It’s not who you know, it’s how you know them: 
Who exchanges what with whom?∗

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Abstract

Reciprocity – doing for others if they have done for you – is a key way people mobilize resources to deal with daily life and seize opportunities. In principle, reciprocity (the Golden Rule) is a universal norm. In practice, it is variable. Personal networks rarely operate as solidarities and as such, people cannot count on all the members of their networks to provide help all the time. Rather, social support comes uncertainly from a variety of ties in networks. This paper uses survey research to understand the variable and contingent nature of reciprocity and inquires about the kinds of resources exchanged between people. We investigate the extent to which interpersonal ties, network characteristics, and people’s personal characteristics (e.g., gender) affect the nature of reciprocal relationships. The evidence is extraordinarily clear on one subject – giving support is strongly associated with getting it. Analyses show that getting support from network members is the key to East Yorkers reciprocating – usually in kind but sometimes with other forms of support.

Keywords: Reciprocity; Social support; Relationships; Networks

1. Does the Golden Rule, Rule?

What goes around comes around, we learned as children on the streets of Berlin, Saskatoon and New York.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, we learned from the Bible.
Where were you when I needed you? We thought this when others did not repay the help we had given to them.

Reciprocity – doing for others if they have done for you – is a key way people mobilize resources to deal with daily life and seize opportunities. In principle, reciprocity (the Golden Rule) is a universal norm. In practice, it is variable. People exchange emotional and material aid, information and companionship. Although these forms of support sometimes flow only in one direction, exchanges can reciprocate between two persons or more indirectly through a larger network. Such exchanges are a key to obtaining network capital: social capital that is embedded in interpersonal relations that can provide custom-tailored helpful resources that are flexible, efficient and effective.1

The loosely coupled networked nature of contemporary society means that network capital does not come reliably from one single solidary group. Because personal networks rarely operate as solidarities, people cannot count on all the members of their networks to provide help all the time. Rather, network capital comes uncertainly from a variety of ties in networks. People navigate nimbly through partial involvements in multiple networks, giving and getting network capital (Wellman and Leighton, 1979; Wellman, 1999, 2001; Kadushin, 2004).

This shift from groups to networks has also had implications for the mobilization of social capital. The traditional notion of social networks and social capital is that people observe and support each other by walking door-to-door—or at most by traveling short distances. But what if most ties are no longer located nearby? That was already the situation in the 1960s and 1970s when modern social network research began in North America, and is even more so in the 21st century with the Internet maintaining many friendship and kinship ties over long distances (Wellman, 2001). It is not that neighborhood ties have died; it is just that they no longer dominate most personal networks.

Has reciprocity become less rooted in the social control and rewards of the group and become more a product of trust within ties? Tie attributes such as proximity, frequency of contact between exchange partners, role relationship, and tie strength can mediate the reciprocal provision of social support. So can the personal characteristics of individuals – the resources available to them – and of the networks in which these ties are embedded. These factors play a significant role in how reciprocity occurs and help to foster trust among network members before the exchanges take place (Table 1).

This shift from groups to networks may also entail more differentiated ties. Even villages are differentiated, but the more complex and sparsely knit networks of modern urbanites probably have a greater variety of role relationships. Not all ties are supportive and not all supportive ties provide the same kinds of resources (Pahl, 1982; Wellman and Wortley, 1989, 1990; Wellman, 1992). This specialization evokes the question of how people obtain resources through interpersonal relationships. If group-based community is not prevalent, have network-based relationships taken their place (Wellman, 1979; Wellman and Leighton, 1979)?

Finally, the information that researchers have amassed about exchanges of network capital has largely been about two-way flows of resources (often called “social support”) using animal studies of reciprocal behavior, laboratory experiments of exchange and the “Prisoner’s Dilemma”

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1 Consistent with a network view, we view social capital as a resource embedded in a person’s social network and accessed through network ties (Lin, 2001, 2005). Social support is one such resource.
or ethnographic studies of reciprocity in villages and urban neighborhoods. Even though we know that much support is given and received, we do not know in any systematic way about the relational nature of reciprocity. For example, are people who receive emotional support likely to give back emotional support in return, or are they likely to provide a minor service instead?

This paper uses survey research to understand the variable and contingent nature of reciprocity and inquires about the kinds of resources exchanged between people. We investigate the extent to which interpersonal ties, network characteristics, and people’s personal characteristics (e.g., gender) affect the nature of reciprocal relationships. The questions we address are

- From whom do people obtain reciprocal support?
- What kinds of supportive resources do they give and get in return?
- To what extent is the supportiveness of others associated with our own supportiveness—in specific exchanges of the same kind of resource or in the exchange of other kinds of resources?

Despite the importance and contingency of reciprocity, these questions have not been addressed in multivariate analyses that tease out which characteristics of people and their relationships are associated with reciprocity. We start the process, using evidence from a Toronto study of social networks and social support, to identify what kinds of reciprocal support are available from whom and in which kinds of relationships.

2. Where does reciprocity come from?

2.1. The Golden Rule

While our earlier research of the East York community in Toronto has told us about the one-way supply of resources between network members, not until we did the present research did we learn anything about who reciprocates with whom for what. Using our knowledge of East Yorkers and their relationships, we investigate the extent to which reciprocity takes place in these networks.

We turn first to the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Defined most strictly, this would mean that if I give you X, you would give me X back, either because of normative pressure or out of self-interest. In case studies, X could be emotional aid, minor services, or major services. Stated more formally, this is

**Hypothesis 1.** People are likely to exchange the same type of resource.

Yet the literature is filled with accounts of people giving some other kind of resource in return for help given. Someone may have lent a supportive ear about family problems for years but receive childcare in return.

Hypothesis 2. Giving one type of resource is associated with getting other types of resources in exchange.

Note that Hypotheses 1 and 2 are not mutually exclusive. Reciprocity can entail exchanges of both specific resources and different resources. Previous research has shown that relational, network and personal characteristics are related to the one-way provision of supportive resources that, in turn, can affect reciprocity. Hence, it is reasonable to expect that the characteristics associated with one-way provision of resources are also associated with the reciprocal provision of resources.

