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Research paper

Accessing and activating social capital resources in Buffalo's public high schools

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Contextualization

This paper builds on the results of a project completed in the summer of 2002 on the effects of urban and industrial decline on the education of youths in Buffalo, New York (Barrett, 2002). While these effects were obviously quite negative, one particular counterpoint placed centrally in the project's conclusion. The 2000 - 2001 school year was the first in which New York State's high school seniors were required to pass standardised examinations in English and mathematics as a precondition for graduation. As the project neared completion, more than 700 of the district's roughly 2,100 seniors, one-third of the potential graduating class, had yet to pass one or both of these examinations with less than one month remaining in what would otherwise have been their 'final' year of high school.

Confronted with the possibility of a severely reduced graduating class, the district's efforts to assist those in danger of failing were supplemented by volunteers from neighbouring colleges and community groups ranging from Hispanics United of Buffalo to Friends of the Elderly. Local pastors were called on by the district to discuss tutorial sessions at church services and citywide informational meetings for parents were held in attempts to inform them about useful tools for helping their children succeed on the tests (Simon, 2002). The broad base of support is noteworthy here, as is that that month nearly 400 of these students passed the required examinations in the final round of testing for the year and were therefore able to graduate. While the problems inherent in these standardised and high-stakes testing regimes are outside the scope of this paper, the overriding sensation was that the efforts of these groups, acting together as sources of information and normative reinforcement, were largely successful. These efforts were placed within a social capital framework and serve as the basis for the research presented here.

Abstract: *This paper examines the distribution of social capital both across and within a representative sample of six public high schools in Buffalo, New York, an industrial city that has suffered massive urban decline and is characterised by high rates of social dislocation. Though statistical analyses indicate social capital's positive relationship to academic achievement, individual levels of social capital are shown to be mediated most prominently by socio-economic status and, the higher a student's household income, the greater their social capital resources. However, while quantitative analysis suggests that some actors are constrained in their access to social capital (based especially on socio-economic status) as a result of structural forces, it does not conclude that they are controlled by them. Many disadvantaged students make use of social capital resources and achieve 'against the odds'. Qualitative techniques explore the processes behind Buffalo students' access to, and activation of, social capital resources. These processes are revealed to vary according to students' school and social contexts.*

Social capital

Educational research utilising social capital in its analysis most frequently draws on James Coleman's theorisation of the concept (Lin, 2001). Coleman focuses mainly on more 'positive' aspects of social capital arising functionally from social interaction not always specifically undertaken to create social capital. Theoretically, Coleman believes social capital

to be 'defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of entities, with two elements in common: They all consist of some aspects of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of others - whether persons or corporate actors - within that structure' (1997, p 81). He adds, importantly, that 'like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, *making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible*' (ibid. my emphasis). This idea is conceivably extremely important for the many at-risk students in Buffalo who are perhaps lacking in more 'traditional' economic and cultural resources.

Throughout his work on social capital, Coleman views the concept as relatively intangible but appearing in three forms: (a) level of trust, as evidenced by obligations and expectations; (b) information channels; and (c) norms and sanctions that promote the common good over self-interest (Dika and Singh, 2002, p 33).

However, some educational studies (Lareau and Horvat, 1999; McNeal, 1999) have begun to employ notions of social capital as conceptualised by Pierre Bourdieu. This represents an important development and informs the theoretical framework of this paper, particularly its investigation of the distribution of social capital outlined subsequently, as Bourdieu's conceptualisation stands in considerable tension with that provided by Coleman. Bourdieu (1997, p 51) defines social capital as:

> The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of collectively owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.

Bourdieu conceptualises social capital from a standpoint emphasising the structural advantage enjoyed by the dominant classes while recognising the necessity of agency for individual actors and adds that the amount of social capital possessed by an agent is dependent upon the size of the network connections the agent can effectively mobilise and on the volume of the various types of capital possessed in his or her own right by each of those to whom the agent is connected (ibid). Social capital, then, is seen in combination with other types of capital to play an instrumental role in social reproduction.

Based on a review of these positions, this paper suggests that social capital is captured in social relations and associated networks and norms. These resources can be invested in and utilised by social agents, but this involves both constraints and opportunities mediated by social structure (Lin, 2001). Recently, the concept has been ascribed growing importance by researchers in various fields and has been demonstrated as leading to social outcomes (Coleman, 1997; Baron et al., 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) that, as posited above, would be more difficult or even impossible to achieve in its absence. Educationally, these outcomes include elevated levels of academic attainment and achievement (Dika and Singh, 2002).

As mentioned earlier, despite its contemporary 'popularity' social capital's distribution across, and relation to, the structure of society has been under-analysed by educational researchers tending to work from theoretical perspectives offered by James Coleman (Lin, 2001). Also, little information exists on the influence of context on the ability of agents to access and activate social capital resources (Edwards and Foley, 1998a, 1998b). Accordingly, this paper aims: (a) to examine the distribution of social capital across a representative sample of six public high schools in Buffalo and between sub-groups of students within them and, (b) recognising these students as social agents, to explore the processes by which they access and activate education-related social capital.

This paper ultimately demonstrates that both the distribution of social capital and the processes by which it is accessed and activated vary greatly depending on students' school and social contexts.

Methods

Quantitatively, an attempt was made to 'map' the distribution of social capital, searching for patterns that might emerge across a sample of students and schools representative of the district as a whole. To accomplish this, a survey (Appendix 1) was administered to random samples of roughly 40% of the senior class at each of six purposively selected Buffalo public high schools, yielding a sample of 306 students comprising, overall, 36% of the total senior class at these schools (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographics for survey sample (N = 306) and for Buffalo Public Schools

Variable	Categories	Percentage of sample	Percentage of Buffalo Public School District
Gender	Female	58	52
	Male	42	48
Ethnicity			
	Black	42	58
	White	28	27
	Hispanic	12	12
	Other	18	3
Poverty		46	44
School Type	Academic	51	45
	Vocational	32	32
	Magnet	17	23

For measurement purposes, and to facilitate an examination of the relationship between social capital and educational achievement, survey results were then transferred into a 'social capital index' (Appendix 2) adapted from Putnam's (2001) version to include measures of parental educational involvement and taking respondents' age into account. Like Putnam's version, the index includes measures of community organisational life, measures of engagement in public affairs, measures of community voluntarism, measures of informal sociability, and measures of social trust. Students' survey responses are used to create social capital index 'scores' ranging from 0 to 57. This allows for individual levels of social capital to be determined and also, considering scores at the aggregate level, for the identification of trends across the sample and between subgroups within it. To enable approximately equal groupings, the bottom 33% of scores were classified as being in the 'low' range (social capital index scores of 1-19), 35% in the 'average' range (social capital index scores of 20-28), and the top 32% into a 'high' range (social capital scores of 29-57). The index serves as a data set with which measures of educational outcomes are correlated and against which other variables such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and parents' levels of educational attainment are systematically compared using statistical techniques such as one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), discriminant analysis, correlation, and general linear multiple regression analysis, to be discussed in further detail later.

