Race/Ethnicity and Social Capital Among Middle- and Upper-Middle-Class Elementary School Families: A Structural Equation Model

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Abstract

This study used structural equation modeling to conduct a first and second order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of a scale developed by McDonald and Moberg (2002) to measure three dimensions of social capital among a diverse group of middle- and upper-middle-class elementary school parents in suburban New York. A structural path model was created which best explains the linkages between race/ethnicity and our new construct "Total Social Capital." The CFA confirmed the three very distinct dimensions of social capital: parent–school, parent–parent, and parent–child. Fit indices also suggest the existence of a second order, global Total Social Capital factor comprised of all three dimensions of social capital. We show that Black, Hispanic, and mixed-race family status is associated with significantly diminished Total Social Capital, both directly and indirectly via socioeconomic status. This is one of the few studies to find decreased social capital even among middle- and upper-middle-class minorities.

Key Words: family social capital, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, parents, children, elementary schools, families, structural equation model

Introduction

Social capital has been trumpeted as an important resource found within family relationships as well as within the interactions between and among

individuals in organizations (Coleman, 1988, 1990; Putnam, 2000). Similarly, Bourdieu (1986) presents social capital as the sum of potential resources connected to a network of institutionalized relationships. Bourdieu posits that these relationships permit individuals to access resources possessed by the groups with which they have a mutual acquaintance. According to Coleman (1988), at the family level, the process of a parent's fostering the cognitive and social development of their children enhances the children's fund of social capital by preparing them to interact more seamlessly and productively among other like-minded children in the social world of schools. Coleman notes that parents who read to their children on a regular basis are creating strong bonds of trust and expectations which ultimately enhance academic outcomes. Other parent–child activities such as visiting museums and working on homework together have also been identified as beneficial forms of parent–child social capital (Jeynes, 2012).

Bourdieu and Coleman both suggest that children who are socialized in middle- and upper-middle-class families arguably possess greater funds of this resource, which they are able to use within schools to greater social and academic advantage. Social capital is also enhanced in interactions between parents and school officials, as well as among parents who have children in the same schools, in ways that ultimately benefit children (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003). All of these types of interactions create tangible resources—like information, connections, obligations, and influence—which can have positive results for the children, including enhanced academic outcomes.

There is growing agreement in the field of social research that the construct of social capital has dimensions which include interactions of parents with other parents (Horvat et al., 2003; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Lareau, 2000; Ream & Palardy, 2008), parents with school staff (Horvat et al., 2003; Lareau, 1989; Ream & Palardy, 2008), and parents with their children (Coleman, 1988; Lareau, 2002; Ream & Palardy, 2008; Riches & Curdt-Christiansen, 2010). There is less agreement about how this social good is distributed along class and racial lines, with researchers (Horvat et al., 2003; Lareau, 2002; Ream & Palardy, 2008) arguing (and demonstrating) that racial and socioeconomic minorities have less social capital as a consequence of the socially stratified nature of many current societies and thus have fewer advantages (especially in schools) than mainstream elites.

The present study attempts to address the multidimensional complexity of the social capital construct, as well as examine both the direct and indirect effects of race/ethnicity on "Total Social Capital" via the mediating variable socioeconomic status (SES). The study considers social capital in the academic context and attempts to deconstruct this concept into three constituent parts:

parent–parent, parent–school, and parent–child social capital dimensions of the construct. The study uses a survey validated by McDonald and Moberg (2002) to capture these three dimensions of social capital among mostly middle- and upper-middle-income White, Black, Hispanic, and mixed-race parents in suburban metropolitan New York. Middle- and upper-income minority groups are rarely the subject of this kind of research (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Structural equation modeling is used to validate these three dimensions of social capital, as well as test for a second order Total Social Capital construct, among all four racial groupings. Finally, a path model is fitted to the data in an attempt to map out a causal relationship between race, socioeconomic status, and Total Social Capital, controlling for important confounding factors.

Social Capital in the Schooling Context

The academic milieu is an important context in which to study social capital. According to Putnam (2000), it is not poverty or demographic characteristics but social capital that exerts the greatest influence on academic test scores. When parents are involved in the education of their children, children do better in school, are less likely to drop out of high school, and the schools are better able to provide a productive environment for learning (Jeynes, 2012; Putnam, 2000; Steinberg, 1997). Coleman (1988) also found a strong linkage between parental involvement in their children's education on the one hand and positive academic outcomes on the other. In their comprehensive review of empirical research on the topic, Dika and Singh (2002) found that, in general, "social capital indicators and indicators of educational attainment are positively linked" (p. 41; see their excellent review for a compilation of research on this topic). Others, too, have continued to establish this linkage with sophisticated statistical models (e.g., Ream & Palardy, 2008).

