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Social Capital and Implications for Positive Youth Development

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Introduction

A few months before my father passed away, he was suffering from mid-level dementia and living in his own apartment in a retirement complex, but he was able to eat breakfast and dinner with other residents in a common dining room. Sometimes he chose to eat with others, and other times, for whatever reason I still am not sure, he elected not to attend the meals. One night, in a moment of lucidity, he asked me why he was happier and felt better when he ate meals with other people. He really didn't know why he "felt better," but he knew he did. His question gave me a chance to remind him that he always enjoyed being around people for the comradery and because of all the things, all the favors, that friends and acquaintances did for one another. I reminded him of the people he had met and the networks that he had become part of; about a friend who did all his laundry for him; of the theatre group that he took part in and its two plays in which he had starring roles; of the people with cars who still drove—safely or not, it didn't matter—as long as they were able to drive him to the grocery store, a movie, an outing; and, of the number of other things that he did with his different networks. I mentioned to him how people always enjoyed his contributions to the storytelling and joke telling around the table. I didn't specifically mention to him that his social networks certainly had value for him, which is the central tenet of what is commonly referred to as social capital (Field, 2003), or that his networks could actually help him stay physically and mentally healthy (OECD, 2001).

This monograph will present and explore the concept of social capital, beginning with a brief history, various definitions, and identifying recognized types of social capital, and positive and negative aspects of the concept. It will end with a discussion of social capital and its implications for youth and for positive youth development organizations.

History

The use of the exact term "social capital" may have been introduced by L. J. Hanifan, the West Virginia State Supervisor of Rural Schools in 1916 (as noted in Bridger & Alter, 2006; Keeley, 2007; and Woolcock, 1998), when Hanifan discussed how individuals in neighborhoods could work together to govern schools. According to Halpern (2005), Lyda Hanifan, in 1920, referred to social capital as "those tangible assets [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit" (p. 6). It has been relabeled or repackaged numerous times since then (Halpern, 2005; Craig & Fowler, 2003; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000), especially over the past 20 years, and this has made the theory more accessible to a wider audience. In discussing social capital, Portes (1998) stated "Despite its current popularity, the term does not embody any idea really new to sociologists" (p. 1). Even Robert Putnam, a leading social capital theorist, when speaking of the seemingly continuous debates on

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individuality and collective effort in this country, said "Social Capital is to some extent merely new language for a very old debate in American intellectual circles" (2000, p. 24). However, from Hanifan's first use of the phrase "social capital," it took 60 years for the subject to come into vogue with academicians and theorists, especially those from the fields of economics and sociology. Pierre Bourdieu, an acclaimed French sociologist, published some brief notes on the subject in a French journal in 1980 (Bourdieu, 1980), but this did not bring the subject a great deal of attention, especially in the English-speaking world (Field, 2003; Portes, 1998), nor did the first English translation of his work, in a sociology of education text (Bourdieu, 1986). There were other individuals during the 1970s and early 1980s referring to or writing about social capital in their talks and articles (Granovetter, 1973, 1985; Loury, 1977), but their work also brought little attention to the subject.

According to Field (2003), James Coleman, a prominent American sociologist who wrote about and influenced education, had much more of an impact on social capital theory than Bourdieu with the publication of his often-referenced article (Coleman, 1988) on social and human capital. Coleman is usually mentioned as the individual who popularized the concept within academia circles (Bridger & Alter, 2006). As reported in Field (2003), the number of scholarly articles using social capital as a "key word" jumped from 20 before 1981 to just over 1,000 in 1999. Putnam (1993, 1995, 1996, 2000), however, is usually credited with popularizing the concept and bringing it to the attention of government officials, policy makers, educators, and community practitioners (Bridger & Alter, 2006; Keeley, 2007). Since the publication of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Putnam, 2000), the study of the concept of social capital seems to have exponentially expanded (Craig & Fowler, 2003). According to Portes (1998), this expanded study and popularity "is not likely to abate soon" (p. 15). Field (2003) writes about how social capital "…has taken off like a brushfire in the social sciences, it has started to catch on in policy circles, and it has also flared up from time to time in the mass media" (p. 1). In addition, many practitioners have incorporated social capital as part of their community development strategies (Bridger & Alter, 2006). To explore why there is such a high level of interest in social capital and to gain an understanding of what social capital is really about, definitions and brief descriptions of some seminal work follow.

