

10-2001

Beyond Trust: Other Dimensions of Social Capital

Roger A. Lohmann

West Virginia University, roger.lohmann@mail.wvu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/faculty_publications



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Digital Commons Citation

Lohmann, Roger A., "Beyond Trust: Other Dimensions of Social Capital" (2001). *Faculty & Staff Scholarship*. 1717.

https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/faculty_publications/1717

This Response or Comment is brought to you for free and open access by The Research Repository @ WVU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty & Staff Scholarship by an authorized administrator of The Research Repository @ WVU. For more information, please contact researchrepository@mail.wvu.edu.

Beyond Trust: Other Dimensions of Social Capital¹

Roger A. Lohmann
West Virginia University

Introduction

As some of you know, I have a longstanding interest in social welfare history. One of my principal concerns is the twin bias that results from what I see as the anti-social welfare bias of so much written history and the anti-historical bias of so many people working in family and community services fields. These are truly mirror images of one another. I am troubled about the unfortunate ways in which so many interesting and talented people who have made such important contributions to human well-being simply disappear from the record when their careers and their lives are completed. To read a general U.S. history book is to find little trace of social welfare concerns apart from Jane Addams' Hull House and you would have to guess that General Howard's Freedman's Bureau was very largely about what we today call health and social services to the recently freed slave populations. In the past several decades, specialized social history monographs and journal articles have added tremendously to our store of detailed knowledge, but, in the case of social welfare institutions and people, made only a slight impact on our overall historical insights.

If I were in a lecturing mode today, I could detail for you literally hundreds of important people whose lives and careers were important to making family and community services what they are today. Instead, I would like to begin today by paying tribute to two distinguished West Virginians from the past whose contributions we ought not overlook. One of those I would like to recall is the Rev. Bea Burgess, for whom the Burgess Center for Families and Communities is named. Bea was still active, particularly with the developing aging network when Nancy and I first came to West Virginia twenty five years ago, and her efforts in that area were a fitting culmination to a career of service and dedication to the state. We can truly suggest that Bea Burgess was one of the people who played an important role in building the present social capital of West Virginia.

The other person I wish to acknowledge is, I confess, a somewhat more enigmatic figure. I was not even completely certain for a long time whether the person I am referring to was a man or a woman. Because of the rather uncommon first name of "Lyda", the neutral middle name (and apparent patronymic) of "Judson" and the professional designation of "L.J.". I speak of Lyda Judson Hanifan, author, education leader and an important, if neglected social theorist of social capital. Lyda initially struck me as a

¹ Comments prepared for a Continuing Education Workshop at WVU, October, 2001.

woman's name, although I freely confess that my view was based purely on the song "Lyda Rose" from *The Music Man*.

I've talked with others more familiar with West Virginia than I who suggest it may not be. But it would not have been at all unusual in the period around 1915 when this particular member of the Hanifan family was active in West Virginia communities as state superintendent of rural schools for a woman to deal with the issue of gender discrimination by using her initials although it certainly would have been unusual for a woman to hold that post. However, the truth of the matter is, Ms. or Mr. or Doctor Hanifan has fallen so far from public awareness that I just didn't know their gender for sure until I finally located a picture of the man in the West Virginia history archives and I had not come across anyone else who had even heard of him.

(Note: This was my first mention of Hanifan in a public presentation. Shortly after this, I was able to confirm that, despite the name, Hanifan was a man and part of the 8-man all male WV Department of Education.)

This is a real shame because L.J. – Lyda Judson – Hanifan is someone who has become very important to the history of social capital theory in the modern world. If you don't believe me check out the online bibliography on social capital at the world bank web site <obsolete web link deleted>. There you will see that Lyda Judson Hanifan's 1916 article is listed along with a large number of articles from 1997 and later as basic readings on social capital. This is not only someone with an important idea, but it was an idea she had 80 years before anyone else!

Even so you can be forgiven for wondering what someone whose gender is presently not certain could have to do with social capital in West Virginia, much less the entire world. Like many other readers of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* book, I ran across my first reference to Hanifan on page 19. It is there that Putnam credits this West Virginia Hanifan as the first user in print of the concept of social capital – many decades, in fact, before the term came into wider use in the 1990's.

Putnam cites the article published in 1916 in which Hanifan refers to social capital in much its contemporary sense. This article, entitled "The Rural School Community Center" was published in the very prestigious *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Vol. 67, pp. 130-138). A quick check of the Library of Congress card catalog revealed also that Ms. Hanifan was also the author of two books: A volume on school management and organization entitled *District Supervision*, released by a Chicago publisher in 1913, and another entitled *The Community Center*, published in Boston in 1920, as well as the 1919 article that Putnam cites. Apparently West Virginia's rural schools at that time were in the capable hands of a well-published national expert.