As Morrow (1999, p 744) suggests, however, social capital might best be conceptualised as a series of processes instrumental in the acquisition of 'other' (such as cultural or human) capitals rather than as a 'measurable thing'. For this reason, I also engage in a qualitative exploration - drawing on direct non-participant observation and interviews with 39 students (selected again to reflect the demographics of the district as a whole and to represent a comprehensive range of social capital index 'scores'), ten teachers, six principals, and five community agencies - of the *processes* by which students access and activate social capital resources. This qualitative exploration, in combination with quantitative findings on the distribution of social capital throughout the district, demonstrates ultimately that these processes, impacted by context, vary from school to school and setting to setting.

Context is envisioned here from two perspectives. Firstly, it is viewed from a 'wider angle' considering the social capital-related effects of the massive structural and economic shifts affecting Buffalo over the past three to four decades – how these shifts might lead to social de-capitalisation at the same time that social capital might be becoming increasingly important to student outcomes there. Then, the focus is narrowed and the processes by which social capital is accessed and activated by students in two Buffalo schools are compared and contrasted.

Buffalo and the Buffalo Public Schools

One hundred years ago Buffalo was one of the world's most thriving cities and boasted its most millionaires per capita. In 1901 it was the eighth-largest city in the United States. It grew as a manufacturing centre and reached its peak population of nearly 600,000 residents in 1950. However, each census since then reveals a declining population, culminating in the loss of over 280,000 residents, nearly half its population and a number that equals the size of entire cities like Louisville, Kentucky and Newark, New Jersey (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). The population loss has been driven largely by 'white flight' (Buffalo, according to the Census, is now the sixth most segregated city in the United States) and massive structural shifts towards a post-industrial economy.

Today, associated with these changes, Buffalo suffers from rates of unemployment that are much higher than national averages and the percentage of Buffalonians living in poverty has doubled since 1970. At 38.7%, Buffalo has the sixth-highest rate of child poverty in the United States (Auer, 2002) and the poverty rate for children served by the district is 66%, indicating that many of the city's wealthier pupils attend private and parochial schools while the public school district educates a higher proportion of the city's disadvantaged children. Three-quarters of the district's students receive free or reduced price lunches and one-in-five have been identified as having special educational needs. The rate of transience in the school district is 54%, meaning that less than half of its students complete a year without changing schools. High rates of transience are a common feature of disadvantaged school districts and Coleman and Hoffer (1987) have found the number of times a student changes school to be the most influential factor in predicting educational failure. Brown and Lauder (2000, p 240) note also that every time a child changes school, the parents or guardians of that child must re-establish networks providing access to social capital. Finally, employment loss and the departure of middle- and stable working-class families from the inner city amount to the removal of what Wilson (1987) has termed a '*social buffer*', which could provide valuable social capital while acting as a shield against some of poverty's most nefarious effects.

In the face of this, since 2001, the number of teachers in the district has been reduced by nearly 1,000. These cuts were initiated in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001 and the financial burden these events placed on the State of New York, the primary source of funding for the Buffalo Public Schools. Other budget cuts have eliminated substantial numbers of teacher's aides, clerical and support staff and administrators.

In addition, most extracurricular activities, before- and after-school extra help for struggling students, and most librarians, computer teachers, school nurses and guidance counsellors have been eliminated by the district. These cuts can be especially detrimental to the school-based formation of social capital networks as many of the close student-teacher and student-student relationships noted in Stanton-Salazar's (2001, p 174) recent study 'developed through interactions outside of normal academic or administrative routines, through participation in school organisations or clubs, athletic teams, formal extracurricular activities, remedial classes, after-school detention, or special elective courses'.

A description of the relative dearth of economic capital in Buffalo and its schools serves to emphasise the potential value of *social* capital there. Despite the negative effects of urban decline just detailed, there is another side to Buffalo: one that is actively engaged in the futures of its young people. Buffalo schools are involved in increasing numbers of partnerships with community, religious and business groups. The city has a tradition of community involvement inside of its schools. Buffalo's nationally recognised school desegregation programme, for example, was centred on the creation of magnet schools and was voluntary and community-based (Goldman, 1990) and two city schools have particular roots in the community: One school was created in 1969 through a partnership between white and African American churches on Buffalo's East Side and Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation, while another opened in 1980 with funds provided by newspapers, television stations, local colleges and universities, and a number of the city's banks (which remain a vital contributor of money and volunteers to the Buffalo schools today).

Buffalo has shown itself to be a national leader in terms of volunteering and grassroots activism. Buffalonians, according to the United Way, give the largest percentage of their incomes to charity of citizens from any city in the country. Additionally, 'for the past two years, [Buffalo] the City of Good Neighbors has led the nation in the National Association of Letter Carriers' annual Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive … Buffalo also often has topped the country in the number of volunteers who turn out for United Way's annual "Day of Caring"' (Sommer, 2005). Furthermore, thousands of city residents have rallied in the past to prevent the closure of Buffalo's Women's and Children's Hospital, to oppose the relocation of the Buffalo Zoo and to prevent the downsizing of the city's public library system, and have been successful on all measures (Goldman, 1990). Work is currently underway to increase public access to the city's Great Lakes waterfront, to oppose the construction of a casino on this same waterfront, and to restore pieces of architecture by Frank Lloyd Wright and the parklands of Frederick Law Olmsted which dot the area. Buffalo, then, is a city that has undergone massive urban decline, yet one that is also buoyed by what seems like a strong degree of social capital as conceptualised above.

The Distribution of Social Capital

In light of the concerns evident in the Bourdieuian tradition outlined earlier, it is important to examine the distribution of social capital across the school district and between subgroups of students within it. This quantitative investigation is based largely on students' social capital index scores, discussed above, considered at the aggregate level.

