



Young People and Social Capital:
What Can It Do For Us?

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CONTENTS

Preface

Introduction

1. Social Capital as Theory and Concept

Social capital in academic and political contexts

Feminist perspectives

2. Issues Around Social Capital and Young People

3. The Families & Social Capital Research Group

Conclusion

References

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Preface

This Working Paper consists of a plenary presentation given at the NYRIS10 Conference Bonds and Communities: Young people and their social ties, held in Lillehammer, Norway from 13 to 15 June 2008. The Nordic Youth Research Information Symposium (NYRIS) is a bi-annual international conference that circulates around the Nordic countries, bringing together many contributions from those countries, Europe and the rest of the world, from researchers and scholars working in Youth Studies, or on the study of young people more generally. NYRIS10 focused on bonds and communities, and many of the papers used the concept of social capital to try to understand the lives, relationships and experiences of young people. The plenary provided a lively introduction to the conference by launching a critique of the concept of social capital, drawing on and reporting the work of the Families & Social Capital Group at London South Bank University, and more widely.

Janet Holland, July 2008

Young People and Social Capital: What Can it Do for Us?

Introduction

My title asks whether the concept of social capital is of use for us in studying the lives of young people and my answer takes me down quite a long route. My talk falls into three parts. First a general review of the concept of social capital, critically examining issues raised by the academic and political use of the concept that are related to its journey through several academic disciplines, and its perceived value as a guide to policy from certain political perspectives. Second I will consider how it has been used and its usefulness in understanding the lives of young people. And third I will talk specifically about the extensive research undertaken with colleagues in a five-year multi-project study of families and social capital, and some of our findings and conclusions.

1. Social Capital as Theory and Concept

Social capital is a controversial, although still surprisingly popular concept. In its more recent manifestations, it has a motley past, coming through and moving between differing academic disciplines, principally political science, economics, economic development, sociology. Whilst this capacity to be recognised and used in a range of disciplines has been seen as a positive and integrative characteristic by some, others have seen it as the source of the confusion and definitional problems regarded as besetting the concept. Kovalainen sees the inherent appeal of social capital as that it is at one and the same time an economic, a political and a sociological concept, giving it interdisciplinary prominence and potential (Kovalainen 2004: 157) and Woolcock sees it as freed in this regard from the constraints of particular disciplinary traditions. But Fine (2001) Morrow (1999) and Portes (1998) point to the fuzzyness and chaos that the concept trails in its wake, working previously distinct perspectives together to suit its own hybrid construction.

From a sociological perspective, the major problem seen here is that in this process, categories developed to understand social action lose their analytic connection with sociology, by being incorporated into an economic or political science framework where they sound the same, but have different meanings and effects. So tensions and contradictions between these understandings in the different disciplines, and between oppositional theories and categories are not addressed (Franklin 2007). Misztal (1996:97) gives us the example of the use of trust in this respect. In social capital theory trust operates as 'a background to everyday interaction through which the predictability, legibility and reliability of collective order is sustained, while the perception of its complexity and uncertainty is restricted'. Contrast that definition of predictability and reliability with Giddens' (1991, 1992) understanding of trust as a dynamic and constantly changing response to insecurity and risk, changing as societies change.

So there are issues here about meaning and context. And the definitional problem applies not only to theory but to method, how to study social capital. With problematic definitions, it is hard to pinpoint what is to be studied and what would be the best way of doing that. Social capital research informed by economic and political science perspectives tends to follow the methodology of the natural sciences, using largely quantitative methods. Frank Furstenberg (2006) in a discussion of how families generate and distribute social capital, talks of the explosion of interest in social capital as being accompanied by a 'measurement rush' (Stone 2001), and

unreflective measurement, with 'a plethora of items and scales based more on convenience than conceptual rigor' with many researchers relying on makeshift measures crafted from secondary data sources rather than tailored measures intended strictly for social capital.' He does not exclude himself from this criticism.

