Promoting Positive Outcomes for Healthy Youth Development: Utilizing Social Capital Theory

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This article discusses the central tenets of the theories of social capital, which include exchanges, trust, obligation, bonding, bridging, and issues concerning the marginalization of certain groups. Included is an exploration of the limitations of the approaches of the key theorists, followed by the presentation of a theoretical framework and model of the development of social capital among youth. Additionally, the article discusses the relevancy of social capital for social work practice.

Key words: *youth, social capital, social support, youth development*

Contemporary social capital theory links an individual's ability to acquire resources through the connection of social networks, and other social commodities, to positive outcomes (Portes, 1998). The empirical research indicates that the various applications of social capital include the notion that it may be a predictor of positive outcomes among adolescents, e.g., healthy development, as well as negative outcomes, e.g., juvenile

delinquency and violence (Wright & Fitzpatrick, 2006). Clearly, youth can derive benefit from their social relationships, their families, and membership in their communities. For example, Masten and Coatsworth (1998) indicate that youth with higher social capital demonstrate improved academic competencies, and Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2000) discuss the importance of social capital for facilitating cooperation, mutual support, and resilient functioning among adolescents.

Conversely, a range of problematic outcomes such as delin-quency, depression, substance use, and sexual acting out has been found to be related to the lack of supportive relationships in a youth's life (Laser, 2003; McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson & Thompson, 1998; Werner & Smith, 2001). The role of social capital in providing individual and social resources, and po-tentially buffering the effects of problematic outcomes, is well cited in the literature (Putnam, 1995a). Disadvantage is related to the breakdown of the infrastructure of supportive networks, and increased sources of human capital have been found to be positively related to youth successfully negotiating high-risk environments (Fitzpatrick, Wright, Piko, & LaGory, 2005).

The field of social work and other related professions have acknowledged the importance of understanding the various conceptualizations of social capital, which differ by the central theorists. This article will discuss some tenets of the theories of social capital, which include exchanges, trust, obligation, bonding, bridging, and issues concerning the marginalization of certain groups. We will then explore the critique and the limitations of the approaches of the key theorists, followed by the presentation of a theoretical framework of the develop-ment of social capital among youth. Finally, we will discuss the relevancy of social capital for social work practice.

Theoretical Considerations

Putnam's (1993, 1995a) notions that social capital is related to connected community networks contributed to thinking of social capital in sweeping generalizations, to describe rela-tionships and the acquisition of resources by insiders versus outsiders. This has created a diluted or simplified version of the original theories of social capital. Though the actual

"inventor" of the terminology social capital is somewhat in controversy, most credit is given to Bourdieu (1983), who purported three forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. Bourdieu's definition of social capital is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possessions of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (1983, p. 248). Bourdieu's pragmatic position regarding economic capital, for instance, characterizes some of the contemporary social capital discourse, which upholds the value of social capital as asset building. Theoretically, this characterization of social capital translates into a pathway of possibility to improve the lives of youth and families.

However, through other social capital research it has been found that there are other factors at work between individuals or groups than the simple exchange of goods and services in transactions. Individuals and groups demonstrated preferential treatment and received benefits when they had a relationship with another individual or group (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 1995, 1998; Lin, 1999a, 1999b; Portes, 2000; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Putman, 1993, 1994, 1995a, 1995b). Preferential treatment and benefits increased when the individual or group had feelings of sympathy and obligation to another individual or group (Robison & Schmidt, 1996). In essence, relationships do matter; they change both the psychodynamic process and outcomes for individuals and groups.

Exchanges that create social capital

There are several major components to social capital theory. First, there are several types of exchanges that create social capital. These exchanges can also be found in the social support literature as types of support (Boger & Smith, in press; Crockenburg, 1988). They are instrumental exchanges, emotional exchanges, informational exchanges, and informal socializing.

