

A Case Study Considering Impacts of Active Membership in the Young Professionals
Networking Group on Sense of Community and Social Capital

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ABSTRACT

Sense of community, social capital, and emerging adulthood are all topics of increasing interest in multiple fields over the past three decades. Both sense of community and social capital are predictors of overall well-being for individuals and communities. As emerging adults begin to establish a sense of person and place, many have begun to look to young professionals groups as an outlet for networking and identity exploration. There is limited research on the impact of these organizations related to sense of community and social capital. This case study is meant to be a starting point to expand the research on this topic. A survey of 97 members of the Young Professionals Networking Group in San Luis Obispo assessed level of participation within the group as well as sense of community utilizing the Sense of Community Index (SCI-2). A one-way ANOVA compared mean differences between established participation levels (low, medium, high). It was determined the more active a member is within the YPNG, the higher sense of community they displayed. Six active members were then recruited to participate in a focus group to discover if active participation in YPNG impacts one's sense of perceived social capital. Open and axial coding of the focus group data indicated that membership within YPNG increases relational qualities that are consistent with the literature on social capital. The results from this case study indicate that active membership in networking groups may lead to a higher sense of community and enhanced perceptions of social capital. More research is necessary to determine how one's sense of community and social capital are impacted before and after joining such groups.

Keywords: sense of community, social capital, emerging adulthood

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Americans tend to value spending time with other people and socialize in a variety of different ways in order to fulfill specific personal needs. Whether it's communication at work in order to make a living, at church to increase our spirituality, or at dinner outings to share stories and emotions with friends, social capital in its most simplistic form is the relationships shared with other people (Putnam, 2000). Sense of community and social capital are topics of increasing popularity over the past few decades. Our social network is compiled through work, organizations, school and friendships. All of these relationships are accrued and maintained under the pretense of personal satisfaction or necessity (Putnam).

One way that Americans choose to socialize is through social clubs and organizations. People join groups that share similar interests or motives. Groups like the Elks Club and the Knights of Columbus have been around since the late 1800s (Putnam, 2000). Both of these organizations were established as *mutual benefit societies*, places for a body of people to join together for a common financial or social purpose. There are a multitude of similar clubs throughout the United States that may also have political, civic or religious themes in addition to the social aspect. Other, less formal groups have also been established for social benefit. Bowling leagues and card clubs offer similar benefits as a fraternal organization. Comparatively, however, these organizations are usually less structured and created purely for recreational benefits, social connections and personal enjoyment.

Putnam (2000) identified and discussed how Americans have experienced a decrease in social capital. Putnam theorized a disconnect from families, friends, coworkers and communities:

Over the last three decades, involvement in civic associations, participation in public affairs, membership in churches and social clubs and unions, time spent with family and friends and neighbors, philanthropic giving, even simple trust in other people....all have fallen 25 – 50 percent. (Putnam, Feldstein & Cohen, 2003, p. 4)

Social capital has been shown to predict many critical elements related to communities. Putnam (2000) suggested that overall quality of life can be predicted by levels of social capital and places with a weak sense of social capital exhibit higher crime rates, teen pregnancies and suicides.

Rationale

Emerging adulthood, as described by Arnett (2000), is a phase of life between the late teens into the twenties where young adults do not consider themselves adolescents, nor do they consider themselves adults. Studies have indicated that more and more young people are not considering themselves developed into full adulthood until their late twenties (Arnett, 1997, 2001). Although the majority of research in developing one's self has been conducted during the adolescent years (age 10-18), Arnett (2000), argues that "most identity exploration takes place in emerging adulthood (roughly age 18-25)" (p. 473). As emerging adults, it may be easier to participate in identity exploration as they move out of their parents' house and embrace a more autonomous lifestyle. Identity exploration can be explained as "one reflection of the desire to obtain a wide range of

experiences before settling down into the roles and responsibilities of adult life” (Arnett, 2000, p. 475). Socialization, namely “the way in which individuals are assisted in the acquisition of skills necessary to functions successfully as members of their social group” (Grusec, 2002, p. 143), is also important in the development of one’s self. As such, membership, and essentially a positive experience in social groups may be instrumental in an emerging adult’s life (i.e., as they develop from adolescence into adulthood).

The joining of, and participation, in social clubs and organizations may improve upon both individual social capital and the community as a whole. There are many types of social clubs, ranging from recreational to professional development to general socializing groups. There are book clubs and support groups, sports leagues and investment circles. The social networking capabilities of the Internet have made the accessibility of these clubs increasingly easier. People can go online and find groups of people that share similar hobbies as they do. They can discuss these hobbies and share information and new perspectives from talking with other people, thus improving members of that social community.

One can argue that sense of community (SOC) and social capital are reciprocates of one another. Perkins and Long (2002) defined social capital in terms of four components, the first being trust in one’s neighbors, which is a predictor for sense of community. They connect SOC and social capital further by stating that, “SOC and collective efficacy are the cognitive or intrapsychic components of social capital” (p. 294). Having a strong sense of community indicates that an individual feels a great deal of connectivity to that particular community. This connectivity also infers that one is able to pool more resources from the community. The more one utilizes their network,

whether for “gift” giving or receiving, the stronger the relationship becomes between an individual and the community in which they are connected. Similar to social capital, a strong sense of community brings many positive benefits to the individual and the community, predicting higher education scores, a lower crime rate and better social conditions (Ahlbrandt & Cunningham, 1979; Churchman, 1987; Florin, 1989; Perlman, 1976; Yin, 1977). People in emerging adulthood need an opportunity to grow and self identify.

This study focused on the Young Professionals Networking Group (YPNG) based in San Luis Obispo County on California’s Central Coast. YPNG is a collection of students and working professionals that gather at monthly socials, outdoor and sporting events and parties. The intent is to provide members the opportunity to meet like-minded individuals for both personal and professional reasons.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if membership in YPNG has an impact on the participants’ social capital and psychological sense of community.

Research Questions

1. What elements of sense of community do members of YPNG exhibit more strongly?
2. How does level of participation in YPNG have an impact on psychological sense of community?
3. In which ways does active membership in YPNG have an impact on one’s sense of social capital?

Delimitations

This study was conducted within the Young Professionals Networking Group (YPNG) of San Luis Obispo, California. An online survey was sent to all the members on the mailing list of the YPNG. This survey was also used to determine which members are active. Active members were then randomly selected to take part in a focus group to determine how membership has impacted their perception of personal and community social capital. The sample size was limited to members who chose to take the survey. The researcher utilized both online and in person surveys in order to reach the sample size in this study. “Active members” were invited to a scheduled focus group, and participation was limited to members that were available during the meeting.

Definition of Key Terms

The terms to be used in this study will be defined as the following:

Sense of community. A feeling of connectedness and belonging to a group in which members matter to the group and that their needs will be met through the unified purpose of the group (McMillan, 1976).

Social capital. “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1995, p. 67).

Active YPNG member¹. Any member of the YPNG that participates in two or more events or activities in a calendar year.

¹ Active membership was determined by the primary researcher

Summary

As more and more information is being discovered around sense of community and social capital, it is important to examine how these theories are utilized in a variety of settings. To date there is limited information on how membership in profession networking groups, like YPNG, impacts one's sense of community or social capital. Because social capital is a relational concept, there is limited information about how such groups impact the social capital of the community that surrounds them. This study seeks to establish a starting point in determining how the sense of community as well as the social capital of a member of a community (YPNG), is impacted by the group. This information can be used as recruiting ploys for such groups. It can also help determine if a community would benefit from more or less networking organizations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of sense of community and social capital, as well as the theoretical framework that addresses how sense of community and social capital can have an impact on the individual and the community, or organization, as a whole. The first section of the literature review will focus on the sense of community (SOC) literature and be broken down into the following sections: SOC definition and theory and SOC in multiple settings. The second portion will focus on social capital and is divided into the following topics: types of social capital and personal relations, benefits of social networking groups and theoretical framework. Finally, relational qualities of sense of community and social capital will be addressed.

Sense of Community

Definition and Theory

Sense of community, commonly referred to as psychological sense of community, has been defined and utilized in a variety of settings and disciplines (Political Science, Social Science, and Psychology). Chavis, Hogge and McMillan (1986) defined sense of community based on four key elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (p. 25). Mcmillan and Chavis (1986) describe each of the four elements as such:

The first element is *membership*. Membership is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. The second element is *influence*, a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members. The third element is reinforcement: *integration and fulfillment of needs*.

This is the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group. The last element is *shared emotional connection*, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences (p. 9).

For the purpose of this paper, sense of community will be defined as: a feeling of connectedness and belonging to a group in which members matter to the group and that their needs will be met through the unified purpose of the group, derived from the definition by McMillan (1976).

The qualities representative of one's sense of community have determined that lack of sense of community can be detrimental to normative human functioning. Feelings of isolation, alienation, loneliness and depression can result from a lack of one's sense of community (Sarason, 1974). A lack of sense of community can also lead to a stifling of self-actualization (Maslow, 1954), and has predicted frustrations in social affiliation (Murray, 1938) and social interests (Adler, 1964).

