

What Comes Around Goes Around: Teaching For and About Social and Human Capital in Leisure Studies

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Bursts of enthusiasm for particular concepts, research methods, or research findings always raise questions. When this enthusiasm overflows the narrow channels in which social science usually moves, spilling into journals of political and social commentary and even the popular media, we have an Event whose origins are worth exploring. Something like this occurred with the publication of R. D. Putnam's Making Democracy Work (1993), accelerating after his essay "Bowling Alone" (1995a). What accounts for the emergence of social capital research and commentary as a growth industry? Just what is social capital? How should it be incorporated into recreation and leisure studies curricula?

Why Social Capital Became Hot

The concept of social capital, as Putnam presents it, appeals to many audiences with related interests. These interests fall into three broad categories: apprehension over civic and political disengagement in the U. S., linking individual-level behavior with system-level consequences, and joining academic research, public policy, and social activism. The concept of social capital addresses long-standing issues for each of these audiences.

Mark Twain (1968) observed, "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress" (p. 562). Recent evidence suggests Americans are strongly inclined to agree. Political participation and trust fell off steadily in the U. S. during the past 50 years. In the 1996 national election, nonvoters outnumbered voters (by over eight million) for the first time since 1924 (Doppelt & Shearer, 1999), and few people engage in any political activity other than voting (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). Trust in major economic, political, and social institutions eroded rapidly from the 1950s to the 1990s (Dalton, 1996; Orren, 1997).

Putnam gives particular weight to declining rates of voluntary association membership as indicative of weakening civic and community engagement. Evidence on membership frequencies is mixed (e.g., Galston & Levine, 1998), but membership patterns appear to be changing. Patterns reflect people's incentives for association memberships (Wolfe, 1998). It is thus significant that memberships in civic, fraternal, and social associations are decreasing while those in work-related or professional associations are increasing. Ironically, even an increasing rate of association membership may signal reduced civic and community engagement if membership incentives are instrumental and self-serving. Concentration of active memberships in a few association types (Curtis, Grabb, & Baer, 1992) and substitution of financial donations for active participation (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995) are further evidence of changing association membership patterns.

Distrust of public figures and institutions is long-standing in America. Recently, however, generalized distrust in people has appeared alongside more focused political distrust. In a 1960 national election survey, 55% of respondents agreed "most people can be trusted"; in 1994 only 34% did so (Wuthnow, 1999). A 1995 Kaiser Foundation survey found that only 35% of respondents trusted people in general, while 65% believed instead "you can't be too careful in dealing with people" (Wuthnow). Distrustful majorities replaced trustful majorities almost without exception in surveys conducted from the 1960s through the 1980s (Knack, 1992).

Many explanations are offered for these findings, but whatever their causes, they are frequently regarded as evidence of societal decay and waning commitment to democracy. This conclusion appears self-evident, but it raises a fundamental issue in social science. Why, for example, does it make a difference whether individuals join voluntary associations or trust each other? More generally, what systemic consequences does such individual action have? Conversely, what are the systemic influences on individual action?

This is the micro-macro problem, which involves bridging the gap between individual actors and the economic, political, and social systems of which they are part. In contemporary social science, individual-level research is often separated from macro-analysis (Coleman, 1986). Descriptions of individual behavior do not necessarily offer clearer understanding of the stability and persistence of macro structures, and macro-level concepts do not always account for variations in individual behavior. Some of the issues under debate are captured in the distinction between (a) methodologically holistic approaches, emphasizing enduring cultural patterns of thought and social organization, and (b) methodologically individualistic approaches, emphasizing purposive individual action and its collective consequences (Nee, 1998; March & Olsen, 1984). The concept of social capital has been introduced on both sides of the debate. For Putnam (1993), social capital is a link from culture to structure, a link that is historically path-determined. Coleman (1988), in contrast, regards social capital as a resource used in individual purposive action, accounting for individual-level outcomes and thus for aggregate outcome patterns characteristic of different macro-structures.

The concept of social capital has sparked similar discussions outside academia. Over the past 30 years or so, public policy assumptions dominant since the New Deal have lost credibility, yet no consensus on alternatives has fully emerged. Two concepts related to social capital, civil society and community, are prominent topics among activists, policy analysts, and even the occasional politicians (e.g., Bradley, 1995; Coats, 1996). In this context, Putnam's conclusions that collective action is facilitated by "a substantial stock of social capital" (1993, p. 167) and that social capital is declining in the U.S. (1995a) drew considerable attention. Absent or weakened social capital generation is a possible explanation for policy failures despite sizeable investments of funds and expertise. A way around previous failures might be found if social capital could be deliberately created (e.g., Gittell & Vidal, 1998).

