



More social than capital: Social capital accumulation through social network exchange among legal and unauthorized Mexican migrants

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 December 2013

Received in revised form 6 September 2014

Accepted 6 September 2014

Available online 26 September 2014

Keywords:

Reciprocity

Neighborhoods

Social cohesion

ABSTRACT

Social capital is frequently used to explain many policy related outcomes, but research has not adequately explained how it is accumulated. It is unclear whether the economic or social characteristics of others in a social network motivate social capital accumulation. This lack of understanding has called some to question social capital's efficacy. Employing data from a survey of randomly selected foreign-born Mexicans in Los Angeles County, the influence of social and economic characteristics of a migrant's social network members are estimated. Results suggest a negative association with social capital accumulation for Mexican migrants with a social network member outside their neighborhood. Having married social network members is positively associated for legal Mexicans, while having network members who work in occupations requiring more social skills is positively associated for unauthorized Mexicans accumulating social capital. Measures of human and financial capital are not associated with the probability of developing social capital.

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1. Introduction

Social capital is a theoretically underdeveloped measure that attempts to harmonize two aspects of the term's etiology: social interaction, which is more communal and focused on concordance, and capital, which is more individualistic and focused on production (Pawar, 2006). By focusing attention on social interaction's positive consequences, social capital research attempts to integrate capital that provides access to power and influence with social networks' more social or supportive mechanisms (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Hanifan, 1916; Jacobs, 1961; Portes, 1998; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993). Social capital is accumulated through social networks

(Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998), civic participation (Putnam, 2000), or social cohesion (Kawachi, Subramanian, & Kim, 2008). Social capital's lack of clear definition and measurement that varies by discipline may contribute to its broad acceptance, but its contradictory social and capital influences makes its policy relevance ambiguous. Social capital appears to function differently than other forms of capital because it does not attract other capital to be functional, as physical capital needs human capital to generate production (Pawar, 2006). Further research is needed to better understand social capital's complexity (Portes, 1998). One way to address this complexity is by focusing on both social and capital or economic components¹ to examine how they shape an individual's social capital accumulation. This

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¹ For the purposes of this research, financial and human capital are identified as economic characteristics.

study's goal is to fill in this gap by distinguishing differences between the social and economic components related to social capital accumulation among Mexican migrants.

Mexican migrants are a socioeconomically vulnerable population with a need for social support throughout the migration process. Social networks play an important part in migrants' lives as demonstrated by a theoretical understanding of their international migration (Massey et al., 1993, 1994), as evidence suggests that social capital helps explain Mexican migration (Palloni, Massey, Ceballos, Espinosa, & Spittel, 2001) but selectively for men not women (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Once in the USA, Mexican migrants use their social capital for employment (Aguilera, 2003), to protect their health (Finch & Vega, 2003), and to increase their home ownership (McConnell & Marcelli, 2007). Because Los Angeles County is home to the largest number of Mexican migrants in the USA, 2001 Los Angeles County-Mexican Immigrant Legal Status Survey (LAC-MILSS) data are used to investigate the extent these social and economic characteristics of individuals in legal and unauthorized Mexican migrants' social networks have on their social capital accumulation.

Logistic regression results are generated to test hypotheses related to social and economic characteristics of people with whom Mexican migrants have reciprocal exchange within their social network. In addition, the research tests these hypotheses by legal status to investigate the extent to which unauthorized status influences social capital accumulation among Mexican migrants. This is necessary to address the possibility that unauthorized Mexican migrants have a greater need to develop social capital from family and close friends due to their desire to limit social interaction in order to keep their legal status hidden to avoid deportation. This research finds that social network members' social characteristics are associated with social capital accumulation, while social network members' capital or economic characteristics are not. This suggests social capital functions differently than other forms of capital among Mexican migrants in Los Angeles County in 2001, and for this population, helps clarify that these social capital sources are important to enhance its efficacy in policy initiatives.

2. Literature review

For this research, social capital is defined as access to material and personal resources accessed through participation in social networks and other institutions that are employed to achieve desired outcomes. It is measured by social network exchange: both providing and receiving instrumental support within social network relationships (Granberry & Marcelli, 2007). A long line of research suggests that social relationships are easier to develop when people are in close geographic proximity, allowing for face-to-face interaction (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1963). People residing in larger cities and living in densely populated apartment buildings are more likely to develop social network relationships necessary for social capital accumulation (Glaeser & Sacerdote, 2000). Social capital increases with age for individuals until they reach their 40s, when it starts to decline, and it is also positively correlated with

marriage (Glaeser, Laibson, & Sacerdote, 2002). This is consistent with network theory based on homophily, which suggests that individuals tend to associate with others possessing similar socioeconomic characteristics.

2.1. Mexican enclaves and the social networks they generate

For international migrants, social network theory suggests that kin and friendship ties reduce migration's social and financial costs (Massey et al., 1993, 1994), and these networks facilitate Mexican migrants' concentration in specific locations in the USA (Flores-Yeffal & Aysa-Lastra, 2011; McConnell, 2008). These migrant networks can shape social capital accumulation because newly arriving migrants have a greater tendency to interact with other Mexicans for social support. Social capital is important for Mexicans to develop instrumental support (Lovejoy & Handy, 2011), find a job (Aguilera, 2009), and earn higher wages (Amuedo-Dorantes & Mundra, 2007; Granberry & Marcelli, 2011).

However, Mexican migrants' residential segregation may be problematic, as increased co-ethnic network relationships may limit social capital's efficacy because embedded resources in networks are not equally distributed (Lin, 2000). Concentrated in segregated neighborhoods, these networks may not provide international migrants with the resources needed for social capital accumulation because networks may promote exclusion of outsiders, create excess claims on group members, cause restrictions on individual freedoms, and result in downward leveling norms (Portes, 1998). This may be the case for Mexican migrants, as those living in more densely populated segregated neighborhoods develop more reciprocal social relationships (Granberry & Marcelli, 2007). It follows then that Mexican migrants may have fewer opportunities to develop social ties outside of the neighborhood that are beneficial for developing bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). Even though Mexicans develop social network relationships in their neighborhoods, they may not lead to desired social cohesion that these networks predict if developed in other neighborhoods (Almeida, Kawachi, Molnar, & Subramanian, 2009; Putnam, 2007). Mexican migrants' long-term success is related to whether neighborhoods and workplaces promote expansion of "weak ties" with noncoethnics (Granovetter, 1973). Evidence suggests that over time, immigrant-based social network disadvantages can develop. Migrants, especially women, can be restricted to a shrinking pool of personal relationships and limited to strong ties on which their networks are built (Hagan, 1998).

2.2. Employment and human and financial capital

Higher levels of human capital are associated with the development of patience and delaying gratification: both are integral for developing interpersonal skills that increase the returns from social interaction (Glaeser et al., 2002). This investment in social networks provides the reciprocal benefits that can be considered social capital's currency (Portes, 2000). Mexican high school students

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