Instrumental exchanges are the trading of goods and services. Emotional exchanges are expressions of caring, buffering the individual from adverse effects of stress (Vaux, 1988) and validations. These exchanges give the individual an

emotional sense of belonging—of "being assured and rec-
ognized of worthiness as an individual" (Lin, 1999 p. 31).
Informational exchanges are knowledge that is gained through
contacts with others, such as opportunities, and information
(Lin, 1999a). The information that is provided and the utility of
that information for future actions create social capital for the
individual (Coleman, 1988). Informal socializing allows the in-
dividual access to individuals, places and organizations and to
make connections to people they would otherwise not encoun-
ter (Putnam, 1994, 1995a, 1995b). Additionally, understanding
some of the important tenets of social capital, such as trust,
obligation, bonding, bridging, and marginalization, elucidates
the benefits, as well as the possible pitfalls, of promoting social
capital with youth.

Trust

Trust is a primary ingredient for maintaining, accruing and
supporting the development of social capital. Putnam states
"trust lubricates social life" (1993, p. 2). He believes that trust is
gained by the belief in reciprocity (Putnam, 1993, 1994, 1995a,
1995b). Fukuyama asserts that one "needs to trust one another
and to cooperate in the formation of new groups and associa-
tions" (1995, p. 89). He states that societies may be high or low
trust societies, but in either incidence the individual trusts that
the group will continue to exist and that her needs will be met
when asked (Fukuyama, 1995, 1998). High trust societies are
characterized by large organizations where kinship ties are
not predominant. The organization perpetuates itself through
the continual addition of new members. In contrast, low trust
societies are characterized by small organizations and are fre-
quently linked by kinship ties. In low trust societies, there are
often large struggles between successive generations when
control is passed on and the ability to resolidify control over
the kin network is often difficult to secure.

In both low and high trust societies, a great deal of social
capital can be created. However, in low trust societies the social
capital is often stratified within a small subset of the popu-
lation with kinship ties. Social capital is centralized within a
group that views the insider verses the outsider very different-
ly. In these low trust societies, social capital can be seen in the

practice of nepotism. In high trust societies, both the informal networks and the formal networks create social capital for its members (Fukuyama, 1995, 1998).

Obligation

Fundamental to the concept of social capital is the importance of the "buy-in" of the individual to the community. The individual must feel that it is in her best self-interest to support the greater good of the group. It is also important for the individual to believe that her involvement now will pay dividends later. She feels obliged to support the group today, so that the group can support her at some later date. Obligations, expectations and trustworthiness are a form of social capital which relies on the reciprocal nature of relationships (Coleman, 1988). As youth interact and give support and services to other youth, there is an expectation that the recipient will feel obligated to give support and services in return. These "credit slips" are often never used but create an atmosphere of cooperation and shared dependency of outcomes. In youth culture this is very similar to the adage that "I have your back and you have mine."

This obligation has been further refined by cultural or group norms (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). It is the obligation toward socialization of the individual to the group that creates culturally expected social protocol and culturally responsible behavior within the group where they are accruing and receiving social capital.

Bonding

As individuals, families or groups are more bonded to each other, the network will become more dense (Boudieau, 1983). As density increases, there will be a greater sense of obligation of group members to each other, a greater sense of recognition of group members to each other, an increased need to keep the group intact and a heightened sense of watching out for the group's best interests. Bonded solidarity is the creation of a common cohesive bond between individual members and the sharing of a common purpose (Portes, 1993). It is typified by team sports and the fervor of school spirit in youth.

Bridging

Strong ties are important for group cohesion and a more dense social network. However, weak ties are ties that connect two individuals from different groups together, thereby acting as a bridge between two different social networks (Granovetter, 1978). This ability to bridge allows both networks some unique advantages in the creation of social capital for both the individuals who bridge the two networks and their networks in general. There is a greater flow of information and a more direct flow of that information between the two groups through the bridging of the networks. There is also the opportunity for greater mobility between the two groups if there is bridging. The distinct networks begin to know each other and create new ties. These ties create a greater integration between the two groups. It also creates greater opportunities for the youth in the networks that have linked. This can be demonstrated in youth in exchanges, round tables and youth forums. Youth who are able to bridge between two social networks are often aware of more information, able to gain information more quickly, synthesize information from a variety of sources, and gain advantages from that information. The connections of youth in the network who have connections to youth in other networks are very beneficial. The ability to have contacts that can "put in a good word" creates a great deal of social capital (Lin, 1999a).

Interestingly, Burt (1998) studied gender in the density verses bridging debate, and has found that in general, men are more skillful at bridging and women are more skillful at creating dense networks. This could also be attributed to socialization of gender roles.