Sense of Community in Multiple Settings

Researchers have examined SOC in numerous disciplines and across various settings and contexts. The Sense of Community Index (SCI) is the most widely accepted and used measure in the sense of community literature. The SCI has been used in a variety of settings in an attempt to determine psychological sense of community. Pretty (1990) discovered that "perceived psychological sense of community is associated with perceptions of environmental performance demands as well as with interpersonal networks and support" (p. 60).

Obst, Zinkiewicz, & Smith (2002) examined an internet community and found support for Chavis, Hogge, and McMillan's four dimensions of SOC on the geographical location level as well as the community of interest as a whole. Brodsky and Marx (2001) examined multiple PSOC in both a "macrocommunity" and a "microcommunity" located within the macro. Specifically, they examined the difference in PSOC of members of a low income woman's job training and education center and the PSOC of the same members in their community as a whole. They determined that many members felt a stronger sense of community at the women's center than they did in their whole community.

As sense of community has been determined to be setting-specific (Hill, 1996), Brodsky, O'Campo, and Aronson (1999) examined how individual and community level factors are associated with an individual PSOC. In a study, Perkins et al. (1990) explored the characteristics of a community that foster participation in social action. They concluded that "block-level participation was correlated with such features in the built environment as fewer barriers on residents' property, greater street lighting and, unexpectedly, street width" (p. 101).

Social participation has shown to be a predictor for SOC in both formal and informal settings. Cicognani et al. (2008) examined social participation habits of university students in three counties. In all three samples, social participation predicted higher levels of SOC. Activities that the American sample noted most frequently include volunteering, sports, and religious activities. Warner, Dixon, and Chalip (2012) compared perceived SOC gained through formal (varsity) and informal (club) sports. Both informal and formal sport helped foster leadership and mutual respect for opponents through

competition. Participants in club sports also referenced common interest and voluntary activity as an indicator of SOC while varsity sport participants noted social spaces (outside of sport).

Other contexts in which the SCI has been used to predict PSOC are workplace communities (Mahan, 2000; Pretty & McCarthy, 1991; Pretty, McCarthy, & Catano, 1992) religious (Miers & Fisher, 2002) and immigrant communities (Sonn, 2002).

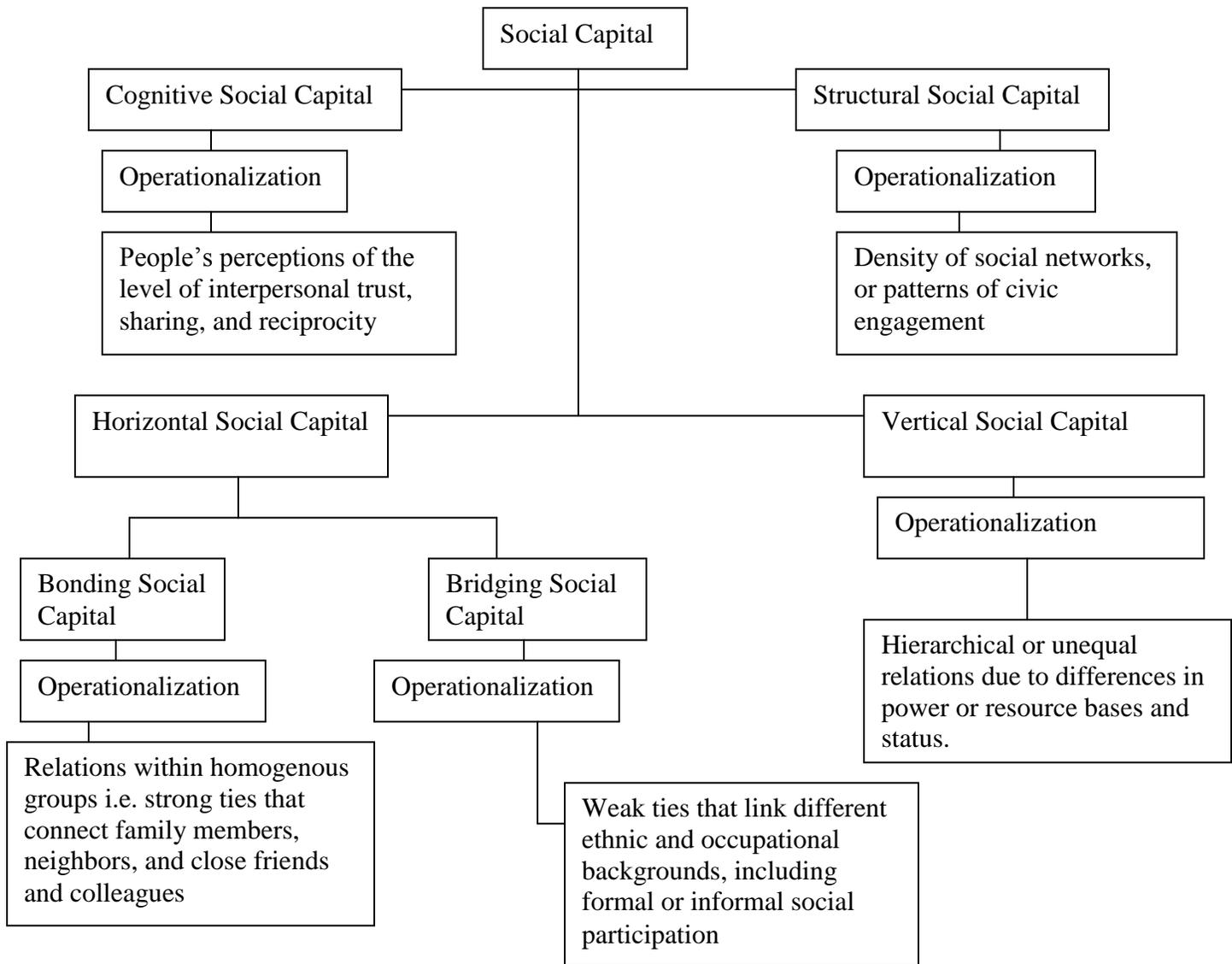
Social Capital

Types of Social Capital

Social capital has been studied in a number of disciplines (social science, economics, political and health science) and there is much discrepancy and debate on an exact definition. Some consensus has been reached that social capital is based on four conceptual constructs: collective efficacy, psychological sense of community, neighborhood cohesion and community competence (Lochner, Kawachi & Kennedy, 1999).

Social capital has also been discussed in both a structural and cognitive sense (Harpham, Grant & Thomas, 2002; Islam, Merlo, Kawachi, Lindstrom & Gerdtham, 2006, McKenzie, Whitley & Weich, 2002). “Structural components refer to roles, rules, precedents, behaviors, networks and institutions” (McKenzie et al., p. 280), whereas cognitive social capital is referring to beliefs and attitudes of cooperative participation and behavior (Colletta & Cullen, 2000). “At the simplest level, these two components can be respectfully characterized as what people ‘do’ and what people ‘feel’ in terms of social relations” (Harpham et al., p. 106). Figure 1 provides a conceptual map of these two components as they relate to social capital.

Figure 1. Graphical representation of cognitive and structural social capital



Source: Islam, Merlo, Kawachi, Lindstrom & Gerdtham, 2006, p. 5

Putnam (2000) discussed two important sub-types of social capital. Bonding social capital refers to the value of social networking created between similar groups of people. These organizations are typically exclusive to a certain population of people.

