

**TARGETING SOCIAL CAPITAL
AS AN ENTRY POINT FOR
INVESTING IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

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INTRODUCTION

In its 1998 Annual Report, *Youth As A Resource*, the William T. Grant Foundation announced its intent to focus its grant making on research, policies and programs that will help the nation value youth as a resource. In pursuing this new tack, the foundation determined to channel its work through three strands of grant making: Youth Development, Systems Affecting Youth, and The Public's View of Youth. This paper is written to assist the foundation as it considers program directions to guide its grant making in its Youth Development Strand.

In particular, the foundation commissioned this paper because of its interest in exploring whether and how the concept of social capital — a macro focus on the social assets available within communities of people — can be usefully applied to the development of youth as a complement to our traditional micro focus on enhancing their human capital — the assets possessed by individuals. We should take a moment to clarify the difference.

Currently and historically, our approach to rearing our children is, and has been, overwhelmingly focused on making investments that enhance their human capital development. According to Gary Becker, human capital investments include any "activities that influence future monetary and psychic income by increasing the resources in people" — resources such as skills, knowledge or health.¹ Whether we acknowledge it or not, our investments in our children are still implicitly guided by a view of a world that functions on individual merit and is driven by a credo of competition. Most parents want their children to be successful and have thereto strived to raise them "so they will be able to compete and survive in the real world." Indeed, and because of this worldview, we and the nation invest in schooling, on-the-job training, medical care, and an array of other human and social services aimed at adding value to individuals.

But what until recently has been ignored, in the development of our children, is that the game is rigged (or, at least, more complex) particularly as it regards urban, disadvantaged and minority youth — indeed, that an individual's assets and attributes such as education, training and experience (human capital) are often enhanced, and on occasion superceded, by his/her relationship assets and resources such as memberships, kinships, friendships and social networks (social capital). Our objective in this paper then is to explore the construct of social capital as an instrument for leveling the playing field and enhancing youth development outcomes.

As such, our tasks in the proceeding are several: first to clarify the concept in order to properly understand its various interpretations, applications and limitations; second, and where possible, to provide insights into how this construct and its component parts can be applied to the challenge of youth development; and, third to suggest what these explorations may signal in the way of possible directions for foundation investment. We begin these explorations with matters of definition.

¹ The concept of human capital gained currency in the early 1960s as economists realized that growth in physical capital explains a relatively small part of the growth in income in most countries. See: Becker, Gary S. 1964. *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research. Pg. 1.

EXPLORING SOCIAL CAPITAL

The phrase Social Capital is intended to describe an asset — a real resource that can accumulate, that can be drawn upon, and that can be put to particular use. The concept serves a useful purpose in social science in that it draws attention to the social structures within communities that economists and other proponents of "rational actor" models often ignore. The rational actor model tends to fall short in explaining community behaviors. It assumes that individuals will always behave in ways that maximize their own welfare and, consequently, it fails to account for occasions when groups of individuals act collectively in ways that may subordinate their individual interests for the greater good.

The failure of the rational actor model can be seen in several illustrations. For instance, the "Tragedy of the Commons" is an example where optimal solutions cannot be reached because individual incentives to over consume a public good (sheep grazing on the Boston Commons) go unreconciled and ultimately reduce the welfare of the entire community. The game of "Chicken" is another example wherein a head on collision can be avoided only if one or both of the contestants "flinch." But because the first to flinch loses, a dynamic is created where neither may flinch and they both may lose.

These dilemmas invariably produce no win scenarios using the rational actor model because the model provides individuals with no mechanism or incentive to act collectively. But people tend to cooperate with each other much more frequently than they would be predicted to. Rational model gaming theorists, who have simulated collective action, have been able to achieve positive scenario outcomes only by imposing strict conditions on the "game."² But the conditions, under which the simulated optimal outcomes are obtained, almost never occur in practice. So, the primary reason we care about the sociology of collective action is that the rational economic paradigm often runs us into a blind alley when applied to community affairs. This accounts in part for the rising popularity of the social capital construct as a way of explaining why it is that people so often cooperate when it may not be "rational" for them to do so.

