



MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning Course # 11.469
BU Metropolitan Studies Program Course # MET SO 502 Urban Sociology

Urban Sociology Study Guide for Week 10: Social Capital and Social Networks

This week's readings come full circle to revisit the issue of social relations and social structure, which we began to consider in the very earliest weeks, from the motivating concerns of early sociologists to the evolution of the concept of "community" in sociology. As the study of city life has shifted to include geographically dispersed networks, and the focus on "the urban" has become increasingly porous and global, ideas about what social ties are important, and what work they do in society, have changed and expanded as well. Compared to our earlier discussion of "community" in theory and practice, the more central issues this week are about identifying what social ties do, both for the individual and for society as a whole. What roles do particular types of social ties play in changing cities and neighborhoods and – by extension – rapidly changing democratic societies, for example as ethnic diversity grows and information and communications technology revolutionize everyday life, commerce, and even politics?

As you work through the readings, it is important to think about social capital in three ways: first, it is a theoretical concept that establishes a standardized language around the study of social ties and which has consequently sparked new kinds of research; second, it is an individual and group-level resource with implications for policy, planning and governance; and third, it is an ideology – a way of viewing social relationships – that carries with it certain normative expectations and goals (namely, what social connections are "good" for).

1. **Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Nan Lin** each define social capital differently. What are the range of ways these scholars discuss the concept? How can we make such a broad concept actionable? What are the potential strengths and weaknesses of social capital as a concept for research and social change?
2. How does **Ronald Burt's** emphasis on the significance of structural holes and brokerage differ from James Coleman's emphasis on network closure and density? What are the implication of these different emphases on brokerage as compared to closure for policy intervention to decrease different types of inequality?
3. What has prior work on social capital and social ties missed, according to **Mario Small**? What are some key, largely overlooked functions of organizational settings?
4. Think back to **Barry Wellman's** theories of Community Lost, Found, and Liberated. How has his study of community evolved based on this social capital literature?

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