In short, there is now much evidence and much agreement that social capital contributes to many positive outcomes, including the development of academic capital. Thus, in the tradition of trying to better understand societal stratification and social capital, this current study focuses on the racial and SES determinants of social capital (and not linkages with academic achievement).

Social Capital, Class, and Race

In countries with a wide divide between class, race, language status, and academic outcomes, such as is the case in the United States, there is an added urgency to be concerned with the fund of social capital available to these often disadvantaged groups. Research indicates that in the U.S., middle- and upper-

class parents are more connected with each other and with the schools their children attend than are poor or working-class parents (Horvat et al., 2003; Lareau, 2000; Ream & Palardy, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). As regards the efficacy of their networks, Horvat et al. (2003) observed that "the social networks accessible by working-class and poor families are less valuable than those of middle-class families for negotiating the particular institutional environment formed by the school" (p. 323). Relatedly, Coleman (1987) argues that those students higher in social capital benefit more from formal schooling than those with less social capital. This, according to Coleman, is due to an interaction effect between social capital from home and the complementary social capital in schools. Though finding measurable differences by class in the level of involvement of parents with their children's schools and other parents, Lareau (2002) and Horvat et al. did not find noticeable differences in parental involvement by race when controlling for class.

There is some evidence, though, that middle-class Black families may not be involved with their children's schooling to the extent of White parents. Ogbu (2003) noted that there were lower levels of parent to school and parent to child social capital among the middle-class African American families he studied—at least the kind that leads to academic engagement—than among comparably situated White families. Additionally, Brashears (2011), in a re-analysis of the General Social Survey data, found that controlling for many factors, including income and education, Blacks indicated having significantly smaller networks within which they share "important matters."

Evidence also suggests that Hispanic parents, for a variety of reasons and not just on account of language barriers, are generally not as involved with their children's schooling as are White parents (Ferrer, 2007; for an excellent treatment of this topic, see Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Iruka and Carver (2006) found that Hispanic parents were much less likely to read to their children ages 3–5 than were White parents. Ferrer (2007) also noted that in households where neither parent spoke English, parents were less likely to read to their children. Among Hispanic/Latinos, immigrant Mexican families, in particular, appear to be lower in parent–child social capital than are White students (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). As regards educational institutions, the distrust held by the African American and Latino communities of local school systems may in part be the reason for their diminished, or at least less productive, involvement with schools (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Yull, Blitz, Thompson, and Murray (2014) point to some of the causes of this mistrust, including "color-blind racism" and cultural ignorance.

Forms of Social Capital

Parent–child interactions, parent–parent interactions, parent–school interactions, and student–student interactions are now all popularly recognized forms of social capital. This paper will focus on the first three, discussed below.

Parent–Child Social Capital

Positive parenting practices such as reading to children, engaging with them in educational and cultural activities, and instilling in them norms and expectations conducive to learning all generate social capital for the child. Coleman (1987) stated that these familial inputs enhanced a child's "attitudes, effort, and conception of self" (p. 35). He noted that adults in the home who engage children in discussions about academic, social, economic, and personal matters are fostering this dimension of social capital. Steinberg (1997) made a solid empirical connection between parental engagement with their children and strong academic outcomes. So, at the heart of parent–child social capital is constructive engagement between the parent and the child.

Parent–Parent Social Capital

Parents not only pass along social capital directly to their children in the home environment, but also acquire social capital for their children in interactions with other parents. These interactions can benefit children in many ways, including pressuring school officials to act in ways beneficial for one's own children (Horvat et al., 2003; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996). As Putnam (2000) noted, the flow of information, mutual aid, and collective action found in civic engagement—of which school is the most common—are all expressions of social capital. When parents get together in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or other groupings with the collective intention of helping their children, they can influence schools in ways that benefit their children (Horvat et al., 2003; Ream & Palardy, 2008).

