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Gendered Social Capital in a Johannesburg Township

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Abstract

Social capital research rarely takes a gendered approach. This article explores how black women and men from a marginalized community in Johannesburg, South Africa, rely on family, friends, and community members to survive and strategize for the future by utilizing social capital. The results from 30 semi-structured interviews and ego network mapping illustrate that gender moderates the type of social capital used and benefits associated with bonding and bridging social capital in important ways. This research builds upon knowledge of gendered advantages and disadvantages in social networks and informs researchers how women and men survive in pervasive poverty. I posit that identifying potential sources of support is an important consideration within social capital or any network research because the prospect of receiving assistance in the future undoubtedly alters the development of these individuals' livelihood strategies.

Keywords

gender; resources; social capital; social networks; South Africa

Poor women and men throughout the world develop livelihood strategies based on the resources that they have actually received from various individuals, as well as on resources that are perceived to be available in the future, to improve their chances of survival and achieving upward mobility.

In South Africa—one of the world's most unequal countries in terms of income distribution (World Bank 2012)—black South Africans and foreign-born migrants disproportionately face the realities of poverty compared to other racial or ethnic groups and must often rely upon their family members, friends, and acquaintances for assistance in times of need, especially in the absence of formal insurance schemes, or *reliable* public assistance. Between 1948 and 1994, South Africa's apartheid regime not only produced vast inequalities across racial groups, but also between men and women; black men had considerably greater opportunities to enter the formal sector economy with employment in mines and service positions in urban areas, yet without the possibilities of their families joining (Seidman 1999). This trend continued in the post-apartheid era as well; consequently, women have typically had to make ends meet in the informal economy, in peripheral urban areas, and away from their husbands and other kin (Casale and Posel 2002).

Thus, in this context of high inequality for black South Africans, gendered survival strategies developed in response to structural forces separating the livelihoods of women and men—on top of social norms often favoring men to begin with.

I use a combination of semi-structured interviews and social network data to explore who women and men, in a marginalized Johannesburg community, have relied on, and potentially will rely on, to maintain their livelihoods in the present while developing survival strategies in a society where women's and men's opportunities to secure these livelihoods are scarce and asymmetrical. My approach in analyzing women's and men's survival strategies is through the lens of social capital, which is theorized to translate into other forms of capital, potentially improving individuals' lives (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988). It is crucial to recognize that the use of social capital in this piece—mostly for survival—is much different from what social capital is often translated into in the predominant literature in high income countries: developing business connections, creating community cohesiveness, or organizing politically, to name only a few. Scrutinizing how social capital translates into gaining employment or acquiring food—necessities for survival in a poor Johannesburg community—gets at the essence of the efficacy of social capital.

But different *sources* of social capital can also provide starkly different benefits for those who are trying to scrape by on a day-to-day basis; comprehending their value within women's and men's networks is critical to understanding if, and how, gendered livelihood strategies are manifested. Research in developing country contexts—although limited in comparison to developed countries—has proven useful in recognizing the value of different sources of social capital. For instance, in poor communities, many residents might have few resources or connections to individuals in the formal economy, in which case having a wealth of “horizontal” contacts through these residents might not be beneficial to improving one's livelihood (Narayan et al. 2000; Narayan, Pritchett, and Kapoor 2009). But knowing someone like a community leader, or other “vertical” contacts (the “right” people), could provide the opportunity to access valued resources and information (Jha, Rao, and Woolcock 2007).

I assess the reasons behind who women and men have sought, and would seek, in times of need. This is a practical and theoretically important, yet vastly understudied venture, especially in contexts where gender norms impact day-to-day survival. The differences in women's and men's current and future survival strategies are not contingent on choice, as much as opportunity within the confines of a gendered social structure; social capital is a theoretical gateway into comprehending this puzzle.

SOCIAL CAPITAL, NETWORKS, AND GENDER

Broadly defined, social capital is the value of one's connections, including those found through social groups, in assisting or potentially assisting, an individual in a wide range of circumstances, but there is little consensus on what such capital encompasses (see Adler and Kwon 2002). But individuals often must subject themselves to the social norms and sanctions pertaining to obligations and trustworthiness that facilitate developing social capital (Coleman 1988).

Among the many approaches to understanding social capital, Putnam's (2000) distinction between its "bonding" and "bridging" forms is a useful heuristic for understanding how the strength of relationships between individuals is associated with the different benefits that these connections bring, even if the distinction between these two types of social capital is not always clear-cut. Putnam indicates that sources of bonding social capital are bound by a type of solidarity that, among other things, provides a safety net for the "less fortunate" members of the group (Putnam 2000:22). Thus, it is not surprising that bonding social capital emerges from membership in exclusive groups such as families or ethnic-based organizations that are strongly connected and share certain characteristics (Massey and Espinosa 1997; Woolcock 2001). Sources of bridging social capital may not be as bound to one another, but possess better abilities to link individuals to external assets and information. Bridging social capital is often derived from "weak" ties (Granovetter 1973) which connect individuals to resources and other networks in general that are outside the range of the tightly knit groups that one has membership in (Cheong et al. 2007).

