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### **Recommended Citation**

Urban Anthropology, Vol. 36(4): 1-32

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# **Social Capital In A Mexican-American Community In Dallas, Texas**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article describes a study in which social capital was the focus of introductory ethnographic research. The World Bank's Social Capital Assessment Tool (SOCAT) was used to assess social capital in a poor, Hispanic area of a large city in the southern United States. The findings demonstrate not only the utility of social capital assessment tools for ethnographic work, but the relevance of social capital to anthropological questions. I describe assets and relationships within this community using three proxy indicators of social capital: (1) memberships in local associations and networks; (2) indicators of trust and adherence to norms; and (3) indicators of collective action. Beyond these data, however, I reiterate the World Bank's stress on local definitions of "community." The malleability of such definitions does not overshadow their importance. I conclude by suggesting that social capital is a useful investigative concept for ethnographers, but that it should not be treated as a discrete social fact.

## **Introduction**

As theories of social capital have become more nuanced, they have also become more flexible in their application.

Most important for readers of URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY, the modern incarnations of social capital reveal much about our ethnographic units of study: the "community," neighborhoods, barrios, and suburbs. In this article, I explore the utility of social capital for capturing meaningful data about community resources and relationships. The research described had two principal goals: first, to test the value of the World Bank Social Capital Assessment Tool (SOCAT) (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002c) for its utility in exploratory and ethnographic work; and second, to situate my findings within a long-term research relationship to an urban Hispanic community struggling with familiar barriers to work and health, such as immigration status, language proficiency, and access to health care. As I approached this new field site, I expanded my normal ethnographic methods to include the instruments of the SOCAT, which address the *trusting relationships* formed between people in a community, and the ability of those people or networks *to access needed resources*. I use these data to describe the focal community and to demonstrate the utility of a social capital lens for exploring urban field sites.

## The Community

The community in this research was defined and identified as a meaningful "community" by residents in seven focus groups and confirmed in organizational interviews and community mapping exercises. The SOCAT is an attractive instrument because it requires the identification of locally-defined "communities" rather than the adoption of an externally defined boundary or identity. Allowing locally defined boundaries, porous though they might be in reality, to inform the analysis is a crucial improvement over reliance on the simple race/ethnic or education level distinctions that still

organize so much of the urban public health and development literature (Smith-Morris 2006). Indeed, much recent attention to theories of social capital might be attributed to a desire to improve upon research models that identify these correlates of health inequity (i.e., race and education level) but which have little explanatory power for the production or sustenance of inequity.

The Terraza Rosa community (a pseudonym) is a low-income rental area of predominantly first- and second-generation Mexican Americans in Dallas, Texas. Census tracts within this community have a high percentage of rental housing, with properties being owned by local and non-local management companies. While some of these properties were managed by Mexican-American residents, to whom a rental discount was often paid, I found nothing in this community similar to a Residents' Council or any regular opportunities for residents to come together as a group to discuss issues related to housing and the neighborhood.

Most of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, since a majority of residents speak little or no English. We did not ask for proof of residency or citizenship in this phase of research (which was essentially our first introduction to a new field site). Such inquiries would have quickly stymied the research effort. Residency status certainly affects, and English proficiency may affect, the type and magnitude of social capital in this community. An excerpt from researchers' field notes exemplifies these concerns via a comparison of Terraza Rosa with the neighboring Flower Grove community:

Flower Grove residents possess a variety of opportunities for voicing their opinions. For example, the community liaison at the local school is well-known and respected by residents, and in talking with parents of students [at this school], we learned that there existed a perception of a real opportunity for community input into school policy-making. By comparison, the community liaison of the [school

in Terraza Rosa] was never mentioned by a community member [as a] leader who might address problems at the school, though parents in this community also seemed far less likely to be engaged in their children's education. These differences may be affected by both the ability to speak English and one's resident status (MT, field notes).

Median incomes in Terraza Rosa are between \$27,612 and \$34,008 for the three census tracts represented in this community. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) statistics also show that Terraza Rosa homes are more likely than others in the ZIP code to have incomplete kitchen facilities or indoor plumbing. A majority of the residences in this area of town are apartment complexes with 10 or more housing units, with 35% having been built before 1970. Almost 20% of residents spend at least 35% of their income on rent.

Participant observation in the community over a two-year period also informs the analysis of these data. Attendance at church functions, visits to area schools for conversation with teachers and parents, walks in the community, visits to and work in a local food pantry, and participation in activities of a local PACE (Personal And Community Empowerment) program form the core of the ethnographic method as this research continues. Interviews with over 60 residents, and household surveys with 40, produced the data discussed here. Characteristics of the 40 residents who provided household surveys are available in Table 1.

## Overview of Social Capital

Variously referred to as the investments people make in governmental and civic support as a measure of their social networks, as the resources enabled by those networks, or as such proxy indicators as trust and collective action, social capital has inspired several years of theoretical and empirical

debate. Yet the concept has been absent from most ethnographic literature, perhaps because of its historical contributions to sociological and other, societal-level considerations, or because it was perceived (and previously conceived) as a static concept. Social capital has more recently been conceptualized as not only a local process, but a dynamic one, and it is this version that is worthy of closer attention by anthropologists, especially those working in urban settings.