In the youth development context, similar dilemmas occur. We know for instance that successful parenting in low-income communities often takes the form of family isolation strategies wherein parents practice an "ideology of difference" — a kind of "shielding" strategy that emphasizes separation from others in the community. "We're different. We don't belong here. This is only temporary." And though that may work, in some cases, for particular families, such strategies are an anathema to the optimal goal of building broad based community support for kids. Similarly, the parallel and also common reaction of some neighborhood adults, to seclude themselves out of fear of the streets, may also be a rational response from the individual's perspective but again unproductive from the standpoint of community welfare. For our purposes then, exploring the concept of social capital offers us a means and an opportunity to consider these individual rational decisions and behaviors and discern the conditions under which they might be changed and/or redirected to achieve positive results in communal rather than individual

² Such conditions might require: that there be repeated trials where the results of various actions can be observed and understood; that each participant have perfect information about past actions and the payoffs of those actions; that participants employ tit-for-tat strategies where they agree to do something only on the condition that others do as well; and/or that participant's interests have sufficiently long term horizons to prevent defection.

outcomes. But we need to be clear about what these terms mean. So, what exactly is social capital?

Alternative Definitions

Portes³ attributes the first systematic contemporary analysis of social capital to Pierre Bourdieu⁴ who, in 1985, defined the concept as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." This definition suggests that social capital has two parts: the relationships that allow individuals to have access to resources possessed by others, and the amount and quality of the resources themselves. But because it was written in French, Bourdieu's perspective has not gained widespread recognition in the U.S.

Perhaps the two best-known proponents of social capital in the U.S. are James Coleman and Robert Putnam. James Coleman's work states that "social capital is created when relations among people change in ways that facilitate action."⁵ Putnam, on the other hand, believes that "social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."⁶

Three critical elements of social capital can be gleaned from these interpretations. The first is that social capital is an asset — a capital asset representing a collection of resources. Of the three authors, Bourdieu is alone in explicitly acknowledging this resource base that social capital represents.

The second implication here is that these resources are embedded in relationships. In other words, the fact that these resources are accessed through relationships is what makes this form of capital "social." Bourdieu and Coleman state this directly while, in Putnam, it is to be inferred from his focus on social networks, norms and trust.

The third element is the notion that social capital is directed and purposeful. Bourdieu is silent on this point while Coleman clearly conditions the existence of social capital on the facilitation of action and Putnam's formulation implies purpose by asserting that the networks facilitate coordination and cooperation. So, for our purposes, we will combine these insights into a unifying definition: Social capital is an asset representing actionable resources that are contained in, and accessible through, a system of relationships.⁷

³ Portes, A. 1998. *Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Society*. Annual Review of Sociology. 24:1 - 24.

⁴ Bourdieu, P. 1985. the Forms of Capital. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J.G. Richardson. Pp. 241-58. New York: Greenwood.

⁵ Coleman, J.S. 1988a. *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*. American Journal of Sociology. 94:S95 - 121. Pg. 100.

⁶ Putnam, R.D. 1995. *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*. Journal of Democracy. 6:65 - 78.

⁷ We should be clear here that social capital is an asset that can also manifest itself in negative ways. Organized crime, street gangs and the Klu Klux Klan are examples. But from a community perspective it would be interesting to speculate as to whether having negative social capital may be better than none at all. Perhaps the potential to redirect negative forms of social organization to positive purposes might be better than having a community be socially disorganized. It may be, for instance, that even depleted, crime ridden neighborhoods may have capacity for positive action if means can be found to redirect whatever organizational energies might exist there.

"Dimensions" (Forms) of Social Capital

Coleman identifies six forms of social capital — six dimensions of our relationships with others that can form the basis for our ability to act: mutual obligations, information, norms, authority relations, appropriable social organization, and intentional organization. In his formulation, social capital can be based on any one or any number of these dimensions. Each is independently sufficient to the creation of social capital.

Close observation however reveals that this is not a list of like items. The first four dimensions seem to be "elemental" in nature (i.e. fundamental and perhaps irreducible components of social capital) whereas the last two seem to derive from the first four. For instance, it may be, that obligations, information, norms and authority are the bases upon which social relations are built and that "appropriable social organization" is about somehow directing those relationships or capacities to some particular purpose. Similarly, "intentional organization" is a deliberate attempt to create a forum for collective action toward a specific end.

The difference between these latter two dimensions seems to relate to the base strength of the relationships on which the collective action is being built. Appropriable Social Organization assumes a fairly strong network of existing relationships whereas Intentional Organization assumes much weaker ties, or none at all. Still, there seems to be a difference in kind between the first four and these latter two items in Coleman's formulation. Below we describe these dimensions in more detail and speculate on their utility across the various contexts to which social capital is often applied (e.g., between individuals, families, organizations, neighborhoods, communities and states).

