



Children, Childhood and Social Capital: Exploring the Links

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with exploring how children develop and utilize stocks of social capital. It draws on two research projects illustrating children's family, peer and community networks. In the burgeoning literature on social capital, children's accounts remain under-researched. Indeed most of the literature operates with a simplistic view of adults passing social capital assets on to children without a subsequent consideration of how children perceive and make use of existing networks and create and manage additional networks. The article will examine the limited treatment of children and childhood in the conceptualization of social capital put forward by Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu. One of the most important attributes of social capital is its supposed ability to be converted into other forms of capital. A focus on children's networks calls into question the ease with which social capital can be transformed into other types of capital.

KEY WORDS

Bourdieu / children / Coleman / Putnam / social capital

Introduction

Social capital remains an elusive concept. It is generally imbued with positive connotations, in particular the importance of social networks and trust in promoting a sense of belonging and well-being. This notion of social capital as emerging from the quality of relationships among people was developed by Coleman (1988: S98) who viewed social capital as a positive feature emanating from the interactions between and among actors. Hence, for Coleman, the best way to understand social capital is to look at its function,

that is, as a resource that individuals can utilize in their relationships with others. This view is shared by Putnam (1995: 67) who defines social capital as 'features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit'. For Putnam, members of communities rich in social capital engage in mutually beneficial collective action. Implicit in the work of Coleman and Putnam is the notion that social capital can be created and built up in communities where it is lacking and ultimately transformed into other forms of capital.

This aspect of social capital has appealed to policy makers who have turned their attention to bottom-up strategies as solutions to poverty in low-income communities. Bourdieu (1986) operates with a more dynamic and somewhat less positive conception of social capital. While social capital is seen to lie in the social obligations and connections that exist among individuals, its value emerges from the ability of individuals to convert social capital into other forms of capital, particularly economic capital. Transferring social capital into other forms is far from straightforward because the wider environment may inhibit the ability of individual actors to achieve such transformations. Convertibility may be particularly problematic for actors with low stocks of cultural and economic capital or those positioned as inferior relative to other societal members. In particular, children's weaker position vis-a-vis adults in society may provide additional constraints to their ability to manage exchangeability between different types of capital.

Children do not feature prominently in the work of Coleman, Putnam or Bourdieu. The work of Coleman and Putnam mainly concerns strong or weak ties among adults. Where children do feature, the analysis highlights some of the limitations implicit in research on children which is not informed by the new sociology of childhood. While Bourdieu does not mention children at all in his analysis, Morrow (1999: 746) argues that his construction of social capital as 'rooted in the processes and practices of everyday life' provides a useful framework for understanding the relevance of social capital in the everyday lives of children. The remainder of the article assesses the limited treatment of children in existing accounts of social capital. Data from two research projects will be presented to illuminate children's individual and collective stocks of social capital. This analysis explores the difficulties some groups in society, such as children, have in achieving convertibility between different forms of capital.

Children, Social Capital and the 'New Sociology of Childhood'

Traditionally sociology has paid limited attention to children and childhood (Ambert, 1986). Children were generally seen as the successful or unsuccessful products of adult socialization. Hence much research into children's lives focused on areas where children interacted with adults such as within the family and educational system. This left many areas of children's lives invisible to

the sociological gaze. It is only recently that a new sociology of childhood has emerged (James and Prout, 1997). The new approach emphasizes children's agency and explores the various ways through which their interactions with adults and each other produces, reproduces, challenges and transforms the nature of childhood and society. Adopting this new approach enables researchers to see interactions between generations as much messier than previously. This means going beyond the recognition that children sometimes resist socialization to one which acknowledges that children also impact on adult society. Rather than the transfer of fixed norms, obligations and expectations which children either accept or reject, interactions between adults and children are likely to produce modified standards and customs for both generations.

We still know much more about the everyday lives of adults than the everyday lives of children. This is very apparent in relation to the operationalization of the concept of social capital. Much of the empirical work on which the concept is based focuses on strong or weak connections among adults and the positive or negative consequences arising from this. When children are brought into the picture, it is often in a limited way that demonstrates their internalization or rejection of the norms and sanctions imposed by influential adults such as parents and teachers. Social capital in the lives of children is generally seen as a by-product of their parents' relationships with others and as a result their own social capital networks are rendered invisible. Moreover, social capital is often regarded as an asset that children can draw on and benefit from in their future lives rather than in their lives in the present. This reflects a recurrent tendency to view children as 'human becomings' rather than human beings (Qvortrup, 1994). As Qvortrup (1994: 2) points out 'adulthood is regarded as the goal and end-point of individual development or perhaps even the very meaning of a person's childhood'.