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**TABLE 1: Household Questionnaire Sample Characteristics**

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<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>No. (N=40)</b>
Ethnic Identification	
Caucasian	8
African American	2
Hispanic	29
Asian	1
Gender	
Male	17
Female	23
Monthly Income	
\$0	2
\$1-249	0
\$250-499	5
\$500-749	5
\$750-999	1
\$1000-1999	11
\$2000-2999	2
\$3000 or above	2
Unidentified	12
Home Ownership	
Own & pay mortgage	6
Own & no mortgage	2
Rent	30
Housing is "pay" for work	2
Squatter	0
Other	0

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For this article, I view social capital as an attribute of networks. More specifically, social capital refers to both the trust that exists among network members and to that network's ability to access needed resources. Taken together, relationships of trust and the ability to access resources give individuals or organizations positive social capital. Jo Anne Schneider summarizes:

Social capital refers to the social relationships and patterns of reciprocal, enforceable trust that enable people and institutions to gain access to resources like social services, jobs, or government contracts. Social capital is a structural aspect of communities, embodying the context-specific networks that people and institutions use to achieve their goals. Drawing on works of Portes (1998) and Bourdieu (1986), social capital is more of a process, rather than a quantifiable set of relationships. (Schneider 2004: 7-8).

Senior scholars within the discipline of sociology have identified four different schools of thought on social capital:

(1) *The communitarian view* of social capital draws on the Durkhemian notion of "value introjection" in which the group provides important values and norms to the individual. Internalization of these norms and values provides a mechanism through which individuals can access resources and create social ties within their community. "Communitarians, who look at the number and density of these groups in a given community, hold that social capital is inherently good, that more is better, and that its presence always has a positive effect on a community's welfare" (Woolcock and Narayan 2000: 229). This body of research has provided important insight into the positive contributions that social ties make in the lives of the poor (Portes 1998).

(2) *The network perspective* of social capital is based upon the idea that poor communities need to form linkages that extend beyond their primary group in order to survive and thrive. This view reflects an important distinction within

social capital theory: the distinction between *bonding* social capital and *bridging* social capital (Gitell and Vidal 1998). Bonding social capital "refers to trusting and co-operative relations between members of a network who see themselves as being similar, in terms of their shared social identity." Bridging social capital, by contrast, "comprises relations of respect and mutuality between people who know that they are not alike in some socio-demographic sense" (Szreter and Woolcock 2003: 655). The network perspective looks for both types of social capital within communities and argues that "different combinations of these dimensions account for the range of outcomes associated with social capital" (Woolcock and Narayan 2000: 231). This view does not, however, take account of institutions and of the state in shaping the community (Woolcock and Narayan 2000).

(3) *The institutional perspective* on social capital places emphasis on the impact of institutions within society. It suggests that "where the communitarian and networks perspectives largely treat social capital as an independent variable giving rise to various outcomes, the institutional perspective views social capital as a dependent variable" (Woolcock and Narayan 2000: 234). Two contrasting bodies of literature exist in the institutional perspective. The first comes from case studies based on comparative history which deny that community groups tend to thrive to the extent that governments retreat. Skocpol (1996), for example, argues that civil society succeeds only insofar as the state encourages its development. The second body of literature includes quantitative, cross-sectional studies that equate social capital with the effectiveness of the society's social, economic, and political structure. In this form of social capital, "investments in civic and government social capital are thus highly complementary to investments in more orthodox forms of capital accumulation" (Woolcock and Narayan 2000: 235).

(4) *The synergy view* of social capital grows out of extensive work by the World Bank which incorporates insights from both the networks and institutional forms. Three main conclusions emerge from these studies:



- (a) The state and civil society are neutral, and not inherently good or bad;
- (b) States, firms and societies are not equipped for sustainable development on their own, but require broad-based partnerships in order for synergy to emerge; and
- (c) The state's role in this process is the most complex because of its broad functioning within society.

This view "integrates the core ideas of bridging social capital and state-society relations and suggests that different interventions are needed for different combinations of governance and bridging social capital in a group, community, or society" (Woolcock and Narayan 2000: 237). However, among all the social relationships previously considered "bridges," there existed important power differences. A third form of social capital, that of "linking" social capital, was therefore introduced which helps take into account these dynamics: "norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society (Szreter and Woolcock 2003: 655).

The assessment of social capital in Terraza Rosa emphasizes network and synergy perspectives. Grootaert and van Bastelaer (2002c: 2) define social capital as "the institutions, relationships, attitudes, and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development," with two important conceptual distinctions. First is the distinction between *structural* and *cognitive* forms of social capital. The structural dimension of social capital includes observable institutions such as the churches, volunteer organizations, schools, banks, and other groups that exist within the community. In contrast, the cognitive dimension of social capital is the more subjective and intangible component characterized by norms, values, individuals' sense of reciprocity with community members, etc.