The National PTA claims to be the "largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States" (www.linkedin.com/company/national-pta, para. 3). However, minorities may not always feel so welcome at PTA or other parent meetings. Historically, the divisive desegregation battles that followed the Brown Decision no doubt influenced the degree to which both Black and White parents participated in their local PTA units and contributed to the perception of the PTA as a White women's organization (Milner & Howard, 2004; Ogbu, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Woyshner, 2000). Thus, Black and Latino parents may feel like outsiders at parent meetings dominated by Whites, and this would predict diminished parent–parent social capital among these two

groups. As regards parent–parent social capital and class, Horvat et al. (2003) noted that middle-class parental networks and connections were more efficacious than poor or working-class networks in getting the desired outcomes from schools for their children. They did not, however, notice differences in the effectiveness of networking by race once SES was taken into consideration (unlike the present study).

Parent–School Social Capital

Academic success within a school setting is not merely a matter of learning and performing satisfactorily. Students and their families must have an explicit or implicit understanding of the rules associated with advancement (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Amassing social capital and converting it into institutional support depends upon successful interactions with various agents within schools (Stanton-Salazar, 1997) from whom parents can acquire information about school policies and teachers. Horvat et al. (2003), too, found that parents (primarily middle class) interacted with school officials to influence them to take actions in ways beneficial to their children, such as advantageous track placement and program participation. Ream and Palardy (2008) found that average levels of parental social capital differed significantly across the social class groupings, with the greater proportion resting in the upper socioeconomic class.

A legacy of racial discrimination and the long-standing distrust of educational institutions held by disadvantaged American minorities likely make it more difficult for some minority families than for White families to work effectively with teachers, administrators, and other school agents (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). For example, Lareau (1989) and Lareau and Horvat (1999) found that both lower- and middle-class Blacks were more likely to be suspicious of schools and school officials than were Whites. Black parents were consistently more vigilant concerning the issue of race and the potential for racial discrimination directed at their children (Horvat et al., 2003; Lareau, 2002; Lareau & Horvat, 1999), potentially making interactions with school officials more tense (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Lareau (1989) also found that some poor Blacks intervened less in their children's schooling than other parents, even when they suspected racially discriminatory school practices.

Interestingly, Ream and Palardy (2008) found that among the low SES families in their study, there was a negative relationship between parent–school social capital (parent's visiting schools) and test scores, which the authors determined to be a consequence of the *reasons* for the visits (low test scores and discipline issues). On the other hand, the test scores of middle-class students in their study benefited most from their parents' influence on the schools. In

sum, there is reason to expect that the fund of parent–school social capital differs not only by class, but also by race, even when the SES of families is taken into consideration.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to use confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling to do the following: (1) to test the factorial validity of three dimensions of social capital among racially diverse, middle- and upper-middle-income families attending four elementary schools in suburban, metropolitan New York; (2) to validate a second order factor of Total Social Capital comprised of the three first order factors; and (3) to present a best fitting path model showing how family race/ethnicity relates to Total Social Capital via the mediating variable of socioeconomic status, while controlling for other important extraneous factors.

Methodology

Study Sample

This study utilized survey data collected from the parents/guardians (families) of 1,068 students enrolled in four elementary schools in a suburban district on eastern Long Island. There were a total of 3,406 children enrolled in the four schools, who lived in 2,870 families. Thus, the usable family response rate was 37.2%. The parents/guardians were asked to complete an anonymous survey at their child's school's open house in September 2009. The survey solicited both demographic information and responses to previously validated survey items (McDonald & Moberg , 2002) which measure three dimensions of social capital: parent–school, parent–parent, and parent–child.

Research Setting

Of the 9,154 students enrolled in the subject district during the study in the 2009–2010 school year, 60% were White, 20% were Black, 15% were Hispanic, 4% were Asian, .3% were Native American, and 1% were multiracial (New York State Education Department, 2011–2012). The district report card indicated that 35% of the student population received free or reduced price lunches. Additionally, the report indicated that White students performed markedly better in every subject area tested and at every grade level and had higher graduation rates than did Black and Hispanic children.

Research Instrument

Lynn McDonald and Paul Moberg granted permission to use 20 items from a validated social relationships questionnaire they created entitled "Parent Social Capital Questionnaire" (McDonald & Moberg, 2002; see Appendix A). The 20 items measure three dimensions of social capital. Six questions measure parent–school social capital (PS1–PS6). One of these, item 5, was reverse coded (4–1=1–4) to reflect that higher values equated with higher social capital on this dimension. Eight items measure parent–parent social capital (PP1–PP8). Six items measure parent–child social capital (PC1–PC6). Five were reverse coded for the same purpose (PC1, PC3–PC6). Questions measuring sociodemographics were added by the authors of this study.