Mutual Obligation, as a dimension of (basis for) social capital, reflects the expectation that persons will act according to explicit or implicit agreements they have with one another. Person A does something that benefits person B and that, in turn, becomes the basis for person A's entitlement to a claim on some future action or service from person B. Trustworthiness and one's ability to accumulate and hold "debt" influence this form of social capital.⁸

But it is conceivable that the value of mutual obligations, and its transactional focus, as a basis for forming social capital, may decline as the numbers of persons involved increase. Stated another way, it is easier to conceive of favors being swapped between and among individuals and families, for instance, than it is between and among institutions, neighborhoods, communities and states.⁹ Moreover, the implicit "pairwise" character of this dimension suggests that it may not be useful as a vehicle for mounting community-wide action. The practical difficulty inherent in finding a "least common denominator," among scores of pairwise obligations, precludes aggregating this form of social capital to the scale of an entire neighborhood.

Still, mutual obligation can be a powerful asset for connecting individual children, youth and families with resources that can meet their more discrete goals and needs. We

⁸ There are likely other forms of obligation however that do not conform to this "rational" approach of transaction and exchange. Person A, for instance, might do a service because it is expected rather than in anticipation of a return. This may be an example of action driven by norms and less by "mutual" obligation. In this case A may be fulfilling an obligation to himself, his community or his profession to behave in certain prescribed ways.

⁹ Exception might be taken with regard to treaties or agreements between and among nations.

should expect that neighborhoods are fairly diverse with respect to the skills and resources commanded by their residents. Mutual obligation as a form of social capital encompasses such things as: borrowing and/or lending appliances, equipment, food or small amounts of money; bartering and exchange to acquire needed commodities or services; reciprocal service agreements such as emergency childcare or transportation; and/or swapping favors more generally. It follows then, that the larger and more diverse a family's social relations, the greater will be their potential access to a wide array of discrete resources through this form of social capital.

Norms can also be a source of social capital. To the extent that they may influence behavior (i.e. constraining/sanctioning negative behaviors or encouraging positive ones), norms can have powerful effects on community life and collective community aspirations and action. Shared norms and values allow us to anticipate each other's behaviors and to expect certain things from one another because of our shared understandings. Those shared understandings, in turn, can add power to our relationships and can enhance our ability to act either as individuals or in groups.

But, unlike mutual obligation, it is likely that the power of norms, as a basis for creating social capital, is greatest at larger aggregations of people and action. For instance, what matter most, in the individual transactions cited above, are the preferences persons A and B have for the objects, services and/or terms of exchange. They probably care very little about what they have in common — norms, values or otherwise. At higher levels of participation and benefit, however, the exploitation of shared norms and values is, not only a powerful incentive for organization and action, but the very basis upon which civil societies are built. As such the establishment of new norms and expectations for adult and youth interactions and behaviors can be an important and powerful component of a youth development strategy.

Indeed, establishing positive norms and expectations for young people is a critical part of creating healthy community environments that will support their positive development. Our expectations for youth are communicated through the messages our communities send to them: messages that speak to self-identity and self-worth and hence self-esteem; messages that speak to group identity, belonging and participation; messages that speak to competence, efficacy and achievement; and messages that speak to, and condition, youth aspirations and the motivation to achieve them.

Using community norms to support positive youth development requires that neighborhoods construct a set of positive messages about how youth are valued and how they are expected to behave. These messages should be communicated to and through neighborhood adults to neighborhood children and youth. What is important here is achieving some level of consistency to these messages. Be it block-by-block or neighborhood-by-neighborhood, communities need a shared set of expectations and standards for youth achievement and behavior. Even if these "rules" are largely unspoken, expectations that are both clear to youth, and consistent across adults, can be an important component of creating a healthy community environment for supporting youth development.

Equally important, however, is the density of these messages and expectations — that is, the larger the proportion of neighborhood residents subscribing to them, the more effectively they can be communicated and reinforced. Thus, a fundamental issue, in exploiting norms as a source of social capital for youth, is how to build or enhance

community structures that are capable of enlisting substantial resident participation in formulating and transmitting positive youth development messages.

Information becomes a form of social capital to the extent that relationships may impart knowledge that, in turn, facilitates action. But unlike the former two dimensions, we might expect information to be an important component of social capital *regardless* of how micro or macro the "stakes." For instance, even in individual transactions, person A and person B must each have some information and understanding about what each possesses (objects or services) that can be the basis of the exchange. Similarly, at larger aggregations of people and action, information is the critical element in the determination, clarification and communication of the issues to which social organization and social capital might be applied.

