

# What Is Social Capital?

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## Introduction: What Brings Us Together?

Before we explore this concept of social capital, take a moment and think about the groups to which you and your family members belong. Perhaps, your sister is a Girl Scout. Maybe, on Sundays, you belt out hymns as a member of your church choir. Perhaps, you're quickly reading this chapter before you and your group of girlfriends head out for a weekly happy hour, where you exchange stories about mutual friends who aren't at this gathering, or about eligible guys who are there, across the room, and catch up on last week's serious conversation about some hiring leads for your younger brother. Or, because one mutual friend was in an auto accident, you talk about crises, and your feeling that if a crisis ever happened to you or your family, the brothers with whom you served in the military would have your "six," and look after those you love. Regardless of what form it takes, you probably belong to a formal or informal group on which you rely for various things in life. Whether your membership in these groups is accidental or intentional, there is research about how and why these groups form, and what benefits we might get from them. All of these important considerations will be discussed under the heading "social capital."

Throughout this book, you will see examples of how the concept of social capital has evolved, how it is being used in different settings, and how it might fit into your life. This chapter will give you the grounding in the basics of social capital, what it is, who first introduced it, and how it is categorized. As you read, you will find that social capital is an umbrella term for relationships and benefits you may have (or have sought), and often took for granted. Hopefully, understanding social capital and its origins will help you recognize its influence in your life.

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## “Habits of the Heart”: Alexis de Tocqueville

In many ways, this book about American-style connectedness is owed to a Frenchman from the 1800s. His name was Alexis de Tocqueville, and early in his work, *Democracy in America*, he marveled at the connections among American people. A number of theorists have discussed de Tocqueville’s influence on contemporary ideas of social capital (Polson, Kim, Jang, Johnson, & Smith, 2013). As early as 1832, he made this observation:

“In their political associations the Americans, of all conditions, minds, and ages, daily acquire a general taste for association and grow accustomed to the use of it. There they meet together in large numbers, they converse, they listen to one another, and they ... are mutually stimulated to all sorts of undertakings. They afterwards transfer to civil life the notions they have thus acquired and make them subservient to a thousand purposes” (De Tocqueville 1832, Book 2, Ch. VII cited in Field, 2003, p. 30).

De Tocqueville later refers to the regular efforts of meeting together as “habits of the heart.” As De Tocqueville and others recognized, these bonds or interpersonal connections, are not just about feeling good; they are part of a larger exchange system that allows individuals, groups, and communities to improve themselves, and to believe in and to participate fully in this system that could ultimately make the nation better as a whole. These habits of the heart, like your grandmother reminding you to share your candies with your siblings, would force Americans to look beyond themselves, look beyond self-preservation to the bigger picture.

Fukuyama describes the value that De Tocqueville saw in voluntary associations for democracy:

“American society has always been characterized by a dense network of voluntary associations—private schools, hospitals, choral societies, literary clubs, Bible study groups, and private business organizations both large and small. Indeed, Alexis de Tocqueville saw this art of association as a key virtue of American democracy, one that served to moderate the political system’s inherent tendency toward individualism by schooling people in social cooperation and public-spiritedness” (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 91).

## Social Capital: One of Many

How can interpersonal connections have an impact on so many different areas of life? And, why do we think it’s important for healthy societies? These are critical questions for the Serve Here CT Project, and this chapter begins a discussion of them. In a nutshell, “capital” refers to different kinds of “currency,” not just money currency, but also such things as skill, knowledge, reputation for being trustworthy, and the like—that help you get to the positions/things that you want in life.

## *A Vocabulary Lesson, and Some New Capital for You!*

Before we begin to dig deeply into the idea of social capital, it is wise to step back and look at some terms that you will find throughout this book. As you read ahead, you will find that many different researchers have many different definitions of these terms (influenced by their academic field and topic area); use this very brief primer to get you started. While learning about social capital, one of the terms you will hear a great deal is *networks*. No, this is not ABC, NBC, and FOX, they are sets of interconnected people. These can be things like family, co-workers, fellow soldiers, parishioners, or Facebook friends. You spend time with these people; and you share interests and hobbies with them (although you may never fully share your cousin's obsession with the *Star Wars* movies). Another term you will see a great deal is (social/cultural) *norms*. This is just as it sounds—it's what is "normal," average, and usual for your community. It is what most people are doing. Time period, geographic location, social conditions (wars, Depression), social class, race, ethnicity, and religion may have an impact on norms. Norms can be formal—written as law, and norms can be implicit, for instance, seemingly without being told, you "just know" that it is "normal" to leave the house in the morning fully dressed. When norms are violated, there are *sanctions* often imposed. Think of these as punishments. They vary from the benign—your fellow passengers on your commute refusing to sit next to you because you forgot to wear pants—to the more severe, such as prison sentence for stealing a car. Like norms, sanctions are influenced by broader circumstances and may change over time. An example of a sanction that has changed over time and varies by national context might be capital punishment. See Amnesty International's (2015) statistics on death sentences and executions here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/0001/2015/en/>.