The focus on adult friendships and adult networks is evident in Coleman's conception of 'intergenerational closure'. The term is used by Coleman to highlight the presence or absence of links among parents. Where intergenerational closure exists, parents 'discuss their children's activities and come to some consensus about standards and about sanctions' (1988: S107). In families rich in social capital, children will accept and abide by these shared adult evaluations while in families lacking in social capital, children may be influenced by the children of parents who are located outside these social networks. In a sense then, the relationship between parents and children is presented in terms of effective or ineffective socialization with socialization as a one-way process that works when children accept it or is faulty when children reject it. Yet the family is likely to be an arena where adults and children negotiate and renegotiate norms and expectations and where on occasions adults individually and collectively may have to modify their 'standards' and 'sanctions'.

The relationship between families and social capital has been explored by Coleman in terms of identifying what sorts of family circumstances strengthen social capital in the wider society. For Coleman, the family is one of the central locations for social capital. 'The relationships established by childbirth'

(Coleman, 1991: 1) are regarded as fundamentally important. Social capital is viewed as a resource which lies in family relationships and which enables children and adolescents to gain access to human capital (Coleman, 1994: 300). Hence, one of the key functions of social capital is its ability to develop into other forms of capital. The ideal family possesses three types of capital (Coleman, 1988: S109). The first is financial capital which refers to the family's economic position and enables families to purchase resources that can facilitate achievement. Human capital finds expression in adults' educational background and this assists the child in providing an environment conducive to educational success. Social capital lies in the relationship between adults and children within the family. Coleman suggests that families rich in financial and human capital may be poor in social capital and hence children may miss out on amassing this crucial resource. This is particularly likely to happen in single-parent families, families with large numbers of children and dual-earner families where parents may not have the time to develop strong relationships with all of their children. Of the three forms of capital, social capital becomes the most crucial because without it parents will be unable to transfer other forms to their children. Their stocks of financial and human capital are redundant without the input of social capital which enables parents to transmit appropriate values to their children. Families rich in social capital will also be rich in human capital because a perceived complementary relationship exists between the two forms. Indeed much of Coleman's work centers on how social capital contributes to the development of human capital (Coleman, 1994).

For Putnam (1995: 73) 'the most fundamental form of social capital is the family'. However, like Coleman, the bulk of his account of the relationship between childhood and social capital focuses on adults' stock of social capital. The issue then becomes how effectively these adults transfer their social capital assets to their children. In this respect, Coleman and Putnam tend to see the child as future citizen so their concern is primarily with the ability of adults to transfer stocks of social capital to children which they can cash in when they grow up (Coleman, 1990: 334; Putnam, 2000: 296). Hence, Coleman and Putnam tell us little about children's existing usage of social capital. They have much more to say about the everyday lives of children who do not possess social capital than they do about exploring the relevance and significance of those who might be considered to possess social capital value. Moreover, there is little acknowledgement that children's own networks might facilitate the development of social capital among children rather than between children and adults.

While Bourdieu (1986) has little to say about the relationship between social capital and childhood, Morrow (1999: 746) argues that his perspective is potentially fruitful because he locates the construction of social capital and capital in general 'as rooted in the processes and practices of everyday life'. If this is coupled with the recognition that children possess agency, then his formulation could usefully illustrate how the micro-social worlds of children interact

with the wider macro-social structure factors which constrain children's agency (Morrow, 1999: 757). At the heart of his analysis is an acknowledgement that the routines of everyday life serve to maintain and reproduce inequality and this is a further strength of his work. His work offers a contrast to Coleman and Putnam's simplistic link between social and other forms of capital. As the data from the two research projects on which this article is based illustrate, strong stocks of social capital by themselves are not enough to achieve the transformation to human and economic capital.