Social capital in academic and political contexts

The analysis of the concept of social capital and of its use in academic research and theorising runs on apace, with many classifications of approaches. I prefer the characterisation into two traditions of social theorising where it is seen as a concept dealing with the dilemma of collective action and integration, or as one dealing with the dilemma of social justice and inequality (Kovalainen 2004, Adkins 2005a). Coleman, Putnam and Fukuyama are in the integration camp, stressing collective goods of reciprocity, trust and co-operation, as Putnam puts it 'features of social organisation, such as networks, norms and trust, that facilitate action and co-operation for mutual benefit' (1993: 35). Putnam sees social capital as a 'public good' embodied in civic engagement with implications for democratic and economic prosperity, possibly quite naturally excluding children and young people, excluded from civic participation as they are often seen to be by age. Coleman focuses on family, community and cohesion, with parents using their social capital to enhance their children's human capital through education, children as the recipients of culture. Many studies have emanated from this strand of work, but it has also been heavily criticised from a range of perspectives, and the work of Bourdieu, in the social justice and inequality strand has sometimes been employed as a corrective.

Bourdieu's contribution is a typology of different, interrelated forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) and his concern is with how social and cultural capital are underpinned by economic capital, the fundamental resource in capitalist societies. The outcomes of possessing these various forms of capital can be reduced to the economic, but for the processes bringing about the alternative forms of capital this is not so easy to do. These processes are more uncertain and less transparent, and I think it is these processes that myself and my colleagues in the Families and Social Capital Group are particularly interested in. Social capital itself consists of social networks and connections – 'contacts and group memberships which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources' (Bourdieu 1993: 143). It also includes sociability, the disposition and skill to sustain and use those networks.

As we know, Bourdieu developed this extended metaphor to describe and understand the production and reproduction of privilege, of the social structure, of class relations. But in the spirit of Bourdieu's own flexible approach and recommendation that the usefulness of concepts lies in their use, these terms have increasingly been developed and extended, and used to explore the absence of resources in the production and reproduction of inequality (Allatt 1993, Reay et al. 2001, Skeggs 1997, Skeggs 2004). From both traditions, other capitals have been added, for example emotional capital, physical capital, identity capital.

Inspired particularly by Putnam's link between social capital and economic development, but also by Coleman's rational action model, politicians and policy makers have clasped the concept of social capital to their hearts with even more zeal and greater alacrity than academics, finding it of immense utility in approaching many and varied problems. Building and enhancing social capital has been seen as a magic bullet for difficult policy issues including the consequences of individualisation and globalisation, changes in family forms, declining, alienated and socially excluded communities and a lack of political and civic involvement (Edwards 2003). It has been at

the core of Third Way politics, embraced by many western governments in the face of what some see as the crisis of the welfare state and the more recent failures of the free market economy to deal with issues of social and economic disadvantage and exclusion. In this context the concept bridges the political gap between market and state, or liberal free market policies and welfare statism, and brings the social into the economic sphere.

And it is at this point that the many trenchant political criticisms come into play. Keri Chiveralls for example, writing about the Australian context, sees social capital as a 'weasel word' which enables politicians to slip out of responsibility for issues of social justice and inequality, by subsuming the social and the political within economic discourse; a rational choice Trojan Horse smuggled into the hard won sociological understanding of the social to deny the inherent complexity and contingency of social life, and the power struggles with which it is imbued (Chiveralls 2006). Barbara Arneil (2006) wants to 'reject the tendency in the transcendent unity of the 'social' in social capital to efface the historical and contemporary reality of profound cleavages in liberal democratic society along the lines of race, class, gender, ethnicity and disability' (2006: 47). Edwards et al (2003) sorrowfully reflect that 'Just when politics turns its attention to the social world, to families and communities – a 'social turn' that feminists have long advocated – its mode of analysis, couched in the language of communitarianism, is covertly economic.' (p:11)¹

Feminist perspectives

So there are many criticisms of the concept, and of its use in academic research and politics and policy-making. Relevant for our concerns too, until recently children and young people were not included in social capital theory, except as recipients of the benefits of their parents' social capital. As part of the social capital lost story favoured by Putnam and Coleman, changing family forms, particularly single parent families, and the increasing workplace participation of women meant that children and young people were being deprived of the social capital that could derive from social interaction within the family, and between the family and other social institutions such as the school and community (Edwards 2004).

