The Role of Social Capital: Bridging, Bonding or Both?

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INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit scholars have investigated several theoretical avenues in their search for an understanding of the role of nonprofit organizations in society. Some discussions have concentrated on the economic role of nonprofit organizations focusing on contribution to GDP (Stewart, 1996, Weisbrod, 1998), job growth (Hall & Banting, 2000), and the labour force value of volunteer work (Day & Devlin, 1996; Duchesne, 1989). Other discussions have considered the role from the perspective of contribution to society in terms of social service provision, and recreational and cultural enrichments beyond what can be provided by the for profit or government sectors (Hall & Banting, 2000, Kramer, 2000, Salamon & Anheier, 1998). Yet, a third scholarly focus has been to investigate the role of voluntary organizations in developing and maintaining social capital. With the publication of Putnam's (2000) book, *Bowling Alone*, this concept has become the topic of increasing academic discourse, because of the connection that he makes between voluntary associations, social capital and economic development. Indeed, Putnam (1993, 1995) and Fukuyama (1995) conclude that social capital is a precondition for economic prosperity.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of voluntary organizations as bridgers and bonders in society and the implications of this role in social and economic development.

Review of Literature

Social Capital Perspectives

Social capital is "a broad term encompassing the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit" (Woolcock, 1998, pg. 155). It is precisely because the term is so broad, this it has sparked so much debate. Onyx and Bullen (2000) describe it as a "slippery" concept with roots in several theoretical traditions. Much of this definitional debate has focused on concerns about the use, context and impact of social capital. Greeley (1997) asserts that social capital as a concept has been misused in American social science, and is not an appropriate measure of the civic health of society. He believes it is best conceptualized as "…an analytic tool suitable for the investigation of specific social structures….[not a]….weapon for those who wish to indulge in the popular game of lamenting the things that are allegedly wrong with this country"…..(pg. 593). Portes (1998) points out that because the context for social capital has expanded beyond the individual to include both communities and nations, the result is a circular argument with social capital being simultaneously both a cause and an effect. Newton (1997) also raises a chicken and egg problem associated with social capital. He asks whether it is the social networks that generate the level of trust that is necessary for a civil society, or whether the existence of widespread trust is the reason why social networks develop? Indeed, scholars do not agree about whether social capital is even a good thing. Greeley (1997) and Portes and Landolt (1996) point out that social capital has its downside in that it enables groups to exclude outsiders and demands conformity.

Despite the debate about the use, context and impact of social capital, Onyz and Bullen (2000) were able to identify five themes that were consistently mentioned by scholars studying this concept. The first is that social capital refers to networks, that is, lateral associations that vary in density and occur among both individuals and groups. The second is that social capital is based on reciprocity defined as the expectation that in the long-or short-term, kindnesses and services will be returned. The third theme is trust. It "entails a willingness to take risks in a social context based on a sense of confidence that others will respond as expected…." (pg. 24). The fourth theme is that social capital is based on social norms, the unwritten shared values that direct behaviour and interaction. The final theme is personal and collective efficacy, "the active and willing engagement of citizens within a participative community" (pg. 25). Onyx and Bullen conclude that while these are the dimensions identified as being components of social capital, they may be distributed in different intensities in different communities.

In their review article, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) present four perspectives on how these dimensions of social capital are manifested in society: the communitarian view, the networks view, the institutional view and the synergy view. The *communitarian* view presents social capital as an entity that is inherently good, and thus there exists a positive relationship between the amount of social capital in a community and its overall welfare. This perspective seems to highlight the importance of "bonding" social capital, that is, the interpersonal solidarity that occurs more easily among homogeneous groups who share a collective orientation (Wuthnow, 2002).

The *networks* perspective is broader in that it acknowledges the downside of social capital and presents it as a more complex concept; one that encompasses both vertical and horizontal associations and includes linkages between individuals and among organizations. According to this view, the "bonding" aspect of social capital is based on strong intracommunity ties that reinforce a sense of identity and common purpose. The "bridging" aspect involves weaker intercommunity ties that cross religious, class, age, ethnic and economic groups. According to this view, economic development takes place as individuals move from bonding organizations that help individuals "get by" by assisting them in leveraging community assets to bridging organizations that help individuals acquire the skills and resources to overcome community limitations and "get ahead".

