

Catherine Elder

Professor Pickett

Poverty 423

15 April 2014

Social Capital and Poverty: A Community-Based Approach

When you study poverty in depth, it becomes increasingly difficult to look just at the individual without considering the social factors that also influence the situation they are in. Individual choices only go so far to determine a person's situation when a number of societal, community-level, and institutional determinants are also at play. Norman Daniels looks at the social factors that influence health outcomes in his book *Just Health: Meeting Health Needs Fairly* and he concludes that social factors are extremely relevant to health policy even though they have largely been ignored (81). One such social factor, although one that Daniels does not discuss is social capital, the effective use of network ties. That social capital exists and is important for a dignified life is not something many would dispute, but it has not been greatly considered in policy creation. One possible reason for this is the difficulty for implementation. Many efforts at reducing poverty focus on the short-term—how can we get this person out of poverty as fast as possible and they ignore the ways they could have a lasting effect on someone's life (or rather they think this will produce a lasting result). By focusing on social factors such as social capital a policy can influence the environment in which an individual is situated and therefore have a more lasting effect on his or her life.

There are also philosophical arguments in favor of this approach, such as that of Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. In her list of ten central capabilities, Martha Nussbaum includes emotions, affiliation, play, and control over one's environment (33). In her description

for all of these she relates the particular capability to the importance of relationships with others. Those in agreement with Nussbaum's list as a way to promote living a dignified life would be hard-pressed to argue against the importance of social capital and network ties (the structure of our weak and strong relationships with other people) for achieving a threshold level of these capabilities. If this moral argument in favor of social capital and network ties is not enough, other thinkers have researched the effects that the social sphere has on poverty and factors of poverty in a more practical, tangible way. In his book, *The Community Economic Development Movement: Law, Business, & the New Social Policy*, William Simon bases his whole proposal of Community Economic Development on the importance of an entire community working together to better the circumstances of the individuals within it. Numerous thinkers have traced social capital and social networks to topics such as segregation¹, mobility and poverty traps², social cohesion that occurs through weak ties³, economic development⁴ and the different pathways to form social capital through ties in organizational and social settings⁵. Considering all of these, it seems reasonable to assume that social capital can have a large effect on poverty and if used effectively can be used to address it well. Small articulates this in his book *Unanticipated Gains*:

¹ DiPrete, Thomas A., Andrew Gelman, Tyler McCormick, Julien Teitler, and Tian Zheng. "Segregation in Social Networks Based on Acquaintanceship and Trust." *American Journal of Sociology* 116.4 (2011): 1234-83. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.

² Chantarat, Sommarat, and Christopher B. Barrett. "Social network capital, economic mobility and poverty traps." *Journal of Economic Inequality* (2012): 299-342. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.

³ Granovetter, Mark S. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78.6 (1973): 1360-80. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.

⁴ Eagle, Nathan, Michael Macy, and Rob Claxton. "Network Diversity and Economic Development." *Science* 21 May 2010: 1029-31. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.

⁵ Small, Mario L. *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life when he writes, “how well people do depends on the range and quality of their connections... better connected people enjoy better health, faster access to information, stronger social support, and greater ease in dealing with crises or everyday problems” (v). If you think of the world as a collection of social networks that carry with them beneficial ties to other people, then it completely changes how you view poverty relief that only focuses on individuals. Social capital carries with it many benefits that are essential to an individual’s well being.

Too many poverty relief efforts ignore the power that a community and the institutions within it have on an individual. Focusing on social capital while creating policies promotes capabilities, can provide effective and beneficial resources for the individuals within a community, and could provide long-term results as these communities rely on their networks for support and information. In the course of this paper I will expand on the moral obligation of enhancing social capital as a means of addressing poverty, examine the resources of social networks that can build social capital and help reduce poverty, look at different approaches that employ social capital in an attempt to address poverty, and examine the obstacles for a community-level approach in reducing poverty as well as responses to those obstacles.

MORAL OBLIGATION

Saying we should do something but giving no claim for why does not have much merit. Philosophical and moral arguments for how we address poverty influence our opinion of why we should address it in the first place. A Capabilities Approach to poverty relief strongly supports implementing policies that consider social capital. Martha Nussbaum includes the importance of social ties in her descriptions of several capabilities. The arguments that Nussbaum lays out are

very convincing for why we should focus on social capital and in this section I will highlight how the two theories connect.

It would likely be easy to find people focused on individual family units or the utility of a large group in their poverty relief efforts; it is less common to find people deeply interested in individual people rooted within a community who recognize that they have ties to the people within it that affect their well being. If we have a responsibility to care for the individuals within our nation but we also have a moral obligation to the population as a whole then the only way to feasibly do this is to focus on individuals as a part of their social networks. I argue that we must do this in order to promote as dignified a life as possible, which is consistent with a capabilities approach. Martha's Nussbaum's list of ten central capabilities in *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, is key to understanding her view of how to look at poverty through a different lens that focuses on promoting a dignified life as a whole, not just a financially secure one. While she chooses to be focused on the individual, many of these capabilities rely on the support of other people. Nussbaum states:

Capabilities belong first and foremost to individual persons, and only derivatively to groups. The approach espouses a principle of *each person as an end*. It stipulates that the goal is to produce capabilities for each and every person, and not to use some people as a means to the capabilities of others or of the whole. (35)

She indicates that individuals should be our first priority in policy and that many policies ignore the individual in their approaches that focus on units such as the family (Nussbaum 35).