A particular benefit of information derives from its value in providing access. And because of their relative social isolation, this type of social capital holds particular significance for poor and urban communities. Access to jobs, education and training, and other needed services and/or access to cultural outlets and events is impeded to the extent that communities lack channels for acquiring information about their availability. So again, we should expect that the larger and more diverse a person's or family's social relations, the greater will be their potential access to information across an array of areas that may be important to improving their welfare or to the health of their communities.

But information can also be a potent force in maintaining stable neighborhoods through the establishment, transmission and enforcement of community values and norms. For example, block watch clubs can easily and readily identify youth and adults who pose problems for the neighborhood or identify troubled families where social services might be needed. Indeed, individuals and families can easily develop reputations, good or bad, which get subscribed to throughout the neighborhood, even among persons with whom they are not familiar. In this way neighborhood information networks impart information, sometimes referred to as gossip, that can help maintain social order, issue appropriate warnings, or confer status. The "efficiency" with which a neighborhood can function in this way is directly related to the "tightness" of neighborhood communications networks such that the more social intercourse there is between neighbors the more effectively this can occur. It stands to reason then, that great benefit can derive to communities from efforts to increase the levels of neighborly contact and exchange. (We will return to this theme in our later discussion of bonding capital.)

Authority relations involve the ability to influence others to do things on the basis of status differentials. Person A is able to obligate person B to do something by virtue of a superior claim or status relative to person B (e.g. person A is above person B in a hierarchy). This particular dimension is different from our usual notions of social capital as involving "lateral" relationships — that is, relationships among equals — as opposed to vertical ones. Authority relations can be the basis of "group" social capital to the extent that group members are willing to voluntarily acknowledge, and accede to, a form of organization based on leadership from some structure of hierarchical relations.

But these authority relations may be more effective, as bases for social organization and action, at lower levels of participation and benefit. For example, within the hierarchical structure that may exist among certain individuals and/or within families and organizations, authority relations may be very effective means for achieving positive

outcomes. But in the less hierarchical world of neighborhoods, communities and states, authority relations probably work less well as catalysts for public action. As an example, neither my neighbor, nor my Mayor nor my Governor can compel me to get involved in a community issue or community organization.

In the context of youth development, this dimension can be useful to the extent that means can be found to expand the authority structures established for children and youth by and within neighborhoods. In the vast majority, parents are clearly the primary authority figures for children and youth. But are there ways to encourage larger numbers of other neighborhood adults to assume more effective roles (*en loco parentis*) for neighborhood children, for instance?

Appropriable Social Organization and Intentional Organization are also regarded by Coleman as forms of social capital. But, as argued earlier, they can be more usefully thought of as means of redirecting the relationships that have their foundations in the first four dimensions. The conceptual value of "appropriable social organization" derives from the focus it provides on whether and how relationships built around a particular dimension or set of dimensions can be appropriated for, adapted to, and/or redirected towards, a particular goal. Consequently, it raises questions about the fungibility of relationships, that are grounded in one set of issues or circumstances, to other ends and purposes.

Intentional Organization, on the other hand, forces us to consider what it takes to create or strengthen social capital where we presume relationships are weak or do not exist. Thus intentional organization is a deliberate effort to erect/strengthen a structure of relationships to address a particular need or issue. And again, the difference between these two dimensions appears to be whether relationships (built on norms and trust, information, mutual obligation and so forth) already exist and are relatively strong, or are relatively weak or have to be built from scratch.

Functions of Social Capital

In addition to its varying forms, the literature suggests that social capital also has two differing functions, bonding and bridging.¹⁰

Bonding capital is thought to function as a cohesive force in maintaining existing relationships. It does so by reinforcing and exploiting the bases of those relationships — things such as shared norms, values and objectives and/or common interests and/or characteristics such as ethnicity, culture, race, and religion. There is a vast number of factors that underlie human relationships and, presumably, each can be exploited to some extent to promote bonding. And by reinforcing the basis for our relationships, bonding capital gives them the potential to be long term and fungible across a variety of social issues and contexts. Indeed, it can be argued that bonding capital is the thing upon which Coleman's formulation of appropriable social organization relies. Coleman's

¹⁰ In *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*, the authors, in interpreting Putnam, define two main types of social capital, "the type that brings closer together people who already know each other (we call this bonding capital) and the type that brings together people or groups who previously did not know each other (Putnam called this bridging capital..)." See, Gittel, Ross and Avis Vidal. 1998. *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Publications

appropriable social organization is premised on the ability to redirect existing bonded relationships.