The distribution of social capital, by school, is clearly unequal across the sample. Henry High School, a high-achieving magnet school comprised mainly of a middle class student intake, has a mean social capital score of 32.1 (SD = 8.6). Roosevelt Technical High School, a highly successful technical and vocational school with an intake that is socio-economically and ethnically mixed, has a mean score of 26.4 (SD = 8.4). These schools are followed, after a considerable decline in mean social capital score to 21.9 (SD = 8.9), by Grant High School, which is a neighbourhood-based academic school with generally declining academic results and an intake that is largely and increasingly working class and poor. Raymond School of Hospitality, a vocational high school with a hospitality and culinary focus that has posted

rapidly improving academic results among its primarily disadvantaged population, has a mean score of 20.5 (SD = 8.3). Main High School, a low-performing neighbourhood-based academic school with an intake that is predominantly working class and African American, posts a mean score of 20.3 (SD = 8.3). Finally, Clinton High School, a low-performing neighbourhood-based academic school with an intake comprising large numbers of recent immigrants and students speaking English as a second language has the lowest mean score in the sample at 18.5 (SD = 8.3).

As revealed subsequently, however, much of the disparity in the distribution of social capital from school to school is related to factors associated with each school's student intake. Social capital, as measured by the social capital index, is determined more directly by factors associated with student background, such as socio-economic status or the level of education attained by students' parents, than by factors that manifest themselves in the school. However, as this paper goes on to show, school context can considerably shape the social capital resources that are available to students.

Gender does not appear to significantly influence students' possession of social capital. An independent samples t-test determines that the difference in female mean social capital index score (24.2; SD = 8.9) and male mean social capital index score (23.9; SD = 10.4) is not statistically significant (p = .790).

In terms of ethnicity, white respondents have the highest aggregate mean social capital index score (29; SD = 8.7) and also the largest percentage (51.1) of respondents scoring 'high' on the index. One-way ANOVA indicates that Black respondents score significantly lower than white respondents (22.1; SD = 9.5), while Hispanic respondents combine for both the lowest aggregate mean social capital index score (20.1; SD = 8.7) and the lowest percentage (11.8) of 'high' scores in the sample.

If only those respondents scoring 'high' on the social capital index are analysed, it is important to note that white students in the sample are more likely to possess resources located 'in the home' – such as higher household incomes and parental levels of educational attainment. On the other hand, higher levels of religious and extracurricular participation by Black and Hispanic respondents with 'high' social capital index scores indicate that, while they may be at a comparative disadvantage in socio-economic terms, they are more likely to access social capital through institutional resources such as teachers and church or community organisations.

Furthermore, as other factors are analysed, it becomes clear that the *structural constraints* (in terms of rates of poverty, single parent families, etc.) faced by Black and Hispanic respondents tend to be much more severe than those faced by white respondents in the sample. These structural constraints contribute further to the explanation of variance in social capital distribution than does ethnicity as a variable.

The level of household income, as a measure of socio-economic status, and social capital are strongly linked across the sample and, on average, the higher one's income, the higher one's social capital index score. Those respondents with household incomes over $100,000 have the highest mean social capital index score (33.2; SD = 9.3) and are followed in order by those with household incomes between $75,001 and $100,000 (31.3; SD = 7.6), between $50,001 and $75,000 (26.4; SD = 8.7), between $25,001 and $50,000 (24.7; SD = 8.2), and less than $25,000 (21.9; SD = 9.0). In terms of statistical significance, one-way ANOVA indicates that those respondents from households earning more than $100,000 annually have significantly higher aggregate mean social capital index scores than all respondents in groups earning less than $75,000. Also, those with household incomes of more than $75,000 annually have aggregate mean social capital index scores that are significantly higher than all respondents in groups earning less than $50,000. Respondents with higher annual

household incomes (>$100,000) also tend to have significantly higher grade point averages (GPA) than respondents with lower household incomes (<$25,000).

When only those with 'high' social capital index scores are included in analysis, however, the statistically significant difference in GPA by income no longer exists. This suggests importantly that, although those with lower incomes tend to be constrained in their access to social capital, for those lower-income respondents who *do* access it, social capital may have a 'booster effect' on educational achievement. Two low-income students – one with low levels of social capital and one with high levels – have different odds for educational success depending in part on the social capital they possess.

Linear multiple regression analysis determines that students' household income serves as the most influential factor in explaining variance in these scores across the sample when all independent variables (household income, r = .41; homeownership, r = .27; GPA, r = .26; family structure, r = .32; time spent nightly on homework, r = .36; level of parental educational expectations, r = .24; religious involvement, r = .17, and parental level of educational attainment, r = .42) highly correlated with social capital index score are included in a model. Using the stepwise method, a significant model emerges (F = 26.7, p < .0005) where household income (Beta = .432, p < .0005, R square change = .187), time spent nightly on homework (Beta = .347, p < .0005, R square change = .118), parental level of educational attainment (Beta = .238, p < .0005, R square change = .042), religious involvement (Beta = .143, p = .012, R square change = .019), and family structure (Beta = .163, p = .008, R square change = .010) combine to account for 37% (adjusted R square = .372) of the variance in students' social capital index scores (parental educational expectations and homeownership were not significant predictors in the model).

Importantly, though there *are* significant differences in social capital index scores by ethnicity in the sample as revealed earlier by one-way ANOVA results, once household income is accounted for, ethnicity (using dummy variables created for linear multiple regression analysis) no longer makes a significant contribution in explaining variance in social capital index scores. Social class and poverty appear to matter most here.

While it is recognised, then, that 'a high level of social capital can help considerably in buffering the adverse effects of being from a lower socio-economic background' (White and Kaufman, 1997, p 396), this paper demonstrates that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely than others to possess social capital in high levels. This draws emphasis back to Bourdieu's (1977, 1997) conceptualisation of social capital and to Lin's (1999, 2001) 'strength of position' proposition suggesting that an agent's position in the social structure often strongly conditions their ability to access social capital resources, which can prove instrumental in achieving social and educational outcomes.

Social Capital and Educational Achievement

The above findings on the unequal distribution of social capital gain extra weight when the relationship between social capital and academic achievement is explored. If discriminant analysis is employed to predict students' academic achievement in terms of GPA using the demographic variables of gender, ethnicity, and household income - in addition to social capital – as predictors, social capital is found to be the only variable that makes a significant contribution (25%) to the prediction. Grades 'D' and 'A', at 'extreme' ends of the spectrum, can be predicted in 77.6% of cases (100% for 'D' and 55.3% for 'A') using only the social capital index score variable. The relationship between social capital and GPA is clear, as the mean social capital score for each GPA category rises across the sample (Figure 1).

