Getting by in New York City: Bonding, Bridging and Linking Capital in Poverty-Impacted Neighborhoods

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A lack or low level of social capital is associated with negative outcomes for communities impacted by poverty. However, less is known about how different types of social capital operate on the ground in poverty-impacted urban neighborhoods. This article explores the ways in which bonding, bridging, and linking capital manifest among residents of two poverty-impacted neighborhoods in New York City. Findings of the study reveal that urban neighborhood characteristics, more than individual-level factors, compromise the ability to develop and utilize the leveraging role of bridging and linking capital. Lack of safety resulted in limited trust, and involvement in community life limit bonding capital. Opportunities for bridging are restricted by the socioeconomically homogenous and spatially segregated nature of the communities. Linking capital is undermined by the lack of resources in the neighborhoods. These structural barriers prevent communities from breaking the cycle of poverty and should be explicitly targeted when developing interventions focused on building social capital.

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INTRODUCTION

Lack or low level of social capital is known to have negative outcomes for communities impacted by poverty (e.g., Massey and Denton 1993; Portes 1998; Putnam 2001; Saegert et al. 2002; Walker and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo 2014; Wilson 2006). However, less is known about how different types of social capital operate on the ground in poverty-impacted urban neighborhoods and how social capital can provide them with opportunities for upward mobility (Curley 2010; DeFilippis 2001; Oakley and Fraser 2016). In this article, we contribute to this theoretical debate by delivering empirical evidence on the roles played by different types of social capital and conditions in which social capital can play a leveraging role for residents of poverty-impacted urban neighborhoods. We examine: (1) the roles played by bonding, bridging, and linking social capital; (2) the structural barriers that interfere with building of social capital in poverty-impacted neighborhoods; and (3) the factors that facilitate development and accumulation of social capital by using qualitative data from 60 interviews conducted with residents of two New York City (NYC) neighborhoods.

This article makes an original contribution to the debate on social capital in poverty-impacted neighborhoods by providing evidence that the leveraging role of social capital (stimulating upward mobility) depends on the structural conditions, rather than on social interactions. Structural level barriers such as lack of safety leading to lack of trust within local communities; residential segregation, lack of public spaces; and overall, poor neighborhood resources limit opportunities to use the leveraging role of social capital. These structural barriers reduce potential positive outcomes of social capital among low-income communities from "getting ahead" with their lives to merely "getting by." We identified several structural level factors that facilitated developing bridges and links, such as getting involved in activities outside geographic communities, building positive bonds with personnel of community-based organizations, and accessing quality level social services. These factors were, however, undermined by neighborhood barriers and eventually did not lead to developing a leveraging role of social capital.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Most scholars agree that social capital allows accessing various resources through direct or indirect ties with others and that the capital depends on mutual trust and reciprocity (e.g., Bourdieu 1985; Curley 2010; Lin 2001; Portes 1998). Social capital is frequently operationalized using measures of level of trust, shared norms and values, prevalence of social ties among neighbors, civic engagement, attachment to place, and network density (Curley 2010; Fulkerson, Gretchen, and Thompson 2008; Krishna and Schrader 1999).

In this study, we define social capital as a sum of actual and potential resources available to individuals, transmitted through social networks of relationships (Bourdieu 1985; Lin 2001). The resources can be both material and emotional and include sense of trust. We examine three forms of social capital, namely bonding, bridging, and linking (Gittell and Vidal 1998; Putnam 2001). Bonding social capital is based on the strongest and the closest ties, and is transmitted through connection among people who are alike. It is characterized by low levels of effort needed to generate it and high levels of trust and reciprocity (Lin 2001; Putnam 2001). Bridging social capital is based on somewhat weaker ties and

connects people who are different from one another. Because of these features, it has a potential to connect communities to external resources (Putnam 2001). Finally, linking social capital is based on the weakest connections, but it grants access to power structures and institutions, which may result in "getting ahead" by improving socioeconomic status (Lin 2001; Putnam 2000). Granovetter (1973) argues that weak ties (expressed in linking social capital) are necessary for individuals to access opportunities, as people are more likely to find jobs through weak rather than strong ties. Lin (2001) explained that the weaker the ties are, resources exchanged in a network become more diverse (*heterophilous*). Consequently, the diversity increases opportunities by providing access to education and employment.

ROLES PLAYED BY SOCIAL CAPITAL IN POVERTY-IMPACTED NEIGHBORHOODS

Many studies stress the positive role of social capital in the lives of communities residing in poverty-impacted neighborhoods (e.g., Dominguez 2011; Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Henly, Danziger, and Offer 2005; Small 2006). Social capital plays at least two major roles in individuals' lives: It offers social support (acting horizontally) and social leverage (acting vertically) (Briggs 1998; Dominguez and Watkins 2003). While social support allows individuals to get by within their social position, social leverage stimulates upward mobility from their current social position to a more advantaged one (Briggs 1998; Lin 2001). Strong bonding capital helps to get by on a daily basis and bridging and linking capital provide the opportunity to use social leverage (Briggs 1998; Dominguez 2011; Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Putnam 2000; Venkatesh 2009). In low-income neighborhoods, social capital operates through exchanges of social support when high levels of social trust exist. Saegert et al. (2002) stress that social capital can facilitate access to and use of economic resources and public services in underresourced communities. It cannot, however, be seen as an alternative to providing these services.

Additionally to creating opportunities to access resources, social capital can generate strong expectations to conform and reinforce social inequalities in already underresourced communities (Caughy, O'Campo, and Muntaner 2003; Landolt and Portes, 1996; Lin 2001). More specifically, it can replicate and reinforce existing social order in that the capital of the upper classes is rewarded and the capital of lower class is devaluated. Moreover, discriminatory racial politics of mainstream institutions may lead to a reduction of positive roles of social capital and further segregate residents (Lopez and Stack 2001).

