

## 2. POVERTY ERADICATION: CONFRONTING FAMILY POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

### **SOCIAL EXCLUSION, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND SOCIOECONOMIC MOBILITY: HOW MICRO-LEVEL PROCESSES OBFUSCATE REDUCTIONS IN POVERTY**

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#### **A. OVERVIEW**

In this commentary we discuss the association between social exclusion, social capital, and socioeconomic mobility among America's poor, and how economically and racially privileged individuals and groups participate in marginalizing this population. We render three arguments. First, we contend that social capital is a key process in mitigating the effects of social exclusion as cause and consequence of poverty and is thus a critical resource for disadvantaged families seeking socioeconomic mobility (Brady 2009; Lin 2000; Silver 1994; Wilson 1987). Second, we argue, as has Prus (1987) and Schwalbe et al., (2000), that beyond the common macro-level sources of social exclusion (e.g., institutional racism) that contribute to poverty in the U.S., there are micro-level processes that govern social interactions both within and between groups of the "haves and the have-nots" that also shape poverty outcomes. These exclusion-laden processes preclude the poor's accumulation of social capital and comprise four generic social processes: othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management (see Schwalbe et al, 2000).

These processes are frequently represented in race and class discrimination behaviors and practices and implicitly involve members of society-as-a-whole regardless of whether actors share the same geographic or physical space (Burton et al. 2010). Third, we assert that context matters relative to how the poor can assuage the micro-processes that perpetuate social exclusion and their capacity to garner and leverage social capital to attain upward socioeconomic mobility. We conclude this discussion by offering thoughts about public policy recommendations that focus on these micro-processes as agents of social exclusion and impediments to social capital and socioeconomic mobility for the poor. We suggest that policy interventions must be designed in ways that seriously consider these marginalizing processes less, as a global society, we will continue to surreptitiously promote social exclusion and disadvantage as a way of life for some and not for others.

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## **B. SPATIAL INEQUALITY AND POVERTY IN THE U.S.**

Our discussion of social exclusion, social capital, and socioeconomic mobility begins with a portrait of the U.S. poverty and inequality landscape detailed in the work of Burton, Lichter, Baker, and Eason (2013). In the U.S., the first two decades of the new millennium ushered in growing spatial inequality and concentrated poverty which was characterized by the uneven geographic spread of historically disadvantaged populations into segregated and isolated communities in inner cities, aging suburban communities, and rural small towns (Curtis, Voss, and Long 2012; Lichter, Parisi, and Taquino 2012; Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 2007). This new geography of haves and have-nots was reinforced in the aftermath of the 2007–2009 “Great Recession” (Grusky, Western, and Wimer 2011). The economic downturn and rising inequality left a trail of personal misfortune and family upheaval as it made its way across the U.S. landscape driven by its chief engineer, rising poverty rates (Jensen, McLaughlin, and Slack, 2003). Poverty rates increased nationally, spiking to 15.1% in 2010, and the number of poor Americans – 46.2 million – was at an all-time high (DeNaves–Walt, Proctor, and Smith, 2011).

Much of the scholarly and public discourse on U.S. poverty and inequality has focused on big-city populations, which have been hit especially hard by slow job growth, high unemployment, and the housing crisis. Indeed, the poverty rate reached nearly 20% in 2010 among the nation’s metropolitan principal (or central) cities (DeNaves–Walt, Proctor, and Smith, 2011). And, surprisingly, more of America’s poor were living in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods despite unprecedented declines in concentrated poverty during the 1990s (Reardon and Bischoff 2011). Since 2000, segments of the U.S. population residing in high-poverty urban neighborhoods (of over 40%) rose by one-third (Kneebone, Nadeau, and Berube 2011). At the same time, America’s upper-income groups increasingly cordoned themselves off in gated communities, affluent neighborhoods (e.g., Plandome, Hewlett Neck on Long Island, or exurban developments in Northern Virginia), downtown luxury condos, and exclusive resort communities (e.g., Aspen) (Park and Pellow 2011). This strategy of opportunity hoarding and segregation are leading indicators of growing socioeconomic inequality in America (Hartman 2014; Massey 2007; Tilley 1998).