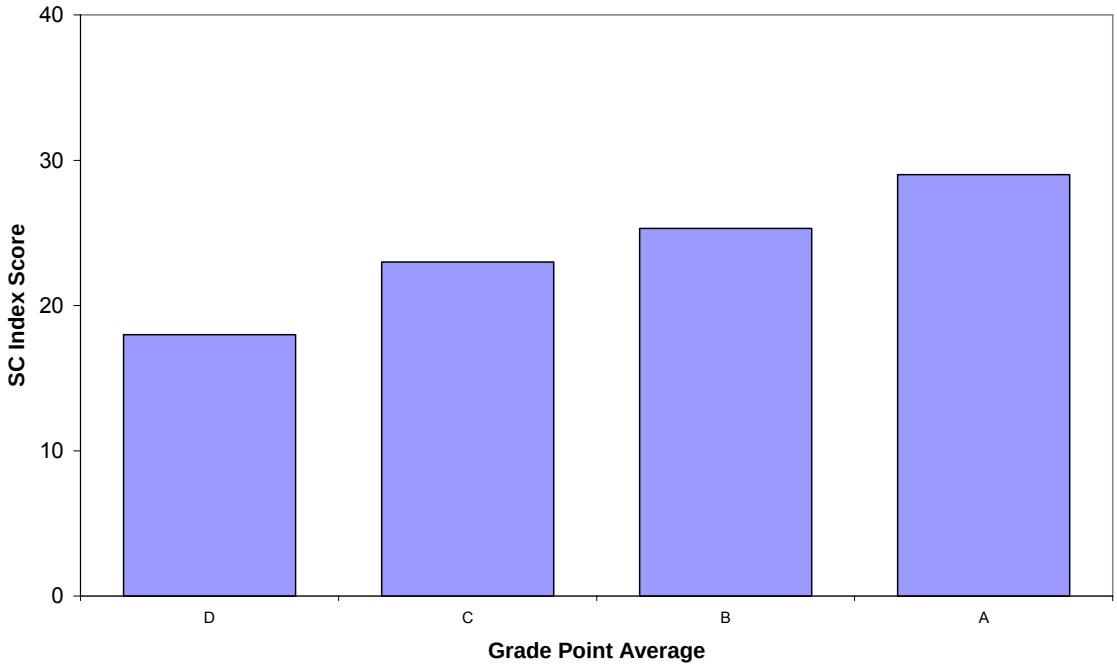

Figure 1: Aggregate mean Social Capital (SC) Index score, by Grade Point Average

Processes behind Students' Access to and Activation of Social Capital Resources

The analyses above do not tell the entire story, however. It has been suggested that social capital be viewed less as a measurable 'thing' but rather as a set of processes integral to the acquisition of 'other' (cultural or human, for example) capitals (Morrow, 1999, p 744). The processes by which social capital 'works' - *how* it is accessed and activated - are impacted by and carry different instrumental value according to context and structural constraints (ibid., p 745).

I examine the influence of context here using two Buffalo public high schools as examples. This allows for an examination of how social capital is accessed and activated by predominantly disadvantaged students in one setting (Raymond School of Hospitality) and by students tending to come from backgrounds that are, relatively, privileged in another (Henry High School) (Table 2). While these schools and their intakes *are* different, both are identified in fieldwork as 'successful'. I attempt here to briefly identify both similarities and, due to its context-dependent nature, differences in how students at each school access and activate social capital resources, examining the role of (a) parental involvement, (b) school context and school mix (and how these affect student-to-teacher and student-to-student connections), (c) community resources, and (d) school size at each location.

Henry High School is widely regarded as the best school in the city of Buffalo. It is a magnet school designed to attract high-achieving students from Buffalo's elementary and middle schools. These students are required to pass an entrance examination in order to be considered for admission. Henry offers more Advanced Placement (AP) courses than are available at other city schools and is also the only Buffalo Public School to offer the prestigious International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. The school's intake is the wealthiest of any in Buffalo. While the school is ethnically mixed, it enrols minorities at a lower rate than the district as a whole.

Table 2: School demographics
Note: District-wide data as of January 2003

			Percentage					
School	***Type***	***Enrol-ment***	Free/ Reduced Lunch	Poverty	Minority	Special Needs	Pass Regents English	Pass Regents Math
Henry	Magnet	856	10.4	5.0	35.7	3.9	100.0	97.1
Raymond School of Hospitality	Vocational	581	70.4	49.1	81.4	20.2	71.0	63.0

Raymond School of Hospitality is a vocational high school that has recently undergone a radical physical transformation involving a change in location to the heart of downtown's business and entertainment quarter and a significant downsizing from over 1,000 students at its former location to just over 500 now.

Students at Raymond are enrolled in academic as well as culinary and hospitality courses and they run and work in a restaurant on the school's ground floor, located on one of Buffalo's busiest streets, serving breakfast and lunch to the public. A look at the school's primarily disadvantaged intake and lower social capital index scores might lead to the assumption that Raymond is a 'typical' at-risk, inner city public high school. However, academic results are rapidly improving there and qualitative data reveals the school to serve in many ways as an effective social capital resource. In this, somewhat counter-intuitive sense, the school appears to be collectively high in social capital despite an intake with traditionally low individual levels.

Parental involvement

Raymond's application process and exam requirement *imply* a certain degree of parental involvement (by encouraging their children to apply and helping them fill out forms, for example). If the home is identified as a key base for the formation of education-related social capital, a number of Raymond students indicate that their parents have played an active role in their education by, for example, checking homework and monitoring report cards. The following conversation with Deion, a low-income student at Raymond, exemplifies this type of involvement.

> Deion: I used to be the one that wanna, you know like in the summertime you come home and you don't want to do your homework; you just want to go outside and play with your friends and stuff … So my parents would be the ones to say - some of my friends' parents would just like let them run out, just go out and play and don't worry. My mom, like, yeah, they'd let me go outside, but I wouldn't be able to play; I'd be able to sit on the porch and do my homework right there and they have to check it and see it and make sure I did everything right … Tests, I have to bring all my tests home and let them see my test; so little things like that.

> BB: Was that typical for other kids?
>
> Deion: I wouldn't say it's typical, but I think it's important … It is the right thing to do because those parents that didn't do that - I'm 16 and a senior [in high school], they the same age as me or a little older and they [are freshmen and sophomores]; so maybe if [their] parents had [done] that, they would have been more focused on their work.

As noted by teachers there, more 'active' forms of parental involvement at Raymond such as attendance at school conferences are generally increasing but are still relatively low and Raymond parents do not begin to approach the degree of influence, detailed later, held by those at Henry over curriculum and teaching practices. It is critical to remind ourselves, however, that parental involvement is likely to be influenced by factors both internal and external to the family, such as the reception provided by the school itself, and how power differentials (evident in economic, social, and cultural capital) can mediate interactions between teachers and some inner-city parents, limiting their involvement in school (Muller and Kerbow, 1993, p 14).