Marginalization of certain groups, particularly women, minorities and low SES

There are some less-than-rosy aspects of social capital. Fukuyama states "social capital and the propensity to work cooperatively in the groups that constitute civil society are not evenly distributed among different social classes, ethnic groups, or other strata within a given society" (1998, p. 64). The benefits of social capital are not accessible to all people. Access to these groups that build social capital, whether they

are informal or formal, may be out of the reach of some individuals. Therefore, even though social capital is an important asset, many poor and minority youth may not have the opportunity or the propinquity to be involved in clubs, sports, and youth organizations that build social capital.

Portes sees several negative outcomes of social capital: (1) the exclusion of outsiders; (2) excessive demands on the resources of the individuals from within the group; and (3) restrictions of individual freedoms and downward leveling pressures (2000). The clannish nature of social capital affects the ability of the individuals to gain social capital. "Newcomers often find themselves unable to compete, no matter how good their skills and qualifications" (Portes & Landolt, 1996, p. 19). Simply put, those youth outside of the group will not be able to gain social capital.

However, youth within the group may feel some negative effects of social capital as well. The weight of excessive demands placed upon them by members for whom they feel compelled to reciprocate, even when it is against their own best interests, is difficult to endure. Members within the group may also resent their inability to determine their own destiny and decisions. This negative sort of group functioning can be seen in youth gangs.

Social cohesion and social capital for a subset of the population does not create outwardly perceived social capital for the greater community. Portes discussed the example of the ghetto, stating "there is considerable social capital in the ghetto areas but the assets obtainable through it seldom allow participants to rise above their poverty" (Portes & Landolt, 1996, p. 20). Therefore, social capital may be across economic strata but not between economic strata.

Additionally, Lin states, "capital inequality creates social inequality" (2000, p. 13). Lin sees that these inequalities develop in two different areas: capital deficits and return deficits (2000). Capital deficits can create social capital inequality in two manners by differential investments and differential opportunities. Differential investments are created by the fact that some youth are the recipients of more investment than others. For youth, it can be a matter of receiving better and more education, improved nutrition, improved medical care

and greater monitoring by caring adults. These investments can be financial or emotional.

The emotional investment the parent places in the child is extremely critical. The richness of a life with strong attachment, strong social interaction and support, feelings of competency and self-efficacy create a basic inequality for those that have not been so blessed with those advantages. Youth with more opportunities will undoubtedly have a greater richness of understanding and greater competency. These inequalities affect a segment of the population. In some aspects, social capital can reinforce the divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots."

Furthermore, if the youth does not receive return for her investment in the network, then no social capital is generated. Individual return deficit can manifest itself either in perceptual deficits of the youth or a lack of reciprocal resources (Lin, 1999b). The youth may not be aware of the social capital she possesses or may not know how to use the resources. The adolescent may have some social capital, but if she does not perceive it as social capital or know how to use it, it lies dormant. A similar concept is true in social support theory of perceived social support: "Social support is only considered social support when it is perceived as social support from the supportee" (Boger & Smith, in press). In both instances, if the youth is not aware of the support or capital, or the adolescent feels incapable of accessing the support or capital, it simply does not exist for the youth.
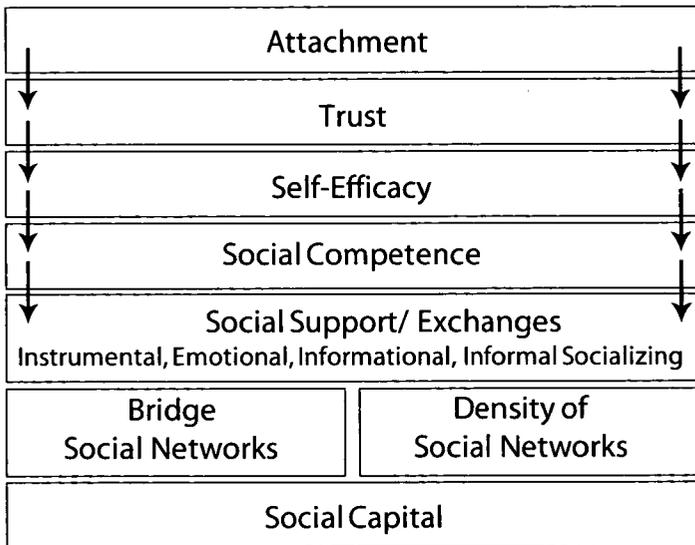
Lack of reciprocal resources is the second return deficit for the youth which creates inequalities in social capital. Social capital is gained when the reciprocal resources are used by the members of the network. If youth are not reciprocating favors or resources, then inequalities are created. The adolescent may feel incapable of reciprocating the favor or may feel fear of asking to have the favor reciprocated. In either instance, inequalities begin to accrue (Fong, Bowles, & Gintis, 2003). This has broad implications for social work.