Definitions of Social Capital

Hanifan's aforementioned definition of social capital in 1920 may have given the reader some sense or suggestion of what social capital is - something to do with connections, networks, values, interaction, cooperation – but the definition has evolved and been enriched since 1920. However, as Keeley (2007) notes, there is not a universal or single definition of social capital that would satisfy all the social capital theorists, meaning that there are many definitions which all contribute something to the whole. Smith, Phillipson and Scharf (2002) agree that "The idea of social capital is complex, and escapes easy definition" (p. 4).

The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development defines social capital as "networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups" (OCED, 2001, p. 4). Field (2003) states that the theory of social capital "can be summed up in two words: relationships matter" (p. 1) and goes

on to state "the central idea of social capital is that social networks are a valuable asset" (p. 12). Woolcock (1998) thought of social capital as "encompassing the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit" (p. 155). Francis Fukuyama (1999), a philosopher, political economist and author said:

> Social capital can be defined simply as a set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permits co-operation among them. If members of the group come to expect that others will behave reliably and honestly, then they will come to trust one another. Trust is like a lubricant that makes the running of any group or organization more efficient (1999, p. 16).

Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) offered a somewhat different definition of social capital when they defined it as "an accumulation of the knowledge and identity resources drawn on by communities-of-common-purpose" (p. 87). Smith, Phillipson and Scharf (2002) simply and concisely said social capital "refers to the benefits that are associated with participation in social relationships and social networks" (p. 2). Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital 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 or recognition" (p. 248).

Coleman offered numerous definitions of social capital as his study and research progressed through the years. Very simply, he said "social capital constitutes a particular kind of resource available to an actor" (1988, p. 98), and then he went further by stating that

> Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors–whether persons or corporate actors–within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (1988, p. 98).

Robert Putnam in ***Bowling Alone*** (2000) 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). It should be apparent by now that there are many definitions of social capital offered by researchers and theorists. It is also true that most definitions of social capital have several essential values in common and these central ideas usually focus on social networks, trust, and norms of behavior, which almost always includes the critical concept of reciprocity (Craig & Fowler, 2003). In addition, there may be a social construct or an economic construct to the definition, which usually is dependent on the background or field of the individual offering the definition.

The lack of agreement among theorists and researchers on a tidy definition of social capital is seen by some scholars as an issue of great concern while others view the rather fluid use of the term as positive because of the flexibility thus allowed in utilizing the concept (see Durlauf and Fafchamps, 2004, and Messner, Baumer, and Rosenfeld, 2004, for the pros and cons, respectively, of the argument on the lack of a single definition). In order to gain a better and more comprehensive understanding of social capital than a listing of definitions will allow, it is necessary to consider the thoughts, ideas and principles of some of the leading theorists in

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the field. The focus will be on the three academicians that brought the concept to the forefront of academic and public awareness over the past 20 years – Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam.

Three Social Capital Theorists

Pierre Bourdieu (1930 –2002)

Pierre Bourdieu was a sociologist very much concerned with social hierarchy and economic capital. Expanding on his definition that social capital is the total of all the resources available to members of a group, he went on to discuss the idea that the "volume of social capital possessed by a given agent" (1986, p. 249) is dependent on the number of connections a person (agent) makes, along with the volume of capital - cultural, economic, and social - possessed by each connection. He is reported to have thought of social capital as an advantage mostly of the bourgeoisie, because social capital helped maintain their social class and accompanying privileges (Field, 2003). It follows that Bourdieu's concept or framework of social capital focuses on the individual and how the individual can profit via their affiliation with a network or group. In other words, as Jarrett, Sullivan and Watkins (2005) point out, "gaining access to rich resources held by others is the major incentive for affiliation" (p. 42) in Bourdieu's world of social connections.