FACTORS HINDERING AND FACILITATING ACCUMULATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN POVERTY-IMPACTED NEIGHBORHOODS

Structural barriers, such as living in homogeneous and segregated neighborhoods, can hinder bridging and linking social capital. In residentially, economically, and socially segregated urban neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty, residents are more likely to have contacts with other people with limited resources. Thus, in such homogeneous environments, bonding capital can be strong, but bridging and linking capitals are weak (Hawkins and Maurer 2010; Henly, Danziger, and Offer 2005; Leonard 2004; Lin 2001). Wichowsky's (2017) analyses of Current Population Survey suggest that residential

income segregation can be a barrier in developing social capital for low-income residents. The wealthier residents of income-segregated areas took part more actively in organizational life and had higher rates of group membership. Wichowsky's findings suggest that using social capital to overcome socioeconomic disadvantages is limited in the context of strong income segregation.

Structural factors, such as social interactions and neighborhood resources (e.g., libraries, public parks, stores, and social services), are identified in the literature as facilitating the development and accumulation of social capital. (Briggs 2002; Curley 2010). Briggs (2002) found that educational resources (higher educational attainment) and social interactions with nonreligious organizations and coworkers stimulated interracial bridging. For example, low-income, less educated individuals of color who had a white friend were also more likely to have higher SES friends. A recent study by Foster et al. (2015) on the spatial dimension of social capital among residents of public housing suggests that collective efficacy (as a form of social capital) can be accumulated through social interactions and accessing resources from a larger neighborhood area. Such area can provide a larger pool of neighbors to cooperate with and ties to build trustful ties. Based on studies by Dominguez and Watkins (2003) and Dominguez (2011), social interactions within networks providing advice and encouragement can facilitate the leveraging role of social capital. Such networks can exist in a heterogeneous employment environment. Also, Granberry and Torres (2017) found that social interactions in an employment environment are associated with accumulating social capital. In their study of Puerto Rican mothers in Springfield, Massachusetts, the authors found that employment and participation in activities of their children increased social capital accumulation. Another study showed that accumulation of social capital depends on other forms of capital and on the structure of opportunities (Fukui and Menjivar 2015). By comparing generation of social capital in Latino and Asian senior centers, Fukui and Menjivar found that access to heterogeneous networks including high SES individuals facilitates accumulating bridging capital.

This study aims to contribute to this discussion by exploring the ways in which social capital operates on the ground and by exploring factors hindering and facilitating the accumulation of capital in poverty-impacted urban communities.

METHODS

STUDY SETTING

The data presented in this article came from an international study with a broader focus on the relation between poverty and experiencing feelings such as shame (Ali et al. 2018; Walker and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo 2014).

The current study was conducted among residents of two NYC neighborhoods with the highest poverty rates. This study uses an administrative definition of a neighborhood based on zip code areas assigned to certain NYC boroughs. This definition does not include residents' subjective perception on what their neighborhood is (Rapaport 1977), unless participants narrated about their "direct neighborhood."

According to United States Census Bureau data, 15.6 percent of the population lives below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). The poverty rates in NYC are higher

than national rates, with 20.6 percent of people living in poverty. At the same time, in the lowest income neighborhoods in NYC, the percentage of people living below poverty reached 41.2 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2016).

Furthermore, among the 10 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S., NYC is the most income-segregated (Taylor and Fry 2012). In NYC, 41 percent of lower-income households reside in majority lower-income census tract, compared to 38 percent in Philadelphia, 37 percent in Houston and Dallas, and 34 percent in Los Angeles. High levels of income inequality correspond to other inequalities. According to the Community Loss Index (CLI),[1] the two lowest income neighborhoods of NYC are also the highest loss areas in terms of incarceration, unemployment, long-term hospitalizations, and premature deaths (Abramovitz and Albrecht 2013). One of these neighborhoods is also a high loss area with foreclosures. Residents of poor neighborhoods of NYC also have limited access to other resources such as traffic safety (low vehicular crash rates), crime safety (low rates of felony complaints and narcotics arrests), clean streets, and street trees (Neckerman et al. 2009). Public open space available for recreation in the lowest income neighborhoods in NYC is lower than that of wealthier neighborhoods (The City of New York, Department of City Planning 2013). Based on a case study of 16 childcare centers in high poverty neighborhoods in NYC, Small (2006) argues that limited access to resources and well-connected neighborhood institutions (which can provide important information) may be the root cause of disadvantage (Small 2006). Residents of low-income NYC neighborhoods are disadvantaged in different spheres of their lives and deprived of many critical resources.

SAMPLE

This study includes 60 participants purposively sampled to take part in semistructured interviews based on three criteria: (1) participant must reside in one of the lowest income zip codes in NYC; (2) participant must be receiving at least one type of social welfare benefit; and (3) participant must have at least one child.[2]

The sample was primarily female (88.5 percent) and born in the U.S. (85 percent). The mean age of participants was 39, with a range from 19 to 73 years of age. Slightly more than half of the participants identified as black (58 percent) and about a third identified as Hispanic/Latino (36 percent). The remaining 6 percent identified themselves as mixed race. Over half of the participants identified as being single (54 percent), less than 20 percent were married, and less than 20 percent were in a relationship. The mean number of children was two. Over half of participants reported that they were unable to save every month (52 percent). Further, more than half of the sample noted that they did not have enough food, and they often or sometimes did not have enough money to buy more. All of the participants in our sample received some form of welfare assistance. Most of the participants (89 percent) received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), fewer than half received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (43 percent), and most of the participants received government health benefits (87 percent). Almost half of the sample lived in a form of government-subsidized housing (i.e., offered by New York City Housing Authority or within Housing Choice Voucher Program Section 8).

DATA COLLECTION

The individual interviews were conducted using an interview guide that asked about the participants' lives, their current challenges in life, and ways with which they coped and managed these situations and emotions. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. Interviews were conducted by six trained interviewers. Participants received $30 and a round trip subway card for participating in the study.

The study was approved by the New York University Institutional Review Board and overseen by the McSilver Community Collaborative Board (CCB). The CCB consists of 30 members, urban youth, parents, school staff representatives from community-based agencies, and researchers primarily residing in the South Bronx. The interviews were conducted at two locations: a community center and at the CCB offices. The ongoing partnership between CCB members and researchers allows for culturally and contextually relevant research projects in poverty-impacted communities to be designed and implemented that meet the specific needs of the community residents.