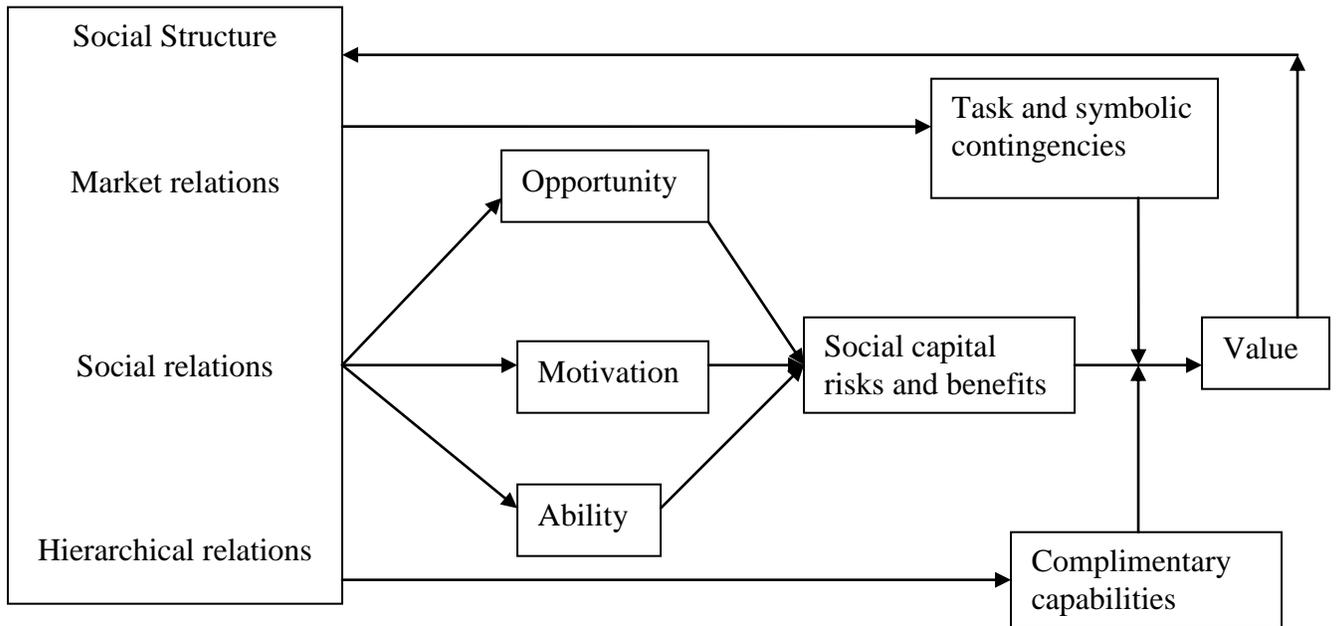
Country clubs and ethnic groups are examples of bonding social capital. Bonding social capital is good for solidarity in a group. These organizations are good for bringing together a homogenous group for a similar cause. "Dense networks in ethnic enclaves, for example, provide crucial social and psychological support for less fortunate members of the community" (Putnam, p. 22). Although bonding social capital is good for reinforcing the relationship within the group, it can foster enmity from outside groups. Schuller, Baron and Field (2000) offered another perspective on bonding social capital in stating that it "refers to the links between like-minded people, or the reinforcement of homogeneity. It builds strong ties, but can also result in higher walls excluding those who do not qualify, American college fraternities being a prominent example of such bonding" (p. 10).

Bridging social capital, by contrast, is more inclusive than bonding social capital. It refers to social networking between non-similar groups. Bridging groups are better for the dispersal of information and resources between heterogeneous organizations. Examples of bridging groups would be social networking websites, many youth development groups and after school programs. Again Schuller et al. (2000) offered their definition: "Bridging social capital ... refers to the building of connections between heterogeneous groups; these are likely to be more fragile, but more likely also to foster social inclusion" (p. 10). These are the day to day relationships that you have with people on a less personal level. Although these relations are less intimate, they can provide increased opportunities for meeting people due to their outward thinking and recruitment. de Souza Briggs (1998) infers that bonding social capital is good for "getting by," but bridging social capital is good for "getting ahead" (p. 85).

Some groups practice both bonding and bridging social capital. For instance, churches bridge people from different social classes, genders and ages while bonding religious beliefs. An online running club may bridge geographically to include people of different nations but still bond in their core beliefs and hobbies. There are groups that foster solidarity, and there are groups that look to expand. Many organizations are not solely considered bonding or bridging but use a combination of the two sub-types in order to facilitate growth and benefits to their participants.

Adler and Kwon (2002) suggested that there are three types of social relations. 1) Market relations are either economical or service oriented and include the exchange of products for money or barter. 2) Hierarchical relations are based around respect to authority in which a sense of security is gained. 3) Social relations are the basis of social capital (p. 18). These relations include the exchange of favors or gifts. Many relations and exchanges involve more than one, or all three types of social relationships. Figure 2 provides an example of how the three relations are connected.

Figure 2. A conceptual model of social capital



Source: Adler & Kwon, 2002, p. 23

Polanyi (1957) suggested the term *embeddedness*, a concept that insinuates that market and hierarchical relations are both embedded in social relations. As such, all three relations can be considered to be social relations at their core. And their exchanges, whether they are monetary, services, favors or gifts, are considered secondary to the social nature of the relationship.

Benefits of Social Networking Groups

The benefits of being part of any social group are well documented. According to Sonnenberg (1990), networking is useful in these seven ways:

1. It can provide knowledge by allowing participants to study successful organizations and individuals and to learn from them
2. It can provide resources by helping members gain access to suppliers, equipment and personnel
3. It allows participants to position their organizations favorably
4. It can be used to create opportunities for placing an organization in the right place at the right time
5. It provides referrals to others
6. It can help solidify existing relationships
7. It is a source of new business leads (p. 55)

These benefits can be utilized on a personal level and in a business sense. But, in order for social capital to exist, there must be some relationship. Portes (1998) stated:

Whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships. To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is these others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage (p. 8).

In this sense, social capital can determine a person or community's actions surrounding any given individual. If someone is known for volunteering and being a safe driver, the community receives the social capital of receiving charity work and the security that their

children are safe to play outside in the neighborhood. The character and beliefs that person has are transferable to the community.

Sociologists use the SCI to determine how much, or how little, people trust other people in a given community. Putnam (2000) cross referenced the SCI with the Kids Count Index (KCI), a measure used to determine child well-being, to distinguish any convergence. Putnam discovered that states that have a high SCI are in many cases the same states that score high on the KCI. Residents of these states “join organizations, volunteer, vote, and socialize with friends” and their children are “born healthy” and “teenagers tend not to become parents, drop out of school, get involved in violent crime, or die prematurely due to suicide or homicide” (Putnam, p. 296).

Although this phenomenon cannot be determined to be “caused” by social capital, there is evidence to support that areas with strong social capital and cohesion are better environments for children to grow up on both community and individual levels. Child abuse rates have been known to be lower in neighborhoods with strong ties and community cohesion (Chambre, 1989; Moffitt, 1992; Olasky, 1992). At risk individuals have been shown to be the greatest benefactors of a connected community. Runyan et al. (1998) produced a study of pre-school students of high risk and low risk to compare how social capital impacted their lives. They discovered that 87% of at risk students were suffering emotional and behavioral problems later in their lives. Furthermore, they concluded “the individual indicators that best discriminated between levels of child functioning were the most direct measures of social capital – church affiliation, perception of personal social support, and support within the neighborhood” (p. 12).

Community cohesion and trust has also been shown to have a protective impact on one's health. Being part of a large social network provides emotional support, which can be linked to better health. This effect has been translated to apply to animal communities. Conger, Sawrey and Turrel (1958) found that social support in animal communities has health benefits, especially under stressful circumstances.

Similar studies have been conducted with human subjects, as some believe the benefits of "social supports are protective only in the presence of stressful circumstances" (Kaplan, Cassel & Gore, 1977, p. 49). Segal, Weiss and Sokol (1965) discovered that students who are affiliated with social groups, such as fraternities or campus clubs, were less likely to have to undergo psychiatric treatment. Schoenbach, Berton, Fredman and Kleinbaum (1986) conducted a study in Evans County, Georgia, and found that mortality rates of "socially connected" individuals were lower than that of non-affiliated persons.

Evidence of the benefits associated with social capital have been studied in informal social settings. A study by Green and Brock (2005) examined both informal and organized interactions of undergraduate students and adult members of a fundraising group. Results from this study suggest that both types of interactions foster beneficial social capital characteristics. Organized contacts offered more opportunities to develop leadership, teamwork, and interact with superiors while informal "engagement fostered companionship, interaction with peers, in-group trust, relaxation, sharing of opinions, negotiating skill, immediate gratification, and long-term satisfaction" (p. 20).

Theoretical Framework

Because social capital has been studied in a variety of professional fields, (economics, social science, political science and health science) there is much controversy and disparity surrounding a true theory of social capital. For the purpose of this paper, a few related theories in sociology will be addressed. The next section contains definitions and applications of the following theories: social resource theory, social exchange theory and the human capital theory.

Social Resource Theory

The social resource theory suggests that using social resources has benefits on multiple levels. Lin (1982) suggested that social resources, and the use of such resources, can be hierarchical in nature and potentially can change one's socioeconomic status. Scholars often discuss social capital as the combination of both social networks and social relations (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Lin, 1999; Portes, 1998).

Lin (1999) suggests that within the Social Exchange Theory there are two common concepts: 1) the location of one's social network is the basis of social capital, 2) the variety of relations that one has either direct or indirect ties to is the key to social capital (p. 36).

Network Location

In the network location approach, the physical location in respect to the desired resource is important. Closer proximity to a network increases accessibility of resources and information for people (Burt, 1997). The level of connectedness that individuals have with said network is also a strong determinant used in establishing that network's

usefulness. How closely related one is to their network correlates to the number of resources that are available. If one is readily identified in a social network, they are more likely to be linked with more information and persons that could provide resources (Granovetter, 1973).

Variety of Relations

Embedded resources can be broken down into network resources and contact resources. Lin (1999) suggested that “network resources refer to resources embedded in one's ego-networks, whereas contact resources refer to resources embedded in contacts used as helpers in an instrumental action, such as job searches” (p. 36). In this sense, network resources are the people that you have direct personal relationships with. Contact resources are people who have relations with your personal social network that can be tapped into through other people that you know.

