

Social Capital and Youth Development

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ABSTRACT--*Positive youth development programmes are often designed for young people of marginalised communities to break the vicious cycles of their low socio-economic status. The notion of social capital which could promote high trust and reciprocity in the social networks has been debated in youth research. Young people who build social capital outside family and friendship realms might be the key construct in enhancing positive youth development in the marginalised community. Thus, this paper aims to examine the concept of social capital as a collective effort and to discuss the concepts of trust and reciprocity as the dimensions of social capital. The authors concluded that both bonding social capital and bridging social capital are beneficial to young people. Especially bridging social capital which makes the broader social connections meaningful for young people. This paper also discusses the two types of bridging and bonding social capital that can be formed within young people. The process of how trust is built and how individuals can cooperate for the benefit of themselves and others also highlighted in*

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this paper. Next, the authors discuss the concept of social capital that promote norms of trust and reciprocal cooperation to work together for the common good. In sum, the element of social capital that embedded in various social networks influences how young people face the challenges in daily life. Positive youth development workers and policymakers could reinvent the youth programmes in which taking social capital component into account for the greater benefits of young people.

Keywords—Social, Development, Capital, Youth

I. INTRODUCTION

Young people from marginalised communities are often characterised by antisocial behaviour, lack of access to economic and educational opportunities, truancy and participation in illicit activities, distrust of government agencies, and failure to participate in civic activities. These deficiencies cause them to become further alienated from mainstream development and put them at risk of becoming a NEET (a young person who is not in education, employment or training). Under such circumstances, it is difficult for young people to break the vicious cycle of their marginalisation.

Numerous efforts have been made to address the problems of young people in marginalised communities through new policy initiatives and intervention programmes, the education system, and by identifying key antecedents that can promote their positive development (Hayes, 2012; McGregor & Mills, 2012; O'Brien & Donelan, 2007). There are several approaches to the study of youths in marginalised communities, ranging from the traditional transition approach to the current debate over the generational approach (Wyn, 2006). One of the constructs that we think will be of particular relevance in the generational approach is social capital (Putnam, 2000). We hypothesised that social capital within and outside the family is key to positive youth development. Putnam (2000, p. 296) argued that 'Social capital keeps bad things from happening to good kids.' In fact, Chong (2007) and Chong et al. (2011a; 2011b) found that generalised social capital and active civic engagement as a result of being part of healthy and meaningful networks that boost social capital in a young person's social sphere (i.e., family members, friends, neighbours, organised group members) is the desired social outcome.

Social capital assists youths to develop into successful adults and may mitigate the circumstances that create uneven opportunities wrought by poverty, fractured neighbourhoods, single parenting and/or lack of educational aspirations (Putnam, 2000). To emphasise the role of social capital in youth development further, Putnam (2000) states that "social capital is second only to poverty in the breadth and depth of its effects on youth's lives.... Social Capital is especially important in keeping children from being born unhealthily small and in keeping teenagers from dropping out of school, hanging out on the streets, and having babies out of wedlock" (pp. 297-298). Social capital development provides not only vital connections and links for youths, but can serve to mitigate risky behaviour, high school dropout rates, and economic inequity. Granted, these are all normative assessments, therefore the challenge is twofold: first, what is the best way to assess what role social capital development plays in creating positive results? Second, how are these opportunities best created for young people? More importantly, what role can institutions play in creating social capital opportunities, particularly when families or communities cannot?

Thus, this paper aims to examine the concept of social capital as a collective effort and to discuss the concepts of trust and reciprocity as the dimensions of social capital and the bridging and bonding social capital that can be instilled in young people.

PROBLEMS

Conceptualising Social Capital

Although two decades have passed since the notion of social capital was first brought to the attention of the broader sociological community by Putnam's (2000) bestselling book, *Bowling Alone*, scholars still express a variety of perspectives. While they all agree that social capital is 'something valuable' within social relations, on what basis do we determine what constitutes 'something valuable' in this regard? In *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam offers the following definition of social capital: "...social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19).