Obtaining both bonding and bridging social capital presumably increases individuals' abilities to sustain or improve their lives in the present and future as they offer access to different resources (Lin 1999). However, having bonding or bridging social capital is not always beneficial if one's connections are unable to provide access to desirable resources (Portes 1998; Wacquant 1998). In some cases, having a source of "linking" social capital (Szreter and Woolcock 2004)—essentially one bridging higher status with access to scarce resources—might be better than multiple, and other, sources of bridging social capital.

The distinction between bonding and bridging social capital is particularly salient in many sub-Saharan African settings. For example, anthropological literature suggests that immediate and extended kin are typically unrelenting in their support for both routine tasks and survival efforts (Evans-Pritchard 1951; Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950) to the extent that similar relations with non-kin are recognized as threatening and undermining of the kinship system (Rodgers 2009). Consequently, non-kin usually engage in small and informal exchanges (Stefaniszyn 1950; Tew 1951), and, therefore, act as complementary, weaker ties to kinship structures (Aguilar 1999). These anthropological descriptions of kin and non-kin are almost analogous with the bonding and bridging social capital dichotomy. However, it is important to recognize that bonding and bridging social capital are not *exclusively* derived from strong and weak ties, respectively, in African or other contexts; these distinctions serve as a valuable framework, nevertheless.

Still, there are additional barriers to accessing social capital. Beyond even having the opportunity to develop an individual-level connection with someone, forces such as limited resources—even among kin (Menjivar 1997), network or community norms that discourage providing assistance to certain individuals (Smith 2005), and the start-up networking difficulties and minimal available support associated with migration (Paul 2013) may drastically diminish the benefits that one could obtain from bonding and bridging sources of social capital. In many instances, being a woman and/or of a racial/ethnic minority group also interacts with these factors to further reduce the chances of effectively mobilizing one's social capital (Smith 2000) due to inequalities inherent in social systems.

It is this last point which has been most understudied in social capital research. While gender differences have been examined in social capital research, such studies analyze gendered differences more as choices than as consequences of deeply-rooted, pervasive gender inequality in societies. The literature suggests that women may be better than men at forming social capital through cohesive groups in the workplace (Westermann, Ashby, and Pretty 2005); male migrants might have greater social capital than women, due to their contacts in the destination location (Curran et al. 2005). The amount of social capital available to female and male migrants from the Caribbean is dependent not only on class and occupation skills, but also on an immigrant's country's migration history in a destination like New York (Grasmuck and Grosfoguel 1997). Thus, gender differences in accessing social capital exist, but the described mechanisms are not necessarily *gendered*.

By contrast, only a small body of research depicts how social capital is gendered: women may need to "borrow" social capital in male-dominated workplaces in order to get ahead (often due to a lack of mentorship from high status ties) (Burt 1998); female immigrants must first rely on their husbands' networks before acquiring social capital of their own (Gold 1995); rural Australian women are routinely shut out of accessing bridging social capital through political and civic participation, since these activities are dominated by men, with a high barrier for entrance (Hodgkin 2009); and women in the United States have access to fewer sources of bonding social capital than men because of the disproportionate number of women who live in impoverished communities with low levels of bonding social capital, due to lower wages, single motherhood, racial discrimination, and stigma (Brisson and Usher 2005). Most notably and recently, Lutter's (2015) comprehensive analysis of career success among film actors indicates that structural inequalities—such as the dominance of men at the executive level and the higher status of men in the business—that inhibit the development of women's careers can be mitigated by having diverse, open networks as opposed to more-cohesive networks. Research in sub-Saharan Africa has shown that microcredit opportunities may facilitate poor women's desires to increase their household and social empowerment, with the help of individuals in women's networks who are willing to invest in small businesses and ideas—including customers. But due to rigid and hierarchical kinship norms, many women do not receive such assistance from their husbands or other kin and must look to their stock of bridging social capital to pool their resources in such efforts (Mayoux 2001). To further compound this disadvantage, the available pools of social capital for women are similarly positioned: poor and without contacts of higher status who might more-easily facilitate the growth of microcredit investments (Olomola 2002). On the other hand, men are seen as having access to valuable sources of bonding social capital—such as to successful brothers or uncles—and high status bridging ties—such as community and business leaders—to advance their economic pursuits and livelihoods.

It is necessary to evaluate *how* social capital is gendered, rather than examining solely the differences in social capital available to, and accessed by, women and men. By employing a framework utilizing the concepts of bonding and bridging social capital, I seek to build upon these under-explored aspects of social capital theory in a Johannesburg township.

Background

Major African cities embody a melting pot of contradictions: colonial remnants, ethnic tensions, economic opportunities, modern technology, and the acceptance of diversity all co-exist with one another at the same time (Simon 1989). In a city such as Johannesburg, individuals might work in the downtown core, take an hour-long bus ride to their homes (which may be constructed of sheet metal and plastic scraps), live next to someone of a different ethnic group (which would be quite unlikely in rural areas), have to fetch water for dinner, and charge their new mobile phone at someone's house before work the next day.