Another quick check of the on-line telephone white pages found about 20 listings for Hanifans in West Virginia, many of them in the Buckhannon and Belington areas. So in an act of social capital formation – if any of you happen to know any of these present-day Hanifans well enough to ask what they might know about their kinsman Lyda Judson, by all means let me know what you find out.

But for right now, let's focus on the concept Hanifan is credited with originating and talk some about how it might apply in the present. As every student of economics knows, capital is the organization of the means of future production. Human capital is usually defined as the stock of economically productive human capabilities (Greenwalt. 1982. 474). One of these is labor which can be defined as "the flow of services generated by a given stock (endowment) of human capital"(Greenwalt. 1982. 585).

From these well-known ideas, its really only a very small leap to social capital. Humans are not merely capable of work in a physical sense and individual knowledge (or know-how). We are also social creatures capable of interaction and association with one another. It is those social relations of ours – insofar as they take on economic significance, or productive capacity – that we properly designate as social capital.

James Coleman, a sociologist who revived and developed the modern interest in social capital in the late 1980s,

Let me give you an example:

Everyone knows that there is a spot just south of San Francisco known as Silicon Valley which – even in the face of the present economic downturn – is one of the engines of production driving the American economy. Silicon Valley is located where it is not because of the climate or the rivers, or the labor supply or any of the other factors usually focused on by 'serious' economic development efforts. It is where it is and what it is to a considerable degree because a couple of engineers named Hewlett and Packard left Stanford University to start a hardware company at about the same time that the Xerox Corporation located its advanced research park in Palo Alto and a little later a couple of adolescents named Steve (Jobs and Wozniak) started another little company based on a 'personal computer' they built in Jobs' parents' garage. And in particular, when we talk about social capital, we need to remember that the early enthusiasm generated by these unrelated events was disseminated throughout the Valley by a loose network of voluntary associations, the most famous of which was named the Home Brew Computer Club. It was at a Home Brew meeting that Jobs and Woz first saw the 8K Altos and told themselves and their friends "We can do that better!"

To begin to understand the potential of the concept of social capital, we need only remind ourselves that the economic powerhouse that is Silicon Valley today began in part with a bunch of entrepreneurial faculty, lab

technicians and teen aged ‘nerds’ located in one spot in the California suburbs and interacting with one another about matters of common interest.

For reasons like this, social capital is one of those ideas which is getting prominent treatment in a wide variety of practical and theoretical contexts in recent years. Often paired with another popular concept – civil society – there are literally hundreds of articles and books appearing every year on this topic.

Unfortunately, a good deal of the current discussion focuses almost exclusively on the social relationship aspects of civil society to the virtual exclusion of the economic productive aspects of social capital. As someone with a career-long interest in nonprofit organizations and their role in civil society, I fully appreciate and support the focus of Bob Putnam’s work on declining civic participation in the United States.

However, I want to call attention today to the more complex and difficult economic development side of social capital, and in particular to focus on a somewhat neglected second dimension of social capital which I call *social skill repertoires*.

As everyone here knows, in West Virginia at the present time we are in a long-term search for replacement engines of economic development. The term ‘post-industrial’ has taken on a particular poignancy here as industry after industry – from coal and steel to lead crystal and glass marbles – have shrunk as sources of employment and economic development in the state. Much attention and public discussion has been devoted to a phenomenon I would call “industrial substitution” – and in particular, what industry might be found to replace coal as the dominant force in the state’s economy? One of the most frequently asked questions, for example, is can tourism replace the coal industry?

We need to remind ourselves, therefore, that the entire reason for the concept of social capital is a way to focus on the relationship between economic productivity and social relationships. The idea is a very intriguing one. It is that, all other things being equal, our social relationships – friendships and acquaintances; our relations with townfolk, neighbors, colleagues and co-workers – may possess an economic value that is like, and in some cases, exchanged for financial, physical or other forms of capital.

Much of the writing and speaking on the subject of social capital by Putnam and others focuses on a single dimension that well illustrates the concept. The one dimension that almost all social analysts and practitioners focus on is trust. The diamond trading industry is often cited as a paradigm case here: Every day, literally millions of dollars in diamonds move back and forth among an international network of traders in complex transactions that rely heavily on trust among the traders, rather than formal contracts, accounting transactions and the like.