At Henry, however, the school's assistant principal notes that students' parents play:

> a very active role. They are the advocates for their children. In some cases generations have gone through [Henry] and I think that they are very - they question us. They have very high expectations of the teachers and administration and it, in turn, leads to their children having high expectations of us and questioning us about things, the way things are done around here. So they are very involved.

In this sense, the social capital that Henry students 'bring with them' to school (as indicated by their high social capital index scores) is enhanced and *complemented* by the high academic expectations maintained by teachers and administrators at Henry and the interest they take in their students' success. Fieldwork reveals that, at Henry, teachers feel much more 'pressure' from actively engaged parents to maintain these standards and remain aware of the 'sanctions' (angry and involved parents) that may result if they are lax in their responsibilities.

In addition to reinforcing education at home, then, Henry parents are quite active when interacting *with* the school and influence school practices and policies. For example, Nathan, a wealthy Henry student talks about how his parents actively intervene on his behalf - 'call[ing his] teachers that night' if he receives an unsatisfactory grade -questioning assessments of his work and inquiring as to how the quality of his work might best be improved. This indicates that Nathan's parents, and parents like them, display the levels of confidence and hold the high demands that Reay (1998) uncovered in her study of the interactions of middle-class mothers with school personnel. This is opposite to the generally more tentative approach of working-class parents often coloured by their own negative school experiences. It is important to note that no students interviewed from schools in the sample, other than Henry, described their parents engaging with and making requests of the school as Nathan has above.

The social capital advantage enjoyed by Henry parents is especially apparent in the school's admissions process, where the influence of parental networking is particularly evident in the case of students entering Henry from Delaware – the city's wealthiest elementary school. Of the Henry interviewees, all students who attended Delaware (four of seven interviewees) prior to entering Henry had 'high' social capital index scores and came from high-income families (two respondents with annual household incomes of over $100,000, one respondent with an annual household income of between $75,001 and $100,000, and one respondent

with an annual household income of between $50,001 and $75,000, while of the seven remaining Henry interviewees, only one had an annual household income of over $100,000, while two had annual household incomes of less than $25,000).

That those Henry students who attended Delaware for elementary school tend to have relied on parental networks (involving similar status parents) in gaining admission is clear from interview data and is exemplified by the statements of Seth, a wealthy, white Henry student who attended elementary school at Delaware, below.

> Seth: I've been here since fifth grade. I don't know how much of a choice it was. I just kind of took the test in fifth grade and my parents brought me.
>
> BB: Where did you go to elementary school?
>
> Seth: Delaware. Pretty much everyone from Delaware came here so it was sort of like what everyone was doing … You have to sign up to take the [admissions] test and, the way a lot of parents find out when the date is, is by word of mouth. So all of the parents in the PTA at Delaware signed up together pretty much. So that's how they hear about it.

However, the effectiveness of this reliance on 'word of mouth' can leave students from many of the city's other elementary schools at a competitive disadvantage in their chances of being admitted to Henry. Students in most other city elementary schools are much more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds than those at Delaware and, at least partially as a result of a lack of access to information about a school such as Henry, tend to be placed in disadvantaged schools. While both working- and middle-class families may highly value education, middle-class students often have privileged access to resources such as information networks (related here to school choice), placing them in advantageous positions for admittance into the city's 'best' schools.

Those disadvantaged students who *do* gain admission to Henry have often accessed other social capital networks from what are frequently school- or community-based sources, including caring teachers, which have assisted them in their navigation of the admissions process. This is exemplified in statements by Katherine, a working-class, Black Henry student entering from a school other than Delaware, below.

> Katherine: I have no idea how I ended up [at Henry]. I took the entrance exam when I was in fourth grade. I got in. That's about it … I didn't even know this was a school before I came here. I didn't know anything about Henry. My mom told me it's a school where a whole bunch of rich kids go and a whole bunch of smart kids go. That's what she told me!
>
> BB: Who let you know to take the exam [for admission to Henry]?
>
> Katherine: Actually, my teachers at school, they advised me to take it. I was like really at the top of my class. I had the highest average in my class and everything. I was really competitive and 'student of the month' and all that and; like I was really close to my principal and my teachers and they really wanted me to take the exam. That's pretty much how I ended up here.

Again, the role of context (here, in the form of access to education-related information networks and interaction with the school) appears crucial. This serves to emphasise Stanton-Salazar's (2001, p 163) explanation of how the transformative power of an institutional agent such as a teacher can be of much different value and power for students (i.e., those who are

of low socio-economic status, or who are lacking in access to information networks) depending on their social background.

School context

The most valuable connections for the predominantly disadvantaged students at Raymond are often located within the school and are built on caring relations with teachers who act as both sources of information and normative reinforcement. High rates of single parenthood, teen pregnancy, and associated pernicious effects of poverty compound the educational challenges these students face. In a study of school inequality, Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995, pp 116-117) conclude that, for disadvantaged students, success in school depends largely on the formation of 'genuinely supportive relationships with institutional agents' - defined as 'those individuals who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly or to negotiate the transmission of institutional resources and opportunities (such as information about school programmes, academic tutoring and mentoring, college admission, and assistance with career decision-making)'. As a result of the challenges outlined above, these supportive ties, for the primarily disadvantaged students at Raymond, would be found mainly outside the family in school settings and community organisations.

Putnam (2000) notes that the degree of difficulty in establishing and maintaining 'bridging' (i.e. cross-class) social capital is greater than what is usually required in the production of 'bonding' links between more homogenous actors. While teachers may be especially valuable sources of information and advice for disadvantaged students and, therefore, especially valuable social capital resources, the class divide between teachers and disadvantaged students (who often are deficient in 'mainstream' cultural capital) can decrease the likelihood that these students will encounter and establish relationships with caring teachers. Therefore, both structural and cultural factors combine to mean that disadvantaged students are less likely to have access to the social capital that teachers can provide. That the class and status differences between students and teachers in Buffalo often impede understanding and 'synergy' between them is an idea introduced by one local community activist below.

> President, Citizens for Educational Excellence and Equitability: There is a…difference between Henry and [other Buffalo Public Schools] in that [Henry] attracts more middle-class kids, more homogeneous … They're not all middle-class, but most of them are; so the teachers come from middle-class backgrounds and there is more synergy and understanding there. I think what happens in other schools, especially schools that have higher poverty levels, is that the teacher comes from a middle-class level, often from suburban areas, they'll have experience [different from that of the students they teach] … I think that's where the major rub is.