These cities offer vastly different opportunities for upward mobility and lifestyle choices than rural locations do. Not surprisingly in a country like South Africa, poor black women and men are often pushed to the major cities, and surrounding areas, for employment and to create better lives for themselves and their extended families. However, kinship and community networks become disrupted (Bozzoli 1991). Out of necessity, new urban residents must develop networks that offer opportunities to acquire jobs or organize collectively in the absence of strong familial or ethnic networks (Little 1973), but, as Bozzoli (1991) points out, this is particularly difficult for women due to existing structural disadvantages. While kinship and ethnic relationships remain important and certainly complex, urban Africans have developed fluid categories of belonging that cut across traditional lines in a multitude of ways (Mitchell 1969). Despite being away from kin, urban migrants also have a larger degree of choice as to whom they continue to be in contact with at home and whom they associate with in their new destinations (Gugler 2002). At least the *potential* to expand one's networks of support is enormous in a city like Johannesburg.

It is not surprising that other negative consequences of living in South African cities are often more severe for women than for men; social and economic structures favoring men often leave women at the margins of both. Since women have considerably fewer viable economic opportunities relative to men, they may have to engage in high risk and insecure employment that is hazardous to their health, such as street vending (Pick, Ross, and Dada 2002) and informal sex work (Wojcicki 2002) in order to survive, since their kinship networks are often not immediately available as sources of economic insurance. Also, women who have family members or friends nearby are not necessarily more secure in their daily lives either, as family and friends are often perpetrators of violence and other crimes, which suggests a serious lack of social cohesion in poor South African communities (Chipkin and Ngqulunga 2008). In townships and other urban settings, men are also often away for extended periods of time, such as to work in distant mines; women are involuntarily left responsible for maintaining the "social fabric" of the township (Bak 2008) and are burdened by caring for family members, rather than being able to rely on them or develop as many external and possibly useful social ties in the workplace as men do. However, it appears that virtually no research examines how men are vulnerable in similar circumstances, and the extent to which networks ameliorate potentially burdensome situations. Instead, men's economic and social advantages are implied in the context of women's vulnerability and disadvantages in South Africa.

In sub-Saharan Africa, more generally, anthropologists and other social scientists have long depicted women's techniques for acquiring resources and strategizing for the future in

impoverished settings. These techniques often emerge in response to aforementioned cultural norms favoring men, which leave women marginalized in the formal economy and inheritance systems (e.g., Cliggett 2005; Donaldson 1987; Mikell 1987; Poewe 1981). For example, in rural Zambia, Cliggett (2005) describes that men accumulate wealth through employment and land ownership, as well as informal, old-age security through their children, even in a matrilineal kinship system. Women, therefore, must “make small investments in social relationships as they move through their life cycle, so in their old age they are able to mobilize support in the form of food, household assistance, and general care” (Cliggett 2005:95). The difference appears to stem from how and *from whom* women and men acquire various resources while positioning themselves for their futures by developing additional relationships with individuals who could potentially assist them in a time of need. This could pose an enormous disadvantage for women, who cannot necessarily rely solely on their network of family members for support in the future, as men may. Women must invest their time in cultivating new relationships with friends, acquaintances, or other community members who *might* provide help in the future. This literature suggests that women have much more variation on whom they rely for assistance, and how they acquire help, relative to men as a direct consequence of heavily-gendered social systems. Therefore, women are likely to have to exert a greater amount of energy in establishing make-shift networks of acquaintances, friends, and kin with only some resources stemming from each, whereas men do not necessarily need to seek out support in such extensive ways; although this literature has a dramatically different set of subjects than that of Lutter (2015), the idea is the same. Thus, in social systems where women are intrinsically disadvantaged compared to men, *gendered*, as opposed to simply “different,” survival strategies are likely to form.

Study Site: Sol Plaatje, Johannesburg

Sol Plaatje, is a relatively new township on the western edge of Johannesburg with an estimated 17,000 residents (Vearey 2013). Between 1999 and 2008, Sol Plaatje was considered an informal settlement because of the combination of squatter residency in the former mine site’s dormitories and houses, as well as the emergence of many metal shacks constructed by individuals who were forcefully re-located from other townships, or by those who were unable to acquire government-sponsored housing elsewhere. Since 2008, Sol Plaatje has become an increasingly formal settlement due to its incorporation of existing settlements and small townships and the building of new settlements and small townships within its bounds. But Sol Plaatje still does not have electricity; it remains disconnected from the business districts of Johannesburg, since few taxi or bus drivers pass through the town; there are extensive waiting lists to acquire government-sponsored housing; and crime is endemic. These factors make survival in Sol Plaatje difficult. However, Sol Plaatje is not necessarily representative of township life across all of South Africa because of its relatively small size and newness. Because of these characteristics, it is important to interpret the results with caution in the context of townships in South Africa.