High rates of poverty and growing class-based spatial segregation did not bypass America’s rural landscapes (Weber, et. al., 2005). The poverty rate among rural Americans (i.e., living outside metropolitan areas) – 16.5% – exceeded the nation’s overall poverty rate in 2010. Today, the rural poor (7.9 million) comprise about 17% of America’s poor population, yet they remain largely invisible to some social scientists and policy-makers despite their presence in almost every geographic corridor in the U.S. The rural poor are found in geographically isolated and economically-depressed parts of Appalachia, the Delta, the Southern Black Belt, the Midwest and Great Plains, the Pacific Northwest, New England,

the Alaskan panhandle, and on American Indian Reservations in the Upper Midwest and desert Southwest (Ulrich and Stanley, 2011).

Race and ethnicity also figure prominently in the geographic segregation and isolation of the poor. Some of the most impoverished racial and ethnic minority populations live in geographically isolated rural areas and have done so for generations (Lichter 2012; Summers, 1991). In this context, America may be entering a new period of growing spatial economic balkanization, which is inextricably linked to changing race relations and economic and political incorporation. African Americans in the Mississippi Delta and the southern Black Belt crescent face exceptionally high rates of poverty (Lee and Singelmann 2006), as do Mexican-origin Hispanics in the colonias of the lower Rio Grande Valley (Saenz and Torres 2003), and American Indians on reservations in the Great Plains states and the American Southwest (Snipp 1989). The regional concentration of rural minorities, especially the poor, underemployed, and uneducated, is a historical legacy of racial subjugation and oppression, slavery, conquest, genocide, and legally sanctioned land grabs (e.g., in the historical case of Mexicans who controlled vast land holding and property in the Southwest) (Tomaskovic-Devey and Roscigno 1997). The statistics are often staggering. Today, more than one half of all rural Blacks (57.9%) and 66.8 % of poor rural Blacks – mostly in the South – live in high-poverty counties (Lichter, Parisi, Taquino, and Beaulieu 2012). For rural Hispanics, the corresponding poverty figures are 31.9% and 38.7%, respectively. Rural minorities are highly segregated from their White counterparts, regardless of income (Lichter, Parisi and Taquino 2012). Rural racial and ethnic segregation often matches or exceeds big-city neighborhood patterns.

### C. SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The demography of inequality and the spatial distribution of poverty in U.S. poignantly bring a recurring story of American life to the fore. Although our previous discussion focused intently on the geographic distribution of poverty in the U.S., it clearly directs our gaze toward a much broader narrative in the everyday lives of Americans. Americans, whether they are legal citizens or not, are either exposed to, turn a blind eye toward, or are deeply embedded in lived experiences involving the micro-processes which socially exclude of the poor.

The concept of social exclusion is a term most commonly used in the European and Latin American scholarly discourse on poverty (Dewall 2013; Daly and Silver, 2008). Indeed, that discourse suggests that social exclusion has a more powerful impact on poverty and socioeconomic mobility than our demographic description of the spatial distribution of poverty and its corollary geographic isolation portends. Social exclusion is arguably a process that serves as cause and consequence of poverty (Duck 2012; Silver and Miller 2006). According to Hunter and Jordan (2010: 245) "it is commonly understood to refer to multiple and often intersecting disadvantages (including disparities in economic as well as

socio-political resources) and captures the relationship between individuals and society and hence the structural roots of disadvantage." Social exclusion "is not just a situation, but a process that excludes" (Rodgers, 1995: 43). It is characterized by: (1) incomplete or unequal integration of the poor into society (Daly and Silver 2008); (2) disadvantaged access to status, benefits, and the human capital building experiences (e.g., education) that should be rightfully afforded to human beings (Brady, 2009); (3) temporal domination by the privileged which creates delays or sociotemporal marginalization in the poor receiving necessary assistance (e.g., Katrina victims) (Reid 2013); and (4) from a relational perspective, "it entails social distance, isolation, rejection, humiliation, denial of participation, and a lack of social support networks" (Silver and Miller 2006:59). In our view, it is the exclusion from social networks and the support that leads to social capital that we, and others have argued, is the Achilles' heel for the poor attaining upward socioeconomic mobility (Lin 2000; McDonald 2011; Wilson 1987).