As you broaden your understanding of social capital, it is worth understanding the many forms of capital that are mentioned in newspapers or books, as well as in the visual media. As stated above, capital is "currency." Capital is a resource that is going to help you get acquire the things that help you survive (like food); or will improve your life (the house you bought for your family, getting your college education, your 401k); or just make you happy (that song you downloaded and have played 50 times this week). While capital sometimes takes the form of that jingle in your pockets; as often, it's something that is invisible but has very real impacts on your life. *Economic capital* roughly translates to what's in your bank account, your stock portfolio, your home/car/other possessions. *Human capital* is a term from business that can be understood as the value placed on you and the skillset you bring to your current job. This means that, while being a janitor is arguably as hard (or harder) than being a CEO, the skills CEOs are assumed to have are given a higher "price tag" because they are seen as more important or valuable to the business (and, potentially took more specialized training to acquire). Someone who is seen to be higher on the human capital scale will likely have a higher salary. The specialized training this CEO has lead us to the next form of capital—*cultural capital*—these

are the knowledge, skills, and education that you have. As with norms above, how these are viewed are influenced by broader societal forces. In a society where being formally educated is valued, being able to write your completed college degree on your job application may help you get a foot in the door where someone else could not. For instance, our CEO probably earned a college degree (or more) and was able to get a job, as she learned more work skills, and got raises, she probably bought some “power suits,” and learned which forks to use at a fancy dinner party. And, those forks skills will come in handy for the final form of capital—*social capital*. If cultural capital is “what you know”; social capital is “who you know.” The CEO, in addition to her degrees, may have something the janitor doesn’t have—wide and well-connected social networks. While your funny cousin’s Chewbacca impersonation may make him friends at a party, the CEO may have millionaires in her network who might be willing to invest in her newest business venture; or, she may have found out during a golf outing with colleagues about an up and coming stock. Through the support of her relationships with high-powered and well-placed people, the CEO is able to make her life better, and more able to reach her professional and personal goals.

The power of these various forms of social capital is seen with many of our modern Presidents. For example, while some of the early Presidents of the US did not attend college, a significant number of the most recent Presidents of the United States have attended Ivy League institutions for their undergraduate education (Desilver, 2014). These Ivy League colleges as well as major public universities appear to provide their graduates with the social and cultural capital that leads to significant economic success.

In the References section, there are several citations that offer definitions of social capital. A number of themes within those definitions overlap and are key to the Project—trust, reciprocity, collective action, and networking. When you are born, you are born into a number of communities, or social networks. You are brought to your networks for different reasons (you are born into a family, join a professional organization, join a volunteer group), but each of the members of the networks have shared values, and largely share an understanding of the norms and sanctions that govern interactions within that network; this allows you to develop *trust* with the others in the group. That trust grows stronger through another element of social capital—*reciprocity*—this is the “treat others as you want to be treated” rule. Social networks work best when we can trust that others are individually behavior according to the rules and are using those roles to govern their interactions with others. This also means accepting when members of the group punish you for violating a norm. Because members of a network have similar values, norms and goals, they often work towards common goals, goals that often increase the knowledge, resources, and prestige of the network—this is *collective action*, and it is a common term across most social capital definitions. Finally, a key term that is connected to social capital is *networking*. These are the moments when you connect with others inside and outside of your own networks, in an effort to learn new things, to meet new people, and perhaps to improve your personal/professional life.