METHOD

Sample

Over a period of two months, respondents—all black Africans between 18 and 60 years old—were selected purposively based on two criteria: gender and residency status (internal migrant, foreign-born migrant, or long-term South African resident). Respondents were selected from both the government sponsored homes and the informal shacks—two distinctive, yet geographically close sections of Sol Plaatje. These networks are more likely to be independent of one another due to the purposive sampling method, than if snowball sampling were employed. Internal migrants are defined as those who have lived in Sol Plaatje for fewer than five years; foreign-born migrants are those who were born in another African nation; and long-term residents are South Africans who have lived in Sol Plaatje for five years or more. This sampling led to a nearly equal distribution of respondents based on gender and within residency status. While comparisons of migrants and non-migrants, or the native-born and foreign-born, are highly relevant in current South African research, an analysis of the interaction between gender and residency status is outside the scope of this paper. Although this sample of 15 women and 15 men is neither random nor representative of township residents in Johannesburg, it is at least heterogeneous.

Respondents participated in semi-structured interviews that covered a range of topics, including their reasons for moving to Sol Plaatje, whom they knew prior to arriving and have relied on for support since arriving, and their involvement in community activities and organizations. Respondents were prompted to describe all of the individuals who provided them financial and non-financial support (money, food, clothing, employment, and information, etc.) when they first arrived in Sol Plaatje. They indicated their relationship to these alters (i.e., father, female friend, male acquaintance, etc.) and its context (the resources they received as well as the circumstances). Respondents' names were never recorded, and respondents did not divulge the names of individuals they were referring to at any point in this process, in order to maintain anonymity. Specific areas of Sol Plaatje that respondents lived in are also not named; respondents and others are not identifiable. However, pseudonyms assigned to each respondent are presented in this study.

Respondents were asked to indicate the “closeness” of their relationship to the named alter by placing his or her position within a series of five concentric circles. The ego (the respondent) was told that he/she was positioned at the center of the sociogram. This approach is visually similar to that of Carrasco et al. (2008) and is based upon early methods of social network analysis in attempting to understand the social structures in which individuals are embedded, but respondents were not asked to write a list of ranked alters prior to placing them on a sociogram and the connections between alters were not recorded (as this step was not part of the study's primary research questions). Although this approach to approximating egocentric networks is relatively simplistic, its purpose is to complement responses in the interviews: strong ties were classified as those who were within one or two rings out of five, from the center of the diagram, while weak ties were those found beyond two rings away from the center. This process was repeated for the present time period. Of course, this method only extracted information on alters who provided resources to

respondents and cannot provide a snapshot of an ego's larger network. Respondents likely did not mention several, or even many, individuals whom they will likely end up relying upon when they eventually need help. But these responses provide a glimpse into respondents' current survival strategies and for unbeknownst events in the future.

The interview analysis began with open-ended data coding in NVivo. Smaller themes were then initially coded and continually aggregated into larger themes as they became apparent in a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The combined data on network tie strength and qualities of these relationships allowed me to categorize instances of bonding and bridging social capital in a recursive analytical fashion. For instance, family membership and being a strong tie (i.e., close to the center of the concentric circle ego network map) are strongly and positively correlated with one another among these respondents, in line with the anthropological literature in sub-Saharan Africa. Further, their relationship quality (described in the interviews) strengthened my beliefs that family members were often a bonding form of social capital, as found in other contexts. Friends and acquaintances are not strongly and positively correlated with weak ties. But the friends and acquaintances were coded overwhelmingly as sources of bridging social capital, based on the discussions of relationship quality and weak tie strength. While rare, some family members were deemed bridging sources of social capital and some friends were considered to be "like family" or even closer than kin, and thus bonding sources of social capital in my coding scheme. Further, by cross-referencing interview responses and ego network maps on the spot, my research assistant and I were able to distinguish between kin—like an aunt or uncle—and friends or acquaintances who were casually referred to as "aunt" or "uncle." It is important to recognize that the social positions of actors who comprise one's bonding or bridging social capital can be fluid over time, as seen in other settings, although I cannot confirm this here.

Bonding Social Capital

I begin to unravel the gendered essence of social capital, as described by the women and men of Sol Plaatje, in this study, through its bonding form.

Virtually none of the female respondents in this study indicated that they already had non-kin connections in Sol Plaatje when they first arrived. Relying on their sources of bonding social capital was absolutely necessary at the beginning and as these women struggled to establish themselves in the community. Women indicated that they relied heavily on close family members to provide them with housing, food, clothing—all basic needs—and even low-skilled employment. For example, Funeka (age 29), *needed* to rely on her sister for housing, until her husband joined her in Sol Plaatje at a later date:

Funeka: When I arrived here the first time, I arrived at my sister's place on the other side of Sol Plaatje.

Interviewer: Was it a formal RDP house [Reconstruction and Development Programme—essentially inexpensive houses built for impoverished South Africans]?

Funeka: Yeah, it was a normal housee ... very, very big She was the only person I knew. Nobody else.

Mudiwa's (age 60) bonding social capital enabled her to acquire a corrugated metal shack, after she bought the property from her uncle's son. Without the close family connection, she probably would not own a home:

This house is totally different than the one I stayed at when I arrived here. But the person who picked this is my uncle's son When he got a house on the other side I used to pay him a visit and I told him that "since you are moving, can you sell me this so I can have my own house where I can go?" Then we did that. My uncle's son and their friend came and put this thing together.