The *institutional* view suggests that civil society is a product of the political, legal and institutional environment. While the communitarian and networks views present social capital as an independent variable, in the institutional view, it is a dependent variable. For example, Knack and Keefer (1997) found that while membership in formal and informal organizations builds trust and civic-minded behaviour, both necessary conditions for economic prosperity, membership in formal groups was not directly related to economic performance. They explain this by noting that the members of an association are more likely to be part of a homogenous group with "thick" ties (Newton, 1997). "Thin" ties are found between groups that are heterogeneous from each other. So the stronger the bonding ties within the organization, the higher the trust, which in turn weakens the trust and cooperation that may occur between diverse groups.

According to Woolcock and Narayan, the *synergy* view attempts to integrate the networks and institutional views. Its proponents emphasize the importance of complementarity, that is, mutually supportive relations between societal sectors, and embeddedness, the nature and extent of ties. In well-functioning states, there are high levels of bridging social capital. Governments in this environment explicitly build bridges to excluded groups and thus increase the likelihood that the marginalized and the vulnerable have access to the required resources and services.

Scholars in each school of thought appear to make a distinction between different forms of social capital according to whether the networks are dense and within homogenous groups (bonding), or less dense and between heterogeneous groups (bridging). The next section will identify some of the issues related to bridging and bonding.

Bridging and Bonding

A number of scholars have investigated the role of bonds and ties and their impact on society. For example, Burt (1992) emphasizes the importance of open rather than closed networks and argues that the area between dense regions of networks, areas he calls "structural holes", present opportunities for the greatest economic return. Granovetter (1973) discusses the notion of strong ties versus weak ties in getting a job. He suggests that it is easier to find a job through a weak tie because this type of "bridging" tie links two networks together that would otherwise not be connected. A strong tie, on the other hand, is more restrictive because the links are more interconnected and more overlapping. While these strong ties reinforce cohesion, they also include a more rigid set of norms and are more impervious to new information (Coleman, 1988).

The consensus seems to be that bonding is based on dense networks and multiplex relationships (Leonard & Onyx, 2003), and occurs more easily among groups whose membership is homogeneous and who associate with each other over a period of time. Thus, the focus of the group is on the needs and interests of its members (Wuthnow, 2002), and group loyalty is valued. Bridging, on the other hand, spans different groups and includes less dense networks (Wuthnow, 2002). Because bridging links heterogeneous groups, reciprocity may be more important and thus, working together is more instrumentally-based and the extent may depend on perceived benefits (Leonard & Onyx, 2003).

Onyx and Bullen (2000) investigated how the dimensions of social capital are distributed in five communities in Australia. They found that rural communities ranked significantly higher on participation in local community, feelings of trust and safety and neighbourhood connections than did urban communities. They conclude that the social capital in rural communities is more bonding in that the networks are dense and multiplex, exhibit long-term reciprocity, thick trust, shared norms and less instrumentality. On the other hand, urban communities have a significantly higher sense of collective or personal efficacy and a higher tolerance for diversity. This bridging social capital is based on large loose networks with relatively strict reciprocity, thinner or a different kind of trust, a greater risk of norm violation and more instrumentality.

Wuthnow (2002) further explores the features of social capital by identifying two types of bridging social capital. Identity-bridging social capitals spans groups differentiated culturally, for example by race or ethnicity. On the other hand, status-bridging social capital is vertical in nature in that it links groups differentiated by power, influence, wealth and prestige. His research suggests that membership in a religious congregation is associated with status-bridging social capital because of the broad socio-economic composition of most congregations. Interestingly, the data from the Social Capital Benchmark Survey (March 2001) are not so supportive of the bridging nature of religious groups. Its data show that those high in religiosity are generous in giving and volunteering, but low on measures of social action and tolerance. It concludes that the social capital in religious communities is more likely to be bonding than bridging.