There is a great deal of research about the history of social capital and several fields (sociology, economics, political science) have contributed to our increased understanding of the role of social capital in American society and other societies. While researchers mostly agree that it exists and it could confer benefits to those who participate, there is less agreement on what compels people—in societies as diverse as the human population—to participate in social capital networks. Boix and Posner (1998) present three possibilities (one new, two summarizing previous research), to hypothesize the origin of social capital;

“The first, and most commonly cited, explanation for the origins of social capital points to experimental research that shows how **stable co-operation can emerge spontaneously among otherwise uncooperative actors when they value future pay-offs and expect to interact again and again an indefinite number of times** (Axelrod) ... A second explanation builds on a distinction between collaborative interactions that take place in associations that produce public goods and collaborative interactions that take place in associations that produce private goods. In **associations that produce public goods, like parent–teacher associations and neighbourhood watch groups, individuals have strong incentives to free-ride and enjoy costlessly the benefits of better schools or safer streets that these organizations provide...** The ability of such enterprises to get off the ground will therefore **depend on pre-existing norms of reciprocity...** A third explanation emphasizes the ability of a **sufficiently powerful third-party enforcer to compel otherwise untrusting individuals through the threat of force or the creation of institutions to facilitate co-operation, to overcome collective action dilemmas that beset them**” (pp. 687–688, emphasis added).

In the first two definitions, the authors recognize foresight on the part of participants. They see the benefits (personal or otherwise) of these positive interactions both in the sense of receiving benefits as well as giving benefits to others. Social capital in some ways becomes an elaborate system of IOUs that we cash in various ways—for direct favors, or just a general feeling (e.g., that feeling of safety the neighborhood watch group provides). In their third definition, they suggest an outside force moving people to develop the behaviors we call social capital. Think back to your grandma seeing you share your candies; she was more likely to give you more later since you were “such a sweet girl” in sharing. Each of these ideas will play a part as we construct a common working definition of social capital for the Project.

## Levels of Capital

As you read through the many definitions of capital, you will see that capital extends from the individual level to levels beyond ourselves. This is in keeping with the De Tocqueville tradition, in many ways, the quotes above highlighted his belief that the one-to-one interactions are connected to a broader American social ethos.

Halpern (and colleagues) defines these three layers of social capital as micro-, meso-, and macro-level that will be useful in our study of the term:

“There are also three levels of analysis for social capital: micro, meso and macro (though many social capital scholars only recognize the meso-level as social capital). At the micro-level, social

capital consists of close ties to family and friends. Meso-level social capital refers to communities and associational organizations. Macro-level social capital consists of state and national-level connections such as common language and traffic customs” (as cited in Reeder, n.d.).

Sometimes the movement between the layers is less than fluid, but this lack of fluidity does not result in a collapse of the system. Halpern (2005) states that there is:

“some functional equivalence between the different levels” (p. 19) and declining social capital on one level can sometimes be compensated for increases on another level. For instance, if people in a society begin to have weaker ties to their family (declining micro-level social capital), this loss could be functionally offset by an increase in participation in community organizations (meso-level) or more fervent nationalism (macro-level)...” (Halpern, 2005).

In other words, while your dreams of “having it all” might include a family with which to share your wealth, you need not be successful on all levels to gain some advantage. Someone who is disconnected (by choice or by chance) from their micro-level social capital (their family), can still go on and have a full life. As adolescents or adults, they may go on to create a different kind of family for themselves—perhaps by joining a religious community, a political party, or the military.

Thinking further about the macro/meso/micro distinction, Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls (1997) have called this macro-level view of social capital **collective efficacy**.

Collective efficacy is differentiated from social capital this way: “At the neighborhood level, however, the willingness of local residents to intervene for the common good depends in large part on conditions of mutual trust and solidarity among neighbors...In sum, it is the linkage of mutual trust and the willingness to intervene for the common good that defines the neighborhood context of collective efficacy” (p. 919).

Later chapters will discuss macro-level in more detail, such as Sampson’s and Graif’s (2009) discussion of collective efficacy and neighborhood social capital and Ferguson’s idea of family and community capital (Ferguson, 2006), (see also McPherson et al., 2014).

Halpern (2005) sees social capital as being comprised of:

“Social networks and the norms and sanctions that govern their character. It is valued for its potential to facilitate individual and community action” (p. 4), and it is comprised of three fundamental pieces: “a *network*, a cluster of *norms, values and expectations* that are shared by group members; and *sanctions*—punishments and rewards—that can help to maintain the norms and networks” (p. 10).

Halpern’s work sets the stage for this book and Project. In developing these ideas, we focus on the work of three major thinkers, James Coleman, Robert Putnam, and Pierre Bourdieu.

Fukuyama (1995) sees Coleman’s (1998) approach as one of trust and cooperation (reminiscent of De Tocqueville’s ideas about “habits of the heart”): “what the sociologist James Coleman has labeled social capital—that is, the component of human capital that allows members of a given society to trust one another and cooperate in the formation of new groups and associations” (p. 90).