#### **D. SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL MOBILITY**

Social capital refers to resources that are accessible through social interactions and extended networks of social ties. Put another way, social capital denotes the value that can be extracted from social relations (Portes 1998). Like other forms of capital, social capital is not evenly distributed in society (Lin 2000). Rather, the social networks through which social capital flows develop in accordance with the homophily principle, which states that similar people are more likely to interact with each other than dissimilar people (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). In other words, like attracts like. Different degrees of similarity between individuals, in turn, give rise to different types of social capital. Bonding social capital reinforces the similarities that exist between strong ties (such as family and close friends) which bolsters solidarity and strengthens support reciprocity. In contrast, bridging social capital reaches across gaps in the social structure to link heterogeneous groups, generally through weaker ties (such as acquaintances).

While bonding social capital is useful for marshaling support in order to maintain the status quo, bridging social capital offers the chance of social mobility precisely because it "bridges" social divides. For example, consider the problem of finding a job. Although a person's strong ties may be more motivated to help with the job search, because they have much in common (by virtue of the homophily principle) both with each other and the job-seeker, there is likely to be a great deal of overlap in the job leads they can provide. On the other hand, because more distant acquaintances travel in different spheres, they are more likely to hear about fresh job opportunities that they can then pass along to the job-seeker (Granovetter 1973, 1983). In communities where unemployment is high and jobs are scarce, these weak, bridging ties take on even greater significance for those pursuing upward mobility.

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

In the post–Civil Rights era, the legal barriers that previously limited social interactions were dismantled, and there have been active efforts to integrate critical areas such as education and housing. In addition to these formal, top–down measures, several informal trends, such as the gentrification of inner–city neighborhoods and the rise of social media, also would seem to increase opportunities for heterogeneous interactions. Why, then, does this social isolation and exclusion persist?

There are several reasons why. First, a number of scholars have argued that even when social ties are theoretically possible, actually making a connection still requires a measure of trust on behalf of all parties concerned. Unfortunately, although they have the most to gain from social capital, people living below the poverty line tend to have high levels of distrust for both institutions and other individuals (Burton, Cherlin, Winn, Estacion, and Holder–Taylor 2009; Edin and Kefalas 2005; Smith 2007). In her exploration of trust among low–income mothers, for example, Levine (2013) observed a pervasive and often overlapping distrust of welfare caseworkers, employers, childcare providers, romantic partners, and extended kin, which made them reluctant to seize opportunities to grow their social capital. The mothers simply did not trust these other actors to follow through on their promises or treat them in a fair manner, and felt they could not afford to risk what few resources they had gambling on someone they did not trust.

Moreover, Levine (2013) found that this distrust was largely learned, resulting from the mothers' own past experiences of extending trust in these various situations and getting burned. In order for effective bridges to form, trust must run in both directions; in other words, the recipients of trust must be trustworthy. Given their economic vulnerability and the untrustworthiness of many of the mothers' associates (both institutional and individual), distrust is, in fact, a more effective strategy for getting by, although it comes at the expense of getting ahead. Any policy designed to reduce poverty through social capital must therefore take into account both the conditioned reaction of the disadvantaged to distrust, and the trustworthiness of the actors they are being asked to network with, particularly the institutions. Distrust is yet another force that leads the poor down the path of social exclusion.

Second, Desmond's (2012) recent work on evicted tenants in high–poverty neighborhoods provides additional insights on social capital and how social exclusion and mistrust can become mired in strong, weak, and what he calls "disposable ties." Through longitudinal ethnographic work with poor Whites residing in a trailer park and Blacks in an inner–

city neighborhood, he followed respondents who had been evicted from their homes to explore the families' survival and the social capital they would accumulate. Results from his study were counter-intuitive to long-standing beliefs that the poor rely heavily on the strong ties of kin in times of need. Desmond (2012) found that some of his respondents relied somewhat on family but were confronted with obstacles in tapping into those ties. Rather, "to meet their most pressing needs, evicted tenants often relied on more disposable ties formed with new acquaintances. They established new ties quickly and accelerated their intimacy. Virtual strangers became roommates and 'sisters.' Once a disposable tie was formed, resources flowed through it. But these bonds were often brittle and fleeting, lasting only for short bursts. This strategy of forming, using, and burning disposable ties allowed families caught in desperate situations to make it from one day to the next, but it also bred instability and fostered misgivings between peers" (Desmond 2012: 1296). Essentially, disposable ties were intense for short periods of time but did not connect sets of people in the ways that bridging ties do. Specifically, these ties were not useful in diffusing information or connecting people in ways that would lead to the accumulation of social capital and mobility opportunities. They often isolated the poor from their families and their "quick fix nature" led to diminished capital and greater social exclusion for those most in need.