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James Coleman (1926 –1995)

James Coleman is often credited with bringing social capital to the forefront of the academic agenda in the late 1980s and in the 1990s. Robert Putnam (2000) credits Coleman with this accomplishment by his use of social capital to "highlight the social context of education" (p. 20). Before Coleman considered the concept of social capital, however, he had a distinguished history of studying the topic of schools, inequality and student success. In the 1960s he led a federal study called *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, which became known as *"The Coleman Report."* Stein (2002) states it was this report that "was the spur that awoke the nation to the fact that schools on their own would have little impact on significant national inequities" (p. 31). In 1972, Coleman chaired another national committee, which resulted in *Youth: Transition to Adulthood* (Coleman, 1972). This report advanced Coleman's idea of a widening gap or separation between youth and adults.

It was a study comparing dropout rates and test scores of students at Catholic high schools, with those of students at public high schools and non-religious based private high schools that seems to have brought Coleman to the concept of social capital. (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987) Coleman & Hoffer found that the students at non-religious based private schools and public high schools were two times and three times more likely, respectively, to drop out of school.

The Catholic high schools were also doing a better job than the other high schools in teaching verbal and math skills. When Coleman and his colleagues took socioeconomic factors into account, the lower drop out rates, lower absenteeism and higher scores were even more striking for students with ethnic backgrounds and from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic situations. Coleman's initial research and successive studies led him to conclude that the success of the students and schools were a result of the complex social structure surrounding the Catholic schools. Students were bonded to one another at numerous levels - through school, but also through church, and through parent friendships. In addition, there was a close-knit adult or parental community, which both supported the school and teachers, their own children, as well as other children in the school. As a result of his findings, Coleman wrote of the importance of young people being surrounded by

adults, first at the family level and then, at the community level – in this case, the community around school. He discussed the impact of community norms upon students, parents and teachers, and how this made a difference in the student's performance.

In his paper *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital,* Coleman (1988) detailed his thoughts on the concept of social capital. Coleman's 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. The trustworthiness of the social environment and the extent of obligations held are two crucial elements in Coleman's construct. There are other important elements in Coleman's social capital construct, such as effective norms, sanctions, and what he called "closure of social networks," which leads to more effective norms by virtue of having an adequate number of ties between a certain number of people; for the interested reader, his 1998 paper lays out all of these elements. It is important to realize that while individuals can and do benefit from their relationships in Coleman's concept of social capital, Coleman's theory of social capital focuses on the group, as opposed to Bourdieu's focus on the individual; norms or common standards, trust and reciprocity are important, and social capital is a construct which benefits the "public good" (Coleman, 1988).

Robert Putnam (1941-)

Whereas Bourdieu believed social connections growing out of networks mostly benefited the individual, and Coleman believed both the individual and group benefited from participation in dense and overlapping social networks, Putnam's conceptualization of social capital is rooted at the community level, with both the overall community and the individual benefiting from engaged citizenry (Putnam, 1993; 1995; 1996; 2000). Putnam is a political scientist by training, not a sociologist like Bourdieu and Coleman were, and the work that led him to embrace and expand on social capital theory focused on civic engagement. His first major work in this area focused on the role civic engagement and political institutions played in generating political stability and economic prosperity in the southern and northern regions of Italy (Putnam, 1993). Putnam found a near-perfect correlation between civic engagement and effective government. In the south, Putnam believed there was a culture of mistrust and fear which did not allow for engaged citizenry and effective government. The opposite was true in the north, which encouraged civic engagement and hence, enjoyed effective governmental institutions. For Putnam, in this instance, community level social capital was developed over a long period of time:

> The quality of governance was determined by longstanding traditions of civic engagement (or its absence). Voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and football clubs – these were the hallmarks of a successful region. In fact, historical analysis suggested that these networks of organized reciprocity and civic solidarity, far from being an epiphenomenon of socioeconomic modernization, were a precondition for it (1993, p. 66).