DATA ANALYSIS

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Researchers uploaded the transcripts into Dedoose (Dedoose 2015) for data management and coding. They used inductive approach for thematic analysis of the data (Boyatzis 1998; Fereday & Elimear Muir-Cochrane 2006; Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2011). Thematic analysis allowed the use of preexisting themes, such as bonding, linking, and bridging social capital, but also derives themes that were grounded in the data, such as neighborhood-specific barriers and facilitating factors for social capital.

Four of the authors of this article were involved in analyzing the transcripts. First, they read three transcripts from each zip code (nine total) to immerse themselves in the data. Later, they independently coded one transcript and met to discuss the results. Next, they coded two additional transcripts using the initial codes, and additional codes that emerged in team discussions. Finally, through iterative coding researchers developed a codebook and coded three original transcripts and an additional fourth to ensure that the process was effective. At the next stage, researchers independently coded the remaining transcripts and met weekly to discuss the coding and analysis. Both in the initial coding process and later through the final coding the researchers used open, in vivo, and theoretical coding techniques. The researchers provided rigor of analysis by (1) using memos during the interview process, the coding, and analysis and (2) using peer debriefing (Padgett 2008). Peer debriefing was used through presenting the codes and results to two McSilver CCB community members. It allowed researchers to discuss emerging hypotheses, to assess their plausibility, and to explore aspects of the data that may otherwise remain implicit.

RESULTS

Participants identified three different types of social capital, namely bonding, bridging, and linking. Their narratives illustrated the roles played by each type of capital

as well as factors facilitating or limiting access to the capital related to neighborhood characteristics.

BONDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Most of the participants talked about the importance of having strong ties with their family members and friends. Although these homogeneous ties included mostly relatives and friends also affected by poverty, participants emphasized the critical role of material and emotional resources they could access through those relations in their everyday struggle with poverty. A single mother of a 15-year-old daughter gave an example of bonding social capital through the material resources she exchanged with her parents. She further spoke about how grateful she was for having the support.

> *My parents are a real good – big help for me. . . . My father helps me out tremendously. I actually thank God for him. So, he actually pays it [rent] for me for right now. . . . That's one thing my father's not going to let; is me and my daughter be on the street, or be in the system, or nothing like that. . . . So, that's where I get a lot of my help and my mother helps me out a lot cash-wise." [K315]*

The bonding ties mostly connected participants to people living in the same or similar low-income neighborhoods with similarly limited resources. Consequently, networks transmitting bonding social capital could not effectively assist participants in overcoming poverty.

Participants acknowledged that their networks were also financially depleted. For example, a 41-year-old caregiver with one child was well aware of the financial struggles her family members were going through. Yet, they managed to help each other. This kind of support exchange was mainly restricted to family members.

The strong ties were limited in number and rarely included neighbors. The low number of neighbors in a support network was attributed to a low level of the sense of safety and trust within the neighborhood, and as a result, limited involvement in community life. Low level of safety in their communities was the primary reason given for limited neighbor relationships. Most participants declared they had experienced violent situations decreasing their sense of safety in their neighborhood.

For instance, a 25-year-old single mother of two young children talked about how her friends from high school had changed over the years. She found that many of her neighbors engaged in risk behaviors and violated the social norms. As a result, she was cautious about interacting with her neighbors beyond brief social exchanges.

> *I know some people from school, high school, they can stop me and I will talk to them really quick and I keep moving because it's not safe. They are not the same people you know; you went to school with. They are either on drugs or selling drugs or the girls are like, I know like in the street with their guys and they are being after the guys. It's like, ugh, I just say hi and bye and I keep on moving. [DC702]*

Some participants lost their existing networks when, due to financial struggles, they were forced to relocate to a neighborhood that their prior connections perceive as unsafe. When a 41-year-old mother of two lost her job, she had to move into one of the lowest income neighborhoods in NYC. She gradually lost contact with many of her friends because they did not feel safe visiting her in her new neighborhood. Eventually, keeping in touch became more difficult and the bonds collapsed.

I lost everything because I'm telling you, my friends from like high school and everything, they don't come. Only one of them came one time by bus and then you know, she was afraid. So she never came back. My apartment, she was like "Oh, your apartment is very nice but when you move to Queens you call me." [K304]

Participants also discussed the lack of safe and well-kept public spaces where they could spend time with their children. Existing parks and playgrounds were not well maintained or were used for other activities such as "drinking and smoking." Hence, caregivers were more likely to keep their children in the apartments or to take them to public spaces outside the neighborhood if they could afford it. While participants did not directly connect the lack of these resources to neighbor relationships, it is very likely that the scarcity of safe public spaces in these neighborhoods further compromised the socialization among neighbors. A 33-year-old single mother of a 3-year-old described the lack of resources such as a decent playground on the premises of their building. She mentioned the lack of benches that would allow caregivers to keep an eye on the children while they were playing.

We don't have a park in the back of our building. But all these projects that's around us do. We don't have benches. We don't even have garbage cans. We need benches to sit down so we can see our kids play in the park, the little bit of park that we did had, they taken out. We have a slide and we have a half a train. We used to have a monkey bars. We used to have the big slide that go around. [K310]

The limits of bonding social capital within the local community had significant implications for the participants. First, access to resources that could potentially be available through bonding ties greatly diminished. Although bonding relationships may be limited in their ability to provide opportunities to help overcome poverty, they can play a critical role in increasing the capacity of residents to organize among themselves to advocate for rights and resources that might otherwise be inaccessible.

Despite these barriers, some participants remained engaged in their communities. Some expressed attachment to the neighborhood because they had been living there for many years or for their entire life. Others engaged with their communities through the school system. A 41-year-old caregiver of two children illustrated how her position as the President of the Parent Teacher Association allowed her to connect with many parents and their children. She argued that the relationships built in that context changed the school for the better.