A second conceptual distinction is drawn in terms of the scope or breadth of social capital measured. Social capital can

exist at the micro level between individuals; at the meso level (incorporating the vertical and horizontal relationships of groups); and at the macro level, incorporating the contributions of institutions and the broader political environment where larger sources of power exist. This definition and classification of social capital parallels other conceptual attempts from a variety of disciplines of social sciences. For example, as synthesized by Woolcock and Narayan (2000), the sociological literature on social capital has produced a different but compatible categorization of social capital (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002c):

- (1) Communitarian view = micro/structural view.
- (2) Networks view = meso dimension.
- (3) Institutional view = entire macro-level.
- (4) Synergy view = incorporates all 3 levels.

In the present work, I used the World Bank's recently developed social capital measurement survey tool (SOCAT) (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002c) for assessing each of these forms of social capital. I chose the SOCAT not because it is a perfect measure of social capital as I have defined it, but because it is a powerful and straightforward tool through which to explore the concept in practice.

## **The SOCAT Tools**

The SOCAT is a synthesis of research instruments tested in more than 25 studies conducted in 15 countries in which a broad scope of populations was studied, including both rural and urban. The SOCAT incorporates several distinct dimensions of social capital into one empirical tool that can be used in almost any community. Because the instrument delves so deeply into the social and economic characteristics of a locally defined community, it offers a structure to ethnographic field site development. The intention in this research, therefore, has

been to develop descriptive data on this poor Hispanic community, to explore the utility of social capital models for understanding local assets and relationships, and to assess whether the SOCAT could provide useful baseline data for future work by other applied researchers in urban areas.

In preparation for the research, I completed a two-day orientation and training in use of the instrument provided by the World Bank in teleconference with the instrument's authors. The orientation provided insights into the historical use of the SOCAT in the developing world, as well as an introduction to the unique adaptations for use in a U.S. city. A sample of the pilot research conducted to test and stabilize the instruments was also reviewed. Finally, a question-by-question exploration of the instruments was completed followed by round-table discussions among a variety of researchers. This training was particularly helpful in understanding the flexibility of the instruments, and the ways in which the measures speak to social capital in the community. Briefly, the SOCAT has three components: a Community Profile, the Household Survey, and an Organization Profile.

- (1) Community Profile: The purpose of this portion of the SOCAT is to create a picture of the community that is being studied, to identify its boundaries, assets, and capacity for collective action by using a combination of both open-ended and structured interviewing techniques. Two instruments form this component.
- (2) Household Survey: This portion of the SOCAT functions as the primary data source for quantitative data in which randomly selected households are interviewed and information is obtained regarding both the cognitive and structural dimensions of social capital. The household survey is a stand-alone instrument.
- (3) Organizational Profile: This final component of the SOCAT assesses the features of the organizations identified through the community profile and household survey. There are two instruments for this component.

The five instruments of the SOCAT work synergistically to define, describe, and quantify relevant characteristics of the targeted community. The Community Profile/ Asset Mapping (Tool #1) and the Community Questionnaire (Tool #2) draw their data from community focus groups and community research, including telephone calls to local businesses and organizations, internet and archival research, observational walks, and drives in the community:

The SOCAT exercise begins with the administration of the community profile, for several reasons. First, meeting with community members in groups enables the research team to familiarize itself quickly with important community characteristics, which should be known before the other instruments can be applied. Second, social capital needs to be investigated with reference to activities that are commonly undertaken collectively within the cultural setting being studied. The nature of such activities varies from one culture to another. Group discussions help identify activities that are commonly executed collectively in the community in question. Third, and perhaps most important, are the intangible benefits that arise as the investigating team and members of the local community come to know each other better in the course of these open discussion sessions. Misgivings are dispelled as community members become familiar with the purposes and proposed activities of the research team (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002c: 4).

Most important to this research were the community focus groups, from which were drawn the essential definitions or boundaries of the community that were employed throughout the remaining research. In the community focus groups, researchers modified the SOCAT guidelines for the community mapping discussion by providing a street-level map of the area and asking members to mark the area(s) on the map considered to be part of their community. The identification of meaningful "community" boundaries not only affords locale-specific data,

but helps to prevent the overextension of findings to other communities or even to this specific geographic area at another point in time. Community focus groups confirmed what most urban U.S. ethnographers would expect, i.e., that community-based definitions are distinct from externally imposed geographic boundaries (e.g., census tracts or ZIP codes).

The Community Profile and Asset Mapping questions were adapted from the original World Bank template to adjust for the reliability of several public services offered in this setting, especially the availability of water, waste and garbage disposal, electricity, public telephones, and main streets/roads. These services were all present and reliable throughout the community. The Community Profile and Asset Mapping work were therefore of principal utility as a way to familiarize ourselves with the bounds of the research area; the services, organizations, and residences within it; and, at least preliminarily, the flow of information and resources between and among residents. This exercise would therefore be a good starting point for any project, especially for non-resident researchers in the research community.