The widespread interest in Putnam's analysis of social capital is the horizon against which the concept was taken up in leisure studies. Putnam's Italian study draws explicit attention to the importance of leisure activity as a site for social capital generation (1993), a point he extends to the U. S. (1995a, 1995b, 2000). A direct relation of leisure to social capital is a strong argument for leisure's social as well as individual significance. Given leisure researchers' interests in community building (e.g., Arai, 1996; Arai & Pedlar, 1997; Pedlar, 1996; Stormmann, 1996), citizenship (e.g., Glover, 2000; Hemingway, 1999; Reid, 1995), new approaches to traditional recreation experiences (e.g., Henderson & Bialeschki, 1999), and the effects of time use (e.g., Robinson & Godbey, 1997), it is hardly surprising Putnam's work resonates in leisure studies.

Conceptualizing Social Capital

There are, however, conceptions of social capital other than Putnam's, whose work has not gone uncriticized. Social capital research tends to emphasize the positive and minimize the negative (Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1993, 2000). These points have received insufficient attention in leisure studies; some second thoughts therefore seem in order.

Social capital is not a new concept, despite its recent prominence. It integrates two long-standing themes in social theory: sociability, the idea that human beings fare better when they join together; and exchange, the idea that human interaction involves transfer of resources. The resources exchanged take several different forms we may collectively label capital. The most familiar is economic capital, including money and real property (Coleman calls it physical capital; 1988, p. S98). A second form of capital is human, including general and specific knowledge and skills. Bourdieu (1987) refers to cultural rather than human capital, defining it more broadly and usefully as an "informational" resource (see also 1983/1985). Economic and human capital belong to individuals (or to corporate groups of individuals) and can be (a) transformed into other forms, as when cash is spent on a university education and (b) transported, as when real property is exchanged for cash that can then be relocated or when individuals take knowledge and skills with them on leaving school or changing jobs. It is most important to keep in mind that economic and human capital are attributes of specific individuals.

Social capital, the third form of capital, does not belong to any one individual, but is instead an attribute of the social networks in which individuals are located (Coleman, 1988). Social capital is defined by Bourdieu (1983/1985) as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources” accessible through membership in “a durable network of more or less institutionalized” social relations (p. 248). For Bourdieu, social capital depends on (a) the scope of an individual’s social networks and (b) the volume and type of resources possessed by the others in those social networks. Portes (1998) characterizes social capital as the ability “to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures” (p. 6). He follows Bourdieu by carefully distinguishing among (a) the individual making a claim, (b) the others on whom a claim is made, and (c) the resources for which a claim is made. Lin (2001) describes social capital as “the resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors” in purposive action (p. 25), emphasizing that resources are properties of networks, not people, and that knowledge of available resources is prerequisite to accessing them.

Social capital, then, is an attribute of a social network that allows a member access to resources that would otherwise be unavailable. Social capital can, like economic and human capital, be transformed, as in a “legacy” admission to an elite university enabled by family ties. Unlike economic and human capital, social capital cannot be transported. Access to it exists only within a specific social network. If an individual exits that network, access to the social capital within it is lost. Social capital is, however, transitive in a way economic and human capital, which are consumed when used, are not, giving social capital a public goods aspect. Social capital is not necessarily depleted if shared with others. Its transitivity in fact creates what Bourdieu (1983/1985) calls a “multiplier effect” (p. 249) because it allows the effects of social capital to be distributed beyond the individuals involved in an exchange, and even to other social networks. In this way, for example, social capital facilitates dissemination of information (see Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973).

An example will help. Charlie and Ed belong to their workplace bowling team. Ed’s child is having difficulty with calculus in high school, which he mentions to Charlie one evening after settling up for the beer frame. Now, Charlie remembers nothing about calculus, but he does sing in a choir with Al, a math teacher at the high school Ed’s child attends. Charlie promises to ask Al next Sunday whether calculus tutoring is available. True to his word, Charlie talks to Al on Sunday. Monday at work he tells Ed that Al is willing to tutor his child as a favor to a fellow choir member, Ed calls Al that evening, and by mid-week Ed’s child is hip deep in calculus.