After his study of civic engagement in Italy, Putnam turned his attention to the United States and further developed his theories on social capital and civic engagement, which he published as a scholarly paper (Putnam, 1995), and eventually in book form as *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000). Putnam used the image of people bowling alone, rather than in leagues, as a

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metaphor for people spending less time involved in community groups, volunteering, and socializing with friends (or connecting with people), while spending more time alone - working, commuting and watching television. Through the gathering and use of various forms of data, including the General Social Survey, National Election Studies, the DDB Needham Life Style Surveys, Social and Political Trends Survey, as well as a range of other membership data sets on organizations from 4-H to labor unions to professional associations, Putnam concluded that there had been a steady decline in associational activity in the USA. He paired this evidence with other survey information showing the decline in perceptions of honesty and trustworthiness, a change in behavior on observing laws and societal norms, and concluded that America's social capital was in a steady state of decline, and had been so for decades (Putnam, 1995; 1996; 2000). The decline in community connections or networks that once led people to associate together in many forms (bowling leagues, PTAs, service clubs, fraternal organizations, etc.), represented a loss of social capital.

For Putnam, the important components of social capital, namely norms of reciprocity and trust, develop from frequent and long-term interactions within the dense networks or associations that engaged citizenry are a part of in their communities. Putnam wrote that the "touchstone" of social capital is the principle of "generalized reciprocity," which he explained as "I'll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favor" (Putnam, 2000, p. 134).

Putnam gave credit to baseball legend Yogi Berra for possibly the most succinct definition of reciprocity: "If you don't go to somebody's funeral, they won't come to yours" (2000, p. 20). When people believe in and follow the norm of "generalized reciprocity," there is a special trust that is formed, which Putnam referred to as "thin trust" but is often called social or generalized trust (Putnam, 2000; Rahn and Transue, 1998; Yamagishi and Yamagishi, 1994). This type of trust allows for giving people, even people that one does not directly know, the benefit of the doubt that they will do the right thing, which according to Putnam's belief, could lead to increased social capital.

In summary, Bourdieu was concerned with social capital being available to and used by individuals of the upper class to strengthen and maintain their positions of power. Coleman focused on the group, but believed that individuals also benefited from their association with dense networks, partly as a result of individuals pursuing their own interests within their networks. Putnam's expanded focus is on the community, regional or even the national level, with both the community and the individual benefiting from increased engagement and participation. The three theorists are similar in the belief that social capital consists of individual connections within networks and that these relationships all operate within a certain set of shared values (Field, 2003). The work of these theorists and others have led to the identification of different types of social capital. These will be described in the next section.

Types of Social Capital

In step with debates over a definition and the components of social capital, there are also discussions over the forms or sub-types of social capital (OCED, 2001). Three categories of social capital have been distinguished: ***bonding, bridging*** and ***linking***. Putnam is often credited with introducing and describing both

bonding and bridging social capital, however Ross Gittell and Avis Vidal (1998) were probably the first to use the term *bonding* social capital and Gittell and Vidal credit Putnam with first using the term *bridging* social capital (Putnam, 2000). Woolcock (1998) further refined the concept of social capital when he introduced the third type of social capital, *linking* social capital.

Bonding social capital, also referred to as 'exclusive' social capital, describes the value resulting from an inner connection between people. It ties people that already know each other and/or have a sense of common identity, closer together based on such things as family, culture, and ethnicity. Putnam (2000) offers the following as examples of bonding social capital: ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women's reading groups, and country clubs. When describing the value of bonding social capital, he said, "it is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity. Dense networks in ethnic enclaves, for example, provide crucial social and psychological support for less fortunate members of the community, while furnishing start-up financing, markets, and reliable labor for local entrepreneurs" (p. 22). It is often said that bonding social capital maintains homogeneity and tends to reinforce exclusive identities (Field, 2003; Putnam, 2000). The notion of bonding social capital parallels the notion of "strong ties" espoused by Granovetter (1973), in which family, friends and others with close bonds are the "strong ties" in a person's life.