Background to the Research Projects

The remainder of the article draws on two projects concerned with examining children's lives in the family and community. While neither project was specifically concerned with the application of social capital, nonetheless the themes explored refer to traditional concepts such as networks and community, which have received a new lease of life due to current interest in the notion of social capital (Portes, 1998). The projects span a ten-year time frame and this may impact on the comparability of the data. However, each project was concerned with examining aspects of children's lives which call into question some of the assumptions embedded in the social capital literature, particularly concerning the convertibility of social capital into other forms. It is my intention to highlight these aspects of the data.

Both Projects were located in working-class communities experiencing varying levels of economic disadvantage. The majority of adults who took part in the research were either unemployed or located at the lower end of the labour market. Poverty was a prominent feature of adults and children's daily lives. The research focused on how individuals managed their poverty and the various strategies they utilized to alleviate or cope with their situation. In Project A, adults from 150 households located in one of the most disadvantaged localities in Northern Ireland were interviewed along with 120 children aged 14–16. Project B was based on in-depth interviews with members of 30 households (Leonard, 1994) drawn from two areas in the Republic of Ireland (Daly and Leonard, 2000). One of these areas shared many similarities with the locality in Project A in terms of its status as one of the most disadvantaged localities in the Republic of Ireland. Sixteen children from 11 households were interviewed and the majority were between 14–16 years of age. Adults and children in both projects demonstrated strong bonds of trust and shared values within the family but while the social capital generated had use value to family members, its exchange value was limited due mainly to adults' low stocks of other forms of capital. The implications of this for Coleman and Putnam's notion of social capital within the family will be outlined. Moreover, while the localities in Project A and B exhibited many similarities, community ties in Project A were strong and almost non-existent in Project B. The reasons for this will be elaborated in the article. One of the main aims of the research was to examine children's

participation in term-time employment and the extent to which this can be regarded as a form of social capital will be assessed. The literature on social capital identifies it as both an individual and collective resource that can be utilized to gain access to economic and human capital. By drawing on these two projects I will illustrate children's individual and collective stocks of social capital and the extent to which convertibility is achievable.

Social Capital within the Family

As is already evident, Coleman argues that only certain types of family possess social capital. His analysis suggests two-parent families with small numbers of children and with mothers who are full-time housewives are optimal contexts for the successful transmission of social capital between generations. Hence, a highly conservative anti-feminist stance permeates his notion of family life. Coleman uses 'the strength of relations between parents and children as a measure of the social capital available to the child from the parent' (1988: S110). Dual-earner families may possess high levels of human capital, which they have already utilized to find formal employment but because their work removes them from the household for long periods of time, their social capital may be weak and therefore 'this human capital may be irrelevant to outcomes for children' (1988: S110). Similarly, parents with large numbers of children may be unable to give sufficient time to individual children for the successful transmission of social capital and hence, ultimately, human capital. For Coleman, (1988: S111) 'the most prominent element of structural deficiency in modern families is the single-parent family'. It is unclear from his analysis why this is the case. But he clearly implies that two parents are always better than one and that a rise in single-parent families is an indication of a breakdown of community values.

If one takes 'the strength of relationships' (Coleman, 1988: SS109–13) between parents and children as the key definition of social capital, then data from both projects call into question some of the assumptions held by Coleman, particularly in relation to the complementary relationship between social and human capital. In Project A, the majority of children lived in two-parent households where neither parent worked. Hence, in contrast to Coleman's dual-earner households, these children lived in no-earner households. This was primarily due to the lack of human capital possessed by the parents, which in turn led to a lack of financial capital, as the majority of households were dependent on welfare benefits. In Project B, the majority of children interviewed resided in single-parent families. Mothers in these households had little human capital, which in turn impeded negatively on their opportunities for obtaining formal employment which in turn influenced their level of financial capital. However, one of the most recurring themes in the data from both projects was the strength of the relationship between parents and children. Parents saw education as the primary mechanism that would release their children from