However, while focusing on the individual as an end is important to ensure his or her dignity, sometimes social networks are essential to doing so. There are certainly situations where an individual cannot pursue a dignified life without the support of the social network they are in.

While focusing on social capital seems like a shift away from this focus on the individual, it operates in this paper under the assumption that each individual still be considered separately and cared for and supported as best as possible. While some of her capabilities can be addressed at a primarily individual level, in some cases these capabilities can only be addressed when looking at a community. Nussbaum writes that capabilities are “not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment” (20). While the capabilities belong to an individual, they are influenced greatly by external (at times social) factors. I earlier noted that among Nussbaum’s list, emotions, affiliation, play, and control over one’s environment rely on the importance of having relationships with other people (33). Now I will examine each capability more in depth in relation to this value on social interactions.

Each of these four from her list ties a capabilities approach into social capital through their social nature. Nussbaum describes “emotions” as “being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves... to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one’s emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety” (33-34). In this we see two important characteristics of social interactions. First, we need interaction with other people to develop a full range of emotion that for many is considered essential to experience as a human. Our experience of emotion is a unique quality that makes up who we are, so to not have a full range of emotion would be limiting even if just for the fact that others do experience emotions. Second, we see that these social interactions must be beneficial, which is important for the idea of social capital. Interactions must be useful in developing a range of emotion, not influential in limiting them. Nussbaum expands on this by saying, “supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their

development” (34). Social capital, or engaging in beneficial network ties, would be influential in this development of emotion. Affiliation is perhaps the most self-explanatory of the capabilities that rely on social capital. This entails “being able to live with and toward others... to engage in various forms of social interaction” (Nussbaum 34). She even declares that we need to preserve institutions that “constitute and nourish” affiliation to protect this capability (Nussbaum 34). Play does not specifically mention other people in its description, which reads, “Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities” (Nussbaum 34). However, I think it is a fair assumption to say that it would be difficult to achieve a threshold level of play without the presence of other people in social interactions. While someone may be able to laugh, play, and enjoy recreational activities on his or her own, it would certainly happen much more frequently when someone else is involved as well. Control over one’s environment relies on social capital in its material sense, which says “in work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers” (Nussbaum 34). This is a different type of example of social capital, as it highlights the mutual respect necessary for an effective network tie in a work environment.

These capabilities turn from theoretical ideals to practical qualities that help promote a better life for the person who possesses them when they turn into functionings. Nussbaum states, “capabilities are important because of the way in which they may lead to functionings... the capabilities would be pointless if they were never used and people just slept all through life” (25). Here Nussbaum strengthens arguments for social capital as a necessary component of the Capabilities Approach by reminding us that the capabilities I described above are important on their own, but they also grow into functionings within society. Some of these functionings are considered fertile, “one that tends to promote other related capabilities” (Nussbaum 44). These

capabilities that enforce social capital can be considered fertile functionings because the benefits of social capital can lead to other capabilities. This enforces the idea that to function and succeed in society you need effective network ties.

Social Capital in Everyday Life. Social capital is essential for a fulfilled life in the resources it brings, but also in the way it promotes unified communities that can be influential in poverty relief and everyday life. In his paper, “Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital,” James Coleman states why social capital is important for everyday life. He writes:

Just as physical capital and human capital facilitate productive activity, social capital does as well. For example, a group within which there is extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust is able to accomplish much more than a comparable group without that trustworthiness and trust. (Coleman S101)

Socially organized communities require social capital to build trust and having a trustworthy community leads to many positive outcomes. An example Coleman gives of this is a woman who has six children and moves from a community in suburban Detroit that does not have much social organization and trustworthiness to a community in Jerusalem that is built on trust (S99). This mother appreciated the greater freedom her children have in Jerusalem because she felt safe letting them go to a park alone and letting her children ride the city bus, something she could not do in Detroit (S99). She thinks that this greater freedom is beneficial for her children so she supports her family’s move. In Coleman’s assertion that greater trust leads to more productivity, we can also see how this relates to poverty as people can rely on social capital to push themselves into further success away from poverty by relying on the support of others. However,

it is not just this support that helps people move out of poverty but the additional resources within social networks that lead to greater well being of the people involved.

RESOURCES FROM SOCIAL CAPITAL

While social capital in itself is important for individuals and their capabilities, it is the resources available in social networks that can make changes in their economic situation. When effective and beneficial, these resources are what can foster long-term results within a community.