Bridging social capital, also referred to as 'inclusive' social capital, provides links beyond a shared sense of identity, and encompasses people across diverse groups. In contrast to bonding networks, bridging networks are much better at providing linkages to external resources and for information dispersion (OCED, 2001; Putnam, 2000). This inclusive type of social capital can generate broader identities and mutual exchanges, or reciprocity, by fostering relationships across religious, class and ethnic lines. The civil rights movement, numerous youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organizations are examples of the bridging type of social capital offered by Putnam (2000). Instead of maintaining homogeneity like bonding social capital, bridging social capital promotes ties that are heterogeneous, connecting "people or groups who are different from each other in some way and addresses how social capital facilitates resource acquisition" (Agnitsch, Flora, and Ryan, 2006, p. 39). The notion of bridging social capital corresponds to the notion of "weak ties" that provide linkage to distant acquaintances and are very often more valuable than the "strong ties" mentioned above, especially when seeking employment or political allies (Granovetter, 1973).

Some theorists have written that bonding social capital is good for emotional well-being and that bridging social capital is good for obtaining useful information and professional advancement (Halpern, 2005). Putnam (2000) presents the view of Xavier de Souza Briggs on bridging and bonding social capital as bonding social capital being good for "getting by" and bridging social capital as essential for "getting ahead."

Both bonding and bridging social capital are thought of as horizontal forms of social capital because the connections made through the connections or networks in both forms are usually between individuals or groups similar in economic and social status, albeit to a much wider (horizontal) audience with the bridging type of social capital. *Linking* social capital (Woolcock, 1998) is thought of as a vertical form of social capital, because the links are with people or groups that are further up or lower down the economic or social ladder (OCED, 2001; World Bank, 2001) or to "those who are entirely outside the community, thus

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enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available within the community" (attributed to Woolcock by Field, 2003, p. 42). "Linking relationships often depend on preexisting bridging social capital between key individuals in organizations situated in different parts of the power hierarchy of a city or town" according to Schneider (2004, p. 15). There is some thought that linking social capital is really a modified or "turbo-charged" form of bridging social capital because it particularly concerns power, political influence, or financial resources at the individual, community or regional national level (Emery & Flora, 2006; Halpern, 2005).

In general, social capital theorists believe there are powerful positive social benefits associated with any of the three types of social capital – bonding, bridging or linking. Putnam (2000) believes that social networks usually can not be strictly divided into either bonding or bridging and it is more reasonable to divide them along a "more or less" scale when considering what type of social capital is provided by a particular network. Each type is useful in meeting different needs. In addition, strengths in one form of social capital can help to make up for deficits in another form (Agnitsch, Flora & Ryan, 2006). Agnitsch, Flora and Ryan also discuss the importance of social capital to community action, meaning the presence of social capital is a predictor of community action, and hence, community development. Research on the types of social capital is still in the early stages, is very dynamic, and there will probably be changes and additions to the concept from current and future researchers and theorists (Halpern, 2005). For a thorough explanation and in-depth comparison of the three forms of social capital, including an illustration of a conceptual map of the types of social capital which includes the components of social capital (networks, norms, and sanctions) as well as the levels or domain of analysis (individual, group, community, nation, etc.), see Halpern (2005, pp. 13-31).