poverty. The majority of parents interviewed spoke of their hopes that their children would obtain educational qualifications and get good jobs, and indeed viewed their children as the most important feature of their lives. When children were interviewed, they highlighted the supportive relationship they had with their parents. In Project B, children defined parents as the 'best part of their lives' and those from single-parent households spoke with admiration about their mothers' struggle to bring them up single handed. At the time of interview, the majority of children indicated that they hoped to achieve some level of qualifications before leaving school. By itself however, social capital was a poor asset in terms of its ability to be transformed into other types of capital. Parents' own lack of financial capital impacted negatively on the educational opportunities available to their children despite their enthusiasm for education. In many households, parents could not afford the costs of schooling. Some households found it difficult to buy the child's school uniform. The amount of books and other educational materials was characterized by its absence in the majority of households. In some cases, children did not have any private space to study. Parents could not afford to pay for their children to go on school educational trips and other outings and children missed out on these and other forms of extra-curricular activity that involved financial expenditure. In Project B, one mother regularly kept her 15-year-old daughter off school during cookery lessons because she could not afford the ingredients specified by the teacher as necessary to take part in the class. Parents' own lack of human capital prevented them from supporting their children in a practical way despite their eagerness for their children to do well educationally. Many parents had problems with basic literacy, itself a product of their own upbringing. In Project B, a lone mother spoke of her ability to help her 5-year-old child learn to read but was concerned that the child would outstrip her ability by the time she reached the age of eight or nine. These examples suggest that the complementary relationship that Coleman envisaged between social capital and other forms may be much more complicated than he implied. The families that he highlights as lacking in social capital may be more afflicted by a lack of economic and human capital and hence unable to move effortlessly among different forms.

However, lack of convertibility between different forms of capital should not deter attention from the emotional satisfaction low income families may accrue through their relationships with each other. Indeed, Reay (2002: 6) views emotions as a type of capital and defines emotional capital as 'the stock of emotional resources built up over time within families and which children could draw upon'. While the relationships nurtured and developed by parents from both projects had little convertibility for their children in terms of access to forms of capital recognized by the wider society as having exchange value, nonetheless many children derived emotional satisfaction from supportive family relationships. The use value to their personal well-being is reflected in the following quotes:

'My ma and my family are the only things that matter to me.'

'My family is the best part of my life because they care for me.'

'I'd just tell my ma if I was worried about anything and she'd fix it.'

Hence the emotional capital that parents, particularly mothers engage in was recognized and valued positively by the majority of children. Its use value compensated for its lack of exchange value. Because Coleman and Putnam see a complementary relationship between social capital and other forms, they are dismissive of its use value. Their analysis mainly focuses on the types of families and communities that can foster exchange value capitals. While one of the strengths of Bourdieu's work is his acknowledgement of the lack of convertibility among different types of capital, the thrust of his analysis restricts him to exchange value action. For Bourdieu (1986), the connections that make up social capital are only useful to individual actors if they can be effectively mobilized to serve their self-interests. Indeed, Bourdieu questions the possibility of disinterested action as, in his view, all actions are related to strategies although these strategies may be unconscious to the individual actor.

Because of his reluctance to consider disinterested action, Bourdieu also over-emphasizes exchange value over use value (Skeggs, 2002, 2004). According to Bourdieu, (Sayer, 1999: 407) action always brings the actor some kind of advantage. In his view, there is no such thing as altruism, only disguised egotism. Hence, social capital is never pursued for its intrinsic value but for its ability to be converted into other more highly desirable forms. While elsewhere he appears to acknowledge that the family is a 'site where people refuse to calculate and the pursuit of equivalence in exchanges is suspended' (Bourdieu, 1999: 22), his conceptualization of social capital, in terms of its exchange value, makes it difficult for him to properly evaluate the workings of use value actions. Associated with this is the possibility of actors developing alternative value systems that are more resilient to the exchange value systems dominated by already privileged groups. The levels of emotional satisfaction that children may experience in low-income families with highly developed internal relationships has received little coverage in the literature on social capital. While I recognize that families may also be sites of conflict as well as support, the point I am emphasizing here is that capital may have different rules of conversion for children compared to adults. Children may have alternative evaluations of value according higher worth to forms of capital that have immediate use value rather than longer term exchange value.

Social Capital in the Community

While Coleman and Putnam ascribe a key role to the family in their conceptualization of the workings of social capital, Putnam goes further and assigns an equally vital role to adults' participation in the wider community. Putnam's