Lin (2000) also points out that capital deficits and return deficits can work jointly or individually to create inequalities of social capital for youth. There are great benefits to the acquisition of social capital, but youth who are not within a network

or who are within a network that creates social capital are, simply stated, "out of the loop."

But from where does social capital come? How does the youth gain or obtain social capital initially? How does it evolve? And how can social capital be generated to a larger sphere of the population, other than those who have the connections already?

Figure 1. The development of social capital

Attachment
Trust
Self-Efficacy
Social Competence
Social Support/ Exchanges Instrumental, Emotional, Informational, Informal Socializing

Bridge Social Networks	Density of Social Networks

Social Capital

The Development of Social Capital in Youth

In youth, the root of social capital can be traced all the way back to the primary, fundamental relationship between caregiver and child (see Figure 1). The ongoing success of the caregiver-child relationship creates attachment (Ainsworth, 1983; Bowlby, 1988; Sroufe, 1983) between the caregiver and child. This primary building block to all future relationships lies within this relationship. The ongoing interaction and attention between caregiver and child creates a strong attachment between child and caregiver. In Sroufe's (1983) research, he was able to quantify a marked difference between those

children entering preschool who had strong attachments to their caregiver and those who did not. Those children with strong attachments to their caregivers exhibited greater ego resiliency, self-esteem, greater independence, were more emotionally responsive and empathetic to their peers and were less impulsive. These are all traits that will enhance an individual's ability to gain both social support and increased social capital in the future. Coleman discusses the social capital within a family. He states "social capital within the family gives the child access to the adult's human capital depends both on the physical presence of adults in the family and on the attention given by the adult to the child" (Coleman, 1988, p. 111). We believe that Coleman's understanding of social capital in the family can be interpreted as a rudimentary understanding of attachment theory. He does not conceive of the inter-dynamic nature of the relationship, but does understand the fundamental nature of the caregiver-child relationship and the long-term ramifications of secure attachment.

With a secure caregiver-child attachment, the child trusts the caregiver. She can then trust herself and, in time, trust the world around her (Erikson, 1959) [see Figure 1]. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development emanates outwardly from the primary trust that is gained through the psycho-social relationship of child and caregiver. In each successive stage of development, the individual is expanding her environment and sphere of interaction. The individual's ability to trust herself and her interactions with others is extremely important in the development of, and the ability to access, social support and social capital. She must feel that her actions have merit and that those individuals she is interacting with can be trusted, and the interaction she is engaged in can be trusted (Coble, Gantt, & Mallinckrodt, 1996). Fukuyama (1995, 1998) has written extensively about high trust and low trust societies. Although his use of trust pertained to a society rather than an individual, the general premise is that a society with greater trust, like an individual with a greater ability to trust, is more successful.

Through her ability to trust herself, the child believes in her own self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995, 1997). She can trust herself to gain control over her life (see Figure 1). She is capable of exerting control to help create positive outcomes in the future

and to help prevent negative circumstances from occurring. She is not invincible, but she is not helpless. She gains greater self-efficacy through mastery experiences and vicarious experiences provided by social models, such as parents, relatives, and neighbors. She also receives positive feedback for her actions (Bandura, 1995, 1997, 2002). Through self-efficacy, she can prepare for her future and trusts her ability to impact it. An individual sense of purpose and a desire for future attainment is fundamental to eliciting social support. The desire to prepare for the future makes social capital pertinent. If one has no expectation or interest in improving future outcomes, then accruing social capital is meaningless. Another tenet of Coleman's family social capital is that the mother's expectations for the child's future educational attainment create social capital for the child. This seems to be close to Bandura's (1995) development of self-efficacy through social persuasion. Individuals close to the youth can strengthen her resolve to continue to persevere through verbal persuasion, even if the youth is facing adversity.