2.2. Tie Strength

Do other aspects of a tie, in addition to the Golden Rule, play a role in fostering reciprocity? Tie strength is a good possibility, as a number of relational phenomena are associated with “strong ties”: a sense of the relationship being intimate and special; a voluntary investment in the tie; a desire for as much companionship as possible and in multiple social contexts; and mutual awareness and supportiveness (reviewed in Wellman, 1992).

Do such strong ties provide more support? This question became prominent with George Homans’ (1961) assertion that sentiments of social closeness are associated with supportive interactions. They became even more pertinent when the second East York study – as well as other studies (reviewed in Cheal, 1988; Wellman, 1999) – suggested that not only are strong ties more likely to be supportive, the relatively small number of strong ties provide much of an East Yorker’s supportive resources. Thus, the second East York study found that most strong ties provide small services, emotional support or both. For example, socially close friends – but not socially close kin – were the most important sources of sociable companionship (Leighton, 1986; Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Wellman and Frank, 2001; see also Uehara, 1990, 1994, 1995).

Although all of the 11 or so ties in the typical East Yorker network are relatively strong (by comparison to the other 200+ ties in a network), some are stronger than others. For this analysis, we have set up a dichotomous 0/1 differentiation between Strong ties (1) and somewhat less strong but still Significant ties (0). It is based on the interview participants’ belief that the relationship is especially socially close; the participants’ report that they interact with a network member voluntarily; the participants’ report of multiplex interactions with a network member in more than one social context. As these three variables have approximately equal factor loadings (Wellman and Wortley, 1989), we combine them into a single tie strength measure. We define a strong tie as one that has at least two of the attributes of social closeness, voluntariness, and multiplexity. Given the high performance of tie strength in one-way provision of resources, we expect it to be significantly associated with reciprocal, two-way, resource exchange:

Hypothesis 3. Strong ties increase the likelihood of reciprocal exchange.

2.3. Kinship and Friendship

2.3.1. Kinship

There are cultural, structural and perhaps biological reasons for kin to be supportive and reciprocating suppliers of social capital. The norm that “blood is thicker than water” idealizes the promotion of family welfare, encourages kin to share resources, urges them to give other kin privileged access to these resources, and celebrates long-term reciprocity (Schneider, 1984). Kin are also the most likely network members to be densely interconnected, fostering communication
about needs and norms of providing help. Thus, most North Americans distinguish between kin and friends in their expectations for supplying social support, and they also distinguish among types of kin, expecting more from immediate kin (Allan, 1979; Farber, 1966, 1981; Argyle and Henderson, 1985). Our East York research has found three distinct types of kinship roles: parent–adult child, sibling, extended kin as well as roles of friendship, neighbor and workmate. Affines (in-laws) behave like consanguines. Because much support effectively goes to the household rather than to the person, kin often feel they are supporting their own blood relatives (Goetting, 1990).

Although most members of a person’s overall network are friends and acquaintances, kin usually consume a high percentage of strong ties. In general, about half of all socially close ties are kin. Immediate kin – parents, adult children, siblings, including in-laws – are more apt to be supportive network members than are extended kin—aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents.

In previous work on these same East York data, hierarchical cluster analysis found that kin differ from friends (and neighbors) in their patterns of support (Wellman and Wortley, 1989). Parent–adult children ties are the most supportive of all intimate and active ties, providing high levels of major services, financial aid and emotional support (see also Adams, 1968; Fischer, 1982a,b). Yet some of this support is almost inherently one-way, as one British study suggests (Grundy, 2005). Large transfers of money tend to go only in one direction, with parents helping adult children to buy homes but rarely vice versa. Siblings – brothers and sisters – give each other much support, although not as much as parents and adult children. By contrast, few extended kin who are involved in personal networks rarely provide support.

2.3.2. Friendship

Friends and neighbors make up nearly half of most active personal networks (Wellman, 1979; Wellman and Frank, 2001; Fischer, 1982b,c; Willmott, 1987) and they usually comprise about half of the ties providing each kind of support. Friendship ties are less densely knit and normatively bound than are kinship ties. For better or worse, getting social capital from friends is more problematic than getting it from kin. Whereas people are born or marry into kinship, friendship is more voluntary and often functions as discrete ties outside of bounded groups. The voluntary, one-to-one nature of friendship means that people must maintain it more actively and be more concerned about reciprocating a friend’s help (Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Crohan and Antonucci, 1989; Allan, 1989; Adams, 1990; Adams and Torr, 1998; Blieszner, 1988).

The East York data shows that while friends provide less variety and quantity of support than parents and children, they are as likely as siblings and much more likely than extended kin to be supportive (Wellman et al., 1988; Wellman and Wortley, 1989, 1990). Because friends tend to be most similar in personal characteristics, experiences and values, they also tend to be most effective in providing support that benefit from similar norms and roles. They are the pre-eminent sources of emotional support and information in networks (Miller and Darlington, 2002).

Hypothesis 4. Kin are more likely than friends to be reciprocally supportive. Parents and adult children are especially likely to reciprocally exchange major services.

We use dichotomous variables (0, 1) to assess the explanatory effects of parent–adult child relationships, siblings and friends.

2.4. Proximity, Contact and Neighboring

Do contact and proximity help explain reciprocity? This is a reasonable expectation because contact and proximity foster shared values, increase mutual awareness of needs and available
resources, reduce feelings of loneliness, facilitate resource delivery, and encourage reciprocal rounds of resource exchange (Homans, 1961). This should especially be true when the resources exchanged depend on the delivery of goods and tangible services, where sizeable travel effort might deter providing help.