Via email, the survey's authors shared that the reliability coefficient for the subset of questions relative to parent–parent social capital was a very strong .93, and .73 for the subset of questions relative to parent–child social capital. No reliability information was available on the measure of parent–school social capital, although this current study does provide reliability measures on all three dimensions of social capital measured by this survey instrument.

Sociodemographic Variables

Following are the added sociodemographic survey items and how they were coded:

- Number of children a family has in the school: 1 = 1 to 2, 2 = 3 to 4, 3 = 5 to 6, 4 = 6+
- Number of children in the household: 1 = 1 to 2, 2= 3 to 4, 3 = 5 to 6, 4 = 6+
- Family race/ethnicity: White (non-Hispanic); Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino; Asian, Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Island, American Indian, or Alaska Native; Mixed Race
- Education level of parent: 1 = some high school, 2 = high school graduate, 3 = some college, 4 = college graduate, and 5 = post graduate studies
- Family structure: 0 = single parent family (with or without support), 1 = two-parent family
- Any children having participated in free/reduced price lunch program: 0 = yes, 1 = no
- Any children classified as needing special educational services: 0 = yes, 1 = no
- Any children classified as needing English as a Second Language services: 0 = no, 1 = yes
- Annual family income ($): 1 = less than $20,000, 2 = $20,001 to 36,000, 3 = $36,001 to 57,660, 4 = $57,661 to 91,705, and 5 = more than $91,705

- SES: A latent factor in the structural model created by the observed variables Family Income, Poverty Status (free/reduced lunch), and Education level. The measurement model of SES generated the following acceptable bootstrap bias corrected factor loadings: .847 on Income, .728 on Poverty Status, and .480 on Education, which were all significant at the $p < .01$ level. These factor loadings suggested a strong underlying SES factor.

Data Collection

The Parent Questionnaire was administered in September 2009 to the parents of students attending the four elementary schools in the subject district during an evening "Open House." Classroom teachers administered the survey with a Scantron answer sheet following a general assembly. It is important to note that while we captured a large part of the parent population, not all parents came to the schools during Open House, and some parents who did come did not complete the survey. Thus, we likely have a selection of the most motivated parents. Not all surveys were determined to have complete, usable responses. A large number of respondents did not complete the entire survey due to confusion over how to record the answers on a two-sided answer sheet. Thus, we did not use these partial responses, which resulted in a total of 1,089 parents/guardians of families who completed all survey questions.

Results

The analyses were conducted using SPSS with AMOS version 22 (for the SEM analysis). Tables 1 and 2 present the descriptives and bivariate correlations, respectively. Of the 1,089 completed surveys, 789 (69.7%) indicated that their family was White, 144 (13.2%) were Black, 74 (6.8%) were Hispanic, 21 (1.9%) were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 79 (8.4%) were mixed-race individuals. There were too few Asian/Pacific Islanders in the sample to do meaningful analyses with SEM, so these 21 individuals were excluded from the study, reducing the usable, complete cases sample to 1,068. Of these respondents, 222 (20.8%) indicated that they received a free/reduced price lunch (an indicator of family poverty status). A total of 34 (3.2%) families indicated that their child received ESL services. There were 168 (15.7%) families who indicated that they were headed by a single parent.

As shown in Table 1, fully 38% of the total sample fell in the highest income bracket, including 37% of Blacks and 27% of Hispanics, with 55% of the total sample having at least a bachelor's degree. All racial/ethnic groups in this sample were well above the American average in terms of income, education, and two-parent family structure. A one-way ANOVA with Bonferonni

post hoc comparisons indicated that while Whites had significantly higher income levels than the other racial/ethnic groups, they did not have significantly higher education levels than mixed-race or Black families (Black families actually had slightly higher education levels than Whites). However, Whites did have significantly higher overall SES factor scores (described below) than the other three racial/ethnic categories. Black families had significantly higher SES factor scores than did Hispanics.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables by Family Race/Ethnicity and Total