Sociologists list many resources that flow through social networks and all of them are important in different ways. This section highlights the various resources that sociologists include in their discussion of social capital and how these resources might be effective for poverty relief.

Chantarat, Sommarat, and Barrett define social capital as “an individual asset conferring private benefits... to emphasize that household’s gain from linking with others for mutual benefit” (302). The factors of social capital that may help aid in escaping a poverty trap are essential for its success. In their research, Chantarat, Sommarat, and Barrett find four coexisting patterns among the initially poor, “(1) exit from poverty through autarkic saving, (2) socially mediated exit from poverty, (3) a poverty trap due to social exclusion, and (4) a poverty trap associated with self-imposed social isolation” (328). This shows that if the poor can utilize resources from social networks and build social capital then this capital can be effective for escaping poverty. These authors identify resources such as information flow, access to funding for technology, market intelligence, access to loans and insurance, and friendship (Chantarat, Sommarat, and Barrett 302). Coleman takes a different approach when describing the resources of social networks and focuses on information, effective norms, and closure of networks (S104-S107).

Obtaining information through social networks can be an essential tool to overcoming poverty as it can provide access to organizations and funding that you might not have otherwise been aware of. In Coleman's model, information as a result of social ties can be used as a basis for action and is thus valuable to the individuals using it (Coleman S104). Information flowing through social networks is considered cultural capital and can be very useful in situations like navigating school systems to best serve your child, as is described in Lareau and Calarco's "Class, Cultural Capital, and Institutions: The Case of Families and Schools." The next resource Coleman identifies, effective norms, has examples that include inhibiting crime, rewards for high achievement in school, and acting in the interest of the group—not your own interest (Coleman S104-S105). Effective norms can be useful in facilitating certain behavior in a community but they can also limit other behavior (Coleman S105). Effective norms could be useful in poverty relief in the sense that they limit negative behavior and promote beneficial behavior. An example could be a norm that makes dropping out of school socially unacceptable or one that makes succeeding in school an admirable quality. This would make students work harder at their education and could lead to more success later.

Coleman notes that some forms of social structure are better at facilitating social capital than others and the structure that a community has could determine its effectiveness for helping reduce poverty. Closure (a closed network) is an example of a form that would facilitate implementing effective norms because the network all works together to impose these ideals (Coleman S106). In "The Strength of Weak Ties," Mark Granovetter explains that the weak ties within social networks can be classified as bridges and as the only connection between two points they provide information and influence (1364). When a community has many weak ties present to bind the network together it can form a closed network where all of the points are

connected in some way, whether strong or weak, and there are likely many weak ties to carry information. For example, in a school setting, parents who befriend the parents of their children's friends can gain power through the conversation with those parents who likely face similar problems because this allows them to provide information for each other through the network of the school (Coleman S106). If all of the parents were tied in some way, regardless of strength, then this network would be closed. Trustworthiness stemming from closure of social networks can also aid in promoting obligations and expectations (Coleman S107). Intergenerational closure in a network demonstrated by the community of a Catholic school shows lower high school dropout rates (Coleman S115). When compared to private high schools with strong religious affiliation in another community the same norm is held in place (Coleman S115). These religious communities function effectively because of all of these resources and the closure of the network promotes trust in the community to uphold the norms they have established.

Other thinkers identify similar resources that run through social networks and can be effective tools for an individual or family's success. For instance, Mario Luis Small cites Coleman as well as Bordieu and Lin and lists: "information, services, material goods, trust, obligations, and pro-social norms" as resources of social networks, which are also affected by whether a person has access to social capital and whether he or she chooses to use it, what they deem *mobilization* (18). Small also says that when effective, organizations fostering social capital "not only enlarge social networks but also produce those particular connections that yield concrete benefits, such as well-paying jobs, better health, discounts on services, or lesser material difficulty" (28). Consequently, they can also move people to "a higher rung on the socioeconomic ladder" (Small 28). Eagle, Macy, and Claxton also write of the economic benefits of social ties (specifically weak ones) and state that these benefits are most likely to come from

outside of a close friend group (1029). Among these benefits they list, “access to jobs and promotions, greater job mobility, higher salaries, opportunities for entrepreneurship, and increased power in negotiations” (Eagle, Macy, and Claxton 1030). All of these resources could be very beneficial to policy suggestion involving social networks in the future, but to truly understand the benefits of social networks at reducing poverty you have to see what they look like in context and how they can be formed.

SOCIAL NETWORKS IN CONTEXT

The following examples show how social networks can be an effective means for gathering the resources that can help some escape poverty. In Nussbaum’s description of the capability of Affiliation, she writes, “protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation” (34). The institutions with which an individual associates largely influence social capital. This section elaborates on social capital as it appears in context and how it can positively (or negatively) affect the concerned individuals. Mario Luis Small provides a useful model for how organizations can influence the capabilities of individuals to use social capital effectively. He explains the benefits of organizations and how the ties that form through them can provide a lot of useful information to those involved. Annette Lareau and Jessica Calarco examine the role of cultural capital of schools and how relationships of parents across social classes can be a very useful way to gain information and subsequently help your children succeed in school. Robert Putnam and Davis Campbell detail a demography shift in religious communities and how that limits the social networks that are formed. They also show this shift to be present in most spheres of the United States today and demonstrate how limiting

cross-class interaction could be detrimental to the cultural capital that would otherwise form (as supported by Lareau and Calarco).