[Being] PTA [President] has helped me to [help the parents and the children]. Because it's a lot of parents, especially the ones that don't speak English. First they don't dare, because they might not understand them or they might just throw it to the burner. They could come to me and I will speak for you. So it has helped, it has changed the school. . . . And we have done a lot of events for the school, for the kids, that wasn't going on for a couple years. [DC703]

Other participants got involved in their community and built relationships by way of assisting elderly residents in their neighborhood. A 46-year-old caregiver with four children described how she and "other ladies" cooked together and offered food to "people that are less fortunate."

I help out the elderly people in the neighborhood, you know. That's another way I'm involved in my community. So basically, that's, that it now and right now it's summertime. We um, you know, me and a couple of the other ladies, we would get together and we will barbecue. . . . You know, people that are less

fortunate and don't get to eat as much, we would offer them food. If they knew we were going to barbecue, you know, we would cook and they would come and they would eat, free of charge. [S507]

Strong ties played an essential role in participants' lives. Through their proximal networks of family and friends, they exchanged a variety of resources, including practical (childcare, housing, taking care of home, healthcare, in some cases searching for and getting employment) and emotional support.

One of the most frequent roles bonding social capital played was exchanging practical support, especially in the form of childcare. Grandmothers often helped take care of their grandchildren. Siblings, cousins, or friends exchanged childcare when needed. They picked up children from school and other activities, or watched after them when the caregivers had appointments.

Participants also gave examples of how important bonding social capital was in the context of housing. Some received important information regarding access to public housing from their family members, while others stayed with their relatives when they could not afford their own apartments. A participant who described herself as homeless and "running from place to place" explained how her relatives helped her when she needed it the most. After she stayed with her father for some time, she moved in with her cousin and her family. She found the situation to be difficult but was grateful for a safe space to sleep.

Well she has her own family so I'm basically in there, so like I leave in the daytime because I have therapy and stuff. So I'll go take care of myself and then I'll come back at night. . . . The most difficult thing is being in other people's houses where I can't just lay down when I need to and just call home. . . . I'm living out of a suitcase and thank God for my cousin because if I didn't find her, I don't know where I'd be at this point. [D109]

Bonding social capital also allowed participants to exchange information on healthcare, which at times included sharing medications with other family members. A 50-year-old mother with three children talked about her initial difficulties with obtaining Medicaid and getting the necessary medication for her diabetes. Knowing her mother and brother also suffer from diabetes, but did not have access to Medicaid, she made sure to share her medication with them.

. . . Then there came a point where I did qualify for insurance. I was starting to get my medication. But because my mother, my brother didn't qualify for insurance, and they also diabetic and we all take the same medication. I would stop taking care of myself and give them and so I got, you know, the proper help I was planning to do, help them. [DC704]

Despite having limited resources, people within the closest networks (family, friends) would still try to provide some financial support. In some cases, parents paid bills for their adult children. In others, friends lent each other money. For instance, a 34-year-old mother of two young children borrowed money from her friends in order to cover shopping expenses or bills.

I can tell you two very good friends of mines. . . . Whenever I need money, . . . I call her up and I'm like, I'm going need a big favor and you know, can you lend me at least a little hundred dollars just to hold me down for the week, you know? . . . And I'll tell her once, I'm working, I'm gonna repay you because that's one thing you know like, once I owe money, I gotta pay. And my other friend, also that he helps me you know, he came through for me and he'll pay my bill. [DC701]

In a few cases, bonding social capital provided access to temporary employment, through immediate networks of family or friends. For example, a 40-year-old mother of four discussed her gratitude for an opportunity to do paid work.

I think I was blessed because I have my older daughter's family that kind of took me in and helped me out, and the children that I had after was no relations to them they loved them and still do for them to this day. So if there was anything that they needed, they would give it to them. They would help me out in that sense. Or times I would like my daughter's grandmother, because she suffers from arthritis. She would need someone to clean her house. So I would clean her house, and she would pay me. [A603]

One of the most important roles bonding social capital played was the emotional support it provided. Even when participants' networks could not provide practical or financial support, friends and family members made themselves available. A 23-year-old single mother of a 2-year-old boy described how pivotal her friend was in her efforts to raise her son. When she got overwhelmed, her friend was there to encourage her to keep going.

If I didn't have her [my friend], I don't know what I would do. I would have gave up already because there's times I be wanting to when stuff get overwhelming. But I always have her to talk to and she would tell me my son is going to be good. Yeah, probably without her it'd be kind of tough. . . . I know if I didn't have her I probably would have been- yeah, I would have been struggling a lot. [D105]

Overall, bonding social capital had multiple roles in participants' lives. While participants were aware that their networks were mostly resource-depleted, and hence not able to help them overcome poverty, even small amounts of financial support allowed them to stay afloat. In addition to the financial support, bonding social capital was critical in providing both practical and emotional support, both of which helped participants to navigate the challenges associated with poverty. Participants had few strong bonds, mostly including family members and few close friends. Interactions among neighbors were limited, primarily due to neighborhood characteristics, such as lack of sense of safety, mistrust, and lack of public spaces for socialization. Consequently, residents refrained from being involved in the community. Despite these barriers, there were also some neighborhood factors that facilitated relationship building among some residents. Existing formal structures such as schools allowed participants to build bonds with other parents.

BRIDGING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Some participants exchanged resources with people outside their immediate network of family or friends, and with people who were embedded in more socially heterogeneous networks, e.g., their religious community, their children's teachers, or representatives of school-based resources or public libraries. Resources accessed through such networks constituted bridging social capital.

Bridging social capital played at least two important roles in the lives of participants. First, it provided access to material resources, which allowed them to get by. Second, it gave them emotional support needed to cope with material and symbolic hardship. The latter refers to stigma and feelings of shame associated with poverty. Although some persons developed resources needed to get by, in most cases it was not enough to overcome poverty.

A 41-year-old mother of two young sons described how her involvement in her children's activities such as Boy Scouts and attendance in events kept her engaged with people outside her social milieu. She actively participated in school-related activities, which allowed her access to material (information) and emotional resources.