The Saguaro Seminar (2012) strongly focused on networks, and defines social capital this way:

The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value. Social capital refers to the collective value of all “social networks” [who people know] and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other [“norms of reciprocity”].

Tzanakis’ (2013) summary of Pierre Bourdieu’s essential ideas is useful:

“According to Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) social capital is defined as ‘the aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition’. Social capital for Bourdieu is related to the size of a network and the volume of past accumulated social capital commanded by the agent” (p. 3).

Bassett and Moore offer a simple distinction among these three major social capital theorists (Bassett & Moore, 2013) (emphasis added):

“Bourdieu was interested in the distribution of social capital within society and explained that like economic or cultural capital, **social capital was unequally distributed among individuals and groups**. Coleman’s approach to social capital was similar to Bourdieu’s in that they both emphasized the importance of **examining social networks**. Rather than considering structural measures of social networks, as Bourdieu and Coleman suggested, Putnam focused on **rational factors** including norms of trust and reciprocity” (p. 686).

Bassett and Moore draw further distinctions by dividing the approaches to social capital into two schools: “networks” and “communitarian”.

“Communitarian approaches to social capital typically include **psychosocial or cognitive constructs** (e.g., perceptions of trust or cohesion) as well as indicators of community participation... In [Putnam’s] definition, social capital encompasses five main principles: (1) ‘community networks’; the number and density of voluntary, state, and personal networks, (2) ‘civic engagement’; the amount of participation in civic networks, (3) ‘local civic identity’; the degree to which there is a sense of belonging, solidarity, and equality between community members, (4) ‘reciprocity and cooperation norms’; the degree to which there is a sense of obligation to help others, as well as feelings that others will reciprocate in the future, and ‘community trust’; (5) the degree of trust held by individuals within the network” (pp. 686–687) (emphasis added).

Bassett and Moore go on to discuss networks:

“A network approach, as represented by the work of Bourdieu, defines social capital as resources that are accessed within social networks for the benefit of individuals or groups. Network approaches to social capital measure directly how and to whom individuals are connected with their social structures by investigating the size, range, and diversity of individuals’ social connections, and the resources potentially available within those networks” (p. 687).

In other words, someone taking a communitarian approach might not only take a count of how many groups you are a member of, but might also ask you about your feelings about the members, try to gauge or sense of how well you trust your neighbors. In a network approach, one might map out on a board, whom you know and where they are placed (Are all your friends lower level employees, or do you have CEOs in your networks?).

Related to these ideas about communitarianism, Uphoff, Pickett, Cabieses, Small, and Wright (2013) offer a distinction between structural and cognitive forms of social capital:

“Cognitive social capital refers to the social cohesion keeping networks together, measured by subjective indicators such as trust, social support and neighbourhood satisfaction. Structural social capital refers to objectively measurable activities and resources such as participation in neighborhood activities, membership of a religious association or election turnout. It facilitates sharing of knowledge and collective action” (p. 2).

In their research about the role of social capital in health behaviors, Nieminen et al. (2013) have defined social capital this way:

“Social capital characterizes the relations and interactions between individuals and groups. Social capital can be conceptualized and measured at the collective or individual level. Collective social capital is seen to arise in communities and neighbourhoods and is examined as a ‘collective property’. At individual level, social capital is seen as a personal resource that emerges from social networks where individuals have better access to information, services and support” (p. 613).

The connection between health and social capital is being actively explored and often takes the aforementioned communitarian approach (see chapter by Chilenski & Summers in this book, in press). In their article, Nieminen et al. (2013) chose to measure the *existence* of social capital in three ways, these ways let you know if you have found that trusted group: “These dimensions were *social support* (the belief that emotional support and practical help would be provided when needed), *social participation and networks* (social activities and meeting friends), and *trust and reciprocity* (trust in people, absence of mistrust, feelings of reciprocity, feeling safe in the neighborhood)” (p. 3).

## Forms of Social Capital: Bridging, Bonding, and Linking

In addition to having layers upon which social capital can be placed, there are different kinds of social capital that are useful to know. The first two distinctions are **bridging and bonding**. As with the discussion of social capital itself, there are a few different views on how to understand the role of bridging and bonding capital. A few useful ones are highlighted here.

Szreter and Woolcock (2004) as cited in Kirkby-Geddes, King, and Bravington (2013) offer one explanation for the difference between the two.