Through her expectancies of future events and ongoing supportive attached relationships, her self-confidence grows and she gains social competence (Von Aken, 1994). She begins to understand how to interact socially and is confident of her interactions (see Figure 1). Social competency is necessary to develop and maintain social relationships and to perceive support to be available (Rohrle & Sommers, 1994). If the individual is not socially competent, the individual may not be aware of the resources of social support and social capital available to her. Value introjections are defined as "value imperatives learned during the process of socialization" (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993, p. 1323). It is akin to what we call in social work the process of acquiring social competence.

Through her social competency she is able to perceive, elicit, and receive social support (see Figure 1). Social support can be support in the form of instrumental goods and services, emotional support, informational knowledge-based support or informal socializing (Boger & Smith, in press; Crockenburg, 1988; Whittaker & Garbarino, 1983). In social capital literature, these types of support are called *exchanges* (Robison, 1997). The supportive relationship is bi-directional, with the supporter

and the supportee both being enriched by the interaction.

It is here that the direct connection between social support and social capital occurs. In many instances, social capital is an outcome of social support. Sometimes the outcome of social support is greater social support, but in many instances, social capital can be a direct outcome of social support (see Figure 1). Connections that are made through the supportive relationship can create social capital. Opportunities, information, access, sharing, formation of organizations, validations, expressions of caring, economic goods and services can all be outcomes of social support that are considered exchanges between the supporter and suportee. Additionally, the reduction of perceived fear or apprehension can happen through social support (Ferguson & Mindel, 2007). The many beneficial outcomes of social support increase the social capital for the individual.

Social capital can also be increased by the involvement in a more dense or larger social network through the individual's ability to access social support (see Figure 1). Increasing the density of a social support network can either primarily increase social support for the individual or can increase both social support and social capital for the individual.

Social capital can also be an outcome of bridging social networks (Burt, 1997; Granovetter, 1978) (see Figure 1). The ability to connect two groups that previously did not have contact is a powerful form of social capital. The individual who through her social support connections, in turn makes connection to another individual outside of her initial social support network has increased her social support and often her social capital as well. She feels that she can take the risk to connect to others (Freire & Macedo, 1998), thus bridging social capital.

There is also a relationship between bridging and density. Bridging can create a larger and eventually more dense network, especially if the individual who is bridging to another social network is well integrated in her primary social support network. A dense network can also reach out to bridge other networks (Robison, 1997). The cycle seems to perpetuate itself. With increased social support, the supportive network continues to grow and with growth in the network comes more opportunity for the individual to increase her social capital.

However, when youth are faced with a very harsh,

threatening or stressful environment, resources can be inadequate and social capital is held onto individually and not shared with others, creating less social capital in the system. When youth allow themselves to share their meager resources, social capital can be created even in the most hostile or resource-poor environments. For those that are already experiencing resource-poor environments, increased social capital can help to overcome the limitations of their environment. Therefore, the knowledge of the development of individual social capital is extremely pertinent and necessary for improved adolescent functioning and the ability of youth to function at their full potential.

Implications for Social Work

If the ultimate goal is increased social capital for all youth, then focusing on how individual social capital develops is an important issue. The developmental map shows how the individual will progress to the acquisition of social capital. At each of these junctures, policies and programs could be created to enhance the likelihood that the developing person would experience positive outcomes. For instance, social support programs designed to support the caregivers of the developing person would enrich the caregiver, and thereby enrich the developing person through strengthening their relationships (Boger & Smith, in press). This would promote the creation of secure attachment (Ainsworth, 1983) between the developing person and the caregiver. Dramatic long-term effects, including the ultimate attainment of greater social capital for all youth, can be created through the promotion of secure attachment between the developing person and the caregiver at the genesis of their relationship. Particular attention given to the successive important developmental milestones of trust, self-efficacy, social competence, and social support will also lead to the attainment of greater social capital. Similarly, a greater emphasis on the youth's human potential can achieved by increased social competence, social support, the bridging of social networks and the density of social networks.

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