Civil and political theorists have focused in on this same concept of trust as an essential component of the social fabric. It may be said that terrorist activities like those of September 11th at the World Trade Center are directed less at physical damage than at disrupting the essential trust that we all display as we walk down a crowded street in Manhattan or fly on an airplane.

Yet, the idea of social capital implies much more than this fundamental value of trust. For social capital to be a truly useful idea, we need to attend also to some of the other dimensions of this concept. But what are they?

It is my suggestion here today that social workers, extension workers, public administrators and others in this room have concentrated for decades on another important social capital dimension of relationships without ever fully recognizing it's economic value or importance. This dimension of social capital, that I choose to call the **social skill repertory**, has both individual and group dimensions. It involves the recognition of a range of situations in which social actors can act comfortably and effectively and a suite of situation-specific behavior from which to compose those actions.

As a form of social capital, the social skill repertory can be defined as those social skills possessed by individuals and groups that enable them to perform economically meaningful tasks. Let me give you a very simple illustration of a social skill repertory that has already had important economic implications in West Virginia: That example is white water rafting.

As a native of Minnesota, who grew up around more than 10,000 lakes at a time when most of the rivers were used primarily as open sewers, I am constantly amazed at the levels of what I might call rivercraft in West Virginia which are on display each year during the rafting season. It is important here to recognize the human capital of rafting: How to guide the raft, and steer clear of the rocks and keep the thing afloat right side up; the care and maintenance of rafts, etc.

But I want you to focus right now on the social capital aspect of rafting: Rafting guides don't – they can't – do all the work themselves. The real trick of rafting is the social skill involved in directing a dozen or so other people – often amateurs or beginners and relative strangers as well – in what to do and when to do it. The “bond” with their fellow rafters that people speak of following an exciting and challenging trip down river is very real; It is formed of the shared experience they've had, and the dependence they've felt on one another and other very real social dimensions. The formation of that bond through that shared experience and felt dependency is at the very core of what makes white water rafting an important industry in West Virginia now and in the future.

We might cite other examples – the making of quilts as a social experience or hunting and fishing guides, for example, or participation in larger events like community festivals (whether buckwheat, strawberry or whatever). The

economic value of each of these arises not from the scarcity of the raw materials, or the application of complex or esoteric technology. It arises directly from insights about the shared experiences, communication and mutual understanding arising from being around and interacting with other people. As someone who grew up in a small town, there is always part of me that wonders whether it might not even be possible – somewhat along the lines of the ‘dude ranch’ idea – to create a social capital intensive industry out of the simple experience of coming to live and participate in small town life for a period of time. The idea itself of urban dwellers temporarily entering into small town life to their benefit is certainly an enduring part of our popular culture – as we saw in the Bill Murray comedy Groundhog Day, for example, or the Julia Roberts movie, Run-Away Bride.

Now, let us examine briefly just one final facet of this idea of social capital and social skills repertoires – one that is much closer to the interests and social skills that many people in this room have but also more speculative. At about the same time that the Silicon Valley phenomenon was just getting underway, there was another “industry” thriving in California that I am going to call the human potential movement. All through the 1960s and 1970s – and for all I know still today – people paid hundreds or thousands of dollars to attend “retreats”, “encounter groups”, “personal growth sessions” and the like. In the more materialistic 1980s and 1990s, this same concept has been expanded to the “You Too Can Get Rich!” seminars, and there are such perennials in the religious arena as the Bill Graham tours and assorted retreat centers for church groups. The oldest and, in some ways, best example of this entire phenomenon is probably the camp at Chautauqua, New York which has been at it for nearly 150 years.

I realize there are a range of complicated professional and ethical issues involved in raising the example of the human potential movement but I don’t have time today to deal with any of them. My point here is only that this particular industry was constructed entirely out of the knowledge and skill of people with skills like those possessed by many of you. With a retreat center industry in the state that already includes such diverse examples as a wonderful state park system, the Greenbriar, Lakeview, Oglebay Park, John XXIII Center and New Vrindaban, the possibilities for expansion and for creation of new forms of social capital out of social work knowledge and skill seem to be worth noting.

In conclusion, let me say that the real promise of the social capital idea is that at least part of the secret to future economic development may not involve recovering lost manufacturing industries, or attracting factories or offices from other locations. The real promise may be that of creating things of value out of the stuff of our daily lives.

References

Hanifan, L. J. (1912). The Rural School and Rural Life. *West Virginia School Journal*, 4, 204-207.

Hanifan, L. J. (1913). *District supervision*. Chicago.

Hanifan, L. J. (1916). The Rural School Community Center. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 67, 130-138.

Hanifan, L. J. (1920). *The community center*. Boston, New York etc.: Silver Burdett & company.