

James Coleman (1988) "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital"

Main Point: Repeats and extends other discussions of social capital. Conceptualizes social capital as an "engine of action" that is often missing in sociological and economic theoretic models. Social capital is a resource for action, embedded in particular social structures, that can introduce social structure into more rational theoretical approaches. Coleman examines three forms of social capital (obligations and expectations, channels of information, and social norms) and looks at the effect of limited social capital on dropping out of high school.

Central Issues And Concepts:

- There are three forms of social capital. *Obligations, Expectations, and Trustworthiness of Structures:* The structure surrounding the things people do for one another, and what they expect in return. In various social settings, differences in the level of obligations/expectations may arise due to different needs, the existence of other sources of aid, degree of wealth in the setting, and cultural differences. Trustworthiness of an environment indicates whether obligations can be expected to be repaid. *Information Channels:* The potential for information that exists in certain social relations. Using social relations to obtain information may be less costly than getting the information from the original source. *Norms and Effective Sanctions:* Effective norms can be powerful forms of social capital. Collective norms can cause one to overlook their own self-interest in the interests of the group. Behavior which follows the norms can be reinforced (positive) while behavior deviating from the norms can be sanctioned (negative). These norms can facilitate some types of action, while inhibiting others (such as innovation).
- Empirical tests of the effect of social capital on education show that presence of social capital within the family and community are associated with reduced probability of students dropping out of high school.

Two Key Quotes:

"The density of outstanding obligations means, in effect, that the overall usefulness of the tangible resources of that social structure is amplified by their availability to others when needed." (Page S103)

"Closure of the social structure is important not only for the existence of effective norms but also for another form of social capital: the trustworthiness of social structures that allows the proliferation of obligations and expectations." (Page S107)

Two Questions:

- Why doesn't he address how the existence of high levels of social capital (at the family and community level) is MORE BENEFICIAL for those who possess high levels of human capital?
- Why doesn't Coleman even mention cultural capital? Does he see it as irrelevant?