This maintenance function of bonding capital is also important to promoting stability, civility and order and to establishing and enforcing social norms. Coleman provides the example of wholesale diamond markets in New York City where hundreds of thousands of dollars in gems may be confidently loaned out between merchants, for private appraisal and inspection, without any formal protections against fraud or theft.¹¹ This is so because of a social structure among the merchants that is strongly "bonded." New York's diamond market is Jewish, with a high degree of intermarriage, living in the same Brooklyn community and attending the same synagogues. It is essentially a closed community and these close ties through family, community and worship provide the bonds that facilitate the market and enforce norms for integrity in business.

There is a lesson in this example. The diamond merchant community is a closed environment where personal connections, communal obligations and behavioral expectations are well established, known and respected throughout the enclave. These shared understandings function both to promote aspirations and behaviors that are positive and constructive for the community; and to sanction and inhibit behaviors that are negative and destructive to the community. In the context of youth in our urban neighborhoods, we could easily imagine better child and youth outcomes if there were ways to duplicate the interconnectedness of relationships in New York's wholesale diamond market.

In fact, Coleman speaks to these parallels directly. He suggests that the existence and strength of the norms in the wholesale diamond market are results of "closure" in the community's social structure. The term closure is intended to suggest the degree of inter-connectedness among members of the community. In this formulation, bonding promotes the formation of norms but closure determines their strength and effectiveness. Figure 1 illustrates the point.

Figure 1 represents two communities, (a) and (b), of parents and children. The point labeled A represents the parent of child B, and likewise, point D is the parent of child C. The vertical lines in each "community" represent the relationships between each parent (A and D) and each of their children (B and C) respectively. The horizontal lines represent relationships between peers — between the children B and C at school or in the neighborhood, and between the parents A and D in the community, at work, church or some other venue.

¹¹ Coleman, Op. Cit. Pg.S99.

FIGURE 1

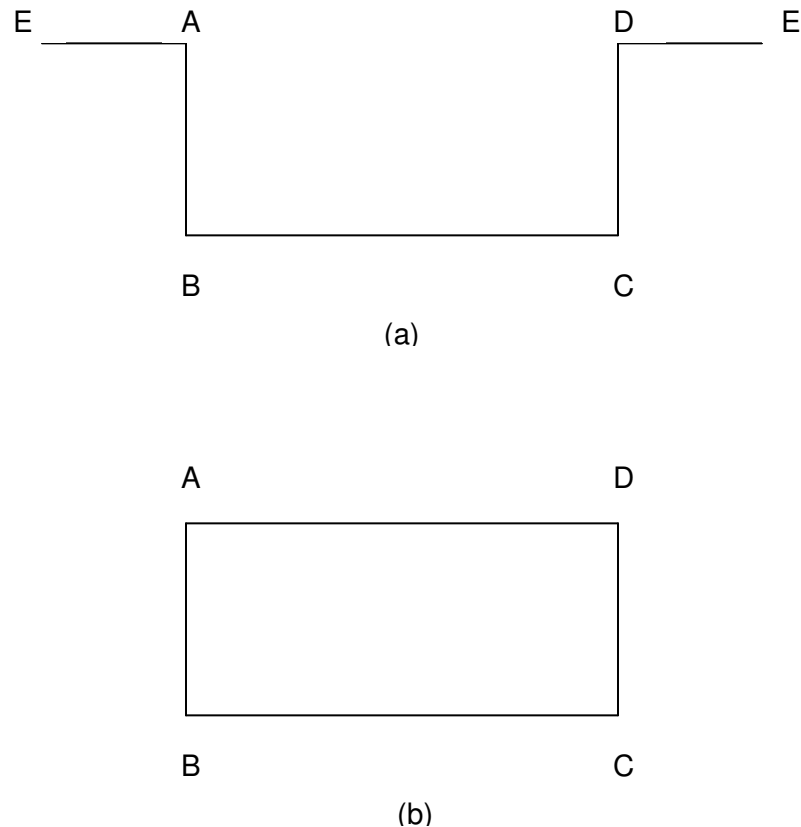


Fig. 1. — Network involving parent (A,D) and children (B,C) without (a) and with (b) intergenerational closure. Taken from: Coleman, J.S. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," in *American Journal of Sociology*. 94: S107.

Communities (a) and (b) differ, however, in the presence or absence of connections between the parents of these children. In (b), the parents' friends are the parents of their children's friends, while in (a), they are not. The consequence of this closure in (b) is a greater potential to monitor and guide the children's activities and behaviors and an increased level of control over the kinds of exposures and influences to which they may be subjected. Parent A is reinforced by parent D in guiding and sanctioning child B's behavior and likewise for parent D and child C. Moreover, parents A and D become interchangeable as monitors and authority figures for both children.