Historically, arguments about contact have assumed the near-identity of neighborhood and community. Yet even before the advantage of the Internet, most active ties were long-distance ties that were sustained by telephones, cars and planes (Wellman, 2001; Hampton and Wellman, 2003). At the time of our 1979 East York interviews, about three quarters of the ties extended beyond the neighborhood, one-third beyond the Toronto metropolitan area, and one-fifth stretching more than 100 miles (160 km). Northern California showed a similar pattern (Fischer, 1982a,b). Even poor Americans, presumably with less access to planes and cars, have many long-distance ties (Oliver, 1986). Kinship ties have been especially able to endure over long distances because their densely knit structures and normative obligations encourage contact.3

Before the Internet, distance clearly reduced contact despite the low-cost of long-distance phone calls and the availability of cars and good roads. More than half of all face-to-face personal network contacts – as contrasted with ties – are with neighbors and workmates: people in close, often daily proximity (Wellman, 1996). Few network members lived near enough to see each other daily. But quick access by phone and car – even in the pre-Internet days when we collected these baseline data – means that it is the metropolitan area, not the neighborhood that is the limit on face-to-face contact and supplying most goods and services. It is not surprising that emotional support and financial aid are less dependent on proximity as they do not require physical contact to be effective (Mok et al., 2007; Wellman et al., 1988; Wellman and Wortley, 1990).

Hypothesis 5. Physical access – in the form of contact, proximity and neighboring – will promote the reciprocal exchange of services, especially minor services.

We measure contact between the participants and the members of their networks by taking the log$_{10}$ of the days per year they are in face-to-face and telephone contact. To measure proximity, we use the log$_{10}$ of the distance (in miles) between the homes of the participants and the members of their networks. We use logarithms because the difference between one and two miles apart is, for example, much greater than difference between living 1001 and 1002 miles apart. Neighboring is measured by a dichotomous (0, 1) variable derived from the participant’s report.

2.5. Personal Characteristics

The personal characteristics of people, as well as their relationships, can affect the provision of social capital. For example, research supports the popular observation that women give and receive more emotional support than men.4 As the saying goes, “women express, men repress”. Women tend to interact “face-to-face” by exchanging emotional support while men tend to interact “side by side” by exchanging goods and services (Perlman and Fehr, 1987, p. 21). Indeed, gender is the only personal characteristic that our previous research found to be related to the provision

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4 See, for example, Kunkel and Burleson (1999), Wellman (1985), Wellman and Wellman (1992), Hogan et al. (1993), Liebler and Sandefur (2002), Sherman et al. (1988), Wright (1989), and Moore (1990).
of social support, with women being more supportive than men (Wellman, 1985; Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Wellman and Frank, 2001).

Research has not made clear the impact of marital status on support. Two studies have shown that the married give and receive more support (Campbell and Lee, 1992; Wellman and Wellman, 1992). Their networks are larger, creating the potential for more support from a variety of sources. Yet another study contradicts these findings, showing that unmarried people are more likely to give and receive support (Liebler and Sandefur, 2002). Age may also be a factor. Research has shown that middle-aged persons have larger networks and also give and receive more support (Campbell and Lee, 1992; Haines et al., 1996).

Finally, socio-economic status can also play a role in the amount of social support exchanged between people. For example, many accounts have shown that poor people rely heavily on interpersonal relationships for their resources. Lacking money or connections to institutional distributions, the poor depend heavily on their friends and relatives. Yet, reliance on interpersonal ties is not limited to the poor. As richer people have more money to give to others, they may be asked to help more often. They also have more awareness of the distribution of social capital in communities and networks (Lin and Dumin, 1986; Espinoza, 1999). While some studies show that people in higher status positions give and receive more social support (Campbell and Lee, 1992; Haines et al., 1996), others show that people of low economic status rely on informal unpaid labor most often for the provision of major and minor services (Pahl, 1982). It may well be that both apparently contradictory situations are true, with high-status people more often called on for help and more often supplying it, even though interpersonal help looms larger in the lives of poorer people.

Similarities between network members can foster support (Feld, 1982; Gibbons and Olk, 2003; McPherson et al., 2001; Wellman and Gulia, 1999; Wellman and Wortley, 1990). Similarity analysts point out that people with similar characteristics tend to flock together in strong relationships. People with more things in common have more opportunities to talk, develop empathetic understandings and friendships, and their relationships often progress to mutual support (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954; Feld, 1982):

**Hypothesis 6.** Being female increases the probability of exchanges of emotional support.

We measure sex dichotomously: men = 0; women = 1. Similarities are measured by complex procedures described in Wellman and Gulia (1999).\(^5\)

2.6. Network Characteristics

Exchanges of social support may depend not only on the characteristics of ties but on the nature of the networks in which these ties are embedded. Size probably matters, but in which direction? People with larger networks may be more network-savvy, able to garner more ties and a higher proportion of supportive ties. Moreover, larger networks are more diverse; increasing the likelihood that someone in the network will be supportive (Sammarco, 2001; House et al., 1988; Hurlbert et al., 2000; Burton et al., 1995; Oxman and Hull, 1997; Williams and Dilworth-Anderson, 2002).

\(^5\) We do not use measures of socioeconomic status (years of schooling, occupational prestige) in the final analysis because preliminary analysis did not show any association with reciprocity or the one-way provision of supportive resources.
Table 1
Terminology used for exchange partners and resources exchanged

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exchange partners</th>
<th>Resources exchanged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restricted (similar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network</td>
<td>One-to-one restricted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Network restricted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One-to-one generalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Network generalized</td>
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</table>

It is possible that quality compensates for quantity, with members of small networks more apt to pitch in for help, just as small numbers of bystanders are more likely than large numbers to intervene in emergencies (Latané and Darley, 1976). Multilevel analysis – such as hierarchical linear modelling – is the best way to study how the characteristics of networks affect the supportiveness of ties embedded in them. Research using the first East York data set (collected in 1968) found that the members of small networks were each more likely to be supportive (Wellman and Frank, 2001). Yet the first East York study looked only at the five or so strongest ties, and while the second East York data set that we analyze here does contain information about more ties in a network, the sample size of participants is too small for multilevel analysis. However, network-level analysis of these data has shown that larger networks contain a higher percentage of supportive ties (Wellman and Gulia, 1999):

Hypothesis 7. Ties in larger networks will be more likely to reciprocate.