There are two separate dyadic relations here, {Charlie ↔ Ed} and {Charlie ↔ Al}. Al and Ed had no social tie; their interaction is mediated by their prior, independent ties to Charlie, who forms a bridge linking two previously separate dyads, {Al ↔ Charlie ↔ Ed}. The social capital available to Ed exists directly in his tie to Charlie, and transitively in Charlie’s tie to Al. Al’s willingness to tutor exists as a favor to Charlie, a fellow choir member; Ed has no claim on Al’s assistance outside the social network {Al ↔

Charlie ↔ Ed} and thus cannot bridge between Al and a fourth person. The effects of Ed's social capital may nonetheless extend beyond the network boundary if, for example, Ed learns from Al of other tutoring services, informational capital Ed may then share with others, or {[Al ↔ Charlie ↔ Ed] → N}. Note that doing so imposes no demands on the original network, but multiplies the effects of the social capital in it.

Gittell and Vidal (1998) identify two basic types of social capital. Both are present in and correspond to features of the social network in our example: (a) bonding social capital strengthens ties among people already known to one another; and (b) bridging social capital creates ties among people who were unknown to each other. Charlie and Ed work and bowl together, that is, they have more than one tie. This is a multiplex relation (Coleman, 1988). Multiplex relations generate bonding social capital by enabling individuals to draw on resources from one setting (e.g., work) to use in another (e.g., bowling). Ed more easily requests Charlie's assistance based on a social tie with two rather than one strand. Ed becomes aware of Al's calculus knowledge as a consequence of the bonding social capital in his tie to Charlie. The bridging social capital necessary to bring Ed and Al together exists in the tie between Charlie and Al, enabling Charlie to request a favor from Al on Ed's behalf. Even were Ed initially aware of Al's calculus knowledge, it would be inaccessible to him without the bridging tie between Charlie and Al. The bonding and bridging social capital that brings this scenario to a happy close (for all except Ed's child, who still hates calculus) lies not in Al, Charlie, and Ed as individuals, but rather in the structure of the social ties among them.

Social Capital, Trust, and Strength of Ties

Social capital is a fact of human sociability, but it is not generated the same way in all social networks. When interacting with others, people must have some basic confidence that role expectations will be fulfilled. This confidence is not always easily achieved, particularly because many social exchanges are open-ended. Charlie assists Ed as a co-worker and bowling teammate, expecting no immediate return. Charlie makes an investment in social capital by trusting Ed to honor the implicit obligation to reciprocate built into their exchange. Perhaps in a year, when Charlie decides to move, Ed will help load the truck, but at the moment the value of Charlie's investment in social capital depends on being able to trust Ed to reciprocate later.

Trust is a necessary component of social capital, but it exposes an individual to uncertainty and possible loss. An individual's trust requires some assurance that her/his interest will not be injured. Coleman (1988) identifies several mechanisms providing such assurance. Information about another person, particularly the person's reputation (see also Lin, 2001), is especially valuable. Network norms, and sanctions for violating them, establish social environments in which trust is easier to bestow. Trust is likelier in closed, rather than open, social networks because norms, role expectations, and role obligations are more fully developed and enforceable. Multiplex social ties are also conducive to trust; more extensive information about individuals is available and expect-

tations about norm compliance are at least partially transferable. Putnam (1993), not surprisingly given his cultural approach, emphasizes generalized trust based on the norm of reciprocity as fundamental to social capital generation. Generalized trust makes cooperative action less risky for all by reducing the necessity and costs of establishing specific trust. Putnam locates the development of generalized trust preeminently in multiple horizontal networks (e.g., nonhierarchical voluntary associations). Generalized trust can in fact be emancipating by releasing individuals from constraints imposed by uncertainty or dependence on narrow group norms (Yamagishi, Cook, & Watabe, 1998). Its formation is difficult, however, and it is questionable whether horizontal networks like voluntary associations can bear the load Putnam assigns them.

Trust, writes Wuthnow, "is always conditional" (p. 215). Its existence is affected by societal and personal factors: social inequalities inhibit generalized trust, regarding oneself as untrustworthy inclines one to see others the same way, while trust is increased by being able to achieve one's own goals and frequent social contacts. Note that trust is associated not with social contacts in general, but rather with "more intimate and encompassing interaction" (p. 214). Such interaction is more frequent, the more similar people are to each other. Wuthnow found that heterogeneous groups, particularly those whose members have diverse viewpoints, are regarded as less trustworthy environments, even by their own members, than are homogeneous groups. Homophily, the tendency of people to trust and affiliate socially with others like themselves, is a common finding in research on trust, voluntary associations, personal and social networks, and discussion circles. Given that the strength of the ties between individuals increases with their similarity, Granovetter (1973) suggests that social networks constructed around strong ties and similarity create trustworthy environments that minimize stresses of coping with dissimilar individuals and dissonant information. There is considerable evidence to support this proposition.

McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1987) introduce the concepts of choice homophily and induced homophily, distinguishing between freely chosen affiliations with similar others and those imposed by contextual constraints. Voluntary association memberships are as a general rule more homogeneous than society as a whole, but McPherson and Smith-Lovin report that choice homophily nonetheless continues within them. Interestingly, they report further that as an association's membership becomes larger and more diverse, increasing opportunities to establish heterophilous ties, friendship dyads among association members become more homophilous, not less. There is a strong correlation between membership gender homogeneity and association type and structure (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1982, 1986) and an important degree of membership homogeneity in civic and political organizations (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Marsden, after finding that dense networks of personal ties are both homophilous and small (1987; 1988), concludes, "Virtually all [social] substructures are less heterogeneous than the population at large" (1990, p. 402; see also Burt, 1990). More recently, Louch (2000) confirms the homophily of personal networks: "Race, education, age, and religion are strong cleavages across which contact between individuals becomes less likely" (p. 59).

Social networks characterized by strong, homophilous ties facilitate development of specific trust. Familiarity, similarity, and regular contact among network members generate bonding social capital based on specific trust. These “dense but segregated” social networks (Putnam, 1993, p. 175) are not likely, however, to create generalized trust and bridging social capital. As Granovetter (1973) notes, the strong ties composing dense networks produce “local cohesion” that results in “overall fragmentation” (pp. 1377-78). Both the social capital generated within networks of strong ties, and the trust on which it depends, are available largely to network members only. The bridging social capital often more readily generated in networks of weak ties, on the other hand, allows information and other resources to circulate more widely and rapidly. Yet, weak ties also generate weaker trust, which is more easily withdrawn than the strong trust created in strong ties, while bridging social capital is no more likely to be associated with community engagement than it is individual instrumental action.

Rethinking Social and Human Capital

Are we left at a dead end here? Is social capital’s promise as a strong argument for leisure’s social importance left unfulfilled? Not altogether, but caution is necessary in using the concept as Putnam presents it. A conceptual weakness in his account leads him to locate the creation of generalized trust, a fundamental component of social capital, in nonhierarchical horizontal networks like voluntary associations, a move for which the empirical evidence is at best inconclusive. When Putnam (1993) defines social capital as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (p. 167), he runs together both (a) culture and structure and (b) human and social capital. These pairs undoubtedly interact within and between each other, but they must be carefully distinguished if their value in practice, teaching, and research is not to be diluted.

Putnam (1993) argues that a historical path-dependent relation between structure and culture explains regional differences in social capital between northern and southern Italy. Such relations develop over centuries, have enduring consequences, and can both impede and facilitate subsequent economic, political, and social development. Yet when he turns to the U. S., Putnam reports sudden, dramatic reductions in the stock of social capital, occurring at most over a few decades he specifically identifies (1995b) as the years after 1960 when television became a dominant force in American life. Jackman and Miller (1998) seize on this contradiction as evidence that Putnam has misconceived social capital. They have a case.

Jackman and Miller ask whether trust, as an essential component of social capital, is endogenous or exogenous to social networks in which social capital exists. Are the sources of trust part of social networks or outside them, for example, as cultural norms? If the former, then it should be possible to identify which features of social networks nurture or inhibit trust, opening at least the conceptual possibility of modifying them. If the latter, then trust levels are socio-cultural givens unlikely to undergo short to mid-

mid-term changes. In his Italian study, Putnam argues the latter position, shifting his ground in his American studies without providing any justification for doing so. This and other criticisms pose significant difficulties for Putnam's analysis (in addition to Jackman & Miller, among Putnam's other critics, Levi, 1996, is particularly worth examining; see also Norris, 1996, on television; Portes, 1998, on circularity; and Sabetti, 1996, on path dependence and the Italian case).