There are two main schools of thought when it comes to defining social capital in the literature. One presents social capital as resources that yield returns that are valued in the market place (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988a; Lin, 2001). Social capital within this stream is often conceptualised as an attribute of individuals who develop and maintain their economic capital or human capital within their social networks. The second stream focuses on norms of trust and reciprocity that can facilitate cooperation (Betts, 1998; Chong, 2007; Cox, 1995; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam 1993). In this paper, we compare these two streams and emphasise the importance of the second stream, which sees social capital as an attribute of communities or societies.

Bourdieu (1986, pp. 248-249) defines social capital as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources that are linked to involvement in a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or, in other words, membership in a group. This group provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. Bourdieu (1986) argues that capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility (p. 243). In other words, Bourdieu is asserting that the aim of the conversion of different capitals is to produce more economic capital. Bourdieu's concept of social capital emphasises how people consciously or unconsciously establish social relations within groups or institutions in order to exchange resources. He is interested in the conversion of social capital into economic capital and he recognises the potential risks and problems that people face in the process of

carrying out these conversions. This might suggest that individuals that hold any of these forms of capital can produce the other forms of capital, and, in doing so, expand their resources.

Coleman's (1988a) theory of social capital has two fundamental elements: 1) it is embedded within dense social structures, and 2) it facilitates the actions of actors within the social structure. Coleman discusses how individuals can gain resources from social relations in three forms of social capital: obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms. Firstly, social capital is created when one has to fulfil obligations while at the same time expecting others to fulfil their own needs. Secondly, Coleman asserts that the flow of information from one party to another is one form of social capital based on trust. The third form of social capital originates from social norms with sanctions. This form of social capital will work if an individual relinquishes their self-interest and makes the interests of the group their first priority (Coleman, 1998a). Furthermore, effective norms with rewards and sanctions help individuals to work for the common good. For example, the norms of a neighbourhood would reward people who keep their front yard clean and tidy. The trustworthiness of the social environment and the extent of the obligations held are two crucial elements in Coleman's construct.

For Lin (2001), social capital is a personal resource consisting of social networks that an individual may call upon (p. 41). Lin (2001) defines social capital as "resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilised in purposive actions" (pp. 29, 43). Three factors determine the quality of a person's social capital: structural position (pyramidal hierarchy), network location (bridging and strength of ties), and purpose of action (instrumental or expressive) (Lin, 2001). He argues that more resources are embedded in higher positions — the stronger the tie, the greater the tendency that the accessed social capital will positively affect the success of expressive action, while the weaker the tie (and thus greater access to different networks), the more likely that the individual can gain access to better social capital to further an instrumental action (Lin, 2001, p. 76). Lin explains that individuals are motivated to maintain or gain their resources in purposive social actions (2001, p. 75).

The second stream of social capital focuses on trust and reciprocity and comes from the works of Putnam (1993, 2000) and Fukuyama (1995, pp. 26-27). Putnam (1993) defines social capital as "the features of social organisation, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 36). According to Putnam (2000), physical capital refers to physical objects, human capital refers to properties of individuals, while social capital refers to connections among individuals — i.e., social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (p. 19).

Putnam (2000, pp. 93-147) measured social capital by the level of involvement in community organisational life, engagement in public affairs, community volunteerism, informal sociability and social trust. Putnam (2000, pp. 277-284) found consistent evidence that the decline of civic engagement from 1965 to 2000 in America was caused by generational change, the long-term effects of television, structural changes in the family due to changing work patterns, commuting and suburbanisation. Putnam (1995) claims that networks of civic engagement enhance norms of generalised reciprocity and encourage members of society to build trust. He explains that dilemmas of collective

action can be solved by facilitating more communication among members of society and by reducing the incentive for opportunism, self-interested action or defection.

Fukuyama's (1995) work also focuses on social capital at the group level. Fukuyama puts forward that social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or in certain parts of it. It can be embodied in the smallest and most basic social group, the family, as well as the largest of all groups, the nation, and in all the other groups in between. Fukuyama (1995) asserts that a high-trust society is capable of achieving more effective organisation because members of an organisation trust one another by sharing a common set of ethical norms. He emphasises that social capital is formed on the basis of mutual trust among group members rather than on the basis of individual virtues. The moral norms of a community (constituting virtues like "loyalty, honesty and dependability") are more likely to create social capital than are individual acts of virtue, since ethical habits are more likely to be maintained and sustained by moral norms than by individuals (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 28). Furthermore, he uses the term "spontaneous sociability" (p. 28) to describe the subset of social capital which refers to "the capacity to form new associations and to cooperate within the terms of reference they establish" (p. 28).