Child Care Centers and Organizational Ties. Mario Luis Small's social capital research details the organizational ties that form within childcare centers and how these ties can be beneficial to the mothers with children enrolled. I will first explain his model for clarity and then look at his examples of organizational ties in practice. Small argues that the organizations people participate in have a great impact on the social capital they possess (5). He expresses that studying this allows us to study how people form network ties, which is essential for understanding the mechanisms of how social networks form (Small 9). Small gives three conditions for forming social ties: whether actors interact/availability of opportunity, how they interact (time, intensity, doing what), and the conditions under which they interact (13-14). To summarize these conditions Small writes:

Independent of their own intentions, people are more likely to form ties when they have opportunities to interact, when they do so frequently, when they are focused on some activity, when they are not competitors, and when they have reason to cooperate. (15)

This suggests that organizations would provide more opportunities for and result in more network ties. Small argues that organizations can shape social ties through brokerage, which he defines as "*the general process by which an organization connects an individual to another individual, to another organization, or to the resources they contain*" (19). In other words this is how cultural capital operates through the organization's network. Small largely studies "non-purposive brokerage" which is when organizations do not intentionally foster social capital, the capital naturally forms (19). To study the effects of an organization on social and organizational

ties, Small examines childcare centers and how they can be effective brokers for the mothers who send their children there (22). He examines these childcare centers with information from the Fragile Families and child well-being study (for individual level data) and the Childcare Centers and Families Survey (for organizational level data) (Small 23).

The results of these studies show how the social and cultural capital the mothers gained in the childcare center was influential in the mothers' lives. The Fragile Families Study found that "(a) most mothers who patronized childcare centers made new friends therein, and (b) making friends in centers was strongly and robustly associated with lower material and mental hardship" (Small 28). Small also noted the differences in the demographics of mothers with children enrolled in a child care center and children who were not. He cites the Fragile Families Study to show that mothers with children in a childcare center "have slightly fewer children and higher probability of being married, college educated, and employed or in school full time" (Small 36). Small also takes note that the number of adults in the household did not differ between the two categories and the mothers differed significantly in income—mothers whose children were enrolled made more than twice as much on average as a mother whose child was not enrolled in a childcare center (36-37). This may suggest that childcare centers are not financially accessible to mothers with lower incomes and therefore their benefits would also be limited to those who could afford it. While some centers accept childcare vouchers (such as those provided by TANF), others do not (Small 31). Affordability may be determined by the options available to a specific family and whether or not there is an affordable center close enough to be able to access it. If all of the mothers deriving benefits from childcare centers are from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and possibly live near each other, since many people factored in location when deciding on a particular center, then this could be a very limited scope of people

(Small 31). Small finds that the hardship of enrolled mothers who made friends at the center was much lower than that of mothers who were not enrolled (43). He clarifies that he cannot prove this causally because of the methods you would need to use to do so, but there is a “robust association” (Small 42).

Studies on hardship of the mothers demonstrate the influence that the capital the mothers gain has in their lives. Small estimated the role of the center on lowered hardship and found that poverty also tied into the effectiveness of the center (Small 43-44). Nonpoor mothers made friends and experienced less hardship while poor mothers experienced less hardship even if they did not make any friends (Small 44). This could be because the nonpoor mothers benefited more from the resources associated with the friends they made, particularly if said friend had access to different information than they did. Poor mothers may derive benefits from the cultural capital in the weak ties they formed, so making friends was not as essential for more access to information. Nonpoor mothers would likely already have access to some of the resources available, so making friends was the best way to increase their cultural capital. Small speculates how the centers made a difference in the mothers’ relationships. He writes, “Enrolled mothers so often make friends because centers generate multiple opportunities and inducements for parents to interact... Making friends is not so much a choice as a process” (Small 51). According to data from the Childcare Centers survey, which looked at about 300 centers in New York, centers required parents to be “actively engaged” so much of their free time and their time with their child included the center itself (Small 52). This was in the form of field trips, fundraisers, and other events the center organized (Small 52-66). Sociologists guess that among childcare centers there are many useful weak ties and fewer strong ties because women reported time constraints upon their relationships and benefited greatly from the resources in other social networks, not the

social support of a community (Small 85). Not only did the social ties that mothers acquired provide access to resources, but the center as an organization did as well. The centers provide organizational ties that lead to resources Small categorizes as information, services provided for free or at discount, and material goods offered for free or at a discount (Small 135). Example of these resources included nutritional information, health and dental exams, substance abuse counseling for parents, housing support, insurance, meals, scholarships, and employment, as well as many more (Small 136). In this example the organization of the childcare centers promoted organizational ties that in turn promoted social capital. Since the mothers enrolled had to be involved because of the way the structure was put in place, information actively ran through the network benefiting all involved mothers. This shows how the resources and effective ties of social networks can make a difference in the lives of people involved and perhaps be implemented in efforts aimed at reducing poverty. The decrease in hardship experienced by the mothers can also be an improvement in the dignity of the mothers' lives so not only does this example identify ways social capital can be influential in reducing poverty, it also shows how this has already occurred.