Social Exchange Theory

Blau (1955) and Homans (1958) were the first to recognize that social relations may stem from the exchanges that people share with one another. Blau conducted research on agents of a federal law enforcement agency that were tasked with determining how compliant a specific firm was in regard to the law. The agents were unwilling to go to their supervisor for information in fear that they would be labeled unqualified for their job. Consequently, agents began asking help from their coworkers and this became the basis of the exchange. Agents who asked for advice paid a cost of feeling inferior. Since the “cost” of going to a highly competent coworker was higher, agents tended to seek advice from agents of similar competence to themselves.

Blau (1955) and Homans (1958) called for the revival of what they called “the oldest of theories of social behavior – social behavior as exchange.” (p. 606) Their perception of social exchange dealt with a “checks and balances” system where people who give a lot often expect a lot in return and people who get a lot can feel a certain amount of pressure to return the favor. They argued that these relations are based on a sense of balance, but the actor tends to seek maximizations in himself while also making sure “no one in his group makes more profit than he does.” (p. 606)

Molm (1997) reinforced the balance system suggested by Homans (1958) with his concept of reciprocal exchange. In this regard, actors are not looking to distribute their resources evenly, but rather they are engaged in gift-giving under the assumption that their “gifts” will be reciprocated back to them. This notion of reciprocity is strengthened by the depth and duration of the relationship as well as past experiences. If the exchange of gifts is not balanced, the frequency of gifts may dwindle. In this belief, people with fewer resources to offer may be left out of exchange due to the fact they cannot reciprocate the transaction.

As stated earlier, social capital does not exist without relationships to other people or organizations (Portes, 1998). These relationships (and resources derived from those relations) are the actual source of social capital and do not refer to the individual actor.

Embedded resources are relationships in which a person can draw resources. One way of doing so is the facilitation of information. For example, if an individual has positive connections with a large number of people in various industries, they can become informed of potential career advancements as job opportunities if positions open up within their network. Organizations can also have access to a larger pool of qualified

individuals if an employee has strong ties with capable people (Lin, 1999). “It is not what you know, but who you know,” is an often used statement that can help explain embedded resources.

Interpersonal trust and neighborhood cohesion seem to be linked in many cases. Data collected using the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System was analyzed by Kawachi, Kennedy and Glass (1999) and the “data indicate that states with low levels of interpersonal trust are less likely to invest in human security and less likely to be generous with their provisions for social safety nets” (p. 1191). Interpersonal trust, or lack thereof, can have a positive or negative impact on a community, especially for marginalized populations. States that display lower levels of trust are less likely to provide support to populations in need of help. Social trust is also associated with higher levels of reciprocity. A person will be willing to help another person if they trust that somewhere down the road the individual in need will be able to repay the favor. This concept of “shared benefits” has been determined to be stronger in smaller towns and has demonstrated positive social constructs. Volunteerism and unsolicited assistance are more common and crime rates are sometimes three times lower in smaller cities (Putnam, 2000). Studies have demonstrated that neighborhoods that exhibit high levels of cohesion can help alleviate family adversity. Children that come from hostile family environments are better off if they have other supportive adults and strong peer relationships in their lives (Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Lapp, 2002).

Community empowerment is the ability “that allows individuals and groups to organize and mobilize themselves toward commonly defined goals of social and political change” (Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001, p. 181). Empowerment within a community has

been predicted by the level of participation within that community. Prestby et al. (1990) reported that leaders of an organization receive the highest levels of personal and community benefits within that organization. Active members also received more benefits than nominal members. Benefits that are powerful distinguishers of active membership and non-active membership were associated with learning new skills and information. Members who are least active in an organization also report receiving lower levels of social support and recognition than do highly active members.

Relational Qualities of Sense of Community and Social Capital

Pooley, Cohen and Pike (2004) believe there is an opportunity to bring together sense of community and social capital in order to better understand the community. “SOC allows us to understand the individual’s connection to the community, which is central to the concept of social capital” (p. 78).

Another similar benefit shared by SOC and social capital seems to be subjective well-being. Davidson and Cotter (1991) utilized their own Sense of Community Scale (1986) as well as the Social Well Being Scale to determine if there was any correlation. This study was conducted using phone interviews and established that sense of community was a strong determinant of subjective well being.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Professional social networking groups have been underrepresented in the literature on sense of community and social capital. The following chapter presents the methods used to conduct the current study. The following sections will be included in this chapter: Study locale, description of subjects, description of instruments used, study procedure and data analysis.

Study Locale

Participants' perceptions of social capital and sense of community were explored specifically for the Young Professionals Networking Group in San Luis Obispo County, California. Table 1 delineates the demographics of San Luis Obispo County as of the last census.

Table 1
San Luis Obispo County Demographics

Population	246,681
Male	126,704
Female	119,977
Median age	37.3
18 years and older	193,268
21 years and older	176,889
65 years and older	35,685

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Description of Subjects

The population of interest in this study was the members of the Young Professionals Networking Group (YPNG) based in San Luis Obispo County, California.

This organization was founded in 2006 centered on the idea that “the Central Coast’s young professionals would benefit, both personally and professionally, from peer connection and support as well as community involvement” (YPNG, Copyright of website). The YPNG is a group of over 900 professionals, most members being between the ages of 23 and 40 and living within 40 miles of San Luis Obispo. The gender breakdown is roughly 53% male and 47% female. Many of the members are college graduates that currently hold professional positions in the San Luis Obispo region.

Description of Instruments

There were two different instruments used to measure both sense of community and social capital within the YPNG. Sense of community was analyzed using a quantitative method known as the Sense of Community Index – 2 (SCI-2). Social capital within the YPNG utilized a qualitative measure. For measuring social capital, active YPNG members, determined from the SCI-2, volunteered to participate in a focus group. The following section will break down the logistics and rationale for both the SCI-2 and the focus group interview.

Sense of Community Index-2

The original Sense of Community Index is the most widely used and accepted quantitative measure of one’s sense of community in social sciences. Chavis, Hogge and McMillan (1986) developed it based on the theory that sense of community is a perception based on four basic elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connection. One definition of sense of community, derived from McMillan’s (1976) review of the literature, is stated as, a

feeling of connectedness and belonging to a group in which members matter to the group and that their needs will be met through the unified purpose of the group.

The SCI was determined to be relevant in this study due to the extent at which it has been utilized in a number of different fields (sociology, social psychology and political psychology) and cultural contexts. Although the SCI has been an adequate measure of psychological sense of community in many settings, it has received criticisms (Chavis, Lee & Acosta, 2008) around the true-false nature of the questions and how that may limit variability in the results. The SCI-2 utilizes a Likert like scale that helps prevent the limited variability discovered with the original SCI's true-false question structure. The SCI-2 is able to cover all attributes in the original theory and was chosen to be used in this study.

The SCI-2 is a 24 question survey divided into four subscales of sense of community: Questions 1 – 6 address a reinforcement of needs; questions 7 – 12 deal with community membership; questions 8 – 18 refer to individual influence within the community; and questions 19 – 24 are related to the shared emotional connections within the community. Each question was answered using a 4-point Likert Scale (0 being “Not at All” and 3 being “Completely”) that determined how well each statement represents how an individual feels about this community (Chavis, Lee, & Acosta, 2008). The community referent for this particular study was the YPNG and did not address the community in which this organization resides as whole. An additional question was added to the SCI-2 by the researcher to differentiate the level of participation amongst members of the YPNG. The full questionnaire used in this study can be found in Appendix A.

Social Capital Focus Group

The study of social capital is a rather abstract science. There are many definitions and interpretations on what social capital is and how it can be measured in both individual and community settings. Because social capital is dealing with personal relations, it is very context and situation specific and subjective across individuals and communities. For this reason, the researcher utilized a qualitative method in order to determine social capital of active members of the YPNG.

The researcher utilized formal literature as well as general information regarding social capital in order to create a focus group interview format that explores the major components of social capital that were applicable to membership in YPNG. The focus group contained questions that provided participants with the opportunity to describe how they perceived to be main trends in social capital as relating to membership in the YPNG: embedded resources (including accessibility and mobilization of such resources), interpersonal trust, neighborhood cohesion and density, and community empowerment. All of the components were tied to social capital in that they all dealt with relations.

After determining major trends in social capital, the researcher formulated questions for a focus group designed to measure the aforementioned constructs of social capital. The focus group guide used for this study is found in Appendix B.

Study Procedure

In order to better understand the impacts of membership in the YPNG, multiple methods were employed in this study. The first was used to determine member's sense of community within YPNG through convenience sampling. An online survey was created and administered utilizing Survey Monkey and was disseminated to all members of

YPNG by way of an internet mailing list. This initial contact included a cover sheet that described the purpose of the study. The cover sheet was also used to inform potential respondents that their participation was both voluntary and confidential. An incentive for completing the survey was offered to all respondents in the form of \$50 cash that was awarded to two respondents by way of a random drawing. The researcher was unable to collect the targeted number of responses (n=100) via internet dissemination. Therefore, the researcher provided physical copies of the survey at three YPNG events during the fall of 2011. The results of the questionnaire were used to measure member's sense of community within the YPNG.