Lumka (age 40) needed employment when she arrived in Sol Plaatje to support her growing family. She reaped the benefits of her bonding social capital when she arrived in 2001 and got a job as a domestic worker:

Interviewer: How did you get that job? Who did you talk to, to get that job?

Lumka: I got the job through my sister.

Interviewer: Was she a domestic worker herself?

Lumka: Yes.

Noxolo (age 18), has relied, and continues to rely, on her *extended* family for all her basic needs. She moved from the Eastern Cape (and her immediate kin) to Johannesburg but has been unable to find a job and support herself.

Noxolo: This is my aunt's husband's house. My aunt has a house in the Eastern Cape so she is not here, but her husband is in Pretoria and he only comes here on Fridays. So, me and my other cousins basically stay with the husband.

Interviewer: So, your cousins here or even your aunt's husband do they give you money, clothes, do they buy you food? What do they do for you?

Noxolo: Well, the people that help us—it's almost everyone who stays here ... my aunt, the husband who stays in Pretoria, a cousin in Pretoria who is the son of my uncle. So I would say it's a rotation. Let's say the aunt gets me shoes, then the brother comes the next week and asks who didn't get anything. We get food and clothing just like that.

However, these women of Sol Plaatje, like Diana (age 27) did not always receive the requested necessary resources from their sources of bonding social capital:

Interviewer: And was there anybody in Diepkloof or Soweto [nearby townships] that still helped you when you first moved here?

Diana: Yeah, I asked my uncle but he didn't really help at all.

Interviewer: But you asked at least! What did you ask him for?

Diana: I want to go back to school, there's no school here! I want money for food. I want money for buying school clothes. He didn't do anything.

Thus, while not all requests for help were fulfilled, these women of Sol Plaatje made it clear that they had at least tried to access such resources—typically only basic needs and menial jobs—embedded nearly entirely in their bonding social capital connections, in order to establish themselves in the township and to survive.

The narrative surrounding men's employment of bonding social capital contains similar actors compared to the women's, but those are less frequently for the basics of survival. The disparity in resources accessed through bonding social capital begins to depict underlying structural inequalities contributing to the seemingly inherently gendered essence of social capital among the women and men interviewed in this context.

Men, such as Baruti (age 33), seem to casually describe how family members have been there to aid them in their pursuit of employment—as if there were little doubt that their family would come through. His bonding social capital eventually landed him in Sol Plaatje, near his work:

Interviewer: So how did you get the work in the fuel station?

Baruti: I had a cousin who was working there...He used to visit me. It was during school holidays that that opportunity came. I had an uncle who was staying with me [on] that side. He came down to us on a Saturday and got a job for my uncle. So I came back with him... and we met a guy—the owner of the company—and I explained my situation to him. He accepted me and he was very happy.

In a similar fashion, Siyabonga (age 38) indicates that utilizing his bonding social capital essentially guarantees him access to private health care and his family's government grants:

The person who helps me is my brother. If I'm not feeling well I just call him and inform him that I'm not feeling well and he comes to fetch me and we go to consult the private doctor. No one else... What happens is that people here are not willing to help you very easily. So if I'm challenged in any form or have problems I either call my brother or else I call home to my mother who is getting a grant and she can probably organize something and deposit it or send it to me.

These men of Sol Plaatje also elaborated on the extent to which their family members were much more reliable than friends and acquaintances—reinforcing the notion that sources of bonding social capital would likely be sought out when necessary, compared to sources of bridging social capital:

Interviewer: With your friends, you said you generally don't help each other out with money?

Bukhosi (age 27): No you do, but not always. We're not dependent. You cannot depend on them [friends]. But family, if you're in a fix, they can get you out. My friends might laugh: "Man you dug up that thing, so close it up as well!"

Friends and acquaintances were even implied as incompetent by the men in my sample, compared to family, as sources of insurance:

Interviewer: Do you guys just hang out and drink, or do you support each other with advice or assistance?

Akonaho (age 28): Because they're not going to school they cannot advise me on getting some jobs. They're not passed matrics [an exam determining whether one graduates from high school]. They're just working for contractors...

Interviewer: So if you had a serious problem in the future, would you talk to your brother, or someone else?

Akonaho: My brother for that.

Nsovo (age 28), conveyed this bonding form of social capital by describing how he would likely rely on his uncle “for everything”—from providing him a place to stay to even paying for his training to become a security guard in the coming years. Even though he had friends in Sol Plaatje, his uncle was his primary potential source of support:

Interviewer: Now let's say you were sick ... who would you ask for help? Would you go to the clinic? The hospital?

Nsovo: I would call home or uncle. I could call uncle and then uncle could call home. You see? Because he would take me.

These illustrations are exemplary of the rest of the sample for both women and men. Utilizing one's bonding social capital has been an important part of women's livelihood strategies. But when compared to how men describe their easy, and almost unimpeded, access to resources via bonding social capital, it is implied that the support that these women in Sol Plaatje receive from sources of bonding social capital is much more conditional and uncertain.