Negative Aspects of Social Capital

During the past 20 years, numerous social capital researchers and theorists have written about social capital's negative aspects, often referred to as the dark side of social capital. The theorists usually agree that it is important to be aware of possible negative impacts of social capital so that the concept isn't offered as the "fix-all" for all social ills. An awareness of positive and negative impacts of social capital also ensures that rigorous academic research will continually occur in order to explore all possible impacts of social capital. Portes (1998) summarizes four possible negative consequences of social capital, identified by other studies. The first negative consequence is the *exclusion or restriction of outsiders from social groups or networks*. Networks are usually very high in trust and reciprocity, all at the exclusion of others. An example is of ethnic groups controlling a sector of a community's economy, making it next to impossible for others to get-ahead or break into the market in that community.

The second potential negative impact of social capital is *excess claims on a network's members*, which may be viewed as the obverse of the first negative impact. For example, a successful businessperson in a tight knit network high in bonding social capital receives multiple requests from others in the network for loans and jobs, thereby halting or slowing the individual's economic progress. Portes reports that in his study of the rise of commercial enterprises in Bali, "Geertz observed how successful entrepreneurs were constantly assaulted by job and loan-seeking kinsman" and "these claims were buttressed by strong norms

enjoying mutual assistance within the extended family and among community members in general" (Portes, 1998, p. 11).

The third possible negative consequence of social capital is a *demand for conformity or restrictions on individual freedom.* Portes reports that researchers identified some situations where individuals are linked together across different roles in overlapping social networks (called multiplex networks); the intense demand for adherence to social norms then led to a reduction of privacy and autonomy. Sometimes the strong adherence to social norms is a desirable impact, but the possible negative consequences must be kept in mind (Portes, 1998).

The fourth potential harmful impact of social capital, closely related to the restrictions on individual freedoms, is the *notion of downward leveling norms.* To illustrate this point, Portes describes studies that have shown the influence of strong network norms in groups that are bonded together by "a common experience of adversity and opposition to mainstream society" (1998, p. 12). Research examples of Puerto Rican drug dealers in New York, Haitian-American youth in Miami, and Mexican-American teens in California are presented. In describing these situations, Portes said "In these instances, individual success stories undermine group cohesion because the latter is precisely grounded on the alleged impossibility of such occurrences. The result is downward leveling norms that operate to keep members of a downtrodden group in place…" (1998, p. 12). Portes goes on to say that "Once in place…this normative outlook has the effect of helping perpetuate the very situation that it decries" (1998, p. 12).

Criticisms of Putnam's work over the past decade for portraying only the positive aspects of social capital moved the researcher to address the subject. In summing up both aspects of social capital, Putnam says that like any other form of capital, social capital "can be directed toward malevolent, anti-social purposes" (2000, p. 22). In discussing the possible negative side of social capital Putnam says "It was Social Capital …that enabled Timothy McVeigh to bomb the …Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. McVeigh's network of friends, bound together by a norm of reciprocity, enabled him to do what he could not have done alone" (2000, p. 21). Field (2003) approaches the subject by exploring evidence of the negative aspects of social capital in two respects: 1) that it may reinforce inequality, and 2) that it may support antisocial behavior. Violent gangs, gambling and prostitution rings, exclusive power elite organizations, and crime "families" are other examples that are cited by social capital theorists of how networks of strong norms and reciprocity can be used for anti-social means. For a thorough discussion of the potential negative aspects of social capital, see Putnam's Chapter 22 in *Bowling Alone* (2000) titled the "Dark Side of Social Capital" and Field's treatment of the same issue in Chapter 3 of Social Capital (2003) titled "A Walk on the Dark Side."

Implications of Social Capital for Youth and for Positive Youth Development Organizations

Readers familiar with the concept of positive youth development will recognize the critical components of relationships, connections and interlinkages, discussed as they relate to social capital, as also necessary components for the positive development of youth. Through ties and connections at the family, neighborhood, school and community levels, young people gain access to a multitude of opportunities, experiences, and forms of support, including those in the areas of education, jobs and careers, emotional growth, and

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life skill development, all of which help with a successful transition to adulthood (Benson, 1997; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Social capital, according to the *Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth,* one of the foremost groups of scholars in the country to study community programs and youth development during the past decade, is a practical method for examining the linkages and connections, and hence the developmental resources, that a young person experiences in a particular setting (National Research Council Institute of Medicine, 2002).