Context is again relevant here as, at Henry, student-teacher class differences that might hamper the development of 'synergy' and understanding are less likely to exist than they are at other Buffalo schools consisting of higher proportions (and often nearly exclusively) of disadvantaged students. However, at Raymond, class and ethnic differences among students and staff, which in some cases might serve to reproduce social inequalities are instead often negotiated in a manner which encourages a 'transformation of habitus' (Scahill, 1994), as an activation of social networks allows students to access sources of human and cultural capital.

Genuinely supportive relationships are vital here because, in essence, they serve as a source of social capital for disadvantaged students when institutional agents, teachers and administrators act as information networks and norm-reinforcing role models. It is also, crucially, through fulfilling their role as information networks and norm-reinforcing role models

that teachers gain the reputation among students of being especially caring. It is clear from standpoints expressed in student interviews that Raymond students often distinguish between teachers they perceive as caring and those they do not. Based on these assessments, they perform and behave differently for - and, accordingly, are more or less receptive of instructional guidance from - these teachers (Dance, 2002). Mr. M a teacher at Raymond who *every* student interviewed there identified as particularly influential, captures this idea.

> Mr. M: A lot of these kids have no one at home they can talk to, which is why I get more of their problems. The kids will tell you straight out and sometimes they have a different perspective on things than I do but...a lot of these kids have no family support on anything. School counsellor? We don't have one, not even a part time person … If these kids actually have a problem, they'll go to a person they can trust, you know. Another obstacle - a lot of these kids feel like there aren't enough teachers who care about them, so they will not work for these people. They won't work for them. If they don't like them, if they don't respect them, they won't work for them. And that's part of the teacher's responsibility, to give those kids respect. You have to.

A common trait in the perceptions of students from both schools is the notion that their most influential teachers care for and *respect* them both personally and academically.

School mix

A review of Henry's demographics indicates a wider class mix than exists at other schools in the sample (Figure 2). The stable working- and middle-class element at Henry provides opportunities for students from a wide variety of backgrounds to interact. As Martina (2005) importantly notes, student peers are often the least intimidating and, therefore, the most accessible institutional agents for other students. Thus, for example, while they may not be surrounded in their neighbourhoods by college-bound peers, disadvantaged students at Henry are able to make connections with other college-bound students at school. These connections are also developed through participation in the school's clubs and organisations and Henry students are identified in surveys as exceptionally active young women and men as only 2% of students there (compared to 35% across the sample) indicate that they do not participate in at least one school-sponsored extracurricular activity.

While Raymond students do come from predominantly disadvantaged backgrounds, the school's vocational status helps create a student mix that may not exist at the city's neighbourhood based academic schools. Mrs. D, a Raymond teacher, comments that, at Raymond, 'the students come from all over the city and bring different experiences with them but share a desire to attend a culinary school, so they almost create their own community [at school]'. She adds that this 'provides them with the opportunity to see a world separate from the world that they grow up in'. This mix widens what Stanton-Salazar (2001, p 17), citing Wellman (1983), refers to as the 'social distribution of possibilities' to emphasise the unequal distribution of opportunities for entering into different social and institutional contexts and for forming relationships with agents who exert various degrees of control over institutional resources.

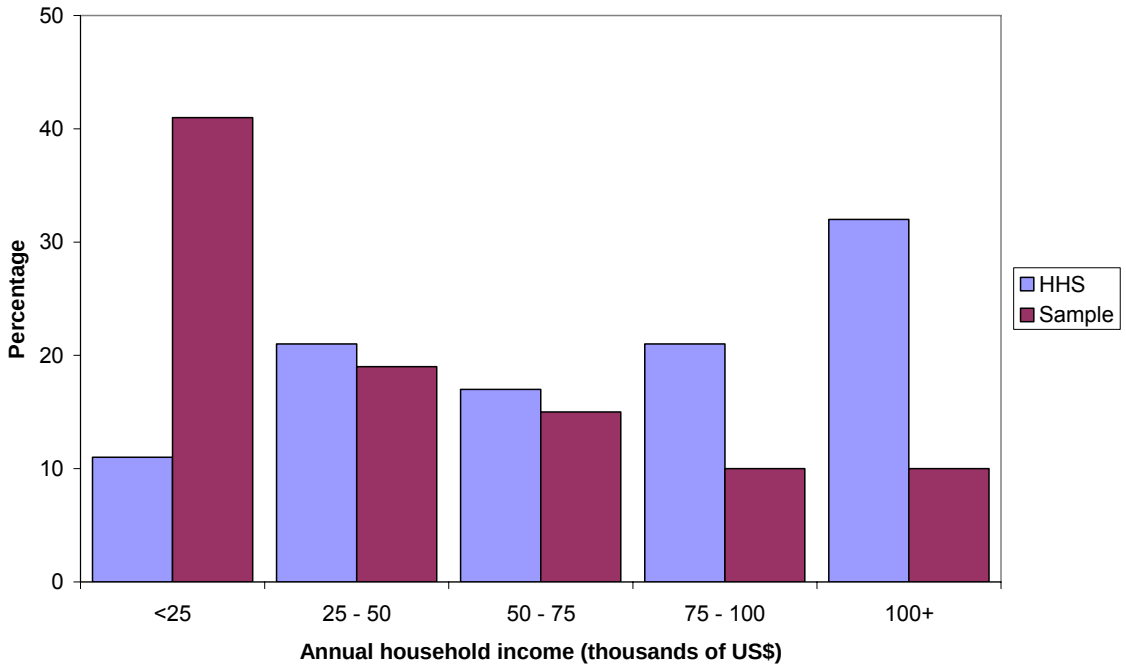

Figure 2: Socio-economic composition of student body for Henry High School (HHS) and total sample.

Community resources

Raymond and its students benefit from a number of partnerships with outside agencies, businesses, and institutes of higher education. At Raymond, community involvement and further bridging connections are encouraged by the existence of the school's restaurant. It serves to encourage students to adopt a stakeholder interest in the school and the success of its business. It also provides access to unique contacts and social resources, exposing Raymond students to a 'world of success' that might not be so evident at other schools with similarly disadvantaged populations, as Mrs. D notes that the restaurant is frequented by local newscasters and businessmen who have donated money to school causes and even created job opportunities for Raymond students in the past.