Both Putnam and Fukuyama emphasise trust as the most important component in forming social capital. However, Fukuyama gives more weight to the role of culture in cultivating ethical habits than to the role of civic engagement in forming norms of trust, as suggested by Putnam.

SOLUTIONS

Trust and reciprocity as dimensions of social capital

For the purposes of our study, we define social capital in terms of the quality of relationships between members of a group rather than as resources possessed by individuals. Following Putnam's (2000) discourse on social capital, we adopt the idea that youth is a period when young people can explore, (re)construct, and expand their social networks while building social capital within the networks. Youths, as the subject of this study, are defined as those between the ages of 15-25 years. As such, either they can be considered an informal group of individuals or they can constitute a formal group within themselves, such as being a member of youth association, sporting club, special interest group, etc.

Each individual in this age cohort plays an important part in creating the group's level of trust. Individuals not only play a part by putting their trust in others, but they also have to show their trustworthiness to balance the dynamics of trust in the group. Thus, social capital is not just a directory of contacts that an individual has access to in order to maximise his or her resources; rather, it is shared by members of a group. This suggests that social capital cannot be measured by the social resources available for any particular individual to tap into to advance their private goals. However, individuals can access the social capital available within the settings in which they find themselves in order to achieve a goal. While social capital is a property of collectives, it is still a resource that individuals can use. Social capital grows with use — the more that we find that our associates are trustworthy, the more we trust them.

Defining social capital from an individual viewpoint does not demonstrate the dynamics of the accumulation of social capital in a collective unit. Furthermore, the trust that an individual has invested in a group cannot be possessed only by that individual. In fact, when one gains a reputation for trustworthiness, mutual trust is formed between individuals. Thus, we think that the benefit of trusting and being trustworthy is only meaningful on a group level because an individual could not sustain his trustworthiness without taking the risk of trusting others in return. After all, it is not possible for isolated individuals to generate social capital by own one sided action (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). In fact, it involves the exchange of trust and favours between individuals in different social settings. Nonetheless, individuals can benefit from high-trust networks and achieve their personal goals as well as the common goals of the group.

Moreover, the function of social capital simplifies the complexity of human interaction and reduces the risks in every emotional or physical transaction (Fukuyama, 1995). For example, when social capital is high, individuals are less fearful of dishonesty and fraud when trading in business. The presence of social capital allows members to cooperate to achieve common goals. Thus, listing whom you know and what they can do for you is simply indicating the outcomes of having social capital but it is not the experience of social capital. Consequently, we disagree with Lin's measurement of social capital. He uses his own framework of "position generator" and "name generator" to evaluate the resources embedded in one's personal networks. Instead, we focus on the measurement of trust and reciprocity that reflects the experience of social capital. However, the mobility of social capital across different networks takes place in both the network-based model of social capital and the trust-based model of social capital. While network-based analysts focus on how capital can be transferred to social networks, we are interested in studying whether the practice of building social capital in one social setting is associated with higher levels of social capital in another social setting.

There are three types of social capital discussed in the current literature: bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and linking social capital. Putnam (2000) defines bonding social capital as that which is reinforced in homogenous groups that share the same identity in an inner social network, such as relationships between family and friends. Woolcock (2000) shares the same view and defines bonding social capital as the strong social ties (i.e., social connections) that exist within groups of people who share similar values, interests and backgrounds. This constitutes the social glue that supports interdependencies. Thus, strong ties usually are formed within a structure of bonding social capital. Iterated interactions between members of strong-tie social networks reinforce a group's identity and homogeneity (Putnam, 2000, pp. 22-23). In these iterated relationships, members interact through overlapping relations and form 'thick' relationships (Hardin, 2002). The exclusivity of membership in such a social network was explained in Coleman's (1988b) argument regarding the closure of a network structure. In a closed type of social network, norms can be easily enforced in the group and social capital is formed within its social relations.