“**Bonding** social capital refers to trusting and cooperative relations between members of a network who see themselves as being similar in terms of their shared social identity. **Bridging** social capital, by contrast, comprises relations of respect and mutuality between people who know they are not alike in some socio-demographic (or social identity) sense (differing by age, ethnic group, for example)” (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004, as cited in Kirkby-Geddes et al., 2013).

Polson et al. (2013) describe bridging versus bonding, with an eye towards community work (in the case of bridging):

“Bonding social capital is comprised of the dense social networks that exist within relatively homogenous groups. The existence of this type of social capital contributes to a strong sense of group identity and social cohesion. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, is comprised



of social ties connecting individuals across group boundaries. It is this form of social capital that is theorized to be particularly valuable to communities because it not only connects individuals but also leaders to work together for their community” (p. 761).

Weller (2009) offers an excellent explanation of the difference between bridging and bonding capital, using the difference between the approaches of Putnam and Woolcock (another prominent social capital theorist):

“Central to exploring the connections between social capital and identity rest questions about the nature and strength of ties. In recognizing different forms of social capital, (Putnam, 2000) adopts a two-fold typology comprising *bridging* and *bonding* elements, whereby the former refers to exclusive, inward-looking connections amongst homogenous groups, whilst the latter denotes outward-looking networks between different groups” (for other forms, see Woolcock, 2001, p. 874).

Remember at the beginning of the chapter, when I told you think about who had your “six” (aka, your back)? Those people are probably examples of bonding social capital. You have something in common with them, you feel free to be yourself around them, but they might help you become a better version of yourself within your own community. Bridging, on the other hand, is more like that old roommate’s uncle who works at the bank and whom you didn’t know until you were introduced. That introduction, which led to your internship created a bridge between your regular lifestyle and that to which you might aspire.

Onyx and Leonard’s (2010) exposition of the difference takes it a step further and shines the light on poverty and social capital. Bonding networks help you make it through the day/life without too many surprises, with the possible result of not gaining much more capital than your friends and family. Bridging capital increases the possibility of career development, often spoken of as one generation’s hope for the succeeding generations. They write:

“Bonding social capital appears to be characterized by dense, multifunctional ties and strong localized trust. It is consistent with (Coleman, 1998) research in which the effectiveness of community networks depended on close, intersecting, multifunctional ties. Bridging social capital appears to be characterized by weak ties as described by (Granovetter, 1986), as well as a thin, impersonal trust of strangers. (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000) **argue that while localized, bonding social capital operates as an effective defense strategy against poverty, the necessary condition for real economic development entails a shift to other, looser networks. Thus, a shift from ‘getting by’ to ‘getting ahead’ entails a shift from bonding to bridging networks**” (p. 382) (emphasis added).

One more important distinction about bridging social capital is made. That is the highlighting of **linking social capital**. This is, according to Chilenski, Ang, Greenberg, Feinberg, & Spoth (2013):

“Linking is a special type of bridging social capital that describes the connections and relationships between individuals or organizations that have different levels of authority or power (Kawachi, Kim, Coutts, & Subramanian, 2004; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Linking connections are vertical and can help individuals access resources (Dominguez, 2010).

Linking highlights power differences—the goal is to connect you with someone who has likely already achieved a level of success. This person might be older, and more experienced in your desired field.

## Dark Side of Social Capital

Finally, we must address the darker side of social capital. Much of Bourdieu's interest in capital was focused on a differential distribution of it—along with other forms of capital—across groups. The critiques of social capital and difference came as early as the 1970s. This “dark side” of social capital was highlighted in the economist Loury's work in the 1970s. He believed that laws against employer biases, and the concomitant equal opportunity statutes, were not alone able to address and eliminate racial inequalities that were facing Black families. Two reasons stood, in Loury's belief, in the way of this, according to Portes (1998):

“[F]irst, the inherited poverty of black parents, which would be transmitted to their children in the form of lower material resources and educational opportunities; second, the poorer connections of young black workers to the labor market and their lack of information about opportunities” (p. 4).

In other words, Loury worried that, in spite of laws addressing discrimination, Blacks (and other disadvantaged groups) might not even be in the running for new jobs. They grew up in poorer communities that would not be as likely to give them access to good schools and, without any participation in the groups for wealthier families, their parents might not have any way to “hook up” their kids with plum internships or other possibilities. They just don't have friends in “high places.” Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods* (2011) also offers support to Loury's earlier arguments about families.

