice at group level often takes the form of group-based anger – expressing the idea that I am in this group and it is treated most unfairly. The comments may also contain evidence of feelings of injustice but not particularly at a group level. Finally efficacy at a group level is about the feeling there is a problem, which you share with others and that together you are able to do something to address it.”

I also gave her a brief description of the context of the comment making.

Her descriptive codes were as follows:

Taking action/control or efficacy

Us/them marginalized

Us/them othering

Practical things, daily life, maintaining independence

Group identity/collective identity

Lack of control/fear of control being taken away/losing voice/removal of independence

Identity

Change – regression

Othering the elite/power. Othering immigrants

Politicising needs

Penalising the vulnerable

Importance of choice

Underlying motives of government

Scepticism

Outrage

Discrimination/age discrimination

Individual rights/freedom

Profit/cheap care

Deindividualisation/ fear of removing group identity by inducing competition  
between people

Collective action

Disgust

Need for specific services

Ironic use of word “care”/Irony

Shifting the blame

Dissatisfaction with service

Unfair

Collective voice

Social consequences

If they were in our shoes

Burnt out



## Appendix 16: Coding scheme for quantitative analysis

Code	Working definition	Variants <sup>40</sup>	Examples <sup>41</sup>	Example where code does NOT apply <sup>42</sup>
Collective identity	Identifying self as a member of, or categorising self in terms of, a particular social grouping (Ashmore and Deaux 2004, p.83).	Use of a group term and a collective pronoun	We cripples We recipients	I care for my war disabled husband and have done so for 50 years.
		Own position related to that of a group	I am in a similar position to many other people in this country. I am disabled with severe mobility problems.	I am in receipt of DLA at the higher rate for both mobility and care...the money I get through this is used for so many things.
Shared feelings of injustice	Presence of any of the following in respect of a group: perceived undeservingness of collective disadvantage, perceived collective mistreatment (e.g., group discrimination), perceived unfairness of procedures, dissatisfaction, fraternal resentment, and group-based anger. The commenter need not make clear that they are	Group-based anger, undeservingness of collective disadvantage. Clear person is in the group themselves	But now the days of bust are here, there was nothing put away for a rainy day, and tiny tim has to pay. We are the easy target.	I am afraid that the disappearance of a universal non means tested benefit will only lead to a real cut in my standard of living and my freedom to choose what I do with the allowance.

<sup>40</sup> These are not all possible variants but variants observed in the data

<sup>41</sup> The actual unit coded was the whole comment but the examples given are extracts (to save space). In the examples quoted, the rest of the comment did not undermine or contradict the impression given in the extract.

<sup>42</sup> These are included by way of contrast

	part of the group themselves. (Adapted from Van Zomeran et al 2008, p.512)	Unfairness of procedures. Clear person is in the group themselves.	Who are you to tell us what will make us better, when you're not in our situation?	
		Undeservingness of collective disadvantage and/or collective mistreatment. Ambiguous as to whether commenter is in group from this extract and from comment as a whole,	Many genuine claimants are unable to work so may take the flexible option of volunteer work or study (when able!) in order to build self esteem and to have some kind of positive input within society.  A 'raid' on non-means-tested benefits which the terminally ill, elderly and disabled rely upon is making a political issue of the needs of the most vulnerable in society as a revenue-saving measure.	
Additional group descriptor	A group identified as affected by the proposed changes, such as disabled or carers, described with additional adjective(s). Not necessary for the commenter to be part of the group themselves.		We understand that public cuts are going to come – but this suggestion is aimed at the ill and less powerful.  Once again the government is hitting the poorest and most vulnerable.  Us ordinary folk [is clear from another part of the comment that this person is a carer].	n/a