> Because in my kid's school they didn't have Boy Scouts, ... so we started the Boy Scouts. ... So that, that got me driven to be there every Wednesday, to make events and take the kids out and do stuff. And we came out to the Puerto Rican parade, we're going... camping, all that stuff- one keeps my mind occupied, and two; I see all these smiles on all these kids and we're doing this and we're doing that. That keeps me motivated. And, like, different teachers are calling me and I feel that I'm doing something. [DC703]

Another participant, a 25-year-old single mother, spoke about the support she received from her church, which she had attended ever since she was a very young girl.

> Yeah I attend [church]. I try to get there when I can most of the time. And, um, I was there since I was young, since I was really young. Same church. So it's been my home church. These people basically helped raise me — and these were my prime examples. [G401]

A 46-year-old participant raising her grandson diagnosed with autism discussed her struggles in getting the right help for him. She described how the child was not able to attend school until she found an unexpected resource. She met her friend who was a special needs teacher who provided her with information regarding where to get help. Even though monetary help was slow and difficult to obtain, she was able to garner support from her contacts at Mount Sinai. Her interactions with counselors, social workers, and medical staff enabled her to receive necessary assistance.

A 46-year-old participant, a single mother of four, described how her relationships with school staff enabled her to furnish her apartment in a new residence when she had scant resources.

> There was a counselor for my daughter's elementary school. She saw that we were having a hard time getting furniture for our apartment. She took it upon herself to find her friends to get us furniture from different places, and she had half the school bring the furniture to the house. [A603]

Some participants also used bridging capital to gain access to job opportunities that were often out of reach within their proximal network. A 40-year-old mother who returned to school to complete her General Education Development (GED) talked about using the contacts she made at the community center and her child's school to look for employment.

> ... networking with people here since I've been at the Davidson community center. I'm trying to network with people at my kids' school. I'm working on my resume... towards having a job. [A603]

When asked how she had found a job in midtown, another participant responded that she used the contacts from her brother, who had a relatively better and stable position at a company. Another participant recounted how she had used her friendship with her daughter's grandmother to procure jobs that provided needed income. Bridging capital was also an opportunity to demonstrate to her children that it was appropriate to ask for help, and "*to see a different life*", as she put it.

No matter how adept a person might be in accessing bridging social capital, the isolation and homogeneity of limited resources in neighborhoods and networks prevented

participants from acquiring practical assets. Two neighborhoods included in the study have high numbers of unemployed people (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). More than half the population within these neighborhoods is receiving public assistance, which makes it very unlikely that they are able to extend concrete forms of social capital.

While bridging social capital was limited in accessing tangible resources or monetary help, it allowed people in need to avail emotional support for coping with poverty, which was mostly in the context of church-going peers, pastors, and teachers. Respondents spoke about their need for friendship and companionship during tough times. Beyond their immediate physical needs, they yearned for human relationships that could comfort them. This was most frequently available through spiritual avenues, from clergy or church community.

A 25-year-old single African American participant talked about how her pastor provided much needed support and guidance.

> *So I can text him like pastor I need prayer. Can you have a word of prayer with me? And he does it. . . . If my friend is in the hospital, he'll go and visit my friend. So he's, my church is really built on love. [G401]*

Another participant, a 32-year-old single mother of two girls, described how much she depended on her pastor and his wife for their encouragement and empathic support when she lost her brother. The pastor would talk to her every day and she stated if it was not for him, she "*would really be lost, really be lost" [D111].*

Another source of bridging social capital for participants who acknowledged the necessity for psychological support were school teachers and staff in programs their children participated in. Parents felt trusted and supported if they were able to create and maintain relationships with school teachers who were an external element of their environment. One 37-year-old single mother of four children explained the benefit from nurturing connections with her children's teachers:

> *So, it's like- we're friends. Um, you need me to go to do anything. Some of the teachers even say "You know what? I'm not going to make it to this trip. Can you go with my class and the other teachers just to be there and keep an eye on my class?" Even though my kids are not in that class. But it's the- they trust me and they know that I'm going to do . . . it's like they being there. I know the procedures. [S502].*

Such interactions allowed parents to establish alliances with people outside their immediate circle, and improved their access to resources. Parents who volunteered in school activities were able to take advantage of these potential opportunities to bridge social capital.

> *[My child's teachers] love me [laughs]. Because I'm one of those parents that, um, I'm always volunteering. I'm always, you know, what do you need, and I'm here, don't even worry about it. . . . You know, so, they all know me . . . [D703]*

Families viewed their relationships with teachers as valuable for the connections that they provided to a world beyond their immediate circumstances.

> *The schools were more helpful. . . . Just they were always really kind. They would have meetings with us about the children like this is what's beneficial for your daughters. You know, what do you think? It wasn't condescending. They actually saw you as an equal, and they were always trying to help you. And I just like my kids love it. [A1603]*

In spite of these illustrations of bridging social capital, connections to people outside their social network remained limited and narrow. Living in resource-poor neighborhoods created an impervious boundary that was hard to puncture. A 51-year-old mother of two children elaborated on the lack of a person to "put her in that right direction" in her network.

> *I don't think there's people in my community that I can go for help when I need help. . . . Who's going to put me in that right direction saying that "Well you know what? You can go over here, you can talk to these people, somebody can help you." To my knowledge I don't know anybody who can actually point me in that direction. . . . If say if I'm about to lose my place I can go to some organization that say they want to help me pay for it – I wouldn't even know where to look at. [A606]*

Moreover, participants' contact with institutions was limited to governmental agencies, schools, religious bodies, and few nonprofit organizations due to lack of resources in the community. This limitation further reduced their access to networks that were more diverse in terms of education and class, and relatedly access to opportunities. A 21-year-old participant with part-time employment drew attention to that point.

> *I tried to actually look for them [resources in the community] and I couldn't find anything. The only thing I found, I heard about was like nowhere near where I live at. So as far as like any outreach or like community councils or stuff like that, I'm not aware of any of that where I live at. [A608]*

Notwithstanding all the barriers that prevent easy access to bridging, some participants managed to accumulate social capital. Taking part in community events, volunteering in child's daycare, and getting involved in activities outside their neighborhood are ways in which people were able to forge new connections to resources.