The principal at Henry repeatedly stresses in interviews the difficulty of securing grants from government and other outside agencies due to the fact that Henry is not recognised as a 'high needs' school. However, the networking and active educational involvement of Henry parents, who tend to come from relatively privileged structural positions, mean that additional resources - such as funding for textbooks, teacher training, or extracurricular activities - still flow to the school from the 'outside' as a result of their collective efforts. Though the contributions are primarily made by middle-class parents, the 'public goods aspect' of social capital identified by Coleman (1997) is brought to light as, in most cases, *all* students at the school, regardless of their socio-economic position, have access to and can benefit from the resources provided to Henry by these parents

School size

One final feature that acts to increase the potential for the establishment of many of the meaningful student-teacher, student-student, and other types of connections and social networks discussed above is small school size. Both schools reviewed here appear to

benefit, in terms of social capital, from small school size. At Henry, the size makes students feel comfortable. Karim, a student there, states:

> I like the small size because you can know everyone here. You know, you've been to high school, sometimes you walk around and feel like a faceless drone. It's like being in prison; but at this school [the small population] helps you not be afraid and feel like a bee in a hive.

Stanton-Salazar (2001) notes that small schools are effective in creating interpersonal relationships and in providing opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities and to take leadership roles, as is evidently the case at Henry.

Small school size may also help foster the caring and mutually respectful relationships that exist at Raymond. Small schools more effectively link students with adults in a learning community who 'can play the role that families and communities find it harder and harder to play' (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p 333). Smaller schools increase the chances that teachers will get to know students and their families and that students will work with the same group of teachers over several years, making students' and teachers' work more consistent and coherent (ibid). Small schools also aid the principal in determining *which* relationships with outside agencies might prove most helpful. Finally, in interviews Raymond students often note the small school's impact on stemming the levels of violence that exist in other Buffalo high schools.

Conclusions

In examining the distribution of social capital across Buffalo high schools and between subgroups of students within them, this paper demonstrates, most importantly, that:

a) Different groups of students are more or less likely to access social capital depending on a number of factors including the school they attend, their ethnicity, and their parents' levels of educational attainment.

b) The most important factor, by far, in influencing levels of social capital in the sample is socio-economic status, as measured by household income. However, when pupils with *high* social capital index scores are compared, wealthier students tend to access most resources 'from home' in the form of higher household incomes and parental levels of educational attainment and others tend to access them from institutions such as churches, community groups, and teachers.

c) Social capital has a significantly positive influence on educational achievement. It proves more important than other factors such as gender, ethnicity, and even socio-economic status, though socio-economic status clearly influences levels of social capital possessed by agents. Two students - one with high levels of social capital and one with low levels - are at different 'odds' for educational success depending on the amount of social capital they possess.

Point (c) is important in that it demonstrates the potential value of social capital, as theorised from the perspective of James Coleman detailed above, in promoting educational achievement for individuals and groups at levels above and beyond what might be expected based on their social structural status.

Points (a) and (b), however, temper this to an extent as they demonstrate the unequal distribution of social capital across the sample and draw renewed emphasis toward the conceptualisations of social capital provided earlier by Pierre Bourdieu and Nan Lin.

These results have been triangulated with qualitative evidence indicating that the processes behind students' access to and activation of social capital resources vary depending on context at two very different, but academically-successful, schools. Here, crucially, it becomes clear that, while some students may be *constrained* in their access to social capital by structural forces, they are not *controlled* by them. Many disadvantaged students make use of the social capital available to them and achieve 'against the odds'. Some factors that may aid these students in accessing social capital resources, such as a reduction in school size, appear quite tangible while others such as 'creating' the caring teachers so influential at both Henry and Raymond, are less so, but might be encouraged through professional development initiatives.

In conclusion, a re-examination of Bourdieu's original theorisation of social capital is critical for future research in education, especially in inner city America, where the gap between rich and poor becomes increasingly clear on a daily basis. However, this paper also suggests that educational researchers must be conscious to avoid over-socialised theories of social reproduction that concentrate exclusively on the structural constraints facing students without recognising their role as social agents and actors.

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Appendix 1

Buffalo Public Schools Student Social Capital Questionnaire

Note: Adapted from the Saguaro Seminar's short form Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/pdfs/socialcapitalshortform.pdf) to enable its distribution in paper form to classrooms of high school seniors.

Purpose: The purpose of the attached questionnaire is to provide information for my PhD thesis at the University of Cambridge in England. This questionnaire will ask students about their background, levels of trust, and levels of organizational involvement in order to inform a thesis on social capital in Buffalo and the Buffalo Public School system.

Confidentiality: You are asked to provide your name on this questionnaire. However, any information you provide will remain confidential. I only need your name in order to contact you for further research on this project. Please *answer all questions* to the best of your ability. All answers are voluntary, but should be truthful. All of the data collected in this questionnaire will remain confidential. No one in taking part in this survey will be identifiable when the thesis is written up.

Directions: Please take some time and fill out this questionnaire in homeroom. Most answers will be circled, some are fill-in-the-blanks, and some are to be written out. When you have finished, please return the forms to your homeroom teacher.

Please circle (or, where instructed, fill in the blank):

1. Gender:
    a) Male
    b) Female

2. Generally speaking, would you agree with the statement that "Most people are honest"?
    a) Agree strongly
    b) Agree some
    c) Disagree some
    d) Disagree strongly
    e) Other: _____

3. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

    a) People can be trusted
    b) You can't be too careful
    c) Other: _____

4. How interested are you in politics and national affairs?
    a) Very interested
    b) Somewhat interested
    c) Only slightly interested
    d) Not at all interested
    e) Other: _____

5. Are you currently registered to vote?
    a) Yes
    b) No, but I am younger than 18
    c) No, and I am 18 or older

6. How much of the time do you think you can trust the NATIONAL government to do what is right?
    a) Just about always
    b) Most of the time
    c) Some of the time
    d) Hardly ever
    e) Other: _____

7. How about your LOCAL government in Buffalo? How much of the time do you think you can trust the LOCAL government to do what is right?
    a) Just about always
    b) Most of the time
    c) Some of the time
    d) Hardly ever
    e) Other: _____

8. Thinking POLITICALLY AND SOCIALLY, how would you describe your own general outlook?
    a) Very conservative
    b) Moderately conservative
    c) Middle-of-the-road
    d) Moderately liberal
    e) Very Liberal
    f) Other: _____

9. Now I'm going to ask you how many times you've done certain things in the past 12 months, if at all. For all of these, I want you just to give me your best guess, and don't worry that you might be off a little. About how many times in the past 12 months have you:

    9a. How many times in the past twelve months have you worked on a community project?
    a) never did this
    b) once
    c) 2-4 times
    d) 5-9 times
    e) about once a month on average
    f) twice a month
    g) about once a week on average
    h) more than once a week
    i) other: _____

    9b. How many times in the past twelve months have you or your parents attended any public meeting in which there was discussion of town or school affairs?
    a) never did this
    b) once
    c) 2-4 times
    d) 5-9 times
    e) about once a month on average
    f) twice a month
    g) about once a week on average
    h) more than once a week
    i) other: _____