Interaction in consultation space	The commenter orients their comment to other commenters as well as or instead of addressing those hosting the consultation	Calls on others to take action (this sometimes includes a link another site).	I would suggest that everyone who is able, contact local MPs by any means, email, letter or even by visiting the next MPs surgery.	n/a
		Makes it clear that they have been reading other's comments and are responding to those	Having read many of the comments already posted on this site I am in total agreement with everything said.	
'Status' codes				
Disabled	Commenter makes it clear they are disabled. Can be expressed in collective or individual way		I am disabled/in receipt of DLA. I have MS. We disabled people.	n/a
Carer	Commenter makes it clear they are a carer. It is not essential they apply the term 'carer' to themselves to convey this. Can be expressed in collective or individual way.		I care for my younger child.	n/a
Disabled and carer	Commenter makes it clear they are disabled and a carer. Can be expressed in collective or individual way		I am disabled with severe mobility problems but I am also the main carer of my husband who has cancer.	n/a
Disabled or carer	Commenter makes it clear they are disabled or a carer but it is not clear which. Can be expressed in collective or		Do the government not appreciate how difficult it is to survive on the benefits they say we are entitled to at the	n/a

	individual way		moment...we find it difficult enough without their attempts to reduce these benefits.	
Older but not stated if disabled or carer	Commenter makes clear that they are an older person but does not state that they are in other categories. (People who say they are in receipt of AA are not in this category because their receipt of AA indicates that they are disabled.)		As a pensioner who has worked all my life I do not think that we should pay for care after we finish work.	n/a
Not stated	Commenter does not state or make it clear they are in any of the 'status' categories listed.	Comment is in an objective style. No information is given about the commenter's own circumstances.	The proposals are so vague as to be exploitable by authorities and individuals.	n/a
		Use of an undefined 'we' or 'us'. The meaning appears to be "us the people" or "us citizens" but this isn't stated.	Do we just live in a dog eat dog society? If we cannot provide basic care for sick people who have virtually no savings or income of their own left what exactly are we paying taxes for?	
Other	This includes the commenter making clear they have a familial relationship with disabled person but that they are not the main carer. It also includes those who work in sector. Comments which refer		My mother receives AA...  I am a benefits advisor...  Haven't we and our elders paid for this all our lives through taxes?	n/a

	to “we” and identify “we” as a group other than disabled people, carers or older people are in this category. For example, a number of comments were phrased in terms of “we taxpayers”.			
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## Appendix 17: quantitative analysis calculations and tables

### 1. Calculation of odds ratios

#### Status (disabled) by collective identity

The odds ratio was calculated in the following way. The number of people who make it clear they were disabled and exhibit collective identity is divided by the number of people who make it clear they were disabled and don't:

$$839/278= 3.018.$$

The number of people who don't make it clear they are disabled and exhibit collective identity is divided by the number of people who don't make it clear they are disabled and don't exhibit collective identity:

$$365/461=0.792.$$

$$\text{Odds ratio } 3.018/0.792=3.81.$$

#### Status (carer) by collective identity

The odds ratio was calculated in the following way. The number of people who make it clear they are a carer and don't express collective identity is divided by the number of people who make it clear they are a carer and do express collective identity:

$$270/156=1.720.$$

The number of people who don't make it clear they are a carer and who don't express collective identity is divided by the number of people who don't make it clear they are a carer and do express collective identity:

$$469/1047=0.448.$$

$$\text{Odds ratio } 1.720/0.448=3.84$$

### 2. Pattern analysis

I applied a simple algorithm to the patterns of codes by assigning a number to each variable and consequently particular patterns of variables were expressed in 4-digit numbers. So for example, a person who described themselves as disabled was assigned a four digit code beginning with 1; if they described themselves as a carer their four digit code began with a 2. I applied this process to the four variables: status, collective identity, use of additional descriptor, group injustice.

Frequency with which the various patterns occurred

<b>Pattern</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent of total</b>
1000	249	8.8
1001	19	.7
1011	10	.4
1100	13	.5
1101	594	21.0
1110	1	.0
1111	231	8.2
2000	153	5.4
2001	73	2.6
2011	44	1.6
2100	3	.1
2101	105	3.7
2111	49	1.7
3000	13	.5
3001	4	.1
3011	1	.0
3101	31	1.1
3111	12	.4
4000	9	.3
4001	12	.4
4011	4	.1
4100	6	.2
4101	68	2.4
4111	34	1.2
5000	1	.0
5001	1	.0
5100	1	.0
5101	5	.2
5111	12	.4
6300	262	9.2
6301	292	10.3
6310	7	.2
6311	330	11.6

7000	21	.7
7001	78	2.8
7011	47	1.7
7101	9	.3
7111	30	1.1
Total	2834	100.0