analysis of adults' participation in civic and political life is problematic when extended to children. Most of the world's children are unable to vote until they reach the age of 18. Most societies also impose age-related restrictions on children's autonomy to make decisions in relation to a number of issues including the age in which they are permitted to drink alcohol, have sexual relations or marry. As a result, children are regarded as not possessing full citizenship and this may impact on the extent of their engagement in civil society. However, one marker of engagement in civic society that can usefully be extended to children concerns their involvement in collective leisure pursuits. One of Putnam's primary indications of active engagement in society is the extent to which individuals engage in organized leisure. Indeed, 'Bowling Alone' rather than bowling as part of an organized group presents Putnam with an effective visual image of much of what is wrong with modern American society. Putnam sees television as the key culprit deterring individuals from engaging in more productive uses of their leisure time. Television keeps people within their homes and indeed impedes communication among individuals within the household. He harks back to the good old days before television had such a grip on society and where leisure had a much more communal function bringing people together in collective activities rather than keeping them apart. However, nowhere in his analysis does Putnam mention the cost of organized leisure and it is this rather than low stocks of social capital which may influence participation. Watching television was a common leisure pursuit for all the children who took part in both projects. However, this was more to do with the cost of organized leisure outside the household than to disengagement from the wider society.

Children are more dependent on the local environment than other age groups with the exception of the elderly. Putnam views participation in leisure from the demand side and gives little consideration to the supply side. As Fronès (1994: 160) points out, 'viewing television has to be seen not only as a phenomenon in itself but also in relation to the wider social and cultural environment'. The provision of leisure in any given locality may be commercial or state led. Areas characterized by high levels of poverty and deprivation may prove unattractive sites for the location of commercial leisure venues. The surrounding locality may be unable to afford to participate and outsiders may be unwilling to spend their leisure time in venues surrounded by visible manifestations of poverty. Hence organized leisure provision may be left to the state and, as Misztal (2000) points out, Putnam tends to ignore the role of the state in his analysis on the workings of social capital. This view is shared by Field (2003) who points out that governments do not play a passive part but actively shape the arena within which individuals decide to engage in organized leisure or stay at home and watch television. As he puts it 'we can only understand withdrawal from engagement if we take it seriously and understand it as an active choice' (Field, 2003: 39). The majority of children interviewed in Project A and Project B discussed the lack of amenities in their locality. Both areas were characterized by almost non-existent leisure facilities for teenagers and younger children in terms of playgrounds or other play areas. Access to organized

leisure necessitated travelling to other areas outside the locality and travelling costs further increased the cost of organized leisure preventing many children from being regular participants and enhancing the attractiveness of television as an affordable leisure pursuit. Many children made distinctions between how they spent their leisure time and how they would spend their leisure time if money was not a problem. Where money was not perceived as a barrier, children mentioned a variety of sporting activities and leisure pursuits they would pursue. While their comments may be intentions rather than realities, nonetheless, the example suggests the importance of economic capital in developing children's social capital if the indicator used refers to collective leisure pursuits.

Elsewhere, Putnam (2000: 301) argues that where mothers have supportive locally based social networks, their offspring will benefit 'over and above how rich or poor they are materially' (Putnam, 2000: 301). The implication here is that children in families rich in social capital may somehow be compensated for their families' lack of financial and human capital. To some extent, a comparison of adults' social networks in Project A and Project B provides some evidence of the importance of this resource for children's lives. Two-thirds of the households in Project B were located in an urban area on the outskirts of Dublin bearing many similarities with the locality featured in Project A. High levels of poverty and deprivation characterized both areas and both had been labelled as 'dreadful enclosures' (Walter, 1976: 155) by the wider society. However, households in Project A were embedded into strong, tight, collective social networks while households in Project B were characterized by isolation and distrust. In Project A, the wider political situation in Northern Ireland facilitated the development of 'bonding social capital' (Putnam, 2000) among the working-class Catholic community. In Project B, the uneven benefits of the Celtic Tiger had torn apart the working-class Catholic community as those who benefited from the recent economic dividend turned against those who continued to live their lives in poverty. Adults in Project A spoke of the strength of their connections with neighbours while adults in Project B viewed their neighbours (and were regarded by their neighbours) with suspicion and misgiving. Households in Project B did not openly display their poverty. Rather they were often ashamed of it and retreated into the privacy of their households rather than engage in any community exchanges with other households in similar predicaments. Supportive social relations, embeddedness, forms of reciprocity and trust were absent. Rather than being integrated into the local community, most of the respondents were isolated. Outside of their immediate families, social support was almost non-existent. These families lived alongside those who had benefited from the Republic of Ireland's recent prosperity. These more prosperous sections of the working class community had turned their backs on those unable to jump on the economic bandwagon and cases of bullying among neighbours were common.