Some have critiqued Coleman's approach to social capital, and see his approach as blaming those without capital as being in part responsible for their lack of networks. For instance, Tlili and Obsiye (2014) offer a detailed critique of Coleman's oft-cited approach:

“In Coleman's image, those people who do not have access to social capital *happen* to be living outside social capital-rich locations marked by ‘social disorganization’. This causal primacy given to ‘social disorganization’ harks back to the US academic and policy discourses of the underclass and the culture of poverty...**Social capital essentially prescribes how social agents ought to conduct themselves; what choices they ought to make to avoid cycles of dysfunction and tap into functional networks and the rewards that come with them; and how and where to be functionally ‘in’; and being ‘in’ here is to be understood in a moral as well as a territorial sense**” (p. 567) (emphasis added).

In other words, Tlili and Obsiye believe that Coleman's work might cause disadvantaged families to be unfairly judged: Have you ever seen a day time talk show where someone in the audience said to a teen mom: “If you *really cared* about your kids, you'd go to college and get a better job instead of being on welfare”? Not only is the mom being chastised for not growing up in a community where she is connected to people who have good jobs (and is therefore struggling to use her networks to find steady work), but she is being seen through a moral lens—she is a bad person because she cannot provide a “better” life for her kids. This is often connected to discussions about the (supposedly rejected) “culture of poverty” thesis (National Poverty Center, n.d.) For more on the culture of poverty see the National Poverty Center website: [http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/policy\\_briefs/brief21/](http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/policy_briefs/brief21/).

John Field explains further (Field, 2003):

“There are, moreover, at least two types of inequality involved in respect of social capital. First, it has been shown that the most affluent and well-educated are also generally those with the highest number of connections. Second, though, there are also qualitative differences in the nature of people’s networks” (p. 82).

Field recognizes that those in the upper classes are probably afforded more networking opportunities (they may grow up in sports clubs, churches, after school clubs, summer camps, etc.), and that those opportunities produce “better” results. This is not to say that a rich person’s friends are better than a poor person’s friends; rather, the rich person may have a more well-placed group of friends who can offer more solid leads in career development.

As with all forms of capital, we can understand the dark side on a macro-, meso-, and micro-level. In Woolcock’s (1998) work on social capital and economic development, he highlights the ways in which contemporary ideas about the positive economic effects of social capital are limited; his work is particularly useful for thinking about communities or nations that are disadvantaged:

“I propose that a community’s prospects for effecting sustainable, equitable, and participatory economic development are low where: (1) class, sex, and ethnic inequalities are widespread, increasing and legitimated; (2) poverty is endemic, unchecked by social safety nets, and difficult to escape through stable employment; (3) uniform laws are weak, unjust, flaunted, or indiscriminately enforced; (4) polities are not freely and fairly elected or voters have few serious electoral choices; (5) dominant and subordinate groups have little shared stake in common outcomes; (6) war, famine, rampant inflation, disease, or chronic under-employment undermine a basic sense of order and predictability; and (7) minorities are overtly or covertly discriminated against” (p. 182).

Woolcock’s (1998) work helps to understand the struggles in many modern societies, where we see disadvantaged groups who may be less able to get ahead, in spite of their best individual efforts. It is often difficult for advantaged persons to recognize the social barriers that hamper even highly talented minority group members.

## Our Common Working Definition of Social Capital

Authors of the several chapters of this book met in advance and agreed on common definitions of social capital that will be used by each of them, as a point of departure in their discussions. As with any working definition, ours is a definition in process; it is intended to aid our thinking about this protean topic and guide a field research project to test whether its implications can be empirically verified.

*Social capital refers to the connections among individuals such that, over time, a social network is created in which people come to expect mutual support and trust. This leads to: a) potential increases in each individual’s physical health and social-emotional well-being, as well as, b) potential increases in civic engagement and employment in the community of which they are a part, both contributing to a healthier and more effectively functioning society.*

## Conclusion

Social capital is the “glue” that holds us together and that keeps us working together for the betterment of our communities, as well as for ourselves. We can work within our own groups (bonding), or work across groups (bridging). Sometimes, in pursuit of our goals, we have to reach outside of our comfort zone and ask for help from higher groups (linking), but we are inextricably linked in a circle of social capital, and have regular opportunities to give back to others as well as to be assisted by them. We can view this concept at the interpersonal level as well as the group and community level. We can observe social capital in operation, both through our own intentions (to network, to be trustworthy, etc.) and through impersonal social forces (group problem solving, collective efficacy, etc.). While there are critiques of this concept, it continues to have relevance in our communities even though we have to work toward resolving all of the inequalities mentioned above, and the chapters that follow explain further how it is understood in various arenas of social, political, and economic life.

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