Network size is the simple count of all active members in the participants’ network. Network density is the proportion of all actually occurring ties among network members (excluding ties to the participants) divided by all possibly occurring ties.

2.7. Varieties of Reciprocity

Most studies of reciprocity look at the conditions that elicit cooperation rather than selfish behavior. These studies find that most people use cooperative strategies when given the option (Ostrom, 2003). Often, people reciprocate in kind to what they have been given. The exchange literature refers to this as restricted (or similar) exchange. A resource given comes with the understanding that reciprocation will take place within a limited time frame (Ekeh, 1974). The resource (goods and services) given is reciprocated with the same resource, which may also create conditions for future reciprocity and cooperation to occur.

People may also reciprocate with something else that they deem (and believe the recipients will deem) to be equally beneficial in a generalized (or mixed) exchange. Generalized exchange has fewer restrictions than restricted exchange, and is an indicator of interpersonal trust (Gouldner, 1960). In such situations, people do not depend on the immediate reciprocation of resources and will exchange one type of resource for a different type.

More densely knit networks may also be more supportive, having the advantages of stability, reliability and consistency (Durkheim, 1897; Bott, 1957; Thoits, 1982; Fischer, 1982b; Kadushin, 1983, 2002; Marsden and Hurlbert, 1988; Molm et al., 2000; Williams and Dilworth-Anderson, 2002). Yet one widely cited study has argued that more sparsely knit networks are more heterogeneous, providing more connectivity to outside resources (Granovetter, 1973). The data for one-way support do not support either hypothesis, as they do not show any substantial relationships between the density of networks and the support they provide (Wellman and Gulia, 1999). Nor did preliminary analyses of reciprocity show any density effects. Hence, density was deleted from the final analysis.
Another distinction exists—exchange between two persons and exchange within a network. If there is trust within a social network, a third person may reciprocate the support (Ekeh, 1974; Kadushin, 1981). As Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994) note, this implies a belief in the reciprocating nature of the network, or if the Golden Rule is accepted, in humanity as a whole (see also Cook, 2004).

3. Studying Supportive Relationships in East York

3.1. Ties, Networks and Personal Characteristics

Survey research has different strengths than focused, decontextualized lab studies of a small set of subjects and sensitizing ethnographic studies of small groups. Survey research lends itself to multivariate statistical analysis that allows researchers to tease out the relative effects of variables. It can provide information about how a substantial number of real-world phenomena relate to reciprocal exchanges:

1. Characteristics of ties: Such as their strength, role relationship, frequency of contact, or similarity in ego-alter personal characteristics. For example, do kin reciprocate more than friends?
2. Characteristics of the networks: In which these ties are embedded—the composition, size and structure of these networks. For example, do densely knit (heavily interconnected) networks reciprocate more because of more communication about needs, more normative social control, and better coordination of the delivery of goods and services? Is each tie in a small network more likely to be reciprocally supportive, with quality compensating for quantity?
3. Characteristics of the persons: Doing the exchanging—such as gender, socioeconomic status, or marital situations? For example, are women more likely to reciprocate emotional support? Are poor people more likely to reciprocate with rich interpersonal support compensating for poor finances? Are people with similar personal characteristics more likely to be supportive? For example, two women (or two men) may be more apt to understand and help each other. People with similar socioeconomic status may be more ready to help each other out on the understanding that the other can return the favor later.7

3.2. Interviewing East Yorkers

The data used in this paper come from interviews conducted in 1977–1978 in the East York section of Toronto. Although the data are not new, they have the benefit of being well studied and validated by research elsewhere (Wellman, 1985, 1999; Wellman et al., 1988; Wellman and Wortley, 1989, 1990; Wellman and Wellman, 1992). They also provide a good baseline for our new Connected Lives study of how the Internet is affecting social capital and reciprocity. Each interview took a total of 10–15 h, over a period of several days.

Twenty-nine people were interviewed, with a combined total of 3335 active ties in their personal networks. The interview participants are a subset of the random sample of adults surveyed in 1968 for the first East York study (Wellman, 1979). Although almost everybody has hundreds of people in their social networks, constraints on interviewing time meant that we were

7 We ignore here individual characteristics, such as intelligence, health, and altruism.
only able to ask in detail about active network members, comprising strong network members (socially close, intimate ties extending beyond the household) and significant network members who are active network members but not as socially close. The median active network has four strong ties and seven significant ties. The 335 active members are the units of our analysis.

At the time of the interviews, East York was predominantly family oriented, English–Canadian in ethnicity (especially from the Midlands and Yorkshire), and working and middle-class. Densely settled East York, with a population of 100,000 is a largely residential, integral part of metropolitan Toronto, with a population of about four million. It is on a main subway line, and it takes about 30 min to travel downtown, either by public transit or driving. At the time of our data collection, most East Yorkers lived in small homes, with neat lawns.

Interview participants ranged in age from 29 to 66 years old. Most (71%) were married. Ninety percent of the men held full- or part-time jobs, such as electrician, technician, truck driver or supervisor. Somewhat fewer women, 66%, were employed, 8% were not in the labor force, and 26% were homemakers. They held jobs such as secretary, insurance claims examiner, teacher, or waitress.

Like the interview participants, the majority of the network members were married (67%), employed (75%), and had attended at least trade school or some university (90%). They ranged between 18 and 90 years in age.

3.3. The Resources that East Yorkers Exchange

We asked East Yorkers about which of twelve different kinds of resources they received from – or gave to – each active network member. The majority of ties between East Yorkers and network members provide some kind of support. We identified four broad kinds of social support – emotional aid, minor services, major services, and financial aid – and also discovered which types of ties were apt to send different kinds of support (see Wellman and Wortley, 1989, 1990 for details).