A question regarding how much, or how little, a member was involved in YPNG was included on the initial survey. Answers to this question allowed the researcher to determine who was an "active member" in the organization. For this study, an active member was defined as a YPNG member that participates in two or more organization event per calendar year. Through purposive sampling, members that were determined to be "active" were placed on a list and randomly selected and asked to take part in the follow up focus group to determine the impact that membership in YPNG has on one's social capital. A random YPNG member on this list was contacted and asked if they would like to participate in the focus group. This process continued until 10 people consented to be part of the focus group. The focus group consisted of 6 active members of YPNG. The initial selection of 10 members was used to account for potential time conflicts when the focus group was to take place. The focus group took place in a neutral setting, as the researcher read each question aloud and documented answers by means of an audio recorder and note-taking by the primary researcher. Focus group participants

were informed that their identity would be kept confidential and each participant chose a code name in which the researcher would use to analyze the data. Refreshments were provided for all participants, and they were thanked for their time after the 40-minute meeting.

Data Analysis

Results of the questionnaire were exported to the program Microsoft Excel for organization. Data were then imported into the program Minitab for analysis. Three of the questionnaires were not thoroughly completed and were eventually discarded. Of the remaining questionnaires ($n=97$), only three questions remained unanswered. These data were imputed and determined by the median of questions answered in the specific question set. For example, questions 1-6 address a reinforcement of needs. If five of the six questions were answered, the median of the answered questions was imputed for the unanswered question.

A Sense of Community Index was then calculated for all respondents by summing all answers coded in the 4-point Likert scale (0-3). Data collected on frequency of participation within YPNG were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mean SOC Indexes were then grouped for likeness and three groups emerged from the level of participation. Low participation level included members who attended 0-4 events per year ($n = 40$), medium level was 5-8 events ($n = 34$), and high participation level included members that participated in 9 or more events per calendar year ($n = 23$). Levene's test for equal variances was run to determine if the groupings showed similar differences for SOC Index. A one-way ANOVA was calculated to assess the mean difference on the SOC Index between the participation levels at alpha level of 0.05 for significance.

Groupwise comparisons between participation level groups were also determined using the Tukey Method.

Due to the qualitative nature of the data derived from the focus group, inter-rater reliability was used to ensure the answers from the focus group were both consistent and interpreted in similar ways. To do so, a research assistant was utilized to alleviate any bias that may have been introduced by the researcher. Both the researcher, and the research assistant, a graduate student at California Polytechnic State University, coded and compared findings from the focus group transcript. The researchers achieved an inter-rater reliability of 80% or greater before any further data analysis was conducted. Demographic information was also gathered for data analysis and included age, sex, and ethnicity.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter presents results from a study conducted on the impact of participation in the Young Professionals Networking Group of San Luis Obispo County on sense of community and social capital. Presented results include a survey on sense of community as well as a focus group for members of the YPNG.

Sense of Community

Surveys disseminated to the YPNG via internet newsletter and distributed at three organizational events resulted in 100 subjects and provided 97 usable surveys after three incomplete questionnaires were thrown out (71% via internet, 29% via events). An initial question asked subjects how important it is to feel a sense of community with other members of the YPNG. This question was answered using a six-point Likert scale (0=prefer not to be part of this community to 6=very important). Responses ranged from 2 to 6 although the vast majority felt that it was at least somewhat important. Mean response was 4.835 with a standard deviation of .799.

Subjects then answered four groupings consisting of six questions. All questions were coded according to response with not at all equal to 0, somewhat=1, mostly=2, and completely=3. The first grouping focused on the reinforcement of needs in the YPNG and addressed such topics as goals, values and problem solving. Question 4, “being a member of the YPNG community makes me feel good,” had the highest mean response (2.299). The findings from this group of questions are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Reinforcement of Needs by Mean and Standard Deviation

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
Positive feelings	2.300	0.648
Goals/Priorities	1.970	0.684
Meets my needs	1.876	0.633
Meets my needs	1.732	0.621
Needs are met	1.412	0.787
Problem discussing	1.402	0.874
Total	1.782	0.778

The next grouping of questions was related to membership in the YPNG. These questions measured each respondent's feelings of trust, member and organizational recognition, investments, and personal identity as they relate to being a member of the YPNG. The question with the lowest reported mean (1.082) asked respondents how much they agreed with the statement "Most YPNG members know me." A complete presentation of these findings is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Membership by Mean and Standard Deviation

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
Trust in YPNG	1.856	0.645
Community Symbols	1.825	0.958
Time and effort	1.320	0.941
Recognize members	1.237	0.899
Identity	1.093	0.879
Members recognize me	1.082	0.886
Total	1.402	0.928

Community influence made up the next grouping of questions and examined empowerment, organization leadership, and personal and organizational influence. Question 18, “YPNG has good leaders,” had the highest mean (2.464) in this grouping. Complete results from this question group can be found in Table 4.

Table 4
Influence by Mean and Standard Deviation

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
Good leadership	2.446	0.613
Community influence	1.969	0.728
Problem solving	1.866	0.702
Member feelings	1.608	0.848
Fitting in	1.536	0.765
Personal influence	1.031	0.918
Total	1.402	0.882

The last grouping of questions dealing with sense of community addressed shared emotional connections within the community of the YPNG. This grouping of questions had the highest overall mean (1.868) and reflects that most members agree they have shared emotional connections with other members of the YPNG.

Table 5
 Shared Emotional Connection by Mean and Standard Deviation

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
Community hope	2.392	0.715
Community care	2.124	0.616
Membership longevity	1.784	0.869
Membership influence	1.732	0.836
Sharing events	1.701	0.831
Time investment	1.474	0.902
Total	1.868	0.853

Answers to all questions were then summed using this coding and a sense of community index for each subject was established. The respondents' SOC index ranged from 17 – 68 and the mean SOC index was 40.784 with a standard deviation of 11.755.

The final question used for data analysis determined how many YPNG events each subject participates in during a calendar year. Of the 97 completed surveys, The frequency of answers is reflected in Table 6.

Table 6
 Event Attendance by Frequency and Percentage

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
0	4	4.1
1-2	16	16.5
3-4	20	20.6
5-6	18	18.6
7-8	16	16.5
9+	23	23.7

A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant mean difference (p-value of <.0001) for participation levels on the SOC index. Using Tukey's Method to calculate

mean differences between specific levels, it was also determined that mean differences in SOC index between participation level groups were also statistically significant. The difference in mean SOC index moving from a level 1 participant to a level 2 participant was 6.04. The difference in mean SOC index moving from level 2 participants to level 3 participants was 9.33.

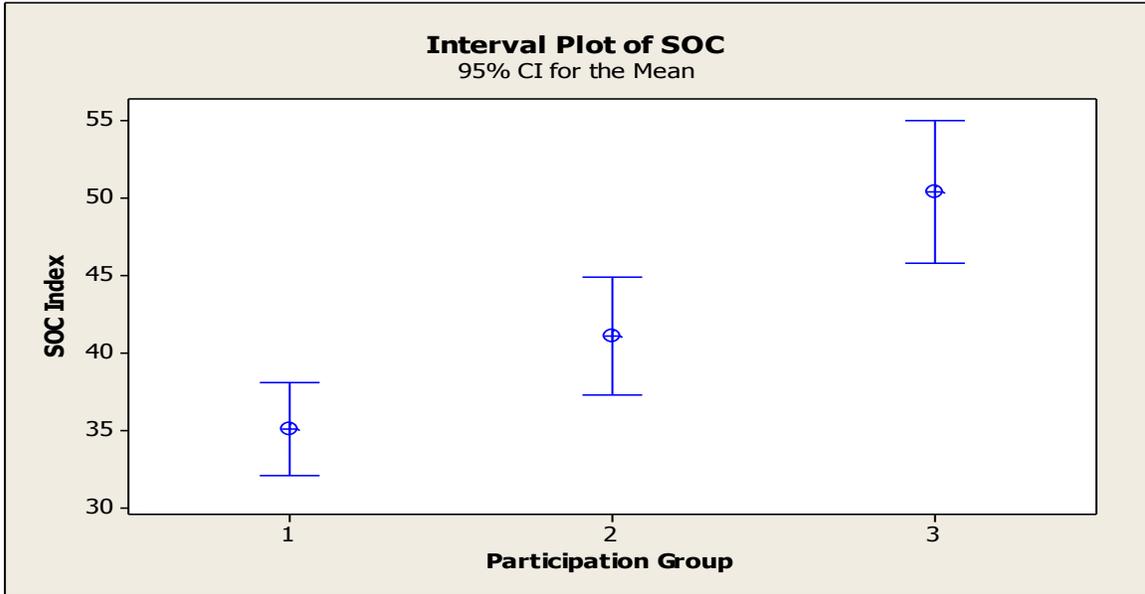
Table 7
Sense of Community by Participation Level According to Mean and Standard Deviation

		N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Level	Low	40	35.02	9.40
	Medium	34	41.06	10.81
	High	23	50.39	10.68