Feminists point out that in this formulation women are blamed for a decline in social capital, implicitly seen as central to its formation in families and communities, although in traditional roles, and ignored in that their ongoing role in generating and sustaining social capital goes unremarked, is taken for granted. 'Present and absent in troubling ways', as Molyneux (2002) says of gender and Edwards (2004) says of families in social capital debates. A lack of consideration of differences relating to gender, ethnicity, race and other aspects of diversity is an ongoing criticism of mainstream social capital theory and research, and a spur for many to engage with it.

A number of feminists, for example, have taken it up, broadly accepting the idea of social capital as providing useful insight into women's lives, particularly around affective relationships. They often build on the work of Bourdieu, and incorporate others of his capitals, as well as adding their own, examining for example social, cultural and emotional capital, and stressing the gendered local processes through which these are generated (Reay 2000, Skeggs 1997, McLeod 2000, Tolonen 2005, Lowndes 2004). Adkins (2005) however, rejects the concept of social capital and its association between collective social goods and women, which in her view aligns women with industrial society and cuts them adrift from postmodernity. For her the concept has no purchase on how the social (including gender and other axes of difference) is being reworked in a process

¹ Many of these ideas are described and elaborated in Edwards, Franklin and Holland (eds) (2006) and in Franklin (2004).

of economic postmodernisation and the development of the new more virtual, reflexive, flexible and networked economy. Here power works through access to and exclusion from information flows, and this is where she thinks feminists should be aiming their analyses and critique.

So a range of questions are raised by the concept, and it has received serious critical and often productive consideration. And people have used it, analysing, criticising, and developing it, as I have pointed out. They often cast aside the more fundamental epistemological and conceptual problems raised earlier, and just take the concept and run with it, throwing in criticisms of earlier and mainstream usages as they find these versions do not quite do justice to their data.

And it is in these many ways that the concept of social capital has come into youth studies, or perhaps more broadly the study of young people.

2. Issues Around Social Capital and Young People

Researchers and theorists who pursue the use of the concept of social capital with children and young people can also be seen as falling into the two groups suggested earlier, collective action and cohesion, following Coleman and Putnam, or social justice and inequality, following Bourdieu. Some do mix and match, and most offer a critique of their source inspiration and suggest ways in which the argument and theorisation can be carried forward. Following divisions in youth studies itself, many are concerned with transitions, despite debates on the utility of the approach (Roberts 1997, Wyn and Woodman 1996, 1997, MacDonald and Shildrick 2007). I'll use a few highly selective examples to briefly highlight some ways that social capital appears in the field, against the backdrop of issues in young people's lives. The first pursue Coleman's work.

Approaching the issue from the perspective of theory, Cherylynn Bassani goes for serious integration. Drawing on Coleman she undertakes an overview of social capital in youth studies with a view to improving the theoretical status of its use, suggesting that 'Despite its wide usage, the theory's utility is limited and largely unknown because researchers typically only test one of the theory's core dimensions, whether social capital influences youths' well-being' usually around education, health and aspects of behaviour' (2007:17). She plans to pull together its fragmented use to facilitate the conceptualisation and operationalisation of social capital and the testing of theory, particularly in relation to quantitative measurement. She is concerned that the various groups or institutions of which young people are members – the family, school or peer group - are studied separately, when the interactional effects are particularly important. A comprehensive and critical review of the use of social capital in the educational research literature, including many quantitative studies based on Coleman's work, is provided by Dika and Singh (2002).