Emotional support is provided in one direction or another in 61% of the ties: 41% of network members reportedly provide the East York interview participants with emotional support while the participants themselves report that they provide 38% of their ties with emotional support. That 61% – and not 79% – of the ties are emotionally supportive is because some ties are reciprocally supportive (see Table 2 for details). In our study, emotional support includes support during minor upsets (provided by 47% of the network members), giving advice about family problems (39%),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network member</th>
<th>Emotional support (%)</th>
<th>Minor services (%)</th>
<th>Major services (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No exchange</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-way exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network member to participant</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant to network member</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal exchange</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of ties = 335</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and support during major or long-lasting emotional crises (33%). The widely given emotional aid is intangible, with little financial cost, and can be given to some extent over the telephone as well as face-to-face.

Minor services are provided in one direction or another in by network members (45%) and by interview participants in 40% of their ties. The minor services include giving or lending household items (38%), helping with small household jobs (35%), providing other minor services (40%), and help in dealing with organizations (10%). Thus minor tangible aid – goods and services – is almost as widely given as less tangible emotional support. Yet while low in time and monetary cost, giving minor services often requires physical presence.

Major services are provided in one direction or another in a far lower percentage of ties: 29%. They are provided by 16% of the network members and by interview participants in 17% of their ties. Major services include help with big household chores (such as repairs, regular help with housework; 16%) and other large services (such as day care for children or long-term health care; 7%). Providing such major services usually requires a major commitment of time, effort, and sometimes skill.

Financial aid is provided by 16%: giving or lending small or large amounts of money. As small-scale financial aid is indiscriminately reciprocated and large-scale financial aid (usually for home-buying) is not reciprocated – it generally passes from parents to adult children – we do not include it in our analyses.

East Yorkers also provide companionship, enjoying each other's company, but we did not ask about this in a way that could be used to study reciprocity. And, to our regret, we never asked about exchanging information, other than the family advice that is part of emotional aid.

3.4. The Extent to which East Yorkers Reciprocate

We use one-way exchange as an independent explanatory variable from participant to network member. This allows us to examine the extent to which the participants’ provision of each type of resource is associated with reciprocal exchange.

Previous research using the same data has shown how the East Yorkers’ different kinds of relationships, networks and personal characteristics provide different types of resources (Wellman, 1985; Wellman et al., 1988; Wellman and Wortley, 1990; Wellman and Gulia, 1999; Wellman and Potter, 1999; Wellman and Frank, 2001). While East Yorkers usually get all the dimensions of resources from somewhere in their networks, they usually get different types of resources from different network members. Not only different relationships, but also different types of relationships, provide emotional aid, minor services, major services and financial aid.

Although the diverse networks provide a variety of supportive resources, the networks’ spatial dispersion, segmentation into different clusters, and low internal connectivity all hinder the widespread communication of needs and the mobilization of activity. These are more duets of resource exchange than integrated orchestras.

The evidence shows that East Yorkers are supportive in many ways, and that they exchange substantial reciprocal support. Their support is expressed most fully in providing emotional support and minor services. The last row in Table 2 shows the extent to which network members giving one kind of resource reciprocally get back the same kind of resource: for example, when a network member and an East Yorker give each other emotional support.

Even for abundantly present emotional support and minor services, only about one-fifth of the ties reciprocate. However, reciprocity is contingent on one-way exchange, and the data show that when emotional support or minor services are given, it is reciprocated in a substantial minority.
of the ties. Thirty percent of all emotional aid is reciprocally exchanged as are 38% of minor services.8

The situation is quite different for major services. Giving such services entails a greater commitment of time and effort. By contrast to the widespread provision of minor services and emotional support, only a minority of East Yorkers, 29%, either give or get major services. Most major services are not reciprocated: only 4% of all ties have relationships in which major services are reciprocated. Even in those ties where major services are given, only 14% (4/29) of the giving relationships are reciprocated. Although the small number of reciprocating ties limits our statistical analysis, the data suggest that either the need for major services has not been present or the receiver does not have the ability to reciprocate by providing major services in return. The provision of such help may well be normative—driven by a felt need to help—rather than self-interested—driven by the belief that similar help will be provided in the near or medium term. For example, one-way provision of major services may occur when parents help adult children in times of childbirth, or adult children help aging parents during illness.

3.5. Statistical Method

Our analysis relies on logistic regression and describes the relationship between the reciprocity of each type of resource—emotional support, minor services and major services—with the set of explanatory variables discussed in the previous section: from tie strength to network size and density. For each of the three reciprocity variables that we study, there are three values:

1. No exchange;
2. One-way resource provision by network member to participant, but not in the other direction;
3. Two-way (reciprocal) exchange of that resource (emotional support, etc.) between network member and participant.

We use models that help describe the reciprocal exchanges of active network members. Our models predict the probability of being in a higher category (two-way exchanges) rather than in a lower category. Our cumulative logit approach makes no assumption about the distances between observed categories. It takes into account the score test for the proportional odds, which tests the assumption that the three-value ordinal restrictions are valid, and with the desired high p-values. The score test of the proportional odds assumption evaluates the null hypothesis that the explanatory coefficients are equal.

4. Explaining Reciprocity: Our Results

4.1. Baseline Models: Measuring the Golden Rule

We use five models to study the reciprocal exchange of each of emotional support, minor services and major services. We first examine whether the provision of a supportive resource in one direction is associated with reciprocity in the other direction—as the Golden Rule suggests. We do this in two ways: the specific (restricted) exchange of a resource (Model 1) and the

8 We calculated the reciprocal exchange of emotional support in the following manner: First, as Table 2 shows, 61% of the ties have an emotional support component (100 – 39 = 61). Dividing the percentage of reciprocating ties (18%) by this number – 18/61 – shows that 30% of all ties that contain emotional support reciprocate it.
mixed (generalized) exchange of one resource for another (Model 2). Subsequent models examine if tie and network characteristics (Model 3) and personal characteristics (Model 4) add to the explanations provided by the Golden Rule.