A third consideration is provided in the recent work of Harrison and Lloyd (2013). In their ethnographic case study of how employers contribute to occupational segregation on Wisconsin dairy farms, they provide a vivid picture of what some social exclusion theorists argue impede the poor's ability to build social networks, accumulate social capital, and ultimately achieve socioeconomic mobility. Harrison and Lloyd's (2013) work is unique in that – in line with social exclusion theorists' promotion of the theoretical and on-the-ground importance of considering the roles of all actors not just the poor – it shows the actual personal processes, practices, and relationships that employers engage in to stall the upward mobility of their workers and why they do it. Essentially results from the study show that employers engage in numerous practices to create inequality and exclusion among their poor immigrant workers including racial stereotyping in assessing them, recruiting workers thought to be the most subservient, and presenting profile of the workers that differentiate them in uncomplimentary and unequal ways. More importantly, however, Harrison and Lloyd (2014: 282) find that the employers exclude and marginalize workers, thereby usurping their abilities to build social capital, because in doing so the employers "not only succumb to stereotypes and greed, but because the unequal organization of work and workers enables these employers to maintain profit, meet their own middle-class aspirations, comply with their peers' middle-class lifestyle expectations, manage their own concerns about immigration policing, assert their own class identity, justify privileges that they and their White, U.S.-born employees enjoy on the farm, and maintain the advantages they have gained." This study provides the perfect segue to our central argument in this commentary – that is, if U.S. policy hopes to affect poverty in more prominent and sustained ways, it will have to con-

sider the micro-processes and “underground” nuanced practices around social exclusion, social capital, and socioeconomic mobility that the haves and have-nots are involved in beyond those visible at macro-structural levels.

#### **E. THE REPRODUCTION OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION: FOUR GENERIC PROCESSES**

Here we recount the work of Prus (1987) and Schwalbe et al. (2000) who have identified four generic processes by which the advantaged isolate the disadvantaged and the disadvantaged isolate themselves: othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management. Moreover, because they are complementary, these four processes can compound and reinforce each other, so that even if one is overcome, the others will fill the void to preserve the divisions between people. The four processes are described in greater detail below.

#### **F. OTHERING**

Othering refers to the processes by which individuals and groups manufacture identity by rhetorically distancing themselves from select categories of people who are perceived as different or inferior. These distinctions, in turn, enable people to refrain from interacting with Others or otherwise intervening in their lives. Schwalbe et al. (2002) highlight three types of othering that create and reproduce social inequality – oppressive, implicit, and defensive.

Oppressive othering occurs when dominant groups attempt to marginalize the less advantaged by defining them as morally or intellectually deficient. Examples of oppressive othering include blaming a “culture of poverty” for socioeconomic inequality (Lewis 1966; Hunt 2007; Hunt and Bullock forthcoming), and promulgating stereotypes such as that of the “welfare queen” living high on the public dole (Hancock 2004) or the “gun-toting, illiterate bumpkin” populating Appalachia (Fisher 1993). More recently, the emphasis on characterizing undocumented immigrants as illegal likewise serves to set them apart from the rest of society. Trouille (2014) poignantly chronicles these dynamics in an ethnography of a neighborhood park in which “liberal” Whites engage in oppressive othering and exclusion behaviors to keep Latino immigrants from using this public space.

Implicit othering, on the other hand, constructs an identity for the dominant group by linking their advantaged status with other desirable traits and implying a similar correlation of disadvantage and undesirable traits. For instance, the narrative of rugged individualism that asserts success is achieved through hard work implies that anyone who has not achieved success is simply not willing to work hard. Threads of implicit othering are seen in the public and scholarly discourse on Asian American immigrants as model minorities and paragons of academic achievement (Lee and Zhou 2013).

Defensive othering occurs when members of a disadvantaged group try to deflect stigma by distancing themselves from, or even disparaging, people who are similarly situated in the social hierarchy, in accordance with the elite narrative. Women who receive public aid, for example, often insist that they are different from most welfare recipients (invoking the stereotypes endorsed by the advantaged), or attempt to hide their association with public aid altogether, in order to avoid being negatively labeled (Seccombe, James, and Walters 1998; McCormack 2004). Duneier (1999) similarly observed two factions of homeless men in New York – panhandlers and trash scavengers – who both insisted that they had too much pride to do the other’s activity.