Clearly, the nature of bridging and bonding is complex and is dependent on a number of factors including the mandate of the organization, its geographic location, and the composition of its membership. Research done to date suggests that different dimensions of social capital are more prominent in particular community types or organizational settings. The next section will explore the role of voluntary organizations in the social capital debate.

Role of Voluntary Organizations in Social Capital

Most often social capital is traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville who believed that the opportunity for face-to-face interaction provided by participation in voluntary organizations not only teaches essential civics skills, such as trust, compromise and reciprocity, but also binds society together by creating bridges between diverse groups (de Tocqueville, as summarized by Newton, 1997). These bridges are viewed as difficult to create because they necessitate people going outside their social circles (Wuthnow, 2002).

Leonard and Onyx (2003) explore the role of strong and weak ties in the context of voluntary organizations. Their qualitative study was conducted in three different communities in New South Wales with respondents who had some association with community or voluntary organizations. The conventional wisdom is that strong ties are associated with bonding and weak ties are associated with bridging, but Leonard and Onyx's findings do not support this conclusion. Their analysis indicates that bridging social capital associated with voluntary organizations is in fact dependent on strong, not weak ties. It is more likely that two different networks will link if they can work through a trusted intermediary. Bridging using loose ties is only possible when the linking person is a professional who is trusted because his/her status provides legitimacy and credibility, and he/she has demonstrated commitment.

Newton (1997) suggests that the impact of voluntary organizations on social capital depends on the type of organization. For example, highly formalized bureaucratic organizations may have less impact because there is not much involvement of members in the daily activities. Instead members pay a fee to access services or benefits or maintain a symbolic attachment to the organization because of its support of a particular social cause. This research highlights the role of face-to-face organizational involvement in the development of trust.

There is also a question of the relative importance of voluntary organizations compared to other societal structures promoting social capital. Marsden and Campbell (1983) found that emotional intensity is a better indicator of tie strength than duration and frequency of contact. Thus, when considering the importance of voluntary organizations as the "glue" that holds society together, it may be that participation in school, family work and community may have stronger internal effects because they take up more time and involve stronger emotional commitment (Newton, 1997).

Onyx and Bullen (2000) would agree that voluntary organizations do not have a monopoly on the development of social capital. Their research indicates that social capital can be produced anywhere there are dense lateral networks involving voluntary engagement, trust and mutual benefit. While voluntary organizations are important so are informal networking among friends and neighbours, the workplace and the educational system.

The Role of Voluntary Organizations in Bridging and Bonding

Research has shown that voluntary organizations fulfill different functions in different societies from adversarial and advocacy to supplementing what other sectors do not provide to full partnership (Young, 2000; Salamon, 1995). Others have pointed out that voluntary organizations reflect the prevailing ideologies of the state (Van Til, 1988). In this paper, we propose that the role of voluntary organizations in bonding and bridging differs in different social contexts: a) in a knowledge-based economy; b) in a culture of partnerships; and c) among different voluntary organizations serving different ethnic and gender constituents.

a) Knowledge-based Economy

In *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam investigates the trends in social capital in the US and concludes that civic engagement is declining and Americans are disengaging, a situation with long-term negative consequences. Other scholars have taken issue with Putnam's conclusions either because of flaws in his data analysis (Ladd, 1996), or his conceptualization of social capital as always positive (Portes & Landolt, 1996).

For example, although Silicon Valley is arguably one of the most successful regional economies in the US, Putnam's theories do not seem to apply in this location. As Cohen and Fields (2000) point out, this economic success story has occurred in an environment with no deep history, no family ties, and none of the features of social capital, including voluntary associations identified by civic engagement theorists as essential. Instead of networks of civic engagement, Silicon Valley has networks of innovation. The social trust that is so much a feature of Putnam's social capital, is different in Silicon Valley (Cohen & Field, 2000). Thus, we ask whether the role of social capital is different in a knowledge-based economy.