Ferguson (2006) provides a critical synthesis of the international literature on social capital in relation to young peoples' well-being and reports that "the social capital literature indicates that this social resource [social capital] can facilitate positive outcomes with respect to children's and youth's well-being, including reducing adolescent pregnancy, delinquency, academic failure, and child maltreatment" (2006, p. 2). Ferguson concludes that it can be beneficial to utilize a "social capital theoretical lens…to further explore various outcomes related to children and young people's well-being" (p. 9). This conclusion is based on two findings from her review: 1) social capital contributes to the welfare of children and youth, and 2) social capital is second only to poverty in having the highest influence on children's development and future success.

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Putnam said "Social capital keeps bad things from happening to good kids" (2000, p. 296). In stating this, Putnam was referring to his study comparing a state-level Social Capital Index with the Kids Count Indexes (Annie E. Casey Foundation), a well-known measure of child well-being developed by using a number of indicators that contribute to positive child development. "Statistically, the correlation between high social capital and positive child development is as close to perfect as social scientists ever find in data analysis of this sort" (2000, pp. 296-297). Putnam acknowledges that that the +.80 correlation between a state's high social capital and a high Kids Count index doesn't imply causation, but the statistical techniques used to explore the specific links between social capital and child well-being make clear that social capital is a significant indicator in the equation necessary for the positive development of children and youth. A "state's social infrastructure is far more important than anyone would have predicted in ensuring the healthy development of youth" (2000, p. 298).

In a qualitative study of three organized youth serving organizations, Jarrett, Sullivan and Watkins (2005) found that structured youth programs can and do facilitate the development of social capital. Using the selection parameters of being youth-centered, attempting to connect youth and adults in the community, having youth work toward goals, and being well thought of by youth professionals, Jarrett, Sullivan and Watkins selected an FFA Chapter, an urban arts program and an urban civic program for their study. An extensive and open-ended interview process with teenage participants in the programs found that after a three-step formation period, youth-community adult relationships were developed as a result of participation in the organizations. The path of the steps moved from a general youth-adult disconnect, to interacting with adults, to then connecting with adults. As a result of the connections that were formed, the research revealed "... the adults that the youth met through the three programs provided them with information, assistance, exposure to adult worlds, support, and encouragement" (Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005, pp. 49-50). The youth described the newly gained

social capital as helping them to achieve their immediate goals and prepare them for their transition into adulthood. The authors state that since they were studying youth and did not collect any data from the community adults, the findings led them to focus solely on "social capital as an individual good for the youth" (p. 53). However, the researchers postulate that adults may have gained some type of capital from their involvement with the youth, and the new relationships would benefit the community as a whole since the networks of exchange formed by youth and adults build and strengthen networks of trust, something Putnam (2000) viewed as vital for engaged citizenry and effective communities. Jarrett, Sullivan and Watkins (2005) suggest further research would add to the knowledge of how social capital develops.

Four Perspectives on Youth and Social Capital

This synopsis of the research on social capital and youth highlights social capital as an important factor in promoting positive youth development and youth well-being. When studying or promoting social capital for youth, it is important to consider social capital from four perspectives: family, neighborhood, school, and community (ACT for Youth, 2003; Coleman, 1988; Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2001). The notion of family social capital is important because of the direct influence that family members have on a young person's development. The relationships that parents have with other adults in the community, at the work place, in informal and formal social networks, through civic and other type of activities, all have an indirect but very important influence on child well-being. ACT for Youth (2003), in discussing the significance of bonds between children and parents and between parents and other community adults, states "Parents directly affect their children's social development through a number of direct and indirect channels" (p. 1). Having a parent or parents who participate in the community is a strong indicator of whether a young person will develop into an adult who also participates and is civically engaged (Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2001). The family environment can be viewed as an incubator of social capital because of both the skills that are learned and the role-modeling that naturally occur between children and significant adults.