Variables	White Families	Black Families	Hispanic Families	Mixed Race Families	Total
Mean Total Social Capital Factor Score	.093	-.120	-.291	-.301	0
% Free/Reduced Price Lunch	15.0	33.3	44.6	29.7	20.8
% College Degree	54.9	59.8	44.6	57.2	55.0
% Lowest Income Bracket (<$20,000)	4.0	9.0	12.2	16.5	6.3
% Highest Income Bracket (>$91,705)	40.2	36.8	27.0	31.9	38.1
% Two-Parent Families	85.1	82.6	83.8	80.2	84.3
% ESL Families	1.6	4.9	13.5	5.5	3.2
Total Families	759	144	74	91	1,068

A one-way ANOVA with paired contrasts revealed that one school had an overall significantly lower SES factor score than the other three schools. This opened the possibility that children and parents associated with this school could have been influenced by differing school norms and culture (Horvat et al., 2003). Thus, to control for this possibility, we created a dichotomous variable we termed "school context" to capture school level SES effects, which assigned families a value of zero if their children attended this school, and one if they did not. The inclusion of this variable in the structural model discussed in detail below did not strengthen our model (but actually weakened it) and was therefore eliminated from all analyses. In short, school level SES effects were not significant.

Table 2. Bootstrap Corrected Bivariate Correlations Between Structural Model Variables

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Black race (0 = non-Black, 1 = Black)	-.108**	-.120**	-.070*	-.181**	-.018	-.036
2. Hispanic (0 = non-Hispanic, 1 = Hispanic)		-.083**	-.149**	-.163**	-.005	.163**
3. Mixed-race (0 = non mixed-race, 1 = mixed-race			-.087*	-.151†	-.034	-.040
4. SES				.316**	.457**	.195**
5. Total S.C.					.282*†	-.213*†
6. Family structure (0 = 1 parent, 1 = two parents)						.024
7. ESL status (0 = non-ESL, 1 = ESL)						

N = 1,068
* Significant at p < .05; ** Significant at p < .01 (two-tailed).
†=bootstrap corrected estimates could not be calculated for this bivariate correlation

Table 3 provides the factor loadings for those items in our final measurement model that loaded on each of these three separate social capital factors. These three factors, in turn, represent a larger, second order factor we term "Total Social Capital," which can be viewed on the right hand side of Figure 1, which displays our final structural model. Upon request via email directed to the lead author, the reader will be provided with a lengthy technical description of the reliability, validity, and model equivalency testing we engaged in to demonstrate the statistical soundness of both our individual measures of social capital and our global measure of Total Social Capital.

Table 3. Measurement Model Results: First Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis Maximum Likelihood Bias Corrected Boot Sample v. ML Method

Observed Variables Survey Quest	Latent Social Capital Constructs	Factor Loadings: ML Bias-Corrected Bootstrap Samples	Factor Loadings: ML
1 (PS1)	Parent–School	.628**	.629***
2 (PS2)	Parent–School	.773**	.774***
3 (PS3)	Parent–School	.792**	.793***
4 (PS4)	Parent–School	.574**	.571***
7 (PP1)	Parent–Parent	.579**	.580***
8 (PP2)	Parent–Parent	.683**	.684***
9 (PP3)	Parent–Parent	.761**	.761***
10 (PP4)	Parent–Parent	.921**	.921***
11 (PP5)	Parent–Parent	.870**	.870***
12 (PP6)	Parent–Parent	.883**	.883***
13 (PP7)	Parent–Parent	.875**	.875***
15 (PC1)	Parent–Child	.384**	.382***
17 (PC3)	Parent–Child	.742**	.741***
18 (PC4)	Parent–Child	.672**	.670***

ML X^2=90.20***/df=57 CFI=.995 GFI=.987 RMSEA=.023
N = 1,068
Note. All regression weights are standardized estimates.
* Significant at $p < .05$; ** Significant at $p < .01$; *** Significant at $p < .001$

Structural Model of Race/Ethnicity, SES, and Total Social Capital

Finally, we assessed the validity of a full structural model (see Figure 1) in which we tested both the direct effects of race/ethnicity on our dependent latent variable Total Social Capital and the indirect effects on Total Social Capital through the mediating latent variable family SES, controlling for family structure and ESL status of child. The racial category White was the reference category, and thus all standardized regression coefficients along the paths from the race/ethnicity variables are interpreted relative to White families. Indirect standardized effect coefficients (IE's) were also generated to determine the importance of the mediating factors. We used modification indices to help create the final model depicted in Figure 1 which best fit the data (Bias Corrected [BC] standardized regression weights are presented along the paths). The fit indices suggest that the overall structural model fit the data exceptionally well