In contrast to bonding social capital, Putnam describes bridging social capital as characterized by open networks which connect people "across diverse social cleavages" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Woolcock (2000) relates bridging

social capital to networks between different social groups — between different generations, cultural, ethnic and religious groups. These ties are generally weaker, with less intense attachments, than ties within bonding social capital. They are cross-cutting connections between heterogeneous groups of people that can foster trust and mutual understanding – they consist of ‘weak ties.’ This concept originated in Granovetter’s (1973) research on ‘the strength of weak ties’ which emphasises the advantages of weak ties in searching for jobs and obtaining information. These weak ties are advantageous because they link people to very different groups that possess different types of information when compared to the intimate groups. Those with dense social ties are disadvantaged in the job market because, as job seekers, they may receive limited information on newly available jobs. In other words, acquaintances are more helpful than close friends because they are connected to different social circles.

Thirdly, Woolcock (2000) defines linking social capital as the ties that connect people and communities to sources of power and to resources that lie beyond the neighbourhood in the wider society, notably in the form of formal institutions. These relationships facilitate social leverage by providing access, information and opportunities to people with less power and with a lower social status. Woolcock (2000) suggests that initially, relationships with adults develop in stages, with youths moving from a stage characterised by suspicion and distrust, to a stage of facilitated contact, and finally to a stage of meaningful connection. Once established, these relationships provide youths with access to adult resources, such as information, assistance, exposure to adult worlds, support, and encouragement. Therefore, to facilitate this process of social capital development, youth–adult activities should be structured around common goals in order to link youths to suitable adults. Woolcock recognises that the transmission of different types of capital has a cost, carrying a chance of loss and involving uncertainty in the transactions between holders of different types. Bourdieu (1986) explains that the recognition of this uncertainty tends ‘... to produce a social capital in the form of a capital of obligations that are usable in the more or less long term (exchanges of gifts, services, visits) necessarily entails the risk of ingratitude, the refusal of that recognition of nonguaranteed debts which such exchanges aim to produce (p. 254)’.

It is perhaps for this reason that Coleman (1988a) extends Bourdieu’s concept to define social capital as ‘the value of these aspects of social structure to actors as resources that they can use to achieve their interests’ (p. 101). He builds on Bourdieu’s point that resources are embedded in social relations and explains that an individual can actively tap into these resources for his or her own use to achieve individual goals. Coleman (1988) concludes that ‘closure creates trustworthiness in a social structure’ (p. 108). For example, in a community with many overlapping networks, the community members will feel a stronger responsibility to enforce social norms with each other.

In this study, we examine bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Trust and reciprocity in the family and among close friends are considered bonding social capital. Meanwhile, connections with neighbours, acquaintances, and people in general are social links where bridging social capital can be formed. We see both types of social capital as important to young people. Bonding social capital provides stable and more secure interactions

than bridging social capital. However, bridging social capital allows for broader social connections to emerge between people from different social backgrounds. Thus, both types of social capital are studied in detail.

So far, we have discussed how trust is built and how individuals can cooperate for the benefit of themselves and others. In this section, we discuss the concept of social capital, which allows norms of trust and reciprocal cooperation to work together for the common good. Norms of trust embedded in social ties and networks allow for the production of social capital. However, not all researchers agree that social capital is comprised of trust. Instead, they assert that trust is the outcome of social capital (Lin, 2001; Woolcock, 2001). They argue that the conceptualisation of social capital should focus on the primary social networks instead of its potential product (i.e., trust). We disagree with this assertion because without trust, networks are merely social contacts that cannot facilitate collective action. The norms to which Woolcock refers should be the norms of trust and reciprocity, whereby members of social networks have mutual agreements and understandings that they will help each other out for the benefit of all. Thus, trust is the essential ingredient in social capital. With trust, members of the community can easily solve the 'prisoner's dilemma' (Ridley, 1996) and work on collective action via building and maintaining social networks that are embedded with norms of trust and reciprocity.

Sztompka (1999, pp. 25-26) defines trust as "a bet about the future contingent actions of others." He theorises that there are two components to trust: –belief and commitment through action. He explains that the belief component involves specific expectations that another person will perform certain actions and that commitment through action means that one is willing to take the chance that there may be unpredictable and uncontrollable consequences.