Social capital should also be viewed from the neighborhood perspective when thinking about youth. There is growing evidence that neighborhoods where there are high levels of mutual trust and reciprocity, connections among families, intergenerational relationships, and the willingness to take action on behalf of others and for the good of the entire neighborhood, all contribute to children and youth's social capital (ACT for Youth, 2003; Coleman, 1988; Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2001). This appears to result from a combination of the naturally occurring role modeling that occurs in such neighborhoods, the connections to non-family adults and the resources they bring to the relationships, and the lessons and skills learned by youth from their intergenerational relationships (Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005).

The connections between social capital and school and academic performance was discussed when presenting Coleman's work. The association between social capital and educational achievement has been confirmed by more recent studies (Field, 2003). School and its associated extracurricular activities is another important factor to keep in mind when thinking about youth and social capital. If students feel connected to their schools,

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their teachers and peers, feel safe in their schools, and are engaged in positive activities in schools, social capital can be promoted and enhanced in a number of ways. Students learn the necessary skills in school and school activities that allow them to participate in civil society in meaningful ways (Putnam, 2000). In civics, government and history classes, students learn about democratic societies and the ways that citizens have participated and are expected to participate to keep democracy alive. Some students participate in clubs and other extracurricular activities, where they often are involved in hands-on training in civic participation on a meaningful and manageable level. In addition, many schools, at all levels but especially at the high school level, are providing or requiring community service activities or "service learning" activities which provides students with roles in the wider community. Students are then often required to complete the cycle of learning by reflecting on their experiences in some way in an allied class (Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2001).

Community is the fourth perspective to take into account when considering social capital and youth. Putnam (2000) put forth the argument that the increase in maladies such as depression, suicide rates, and violence among recent generations of youth in the United States, has been strongly related to a decrease in social capital or social connectedness between community members and civic and governmental institutions in communities. In fact, "social connectedness is a much stronger predictor of perceived quality of life in a community than educational or economic indicators – at least for adults" (ACT for Youth, 2003, p. 2). In general, there seems to be a groundswell of evidence indicating the overall importance of the connections between young people and the greater community for their well-being and positive development (Craig and Fowler, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America, 2001; Zeldin, 2004). Examples of the "greater community" include positive youth development organizations, other community-based organizations, social networks, service organizations, business groups, and government entities. Zeldin (2004) describes the outcome of youth being involved in organizational governance in eight different community organizations:

> Over time, the youth built connections that were valued not only for their instrumentality but also for the feelings of belonging. As the youth gained more trust and comfort with their adult colleagues in governance, they began to perceive them differently, more as allies than antagonists. They appeared to recognize that they could share, and work with adults in their communities (p. 83).

This is exactly the type of outcome that one would hope for as a result of enhancing the social capital of the involved youth. Zeldin (2004) reported that as a result of these new connections, the youth benefited in numerous ways; there were job offers, financial and scholarship advice, speaking engagements, internships, and offers of membership in community groups.

Hopes for the Future

In their conclusion to a review chapter on social capital, Baron, Field, and Schuller (2000) state: "Social capital has several characteristics: it is neither tidy nor mature; it can be abused, analytically and politically; its future is unpredictable; but it offers much promise (p. 35)." Even though the research is limited and still in its infancy, there is optimism about continuing the study of the

importance of social capital for youth well-being and development. Positive benefits can result from practitioners and researchers becoming more familiar with the concept and implementing its development, as well as further studying its impacts. Wall, Ferrazzi, and Schryer (1998) wrote social capital should not be viewed "as a panacea for the ills of modern society" (p. 313), but a focus on nurturing and developing the many aspects of social capital – like relationships, trust, positive norms, social networks, reciprocity – especially of the bridging and linking types, is a positive objective for any group, community, or society. If the past 20 years are an indication, more studies and scholarly articles written about social capital will benefit society as a whole and youth in particular. ■

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