For one participant, bridging capital played a leveraging role and allowed her to overcome structural barriers. This single mother struggled to finish her education when she started volunteering in a community-based organization. That led her to find childcare for her children, and further connected her to an employment opportunity as an emergency medical technician.

> *When we moved here, I had to find a day care for them and actually a choice was uh the Washington Lexington Foundation. . . . I would help within the day care. I would chaperone trips if I was off because I was like doing home care work then . . . I was actually on the PTA, you know, I helped with other things in the committee. I went to the bigger branch and I did mediating with the committee, you know, so that they can get more funding for the day care. And actually they followed up. . . . I would help out, you know, also like mentor, tutor, you know, kids after school. And through it, I've met some very educated, influential people that know a lot of things about the community that, you know, you can help that they will pull you in into so that you can also help out, you know, for, to make a difference in the community for people, you know, making them aware of, you know, organizations and funding and things that are available to them where they would normally not go. [S507]*

This single mother had, however, another important asset—higher level of education. Most participants living in the two researched neighborhoods did not have higher education. Thus, they could not benefit from the few resources available in their neighborhoods in the same way as this mother.

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LINKING SOCIAL CAPITAL

While considered the weakest of ties, linking social capital has been thought of as valuable in providing access to formal networks, power structures, and institutions beyond their neighborhoods (Lin 2001; Putnam 2001). However, unlike in other studies, due to structural barriers (i.e., unstable housing and difficulty in locating employment) and individual outcomes (i.e., financial struggles and physical and mental health issues), few participants of this study used linking capital as a tool to overcome poverty. They used it rather as a tool to get by in their everyday life struggles.

Like bridging, linking social capital enabled the accessing of material resources and healthcare through formal networks primarily for the purpose of addressing basic needs. A mother of three who managed to access material resources by connecting to a religious charity institution (Little Sisters of the Poor) discussed how she could pay her rent or buy food for her children:

> I had um, this great resource called Little Sisters. They would help me pay my rent, they would, you know, food, um, they'd bring like a big bag of toys for Christmas for them. [K307]

Other participants managed to access information, which later improved their quality of life and allowed their children to go for vacations. Linking social capital provided access to healthcare, resources needed to pay rent, receive food support, toys for children, after-school activities, and legal assistance.

A 50-year-old part-time employed mother of three recollected the opportunities her family gained when her daughter received a computer from a program at school. Having a computer in their home linked her family to many resources available outside her community. For example, she had an opportunity to search for free activities for her children taking place in different parts of the city. Although the family's living standards had improved since then, they still struggled with material hardship.

> She did a program in school. So by her completing the program, they gave her a computer. . . . So we were able - I used to tell her "Genesis? Can you?" And she said "Sure, Mommy!" And then we Google everything and we'll find all these parks. We go to Long Island. We go to Robert Moses; you know - which is the beaches. It's awesome; it's beautiful. I rather, I would rather have my kids go out, or I would let them go out with somebody. [DC704]

Furthermore, her daughter was able to extend her social capital when she participated in a program offered by a nonprofit agency through her school.

> I don't know if you ever heard of Fresh Air, well, they sponsor children and take them for two weeks, — they get to live with other families. . . . So it was like two weeks and they loved it. . . . It was a different environment, fun and all that. Because I said I refuse to see my kids see them sitting on the stoop. I did that when I was a kid, but in our time, you could sit out in front of a stoop in your building and have fun. . . . kids can't do that now in the neighborhood because of the drug dealing, the shooting and stuff. [DC704]

The school served as a link to a computer as well as access to, and participation in, a program that allowed for her daughter to experience a different city and not to "sit on the stoop" in a neighborhood the participant described as "unsafe."

Access to healthcare and healthcare information was another important service that participants sought for themselves or their children. Specifically, some participants uti-

lized their networks to obtain this healthcare-related information. A mother of an 18-year-old son who struggled with alcoholism, managed to access information on how to help her son. As a result, he received psychiatric and addiction services.

Similarly, a grandmother raising her 5-year-old grandson discussed receiving many forms of assistance through her access to formal social networks associated with a hospital operating in her neighborhood. Her relationship with the hospital allowed her to access welfare assistance (SNAP) and nongovernmental assistance to address their food needs.

> I just started networking, and people were telling me oh, you know you could go through Mount Sinai and they can help you out with benefits. I went to a charity over by me, they helped me out. . . . They'd give us care packages which are little boxes of food. . . . But going back to SNAP, they didn't give me the food stamps until Mount Sinai stepped in. . . . And then at the end, at the bottom of it um Catholic Charities helped me a lot with him too. . . . Mount Sinai was the one who, they have lawyers, like social workers . . . that can intervene, and they can represent you. And I ran into a lady, she did her paperwork. She said give me two weeks and I'll get back to you. Within the two weeks, I had food stamps, I had the big check from last year, everything. [S506]

This person was able to access a variety of resources for herself and her grandchild due to people and institutions linking her to other resources. While few participants discussed such experiences, the ones who did were able to obtain the services they needed.

Most participants discussed the lack of properly resourced public institutions in their neighborhoods. They describe difficulties in accessing healthy food, activities for children, good conditions of housing and public space, or community councils.

Lack of economic and public institutions development, as well as few resources in participants' immediate community, limited the opportunities for education, socialization, and employment for themselves and their children.

> There's really no after school programs. There's nothing for these kids to really get into education wise other than school. . . . When kids don't have nothing to turn to, they turn to the streets. And they turn into being drug dealers. . . . No YMCAs, nothing. And these is young kids. Young. I mean, if we was to put more programs out for them then they could achieve, you know, leave the life of badness that's back there before your time. . . . There's many people that want to work as a counselor that wants to do this, wants to do that. But how could they do it when you all don't open up a youth center somewhere. [S503]

Despite the barriers, few neighborhood factors facilitated the accumulation of linking social capital. The proximity of social service institutions to individuals' residence and the relationships within the institutions shaped the ways in which linking social capital worked. The earlier mentioned grandmother raising a 5-year-old lived in a neighborhood that was located close to a big hospital in NYC. Thus, she was able to get services for her child there. Additionally, they were able to visit her residence to provide the necessary services for her child. This otherwise would not have been possible.

