![William T. Grant Foundation logo]

William T. Grant
FOUNDATION

Inequality and Opportunity: The Role of Exclusion, Social Capital, and Generic Social Processes in Upward Mobility

EXCERPTS FROM THE FULL REPORT

Linda M. Burton and Whitney Welsh
Duke University

Empirical research on the poor in the U.S. has relied heavily on theoretical perspectives on social capital and socioeconomic mobility, but has rarely considered the conceptual frames on social exclusion used in the global discourse. Extant U.S. empirical studies fall woefully behind those in other countries (e.g., Australia) that simultaneously consider how organizational policies and practices, and the social interactions between the haves and have-nots, shape social exclusion and ultimately affect the garnering of social capital among the poor. Research designed to capture these dynamics is needed to expand our understanding of how social exclusion and the macro and micro processes associated with it are shaping the growing inequalities between and within populations in the U.S. and what factors might mitigate the deprivation of social capital among the poor.

Social capital is a key process in mitigating the effects of social exclusion as cause and consequence of poverty and is thus a critical resource for disadvantaged families seeking socioeconomic mobility (Brady, 2009; Lin, 2000; Silver, 1994; Wilson, 1987).

Beyond the common macro level sources of social exclusion (e.g., institutional racism) that contribute to poverty in the U.S., there are micro level social processes that govern social interactions both within and between groups of the "haves and the have-nots" that also shape poverty outcomes (Prus, 1987; Schwalbe et al., 2000).

These exclusion-laden processes preclude the poor's accumulation of social capital and comprise four generic social processes: othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management (Schwalbe et al., 2000). These processes are frequently represented in race and class discrimination behaviors and practices and implicitly involve members of society as a whole regardless of whether actors share the same geographic or physical space (Burton et al., 2010).

Because the social isolation and exclusion that the disadvantaged encounter is the cumulative result of these four mutually reinforcing processes, simply bringing different people into contact with each other will not be sufficient to generate bridging social capital (Briggs, Popkin, & Goering 2010). However, these processes are also not entirely insurmountable. Social interactions are highly contingent on context, at both the individual and organizational levels, and changing the contexts in which these processes are operating has the potential to disrupt (or exacerbate) their effects.

If U.S. policymakers hope to affect poverty in more prominent and sustained ways, they will have to consider the micro processes and "underground" nuanced practices around social exclusion, social capital, and socioeconomic mobility that the haves and have-nots are involved in, beyond those visible at macro-structural levels.

Social Exclusion

In the U.S., the first two decades of the new millennium ushered in growing spatial inequality and concentrated poverty, which was characterized by the uneven geographic spread of historically disadvantaged populations into segregated and isolated communities in inner cities, aging suburban communities, and rural small towns (Curtis, Voss, & Long, 2012; Lichter, Parisi, & Taquino, 2012; Lobao, Hooks, & Tickamyer, 2007).

The demography of inequality and the spatial distribution of poverty in U.S. bring a recurring story of American life to the fore. Indeed, whether they are documented citizens or not, Americans are either exposed to, turn a blind eye toward, or are deeply embedded in lived experiences that involve micro social processes that exclude the poor.

Social exclusion is arguably a process that serves as cause and consequence of poverty (Duck, 2012; Silver & Miller, 2006). According to Hunter and Jordan (2010, p. 245), "it is commonly understood to refer to multiple and often intersecting disadvantages (including disparities in economic as well as socio-political resources) and captures the relationship between individuals and society and hence the structural roots of disadvantage."

SOCIAL EXCLUSION IS CHARACTERIZED BY:

1) incomplete or unequal integration of the poor into society (Daly & Silver, 2008);

2) disadvantaged access to status, benefits, and the human capital building experiences (e.g., education) that should be rightfully afforded to human beings (Brady, 2009);

3) temporal domination by the privileged, which creates delays or sociotemporal marginalization in the poor receiving necessary assistance (e.g., Katrina victims) (Reid, 2013); and

4) from a relational perspective, "it entails social distance, isolation, rejection, humiliation, denial of participation, and a lack of social support networks" (Silver & Miller, 2006, p. 59).

Social Capital and Social Mobility

Social capital refers to resources that are accessible through social interactions and extended networks of social ties. Put another way, social capital denotes the value that can be extracted from social relations (Portes, 1998). Like other forms of capital, social capital is not evenly distributed in society (Lin, 2000). Rather, the social networks through which social capital flows develop in accordance with the homophily principle, which states that similar people are more likely to interact with each other than dissimilar people (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).

Different degrees of similarity between individuals, in turn, give rise to different types of social capital. Bonding social capital reinforces the similarities that exist between strong ties (e.g., family and close friends), which bolsters solidarity and strengthens support reciprocity. In contrast, bridging social capital reaches across gaps in the social structure to link heterogeneous groups, generally through weaker ties (e.g., acquaintances).

Studies have shown that bridging social capital has a particularly strong effect on the social mobility of the disadvantaged (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; O'Regan, 1993). There is even some research that suggests social capital has a greater impact than human capital on the fortunes of the poor (MacLeod, 2008). However, the disadvantaged generally possess few of these valuable bridging ties, due to persistent social isolation and exclusion across multiple domains (Wilson, 1997; Krivo et al., 2013; Tigges, Browne & Green, 1998).

The Reproduction of Social Exclusion:
Four Generic Processes

OTHERING

Othering refers to the processes by which individuals and groups manufacture identity by rhetorically distancing themselves from select categories of people who are perceived as different or inferior. These distinctions, in turn, enable people to refrain from interacting with Others or otherwise intervening in their lives. Schwalbe et al. (2000) highlight three types of othering that create and reproduce social inequality: oppressive, implicit, and defensive.