Transect walks of the community were conducted not only at the beginning of research, but periodically throughout the social capital assessment period to record public and visible aspects of the community over time. This methodology was, most likely, not as productive as might be the case in a smaller village or community where public space hosts more human interaction and activity. In Terraza Rosa, public space was relatively anonymous, with most people passing by in cars. Exceptions included basketball courts, an occasional gathering of neighbors on a porch or sidewalk, and pick-up locations for (undocumented) workers. So while the transect walks did allow the researchers to "gain a sense of the special characteristics that might influence the field work and logistics," it was not the most productive way "to identify key informants" or "establish convenient times and venues

for community meetings,” as envisioned by the World Bank (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002b: 55).

The Household Questionnaire (Tool #3) constitutes the primary instrument for generating quantified indicators of social capital, and it has five main sections: the introduction, household characteristics, genogram, structural dimensions of social capital, and cognitive dimensions of social capital. This questionnaire-guided interview can be completed in 1 to 2.5 hours. Minor alterations were made to the Household Questionnaire to adapt it to this urban setting, i.e., questions about the type and availability of basic utilities and other questions directed at rural populations were deleted. Categories of occupation were altered to better capture the most common types of employment in the area.

Finally, the Organizational Profile and Score Sheet (Tools #4 and #5) produce a systematic assessment of organizational characteristics. According to the SOCAT authors:

The organization profile seeks to assess the internal characteristics of specific local organizations and to delineate the relationships and networks they have with other organizations.... The organization profile is obtained during a series of semi structured interviews with organization leaders, members, and non-members. Key information sets relate to the organization's origins and history; quality of membership (why people join, exclusion and inclusion of particular subgroups); institutional capacity (quality of leadership, participation, organizational culture, and organizational capacity); and institutional linkages (extent and nature of exchange with other governmental and nongovernmental agencies) (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002a: 124).

Twenty-two organizational interviews were conducted by the researcher and trained research assistants with representatives of nine community organizations and business. For each institution, invitations for interviews were extended to

leaders, members, and non-members. All known schools, churches, and non-profit organizations plus the three largest businesses and several smaller ones in the ZIP code were invited to participate.

These detailed interviews were somewhat lengthy, were given in response to open-ended questions, and helped in two principal ways:

First, the interviews offered some insight into the presence and character of social capital within the organization. Further study would be necessary to obtain a complete picture of each organization, but initial data were detailed enough for team leaders to prepare informative summary reports on each organization and to begin to map social capital in the community.

Second, the organizational interviews helped us to learn the history of major organizations and institutions in the community, to estimate their roles and functions for the community, and to expand our own network of resources and participants for the research.

The organizational interviews helped identify key informants and facilitate recruitment for community focus groups in ways that the transect walks did not. The organizational interview data also provided helpful insights into community concerns and history. So, although the score sheets can be somewhat impressionistic, they do cover a useful range of information: the density, diversity, and rotation of leadership; the frequency and extent of participation in decision making within the organization; and aspects of organizational culture including knowledge of rules and policies, ability to deal with both internal and external issues, and activities relating to the conduct of business within the organization (e.g., hiring, firing, financial reports).

## **Findings: The Terraza Rosa Community**

Overall, this SOCAT-based assessment of residents of Terraza Rosa produced a picture of the social resources available in this community. Social capital was assessed using the three themes outlined by the World Bank: (1) Memberships in local associations and networks; (2) Indicators of trust and adherence to norms; and (3) Indicators of collective action.

These realms of social capital are by no means a complete or exact model of the social resources available in any given setting. But research by World Bank and other scholars supports the validity of these constructs for analytical and, in some cases, predictive purposes (e.g., Pantoja 2000; Rose 1999). The instruments produce data on both the structural and cognitive forms of social capital, which are considered vital to a robust assessment of the community in question. Structural forms of social capital are measured by informants' membership in associations, social networks and mutual support resources, informants' sense of exclusion that occurs in the neighborhood, and their reported participation in previous collective action. Cognitive forms are assessed through questions that estimate solidarity, trust and cooperation, and conflict resolution within the community.

### **Memberships in Local Associations and Networks**

The SOCAT estimates memberships in local associations and networks through the density of local associations and the number of household memberships. Additional data are gathered about the membership within those associations (e.g., the diversity of their memberships) and characteristics of association decision-making processes.

The residents of Terraza Rosa surveyed were fairly likely to be involved in some form of mutual support organization,



such as churches, parent-teacher associations, or political groups (60% of those sampled were members of one or more organizations). Almost all association members felt that their membership was beneficial for them, and that group leadership was effective. The presence of a large portion of the sample *not* involved in any association might be indicative of limited structural social capital in this regard. However, informants' social networks and mutual support organizations were also assessed, and these are viewed as informal groupings. Many in our sample rely upon these informal support networks in times of need. For example, though only half were in formal associations, a strong majority of respondents to question 4B.1 identified at least one person in the community who would respond if the school went without a teacher for a long time (see Appendix 1 for details on the interview questions).