Cultural Capital in Schools. The cultural capital that runs through social networks can be very important to the role of networks on poverty relief. Annette Lareau and Jessica Calarco examine the cultural capital that runs through schools in their paper, "Class, Cultural Capital, and Institutions: The Case of Families and Schools." Cultural capital can be distinguished from social capital in that social capital is the organization of a network and the social ties themselves (in relation to an organization or personally) and it is the information as it works properly within the network. Cultural capital is the information that runs through these networks and the habits and

behaviors it produces. Lareau and Calarco give the definition of Lareau and Weininger for cultural capital, which states that it “emphasizes micro-interactional processes whereby individuals’ strategic use of knowledge, skills, and competence comes into contact with institutionalized standards of evaluation” (Lareau and Calarco 62). Lareau and Weininger classify these skills as “transmissible across generations, are subject to monopoly, and may yield advantages or ‘profits’” (Lareau and Calarco 62). In other words, cultural capital is added to a network through the people who are involved in it and this capital can have lasting effects on those who gain it.

Cross-class interaction is one way that cultural capital can convey information that brings great benefits to those experiencing poverty. Lareau and Calarco look at studies of schools that show instances where cross-class interaction is not common among schools and argue that this interaction could help parents benefit from the cultural capital of other parents to get the best education possible for their children (64-65). This interaction would also promote more weak ties within the network and could lead to the closure of the network that Coleman describes as resource of social networks. In their description of the studies, Lareau and Calarco characterize working-class parents with a tendency to defer to the educator’s expertise because they do not know the inner workings of the school while middle class parents felt they did have the power to intervene and possessed the necessary skills to do so (64-65). They write, “middle-class parents were often able to activate their cultural resources to gain advantages for their children, securing school services on their behalf” (Lareau and Calarco 65). Working-class parents were found to be “deeply concerned about their children’s progress in school, but they intervened rarely” while middle-class parents approached educators frequently and much more informally while probing for information to best serve their children (Lareau and Calarco 67). This shows that the

interactions between the groups of parents transmit information and there is a clear split in these interactions shown in their actions. The middle-class parents are transmitting information to each other to pass on how to support their children in school most effectively. They have learned the various techniques for doing so over the years and the working-class parents are not benefiting from this knowledge because they do not have interactions with the middle-class parents to teach them how. Working-class and “poor” parents were also observed to not interact with the other parents at school (Lareau and Calarco 67). Middle-class parents in these studies were shown to have a good knowledge of how the school worked and were able to decide when and how to intervene effectively (Lareau and Calarco 75). Working-class parents “had limited knowledge of when and how to intervene at school” and were “largely unaware of the school’s expectations for parental involvement”; they tended to hide their frustration from the school or express it in a way the school did not respond well to (Lareau and Calarco 75). This shows that there is a clear information gap between the two classes studied and the children are likely to have unfair advantages or disadvantages as a result.

Cross-class interaction can decrease this information gap and create more equal opportunities for the children involved. When cross-class interaction did occur, the results were not the same as the findings above. Some parents had children on sports teams or worked jobs that put them in contact with parents in other social classes (Lareau and Calarco 75). This allowed the use of what Lareau and Calarco refer to as “cultural mentors” (75). In these cases mothers in the middle-class explained different strategies to working-class parents that would help them with their specific problems (Lareau and Calarco 76). In some ways this is similar to the organizational ties that Small talks about as the parents help each other gain information through the ties they have to each other. This differs in that the ties are more social than

organizational so they are not also building the community of organizations' support, but it is still a tie that is facilitated through an organizational connection so it can be manufactured in the same way (if so desired). Through this interaction they could use the tools they learned to gain more benefits for their child within the school. This is limited in that not all working-class parents benefit from these interactions, it did not transform their parenting styles, and they did not have the same confidence using these strategies that middle-class parents did (Lareau and Calarco 78). This could also be limited by the decreasing occurrence of cross-class interaction due to a transition from social interaction in organizations to organizations that are nominal and just involve paying dues (DiPrete et al 1238). This trend further limits the possibility of forming cross-class relationships. However, Promoting cross-class interactions and the exchange of cultural resources might be effective in reducing this information gap between different classes and even the playing field in navigating the school system effectively (Lareau and Calarco 80). Lareau and Calarco cite a warning:

As Thomas DiPrete and colleagues (2011) suggest, the social networks of Americans are becoming more homogenous. This means that opportunities for meaningful cross-class interaction (and the cross-class learning that they facilitate) will likely become increasingly rare. (80)

This suggests that we need to be fostering these interactions intentionally if they will continue to develop at all. Making access to this information more equal among parents could make great strides in poverty alleviation through the way it would promote better education for the children of parents actively and effectively involved in their child's education with the resources to be successful in their involvement.

