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## Article

## The development of a bridging social capital questionnaire for use in population health research

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## ABSTRACT

Bridging social capital is defined as the connections between individuals who are dissimilar with respect to socioeconomic and other characteristics. There is an important gap in the literature related to its measurement. We describe the development and validation of a questionnaire to measure bridging social capital. We focused the development of the questionnaire to be suitable for use in Latino immigrant populations in the U.S. The structure of the questionnaire comprised the following: Socialization in the job place (5 items); Membership in community activities (16 items); Participation in community activities (5 items); Contact with similar/different people (7 items); Assistance (17 items); Trust of institutions, corporations and other people (14 items); and Trust of intimate people (3 items). First, we used focus groups ( $N=17$  participants) to establish content validity with an inductive thematic analysis to identify themes and subthemes. Changes were made to the questionnaire based on difficulty, redundancy, length and semantic equivalence. Second, we analyzed the questionnaire's psychometric properties ( $N=138$ ). We tested internal consistency with Cronbach alpha and construct validity with a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for each sub-scale to test theoretical unity; discriminant validity to observe differences between participants from high and low SES backgrounds and different language; and content validity with an independent expert panel. Cronbach alphas ranged from 0.80 (Assistance) to 0.92 (Trust). CFA results indicated that CFI and TLI were higher than 0.90 in almost all the scales, with high factor loadings. The Wilcoxon tests indicated that there were statistically significant mean differences between SES and language groups ( $p < 0.00$ ). The independent expert panel determined that the questionnaire had good content validity. This is the first demonstration of a psychometrically validated questionnaire to measure bridging social capital in an immigrant population in the United States. Our questionnaire may be suitable for further refinement and adaptation to other immigrant groups in different countries.

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## Introduction

Social capital is defined as the resources accessed through social connections. From an individual (egocentric) perspective, these resources include the exchange of social support, information channels and social credentials. From a collective perspective, social capital comprises at least three dimensions: a) group solidarity and social cohesion (e.g., perceptions of trust, norms of reciprocity); b) the ability of the group to undertake collective action (collective efficacy) and to enforce social norms (informal social control); and c) civic engagement and participation (Berkman, Kawachi & Glymour, 2014). Social capital has been linked to health

outcomes in a variety of settings, including residential neighborhoods, workplaces and schools.

One important distinction is between bonding and bridging types of social capital. Bonding social capital refers to connections between members of a network who are similar to each other with respect to social class, race/ethnicity, or other attributes. By contrast, bridging social capital is defined as the connections between individuals who are dissimilar (or heterogeneous) with respect to socioeconomic and other characteristics. The distinction matters because reciprocal exchanges that can take place in groups with high bonding social capital are constrained by the totality of resources available within the network. For example, the social ties that exist within socioeconomically disadvantaged communities may be characterized by intense levels of mutual assistance. However, the overall availability of resources (e.g., cash loans, labor in-kind) is often constrained, such that bonding social capital in these circumstances can actually strain the psychosocial

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wellbeing of network members. The presence of bridging social capital helps to build trust and maintain channels of communication between disputing groups. Bridging social capital provides low SES individuals with the potential to access resources outside of their constrained environment. For low SES groups, it is akin to Nan Lin's concept of "upper reachability" in social networks, i.e. the ability of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups to access valued resources such as information and instrumental assistance (Lin, Cook & Burt, 2001; Lin, 1999). Indeed access to bridging capital can be conceptualized as one of the distinguishing hallmarks of socioeconomic privilege. High SES groups routinely draw on status, prestige, power, and authority via their powerful social connections – e.g. when a businessman calls upon a politician to expedite their dealings.

Linking social capital has been defined as the connections across individuals who occupy different positions of power within a social hierarchy. We consider this form of social capital as a specific sub-type of bridging social capital. Both forms refer to ties that cut across different groups. However, linking social capital refers to vertical ties, while bridging social capital refers to horizontal ones. In this manuscript, we treat linking social capital as a subset of the bridging variety.