The intent of question 4B.1 ("If the primary school of this neighborhood went without a teacher for a long time, say several weeks or more, which people in this neighborhood do you think would get together to take some action about it?") is to estimate each respondent's support network by assessing the breadth or variety of support resources they identify for a given problem. By posing a specific scenario, the researcher reduces the amount of speculation required to answer the question. In this example, one can compare the percentage of "Yes" responses to each of the possible support network members (e.g., local/municipal government, neighborhood association, parents of schoolchildren, or the entire neighborhood). An "other" category and "no one in the neighborhood" were also options. The greater the percentage of "Yes" responses (i.e., for all categories but "no one"), the higher the indication of social capital for that group.<sup>1</sup>

Communities with strong informal but relatively weak formal association membership can be high in social capital. This exposes the danger of emphasizing group membership as an indicator of social capital. Namely, when group

membership is used as a proxy for social capital, there comes the risk of thereby conceptualizing social capital not only as an attribute of formal relationships but as an attribute of a group. Pantoja cautions:

The relationships that take place outside groups and the resources that these individuals can access through these relationships are neglected. This is misleading on two counts: first, because people have many relationships that are outside the context of groups; second, people keep relationships with others that they may have met in a group after the group have disappeared or they have separated from it. Many of these "weak" ties can be substantial sources of social capital (Granovetter, 1973). In this sense, participation levels, or associational membership levels, turn out to be crude measures of social capital" (Pantoja 2000:18).

As resources for aid and support, formal and informal associations require different forms and levels of investment, promote different patterns of behavior and hierarchies of relationship, and generally produce a wide range of characteristics and outcomes.

Informal sources of support are particularly relevant to research within Hispanic communities. Moore (1970) considers *familismo* to be an important culture-specific value among Hispanics. Although the concept is very general, *familismo* has been proposed as a way to explain aspects of the adaptation of Hispanic immigrants to the U.S. (Rumbaut and Rumbaut 1976). The Hispanic family acts as a social support system where relatives can seek assistance on a consistent basis in times of need (Sabogal et al. 1987; Keefe et al. 1979). This social support system acts as a mechanism for protecting its members from "external physiological and emotional stressors" (Sabogal et al. 1987).

In response to question 4B.1, 60% of Terraza Rosa residents in our sample said that the parents of the children

would take some action. *Each of the other groups* (for example, local government, a neighborhood association, the entire neighborhood, and "other," typically "the church leaders") was named by between 20 and 27% of residents. Thus, parents were not considered a strong resource for responding to school problems. These responses are quite a bit lower than for those in a neighboring community where, for example, 75% of residents said the parents would take action, and between 30 and 75% of residents named other groups in the community. (More will be said later about this neighboring community, and my comparisons to it.)

### **Trust and Adherence to Norms**

The Household Questionnaire contains questions about informants' expectations and experiences in the community having to do with trust, trusting behavior, or feelings of trust in others (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002a: 76-77). Fewer than half of respondents (n=55) expressed awareness of "divisions within neighborhoods" over various social and demographic factors listed in the question. And only about half of those who saw divisions stated that these differences caused any problems. A closer look at questions of access reveals some notable differences, and I turn to these next. Question 4C.5 ("Are there any services where you or members of your household are occasionally denied service or have only limited opportunity to use?") asks about access to services.

Responses to this question indicate that Terraza Rosa respondents have a sense of exclusion from housing and job training/employment services and from credit/financial services. Ethnographic inquiries suggest that participants need broader access to loans, both short- and long-term, including credit cards. Economic factors are a principal

concern of the longer term research project in this community, and these preliminary data confirm that economics may have a substantial influence on the patterns of social capital in this community. Donato (1999) suggests that economic factors play less of a role in Mexico-to-U.S. migration decisions today than they did in earlier generations, while social mechanisms have a greater influence now. She further explains that communities with long histories of migration are now self-perpetuating, and that migration (legal or illegal) "has become a way of life in many communities" (Donato 1999). Thus, a family's and community's historical migration patterns help define the vocational opportunities available to any given person through migration. The economic opportunities available to and within communities here in the United States are in some ways a reflection of historic patterns and "sending" communities.

Household Questionnaire item 5B.1 asks respondents to state whether the people in their neighborhood generally trust one another in matters of borrowing and lending. The results were fairly low for Terraza Rosa, with only 40% expressing a sense of trust among community members. Respondents were also asked with whom they would leave their house (question 5B.4 ["Suppose someone from the neighborhood had to go away for a while, along with their family. In whose charge could they leave their house? {Only the first answers are discussed here.}"]) or their children (question 5B.6 ["If you suddenly had to go away for a day or two, whom could you count on to take care of your children? {Only the first answers are discussed here.}"]) if they had to "go away for a while."