Figure 1. Structural Equation Model of Family Race/Ethnicity, SES, and Total Social Capital (with controls and ML bootstrap standardized regression weights
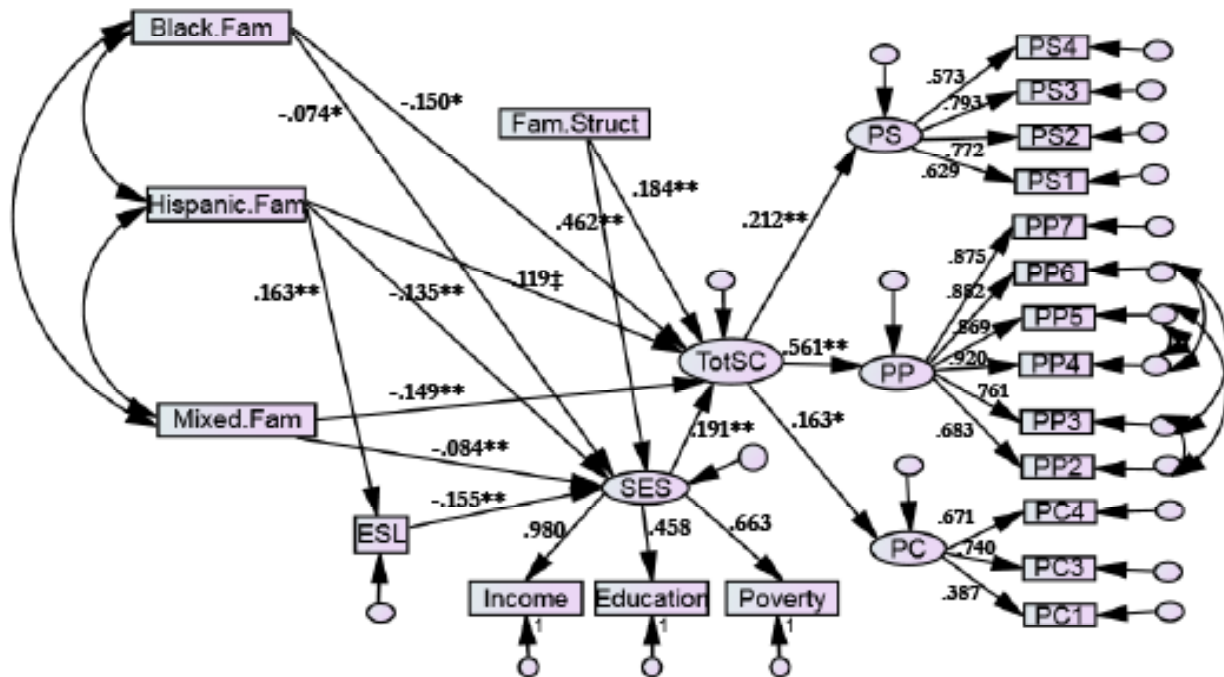
White family is the reference category for family race/ethnicity
‡ < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01; all item factor loadings significant at < .01 level
Fit Indices: chi-square = 280.21/df = 172 (p < .001), CFI = .987, NFI = .968, RMSEA = .024

(X^2 = 280.21/df = 172), CFI = .987, NFI = .968, RMSEA = .024 (90% CI = .019–.029), even though our Total Social Capital second order factor is less than perfect. Every bias corrected structural weight (direct effect) was a statistically significant predictor except for the path from Hispanic race to Total Social Capital, which was marginally significant (β = -.119, p = .075).

The relatively small, direct effects (negative) of both Black and mixed-race family on Total Social Capital were of almost the same magnitude (β = -.150, p = .025 for Blacks; β = -.149, p = .009 for mixed-race families), followed by Hispanic family ethnicity (β = -.119, as noted above). Hispanic family ethnicity had the strongest negative association with family SES (β = -.135, p = .002), followed in magnitude by mixed-race family (β = -.084, p = .005) and Black family race (β = -.074, p = .012) . Though not large in magnitude, all of the bias corrected IE's of each racial/ethnic category on Total Social Capital via the mediating variable SES were negative and statistically significant. These IE's were β = -.031 for Hispanics, β = -.016 for mixed-race, and β = -.014 for Black families. In other words, Black, Hispanic, and mixed-race family status not only had a direct, negative influence on Total Social Capital levels, but also had an indirect negative influence via their lower SES. The total IE for Hispanics was larger due to the additional negative IE that Hispanic family status had on SES via family ESL status (IE = -.025, p = .002).