This suggests that increasing the level of closure in neighborhoods can reinforce and strengthen the norms and authority relations aspects of the community's social capital and hence its community supports for kids. We conclude then that the degree of interconnectedness among community members is an important ingredient in the formation and enforcement of community norms and expectations and that increasing this level of

connectedness may be a key strategy for building community supports for children and youth.

There are immediate and practicable implications. Specifically, this suggests the need to create more links — both horizontally, between and among more adults, and particularly parents, in order to foster more intimate neighborly contact one with another; and vertically, between adults and children, so as to generate more familiarity and connection between larger numbers of neighborhood parents and neighborhood children and youth. In this scenario, bonding capital functions to promote the formation of norms and closure functions to strengthen those norms and expectations and make them enforceable and effective in promoting the desired social order — community supports for youth.

Bridging capital, on the other hand, is about bringing people together to form *new* relationships. This "bringing together" is an active and intentional act and not just a random, evolutionary, or happenstance phenomenon. Indeed, bridging capital is understood to be purposeful and transaction focused — based on the utility of a particular relationship or set of relationships to the attainment of a specific goal. In other words, and by contrast to bonding capital's focus on maintaining existing relationships, as a resource for establishing order, bridging capital can be thought of as the link to new relationships and to missing resources that may be needed to get things done. As such, it is particularly useful in connecting individuals and groups with capacities, expertise and information not available through their current networks. At the same time, however, its transaction focus makes it necessarily short term and limited in its application to issues, objectives and exchanges that lie outside of the original goal or transaction. Community policing offers an example of this type of capital.

Community Policing involves the residents of a neighborhood or community in "bridging" to each other, and to their local police precinct, in an effort to assist in the abatement of neighborhood crime. Research suggests that this application of social capital is associated with low levels of neighborhood crime¹² and that it can effectively inoculate neighborhoods against the migration of crime from other hot spot areas that may be targeted for police intervention.¹³ But research also suggests that community policing is not a good vehicle for creating sustainable social capital.¹⁴ The primary reason is that, if the effort is successful, the incentive for coming together in the first place is removed, and with it goes the energy that residents invested in operating collectively. Unless people find another basis for their relationship, the culmination of the transaction (accomplishment of the goal) causes bridging capital to dissipate.

Moreover, we can reasonably conclude that it will be difficult to redirect that energy to other uses. For example, there is no basis for assuming that the energies devoted to a successful community policing effort in poor communities could be "rewired" to address other community needs such as improving educational accountability in the public schools, for instance. Why not? Well, for starters, the residents active in community

¹² Sampson, R.J., S. Raudenbush, and F. Earls (1997) "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy." *Science* 277: 918-24.

¹³ Clarke, R.V., and D. Weisburd (1994). "Diffusion of Crime Control Benefits." In R.V. Clarke (ed.), *Crime Prevention Studies*, Vol. 2. Monsey, N.Y.: Criminal Justice Press.

¹⁴ Bennett, Susan F. 1995. "Community Organizations and Crime." *The Annals of the American Academy*:539. May 1995. Pg. 78.

policing tend to be older, retired persons for whom watching the neighborhood is a familiar and "uncostly" civic pastime that can be performed from the comfort of a living room chair. By contrast, volunteering in schools requires a much higher investment of effort with higher associated costs. Moreover, this relatively elderly population, with few if any remaining school aged children, may have little by way of residual interests or stakes in public education.

So, bridging capital, as shown through this example, may be relatively short lived and not be very fungible. There are circumstances, however, under which this may not be true but those circumstances require finding, within a "bridged" relationship, a basis for bonding. If, for instance, through the community policing effort, participating residents expanded beyond their functional relationships into social ones as well, one could imagine friendships being formed that could be both lasting and the basis for action on other issues of mutual interest. In this case, relationships that would have begun with bridging would have transformed themselves into bonding relationships and, as bonding relationships, would be more appropriable to other uses. Still, our general conclusions remain the same — namely, that, to be sustainable, social capital must itself be built on sustainable relationships, bonding capital, and that social capital built on bridging bases alone will necessarily be short term and of limited value beyond its initial impetus.

In the youth development context, this suggests that bridging capital cannot be the basis for the kind of "village-building" and socialization spoken to above. Instead bridging capital can be viewed as a vehicle for connecting children, youth and families with the things they need — public assistance, jobs, housing, college admissions, legal services, etc. It is a mechanism for accessing and exploiting the knowledge and other resources possessed by others in the community who lie outside of but may be accessible through our immediate relationship networks. And again, it follows that the larger an individual's social network, the greater the potential to access bridged resources.