Other family members and neighbors were most often listed as appropriate persons to turn to for supervision of one's home (question 5B.4). "Friends" and leaving the house without supervision were also considered viable options in this urban setting. For the care of one's children (question 5B.6), the major-

ity of respondents who had children identified "Other family members" as the first choice for childcare. However, several simply could not accept the scenario and said they would not leave their children with anyone else.<sup>2</sup>

A set of direct questions (questions 5B.7 through 5B.10) asked respondents to speak about their own neighbors and their sense of solidarity with them. These questions produced substantial negativity about one's neighbors or the sense that respondents are isolated from neighbors. While a moderate majority expressed positive sentiments (e.g., "there's always someone to help me with a problem"; "I feel accepted in this neighborhood"), there were significant numbers of respondents with negative opinions (e.g., "a found purse/wallet would not be returned to its owner"; "people are always interested only in themselves"). Most felt their neighborhood to be "peaceful" and that relationships within it are "harmonious," but most also reported that their neighbors contribute "very little or nothing" to the common development goals.

Question 5B.5 poses the scenario of choosing between a smaller private patio and a larger shared patio. The choice of sole patio ownership would be considered a marker of lower trust. Members of this community most often chose the shared patio response, despite a question that may reflect urban industrial values of individualism, individual (rather than communal) property ownership, and expansive private space. That is, cultural differences (and specifically notions about privacy and how much one can or should expect from community members) may mediate respondent answers to these questions.

## Indicators of Collective Action

The World Bank explains its third theme, “indicators of collective action,” in this way: “The provision of many services requires collective action by a group of individuals. The extent to which this collective action occurs can be measured and is an indicator of underlying social capital at least to the extent that the cooperation is not imposed by an external force, such as the government.” (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002a: 77)

A series of questions asks about residents’ participation in a collective action within the past three years. These actions included a collective effort in the neighborhood to petition government officials, notification of the police about a problem, or talking with others in the area about a problem. Collective action is considered a useful proxy for social capital since it typically requires a significant amount of coordination, group effort, and trust to accomplish. For discussion here, I have chosen two questions about collective decision-making: one that inquires about the spirit of participation in the community (question 4D.7 [“Overall, how would you rate the spirit of participation in this neighborhood?”]) and a second that asks for respondents’ sense of having any influence in the community (question 4D.8 [“How much influence do you think people like yourself can have in making this neighborhood a better place to live?”]).

Although the SOCAT contains other questions that ask respondents to mark the forms of collective action in which they have engaged during recent years (e.g., voting, participating in an information campaign, soliciting a person of authority for help), I found questions (4D.7 and 4D.8) to be most appropriate for my research interests, and most relevant for assessing resources and access to residents of Terraza Rosa.

In estimating neighborhood “spirit of participation,” the residents of Terraza Rosa were spread across categories low,

average, and high responses. Mexican-Americans and those with higher levels of education (some college) reported somewhat lower ratings of neighborhood spirit of participation. Regarding personal influence, respondents in Terraza Rosa reported a very low sense of influence.

## Discussion

The data collected through the World Bank SOCAT instruments offer detailed community, household, and organizational information. The tools are effective for their stated goal of providing a single empirical measurement tool that can be used to assess social capital within a defined community. The SOCAT tool, including all methods and not just the Household Questionnaire, offers a broad view of social capital. The SOCAT Household Surveys provided the primary data on structural and cognitive social capital. These data further enabled us to perform detailed analysis using personal characteristics of education level and ethnicity as dependent variables to assess the presence of disparities in social capital.

Overall, the SOCAT data reveal broad membership and support across the sampled respondents, though that sense of support was not particularly deep or substantial vis-à-vis difficult community problems. Informal support mechanisms are much stronger than formal ones in this community. Of particular concern is residents' widespread sense of exclusion from employment and job training opportunities, which indicates not only a need but a priority within this community. Only 40% felt a general sense of trust existed in the community and, while harmonious and peaceful, the community does not seem to respondents to be particularly likely *or* capable of coming together as a group to solve problems. Responses to questions aimed at measuring collective action, members'

participation in community projects, and general influence over the quality of the community scored low in our sample.

These data produce a snapshot of social capital in Terraza Rosa. As a measure of social capital, they offer meaningful insights into the motivations, needs, and resources of community members. They give researchers and programmers several useful markers that might be tracked over time. The SOCAT data are also a useful way for ethnographers to explore the community-wide level into the effects of power relations, resource distribution, and the meaning and utility of “community” in this urban setting.

### **Local Definitions of “Community”**

The project’s initial goal of assessing social capital throughout a ZIP code produced a conceptual and methodological difficulty. The SOCAT tools require the identification of a clear and somewhat consistent definition of “community” that is shared by respondents. The importance of using local definitions of “community” cannot be overstated, especially if the concept of social networks, so central to the network approaches of Coleman and Bourdieu, is to have any importance (see for example, Moore et al. 2005).