Religious Segregation and Network Homogeneity. Religion is one sphere in which networks are becoming far more segregated, limiting beneficial cross-class interaction in a community where many people come together. Religious communities would have the opportunity to unify classes and transmit useful interaction, but demographic trends are showing they are becoming homogeneous just as other spheres are. In *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Robert Putnam and David Campbell explain the shifts in demography of religion in recent decades and how that affects the social networks that could be formed. They state that people became more segregated by residence and socially and “at the same time that religion in America was undergoing the divisive aftershocks... the extremes of wealth and poverty in America were pulling apart” (Putnam and Campbell 248). At the same time this divide between classes was occurring shifts in the structure of networks that provided information changed as well. Putnam and Campbell write, “fraternal and civic organizations no longer bring together people from different social and economic backgrounds as they once did” (Putnam and Campbell 249). They note that church attendance has shifted to be more common among college educated and less common among those who are not, a trend that is “contrary to any idea that religion is nowadays providing solace to the disinherited and dispossessed, or that higher education subverts religion” (Putnam and Campbell 253). This shows yet another sphere where classes are segregated (Putnam and Campbell 253). In this they note that this trend of wealth division is present in secular as well as religious networks so there are not many opportunities for networks ties that could benefit the lower class that is involved greatly.

This demographic shift shows that a number of people from certain classes are lacking in the religious community in general, but Putnam and Campbell find that religious environments are indicative of cross-class interactions when they have the opportunity. Similar to other

thinkers mentioned in this paper, in Putnam and Campbell's surveys they find that bridging ties are correlated with religiosity, particularly ties that bridge a higher class to a lower one (Putnam and Campbell 253). The correlation appears to be driven not by the religiosity itself, but by "involvement in religious social networks, like prayer groups and Bible study groups and (above all) having more friends in one's congregation," particularly among evangelical Protestants (Putnam and Campbell 254). Putnam and Campbell then suggest that religious social networks could help buffer against the class segregation that is increasing (Putnam and Campbell 254). This example from Putnam and Campbell shows that while networks can be effective in providing information that could then aid in reducing poverty, these networks are now limited in many ways because of the limited cross-class interaction. This echoes the warning that Lareau provides citing Thomas DiPrete that our networks are becoming increasingly homogenous (Lareau 80). This trend indicates that it may be time to intervene in this shift and promote more network ties through organizations or other structures that may foster them.

This demographic shift is important to community development because it limits the amount of cross-class social ties and personal ties are where people are likely to obtain information and act on it. Granovetter examines the role of social networks in community organization and points out "studies of diffusion and mass communication have shown that people rarely *act* on mass-media information unless it is also transmitted through personal ties" (1374). He states that trust plays a role in this as well as the lack of bridging weak ties that occurs when there are a few groups in a community that only have strong ties with each other (Granovetter 1374). When communities fail to organize it is often because of fragmentation from the lack of weak ties to connect groups (Granovetter 1375). In communities where organization was successful there was a large amount of cohesion due to the presence of weak ties

(Granovetter 1973). Specifically, Granovetter provides the example of Charlestown, which is a working-class community with “a rich organizational life, and most male residents worked within the area” (1973). This whole discussion is just speculation as to the role of bridges in community organization by Granovetter, but there does seem to be validity to his ideas (1973). In a community with many bridges there would be more sharing of information and communities would be able to communicate and interact with each other effectively. Brown and Schafft echo this from the angle of what would happen without these bridges. They write:

Communities lacking both bonding and bridging capital tend to be extremely individualistic, lack social cohesion, and are socially and economically isolated. As a result they have few options, and are often caught in a vicious cycle of decline. (41)

This shows the difficulty that a lack of transmitting information imposes on a community. A community that has obstacles for transmitting information (particularly across classes) would suffer greatly if all of the positive benefits of social networks were not in place. There are additional factors that limit the creation of social capital and they could limit the implementation of policies that involve it. The next section describes situations where these obstacles may occur and possible solutions.

OBSTACLES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND POSSIBLE RESPONSES

If a community wanted to build social capital to reduce the poverty they currently face then they would need to know the obstacles they may face in implementing this. Despite the benefits that may come from social capital, if there are factors that limit the creation of social capital then it is even more difficult to use social capital as a means of reducing poverty. This section outlines some of the obstacles that one may encounter in policy implementation of social capital. Among

these are non-standard work hours, family mobility, and the amount of resources a community has to begin with.