In many communities, the church often plays a very important bridging function either formally by providing structured counseling and other programs of family assistance, or informally, as a venue where members can interact and "discover" the resources contained in and accessible through some of their church relationships. An implication for youth development is the need to provide more forums and venues for community interaction. If we can find ways to enlarge the networks of acquaintances that are available as resources to parents and families, we might expect to increase the social capital available to them, and hence, the potential for bridging to resources that meet their various needs.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT: Implications for a Grant Strategy

Our explorations of social capital and its definitions, dimension and functions all suggest that, in general, merely enlarging the social networks available to residents of poor neighborhoods would permit increased access to resources and improvements in their welfare. So, whether our concern is for the futures of neighborhood youth or any other community issue, one conclusion we can draw from this discussion is that providing more venues and incentives for more social interaction and connection among neighborhood residents is worthwhile and, I would argue, compelling.

But in the specific interests of youth, our discussion suggests that two directions for increasing social interactions might hold promise: (1) strengthening neighborhoods (bonding) to promote more closure around positive community messages, norms and expectations; and (2) building bridges to relationships, and particularly to relationships outside of the neighborhood, in order to establish resources networks for youth.¹⁵ The question remains however, whether there are viable strategies for catalyzing and enabling these developments that the William T. Grant Foundation might pursue through its grant making.

Neighborhood Bonding: Building the "Village" (using the Norms, Authority Relations and Information dimensions of Social Capital)

Our explorations in this paper suggest that one direction for foundation grant making might include supporting initiatives that enhance neighborhood bonding in order to create a positive youth development culture within communities — a culture that establishes new norms and expectations for adult relationships and for adult relationships with children; a culture that has high levels of closure in the neighborhood social networks (particularly of parents and children) and consequently, where adults are empowered to act as authority figures for youth; and a culture that transmits positive messages and provides positive activities for its young people.

Establishing such a culture means finding ways to build bonding capital around the issue of positive youth development — ways to rewire (appropriate) existing relationships to the cause of children and youth. Alternatively, in severely depleted neighborhoods, this may require intentional organizing to strengthen relationship structures that may be weak or to build them where they may be lacking. In either case, it means finding ways to promote more social interaction and involvement between and among neighborhood residents and their children. The question however, is "how?" How do we go about generating a higher level of community involvement in, and hence, communal responsibility for, the development of young people? How do we create a greater sense of obligation and connectedness among larger numbers of proximate adults and parents that can be instrumental in providing strong community supports for kids?

One suggestion is that the foundation invest in **strengthening the capacity of neighborhood organizations** to operate as vehicles and venues for community activity and action. In particular, such investments should be directed at bringing neighborhood residents together, with some regularity, for intra-neighborhood, intergenerational events and programs that will help create more neighborhood identity, more relationships among adults and more adult familiarity with neighborhood children.

A second strategy might involve **supporting neighborhood message development** through processes that engage large numbers of neighborhood residents in strategies for creating, disseminating and promoting positive messages to and about their young people; and establishing methods and means to publicize and celebrate neighborhood youth activities and achievements.

¹⁵ Still a third application of social capital to youth development that has not been explored here relates to notions of youth participation, engagement and efficacy. We have omitted this important application because the Grant Foundation has already established a four-pronged approach to drawing more attention to the need to enhance young people's citizenship and their participation in politics.

A third strategy might seek to **create inter-family support networks** among parents of youths' friendship groupings as a means of creating more closure around youth relationships. Parents often feel more comfortable when their children's selection of friends occurs among other youth whose parents, and parent's parenting skills, they know and respect. In many communities, networks of adults often get formed, quite naturally and without conscious effort, around such things as the community sports activities of their children for instance. The regularity of practices and games tends to bring the same group of parents together on weekly and oftentimes more frequent bases. Faith-based organizations and other nonprofits that do youth programming could be sponsors of youth organized events that feature regular whole-family involvement and inter-family socialization.

Positive peer support is also a very important part of a supportive youth development culture. As such, a fourth strategy might involve **creating positive peer groups** or clubs — "anti-gangs" of youth who share a set of interests and are given support to pursue them and to create community wide opportunities to express and celebrate them.