Bridging Social Capital

Unlike family members, nearly all of the friends or acquaintances mentioned by respondents were weaker ties compared to family, since respondents noted that their relationships with these individuals were not intimate, but rather quite casual and/or fleeting. These friends and acquaintances provided access to different networks, however, which suggests that they are sources of bridging social capital.

The way these men of Sol Plaatje have employed their bridging social capital is nearly uniform—for employment. And these weaker connections have led to relatively stable livelihoods for these men. For example, Kwanele (age 55) knows a man named David, who has provided him with steady employment: “For a long time I was doing this job...Because I knew this guy [David] before I came here. We worked together. I knew him from business. Sometimes we'd meet on the side when we were working and ask each other: ‘What's your name? Where are you from?’” David has offered Kwanele opportunities to branch out and

meet new clients, and is an important component of Kwanele's stock of bridging social capital.

Like Kwanele, Roger (age 22) acquired a job through an old connection. Even if it was only for a short period, he effectively harnessed his bridging social capital:

Roger: I did find some piece [work] job in Pretoria...It was in April for just one month this year.

Interviewer: Who helped you find that job?

Roger: The job I got was through my childhood friend from back home. He was the one who arranged for me to come here.

John (age 33) acquired employment, and a place to live, through even less effort, and through even weaker connections, simply by being of the same ethnic group as two men. "I came here and came looking for a job and then I got it here...We are just friends. Since I came here and started this job for one month they've been good to me."

Relying on a relatively unknown person (who becomes a friend or remains an acquaintance) or an old friend for something so important to survival, such as employment, is the essence of bridging social capital. But the process—achieving a fairly stable livelihood through little-to-no effort with weak ties—does not appear to come as easily for the women of Sol Plaatje in this study.

The women of Sol Plaatje face many greater burdens than their male counterparts, including few appealing employment opportunities and the expectation of performing domestic labor. Despite this—or possibly because of this—women were not deterred from seeking upward financial mobility or, at the very least, financial stability. Women described how they constantly sought out new, relatively weak connections through the church, rotating credit societies or *stockvels*, funeral societies (which operate similarly to rotating credit societies), the African National Congress's Women's League, or local non-governmental organizations in efforts to develop a support network. Many of these community groups are almost exclusively for women, as seen in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and act primarily as informal insurance schemes. Although these groups *could* be viewed as sources of bonding social capital, since many have been used as galvanizing forces against various forms of oppression in African countries (Comaroff 1980; Comaroff 1985), these groups *are not* closely-knit; the personal relationships that emerge from these groups were described as ones of convenience more than anything else.

Thus, for these women of Sol Plaatje, churches, *stockvels*, and other organizations are potential sources of bridging social capital, even if it is unclear whether these connections will actually offer resources when called upon. Nevertheless, this is almost a necessary strategy for survival in the future given inheritance patterns and norms that often disadvantage women later in life; such women predict that they will be less able to mobilize resources from family members as time progresses. Likely in anticipation of this reality, women cultivated wide safety nets, through their bridging social capital, which could

potentially result in a job or simply having people nearby who may be able to care for them. For example, church-based connections often had not yet provided resources but these women believe that if they need help, their connections in the church are valuable forms of insurance as well. As Jongiwe (age 39) indicated: “It’s like they all have food. It’s like if I’m having a problem, I can go to them.”

In several instances, neighborhood or church-based connections also translated into the formation of rotating credit societies or funeral societies which thereby padded the potential network of support that women had already begun to develop through the church; this process is the crux of how bridging social capital is formed and how it is useful. In these societies, members contribute a monthly fee that is put towards whatever goods are needed by the women involved. With few other options available for women to develop insurance schemes, Lumka (age 40) believed that a rotating credit society was at least something that women could collectively participate in: “We realized we don’t have anything as women that we do together here. We came up with the *stockvel* it’s just something for us women to do together.”

These institutions provided the structure for women to invest in their connections in case they need to rely on someone in a crisis in the future:

Veliswa (age 32): The only society I’m a member of is the funeral society where I pop up 100 Rand per month [roughly US\$12.50]. If there’s a funeral at home then we pool our money... There are people I know from home in the society so I became a member.

Interviewer: Do you think you could ever ask them for help if you needed any?

Veliswa: Yes I could ... I could ask them for money.

Also, the formation of these networks of potential support was not bound to political affiliation or group membership, but rather by being a woman and living in the same place:

Interviewer: How many people are involved?

Jongiwe (age 39): I think 20-something. 22? It’s R200 a month. It’s like every month you’re donating R200, R200—two people [actually donate per month]. For us to take it back, it must come with interest. You just collect and put it here. Then we ask who wants how much and they take it from there and it comes with interest. If there is something of a balance, we will take it to the shop and run to get our groceries ... At the end of October everyone has to pay all the interest on their balance.

Interviewer: Were you part of a *stockvel* when you first came in 2000?

Jongiwe: No we only started here last year. We didn’t do anything when we were in the squatter camp.