Richard Florida's (2002) investigation of the creative class indicates that "quality of place" is not necessarily defined in terms of social capital and social cohesion. His research demonstrates that for the creative class, diversity and tolerance are the most important characteristics. Florida, Cushing and Gates (2002) reanalyzed Putnam's data from the

perspective of creativity, innovation and competition and found that locations with low levels of innovation scored high on social capital and those with high levels of innovation tended to have below average levels of social capital. These results contradict Putnam's assertion that strong social networks fuel innovation and increase economic development. Strong ties can insulate a community from new information and new ideas. Communities with weak ties, in contrast, allow new information to flow in and are more likely to accept newcomers with different ideas (Granovetter, 1973; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Coleman, 1988). This diversity and cross-fertilization allow creativity to flourish.

Florida (2002) also raises the concern that American society may be dividing into two solitudes. The first is the high tech, low social capital community, full of excessively individualistic people uninterested in politics, community or virtually anything outside their own lives. By the same token, this group is very involved with stoking the American economic engine and is most responsible for the creativity and innovation seen in the last two decades of the 20th century. The other solitude is represented by close-knit, church-based, high social capital communities filled with working people and rural dwellers who feel increasingly marginalized in this global economy. One way of expressing this has been the development of a new set of voluntary organizations that are advocating against some of the features of this new economy (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003).

What then is the role of the voluntary organization? Mancour Olson (1986) talks about "institutional sclerosis". By this he means the inability of organizations that grew and prospered in one era to adopt new patterns and structures that are necessary for a new era. Putnam (2000) bemoans the demise of social capital in America and seems to hold up the tight knit communities with high social capital as a model for civic engagement, collaboration and ultimate economic prosperity. Florida (2002), on the other hand, believes that new forms of civic involvement are required. Group attachments are breaking down and the community itself must be the new social matrix that holds it together. Given Florida's scenario, perhaps voluntary organizations must become more involved in bridging. Organizations that focus on bonding are more inwardly directed and homogenous, much like Putnam's definition of high social capital communities. Bridging organizations are more network-oriented in that they go across diverse groups (Putnam, 2000), and seem to be consistent with Florida's view of the needs of the new era, where the creative class defines the culture. This is seen now in the way that organizations can bridge across countries and continents to advocate for a particular cause. Florida's view seems to be reflected in the shifts that have been noted in motivation to volunteer. Previously volunteering was motivated by a community commitment and collective orientation. Now it appears to be more dependent on an individual's personal needs and the extent of benefits derived (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003).

b) Culture of Partnerships

Meinhard, Foster and Berger (2003) are currently undertaking a study with the public and private sector to understand their viewpoints on the nonprofit sector and the partnerships they may have with voluntary organizations. In many instances, the key role of government bureaucrats is to act as brokers between the politicians and the voluntary organizations.

However, in one particular Ministry, in a unit responsible for arts and cultural industries, true partnerships exist among all three sectors. Policy is developed from grass roots initiatives; joint decision-making is the modus operandi. The glue that holds these partnerships together are the voluntary arts organizations. The for profit cultural industries view these organizations as their R & D arm. In addition, the for profit companies and nonprofit organizations share the same labour pool for both creative and production activities. Creating and preserving a national identity is a mandate of all levels of government and the voluntary arts organizations are the mechanism by which this is achieved. What than are the necessary conditions for successful bridging across heterogenous sectors?

While much research has tended to focus on trust as the core dimension for building social capital (Knack & Keefer, 1997; Newton, 1997), reciprocity and mutual benefit seem to be important ingredients in the glue that comprises the bridges between the three sectors involved in arts and culture in Ontario. The for profit cultural industries use the talent resident in the voluntary sector to create their commercial productions. Likewise, these commercial ventures provide a mechanism for those in the voluntary arts community to earn a living so they can stay focused on honing and developing their craft. Both of these sectors are key players in the government strategy of supporting multiculturalism and nuturing a Canadian identity, which are cornerstones of both economic and social policies. These mutually beneficial ties mirror the changes noted in volunteer trends by Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) who noted a shift from a collective motivation to serve a community to a more self-involved motivation to gain personal benefits.