Also influenced by Coleman but using qualitative methods, Rob Strathdee (2001) wanted to test the social capital lost story by looking at social capital over time in New Zealand. He uses the retrospective report of fathers of their own experience compared with that of their sons whom he followed over time through the transition from school to work. In the father's youth (1955-80) there was full employment, readily available work, and well-formed social networks embedded in the social infrastructure of their families and communities. School to work transitions were easily accomplished with employment found through these networks. The situation was sorely changed for their own sons through the effects of globalisation, technological change, credential inflation and de-industrialisation, which reduced their abilities to draw on their own social networks to advise and help their sons. Strathdee concludes that in the changed context of current transitions, social networks are less useful as a means of helping poorly qualified, male school leavers to find

jobs than they were in the past (2001: 322). For these working class families there has been a decline in social capital.

Developments in the sociology of childhood endowed children and young people with agency, regarding them as actors in their own right (James and Prout 1997 [1990]). Taking inspiration from these ideas, some research on young people asks to what extent they themselves access and/or generate social capital and show agency in acquiring and using it. The work encompasses a range of definitions, operationalisations and contexts of potential sources of social capital for children and young people – examining families, educational institutions, friends and peer groups, neighbourhoods, communities, political and civic activity (Morrow 1999, 2000, 2001a, b, Schaefer-McDaniel 2004, Egerton 2002, Whiting and Harper 2003).

Within this framework, and emerging from the social justice and inequality strand of research, a number of researchers have become interested in social capital networks generated by young people in socially disadvantaged areas, often explicitly rejecting underclass theory with its tendency to blame the victim. Some highlight the negative effects of disadvantage on the possibility of generating and using social capital, whereas others are concerned to valorise the social networks and support that are available in disadvantaged situations, often focusing on geographical area, space, and community.

Nicole Schaefer-McDaniel (2006), concerned with neighbourhood and place, extends Coleman and Putnam's ideas to develop a framework in which children's social capital can be understood, which includes three elements: social networks and interactions, trust and reciprocity, and a sense of belonging or place attachment. This revised model of social capital did have purchase in understanding the experiences of young people in a low-income, Hispanic/Latino and African American neighbourhood in New York with whom she discussed friendship, school and neighbourhood. Whether they were spatially restricted or active also affected the degree to which they were able to build social networks, but the restricted children compensated for their inability to go out and about in the neighbourhood by building more relationships in school. Others have pursued this model, and Susie Weller for example also discusses social capital in the context of spatial aspects of young people's civic and community involvement, and identity building through intersecting group membership (2006, 2007).

Carlo Raffo and Michelle Reeves (2000) interviewed 31 disadvantaged and disaffected young people aged 15-24 in a city in the north of England. Keen to capture and analyse 'the complex and sophisticated agency and actions' of these young people, they too suggest an advance on social capital theory that they call individualised systems of social capital, that both support and constrain individual actions. This is 'a dynamic, social, spatially, culturally, temporally and economically embedded group, network, or constellation of social relations with the young person at the core'. While this looks like an individualising approach Raffo and Reeves are keen to make the link between structure and agency, and to recognise the agency of the young people demonstrated by the degrees of control they attempt and indeed do take over their transitions. Detailed case studies illustrate the different types of individual systems they found in their study: weak, strong, changing and fluid. They suggest that fluid individualised systems show a significant degree of dynamism, flexibility and adaptability in the face of changing circumstance and the changing biography of the young person.

Colin Webster and his colleagues (2004) revisited young people from two studies in a disadvantaged, 'socially excluded' community in the north of England five years later, and their findings were less optimistic than those of Raffo and Reeves. They used the concepts of bonding

and bridging social capital, to reflect on the experiences of the 23-29 year old young people. Bonding social capital tends to be inward-looking and to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups; bridging social capital involves outward-looking connections across diverse social cleavages. It has been argued that bonding social capital enables people to 'get by', whilst bridging social capital enables them to 'get on'. There was certainly strong bonding capital across the young people's networks, which enabled them to cope, offering emotional and financial support, childcare and access to job opportunities. But the dark side of this bonding social capital was that it could exclude, marginalize, constrain and entrap people, and in some instances draw them into criminality and dependent drug use. The trust and loyalties built through these bonding ties could lead them to ignore alternative opportunities and possibilities. Whilst strong bonds with personal networks were in place, few of the young people had maintained or established bridging social capital through wider networks of association over time. In fact, compared with their teenage years, their networks had slimmed down, and most socialised with and received support from their families. As the drug-using group initially identified grew older, the benefits from their earlier networks became liabilities, and constrained them from gaining independence and pursuing other life goals, just as periods in prison disrupted their lives. Most of these young people had abandoned their drug-using social networks and also turned to close networks of partners and families. All in the study had become more embedded in the immediate neighbourhood and community.