SUBORDINATE ADAPTATION

Subordinate adaptation denotes the behaviors and strategies that the disadvantaged employ to cope with their diminished status, which in turn often inadvertently perpetuate the existing social hierarchy.

BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE

Boundary maintenance indicates the activities that groups engage in to control and limit access to resources by Others, and thereby preserve their power and status.

EMOTION MANAGEMENT

Because inequality foments feelings, such as anger, resentment, despair, and sympathy, that threaten to destabilize the social order, these emotions must be managed. One way of managing emotions is by regulating discourse. Another means of managing emotions is through conditioning emotional subjectivity. This involves suppressing a natural emotional reaction by habitually reinterpreting the meanings assigned to the circumstances that trigger the emotion.

Context Matters

Organizational structure is vital to creating an environment that either stimulates or hinders bridging social capital. An organizational structure that actively facilitates interactions between its members is more likely to stimulate bridges than an arrangement that is disinterested, or one that encourages solitary pursuits. Organizations can also help to offset disparities in human capital between actors by providing opportunities and incentives to form bridging ties. However, individual interactions are ultimately what make or break the bridges. Just as social exclusion is created and reproduced by repeated individual interactions that eventually assume the character of structure, so too must local interactions bridge the divides if poverty, socioeconomic mobility, and the structure of inequality are to be altered.

Relationships and the ways that people connect with each other, pass on useful information to one another, think about each other's relevance and worth to society, and commit to leveling the playing field (e.g., quality education for all) in order for all citizens to have access to the "American Dream" are critical to the reduction of social exclusion of the poor. We are not naïve enough to suggest that public policy should mandate how people relate to each other, but such changes can, as Silver and Miller (2006) contend, alter the discourse about the poor and the privileged in ways that can lead to an openness about community-building as a major source of poverty reduction. If provided with the appropriate financial support and relationship and participation interventions, communities can guide families in building bonding and bridging social capital.

References

Brady, David. 2009. *Rich Democracies, Poor People: How Politics Explain Poverty.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Briggs, Xavier de Souza, Susan J. Popkin, and John Goering. 2010. *Moving to Opportunity: The Story of an American Experiment to Fight Ghetto Poverty.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Burton, Linda M., Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Victor Ray, Rose Buckelew and Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman, E. 2010. "Critical Race Theories, Colorism, and the Decade's Research on Families of Color. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72: 440-459.

Curtis, Katherine J., Paul R. Voss, and David D. Long. 2012. "Spatial Variation in Poverty-Generating Processes: Child Poverty in the United States." *Social Science Research* 41:146-159.

Daly, Mary and Hilary Silver. 2008. "Social Exclusion and Social Capital: A Comparison and Critique." *Theory and Society* 37:537-566.

Duck, Waverly. 2012. "An Ethnographic Portrait of Precarious Life: Getting By on Even Less. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 642:124 – 38.

Hunter, Boyd and Kirily Jordan 2010. "Explaining Social Exclusion: Towards Social Inclusion for Indigenous Austrailians. *Austrailian Journal of Social Issues,* 45: 243-265.

Krivo, Lauren J., Heather M. Washington, Ruth D. Peterson, and Mei-Po Kwan. 2013. "Social Isolation of Disadvantage and Advantage: The Reproduction of Inequality in Urban Space." *Social Forces* 92:141-164.

Lichter, Daniel T., Domenico Parisi and Michael C. Taquino. 2012. "The Geography of Exclusion." *Social Problems* 59:364-388.

Lin, Nan. 2000. "Inequality in Social Capital." *Contemporary Sociology* 29:785-795.

Lobao, Linda M., Gregory Hooks, and Ann R. Tickamyer. 2007. *The Sociology of Spatial Inequality.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

MacLeod, Jay. 2008. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood, Third Edition.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

McPherson, Miller, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M. Cook. 2001. "Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27:415-444.

O'Regan, Katherine M. 1993. "The Effect of Social Networks and Concentrated Poverty on Black and Hispanic Youth Employment." *Annals of Regional Science* 27:327-342.

Portes, Alejandro. 1998. "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:1-24.

Prus, Robert. 1987. "Generic Social Processes: Maximizing Conceptual Development in Ethnographic Research." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 16:250-293.

Reid, Megan. 2013. "Social Policy, 'Derservingness,' and Sociotemporal Marginaliztion: Katrina Survivors and FEMA." *Sociological Forum* 28:742-763.

Schwalbe, Michael, Sandra Godwin, Daphne Holden, Douglas Shrock, Shealy Thompson, and Michele Wolkomir. 2000. "Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality: An Interactionist Analysis." *Social Forces* 79:419-452.

Silver, Hilary. 1994. "Social Exclusion and Social Solidarity: Three Paradigms." *International Labor Review* 133:531-578.

Silver, Hilary, S.M. Miller. 2006 "From Poverty to Social Exclusion: Lessons from Europe." Pp. 57-70 in *Poverty and Race in America,* edited by C. Hartman. New York: Lexington Books.

Stanton-Salazar, Ricardo D. and Sandy M. Dornbusch. 1995. "Social Capital and the Reproduction of Inequality: The Formation of Informational Networks among Mexican-origin High School Students." *Sociology of Education* 68:116-135.

Tigges, Leann M., Irene Browne, and Gary P. Green. 1998. "Social Isolation of the Urban Poor: Race, Class, and Neighborhood Effects on Social Resources." *The Sociological Quarterly* 39:53-77.

Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.