c) Different Voluntary Organizations with Different Constituents

We collected data from 645 voluntary organizations in Canada to understand in particular the responses of women's voluntary organizations to changes in the social, political and economic environments (Meinhard & Foster, 2003). We found that while the responses of women's organizations are similar in direction to other organizations, they are different in degree. Compared to other organizations, women's organizations are more critical of current policies, and more pessimistic about the future. Although they are more inclined to collaborate, they are less likely to embrace a business orientation, develop new revenue strategies or see competition as positive. We concluded that despite strong shared sectoral trends, women's organizations are a distinct subset of the nonprofit sector. Given this conclusion, the question to be investigated is whether the social "glue" produced and maintained by women's voluntary organizations is the same as for gender-neutral organizations. Is there evidence that women and women's organizations are any more or less skilled than men or gender-neutral organizations at making bridging connections?

Much has been written about differences between male and female behaviour. According to these researchers, males are taught to be competitive, hierarchical and independent (Harragan, 1977; Henning & Jardim, 1976; Lever, 1978; Tannen, 1990), whereas females are encouraged to be nurturing and relationship-oriented (Grant, 1988; Rosener, 1990; Tannen, 1990). Although socialization differences are often superseded by situational exigencies when

males and females enter the workplace (Kanter, 1977), these socialized behaviours do carry over to the organization (Fondas, 1997).

While studies indicate there are no differences between men and women on several management measures, there is one area in which women are consistently different. Women are more likely than men to be democratic, process-oriented, transformational leaders who value information sharing and collaboration (Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996; Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990, 1995). When it comes to relationships, they are more inclined to deal fairly with their clients (Dawson, 1997), and to consider the common good and the needs of others, even those whom they don't represent (Halpern & Parks, 1996). Recently, Walters and his colleagues (1998), in a meta-analysis of the role of gender in negotiations, found consistent results to indicate that women are more cooperative in negotiations. In addition, there is increasing evidence to suggest that women organize differently with different board structures and different *modi operandi* (Bradshaw, Murray & Wolpin, 1996; Foster & Orser, 1994; Odendahl, 1994; Odendhahl & Youmans, 1994; Perlmutter, 1994). Historically, women's organizations tried to distance themselves from male hierarchical structures (Clemens, 1999) and were early adopters of organizational structures that were less formal, and more inclusive, consensual and empowering (Bordt, 1997; Lott, 1994). These open, inclusive and decentralized structures allow for greater information sharing and collaboration and may predispose members to favour external collaborations as well.

Indeed, in our nation-wide study, we found that 69% of women's voluntary organizations engaged in more than five types of interorganizational activities, a proportion significantly higher than the 58% of gender-neutral organizations that reported the same level of collaboration (Meinhard & Foster, 2003). We also found that the predispositions for collaboration were quite different for women's organizations than others (Foster & Meinhard, 2003). While gender-neutral organization are motivated to make linkages with other voluntary organizations in order to reduce costs, and because they believe competition is good, women's organizations are motivated by a different set of factors. They are more likely to collaborate if they perceive an impact from environmental changes, believe there are few obstacles to collaborate, believe in the future of partnerships, do not believe that management solutions are part of the future for the voluntary sector, and if they have already implemented strategic staffing measures in response to changes in the environment. This raises the issue of whether bridging and collaborating are the same thing, subsets of each other, or completely different networking phenomena.

Is there other evidence of differences between how men and women connect to different networks? Burt (1998) in his study of 3000 employees below the rank of vice-president in a large US electronics firm found that women have to build social capital differently in an organization than men do in order to get promoted. Men can build their own social capital by establishing strong ties to disconnected groups. These ties allow men to broker information between these groups and the more non-redundant contacts a person has, the more he is accessing additive information. Women, on the other hand, have to borrow the social capital of someone else to make connections with other groups. Burt suggests this strategy is necessary because women are not seen as legitimate in the firm and are therefore outsiders, not afforded the same level of trust as insiders.