Our operational definition of reciprocity is that the interviewed East Yorker has given a resource (for example, emotional support, etc.) to a network member and that the network member has given that (or another) resource to the East Yorker. However, we do not have systematic information about in which direction the support was given first. In many cases, it is an ongoing dance of reciprocal exchanges.

The first model straightforwardly supports a narrow construction of the Golden Rule: East Yorkers are significantly likely to do unto their network members as their network members do onto them (the main diagonal of Table 3). Put another way, there are significant associations between the giving and receiving of emotional support, the giving and receiving of minor services, and the giving and receiving of major services. This does not mean that all who get a resource give it in return, but they are more likely to do so than those who never got the resource. All three statistical associations are significant and large, with minor services having a somewhat stronger association than emotional support: odds ratios of 7.5 and 5.4, respectively.

The only other Golden Rule phenomenon is between emotional support and major services. Participants who have given emotional support to network members have received major services from them. However, we do not know which came first: the hug or the care giving.

Although importantly supporting the Golden Rule, the analysis based on Table 3 looks at reciprocal exchange only in isolation from other potential explanatory variables. Hence, we use fuller logistic regressions that include the potential explanatory variables discussed earlier (tie strength, etc.). Tables 4–6 present these for emotional support, minor services and major services, respectively. Although they contain many variables, they are the pared-down result of many logistic regressions in our preliminary work. For example, because kinship and network density are statistically associated, we ignore network density as an explanatory variable and use several kinship measures. Similarly, preliminary analysis led us to retain a variable indicating whether a network member was a neighbor or not and to delete a measure of residential distance between network members and participants. Although we include Table 6 for major services, we do not discuss it extensively because the low percentage of ties providing major services makes statistical analyses problematic.

---

**Table 3**

Reciprocal pattern of resource exchange between network members and participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ support</th>
<th>Emotional support</th>
<th>Minor services</th>
<th>Major services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>b</strong> (S.E.) Odds</td>
<td><strong>b</strong> (S.E.) Odds</td>
<td><strong>b</strong> (S.E.) Odds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>1.70*** (0.16) 5.4</td>
<td>0.27 (0.14) 1.3</td>
<td>0.87*** (0.24) 2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor services</td>
<td>0.37* (0.15) 1.4</td>
<td>2.02*** (0.18) 7.5</td>
<td>0.43 (0.26) 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major services</td>
<td>0.17 (0.25) 1.2</td>
<td>0.02 (0.24) 1.0</td>
<td>1.91*** (0.27) 6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio</td>
<td>191.26</td>
<td>222.79</td>
<td>111.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*
Table 4
Summary of cumulative logit analysis for reciprocal emotional support of network members (N = 335)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services by Participants</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b (S.E.)</td>
<td>Odds</td>
<td>b (S.E.)</td>
<td>Odds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>1.85*** (0.16)</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>1.70*** (0.16)</td>
<td>5.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor services</td>
<td>0.37* (0.15)</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.42** (0.16)</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major services</td>
<td>0.17 (0.25)</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.04*** (0.27)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Relational Attributes    |         |         |         |         |
|                          |          |         |          |         |
| Tie Strength (strong ties = 1) | 0.01 (0.28) | 1.01 |
| Frequency of phone contact | −0.01** (0.20) | 1.01 |
| Frequency of face to face contact | −0.12 (0.23) | 0.88 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network Members’ Role Relationships</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent–adult child</td>
<td>0.81 (0.53)</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>0.65 (0.60)</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>0.37 (0.38)</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.74 (0.41)</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>0.33 (0.37)</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>0.61 (0.39)</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbor</td>
<td>−0.31 (0.39)</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>−0.56 (0.43)</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Net Members’ Personal Characteristics</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex (female = 1)</td>
<td>0.86** (0.31)</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (married = 1)</td>
<td>0.36 (0.29)</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.03** (0.01)</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Personal Characteristics</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex (female = 1)</td>
<td>0.22 (0.34)</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (married = 1)</td>
<td>−0.01 (0.33)</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.02 (0.02)</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Network</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netsize</td>
<td>0.09*** (0.03)</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| −2 log L                              | 535.4   | 526.5   | 518.0   | 462.0   |
| N                                     | 335     | 335     | 335     | 335     |

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
Table 5
Summary of Cumulative Logit Analysis for Reciprocal Minor Services of Network Members (N = 335)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b (S.E.)</td>
<td>Odds</td>
<td>b (S.E.)</td>
<td>Odds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Services by Participants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>0.27 (0.14)</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.28 (0.15)</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor services</td>
<td>2.12*** (0.17)</td>
<td>8.32</td>
<td>2.02*** (0.18)</td>
<td>7.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major services</td>
<td>0.02 (0.24)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>−0.03 (0.26)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relational Attributes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tie strength (strong ties = 1)</td>
<td>−0.00 (0.29)</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.04 (0.31)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of phone contact</td>
<td>−0.09 (0.21)***</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>−0.01 (0.22)***</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of face to face contact</td>
<td>−0.12 (0.24)***</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.06 (0.25)***</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Network Members’ Role Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent–adult child</td>
<td>1.08* (0.54)</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.75** (0.60)</td>
<td>5.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>0.28 (0.40)</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.31 (0.43)</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>0.92* (0.37)</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>0.93* (0.41)</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbor</td>
<td>1.20** (0.40)</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>−1.22** (0.43)</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net Members’ Personal Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (female = 1)</td>
<td>−0.51 (0.30)</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (married = 1)</td>
<td>0.05 (0.29)</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.03** (0.01)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants’ Personal Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (female = 1)</td>
<td>0.38 (0.33)</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status (married = 1)</td>
<td>−0.39 (0.33)</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.02*** (0.02)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size of Network</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netsize</td>
<td>0.04† (0.02)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−2 log L</td>
<td>501.4</td>
<td>498.0</td>
<td>482.2</td>
<td>465.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services by Participants</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support</td>
<td>0.87*** (0.24)</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.91** (0.26)</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor services</td>
<td>0.43 (0.26)</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>0.21 (0.29)</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major services</td>
<td>2.32*** (0.26)</td>
<td>10.21</td>
<td>1.91*** (0.27)</td>
<td>6.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Relational Attributes   |         |         |         |         |
| Tie strength (strong ties = 1) | 0.17 (0.42) | 1.19 | 0.16 (0.44) | 1.17 |
| Frequency of phone contact | -0.02 (0.30) | 0.98 | -0.01 (0.31) | 0.99 |
| Frequency of face to face contact | -0.32 (0.38) | 0.72 | -0.42 (0.40) | 0.66 |