Similarly, a single mother of two little kids, struggling with severe health problems after kidney transplant, got involved in numerous community activities and received emotional support from her case worker and nonprofit organizations. She found bridging social capital within a linking context. It helped her to get by:

> She was my case worker, but she became a friend. Even just if had twenty, ten minutes left it was just go into her office and just drink coffee, or something, talk it out until it was time. That's what I want. You know, because we go through stuff. And, just because you're there with a smile on your face, does not

mean that inside something is there, so you need to feel that you have also a person that's not just your case worker, somebody that's there truly to be there for you. [DC703]

While only a few participants had linking social capital connecting them to services, what capital they had functioned as a survival resource. Neighborhood also played a salient role in linking social capital. Participants usually noted that their neighborhood (subjectively defined) did not have many resources, thus was a deterrent to linking capital. However, a few who did live in the parts of the neighborhood where a large hospital was located did have access to exceptional social services. This different perception of neighborhood resources derived from subjectively defined boundaries of neighborhoods.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the roles played by different types of social capital in poverty-impacted communities and to identify structural factors hindering and facilitating the accumulation of social capital.

Based on participants' experiences, their bonding capital was derived from family, friendly, and neighborhood relationships. Bridging capital was based on the ties with local religious communities, contacts with schoolteachers, and public libraries. Linking capital was rooted in formal relations with religious charity institutions, nonprofit agency programs, school programs, and contacts with healthcare providers. Our findings confirm the evidence around the strength of bonding social capital in homogenous environment (Hawkins and Maurer 2010; Henly, Danziger, and Offer 2005; Lin 2001). Bonding social capital available to participants was based on ties that were strong but few in numbers. Although participants' social networks included strong relations, these relations were not dense and limited to few family members.

ROLES PLAYED BY DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Similar to other studies, we found that bonding, bridging, and linking capital helped residents of the poverty-impacted neighborhoods to "get by" (e.g., Dominguez 2011; Dominguez and Watkins 2003; Saegert et al. 2002). More specifically, bonding capital allowed participants to access resources such as childcare, housing, taking care of home, healthcare, in some cases also employment, and emotional support. Bridging social capital provided access to material resources and emotional support needed to cope with material and symbolic hardship. Linking social capital helped to access resources such as public and nongovernmental assistance beyond their neighborhoods. These important functions of social capital should not be undermined, but also should not be overestimated in their effect on reducing poverty.

Unlike findings from other studies of low-income communities, bridging and linking capital did not, however, play a leveraging role in participants' lives (e.g., Briggs 1998; Dominguez 2011; Dominguez and Watkins 2003). Dominguez and Watkins in their study of social capital among African American and Latin American low-income mothers found that upward mobility based on social capital was achieved through relationships that provide support in the form of advice, contacts, and encouragement. Such relations were found throughout employment in economically advantaged contexts and heterogeneous
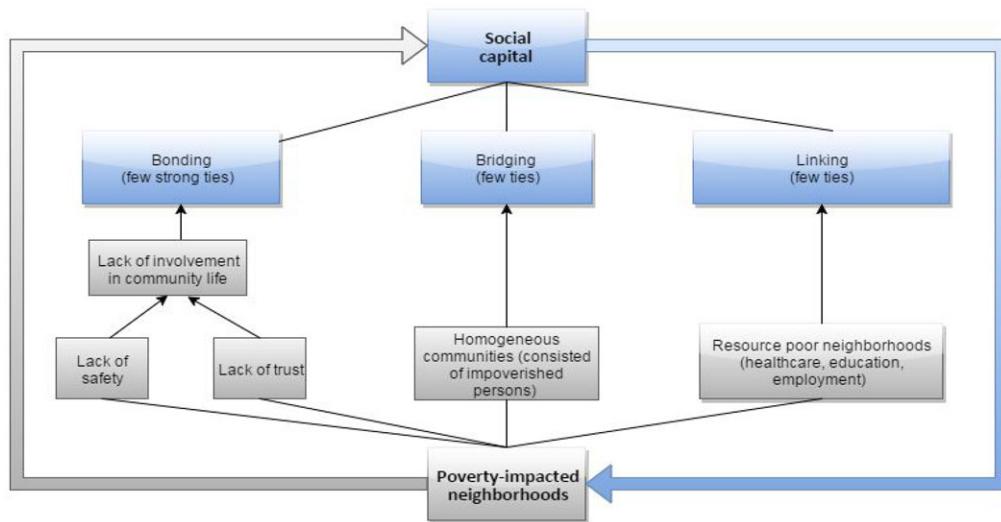
FIG. 1. Relations between bonding, bridging, and linking capital and characteristics of the neighborhoods.
[Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

local ties, where women shared information. Similarly, Granberry and Torres (2017), using a case of Puerto Rican mothers, showed that those of them who were employed were more likely to accumulate social capital. Participants of our study had, however, access neither to employment, nor to the local heterogeneous networks. Therefore, their opportunities to utilize the levering role of bridging or linking capital were limited.

The results of this study contribute to Brisson's argument (2009) that a nuanced understanding of social capital with its different forms is essential to understand how the concept operates among poverty-impacted communities and how to design and implement successful antipoverty interventions addressing social capital. It is not enough to say that low social capital perpetuates poverty, or that developing social capital helps overcoming poverty. This study demonstrates that people living in poverty-impacted neighborhoods actually do have strong bonding ties, which are essential in their everyday struggle with poverty, but they have few such ties, and these ties include mostly other members of poverty-impacted communities and few people in power.