Interviewer: And is it all women from the ANC [African National Congress political party]?

Jongiwe: No we're doing it as neighbours. It's all the women from this section.

Choosing to emphasize such livelihood strategies signifies that bridging social capital within and across groups such as churches, rotating credit societies, or funeral societies is at least perceived to be vital to the survival efforts of these women in Sol Plaatje.

But there were only a few cases where women, like men, were able to fortuitously meet a very weak tie, grasp the bridging social capital they offered, and find a job. This was the case for Ayibongwe (age 42) as a woman she simply met on a train to Johannesburg proved to be a valuable source of social capital:

Ayibongwe: Yeah. I'm doing a piece job for a certain lady. I'm working 3 days as a domestic worker and 2 days as a tutor for children in maths, science, and English.

Interviewer: Now with the job for this lady, how did you find out about that job?

Ayibongwe: It was just a miracle! It was a God-given job.

When examining the types of bridging social capital accessed by women and men and the circumstances in which is developed or sought out, it is clear that women must acquire a greater variety of bridging social capital in order to survive—as Cliggett (2005) describes in the anthropological literature in the sub-Saharan African context and Lutter (2015) indicates in his formal social network analyses. The women of Sol Plaatje are disadvantaged by social and economic structures favoring men, and, therefore, need to work considerably harder to develop support systems and maintain their livelihoods.

DISCUSSION

Sol Plaatje is a place in the greater Johannesburg area where all individuals' livelihoods and futures are fragile and uncertain. In this setting, the connections women and men have made are important sources of social capital because they have led, or are expected to lead, to other necessary types of capital, such as employment, housing, or other basic needs. Whether or not these strategies for survival continue is beside the point when considering the value of the individuals—and thus, different sources of social capital—mentioned by respondents. But many of the differences in women's and men's survival strategies stem from the social and economic advantages that men have in Sol Plaatje, and in South Africa more generally.

The men of Sol Plaatje in this study, more often than not, have had their bonding sources of social capital almost unquestionably come through for them in times of need and they assume that they will be able to draw upon their bonding social capital as easily in the future. Also, the men in this study recalled how their sources of bridging social capital have often provided them with fruitful employment opportunities that promoted stability in their lives; rarely were these connections fostered for food, clothing, or shelter, unlike those of women. Due to the availability of construction work, mining, and other jobs involving heavy physical labour, it is conceivable that men have been embedded in network structures that have allowed them to develop bridging social capital and mobilize these connections at

important junctures in their lives, such as when they have been in need of employment. Given the well-known transience of the male, South African population, men might believe that family members—common sources of bonding social capital—will always be around for them in times of need, no matter where are, which is in part due to gendered norms favoring men in the first place.

While the women of Sol Plaatje, in this study, indicated that they often relied on sources of bonding social capital to acquire these resources, they also have developed a wide array of sources of bridging social capital—through other women in the community—in case they need support just for basic needs; this is likely to be the case in a context where women are socially and economically disadvantaged through male-dominated inheritance systems and labor markets. Although women may have mobilized their bonding social capital when establishing themselves in Sol Plaatje, these sources of social capital could be near exhaustion, and, thus, these women would need to diversify their connections—as Cliggett (2005) suggests—for an uncertain future, even despite an established, yet small, old-age pension system in South Africa. But, since the women of Sol Plaatje are not embedded in any lucrative employment sectors—which are dominated by men—where they would have a greater chance of developing bridging social capital (similar as found among rural Australian women by Hodgkin [2009]) that could secure their livelihoods, they must rely on other, similar women who offer minimal resources. The gendered disadvantages via bonding *and* bridging social capital are evident.

The mobilization of social capital is indeed gendered in this context, rather than simply different for women and men. Although it is not explicitly explored in this study, it appears that this gendered structure maintains inequalities between women and men; for women, the noted survival strategies via bonding and bridging social capital are simultaneously responses to, and perpetuations of these inequalities.

Yet regardless of how social capital is conceptualized, research has not often explored how having different sources of social capital and mobilizing them are not synonymous with “the size of the network of connections he [sic] can effectively mobilize” (Bourdieu 1986: 51). Most research evaluates either one’s potential network of support *or* one’s actual network of support from whom individuals have drawn resources. This is especially relevant if individuals’ livelihoods are contingent on potential sources of social capital—like a friend who *could* be called upon for help in acquiring a job, that may or may not be available, in the future—being translated into economic (or other types) of capital in order to survive. Potential sources of support may be just as important as the sources that have actually provided support. This might be a key feature of the gendered essence of social capital among these respondents in Sol Plaatje, since women have relied on family members in the past, but imply the uncertainty of receiving support in the future from family, due to the need to establish a wide network of support through bridging social capital. This is corroborated by men’s responses that family members have been and always will be there, and that while weaker—bridging connections—such as friends or acquaintances can be helpful in attainment employment, there is no immediate or distant need to rely on them because of the strong support continually available from kin. Distinguishing between one’s “*potential*” and

“actual” sources of social capital would seem to be an essential next step in advancing theory, although difficult to fully evaluate with these data.

