

**Social Capital: An Inclusion and Equity Brown Bag Lunch and Conversation
Maine Philanthropy Center, Portland
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Opening Reading: "Senegal" by Maya Angelou¹

What is Social Capital?

"Social capital is the shared values, experiences, and expectations that promote familiarity and trust in a community. And it has a lot of relevance for a funder working in a community." (MPC Handout)

"'Social capital' refers to features of social organization, such as **networks, norms**, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."²

"Social capital is ... the networks of association and norms of trust and reciprocity that facilitate collective action ..."³

Networks and Norms

"Networks" are associations or relationships with friends, family, and colleagues.

"Norms" refers to a pattern of behavior in a particular group, community, or culture, accepted as normal and to which an individual is expected to conform; social norms often reflect shared experiences and expectations, shared understandings of the meaning of things, and shared values among members of a group.

Bonding (strong ties) and Bridging (weak ties) Functions⁴

"Bonding social capital refers to the links between like-minded people, or the reinforcement of homogeneity. It builds **strong ties**, but can also result in higher walls excluding those who do not qualify, American college fraternities being a prominent example of such bonding."⁵

¹ Maya Angelou, *Letter to My Daughter* (New York: Random House, 2009), ch. 8.

² Robert Putnam, "Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life," *The American Prospect* (Spring 1993), 2.

³ Eleanor Brown and James M. Ferris, "Social Capital and Philanthropy: An Analysis of the Impact of Social Capital on Individual Giving and Volunteering," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 36 (2007), 86.

⁴ Rosalind Edwards, Sloan Work and Family Research Network Social Capital Encyclopedia, <https://workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/glossary/b/bridging-social-capital-definitions>

⁵ Schuller, T., Baron, S. & Field, J. "Social capital: A Review and Critic." In S. Baron, J. Field, & T. Schuller (Eds.). *Social Capital*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

For an illustration of the Equity challenges inherent to bonding social capital, see Toby Morris' blog, "On a Plate."⁶

"Bridging social capital ... refers to the building of connections between heterogeneous groups; these are likely to be more fragile **[weak ties]**, but more likely also to foster social inclusion."⁷

Related to the **Bridging function** (intentional reaching out to build weak ties) is an important **Linking function** (Malcolm Gladwell's "Connector"),⁸ which connects members of one's strong and/or weak ties to each other.

Mapping Exercise

Based on Rosalind Edwards' "Mapping Your Social Capital, A Suggested Work and Family Class Activity"

Why is social capital important?

- It builds trust leading to a general sense of reciprocity and good will.
- It supports the development of collective problem-solving.
- It is a key ingredient to resilience, social and economic strength (like diversifying stock).
- Like financial capital, social capital tends to be self-reinforcing and cumulative: the more you invest in it, the more the "stock" grows; if you don't invest in it, the "stock" flat-lines.
- Building social capital for those with limited access to resources builds **EQUITY** and lowers the likelihood that race, gender, and other similar factors will determine the fate of an individual or community.

Q & A

How do we build it equitably?

Share stories and brainstorm!

⁶ Toby Morris, "On a Plate," <http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/the-pencilword-on-a-plate>

⁷ Schuller, Baron, and Field, "Social Capital."

⁸ Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (Little, Brown and Company, 2000).