The concept of network also raises questions about the meaning of “community” within highly technological and vehicular (mobile) societies. While informants responded to our questions in reference to the definitions of “community” generated during focus groups and community mapping, these informants may not necessarily rely upon this “community” in the way that social capital theorists had intended. That is, residents may increasingly access resources, support, information, and opportunities from geographically distant sources through forms of high technology (e.g., computers, cell phones). In short, relationships are *not* defined by geographic



proximity. So, exercises that limit community-defining to local areas suffer from significant bias. Indeed, under processes of globalization, geographically distant sources of information and power will be significant in determinations of even local social capital. These may include: (1) market suppliers that affect retail options and prices; (2) non-local levels of government that determine minimum wage, civil rights law, immigration policies, etc.; (3) policymakers influencing rules for government housing projects; and (4) banking institutions and other sources of credit.

Because modern technological society has introduced new forms and venues for social interaction, analyses of these data should not ignore new forms of collective action and solidarity, including imagined communities and cyber communities. Our research suggests that such communities may exist around: (1) participation in a range of ethnic churches (Catholic, African American, or mega-churches), (2) involvement in, or at least increasing exposure to, internet communities and the use of computerized communication and information sharing, and (3) art and aesthetic communities (e.g., devotees of hip hop, gospel music, or even fashion trends) that are created through various forms of media but which have unique forms and expressions of solidarity, trust, or conflict resolution. In short, the meaningfulness of social capital indicators for an urban and high-technology community raises unique questions and problems.

### **"Community" As An Analytical Category**

Communities are rarely homogeneous, and so a community-driven analysis in which neighbors, regardless of race/ethnicity, are grouped together, offers a more productive perspective for anthropological inquiry (Smith-Morris 2006, 2007). By insisting on the development of fine-grained,

locally produced definitions of community, we can shift the level of analysis from population to community, transcend assumptions about race/ethnicity, and achieve a longitudinal and processual view of social capital.

As an instrument rooted in the network perspective on social capital, the SOCAT identifies the macro-level bonds among community members, and the meso-level bridges between communities. The World Bank makes clear that these instruments “are intended to measure social capital at the micro and meso levels” (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002b: 13), and so there are some specific and important forms of social capital (notably the macro-level forms of social capital that “link” communities to power structures and authorities) that are absent in the results.<sup>3</sup>

Power relations are an integral part of the context for social capital, particularly for revealing the “investment strategies” characteristic of (or most effective in) different types of societies (Pantoja 2000). Unless higher-level sources of power (e.g., politicians’ offices, banks, health care systems, media offices) are physically present in the community (or are identified by community members as part of “the community”) then these will *not* necessarily be addressed by an application of the SOCAT. Ethnographers can compensate for this weakness by expanding their investigation to relevant power sources.

Overall, the SOCAT produced meaningful and dense descriptions from this community on the bonds within individuals’ lives, households, local organizations, and small local communities. Low to average in measures of trust and collective action, and low to high in memberships and networks, these data refer almost entirely to relationships among similar individuals in shared communities. Although alternative communities (and perhaps the presence of bridges between unlike communities) can be assessed through participant responses to questions on associations, exclusion and solidarity, and in focus

groups discussions, these are not necessarily in geographically contiguous spaces.

## Conclusion and Implications

The premise behind theories of social capital and population health is that some “unmeasured” resources exist in communities which may mediate the consistently observed differences in health and well-being, development, crime rates, etc. Our research suggests that recording social capital indicators longitudinally within locally meaningful “communities” may help identify what previously remained “unmeasured” (cf. Kemper and Royce 2002). Long-term analysis may assist in the development of new interventions that not only influence social capital in its various forms (structural, cognitive, bonding, bridging, and linking) but are also tailored to the characteristics, history, needs, and assets of a specific community. It is, therefore, both the theoretical concept of social capital and the methodological orientation described in this report (i.e., long-term follow-up, descriptive data, locally defined communities) that have utility for ethnographic and applied work.

The tendency in public health literature to employ social capital as a discrete risk factor is problematic, since its measurement may be convoluted by the timing of the interview, narrative issues (like participants’ desire to please), and the subjectivity of notions like exclusion and trust. Further, having high social capital is not the same as having the resources or opportunities to be successful (see Portes 1998 or Pantoja 2000). Ethnographers in urban settings are the most likely researchers to investigate the presence, character, and processes of bridges and links that explain this important difference. “[S]ocial capital should not be analyzed in isolation but as part of a portfolio of resources that individuals use

to secure welfare" (Rose 1999). It was Schneider's (2005) discussion that described effective social capital as a complex and context-dependent concept which rests on long-term trust-based relationships.