| Network Members’ Role Relationships |         |         |         |         |
| Parent–adult child | 2.30* (1.13) | 10.00 | 2.52* (1.18) | 12.40 |
| Siblings | 1.62 (1.12) | 5.05 | 1.61 (1.12) | 5.00 |
| Friend | 1.68 (1.12) | 5.40 | 1.70 (1.12) | 5.51 |
| Neighbor | 2.68* (1.10) | 14.70 | -2.83* (1.12) | 16.90 |

| Net Members’ Personal Characteristics |         |         |         |         |
| Sex (female = 1) | -0.90 (0.44) | 0.41 | 0.01 (0.43) | 1.01 |
| Marital status (married = 1) | -0.01 (0.02) | 0.99 |

| Participants’ Personal Characteristics |         |         |         |         |
| Sex (female = 1) | 0.29 (0.48) | 1.34 | 0.66 (0.59) | 1.95 |
| Marital status (married = 1) | 0.02 (0.02) | 1.02 |

| Size of Network |         |         |         |         |
| Netsize | 0.03 (0.04) | 1.03 |

| -2 log L | 271.1 | 250.0 | 238.6 | 231.3 |
| N | 335 | 335 | 335 | 335 |

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
Model 1 in the three tables is the baseline model, examining the narrow definition of the Golden Rule. The statistics for this model repeat those found in Table 3: giving emotional support, minor services or major services in one direction strongly increase the odds of receiving it in the other direction.

Model 2 examines the generalized Golden Rule. With these different statistics, there are minor variations from what was discussed for Table 3. The association between participants giving emotional support and getting major services is joined by a weak association between giving minor services and getting emotional support.

Taken together, the two Golden Rule models show that most exchanges are for similar resources, such as minor services for minor services. However, all of the other associations for resource exchange are positive, suggesting that there is an additional tendency towards some generalized exchange. Hypothesis 1 is clearly confirmed, and there is some support for Hypothesis 2. Not only are a few generalized exchanges statistically significant, but the goodness of fit increases from Model 1 to 2: the logistic likelihood statistic (−2 log likelihood) decreases in each of Tables 4–6.

4.2. Relationships and Reciprocity

Is it all just support bringing forth reciprocal support, or are there other influences on when the Golden Rule is observed? We start by adding to the baseline models measures of other aspects of the ties between participants and network members. Model 3 adds measures of tie strength, frequency of contact, and indicators of role relationships: parent–adult child, sibling, friend, and neighbor.

We were astonished to find that tie characteristics add little to the Golden Rule items in explaining the likelihood of getting reciprocal resources. (The Golden Rule items of specific and generalized reciprocity continue to remain significant in these two models.) There are no significant tie characteristics related to the reciprocal exchange of emotional support in Model 3. However, being a neighbor, a parent or an adult child is associated with reciprocally receiving minor services in addition to the Golden Rule. Similarly, being a parent or an adult child is associated with reciprocally receiving major services. Tie strength has no impact, nor does frequency of contact – either face-to-face or by phone – or being a friend or a sibling. In short, there is no support for Hypothesis 3 (tie strength), and only partial support for Hypothesis 4 (the parent–child kinship relationship) and Hypothesis 5 (neighboring).

The strongest positive relationship for the parent–adult child relationship is an adjusted odds ratio of 10.7 for the exchange of major aid. This means that the odds of a parent and adult child exchanging major aid is more than ten times the odds for other role relationships.10 As only a small number of all ties exchange major services, these odds are not reliable, but they do suggest that parent–child relationships dominate this type of exchange, and not close friends or other kinfolk.

We have been surprised at the low number of associations between tie characteristics and reciprocity because these same data have shown all of the tie characteristics to be appreciably related to the one-way provision of supportive resources (see above; see also Wellman and Wortley, 1990). We found an association then; why not now? We believe that we have stumbled onto a chain of causality that is more complex than we had originally imagined. Tie strength, frequent

---

10 We also have a large odds ratio for neighbors reciprocating major services, but only two neighbors actually exchange major services.
contact, and role relationships affect the one-way provision of resources, but once these resources have been received, it is the sheer fact of getting them that engenders reciprocity, both specific and generalized.

4.3. Personal Characteristics, Network Characteristics and Reciprocity

Do the personal characteristics of interview participants and their network members affect reciprocity in addition to – or even instead of – the Golden Rule and tie characteristics? Once again, the Golden Rule measures remain important in Model 4, but there is an additional effect of one personal characteristic: gender. Recall that our one-way analysis of social support (Wellman and Wortley, 1990) had found that women are more emotionally supportive (Wellman, 1985). Model 4 shows that gender is important for reciprocity as well as for one-way support. Female participants significantly reciprocate emotional supportiveness. Hence, Hypothesis 6 is supported. There are also slight negative effects of the age of participants and network members on reciprocated emotional support and of network members’ age on reciprocated minor services.

Model 4 is our final model. It is the best fitting model for all types of reciprocity, as shown by the lower $-2 \log$ likelihood statistic in Tables 4–6. This is especially apparent for emotional support (Table 4): the 11% decrease in this statistic from 518 to 462 shows how the personal characteristics of sex and age help to explain the likelihood of reciprocating emotional support.

Measures of the similarity of personal characteristics were removed from Model 4 when preliminary analyses did not show any relationship between them and any form of reciprocity. The lack of importance of similarity suggests that the reciprocal exchange of resources is not based on “sameness” but on resources previously supplied. The implication is positive for societal cohesion that cuts across boundaries of class, gender, ethnicity, etc. Prior supportiveness fosters the bond of reciprocity and not class, gender or marital status.