FACTORS HINDERING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Our findings indicate that bonding, bridging, and linking capital of participants were undermined by limited neighborhood resources and lack of links to the networks of the affluent and powerful due to income and residential segregation (Figure 1). Lack of safety and trust, and consequently the lack of involvement in community life, limited bonding capital and compromised communities' ability to organize and advocate for their rights. Homogeneity along with social and economic segregation of communities (i.e., the fact that they consist mostly of low-income persons) limited their bridging capital. Finally, few

resources in the neighborhoods (e.g., healthcare, education, and employment) limited linking social capital.

The results of this study contribute to and develop the argument of Lopez and Stack (2001) that structural conditions in segregated neighborhoods devaluate social capital and reduce its potentially positive role. The results also contribute to Wichowsky's (2017) argument that residential income segregation limits chances to utilize social capital in overcoming socioeconomic disadvantages.

In this article, we make the case that living in spatially segregated urban settings with deep structural barriers undermines residents' ability to accumulate social capital and prevents them from utilizing the leveraging role of bridging and linking capital. More specifically, we show that resources accessed by participants through their linking capital were limited and did not provide as many opportunities as linking social capital usually does in other contexts. We argue that social capital of poverty-impacted communities is largely undermined, not by individual-level factors (e.g., lack of agency) but by structural barriers existing in low-income neighborhoods, which, in turn, perpetuate poverty. As observed by Bourdieu (1985), not only does having one type of capital (economic, cultural, or social) easily translate into having another one, but also having one type of social capital translates into having another one. Thus, individuals with few bonding ties will likely have few bridging and linking ties, therefore their chances for upward mobility are blocked, and at the society level, structural inequalities are reproduced (Fukui and Menjivar 2015; Lopez and Stack 2001).

Results of this study support the argument that efficient reducing of poverty through developing social capital cannot take place without or alternatively to providing actual welfare, healthcare, educational, and employment resources to poverty-impacted communities (Saegert et al. 2002). Lack of these resources creates structural barriers, which further limit opportunities to utilize the leveraging role of social capital. Going even further, this study supports results from analysis of the effects of the Hope VI program (Curley 2010), which shows that it is not social interactions that can facilitate developing social capital, but rather access to safe public spaces, good healthcare system, education, and employment.

FACTORS FACILITATING DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

According to the existing literature, accumulation of social capital and developing its leveraging functions can take place through collective actions within a community and through utilizing neighborhood resources (Briggs 2002; Cleaver 2005; Collier 2002; Dominguez 2011; Foster et al. 2015; Granberry and Torres 2017; Lin 2001; Narayan-Parker 1999). The accumulation of bonding social capital among participants was facilitated by developing informal bonds through existing formal ones. As in Granberry and Torres' (2017) study, participants developed ties with their neighbors through children's school activities, while assisting elderly people or joining tenant patrol to increase security. Due to lack of sense of safety in the neighborhood and low levels of trust toward their neighbors, participants of this study had, however, few relations with their neighbors and therefore did not organize themselves.

Accumulation of bridging capital among participants of this study was facilitated by getting involved in activities outside geographic communities and building positive bonds

with personnel of community-based organizations. Linking social capital was strengthened through access to high-quality social services and formal links outside communities. However helpful, these activities had limited outcomes due to existing structural barriers.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Results of this study lead to several implications. First, in order to develop and utilize the leveraging role of social capital, interventions addressing social capital should take place in parallel to minimizing or removing structural barriers at the neighborhood level and developing resources existing in the poverty-impacted neighborhoods (e.g., healthcare, education, employment). Second, interventions addressing social capital should focus on developing specific types of social capital needed in particular communities, instead of addressing some vague notion of social capital. For example, participants in this study lacked dense neighbors-based bonding ties. Third, if dense bonding ties are needed in a community, opportunities to develop informal bonds through strengthening formal ones should be created. That can take place, for example, through involving parents more into children's school activities, involving communities to assist elderly people, or join tenant patrols. Fourth, if leveraging bridging ties are missing in a community, residents should get more access to information on activities taking place outside their neighborhoods. Fifth, if a community needs more leveraging linking ties, increasing quality of welfare and other services should be available to residents of low-income neighborhoods.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The results and implications of this research have several limitations. First, the interviews were cross-sectional, therefore we have limited understanding of how bonding, bridging, and linking social capital changes over time. Second, the results of our study are unique to the two lowest-income neighborhoods in NYC and therefore they cannot be generalized to the rest of the United States. Third, our understanding of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital is unique to welfare recipients, since all of the study participants received some sort of public assistance. Fourth, our findings can be biased by the fact that participants were primarily female (88.5 percent). An overrepresentation of females in our sample resulted from the disproportionate amount of females (compared to males) that care for their children. Fifth, participants' educational attainment was not identified. This information could provide additional insight into factors facilitating accumulation of social capital. Sixth, this study was not focused on negative outcomes of social capital. Including this factor in interview guide and later in analysis could reveal important mechanisms of how social capital operates in low-income communities. Future directions of the studies of social capital in low-income communities should address potential negative outcomes of social capital among individuals having few bonding connections in their neighborhoods. Finally, results of this study are limited to the administrative definition of a neighborhood. In some cases, this definition turned out to be too broad to capture nuances in subjectively defined direct neighborhood and its resources. Although most participants of this study referred to few resources available in their neighborhoods, some were satisfied with access to healthcare resources. The latter case regarded individuals living nearby a large hospital. To capture these differences, future research should

include the subjective definition of a neighborhood, meaning the way a neighborhood's borders are perceived by its inhabitants.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1]CLI is based on losses such as: the loss or removal of household members due to foster care placement, incarceration, long-term hospitalization, and untimely deaths due to murders, suicides, and accidents and the loss of financial assets due to unemployment and foreclosure. CLI uses available statistical data regarding these losses at the smallest units, e.g., postal addresses, census tracts, and ZIP code areas. CLI measures losses in terms of lacking certain resources, but not in terms of the awareness among residents of whether resources exist or not. It also does not measure efficacy in providing resources by different institutions.

[2]Participants with children were sampled for two reasons. One, the broader study focused on the feeling of shame, which often appears in familial relations. Two, families in poverty and the ways in which they manage and negotiate being on welfare are seldom examined.

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