By contrast, households in Project A established strong networks as a way of challenging the State's inability to provide employment. Because of the wider political situation, the networks that developed were seen as political strategies

rather than simply a solution to individual or community disadvantage (Leonard, 2004). This again suggests the important role the state may play in facilitating or restricting the environment in which social capital may flourish (Field, 2003; Myszal, 2000). Some 44 percent of males in Project A had been unemployed for over 10 years and in this context alternative sources of social identity had emerged. In the estate, 78 percent of households were related to at least one other household and over half the sample of married couples had been born in the estate. Cultural isolation, long-term stability of residence, social homogeneity, extensive kinship and friendship networks and low levels of access to external resources all contributed to highly developed stocks of social capital.

The strength of social networks in Project A and the absence of these supportive networks in Project B were reflected in the everyday lives of children. The locality in Project A was characterized by the existence of multiple strong close bonds within and between households. Social ties often influenced economic transactions and adults were drawn into dense webs based on trust and reciprocity. A number of features of children's lives illustrated their strong links with the wider community. One in five children engaged in regular voluntary activity. The majority belonged to church groups and religious organizations and the most common activity involved helping the elderly or disabled within the estate. One in three children stated that they did favours for other children and for adults. While in some cases these favours linked children into reciprocal relationships with other community members, in some cases no counter favour appeared to be expected. This was particularly the case for teenagers who did odd jobs for elderly neighbours. One 15 year old boy stated how he went errands for people in the estate for monetary payment but refused this money if the recipient was elderly. When I asked him how much he charged for running errands for his elderly neighbour, he replied:

Don't be stupid, she's an auld doll [old woman]. I wouldn't charge her money, sure she hasn't got any.

Hence, these activities appeared to differ from Coleman's notion of reciprocal transactions as 'credit slips' that can be cashed in at some future unspecified date (1988: S102).

The two projects demonstrate that the links between family and community take place within varied geographical settings. Hence, as Winter (2000) points out it may be particular places rather than particular families that foster the development of social capital at the community level. Some seemingly cohesive communities may exhibit the 'dark side' of social capital and function as sites of exclusion rather than inclusion (Portes and Landholt, 1996). The strong bonding social capital exhibited by households in Project A was unable to provide adults and children with effective 'bridges' into the wider community. According to Putnam, bonding social capital is useful for 'getting by' but bridging social capital is necessary for 'getting ahead'. While adults and children in Project A had highly developed social networks that bridged the path between

the family and surrounding community, nonetheless in relation to the wider society outside the immediate locality, the social capital was of the bonding type. Adults' lack of access to other forms of social capital meant that most resources had use value rather than exchange value.

Child Employment as a Source of Social Capital

Thus far, I have focused on children's access to social capital within the family and community. I have suggested that the ways in which children accumulate and utilize social capital has not featured prominently in the work of Coleman, Putnam or Bourdieu. The previous two sections demonstrate the ways in which adults' social capital networks impact on children. In this section, I want to explore children's participation in paid work as a way of demonstrating how children make use of parents' existing networks but also develop their own networks in order to gain access to job opportunities.

Children's employment opportunities provide a useful way of exploring the usefulness of children's social capital networks. It is now becoming commonplace to acknowledge that paid employment is a significant feature of most children's daily lives (Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997; O'Donnell and White, 1998). In Project A, almost one in two children interviewed had experience of paid employment while at school, while in Project B one in seven children had access to some form of part-time work. Children's involvement in paid employment while still attending school challenges taken-for-granted assumptions of school children as dependents within the household. While in the majority of cases, earnings were low, nonetheless there were many instances where children contributed to the family income or provided for their own needs thereby relieving parents of some of their financial burdens.