Non-standard work hours and family mobility are obstacles that inhibit the amount of cross-class interaction a family has. We saw in the previous section how cross-class interaction can be beneficial to those involved in it so it seems logical that not having such interaction would be detrimental. Small writes, “William J. Wilson argues that people in poor neighborhoods looking for jobs will find it difficult to develop middle-class networks because they lack opportunities to interact with them informally, an argument consistent with the evidence” (14). Non-standard work hours would severely limit the possibility of cross-class interaction that would provide such opportunities. Vernon-Feagans, Burchinal, and Mokrova report that in rural communities the “the most common times for rural adults to start work are around 3:30 a.m., 1:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. and the least common time is 8:30 a.m. These times are in contrast to the more standard times of metropolitan adults” (5). If adults are working at opposite times of the generally wealthier metropolitan population so they cannot develop the same relationships as metropolitan parents would with each other. In Lareau’s example, this would be a major limitation to finding a cultural mentor because you would not have the cross-class interaction to develop that relationship. When shift work at odd hours is the only available option available for work in a town then it is what needs to be done, but it can severely limit cultural capital that could have bridged the metropolitan and nonmetropolitan communities. High levels of family mobility can also serve as a barrier to social capital because the ties that are already formed break at each move (Coleman S113). When moving is the only choice a family has because of a job opportunity or other need, then this cannot be helped easily. To me, the most alarming

obstacle is the idea that a community needs a minimal level of social and economic ties to be able to use social capital as a means for reducing poverty.

Multiple thinkers state that not having enough resources to begin with, economically or socially, may limit the effect of policies that use social capital. I argue that our response to this should not be to focus only on communities with this minimal level, but to find a way to get the community to a point where social capital could be used beneficially. Chantarat, Sommarat, and Barrett argue that while social capital is an effective means for escaping poverty traps, it may be limited if a family does not have a minimal level of resources to start out with (321). They write, “some households are so destitute initially that they almost never find social relations sufficiently beneficial to enable a climb out of poverty. They are thus socially isolated in almost all configurations of the economy” (Chantarat, Sommarat, and Barrett 321). They elaborate to say:

The key thing to note about social isolation is that, at least under the parameterization [sic] we employ, it depends primarily on a household’s initial endowment of traditional, productive capital. Those who begin too poor simply cannot leverage their meager endowments no matter how skillfully they interconnect themselves with others. (321)

This then indicates that for social capital to be an effective means for reducing poverty you can only focus on people who are perhaps lower-middle class and would have enough resources to begin with to successfully escape poverty. Likely in this case social capital could be more beneficial if there were also economic resources flowing into the family, but implementing social capital into policy should not be abandoned. Instead we should find a way to develop the community so that they can grow socially and economically and ultimately reduce poverty. This argument echoes William Simon’s in many ways. Simon gives a model for community development and near the end of his book states that in order for his model to be successful a

community must have “a substantial proportion of residents with at least moderate levels of civic competence, economic independence, and attachment to neighborhood” (219). While these (as well as Chantarat, Sommarat, and Barrett’s) are valid concerns, I do not think the solution is then to only focus on families or communities that already have these qualities. We should instead find a way to get these communities to this baseline level so they can benefit from these approaches. Economic transfers and organizational density are two ways that societies could be brought up to a baseline level that would make a social capital focus effective.

One example of an approach aimed at getting communities to this minimal level used economic transfers; this would be one way to implement the use of social capital in areas that start out very financially unstable. Chantarat, Sommarat, and Barrett test monetary transfers with a goal to induce social network formation and find that “well-targeted transfers can lift even non-recipients out of long-term poverty, while poorly targeted transfers can fail to facilitate economic mobility even for recipients” (327). They explain that the transfers “crowd in private support” which then reduces the social distance between individuals and social networks expand (Chantarat, Sommarat, and Barrett 325). With this newly formed social capital individuals are in a better position to escape from poverty (Chantarat, Sommarat, and Barrett 325). Robert Sampson’s analysis of Chicago in *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* fights the idea that a community needs a minimal level of social connections in order to participate in community development initiatives. He finds that organizational density is a more important indicator for collective action despite appearances of decreasing social ties. He writes:

While we might know fewer of our neighbors than in the past, every day thousands of nonprofit organizations around the country are busy organizing and creating opportunities for new associations. (Sampson 179)

Even though other researchers have found that there is increased class segregation, which limits helpful cross-class interaction, organizational density may help build those ties back up.

Sampson also looks at diversity in relation to civic intensity and reports “communities highest in nonprofit density and collective civic action (e.g., the Loop, Hyde Park, Near South Side) are actually in the highest diversity category” (197). He also reports “nonprofit density was the second-largest predictor of collective action propensity” (Sampson 198). The largest predictor was residential stability (perhaps because they have ties built up within that community because they have had time to invest in it) (Sampson 198). Surprisingly, churches did not function the same way as other nonprofits in this study. Sampson states the religious sector appeared “unrelated to ‘outside’ or nonreligious civic engagement defined by the event rate of collective civic action” (205). This alone could just mean that the religious sector has separate influence on civic engagement, but Sampson writes, “a deeper inspection of the data reveals that the density of churches is *negatively* related to collective efficacy⁶ and one of its core indicators—trust” (205). Given this information, any influence churches have is likely outside the realm of collective action. They still are useful in building cross-class interactions when the opportunity is available, but the sheer density of churches does not affect collective efficacy.