Burt (1998) goes on to outline three different forms of networks. The first is an entrepreneurial network that provides access to information and control. The groups in these types of networks are very different and thus the ties create information and control benefits. Burt calls the second type of network a clique in that its main benefit is security. The groups in these networks are highly redundant, and while this creates social support there are minimal information and control benefits. The final type of network is hierarchical and this provides sponsored access to information and control. Structural holes are borrowed from the sponsor and thus any information and control benefits are second-hand. There is some evidence that women's organizations are more likely to be engaged in networking as a clique rather than an entrepreneurial network. For example, in Meinhard & Foster's (2003) study of Canadian voluntary organizations, women's organizations were significantly more likely to agree that it is easier to collaborate with an organization mostly run by women, that organizations with collective structures make for better partners than organizations with hierarchical structures, and that partnerships are a way for larger organizations to build empires.

There also appears to be evidence that women's voluntary organizations suffer from a credibility gap which may make it difficult for them to be mechanisms for bridging. This is illustrated in the challenge women's organizations encounter when they have tried to diversify their revenue sources. They are much less successful in this activity than gender-neutral organizations. For a variety of reasons, women's organizations are not perceived to be prestigious targets for donors (Bradshaw, Murray & Wolpin, 1996). Women's needs rank low in the "establishment's" evaluation of what is important (Useem, 1987). The tendency of women and women's groups to place a higher priority on benevolence and social issues (Myyry & Helkama, 2001; Riordan, 2000; Smith & Schwartz, 1997; Women's Communication Centre, 1996) means they give voice and aid to the marginalised and excluded members of society (Stewart & Taylor, 1997; Yasmin, 1997). These groups are not high in the consciousness of major donors, who concentrate their efforts on the more prominent health, educational and cultural organizations (Useem, 1987). Capek (as reported in Nonprofit World, 1999) suggests women's organizations fail to attract funding because their non-hierarchical, experimental structures may seem risky for donors, they do not stake out niches that differentiate them from other organizations espousing similar causes creating confusion in the eyes of potential donors, and having to deal with chronically meagre budgets detracts from an organization's energies to invest in fundraising strategies. Furthermore, women board members' having fewer overlapping board memberships (Moore & Whitt, 2000), may disadvantage their organizations in the quest for resources. For a variety of social, structural and psychological reasons, women and women's organizations may have a tendency to engage in more bonding than bridging. This suggests that all voluntary organizations are not equal in their capacity to move from a focus on bonding to a focus on bridging that Florida suggests is necessary in the knowledge economy.

CONCLUSION

Social capital is a very complex concept that "plays out differently in different settings, depending on both informal and formal elements of social organization" (Foley, Edwards, & Diani, 2001, pg. 279). The latest research has been investigating this concept from different

perspectives and in doing so has challenged some of the conventional beliefs. One example is the recent article by Leonard and Onyx (2003) that questions the view that society comprises "small cohesive well-bonded groups joined to each other by loose ties" (pg. 202). They suggest that society is more ably represented as a chain with overall societal strength being determined by the weakest link.

The purpose of this paper has been to further the discussion of the role of voluntary organizations in the key area of bridging and bonding and to suggest some future avenues for investigation. Three have emerged:

- ***Economic context and ethnic diversity.*** If Richard Florida is correct and the knowledge-based economy presents a different context for the development of social capital, then one fruitful avenue for investigation would be to explore the role of the voluntary sector in different economic and cultural situations. Several scholars alluded to ethnic diversity as a important community indicator in shaping the nature of bonds and networks, so more work between and within ethnic communities seems warranted.

- ***Segmenting voluntary organizations***. Our research on women's voluntary organizations and the contradictory findings related to religious organizations suggests that different voluntary organizations have different capacities and inclinations to bond and to bridge. It would be helpful to identify the features of voluntary organizations that predispose them to take on different roles.

- ***Relationship of bridging to collaborating and partnering***. It is unclear how bridging is related to collaborating. Our own research with women's voluntary organizations reveals that this a complex relationship and one set of factors may predispose bridging, while another set may predispose collaborating. Indeed there may be overlaps in the dimensions involved, but the extent of similarity is unknown at this time.

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