In fairness, Jackman and Miller impose an oversimplified distinction between culture and structure, and dismiss too quickly the complex interactions between them. Sound evidence for historical path-dependent effects on social interaction and organization exists (e.g., Greif, 1994), along with cognitive and structural conceptions of culture (e.g., Swidler, 1986) reasonably compatible with Putnam's general approach. Nonetheless, I think it is more advantageous to conceptualize trust and similar components of social capital as endogenous to social structures like networks, rather than treating them as cultural norm or societal givens. Individual action is by and large purposive (though "purposive" must not be confused with "instrumental"), that is, people act in order to achieve some end, even in leisure. They do so subject to institutional and structural constraints that open or close various fields of action (e.g., Clemens & Cook, 1999; Nee & Ingram, 1998). These constraints clearly have historical and socio-cultural dimensions. Yet, if social capital is a resource located in social networks, it is more consistent to conceptualize its components as endogenous to those networks. Differential effects of social capital are then understood as the consequences of purposive but bounded action, bounded not only by the actor's individual attributes but also by the social structures within which they act. The historical and socio-cultural horizons against which action proceeds cannot be ignored, but conceptualizing the components of social capital as endogenous to the structures in which social capital exists allows us to target research, teaching, and policy interventions more directly and with greater prospects for success.

We also avoid the danger of conflating social capital and its components with the purposes for which individual actors use social capital. These purposes are separate from social capital. The greatest value of Putnam's work is calling our attention to the importance of social capital in building community and democratic citizenship, but much excellent social capital research examines such topics as the dynamics of individual-level competition in market settings (e.g., Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973, 1985; Lin, 2001). There is nothing inherently democratic, equitable, or moral in social capital as a resource. It exists in, and can be used just as easily to sustain, the Mafia or Klan as Amnesty International or Oxfam.

Social capital comes with few instructions; human capital is therefore necessary to understand and use it. Incorporating teaching for and about social capital into leisure studies curricula requires that we link it more explicitly to human capital than often appears in the literature. With this in mind, let me close by suggesting two tasks necessary to build this link.

First, recall the basic definition of social capital as a resource existing in social networks allowing individuals access to further resources otherwise unavailable. Students, long familiar with colloquial definitions of social capital as “it’s not what you know, but who you know” and “what goes around comes around,” have little difficulty with this definition when it is presented as part of securing funding for a new playground, planning a bond referendum, or networking for promotion. They also understand, perhaps somewhat less intuitively, how recreation programs and facilities provide space and opportunity for social interaction that builds on trust. The real significance of the relation between social capital and leisure only becomes clear, however, once we move out of the comfort zone of professional education and practice. To understand social capital, we must understand society. This in turn means enriching the field’s sociological content in teaching and in research.

Leisure studies has become disconnected from leisure’s social contexts over the past several decades. Too little is known or taught about the social structures of leisure. We must push beyond demographic patterns, participation frequencies and preferences, and time use studies to investigate social networks in leisure, how they are constructed and used, and of course how social capital exists and is used as a leisure resource. Neither professional expertise nor standing can be privileged in efforts to broaden our sociological horizons, which may entail some professional and personal discomfort. Access to social networks rich in social capital and its components is not equitably distributed in the U. S. People without this access are not likely to have much trust in those who do have it or who act as gatekeepers, and thus lack trust in how social capital is used. We must be leery of presuming we know the reasons why.

African Americans are not less trusting than white European Americans because they watch the wrong kind of television. They are less trusting because they have fewer economic resources to risk and are more in danger of being victims of violent crime. The frames that privileged Americans use to justify their faith in people attest clearly to the importance of social circumstances: those who generalize from their experiences in safe, affluent suburban families need to know that not everyone is able to draw on the same experiences. (Wuthnow, p. 226)

There are conceptual (Hemingway, 1999) and empirical (see particularly Arai & Pedlar, 1997; Glover, 2000; Storrman, 1996) reasons to believe that leisure is an arena in which social capital can be generated, provided the resources are available. The field can make a vital contribution here, but only, as Wuthnow forcefully reminds us, if we understand leisure’s social frames from the inside. It is time to do a little sociological listening, a project in which our students can be very valuable partners.

The second task is to rethink human capital. Something broader than the usual definitions, focused on instrumental knowledge and skills is needed, along the lines of Bourdieu’s expanded conception of cultural or informational capital. We must under-

stand the evolution of the structures in which social capital exists, with their norms and expectations about its use, but we must also explore the origins and consequences of differential access to it. The purposes for which social capital is used are, to repeat, independent of social capital itself. We must prepare our students, and thus ourselves, to think reflectively and critically about the effects of social capital, including the profession's contributions for good or ill. It is not enough to understand that leisure is an arena in which social capital can be generated. We must ask why and for what purposes. And if the social capital generated within leisure contributes to individual or community development, we must then also ask what sort of individual or community. We cannot evade these questions; addressing them is a personal and professional duty. When we do so, however, not only will we clarify the reasons for our interest in social capital, but also our individual and collective purposes as recreation professionals, educators, and even citizens.

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