### G. SUBORDINATE ADAPTATION

Subordinate adaptation denotes the behaviors and strategies that the disadvantaged employ to cope with their diminished status, which in turn often inadvertently perpetuate the existing social hierarchy. For example, in their exploration of why low-income African-American, Puerto Rican, and White women in Philadelphia put motherhood before marriage, Edin and Kefalas (2005) found that the limited opportunity structure the women faced, combined with the high value low-income communities place on children, resulted in many of them becoming mothers at earlier ages. Although motherhood increased their status within the community, it effectively arrested their social mobility more generally and curtailed the growth of their social networks by cutting short educational careers and making it more difficult to work (see also Fernandez-Kelly 1995).

Similarly, in his study of impoverished Whites in a rural Midwestern community, Harvey (1993) uncovered a “jack-of-all-trades” work culture among the men, which prized physical strength, mechanical dexterity, and practical knowledge across a wide (but shallow) set of skills. Although these values made sense in the context of an ever-churning economic environment, they also fostered a certain contempt for people who specialized or dealt in abstracts, which curtailed their ability to bridge and transition out of that niche. Subordinate adaptation can also take the form of joining gangs (Bourgois 1995; Anderson 1992) or organized crime syndicates (Steffensmeier and Ulmer 2006), which offer not only status within the community, but also access to the material goods of the dominant culture. However, any gains are usually fleeting, and the illicit business of these groups impedes true upward mobility, both because of the negative impact a criminal record has on employment and because it tends to encourage insularity, which prevents the development of bridges to the legitimate economy.

Alternately, some groups adapt to their lower social position by rejecting the values of the dominant culture. Researchers have described subgroups of disadvantaged African-Americans (Fordham & Ogbu 1987), Mexican-Americans (Matute-Bianchi 1991), and working class Korean-Americans (Lew 2004) who disdain educational achievement because they equate it with “acting white.” Similarly, many Asian and Latino immigrants



(including younger generations) remain wary of acculturation because they identify problem behavior, such as disrespecting elders, having premarital sex, and misbehaving in school, with becoming “Americanized” (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). In all of these cases, aversion to the dominant culture has the effect of isolating the subgroups from mainstream society, and encouraging interactions only within homogeneous niches, thereby hindering the development of bridging social capital.

#### **H. BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE**

Boundary maintenance indicates the activities that groups engage in to control and limit access to resources by Others, and thereby preserve their power and status. Empirically, boundary maintenance is most apparent in the persistent segregation that divides neighborhoods throughout the U.S. by race, ethnicity, and class (Lichter, Parisi and Taquino 2012; Massey and Denton 1998). Poor neighborhoods, in turn, generally have fewer quality schools, employers, and cultural institutions, which limits their residents’ ability to accumulate all types of capital. Boundary maintenance can also act more obliquely to isolate the disadvantaged. For instance, Goffman (2009) documented how aggressive policing in poor neighborhoods, in addition to overtly reinforcing social boundaries, also disrupts the mobility aspirations of young African-American men in Philadelphia by making incarceration seem both commonplace and unavoidable.

Although the advantaged would seem to have more to gain from upholding these boundaries, the disadvantaged at times also work to sustain them. For example, Harvey (1993) described a rural community that steadfastly resisted incorporation by a nearby city because of strong anti-urban biases and a sentimental attachment to the land passed down from their farmer forebears. Alternately, some of the subcultures described in the preceding section, such as gangs or organized crime syndicates, can only amass power in resource-poor environments. Thus, they attempt to keep wealthy, well-connected (and therefore more difficult to intimidate) people and enterprises out of their territory, while at the same time discouraging residents from cooperating with representatives of mainstream society, such as law enforcement.

Boundaries are also preserved within disadvantaged communities. In their study of Vietnamese-Americans in New Orleans, Zhou and Bankston (1998) observed that once a youth began to acquire a reputation for being a “bad kid,” rather than attempt an intervention, the community rejected and excluded him (or more rarely, her), which in turn tended to encourage further delinquency. Along the same lines, Smith (2007) found that blue-collar African-Americans in Michigan were less likely than either more affluent African-Americans or jobholders from other ethnic groups to act as bridges for jobseekers in their social networks, because they lacked confidence in their associates’ follow-through. Consequently, their own networks and opportunities for bridging remained limited.