Elizabeth Bullen and Jane Kenway (2005) directly confront the contention that the growth of the underclass is a function of features intrinsic to a deviant underclass culture into which children are socialised largely by their single mothers (Murray 1994, 1999). Over time these researchers have studied a group of young women marginalized from education and work, living in a disadvantaged suburb in Australia. They compare cultural underclass theory's explanatory purchase on the experiences and lives of this group, with that of their own reworking of subcultural theory via Thornton's work on subcultural capital in popular culture (1995) and Bourdieu's concepts of cultural, social and symbolic capital. Their focus then is on educational subcultures, and they argue that while the forms of capital the girls in their study draw on could be seen as deficit, putting them at risk of leaving school early, teenage pregnancy and poor employment prospects, for the girls:

'the cultural, social and symbolic capitals they deploy have currency within their social groupings, providing resources and strategies for survival in the classroom and the schoolyard, indeed, for surviving the positional suffering they experience there' (2005: 52).

They give the example of 'tough girls' who could be regarded as reflecting the feminine equivalent of Murray's 'thug code', transgressing notions of proper behaviour. But being tough has great subcultural value, it displays the cultural capital of knowledge of certain social strategies; it accrues symbolic capital in terms of prestige, and brings the social capital of subcultural group belonging and solidarity.

Bullen and Kenway are looking at a very particular subcultural group, defined largely by their families' lack of economic capital, poverty and marginalisation from mainstream society, very tied to structural aspects of difference. Similarly to others working with social and other capitals and disadvantaged young people, they suggest their analysis shows that this group does have social, cultural and symbolic capital that they use to take such control as they can of their situation. In general, however, the subcultural strand in youth studies focuses on youth culture and identity with an acceptance of young people's agency. It's history flows from the Chicago School, through the CCCS to current postmodern theorisation, with its individualising emphasis on

lifestyle and consumption, music, dance and style - 'post-subcultural studies' (Muggleton 2005:214-217) and its critiques (Blackman 2005), to recent reassertions of the holistic context of young people's lives with an impetus to bridge strands within youth studies (Shildrick 2006, Shildrick and MacDonald 2006, 2007, Nyak 2004, Pilkington and Johnson 2003).

From varying perspectives the focus of youth subcultural study is young people and the contexts in which they can create their own groups, with their own cultural meanings, values, styles and behaviour, whether resistant or not to mainstream, macro society. Sarah Thornton (1995) in her study of club culture does suggest limits to subcultural autonomy by arguing that youth subcultures are created by the media, but introduces Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital into the frame. She argues that subcultural capital held by individual members of youth subcultures is a 'means by which young people negotiate and accumulate status within their own social worlds' and in fact that this can be converted into economic capital, in this instance by pursuing careers within the subculture in music or entertainment (1995: 163, Fangen 1991). Tolonen wants to extend this notion specifically to social capital, suggesting that subcultural social capital can be held and used in these groups (Tolonen 2007).

3. The Families & Social Capital Group

I now turn to the third part of my talk, about the Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group, a programme of eleven projects running from 2002-2007 in the UK. Group members had previously worked on families, gender, young people, and race and ethnicity from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Overall we fall into the social justice and inequality strand of theorising, although we used the work of Putnam and Coleman in some of our investigations and analyses. Our research examined three key dynamics of both family life and social capital: identities and values, trust and reciprocity, and caring for and about, with a substantive focus in specific projects on ethnicity, education and employment, and intimacy.

We worked with a collective definition of social capital, with an emphasis on values, resources and relationships, inflected by our particular interests and concerns in the specific projects involved: The values people hold and the resources that they can access, which both result in and are the result of collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships. We had a broad definition too of family life - as lived in and across households, within and across communities and localities, and in its individual and collective aspects (http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/families/ESRC_Group_report.pdf).