Youth Bridging: Building Youth Resources Networks (using the Mutual Obligations, Information, and Appropriate Social Organization dimensions of Social Capital)

As we have discussed, one of the important functions of social capital is bridging — providing links to persons and resources that lie outside of our immediate relationship networks. In the context of the nation's poorer neighborhoods and distressed communities, where opportunities for enrichment, recreation and positive supports may be limited, making connections to these resources can be an important part of positive development for young people. So, in addition to the above investments that are aimed at encouraging positive youth attitudes, behaviors and aspirations, other connections may be necessary to provide youth with positive access — access to information, assets, services and supports.

How do we promote youth bridging? Well, fundamentally we must find means to assist youth in building "instrumental" relationships — relationships that have an asset, as well as a social value to them. As an arbitrary guidepost, let us say that a neighborhood organization adopted a programmatic goal of establishing **10 connections for kids** — 10 connections for each of the children it serves in the community — 10 relationships with other, same-aged or older youth, or with adults that are likely to be positive associations through positive activities (e.g. a neighbor, a coach, an athlete, a tutor, a piano teacher, the neighborhood barber/beautician, the gym or English or math teacher, an aunt/uncle, or the parent of a friend, etc.). Almost anyone who is himself engaged in positive pursuits and who is able to be nurturing and supportive of young people can be one of these important 10 connections.

The point here is, that if each youth has 10 (or perhaps only 3, 4, or 5) connections to draw upon for encouragement, advice and assistance, a group of young people can become asset-rich in relatively small numbers by "pooling" their relationships in response to any rising need. It is particularly important that these youth connections be able to provide access to a range of resources. Consequently, we can assume that the more varied these connections (relationships) are, in terms of the other person's interests, aspirations, professions, and social and economic circumstances, the richer

still we can expect this asset base to be. Among the range of resources these connections might provide are access to:

- Advice and Counsel on matters of personal importance and/or in areas requiring moral guidance, critical thinking and problem solving.
- Information Channels to news on opportunities and activities (related to education, training, enrichment, recreation, earnings, or employment etc.) within and outside the neighborhood.
- Community Services, Assets and Resources that can be exploited by neighborhood youth and families in meeting their various needs.
- Self Help Peer Exchanges that will allow young people to come to each other's aid in providing mutual support and selected needed services (transportation, tutorials, childcare, etc.).

A Research Agenda

There is much we do not know about how to do the things our discussion suggests might be helpful. In order to promote neighborhood bonding, for example, we need to better understand how to create the kind of civic engagement, connectedness and trust that this social capital construct implies. We need to figure out how to encourage residents of distressed communities to expand their relationships and to be/get involved with larger numbers of adults and children outside their homes? We need to explore which organizations, venues and forums can be effective conduits for encouraging, expanding and maintaining these social networks. We need to discern strategies for how communities can craft, transmit and maintain a set of positive messages across large numbers of neighborhood residents and, through them, to neighborhood children and youth. And we need to explore what kinds of supports and "protections" resident adults will need to become more aggressively engaged in the lives of neighborhood children and youth?

Similarly, to promote youth bridging, we need to be thoughtful about means of promoting the formation of the "instrumental" relationships we have suggested. How do we go about encouraging the formation of an extended network of "nested mentorships?" And is mentoring the model for the connections we need or is there a less intensive mentoring-lite version of instrumental relationships that can suffice? How, would one devise an approach to assuring the diversity of relationships that would permit access across a wide array of assets and resources? Are there personal characteristics and attributes that can stand as proxies for other accessible resources? How could such an initiative be organized, monitored and evaluated and by whom?

These are but a few of the many difficult issues likely to arise in conjunction with interest in social capital as an entry point for youth development. But considering the paucity of results we have obtained to date by focusing almost exclusively on human capital development service strategies, the potential payoff of further research and program development in this area would seem sufficiently high to warrant our commitment to it.

CONCLUSION

Our charge in the foregoing was to assist the William T. Grant Foundation in its attempt: to understand the construct of social capital; and to assess whether, and in what ways, it might offer promise as an entry point for improving the nation's youth development

outcomes. Given the observations and arguments we have put forward, we can conclude that investments in social capital, as we described the concept here, can indeed be a powerful complement to the nation's ongoing efforts to enhance the individual strengths, abilities and attributes that constitute human capital in our young people.

The program directions and research questions put forward here are intended merely to be suggestive and to scratch the surface of the potential applications of the construct to the cause of improving youth futures. More deliberate and concerted efforts in this area should yield more detailed and practicable approaches. And of course the critical common denominator across any strategies for social capital investment will be the capacities of local neighborhood-based organizations to mount and sustain them. Strengthening their abilities to do so will be a central and ongoing challenge to the success of our efforts to target social capital as an entry point for investing in youth development.