Model 4 also includes network size, the only network characteristic retained for the final logistic regressions. The data show that the larger the network, the more likely each tie in the network is to reciprocally provide emotional support. Having more people in a network increases the chances for reciprocal exchanges. Rather than quality compensating for quantity, the larger the number of ties in a network, the more likely a tie is to be emotionally supportive in both directions. Hypothesis 7 is supported for reciprocated emotional support and almost significantly for the reciprocation of minor services. However, major services depend solely on prior supportiveness and the parent–child bond.

4.4. The Relational Basis of Reciprocity: Conclusions and Discussion

The evidence is clear. The overwhelmingly direct cause of reciprocity is giving support in the first place. Many people give emotional support or minor services in one direction, and the logistic regressions show that getting supportive resources from network members is the key to the East Yorkers reciprocating—usually in kind but sometimes with other forms of support (Fig. 1). The parent–child bond is the only relationship that appears to operate without much regard to near-term reciprocity: providing minor and major services.

NetLab’s 35-year body of work analyzing these East Yorkers allows us to place the Golden Rule in context. As Don Corleone pointed out (Puzo and Coppola, 1972), to get, you often have to give. And it is in the initial giving of supportive resources that characteristics of ties – such as their strength and their frequency of contact – are important. They set the chain of exchange in motion, and then the Golden Rule kicks in.
Fig. 1. Pathways of support and reciprocity: (a) Pathways to reciprocated emotional support; (b) pathways to reciprocated minor services; (c) pathways to reciprocated major services.

The practice of reciprocity is especially important for the exchange of resources that supply social capital for dealing with everyday matters: minor services and emotional support. And with the practical functioning of the Golden Rule, each exchange strengthens the bond and makes further exchanges more likely. Our reading of the interviews suggests that both self-interest and norms are at work here.
The exception is the much rarer provision of major services where there is little evidence of reciprocity. Why is it that greater expenditures of time and money do not evoke return engagements? Perhaps our time frame was too short in the interviews to discover reciprocal exchanges. This is probable when the most likely exchange of major services is between parents and their adult children. It is a long time between parental help to children and young adults to filial help to their aged parents. Perhaps there is some social pressure from other kin to reciprocate appropriately. But given that we know that other kin are less supportive and that most ties largely operate independently of each other, we believe that the parent–child norm of mutual support continues even while other kinship norms are weakened.

Even though we suggested earlier in this paper that networks have gone beyond the confines of our front yards, neighboring still pays off. Neighbors reciprocally exchange more services. Yet neighbors are only a small fraction of the East Yorkers’ networks, and the advent of the phone, expressway, car and transit system meant that even in 1978, the distance between network members is only of secondary importance. Indeed, it plays an insignificant role in the exchange of social support. The phone takes much of the place of neighborly interaction, supplemented by intermittent trips by car or plane to visit with far-flung network members (Wellman and Tindall, 1993). In 2007, the Internet and instant messaging – joined by webcams and digital-network telephones – can also reduce the importance of physical proximity (Wellman, 2001; Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). Yet, the importance of proximity will persist for services until it is possible to transport a cup of sugar electronically.

What do these findings mean for social capital? First, as the sages have counseled, invest in your ties. Second, the advent of networked individualism means that the ties themselves are more important than the network (Wellman, 2001; Wellman and Frank, 2001). Network density has no effect on reciprocity and network size has only a small effect. There is not much evidence of group pressure to reciprocate that has been celebrated in scores of village and neighborhood studies in past decades.

Third, the supportive exchanges we have discovered focused on reproduction rather than on production. To some extent, this was because we not investigated ties at work. In their interviews, the East Yorkers rarely talk about using social – or other forms of capital – to go into business, to invest, or even to get a job. Their networks provide social capital for reproduction much more than production. They center on the household – with in-laws providing as much help as consanguines and secondarily on the network and the neighborhood. They rarely are concerned with earning a living. The East Yorkers’ investments in their ties provide havens: a sense of belonging and being helped. When needed, the ties provide bandages: routine emotional aid and small services that help people cope with the stresses and strains of their everyday lives. More rarely, a few ties provide safety nets that lessen the effects of acute crises and chronic difficulties such as serious illness, childcare and unemployment. Even more rarely, the ties provide leverage to a few East Yorkers keen to change situations (houses, jobs, spouses) or to change the world (local school board politics, banning unsafe food additives, stopping cruelty to animals).

Perhaps the sages got the reciprocity norm right: As Bakunin said in 1867:

No person can recognize or realize his or her own humanity except by recognizing it in others and so cooperating for its realization by each and all.

Or, perhaps, reciprocity is a more hardbitten, utilitarian set of accounting, as Matron Mary Morton sang in the musical, Chicago (Kander and Ebb, 1975):
They say that life is tit for tat, And that's the way I live
So, I deserve a lot of tat, For what I've got to give
Don't you know that this hand, Washes that one too
When you're good to Mama, Mama's good to you!

While our research provides a start to teasing apart the relational nature of reciprocity, further work needs to be done. Three areas seem promising. First, why do people reciprocate? Is it Bakunin humanitarianism or Matronly utilitarianism?

Second, while we are able to determine that receiving support is most likely associated with the provision of similar and different forms of support, we have no way of telling which came first. Future research needs to look at specific interactions between network participants and members to determine the directionality of reciprocity and how this important characteristic impacts the flow of resources.

Third, we suspect that a difference exists between reciprocal exchanges between pairs and reciprocal exchanges that operate within more complex network-based systems of exchange. Is support being reciprocated between three or more members within a network? Reciprocity at the network level demands a look at the types of structures – as well as relationships – that are more likely to participate as well as the types of support that are more likely to be exchanged within a network chain. As such, our study provides but an introduction to the study of reciprocity and how people exchanges resources.

References


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