Sampson’s arguments about collective efficacy show ways that policies could be put in place that involve social capital as well as how this could be done in communities that start out socially and economically isolated. Sampson concludes these arguments by saying:

⁶ Defined as social cohesion among residents with shared views on social control (Sampson 27).

Despite persistent poverty, racial diversity, and other social challenges, community-based organizations strongly predict collective efficacy and collective civic action, durably so.

It is not just one type of institution, and indeed churches alone are not the answer, contrary to what some believe. (209)

Again, this is not to say that churches cannot be powerful actors in fighting poverty, but just putting churches in an area does not provide the same result in collective efficacy that organizational density does. This discussion of collective efficacy and collective action is important because if communities are working together then they are building social ties in the process that could expand their social capital and the benefits they derive from it. Sampson's study of these indicators combats the idea that a community needs a minimal level of social connection to begin with in order to participate in community development because of organizational density's role in collective action (which is required for community development to have lasting results). The information in this section suggests that communities could be raised above a baseline economic and social level through effectively placed economic transfers and by building organizational density in the form of nonprofits (which disputes views like Simon's that communities without this baseline should not be helped). While this is not an easy task to accomplish, it could benefit the community greatly so it is worth considering despite its challenges.

CONCLUSION

While I cannot propose exactly how to implement the use of social capital in poverty relief in the brief confines of this paper, I have provided arguments that show we should consider entire communities and social capital in our efforts at reducing poverty, how social capital is beneficial,

and situations where social capital has been used effectively. I have addressed its shortcomings as well as solutions for dealing with those shortcomings. Ultimately, I argue that we need to consider this more than we currently do. In Simon's proposal for Community Economic Development he stresses the importance of face-to-face interactions and writes, "part of the idea is that one is more likely to be understanding of and respectful toward the interests of people of whom one is personally aware" (50). In theory, that sounds appealing, but the concrete resources that social networks provide is what would make his model more attractive to policymakers. Ultimately, that is what social capital provides and it is likely why some of the results would be more long-term than other styles of intervention. Brown and Schafft write:

Through their institutions, communities educate and socialize youth, protect public health and safety, provide religious affiliation and spiritual guidance, manage elections and other aspects of local governance, and plan for the future. (76)

Again this shows the importance of social networks in building social capital and the concrete ways in which this occurs. Building community-level resources in addition to aiding individuals in their needs can be a very effective way to address poverty and one that could be lasting if the institutions and organizations in place reproduce these effects in future generations. If we built up organizational density in poor communities to promote new social ties and greater social capital, we could begin to see long-term poverty relief results as we create communities that can function on their own through the support they have built into them. If individuals receive help from organizations they have ties to and get information about how to do so from the people they are associated with then they would have a better standard of living and could find support in a more personal way than many of our welfare programs today. This is not to say that we should stop other efforts aimed at reducing individuals' poverty, but rather we should also focus on the

community to build systems of support to keep the well being they promote sustainable and to promote the capabilities of emotions, affiliation, play, and control over one's environment.

Works Cited

- Brown, David L., and Kai A. Schafft. *Rural People & Communities in the 21st Century: Resilience and Transformation*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011. Print.
- Chantararat, Sommarat, and Christopher B. Barrett. "Social network capital, economic mobility and poverty traps." *Journal of Economic Inequality* (2012): 299-342. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.
- Coleman, James S. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988): S120-S95. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.
- Daniels, Norman. *Just Health: Meeting Health Needs Fairly*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Print.
- DiPrete, Thomas A., Andrew Gelman, Tyler McCormick, Julien Teitler, and Tian Zheng. "Segregation in Social Networks Based on Acquaintanceship and Trust." *American Journal of Sociology* 116.4 (2011): 1234-83. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.
- Eagle, Nathan, Michael Macy, and Rob Claxton. "Network Diversity and Economic Development." *Science* 21 May 2010: 1029-31. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.
- Granovetter, Mark S. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78.6 (1973): 1360-80. *JSTOR*. Web. 4 Mar. 2014.
- Lareau, Annette, and Jessica M. Calarco. "Class, Cultural Capital, and Institutions: The Case of Families and Schools." *Facing Social Class: How Societal Rank Influences Interaction*. Ed. Susan T. Fiske and Hazel R. Markus. New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 2012. 61-86. Print.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011. Print.
- Putnam, Robert D., and David E. Campbell. *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. Print.
- Sampson, Robert J. *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012. Print.
- Simon, William H. *The Community Economic Development Movement: Law, Business, & the New Social Policy*. Durham: Duke University press, 2001. Print.
- Small, Mario L. *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.
- Vernon-Feagans, Lynne, Michelle Burchinal, and Irina Monkova. *Diverging Destinies in Rural America: Chapter 3*. N.d. TS. Collection of Lynne Vernon-Feagans.