Individual 95% Confidence Intervals for Mean based on Pooled Standard Deviation

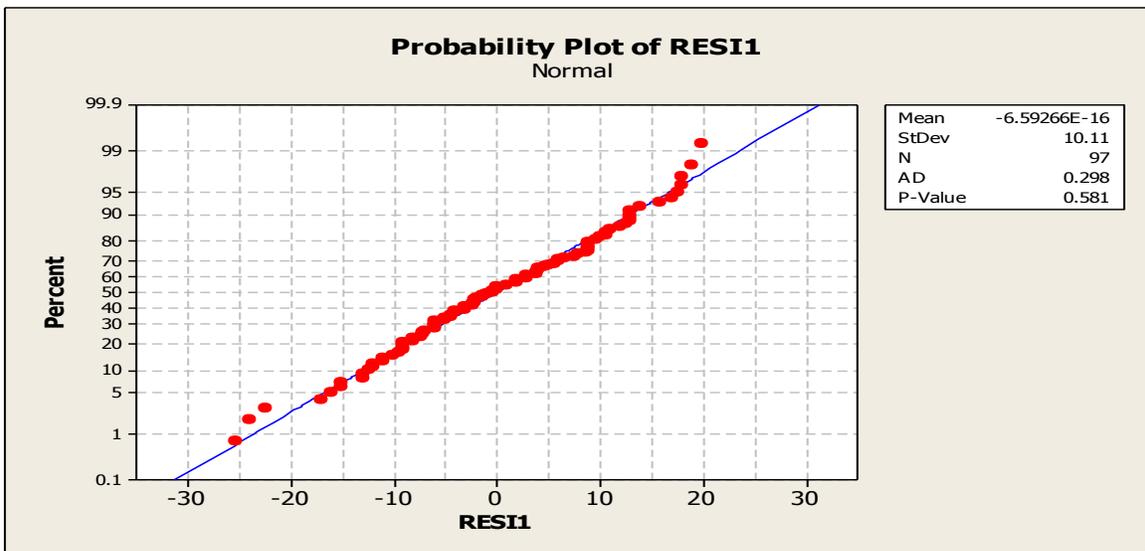
As participation in the YPNG increase, so did members' SOC Index. Figure 3 shows the relationship of participation level groups and their respective SOC Index and standard deviation.

Figure 3. Interval Plot of SOC and Participation Groups



A probability plot of residuals was created and indicated that a normal distribution was a good model for this data set and was statistically significant at a p-value of 0.581.

Figure 4. Probability Plot of Residuals



Social Capital

Demographic Information

Of the six YPNG members that participated in the focus group, four were male and two were female. The age range of the participants was 26-42 years old (26, 29, 31, 33, 33, 42). Four of the subjects identified themselves as white. One subject identified as Latino and another indicated mixed ethnicity.

Perceptions of Embedded Resources in YPNG

To determine how embedded resources (including accessibility and mobilization of such resources) are impacted by membership in the YPNG, subjects were asked how membership in the YPNG has impacted the number and type of resources available to them. Answers to this question were coded and revealed three common themes that emerged from the repetitive answers from the participants: social connections, business networking, and mobilization of resources.

Answers that addressed social connections included statements such as “there is just a lot more stuff to do,” “I just know a lot more people,” and “I wouldn’t have thought to become involved (in an event) if it wasn’t for YPNG.” Subject *El Duderino* described “additional resources as far as events, mixers and softball. So it could be up once a week or once a month.”

Subjects that discussed business networking included examples of how YPNG has been utilized as an outlet to share business with other members. Subject *Blair Waldorf* stated, “someone might go to a certain business because you know about a business and want to support it because they know the people.” *Larry* agreed and offered that “I have done business with people and they have done business with me just from our

membership in YPNG.” Subject *Snoop* followed up by saying, “I can tap into people in different areas for what I do and I can find people to present to kids I work with.”

Multiple examples were discussed on the topic of resource mobilization. Subject *Larry* stated that “the website has a list of people’s names and their jobs...if I want to find a mechanic or gardener I would go to the website to see if I can give business to someone I know.” Subject *El Duderino* agreed with a statement regarding “being able to go after those resources, if my company needs help with marketing I can go to that list and see who can help and I may know them a little better and it may not be a shot in the dark...a little more personal and in depth.” All respondents that contributed associated YPNG as a place for social or business networking, or a means of finding and utilizing business resources. Focus group participants were then asked about the level of trust within the YPNG.

Perceptions of Trust Within YPNG Compared to the Outside Community

In order to address interpersonal trust within the YPNG, subjects were asked if they feel more or less trusting of members of the YPNG compared to their outside community. All responding subjects to this question associated a stronger level of trust than that of their outside community. Statements that supported these thoughts included “I feel I can relate to them,” “I would have a better feeling of who they are (YPNG members) compared to the general population,” and “more trusting because there is a level of accountability.” The last statement was supported by Subject *Larry* who said “if someone is a member and other people have a negative experience with them, you would probably hear about that and you would then know you would not want to do business with this person.” Being able to relate to members in regards to age and professional

development also emerged as a theme around trust. Subject *Snoop* indicated “I would be more trusting working with someone in YPNG that I know and have hung out with and had interactions...and seen them in many different lights.” Subjects were then asked about cohesion within the YPNG.

Neighborhood Cohesion and Density in YPNG

To determine how much or how little cohesion and density exists in the YPNG, focus group participants were asked how they feel about the level of cohesion in the YPNG. Subjects were also asked how active participation in the YPNG has impacted how they perceive the San Luis Obispo community. Only three subjects responded to the first question related to this topic and continued to discuss trust, personal connectedness and event cohesion versus group cohesion. Subject *Blair Waldorf* discussed business interactions in that “I have gone on the website and found people to work with given our common ground.” Event cohesion versus group cohesion was addressed by subject *Blair Waldorf* as well with their response that “at the mixer everyone is cool and wants to chat it up but outside of YPNG it is very cliquey.” Subject *El Duderino* offered another example with the statement that “at the events, there is a decent level of cohesion, but the bigger you get the more natural it is to have subgroups.” Subject *Taryn* also offered that “everyone is on the same page...and there is a level of safety and acceptance.”

When subjects were asked if active participation in the YPNG has impacted how they perceive the San Luis Obispo community, there were a variety of responses addressing the people, the scenery, and the opportunities in San Luis Obispo. Subject *Larry* indicated that “YPNG has strengthened a feeling that everyone here is friendly.” Connectedness to the community was also discussed and Subject *El Duderino* stated

“feeling connected to the community as a whole, the more connected you feel the greater sense of place you have and the more pride you have in the community.” Subject *Taryn* suggested that “I have a greater appreciation of the physical beauty of this place because of going on hikes or seeing different places...with people I have met through YPNG.” In referring to the opportunities that have come from YPNG, subject *Snoop* explained that YPNG:

Has expanded on how big San Luis Obispo is and what it has to offer. Stuff in town I would have never been to, or never knew existed. There is a ton of resources in this town I wouldn't have known about without YPNG.

Subject *Honey Badger* offered another perspective by stating:

It's a medium size town, but it (YPNG) has made me realize there is a possibility to live in the town and actually do something productive and grow in the community with YPNG because there is a lot of opportunity...and it makes me feel there is potential for me to do something better in this community.

Next, participants were asked how active participation in the YPNG has impacted their sense of community empowerment.

Community Empowerment

In order to determine if membership in the YPNG has impacted member's community empowerment, focus group participants were asked if active participation in the YPNG has impacted their sense of community empowerment. Three respondents mentioned that the level of involvement a member has will determine how connected and empowered they feel in the community. Subject *El Duderino* felt “my personal level of empowerment may not be perceived as that high, but I can see if I had more active

involvement...how that would increase if I was more active.” The same subject went on to say “all of the events are increasing the level of activity in the community, so if I just expand the amount of activities I’m doing, I can see how I would feel more connected and part of the community.” Subject *Larry* reinforced these thoughts by adding, “I think the different events dictate the level of involvement. At softball you connect with those 13 players and see them more, and then when you go to a fundraising event you connect to the community.” Other answers related more to community connections. Subject *Honey Badger* made this statement when referring to a fundraiser event hosted by YPNG:

I like YPNG for that reason. Besides the social aspect, they do community things that help raise money for a community organization and that empowers me a little because I feel I am contributing in some way to San Luis Obispo.

Subject *Snoop* discussed how “I’m new in town and YPNG totally hooked me up not even in San Luis Obispo but outside, and that’s like community.” When pressed for elaboration, *Snoop* described how “its cool to walk in somewhere and know someone from something and even the ones you don’t connect to at socials, you recognize them and share a common ground, and it is expanded, excessively, quickly for me.” Lastly, subjects were asked about their general feelings towards the YPNG.

General Feelings Associated With YPNG

In order to wrap up how the subjects felt about the YPNG, they were asked what feelings can they most associate with being a member of the YPNG. All responses given were positive in regards to the organization and the people involved. Subject *Blair Waldorf* stated “I look forward to going to the mixers and meeting new people and seeing people from before and reconnecting. Good things come out of it.” Subject *Snoop* stated,

“its straight up community, that’s my word...a feeling of sense of community and belong to the town I’m actually in.” Subject *Blair Waldorf* then shared:

It’s a good group, and a lot of good people and when I meet people that are new to this town, I tell them to join this group (YPNG)...it’s a great place to meet people and a good feeling and a sense of community...and you want to invite others to join your community.

