

# Functions of social capital

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# Overview

- Origins of the bonding/bridging distinction
- Different between bonding and bridging social capital
- Problems with the bonding/bridging distinction
- What is bonding social capital
- What is bridging social capital
- What is linking social capital

# Bonding / bridging

- The bonding / bridging distinction originally a general description of a social grouping. Putnam (2000) credits Gittell and Vidal (1998) with the distinction
- Bonding / bridging has been used to describe specific social relationships
  - Bonding social capital
    - Ties to people like you in some important way
    - Associated with strong ties between homogenous individuals who share intimate relationships or shared identity and who share common interests and values and interact frequently
  - Bridging social capital
    - Ties to people who are unlike you in some important way (Putnam 2007)
    - Associated with weak ties based on a wider heterogeneous social network of relationships that are generally less intimate and do not necessarily involve shared values

# Difference between bonding/bridging

- Bonding social capital is *within* a group or community, whereas bridging social capital is *between* social groups, classes, races, religions, or other important sociodemographic or socioeconomic characteristics.

## **Bonding social capital**

Within  
 Intra  
 Exclusive  
 Closed  
 Inward looking  
 “Getting by”  
 Horizontal  
 Strong ties  
 People who are alike  
 Thick trust

## **Bridging social capital**

Between  
 Inter  
 Inclusive  
 Open  
 Outward looking  
 “Getting ahead”  
 Vertical  
 Weak ties  
 People who are different  
 Thin trust

# Problems with bonding/bridging distinctions

- This approach to social capital has been extensively criticised
- The distinctions mutually contradict one another across traditional social variables such as class, gender, and ethnicity and present a conundrum for potentially negative outcomes (Fine, 2010)
- It amalgamates a variety of contradictory aspects of both networks and norms into single categories, creating methodological blind spots that decrease the use-value of the concept (Ramos-Pinto 2012)
- Granovetter (1973, p.1378) warned, “treating only the *strength* of ties ignores, for instance, all the important issues involving their content”

# Bonding social capital

- Bonding social capital is a type of social capital that describes connections within a group or community characterised by high levels of similarity in demographic characteristics, attitudes, and available information and resources
- Exists between ‘people like us’ who are ‘in it together’ - people of similar backgrounds and interests, who provide material and emotional support, and who are more inward-looking and protective
- Examples include family members, close friends, and neighbours.

# Bridging social capital

- Bridging social capital is a type of social capital that describes connections that link people across a cleavage that typically divides society (like race, or class, or religion)
- Bridging describes social relationships of exchange, often of associations between people with shared interests or goals but contrasting social identity (Pelling and High 2005)

# Linking social capital

- Linking social capital captures the power dynamics of vertical associations - *across* explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society (Szreter and Woolcock 2004)
- Michael Woolcock suggested that bridging social capital can be horizontal or vertical, consequently a single category misses the important aspect of the exercise of power that is important in vertical associations (Evans and Syrett 2007)



# Summary

- The bonding / bridging distinction describes the structure of networks
- Bonding is between 'people like us'
- Bridging is between 'people not like us'
- Linking social capital is between power hierarchies