I have already outlined the strong social ties that characterized children's environment in Project A compared to the absence of these ties in Project B. The job search strategies of working children from both projects further reveal children's varying access to social networks. One in two children in Project A obtained their employment through neighbours and relatives living in the locality. By contrast the job search strategies of the children in Project B revealed much more individual modes of job search and social ties were largely unimportant in this respect. However, while children benefited from their parents connections, children from both projects, in some cases formed their own social ties with adults in the locality. This calls into question the limited focus of Coleman and Putnam on adults' social networks and corresponding neglect of the possibility that children may form their own social networks. Babysitting in particular provided a structure whereby children could develop relationships with adults not directly connected with their parents. Almost one in two males and four in five females in Project A engaged in babysitting for money on a weekly basis. While often parents, relatives and neighbours known to parents were the recipients of babysitting, there were some instances where children

developed their own networks as potential sources of babysitting for money. Children babysat for households that did not have strong ties with adults in their own households. This suggests more complex patterns of ties between parents and children whereby in some cases children can utilize parents' existing networks while at other times practice agency in developing their own networks as sources of additional income. While babysitting for money was less prevalent in Project B, some children engaged in babysitting for money and developed ties with neighbours separate from adult ties with each other. In one household, a 14-year-old girl when asked whom she would call on for support if she needed it cited her neighbour whom she had built up a relationship with due to babysitting for her on a weekly basis over the previous year.

Peer groups were also an important source of information about jobs for children in Project A but insignificant for children in Project B. Of those who had jobs, almost one in two children in Project A found out about their jobs from friends or were recommended by friends who were already in employment. Some jobs such as newspaper delivery work were age specific and older children often passed newspaper rounds on to younger children in the locality. By contrast, not one of those interviewed in Project B obtained their job through peer friendships. For Coleman (1988: S104) one useful advantage of having strong social networks is that they can be utilized as a source of information. Coleman deals with this aspect of social capital in a very limited way by providing a few general examples whereby adults relied on other adults as sources of information. He does not extend this perspective to children although elsewhere he implies that peers may provide information that conflict with the values transmitted by responsible adults such as parents and teachers. Moreover, he views this aspect of social capital in a very limited way. He suggests that the value of social capital in this context does not lie in 'the form of obligations that one holds for others' performance or for the trustworthiness of the other party but merely for the information they provide' (1988: S104). However, other research (Jenkins, 1988; Morris, 1985) has shown that informal information channels about job openings are highly conducive to ensuring the loyalty, docility and self-discipline of the workforce. While these studies apply to adults' recruitment networks, there is no reason not to suppose that recruitment networks among children may operate in a similar fashion. Children who vouch for other children and bring personal ties to bear in the recruitment process may create bonds of mutual trust and obligation between them and the friends they recruit.

Having a paid job while at school could also be viewed as a potential source of human capital. Coleman and Putnam tend to give too much emphasis to formal education in their analysis of the links between social and human capital. In Project A in particular, children spoke at length of the skills they had learned informally through their term time employment. Many children felt that they had learned a variety of skills that they would not have gained from adults in the family or at school. Moreover, having access to money provided some children from disadvantaged areas with the opportunity to acquire human

capital through enabling them to remain longer in the educational system because of their earning ability. Term-time employment also enabled children to challenge the power relationship that generally exists between adults and school-aged children. Many children felt that their parents saw them as more responsible and self-reliant than previously. Children also welcomed the opportunity to work alongside adults and felt they were able to negotiate a more individualized conception of themselves as co-workers rather than children.

However, often children were recruited to low paid exploitative jobs. Children in paid employment were in all cases paid lower wages than adults even when they worked alongside adults doing similar work. Moreover, this exploitation was most pronounced among children who worked for relatives who were the lowest paid of all workers in the sample. There were cases where children were paid lower than other children in the same type of job because the ties of personal recruitment based on kinship was used as a justification for paying lower wages than labour recruited from outside kinship networks. Moreover, children were often recruited into low-skilled jobs that had little element of training making it difficult for children to utilize their employment experiences as a way of amassing transferable skills. However, in some cases, this led children to re-evaluate their occupational intentions. Nine children from Project A discussed the boring, repetitive nature of their jobs. Their views are reflected in the following quotes:

‘All I do all day long is stack shelves. Imagine spending the rest of your life doing that.’

‘Well my job’s okay, it gives me a few bob (money) but if I thought I had to do the same thing for the rest of my life, I’d go nuts.’

‘At the beginning it wasn’t too bad but as each day passes, it becomes more and more boring. It’s really starting to get on my nerves.’

All nine children had intended to leave school at the earliest opportunity but had revised their intentions on the basis of their work experience. While I did not do a follow-up study and therefore do not know whether these changed aspirations remained intentions and not realities, nonetheless the example suggests that children’s experience of term-time employment may enable them aspire to obtaining educational qualifications as a route out of disadvantage.