In a previously published commentary (Villalonga-Olives & Kawachi, 2015), we noted that bridging social capital has been measured by two approaches: either by using a non-standardized set of questions, or by attempts to construct multi-item indices. Some studies have assessed bridging capital by inquiring about people's participation in various kinds of civic groups with membership drawn from diverse segments of society, or by asking about the individual's perception of the heterogeneity of the networks to which they belong. As for studies that have attempted to construct multi-item indices of bridging social capital, we noted considerable variation on the selection of items. In this approach, bridging social capital has been assessed with questions related to multiculturalism, or interactions with diverse groups outside one's own (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). The underlying gap in the literature is that the studies we identified have not used standard definitions of bridging social capital. We give examples of the measurement of bridging and bonding social capital in a previous manuscript (Villalonga-Olives & Kawachi, 2015). For example, Williams' questionnaire is focused on online/offline social capital and measures support of the bonding type and relationships that can be related to bridging social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Nonetheless, we observe the questions related to contact with a broad range of people are not questions related to specific relationships with equals or non equals. Chen et al. developed the Personal Social Capital Scale that aims to measure bridging and bonding social capital (Chen, Stanton, & Gong, 2009). However, we observe it is difficult to find out if the type of groups and organizations referenced by the measure of bridging and bonding social capital include people with dissimilar or similar characteristics. The Adapted Social Capital Assessment Tool (A-SCAT) by Harpham et al. attempts to distinguish between bonding, bridging and linking social capital and it is a good starting point for a scale that contains items related to bridging social capital (Harpham et al., 2002). However, we are not aware of an instrument exclusively focused on the measurement of bridging social capital.

Immigrant communities confront the challenge of accessing resources beyond their own intimate circles. On the one hand, they can draw upon the dense social connections within their enclaves for information, instrumental support, and solidarity (bonding social capital). On the other hand, by staying within their communities, they remain disconnected from opportunities available to the mainstream of society. Bridging social capital is important for immigrants in order to become connected to opportunities that may facilitate upward social mobility (Lancee,

2010; Tselios, Noback, van Dijk, & McCann, 2015). In turn, the ability to access resources from outside one's own network is linked to better health outcomes. Consistent with this notion, in a small study of a disadvantaged minority community in Birmingham, Alabama, Mitchell and LaGory (2002) reported that high bonding social capital (measured by the strength of trust and associational ties with others of a similar racial and educational background as the respondent) was paradoxically associated with higher levels of mental distress. In the same study, however, individuals who reported social ties to others who were dissimilar to them with respect to race and class (i.e. who had access to bridging capital) were protected from mental distress (Mitchell & LaGory, 2002).

Hence, bridging social capital is an important resource for the immigrant community. In the United States, one of the largest groups of immigrants are Latinos. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's population estimates as of July 1, 2013, there were roughly 54 million Hispanics living in the US, making people of Hispanic origin the nation's largest ethnic or race minority groups (CDC's Office of Minority Health and Health Equity, 2016). The Migration Policy Institute states that in 2014 there were 55 million Hispanics in the US. Of the 55 million people who identified themselves as of Hispanic or Latino origin, 35% (19.4 million) were immigrants (Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States, 2016).

Despite the importance of bridging social capital, there is an important gap in the literature related to its measurement. Only a few studies have measured this concept in the public health literature (Barman-Adhikari & Rice, 2014; Enfield & Nathaniel, 2013; Maselko, Hughes, & Cheney, 2011; Murayama, Fujiwara, & Kawachi, 2012). However, these studies have not used standard definitions of bridging social capital. In this paper, we sought to develop and psychometrically validate a new scale to assess bridging social capital with a particular focus on Latino immigrants.

## Methods and results

We employed a sequential exploratory mixed methods design strategy to create a bridging social capital questionnaire for immigrant populations (Creswell, 2013). This is a method that begins with qualitative inquiry, the results of which inform the next, quantitative, phase of research. First, we conducted focus groups to establish the content validity of our social capital questionnaire. Social capital is a widely used concept in the social sciences; however, there is no gold standard for the concept of "bridging social capital" (Villalonga-Olives & Kawachi, 2015). The purpose of the focus groups was to gather an open-ended narrative on the language and appropriateness of existing and new items to be used in a "bridging social capital scale". Second, we conducted a psychometric validation of the scale with 138 individuals through the use of Qualtrics, an online survey tool (Qualtrics, 2016). In the first part, we describe the development of the qualitative component to establish the content validity of our social capital questionnaire. In the second part, we establish the psychometric validity of our questionnaire.

### Theoretical framework

The questionnaire was designed based on a systematic review we performed to analyze the measurement of bridging social capital in public health (Villalonga-Olives & Kawachi, 2015). We observed that bridging social capital has been measured by two approaches: either by using a disparate and non-standardized set of questions (Gele & Harsløf, 2010; Irwin, Lagory, Ritchey, &

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