We contextualised our work in a series of broad questions about social change. Is social capital breaking down, the social capital lost story favoured by Putnam and Coleman and the social cohesion strand. Or in relation to the more optimistic viewpoint favoured by some social theorists, is it flowing in new forms into a potential 'new golden age' where family and community diversity generate new forms of social allegiance, and there is an emphasis on democratic relationships built on mutual understanding and autonomy. These new forms of relationality and connection being seen as more able to adjust to the complexities and uncertainties of high or postmodernity than traditional forms of social ties (e.g. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995, 2002; Cohen 1997; Giddens 1991, 1994; Goulbourne 2002; Stacey 1996; Weeks 1995; Weeks et al. 2001).

Or perhaps the whole issue of social change has been overplayed, and communities and societies are still shaped by structural features of social life implicating social class, gender, race

and ethnicity, and rather than decreasing or increasing, social capital and other resources are continually being accumulated and used in ways that create, transmit and reproduce social inequalities, sustain privilege and power across generations, and maintain exclusion and oppression (Bourdieu 1986, 1992, Allatt 1993, Reay 2000, Skeggs 1997).

We included children and young people in our projects to investigate their potential as producers of their own social capital within and between the potentially intersecting social institutions in which they live – families, schools, universities and workplaces; and through their social interactions and relationships with peer groups, friends, siblings, and work associates. The programme employed quantitative and qualitative methods, took locality, community and place into account, had wide UK coverage, and included international dimensions through the diasporic families that we traced across the globe, but in more detail to the Caribbean, India, and Italy.

To illustrate our work I will take one analysis that included three projects that explored different aspects of young people’s experiences, from the transition from primary to secondary school, through transitions to adulthoods, and the construction of ethnic identities through family and kinship networks. Together they highlight the diverse experiences of young people, drawing on a broad spectrum of participants aged between 11-30 from different class, ethnic and faith backgrounds, living in a wide range of national and transnational contexts. The studies are: Locality School and Social Capital examining the transition from primary to secondary school; Youth Transitions following through time young people’s invention of adulthoods, Caribbean Families, Social Capital and Young People’s Diasporic Identities, examining the construction of ethnic identity (Holland et al. 2007).

<u>Project</u>	<u>Methods</u>	<u>Sites</u>
<i>Locality School and Social Capital</i> , Irene Breugel and Susie Weller	Repeat surveys (588/81), focus groups (12), individual interviews: children (20, age 11-13) parents (76) teachers (5), pre/post transition.	Different cultural, ethnic, religious and social class backgrounds London, the south-east and central England.
<i>Youth Transitions</i> , Sheila Henderson, Janet Holland, Sheena McGrellis, Sue Sharpe, Rachel Thomson (2007)	Questionnaires (1800), focus groups (66) up to 6 repeat biographical interviews 100 young people 11-17 in 1996 (1996-2007)	Five socio-economically contrastive sites in UK and Northern Ireland
<i>Caribbean Families, Social Capital and Young People’s Diasporic Identities</i> , Tracey Reynolds (2005)	Interviews: purposive sample of 30 second and third generation Caribbean young people (aged 16-30) and their family and kin	London and other major sites of immigration around England, and in the Caribbean.

We used Bourdieu’s work in the analysis to identify how young people from different ethnic groups use social capital as social and cultural resources in their important educational transitions, and their routes into adulthood. We examined families, communities and place in the construction of young people’s identities.

In our analysis it became clear that the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital developed by Putnam (2000, Gittell and Vidal 1998) could prove fruitful in reflecting on the negotiation of their transitions. Education plays an important part as a potentially successful outcome of the social capital practices of parents insofar as it produces human capital and

desirable life chances for their children. In the UK research into the transition to secondary school, and the 'choices' made at this juncture has increasingly used social capital in its framework of analysis. In a stressful process, parents compete for places in well-resourced schools. Research suggests that middle-class families are better able to deploy their social, economic and cultural resources to gain advantage in this process in the form of places in the better-regarded and resourced schools (Bagnell et al. 2003, Ball et al. 2000, Ball 2003). To what extent are children and young people themselves able to draw on their own social capital to help them through this trying transition?