9c. How many times in the past twelve months have you or your parents attended a political meeting or rally?
a) never did this
b) once
c) 2-4 times
d) 5-9 times
e) about once a month on average
f) twice a month
g) about once a week on average
h) more than once a week
i) other: _____

9d. How many times in the past twelve months have you attended any club or organizational meeting (not including meetings for work)?
a) never did this
b) once
c) 2-4 times
d) 5-9 times
e) about once a month on average
f) twice a month
g) about once a week on average
h) more than once a week
i) other: _____

9e. How many times in the past twelve months have you had friends over to your home?
a) never did this
b) once
c) 2-4 times
d) 5-9 times
e) about once a month on average
f) twice a month
g) about once a week on average
h) more than once a week
i) other: _____

9f. How many times in the past twelve months have you been in the home of a friend of a different race or had them in your home?
a) never did this
b) once
c) 2-4 times
d) 5-9 times
e) about once a month on average
f) twice a month
g) about once a week on average
h) more than once a week
i) other: _____

9g. How many times in the past twelve months have you been in the home of *someone of a different neighborhood* or had them in your home?
a) never did this
b) once
c) 2-4 times
d) 5-9 times
e) about once a month on average
f) twice a month

g) about once a week on average
h) more than once a week
i) other: _____

9h. How many times in the past twelve months have you volunteered?
a) never did this
b) once
c) 2-4 times
d) 5-9 times
e) about once a month on average
f) twice a month
g) about once a week on average
h) more than once a week
i) other: _____

10. Generally speaking, do you agree with the statement "I spend a lot of time visiting friends"?
a) Agree strongly
b) Agree some
c) Disagree some
d) Disagree strongly
e) Other: _____

11. In the past twelve months, have you served as an officer or served on a committee of any local club or organization?
a) Yes
b) No

12. How often do you attend religious services?
a) Every week (or more often)
b) Almost every week
c) Once or twice a month
d) A few times per year
e) Never
f) Other: _____

13. Please tell me for the following statement whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly. Television is my primary form of entertainment.
a) Agree strongly
b) Agree somewhat
c) Disagree somewhat
d) Disagree strongly
e) Other: _____

14. Please list all of the clubs/organizations to which you belong in the space below (Please write):

15. Next, in what year were you born? (Please fill in the blank):

_____

16. Do you consider yourself:
    a) Hispanic or Latino
    b) White
    c) Black or African American
    d) Asian
    e) Native American
    f) Other: _____

17. Are you an American citizen?
    a) Yes
    b) No

18. Is English your first language?
    a) Yes
    b) No

19. If you added together the yearly incomes, before taxes, of all the members of your household for last year, 2003, would the total be:
    a) $20,000 or less
    b) Over $20,000 but less than $30,000
    c) Over $30,000 but less than $50,000
    d) Over $50,000 but less than $75,000
    e) Over $75,000 but less than $100,000
    f) Over $100,000 or more
    g) Other: _____

20. Besides you, how many children, aged 17 or younger, live in your household? (Please fill in the blank):

    _____

21. Does your family own the place where you are living now, or is it rented?
    a) Own
    b) Rent
    c) Don't know
    d) Other: _____

22. How long have you lived in Buffalo? (Please circle)
    a) All of my life
    b) More than 10 years, but not all of my life
    c) 5-10 years
    d) 1-4 years
    e) Less than 1 year

23. How many times have you changed high schools? (Please fill in the blank)

    _____

24. Do you live with: (Please circle)
    a) Mother and Father
    b) Mother and Stepfather
    c) Father and Stepmother
    d) Mother only
    e) Father only
    f) Other:_____

25. What is the highest level of education attained by your father?
    a) Did not graduate from high school
    b) Graduated from high school
    c) Completed some college
    d) Graduated from college
    e) Completed post-graduate work
    f) Other:_____

26. What is the highest level of education attained by your mother?
    a) Did not graduate from high school
    b) Graduated from high school
    c) Completed some college
    d) Graduated from college
    e) Completed post-graduate work
    f) Other:_____

27. What are your parent(s) expectations for your education?
    a) They do not expect me to graduate from high school
    b) They expect me to graduate from high school
    c) They expect me to attend college
    d) They expect me to attend graduate school
    e) Other:_____

28. What is your mother's occupation: (Please fill in the blank)

    _____

29. What is your father's occupation:

    _____

30a. How frequently do you talk about your current school experience with your parents?
    a) Almost every day
    b) About once a week
    c) About once a month
    d) Occasionally, but less than once a month
    e) Never
    f) Other:_____

30b. Do you receive help from your parent(s) or siblings on your homework?
    a) Yes, often
    b) Yes, sometimes
    c) No, never
    d) Other:_____

30c. Do you have a parent who is involved in a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)?
    a) Yes
    b) No

30d. Do your parent(s) know your friends?
    a) Yes, nearly all of them
    b) Yes, some of them
    c) Yes, but only a few of them
    d) No

30e. Do your parents know your friends' parents?
a) Yes, nearly all of them
b) Yes, some of them
c) Yes, but only a few of them
d) No

30f. Do your parent(s) restrict your television viewing?
a) Yes
b) No

30g. To what degree do you discuss and make choices with your parent(s) in regard to academic programs and matters?
a) I discuss all or most of these choices with them.
b) I discuss some of these choices with them.
c) I do not discuss these choices with them.

31. How long do you spend doing homework on an average day?
a) More than 2 hours
b) Between 1 and 2 hours
c) A little, but less than an hour
d) No time

32. What is your average grade (grade point average)?
a) A
b) B
c) C
d) D
e) F
f) Other

33a. Have you taken the PSAT or SAT exam?
a) Yes
b) No

33b. If you answered 'yes' to question 33a, what was your highest score on the PSAT or SAT (please fill in the blank)?

_____

Appendix 2

Components of adapted Social Capital Index

Note: Adapted from Putnam (2001, p 68)

Measures of community organisational life
- Served as an officer or on committee of some local organisation in last year
- Mean number of club meetings attended in last year
- Mean number of group memberships

Measures of engagement in public affairs
- Level of interest in politics and national affairs
- Attended public meeting on town or school affairs in last year

Measures of community volunteerism
- Mean number of times worked on community project in last year
- Mean number of times did volunteer work in last year

Measures of informal sociability
- Agree that "I spend a lot of time visiting friends"
- Mean number of times entertained at home in last year

Measures of social trust
- Agree that "Most people can be trusted"
- Agree that "Most people are honest"

Measures of parental educational involvement
- Parent is involved in Parent-Teacher Association
- Frequency of talk with parents about current school experience
- Frequency student receives educational help from parents or siblings