Subject *El Duderino* added:

I agree with the others, I think positive is the biggest one. But it also depends on which aspect of YPNG you are looking at, like if you are going to community service type of events its going to be a different positive feeling like your giving back or going to a mixer it is positive in the sense you are expanding your social network for business reasons or just increasing your networking and who you know in the community.

Summary

This chapter has presented results from a questionnaire and a focus group relating to the Young Professionals Networking Group. These results provide information on how membership in the YPNG impact member’s sense of community as well as their social capital. The final chapter will include a summary of the findings, a discussion on the results, conclusions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if active membership in the Young Professionals Networking Group (YPNG) has an impact on one's sense of community and social capital. The intent was to determine if membership in organizations such as YPNG is beneficial to its members. This chapter will provide a summary of the study; a discussion of significant findings will lead into discussion of theoretical implications of this study; as well as provide recommendations for future research.

Summary

Both sense of community and social capital have been shown to increase overall wellness of individuals and the community they reside, predict higher education scores, crime prevention and better social conditions (Ahlbrandt & Cunningham, 1979; Churchman, 1987; Florin, 1989; Perlman, 1976; Yin, 1977). A dilution of sense of community may lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation (Sarason, 1974), stifled self-actualization (Maslow, 1954), frustrations in social affiliation (Murray, 1938) and social interests (Adler, 1964). Social capital allows people to study and learn from others, provide and mobilize resources and solidify new and existing relationships (Sonnenberg, 1990). Sense of community and social capital share many characteristics and Pooley, Cohen, and Pike (2004) believe that "sense of community allows us to understand the individual's connection to the community, which is central to the concept of social capital (p. 78)."

The Young Professionals Networking Group believes the Central Coast's young professionals would benefit, both personally and professionally, from peer connection

and support, as well as community involvement. As such, they strive to “enrich the lives of young professionals by facilitating events which create opportunities for professional development, community involvement, and the establishment of personal connections with other young professionals” (YPNG, Copyright of website). Although both sense of community and social capital have been examined in many disciplines, there is limited research looking at these subjects from a professional networking standpoint. The present study aimed to quantify sense of community as a result of participation in the YPNG. This study also sought to categorize and interpret social capital characteristics associated with membership in the YPNG.

This study targeted members of the Young Professionals Networking Group through a questionnaire addressing sense of community of members and a focus group addressing social capital of active members. Surveys regarding member’s sense of community within the YPNG were disseminated to all YPNG members via online newsletter. The researcher was unable to reach the target number of respondents and surveys were distributed in person at three YPNG events until the target number was reached. Overall, 100 questionnaires were completed resulting in ninety seven usable surveys. This survey also included a question that addressed how active members were within the YPNG. “Active members” were chosen at random to participate in a focus group discussing their social capital as it relates to their membership within the YPNG.

The results of this study indicate that as participation levels within the YPNG increase, so does one’s sense of community. One-way ANOVA at $\alpha = .05$ and a Tukey Comparison were used to find significant differences between YPNG participation levels and members sense of community. Respondents who reported low level participation (0-4

events per year) had a mean SOC index of 35.02. SOC index for subjects reporting medium (5-8 events per year) and high level participation (9 or more events per year) were 41.06 and 50.39 respectively. Tukey comparisons of participation level groups were determined to be statistically significant.

Results also suggest that participation in such an organization as the YPNG is associated with high levels of perceptive social capital among members. Focus group participants responded affirmatively to four indicators for measuring social capital.

Discussion

The current study determined that members that have higher levels of participation within the YPNG, have higher levels of sense of community. These findings are consistent with Cicognani's et al. (2008) research that indicated both informal and formal settings can foster sense of community. Informal sport has also shown to advance sense of community characteristics (Warner, Dixon & Chalip, 2012). The findings are relational to the YPNG in that the organizations offers formal (professional development, volunteering) events, informal (mixers, hikes) events, and informal sports such as softball, beach volleyball and kickball tournaments. This study also determined that members of the YPNG feel more strongly about their shared emotional connections and reinforcement of needs than they do with their actual membership and influence within the organization.

One of the most significant findings was the magnitude of SOC index between the participation level groups. Specifically, as participation level increased, the difference in mean SOC index between participation levels for subjects also increased and is

statistically significant. These results suggest that more participation within an organization translates to a higher sense of community with an organization.

Results from the focus group indicate that members within the YPNG experience an increase of embedded resources (including accessibility and mobilization of such resources), interpersonal trust, neighborhood cohesion and density, and community empowerment through membership within the YPNG. The affirmation of these four themes was consistent within the literature for determining social capital (Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Lapp, 2002, Kawachi, Kennedy & Glass, 1999, Linn, 1999, Prestby et al. 1990, Putnam, 2000,). Respondents from this study indicate the YPNG allows for easier access and mobility of resources, members are more trusting and cohesive within the YPNG than the community as a whole, and feel a sense of community empowerment from being a member. These findings are consistent with major themes in social capital literature review and previous study results (Lin, 1999, Kawachi, Kennedy & Glass, 1999, Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001, Pretsby et al., 1990).

Limitations

There were several limitations that may have impacted the findings from this study. To start, the limited sample size and case study orientation severely limits the generalizability to wider populations. This limitation essentially limits the scope of the study to YPNG in San Luis Obispo, but it should also be noted that the preliminary and exploratory nature of this study was intended to be a starting point for research on young professionals organizations. In addition, since there was no baseline collected on sense of community, the impact of membership in YPNG on sense of community could not be calculated. No demographic information was collected for the quantitative data on sense

of community, which limited the utility of the results. Focus group subjects were free to provide their own answers to questions, and as such, data coding relied on the researcher and the research assistant's interpretation. As the primary researcher was also a member of the YPNG, findings could have been impacted or biased.

Conclusions

The findings from this study lead to the following conclusions based on the research questions:

1. What elements of sense of community do members of YPNG exhibit more strongly?

Results from this study determined that members of the YPNG feel more strongly about their shared emotional connections and reinforcement of needs than they do with their actual membership and influence within the organization.

2. How does level of participation in YPNG have an impact on psychological sense of community?

Results from this study indicate as one's level of participation in the YPNG increases, so does one's sense of community.

3. In what ways does active membership in the YPNG have an impact on one's sense of social capital?

Subjective interpretation of the focus group findings indicate that membership within the YPNG has increased relational qualities that are consistent within the literature of social capital for members of the YPNG. Based on the results of this study, there are recommendations for practical applications within the YPNG and similar organizations. Sense of community positively correlated to participation level. Subject's responses from

the focus group also indicate that “you get what you put into it.” As such members that wish to maximize their sense of community within the organization and increase their social capital would benefit from being involved in and participating in as many organization events as possible.

Future research

This study was intended to provide a preliminary look into professional networking groups and the impact they may have on one's sense of community and social capital. Recommendations for future research include providing a baseline assessment for both sense of community and social capital before a potential member joins such an organization. This study also disregarded some information that may have an impact on one's sense of community. Demographic information such as age, sex, and marital status may produce more practical implications for organizations such as the YPNG.

By determining how participation levels in networking groups impacts one's sense of community, this study aimed to provide some insight into the benefits of being a member of a networking group. Preliminary results indicate participation levels are a predictor for psychological sense of community and active membership may predict higher levels of social capital. The results have implications for future recruitment within the YPNG as well as similar organizations that seek to develop community and beneficial relationships.

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APPENDIX A

Sense of Community Index II

The following questions on community refer to the Young Professionals Networking Group in San Luis Obispo.

How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Prefer Not to Part of This Community	Not Important at All	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important

How well do each of the following statements represent how you *feel* about this community? Please indicate your answer by checking one of the following boxes: Not at all, somewhat, mostly, or completely.

1. I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community.
2. Community members and I value the same things
3. This community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.
4. Being a member of this community makes me feel good.
5. When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community.
6. People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.
7. I can trust people in this community.
8. I can recognize most of the members of this community.
9. Most community members know me.
10. This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.

11. I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community.
12. Being a member of this community is a part of my identity.
13. Fitting into this community is important to me.
14. This community can influence other communities.
15. I care about what other community members think of me.
16. I have influence over what this community is like.
17. If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.
18. This community has good leaders.
19. It is very important to me to be a part of this community.
20. I am with other community members a lot and enjoy being with them.
21. I expect to be a part of this community for a long time.
22. Members of this community have shared important events together, such as
holidays, celebrations, or disasters.
23. I feel hopeful about the future of this community.
24. Members of this community care about each other.

How many YPNG events do you participate in during a calendar year?