Urban communities of Mexican migrants have received a great deal of ethnographic and other social scientific attention for several decades. This research represents only an initial investigation of Terraza Rosa as one such community. What the SOCAT data help elucidate is that communal and cooperative attitudes reported in ethnographies of these communities are also quantifiable as forms of social capital. The residents of Terraza Rosa have indeed formed a moderate degree of trust, despite living in a fairly impermanent, high rental, low income area. We have long recognized that Mexican migrants are not isolated individuals making lone and irreversible decisions (cf. Lochhead 2006). These are extended families making multiple decisions over the lifetimes of members, based on contingencies, resources, and experience much more than simple one-way economic equations. The relationship between these links, and the locally displayed forms of social capital, would be a productive area of inquiry. For example, can quantitative measures like the SOCAT in home and destination communities, verify the likely success of a given migrant? Can measurements of social capital not only elucidate, but help harness, forms of power and engagement for urban migrant communities? The unexpectedly moderate levels of trust and cooperation in Terraza Rosa may be explained by the cultural attitudes toward communalism shared by many of its residents. Further exploration of social capital by ethnographers, who are attentive to core values and the shared political histories of community residents, will be an important aspect of future immigration policy research. I therefore suggest that social capital can be a productive tool for ethnographers, added to our more important participant observation, long-term familiarity with communities, and language competency. Only through sustained attention to

the evolving circumstances and shifting boundaries of these Mexican migrant communities, like Terraza Rosa, can we understand, predict, and empower them.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My first thanks go to the community members who made this research possible. I am also very grateful to my colleague, James Walton, D.O. (Office of Health Equity, Baylor Health Care System, Dallas, TX), with whom I conceptualized and have discussed this work for several years. The work was made possible through a grant from the Institute for Faith Health Research, Dallas, and its publication through a research leave from Southern Methodist University.

### NOTES

- 1 Question 4B.1 is just one of several dedicated to assessing memberships in local associations and networks, but it illustrates well how the SOCAT works. Respondents are sometimes asked about specific scenarios, and other times about general characteristics in their community. Some items explore characteristics that may change quickly – for example, respondents' membership in formal organizations, or their sense of how a particular problem might be solved – while other items explore more stable characteristics, such as the degree of participation or exclusion within the community. By assessing communities multiple times (typically, before, during, and after a development intervention in the community), the SOCAT attempts to find evidence of social capital in changing circumstances.
- 2 These results reveal only the tip of a research iceberg vis-à-vis urban isolation and the degree to which childcare is shared across communities in urban settings.
- 3 For example, only one political representative was available to participate in the research, and no clear mechanism exists within the five SOCAT instruments for assessing links to power structures in society as a whole. An improvement to this assessment of the community's links to power structures will be made in the future, and may involve an adaptation of the social networking matrix for linking social capital (Krebs and Holley 2006) or by better assessing

inter-organizational networks while paying close attention to the power and resources of those organizations (Franke 2005).

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**Appendix I: Household Questionnaire Items Discussed**  
(Only those items discussed in this manuscript are listed.)

- 4B.1 If the primary school in this neighborhood went without a teacher for a long time, say six months or more, which people in this neighborhood do you think would get together to take some action about it?
- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| a. No one in the neighborhood would get together | Yes | No |
| b. Local government                              | Yes | No |
| c. Neighborhood association                      | Yes | No |
| d. Parents of school children                    | Yes | No |
| e. The entire neighborhood                       | Yes | No |
| f. Other (specify)                               | Yes | No |
- 4C.5 Are there any services where you or members of your household are occasionally denied service or have only limited opportunity to use?
- |                                |     |    |
|--------------------------------|-----|----|
| a. Education/schools           | Yes | No |
| b. Health services/clinics     | Yes | No |
| c. Housing assistance          | Yes | No |
| d. Job training/employment     | Yes | No |
| e. Credit/finance              | Yes | No |
| f. Transportation              | Yes | No |
| g. Justice/conflict resolution | Yes | No |
| h. Security/police services    | Yes | No |
- 5B.1 Do you think that in this neighborhood people generally trust one another in matters of lending and borrowing?
- Do trust \_\_\_\_\_
- Do not trust \_\_\_\_\_
- 5B.4 Suppose someone from the neighborhood had to go away for a while, along with their family. In whose charge could they leave their house? (Record first three mentioned.)



- a. Other family member \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Neighbor \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Anyone from the neighborhood for this purpose \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- e. No one \_\_\_\_\_

5B.6 If you suddenly had to go away for a day or two, whom could you count on to take care of your children? (Record first three mentioned.)

- a. Other family member \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Neighbor \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Anyone from the neighborhood for this purpose \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Have no kids \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Other (oldest) child \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Would not take the trip \_\_\_\_\_

5B.5 Suppose a friend of yours in this neighborhood faced the following alternative, which one would s/he prefer most?

- Own a patio (30 ft.<sup>2</sup>) alone \_\_\_\_\_
- Own a patio (75 ft.<sup>2</sup>) that is shared with one other family \_\_\_\_\_

4D.7 Overall, how would you rate the spirit of participation in this neighborhood?

- Very low \_\_\_\_\_
- Low \_\_\_\_\_
- Average \_\_\_\_\_
- High \_\_\_\_\_
- Very high \_\_\_\_\_

4D.8 How much influence do you think people like yourself can have in making this neighborhood a better place to live?

- A lot \_\_\_\_\_
- Some \_\_\_\_\_
- Not very much \_\_\_\_\_
- None \_\_\_\_\_