The results of this study provide a base from which to devise future studies on gendered social capital—which is slowly growing (i.e., Brisson and Usher 2005; Burt 1998; Gold 1995; Lutter 2015; Mayoux 2001; Olomola 2002). For one, it is unknown how bonding and bridging social capital differentially advantage women and men in other ways, such as their mental health, since perceived social support is associated with lower anxiety and depression in stressful situations (Norris and Kaniasty 1996), as is township-life. Additionally, since women’s and men’s survival strategies differ from one another’s, it is possible that women’s and men’s survival strategies could actually complement one another. While sampling couples was not part of the research design, one could test to see whether couples maximize their social capital to altruistically benefit their households, in a twist on Becker’s (1991) family model. Age might also be a crucial factor to consider; elderly individuals who are no longer working or who are not near family members may not have the physical capabilities to develop new networks of support, compared to younger, more mobile individuals. It is also likely that marital status and number of children jointly impacted the types of network ties available to respondents. These factors undoubtedly interact with one another, potentially affecting the forms of social capital employed to acquire resources and develop safety nets. There likely is a nexus of gender, social capital, and power which exacerbates inequalities between women and men as well. Additional qualitative research could effectively address the mechanisms behind the way power is manifested when considering gender and social capital. More generally, pinpointing social and economic factors that are highly correlated with women’s and men’s structure of opportunities to acquire and utilize different types of social capital—and either survive or acquire upward mobility—is of utmost importance in this line of research. Approaching social capital research in this manner would further distinguish instances where there are only *differences* between women and men, and *gendered* differences in social capital acquisition and utilization.

The interview and ego network data provide insight into the larger social and economic dynamics of Sol Plaatje, but they have their limitations. The extent to which my presence as a white foreigner biased interviews remains unclear, but limitations pertaining to insiders and outsiders are common in interview data. The limitations of ego network data, particularly in Africa, have also been noted. For example, recent mortality within one’s network of support may influence other responses during an interview such as expected family size or infant and child mortality (Sandberg 2005; Sandberg et al. 2012). Further, since the interviews included a retrospective description of past resource-based networks, it is quite possible that some of these recollections were inaccurate and/or particular to the day of the interview.

Beyond methodological limitations, both internal and foreign-born migrants are select groups of individuals who are likely different from long-term residents in terms of health, motivations, and wealth—measures outside the aims of this study—and the sample could be biased across these lines. Finally, it is unclear as to how living in Sol Plaatje’s informal settlement, or government housing section, would impact women’s and men’s access to sources of bonding and bridging social capital.

Lastly, context undoubtedly matters in important ways. In Johannesburg, exclusion in community institutions (Landau and Freemantle 2010) or xenophobia (Landau 2011) are common themes in the city and may decrease individuals' abilities to make social connections that provide resources in the future. So it is possible that Johannesburg, as a city, has low levels of various forms of social capital. We do not yet know though how macro-level and micro-level social capital impact one another in this setting and whether it would be different in another major African city. It is even less clear whether the way gender moderates social capital in a Johannesburg township does so similarly in an impoverished part of a major city in the United States or Europe. We know that poor American women develop unique survival strategies through the reliance on "fictive kin" and a social safety net through a wide variety of constant reciprocal exchanges known as "swapping" (Stack 1974), and that there are some gendered differences in the levels of bonding social capital in low income neighbourhoods (Brisson and Usher 2005). Extended families' resources in such settings are often strained (Miller-Cribbs and Farber 2008), and these connections may diminish women's and men's networking abilities beyond the family (Gerstel 2011). However, and again, more research on how these pathways operate is necessary.

My analyses suggest that conventional understandings of social capital ought to be assessed through gender. This research from Sol Plaatje is only one case, but implies that well-known sociological theories continually need testing and refining. Assessing differences in how social capital is acquired along various demographic and structural lines in other contexts can only increase our understanding of *why* certain sources of social capital are utilized over others when it comes to understanding how social capital translates into human and other forms of capital. But without extending the variability of the social setting in theoretical explorations of social capital, our comprehension of how people negotiate their lives and difficult circumstances will remain limited.

This article provides insight into gendered social capital—an under-explored notion, even when considering the salience of the concept of social capital. It is not a matter of choice: women's and men's livelihood strategies are deeply embedded in racial, social, and economic inequalities in this Johannesburg township and many other settings around the world. While much more qualitative work still needs to be done, quantitative analyses of social capital will undoubtedly be improved by the iterative process of discovering its limitations through qualitative analyses, and applying the newfound knowledge back to quantitative work. It is necessary to use these methods to better understand how women and men differentially survive and strategize for the future in situations where absolute poverty is a fact of life—a component of nearly all societies and countries. In South Africa, where many urban dwellers are forcefully relocated by the government, or pushed out of a space due to the unavailability of work, women's and men's support networks are often in flux. With few viable social safety net policies for South Africa's most vulnerable populations, the effects of disrupted networks are magnified. This type of research can be used to garner the attention of South African policy makers for the development of a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by similar communities and the critical role that gender plays when it comes to ensuring the survival of members of these populations.

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