## **I. EMOTION MANAGEMENT**

Because inequality foments feelings such as anger, resentment, despair, and sympathy that threaten to destabilize the social order, these emotions must be managed. One way of managing emotions is by regulating discourse. Scott (1990) asserts that dominant and subordinate groups in society participate in both a shared public discourse, which is controlled by the dominant group and reinforces the existing social structure, as well as separate private discourses that work to strengthen and challenge, respectively, the public discourse. The reframing of welfare discourse in terms of personal responsibility and corrosive dependency, and the subsequent adoption of this language even by welfare recipients, offers an example of how elites can shape public discourse to make inequality more palatable (Hancock 2004). Pfeiffer (2006) similarly described how discourse about public housing was manipulated to spur redevelopment and deflect attention away from the consequences of severing the displaced residents from their communities.

Another means of managing emotions is through conditioning emotional subjectivity. This involves suppressing a natural emotional reaction by habitually reinterpreting the meanings assigned to the circumstances that trigger the emotion. For instance, in order to prevent caseworkers at public aid offices from bending the rules out of sympathy for the applicants, they are conditioned to focus on eligibility compliance rather than engaging with the applicants on a personal level (Bane and Ellwood 1994; Rosenthal 1989; Watkins-Hayes 2009). Along the same lines, Devine (1996) noted the efforts of both administrators and students of inner-city schools to downplay the violence they encountered at school, even though it was frequent and disruptive. Outsiders, in turn, feel alienated not just by the violence, but also by the community's desensitized reaction to it, further curtailing interactions.

## **J. CONTEXT MATTERS**

Because the social isolation and exclusion that the disadvantaged encounter is the cumulative result of these four mutually reinforcing processes, simply bringing different people into contact with each other will not be sufficient to generate bridging social capital, as the underwhelming results of social experiments like the Moving to Opportunity program clearly demonstrate (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering 2010). Dissimilar people who suddenly find themselves in proximity of each other, with no social script to guide them, are far more likely to behave like strangers in an elevator than neighbors. However, these processes are also not entirely insurmountable. Social interactions are highly contingent on context, at both the individual and organizational levels, and changing the contexts in which these processes are operating has the potential to disrupt (or exacerbate) their effects.

Several studies have affirmed the importance of context to the procurement of bridging social capital. In his exploration of why having a child enrolled in a childcare center improved the well-being of low-income mothers in New York, Small (2009) determined that the organizational structure of childcare centers was highly conducive to acquiring social capital. Specifically, the centers provided opportunities for the mothers to repeatedly interact for extended periods in a noncompetitive setting, which for many resulted in the expansion of their support networks (bonding social capital). The centers also brokered ties to other organizations and resources, which enabled the mothers to acquire information and services they would not otherwise have been likely to access (bridging social capital). Notably, Small credits the combination of state mandates and the professional norms of the childcare providers as providing the framework for parental involvement that has proved so advantageous for the mothers.

In terms of the four generic processes, the principle means by which Small's childcare centers helped actualize bridging social capital was by enabling the mothers to cross boundaries that would have otherwise checked their mobility through contacts between institutions. Key to this brokerage service was the emotional involvement of the childcare providers. Unlike the social workers who were conditioned not to sympathize with their clients, the professional norms of the childcare providers in fact encouraged them to forge emotional bonds with the families and assist them in any way they could. Finally, the noncompetitive setting, repeated interactions, and common goal of caring for children fostered solidarity and discouraged othering.

Alternately, Dominguez (2010) examined the experiences of Latino immigrants in two Boston neighborhoods that until recently had a predominantly White population. One of the neighborhoods, East Boston, had in the past been home to successive waves of immigrants, while the other, South Boston, had a reputation for racial antagonism and insularity. She found that the historical context strongly influenced the development of bridging ties, but in a rather unexpected way. Precisely because South Boston had so notoriously resisted past integration efforts, a number of individuals from the community went out of their way to forge connections with the new arrivals. In East Boston, on the other hand, because previous waves of immigrants had successfully assimilated into the community, residents were more complacent about outreach, and most of the bridging ties arose from institutional mandates. Moreover, the spontaneous bridges in South Boston ultimately proved to be more effective with respect to social mobility than the mandated bridges in East Boston.