We found that friendship was a valuable source of social capital, providing an entry into wider social networks. Social networks of friends and peer group, from primary school, or in the new secondary school, were critical in providing coping resources and support in the transition. When children moved with friends from their own school, this supportive basis of bonds enabled them to bridge out into new friendships:

If you go to a school with your friends you don't feel as uncomfortable as you usually do 'cos you know each other and you can stick to each other like glue until you meet some new people. (Britney, 12, focus group)

Siblings and older relatives already in the secondary school could provide practical help, insider information about the school including norms and expectations, emotional support and a bridge to new friendships. Both siblings and friends were back up and support in cases of bullying. In this way familial networks were important bridges into the new social setting of the school.

I have a cousin here and she introduced her friends to me and her friends get to know me and their friends and it goes on and on ... (Edisha, 12, interview)

The social capital to be realised through sibling relationships was supported in other studies we undertook on siblings, and on parenting (Edwards et al. 2005, 2006, Edwards and Gillies 2005). The earlier bonding social networks from family and primary school, can help to bridge into the new social setting, and in these negotiations of the move to secondary school the children become more independent social actors who are able to settle in and 'get on'.

Bonding and bridging social capital could operate in more complex ways in later educational transitions, both enabling and constraining, with varied intersections of family and community influence. Some of the middle class young people in the Youth Transitions study were certainly able to tap into their parents social capital networks to ease their way through their educational transitions into further/higher education, but could also be very active, indeed instrumental, in generating their own social capital networks (Holland 2006, Henderson et al. 2007):

I'd say more my networking friends than my close friends, because all my networking are usually friends for reasons. And there are a lot of people for a certain reason - not because I don't - not because I'm using them - but just because it helps to have friends in - not so much high places, just in places ... It's what I've always wanted to do, it's the only skill I really have is networking. (Sam, 20, leafy suburb)

But in Northern Ireland, and in the more socially disadvantaged communities, strong bonding social capital could operate as a constraint. In the early years of our study for example, young men in particular could be tied to family and community through sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland, which dictated their networks of association and constrained their possibilities for moving on or out (McGrellis 2005a, b). Similarly in a socially disadvantaged estate in the north of England

it was often difficult for the young people to imagine breaking from 'the bubble' of the community. There were exceptions here with different family and community interactions.

For example, with the support of her family, Maureen rejected the constraining norms and values of the community, which supported a particular feminine identity involving early motherhood and a matriarch centred family with changing male partners, and she was able to pursue education and social mobility with a steely determination that grew over the years that we met her. Maisie, worked to support both herself and her family, remaining in and of the community whilst pursuing education. She was an expert in generating social capital from every possible source, networks and contacts that would enable her to work to pursue her ambition to escape from the bubble. Although she could see the serious differences between herself and her friends at university, they for example did not have to undertake paid work for at least 25 hours a week to maintain a precarious family financial set up, she recognised them as a source of social capital networking, 'friends for life' as she put it.

In some cases too for the Caribbean group, strong bonds to community and to place could provide a safety zone beyond which the individual was loath to stray, and so serve to limit the possibilities for bridging into, for example, educational institutions which might be substantially white and geographically removed from the home base. Michael, for example, reflecting back, regretted not taking the opportunity to move to a prestigious university for a sport scholarship:

I got a [sport] scholarship for [university] but at the time I was so immature and foolish. I didn't go because I wasn't feeling it, because it seemed so far and I didn't want to go away from my friends. (Michael, 27, London)

David similarly rejected a place in a northern provincial university since he was the only black person at the Open Day, and took a place at a nearby London college instead:

I'm happy and comfortable at college. We have all races and nationality on my course, I don't stand out. (David, 21, London).