Uslaner (2000) defines another type of trust – moralistic trust – that is not based upon personal experience. Moralistic trust refers to the moral foundation of trust in "people whom we don't know and who are likely to be different from ourselves" (Uslaner, 2000, p. 572). Moralistic trust reflects a commonality of values. It is the belief that it is human nature to have faith in others because they share the same fundamental moral values. Thus, everyone is naturally and inherently trustworthy and it is unethical to distrust others. By contrast, Lewis and Weigert (1985) argue that "trust must be conceived as a property of collective units (ongoing dyads, groups, and collectivities), not of isolated individuals" (p. 968). A trust culture is then formed between members of these collective units.

Sztompka (1999) suggests that a trust culture is not merely an historically and collectively shared experience. Instead, the formation of a culture of trust involves four processes. First, the driving force of social processes is human agency; that is, individual and collective actions, decisions, and choices taken by specifically endowed actors within the framework of opportunities provided by existing structures. Second, the concurrent events making up the social praxis are always complex products of some traits of actors combined with some traits of structures; or, to put it otherwise, they result from the exploration of existing structural opportunities by willing and competent actors. Third, the structural context itself and the opportunities it provides are shaped and reshaped by ongoing praxis; they are the accumulated, lasting, and often unintended outcomes of the multiplicity of earlier actions.

Fourth, the structural effects of past praxis, crystallised as structural tradition, become the initial conditions for future praxis and are explored as structural resources; this cycle proceeds interminably, thus making all processes contingent and open-ended (Stzompka, 1999).

In contrast to interpersonal trust, members of informal groups and members of whole societies may trust one another based on inherited norms of trust that focus on the ethical aspects of trusting behaviours (Fukuyama, 1995). This broader trust allows all members of a community to trust each other on an equal basis. For example, Fukuyama elaborates on the norms of trust that exist in a community based on the regular virtues of moral behaviour as advocated by Chinese Confucian values. Thus, in this context, it is almost a crime to not trust your family, but there is no matching obligation to trust strangers (whether they are local or foreign) and other non-relatives.

For the purposes of studying at-risk youth, we define trust as the expectation that the trusted party will act in the best interests of the truster within the norm of reciprocity and that the truster and the trusted will exchange favours asynchronously. Thus, ‘trust and reciprocity’ is one single concept composed of two components: ‘trust’ and ‘reciprocity’. This definition is derived from Hardin’s (2002) encapsulated trust, which emphasises that “the trusted party has incentive to be trustworthy, incentive that is grounded in the value of maintaining the relationship into the future” (p. 3). This definition is more suitable than Stzompka’s for the aims of this thesis, because every social group has different expectations with regard to the levels of trust among its members in different situations.

According to Cook et al., (2005), “trust is unproblematic in a world in which everyone is trustworthy”. The risk attached to acting on trust would be much lower if everyone were highly trustworthy. By ‘trustworthiness’, Hardin (2002) means the commitment shown by the trusted person to live up to the truster’s trust. Like the concept of trust, the trustworthiness of a person is often judged in specific relational contexts (Cook et al., 2005). In other words, the truster’s judgement about the trustworthiness of the trusted party will vary according to different expected actions and in different situations. Thus, whom do we choose to trust to fulfil our expectations? We usually trust our family and friends because past experience provides the basis for our faith in their trustworthiness.

CONCLUSION

Youths in general are facing many challenges in a globalised world. Their wellbeing is a leading indicator of the long-term health of a community or nation. Evidently, acquiring strong social capital is important for their wellbeing. They might acquire this social capital from schools, families, religious institutions, youth clubs or their community. However, the nature of the social capital they acquire from various sources influences how well they learn to deal with the challenges they must confront.

In comparison to previous generations of youth, the current generation has access to more opportunities to participate in volunteering and civic activities. It is important that they seize such opportunities to benefit from meaningful engagement in order to gain dignity and praise for their achievements. However, successful engagement is grounded in practices that enhance young people’s development through elevated expectations that are sustained by adult support and a peer group with explicitly positive values. To progress as a developed nation, there must be

constant reinvention in youth development programmes in which social capital forms an integral component in order to enhance the wellbeing of our youths.

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