Dominguez's narrative begins with the institutional dismantling of the racial boundaries that had characterized public housing in South and East Boston; the Latino population in both communities was growing in part as a result of desegregation mandates handed down by the courts. Previous efforts to integrate South Boston had led to the residents violently defending their boundaries. This past violence, in turn, provoked an emotional reaction in certain individuals within the community, which prompted them to actively

work to combat the othering of Latinos during more recent efforts to desegregate. In contrast, residents of East Boston had been historically conditioned not to worry about how new immigrants were faring since previous groups had succeeded without interventions, and thus relied solely on institutions to build bridges.

Likewise, in separate studies of HOPE VI relocations in Chicago and Boston, Chaskin (2013) and Curley (2010) found that social interactions both in and out of public housing were conditioned by the physical structure and spatial arrangement of a community in combination with its policies regarding public space and intensity of surveillance. In public housing, the built environment enclosed the community, and what regulations there were, were not strictly enforced, resulting in a lively social scene within the development. However, the same qualities that fostered social activity inside the projects impeded bridging to the wider neighborhood.

The mixed-income communities, in contrast, were designed to be more accessible to the rest of the city, and thus decentralized the common areas. Public spaces were also more heavily regulated and monitored. Furthermore, many of the former public housing residents felt that the tenants paying market rent were, at best, not interested in getting to know them, or at worst, actively trying to have them evicted, and both scenarios made them more hesitant to use the common areas. Consequently, not only were the HOPE VI relocatees seldom interacting with the tenants paying market rent, they also had fewer interactions with other former public housing residents.

One of the explicit ambitions of the mixed-income design was to break down the boundaries between socioeconomic classes and better integrate the housing development with the neighborhood. Another goal was to counteract some of the negative adaptation strategies that had flourished in public housing. However, in the process of addressing these problems, the administrators created a whole new set of boundaries within the community that isolated and alienated the former public housing residents. Likewise, the rampant othering that occurred in the communities along socio-economic lines further undermined the redevelopers' intent.

Interestingly, these three examples offer differing assessments of the effectiveness of administrative mandates. Small (2009) conveyed a generally favorable impression of the ability of state mandates to create environments where both bonding and bridging social capital could flourish, though in his exemplar cases an individual childcare provider usually facilitated the bridging connections. Dominguez (2010) acknowledged the role of institutional mandates in linking residents to services, but found that spontaneous bridges between individuals were the real drivers of social mobility. Chaskin (2013) and Curley (2010), meanwhile, made the case that administrative mandates did more to inhibit the creation of social capital, though the attitudes of management and both sets of tenants no doubt contributed to the former public housing residents' feelings of isolation.

While seemingly contradictory, the overall picture that emerges in our commentary confirms the importance of both the individual and organizational contexts to the acquisition of bridging social capital. Organizational structure is vital to creating an environment that either stimulates or hinders bridging social capital. An organizational structure that actively facilitates interactions between its members is more likely to stimulate bridges than an arrangement that is disinterested, or one that encourages solitary pursuits. Organizations can also help to offset disparities in human capital between actors by providing opportunities and incentives to form bridging ties. However, individual interactions are ultimately what make or break the bridges. Just as social exclusion is created and reproduced by repeated individual interactions (conditioned by the four generic processes described in the preceding section) that eventually assume the character of structure, so too must local interactions bridge the divides if poverty, socioeconomic mobility, and the structure of inequality are to be altered.

#### **K. THOUGHTS ON PUBLIC POLICY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

As noted in our demographic description of inequality in America, the U.S. consistently experiences a high prevalence of poverty despite its global distinction as a leading developed country. Our goal in this commentary was to link three processes – social exclusion, social capital, and socioeconomic mobility – that shape and sustain that prevalence. We also aimed to highlight how economically and racially privileged individuals and groups participate in marginalizing poor populations. We argued that: (1) social capital is a key process in mitigating the effects of social exclusion as cause and consequence of poverty; (2) there are micro-level exclusion-laden processes – othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management – that form the bases of interactions both within and between groups of the haves and the have-nots and preclude the poor's accumulation of social capital; and (3) context matters, particularly in how it facilitates bridges between helping organizations and the disadvantaged in promoting the poor's ability to assuage the micro-processes that perpetuate social exclusion and their capacity to garner and leverage social capital to attain upward socioeconomic mobility.