Because children are commonly perceived as irrational, the extent to which they may act to further their self-interest remains under-explored in sociological research. While children benefited economically from paid employment, their status as children justified their unequal treatment compared to other adults while their subordinate position in kinship networks resulted in differential treatment from other non-kin minors. This suggests much more complicated relationships between adults and children than envisaged by Coleman and Putnam. It highlights in particular power differences between generations. While power is central to Bourdieu’s work, he has little to say about this form of power. However, his notion of the ‘ideology of com-

petence' (1998) provides a useful framework for understanding divisions between generations.

Bourdieu uses the notion of competence to distinguish between the haves and have-nots in society 'on the one hand there are full citizens who have very rare and overpaid capacities and activities...and then on the other side, there is a great mass of people condemned to borderline jobs or unemployment' (Bourdieu 1998: 42–3). For Bourdieu, it is competence that is used to justify the privileges of dominant groups. Competence is internalized by the privileged to justify their domination over the incompetent. For Bourdieu, elites develop a reputation for competence, which enables them to easily convert social capital into other forms. Social capital is a form of social competence whereby already privileged groups accumulate and reproduce their advantaged position. For Bourdieu then, social capital is about disguising the workings of the power of the powerful (Skeggs, 2002, 2004). In Skeggs view (2002), the habitus becomes the site of accumulation based on knowledge of how the game works and how to play it. The importance of social capital lies in its ability to be converted into other forms but convertibility is dominated by the powerful who position working class social capital as having limited exchange value.

This notion of the competence of the powerful vis-à-vis the powerless can be usefully extended to evaluate society's conception of children as naturally incompetent. As Qvortrup (1994: 4) points out 'this means that the adult world does not recognize children's praxis, because competence is defined merely in relation to adults' praxis – a suggestion which is all the more powerful since adults are in a sovereign position to define competence'. Hence, social capital is something possessed by adults and not by children. Indeed, implicit in Coleman and Putnam's work is the suggestion that adults' stocks of social capital are passed on to children and this leaves unexplored children's own stocks of social capital, their own strategic use of networks or their impact on adults' social capital. Adopting a position that acknowledges society's traditional treatment of children as incompetent could open up fruitful areas of research on the relationship between childhood and social capital that moves beyond adult-centred occupations. In particular, children may experience specific difficulties in converting social capital into other forms because conceptions of children as 'naturally incompetent' may prevent them from accumulating stocks of social capital that the wider society recognizes as having exchange value.

Conclusion

Throughout this article I have argued that children are resourceful and active in developing networks with each other and with adults within and outside the family. Children accumulate and use social capital and this is particularly evident in their participation in paid employment and babysitting. However, the data calls into question Coleman's and Putnam's optimistic attitude to the beneficial relationship between social capital and other forms. It also calls into

question Putnam's sanguinity about the ability of social capital to compensate for the absence of other forms. As Project A in particular illustrates, children's ability to benefit from their parents' stocks of social capital was impeded by their parents' lack of human and economic capital. There tends to be a naïve assumption that if poor communities developed their stocks of social capital then the problems of poverty could be solved. This approach, which is implicit in the work of Putnam, in particular ignores the wider structural factors which may preclude the ability of groups to realize their interests. The analysis presented here gives support to Bourdieu's (1986) view that social capital becomes effective when it is reinforced with other forms of capital. Adopting this position however, entails prioritizing the exchange value aspects of social capital and ignoring its use value. Following Skeggs' analysis of the problematic aspects of this view for understanding the relationship between femininity and different types of symbolic values, I would suggest that childhood like femininity is a form of regulation rather than domination (Skeggs, 2004). However, as Skeggs points out femininity 'is embodied and operates as a local cultural resource that can be used in local rather than nationally recognized symbolic forms of exchange' (Skeggs, 2004: 16). Just as femininity cannot be understood without reference to masculinity neither can childhood be understood without reference to adulthood. Children's stocks of social capital may have local use value rather than national exchange value because of the power relationships between children and adults and the ability of adults to dominate evaluations of symbolic forms of exchange. While Bourdieu can be criticized for his failure to fully acknowledge use value and childhood in his analyses, his concepts of agency, habitus, power and competence combined with the insights provided by the new sociology of childhood could provide a potent framework for understanding the significance of social capital in the everyday lives of children and its impact on childhood and adulthood.

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