0 1-2 3-4 5-6 7-8 9 or more

APPENDIX B
Social Capital Focus Group Guide

1. How has membership in the Young Professionals Networking Group impacted the number and type of resources available to you?
2. Compared to your outside community, do you feel you are more or less trusting of members of the Young Professionals Networking Group?
3. How do you feel about the level of cohesion in the Young Professionals Networking Group?
4. Has active participation in the Young Professionals Networking Group impacted your sense of community empowerment?
5. Has active participation in the Young Professionals Networking Group impacted how you perceive the San Luis Obispo Community?
6. What feelings can you most associate with being a member of the Young Professionals Networking Group?

APPENDIX C
Social Capital Demographics

The participants in the social capital focus group were asked to self-identify age, ethnicity, and gender.

APPENDIX D
Social Capital Focus Group Transcript and Coding

1. How has membership in YPNG impacted the number and type of resources available to you?
 - El Duderino – well additional resources as far as events, mixers, softball...so it could be up to up to once a week to once a month
 - Snoop – just a lot more stuff to do, lot more people to know or see on the street and are familiar.
 - Honey Badger – just social, I just know a lot more people that come in to work that I know and have a connection and this includes a lot more people that are my age.
 - Taryn – people are resources, I came here knowing no one and now I know a lot of people
 - Me- anything else besides people as a resource.
 - Blair Waldorf – probably like business networking, just getting to know what people do, so someone might go to a certain business because you know about a business and want to support it because they know the people.
 - Snoop – and actually some people in ypng own the business and not just work there and
 - Honey Badger – personal value and gratitude, even the event we did last Friday was a fundraiser and benefited the community. I probably wouldn't have thought to become involved it wasn't for ypng and it felt good to be help the community.
 - Larry – the website has a list of people's names and their jobs so in terms of networking if I want to find a mechanic or a gardener I would go to the website to

see if I can give business to someone I know and in turn get business from them so you are aware of different companies so throughout the time of being in ypng I have done business with people and they have done business with me just from our membership in ypng

-El Duderino – and being able to go after those resources, like if my company needs help with marketing I can go to that list and see who can help and I may know them a little better and it may not be a shot in the dark like going through the phone book, it is a little more personal and in depth.

...I haven't actually been affected at work but I feel there are additional options available if I needed them

-Snoop- yeah that's cool, I can tap into people in different areas for like what I do, but yea I can find people to present to the kids I work with, there's a lot of connections to a lot of people both in my work and outside that will work.

Coding for Question 1: Social connections, business networking/connections, support system, work and personal relations

2. Compared to your outside community, do you feel you are more or less trusting of members of the ypng?

-Blair Waldorf – more trust in ypng, I feel I can relate to them for various reasons, they are all around my same age and are young professionals trying to make it so we are connected

-El Duderino – I would say more trusting but more just because it's a little more personal where I feel I've met a greater percentage of people in ypng than I have

in the community in general, so off of that I would have a better feeling of who they are compared to the general population of SLO

-Larry – I would say more trusting because there is a level of accountability in the sense that if someone is a member and other people had negative experience with them you would probably hear about that and you would then know you would not want to do business with this person or you can trust this person.

-Honey Badger – I agree with that, it is pretty much the same, I have only been involved for a year or two but getting to know people and being in the same age group and we are similar in different ways but we are all trying to grow up and do our thing,

-El Duderino – there is also a common theme in members, not only are we trying to meet people but we are trying to better ourselves and increase their own personal network, we can relate in that aspect

-Snoop – with the community focus to group, and to tie onto the last question, I would be more trusting working with someone in ypng that I know and have hung out with and had interactions with like at a bar or at a fundraising thing or at a softball game its totally cool that you have seen them in many different lights.

-Larry – in a lot of other groups i. e. chamber of commerce – it costs more to join and have other requirements, so it is easier to become a ypng member so it means they are not necessarily trustworthy initially but you can see and hear from people about how they work

Coding for Question 2: Accountability, common bonds, relations, connectedness

3. How do you feel about the level of cohesion in the ypng?

-Blair Waldorf – I would say on a business level, sometimes I do trust ypng on a business level more, because I have the connection and like I have gone on the ypng website and found people to work with and contacted them to see how we could work together given our common ground, on a social level I feel that at the mixer everyone is cool and wants to chat it up but outside of ypng it is very cliché, and like any social group, there is a hierarchy and the older members are and then the new people that don't know anyone and are trying to fit in.

-Me – lets try and focus specifically on general ypng outings and not comment on personal things that may happen outside of the realm of ypng.

-El Duderino - at the events, there is a decent level of cohesion, but due to the size of the group, it is a lot harder, like if you have a smaller group it is easier, going back to softball, cohesion on one team is going to be stronger than the whole group and the softball group as a whole may be connected more than the overall group, at a mixer you can socialize with everyone but you will still have small pockets of more and less cohesion, the bigger you get the more natural it is to have subgroups so it is always going to be pocketed based on your overall size

-Taryn – I would say it's fairly cohesive, because there is a real, everyone is on the same page, people go to mixers and everyone is chitchatting, its friendly and there is a level of safety and acceptance and a level

Coding for Question 3: Business connections, organizational connectedness, event cohesion

4. Has active participation in the ypng impacted your sense of community empowerment?

-Honey Badger – definitely – like the fundraiser, I like ypng for that reason, besides the social aspect, they do community things that help raise money for a community organization and that empowers me a little because I feel I am contributing in some way to san luis Obispo,

-Snoop – yea I wouldn't have even known about firestone brewery or some real estate options in town or even the school that she works at, I have no idea, I'm the new guy in town and ypng totally hooked me up not even in slo but outside, and that's like community, I go into a bar and I know a bartender because I know someone who introduced me or go to a school and know a teacher through ypng

-Me – so you feel more connected to the community is a sense of empowerment to you?

-Snoop – its way cool to walk in somewhere and know someone from something and even the ones you don't connect to at the socials, you recognize them and share a common ground, and it has expanded, excessively, quickly for me

-El Duderino – I think my personal level of empowerment may not be perceived as that high, but I can see if I had a more active involvement, I could see how that would increase if I was more active

-Larry – I think the different events, dictate the level of involvement, like at softball you connect with those 13 other players and see them more and connect and bond with them, and then when you go to a fundraising event you connect to the community, so depending on the event, depends on who you are connected with and how you are connected but overall you have a sense of community and you have met all these people and may have done business with them

-El Duderino – all of the events are increasing the level of activity in the community, so if I just expand the amount of activities im doing I can see how I would feel more connected and a part of the community

-Honey Badger – you get out of it what you put in, as I get involved with more and more events I feel I get more sense of community out of it, and I get to meet more people and actually contribute to the group, if you try and get involved you can get that sense of community. You get what you put into it.

Coding for Question 4: Community outreach, community building, personal resources

5. Has active participation in the ypng impacted how you perceive the san luis obipso community?

-El Duderino – just feeling connected to the community as a whole, the more connected you feel and the greater sense of place you have the more pride you have in the community, so it's like the more you feel this area represents who you are and that you choose to be here

-Larry – it's a friendly welcoming community and you get sense that through ypng. Ypng has strengthened my feeling that everyone here is friendly, most of the people in ypng live around slo, but most do business or live here or are part of the community

-Taryn – I have a greater appreciation of the physical beauty of this area because of going on hikes or seeing different places or going places with people I have met through ypng on day trips and has expanded my awareness of what is here

-Snoop – it has expanded on how big slo is and what it has to offer, I had no idea there were so many...there are so many graduates who feel they cannot get a job and ypng has a ton of representation of the jobs that are available or taken that I never knew even existed or would exist in this town. Stuff in town I would have never been to and even the park I went to yesterday, I never knew existed that I want to utilize for a bbq later, this facility maybe you didn't know about. There is a ton of resources in this town I wouldn't have know about without ypng, you need a reason to get out of the house, and it is nice to have an outlet and not become stagnant

-Honey Badger – it's a medium size town, but I has made me realize the grasp of it, and there is a possibility to live in this town and actually do something productive and grow with the community just with the ypng in this town because there is a lot of opportunity and the town is expanding and it makes me feel there is potential for me to do something better in this town and community.

Coding for Question 5: Community connections, community awareness, hope in community, expanded opportunities,

6. What feelings can you most associate with being a member of ypng?

-Blair Waldorf – I would say good feelings usually, I look forward to going to the mixers and meeting new people and seeing some people from before and reconnecting every month, good things happen out of it, also there a lot of events that ypng does like hikes and other social events and its something to talk about and like are you going to the hike later on?

-Taryn – positive –

-Snoop – Its straight up community, that's my word, its not really a feeling, but yeah a feeling of sense of community, more a belonging to the town I'm actually in.

-Honey Badger – yeah that's a good way to put it

-Blair Waldorf – it's a good group, and a lot of good people and when I meet people that are new to this town I tell them to join this group because it's a great place to meet people and a good feeling and a sense of community and you want to invite others to join your community

-El Duderino – yeah I agree with the others, I think positive is the biggest one, but it also depends on which aspect of ypng you are looking, like if you are going to community service type of events its going to be a different positive feeling like your giving back or going to mixer it is positive in the sense you are expanding your social network for business reasons or just increasing your networking and who you know in the community.

Coding for Question 6: Belongingness, community, sense of community