As we considered the policy recommendations we would offer based on our arguments and the extant literature on the prevalence of and the difficulties of ending poverty in America (Edelman 2012), we also consulted the literature on poverty and social exclusion in Europe, Latin America, and Australia. What we found, albeit still in the early stages of our synthesis of this literature, is that in considering the myriad factors that forestall efforts to reduce poverty – that is, from the shift to a low-wage economy and changes to the criminal justice system to the increase in out-of-wedlock births – the U.S. remains concerned and focused on macro-level processes, policies, and interventions, many of which are fragmented and even compete with each other. In contrast, what we saw in the literature on other countries, such as Australia (Long 2013) and those in Europe (Silver

and Miller 2006), was an openness to consider the processes of exclusion and inclusion which points policy-makers in the direction of contemplating the role of micro-level processes, such as the ones we described, in mitigating the reproduction of poverty and shifting the broader national discourse about the poor away from deficit models.

For example, in our discussion of othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management it became clear that, in the U.S., the discourse and interactions around the poor remain anchored in racism, class stereotypes, and elitism that are not limited to one-on-one interactions such as those the dairy farmers had with their immigrant employees (Reid 2013). They are also prevalent in the top-down messages that are sent within organizational hierarchies to front-line workers who provide direct services to the poor (Watkins-Hayes 2009). U.S. policy-makers must pause to discern and seriously consider what types of discourse, micro-processes, and interactions are occurring on the ground level in peoples' everyday lives that are keeping America from achieving more profound reductions in poverty. That level of consideration has to take into account the four generic processes we outlined that clearly are contributing to increasing exclusion of the poor in American society from the bottom up as well as the ways in which exclusion impinges on the poor's access to social capital and social mobility.

What is more, the manners in which the disadvantaged engage in othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management toward each other requires further empirical investigation and the development of evidence-based contextually appropriate interventions as needed. Research and interventions also need to consider the multiple levels of distrust experienced by the poor as described in the work of Levine (2013), and the emerging variants of social networks, such as the disposable ties reported by Desmond (2012) must be recognized as "real" and that they are not moving America any closer to reducing poverty, especially among the poorest of the poor.

Perhaps, in the long run, America's spirit of individualism may have kept it on the wrong-side of ameliorating poverty. Relationships and how people connect with each other, pass on useful information to one another, think about each other's relevance and worth to society, and are committed to leveling the playing field (e.g., quality education for all) for all citizens to have access to the "American Dream" are critical to the reduction of social exclusion of the poor. We are not naïve enough to suggest that public policy should mandate how people relate to each other, but such changes can, as Hillary and Miller (2006) contend, alter the discourse about the poor and the privileged in ways that can lead to an openness about community-building as a major source of poverty reduction. Communities, if provided with the appropriate financial support and relationship and participation interventions can guide families in building bonding and bridging social capital. We already have some potential bright spots in the country as seen in Small's (2009) work in a Boston day care center and Dominguez's (2010) work in a housing project. We are sure there are more. But, they are not part of the dominant discourse on poverty in

America. As an important step forward, they need to become primary spoken and visual messages to Americans as behavioral theory tells us that people often imitate the actions they hear about and witness.

## **L. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RESEARCH**

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

### **PUBLIC POLICIES AND PROGRAM**

While public policies and programs that provide cash transfers and access to health care, education, housing, employment opportunities, and child care remain essential to the survival and upward mobility of the poor, these policies and programs must also be mindful of how on-the-ground social processes such as othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management, impact social exclusion, social capital, and social mobility among America's disadvantaged populations. It is imperative that public policies and programs:

- a. create innovative interventions in geographic and physical spaces with well-trained staff who can facilitate "organic" opportunities for the poor to develop and nurture bridging capital with each other as well as those who occupy more privileged rungs in American society.
- b. reconsider the designs of programs like HOPE VI which create mixed-income living/housing environments, but may do little in the way of facilitating social interactions among groups in ways that do not reproduce segregation and social exclusion.
- c. not underestimate the competition and fragmentation that occurs in social relationships among the poor themselves and their negative impact on social exclusion

d. develop a national discourse on inclusion that is not mired in the trappings of outdated language about “diversity” and “privilege.”

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