He obtained a first class honours degree and attributed his educational success to the fact that he was able to study in a comfortable and supportive environment where being black and male were not issues of concern (Lyle 2008). In this instance, David's bonding social capital in family and community gave him a strong base and the social and emotional resources to be able to 'get on' and achieve through education.

For the Caribbean young people in general in this project, families and communities offered strong bonding social capital ties, contributing to the development of their ethnic identity. The strong bonds and internal institutions in African Caribbean communities, including Saturday schools and religious organisations, have developed to combat racism and exclusion in British society. The Caribbean young people in the study have strong bonding social capital in ethnic/racial specific community associations and demonstrate high rates of 'civic engagement' in these areas. The young people in this study regarded black neighbourhoods as a resource for politics, collective mobilisation and reaffirming ethnic identity, and as a source of a range of ethnic specific social resources. Coupled with the bonding social capital generated through their families, these resources and experiences could enable access to wider resources and friendship networks during their transition to further/higher education and employment, offering a basis from which to bridge out into the social macrocosm. The strong family ties in these young people's lives also extended to their diasporic families potentially widening and extending their social

networks geographically, socially and temporally, contributing to intergenerational transmission of social and other capitals and resources. All the projects on ethnicity in the study revealed that transnational family networks flow across national boundaries as well as across and within generations, representing bonding and bridging social capital at one and the same time.

As the group examined the social capital practices in families and communities we noted that these interactional, relational processes had long been significant in families and communities and studies thereof, without the label of social capital (Portes 1998). Following from this, the Group's synthesising work on the inter-relationship between the dynamics of family change and processes of social capital identified three main issues that we want to contribute to debates around social capital.

First, paradoxically that the concept of social capital in itself is not enough to enable us to understand the nature of the relationship between families and social capital processes and practices in societies. It can point us towards them, and provide a short hand term that indicates the kind of processes we should examine, but does not capture the complexity of these processes. We concluded that we needed at least a framework of temporality to be able to understand the relationship between social change and social practices of this type.

Second, contrary to the social capital lost story, our research revealed a great deal of socially connective practice and other elements of social capital in people's family and community lives. But this social capital practice is differentially related to gender, age, ethnicity and social class, and not all of it is recognised as social capital in mainstream ideas. Our publications detail from our research the many ways that social capital practice and processes are differentially related to structural aspects of people's lives (e.g. Edwards et al. 2005, Edwards and Gillies 2004, 2005, Gray 2003, Zontini 2004, McGrellis 2004, Reynolds 2005).

Third, our data suggested that we need to move beyond narrow conceptions of 'amounts' of, and distinctions between, bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 1993), based on fixed socio-demographic characteristics or identities, to examine the processes and resources that are involved. From this perspective, some everyday family practices around social capital are limited, and limiting. Others are facilitative and enabling.

Concluding Thoughts

These three findings from the Families & Social Capital Group's work colour my concluding thoughts. I have recalled for us some of the criticisms of and problems with the concept of social capital in relation to its academic and political use. I have suggested some of the imaginative and productive uses it has been put to, particularly in the study of young people. Here theorists and researchers have taken the concept seriously, and attempted to improve, elaborate, and expand its meaning and its use. And I have come to the conclusion with my colleagues that the concept itself is not enough for the study of the issues that we need to come to grips with in studying families and communities.

When we first started to use it we could see the value of its role in the turn to the social, focusing attention on what takes place in families and communities, from both an academic and political perspective. It was good to see policy makers interested in policy issues that we were interested in. Perhaps there was a possibility that academic concerns, interpretations and understandings in relation to families and communities could move in step or at least in tune with policy makers,

particularly in relation to politicians voiced concerns about social exclusion. But the division between social cohesion and social justice was too big to breach with one contested concept.

The concept of social capital is likely to fade from academic concerns, as with all fashions, although those with large investments in it will continue to pursue its use, as will those who always have seen its specific usefulness, perhaps in the context of Bourdieu's capitals. And as I suggested, it could be seen as a shorthand term guiding us towards and encapsulating the types of processes and practices that are important for understanding family and community lives, and the connections between the micro and macro social. In these senses it can still have a contribution and lessons for us all.

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