Though not huge, the total effects (direct plus indirect effects) of race/ethnicity on Total Social Capital were largest for mixed-race (β = -.165, p = .003) and Black (β = -.164, p = .010) families, followed by Hispanic families (β = -.150, p = .033). There is arguably very little meaningful difference between these total effect sizes.

Summary of Structural Model Findings

We can conclude from this path analysis that being from a Black, Hispanic, or mixed-race family is not only directly associated with diminished overall Total Social Capital, but also indirectly via the small suppressing influence of family race/ethnicity on family socioeconomic status. Hispanic family ethnicity also had a second, significant (though relatively small) negative influence on family SES via ESL status. An important caveat to keep in mind when interpreting our findings is that with a relatively large sample size of 1,068, it is easier to obtain statistical significance than with smaller sample sizes. More important than statistical significance is the practical significance of effect sizes, most of which are relatively small (though not miniscule) in our path model, according to Cohen's (1992) recommendations for interpreting effect sizes. The standout exception in our model is the strong positive effect of family structure on Total Social Capital (β = .462, p = .002). In other words, all things

being equal, two-parent families had much higher socioeconomic status than did single-parent families.

In summary, being from a Black, Hispanic, or mixed-race family was associated with a diminished fund of Total Social Capital among this sampling of mostly well-off Long Island families in both a direct fashion as well as indirectly via the diminished SES of these racial/ethnic minorities. Hispanic ethnicity was also indirectly associated with lowered family SES via the mediating factor of ESL, a proxy for family language status. Importantly, all of these direct and indirect influences are net of the effect of household family structure (one-parent vs. two-parent families), which itself was the best predictor of family SES by a large margin. Family structure was also the second best predictor of Total Social Capital after SES ($\beta = .184$, $p = .008$) and the variable with the strongest IE on Total Social Capital via its influence on SES (IE = .088, $p = .003$).

In sum, those families who were the worst off with regards to diminished Total Social Capital were poor Hispanics in single-parent families receiving ESL services. When one considers that a disproportionate number of families who fit this description are also likely undocumented (based on previous research by the authors), this subset of families is truly "unconnected" from important funds of social capital which are essential for psychological, emotional, economic, community, and educational well-being.

Discussion

Our study used structural equation modeling on survey results from a sampling of relatively high SES, racially and ethnically diverse New York families with children in four elementary schools to accomplish several objectives. First, we validated three streamlined first-order factors of parent–parent, parent–school, and parent–child social capital, all from measures originally developed and piloted by McDonald and Moberg (2002). Then, we confirmed that these three factors were operating the same way among the four racial/ethnic groups of White, Black, Hispanic, and mixed-race families. Next, we provided some evidence for a moderately valid, broader second-order factor which we term Total Social Capital and which is comprised of the three first-order social capital factors of parent–school, parent–parent, and parent–child social capital. This more general construct is a measure of the combined fund of social capital available to the diverse sample of families in our study which comes from the positive interactions between parents and staff in their children's schools, other parents, and their own children. Then, we provided some evidence to suggest that the Total Social Capital construct is operating the same way among the four racial/ethnic groups.

Finally, we created a structural model which best explains the linkages between family race/ethnicity on the one hand and Total Social Capital on the other. We show that Black, Hispanic, and mixed-race family status is directly associated with diminished Total Social Capital among these families, as well as indirectly associated with diminished Total Social Capital via minority race/ethnicity's negative association with diminished family SES. In the case of Hispanic ELL families, there is another indirect, negative influence on Total Social Capital via the child's language status (a proxy for family language status).

Importantly, we have uncovered evidence that even middle- and upper-class minority families have access to less social capital, as we have defined it, than do White families. As far as we know, ours is the first social capital study of its kind to use a sample of families who are so socioeconomically advantaged. Our findings lend credibility to Bourdieu's (1986) notions of a social elite (in our case Whites) who hold so many intangible historical, social, and cultural advantages, beyond just those suggested by typical measures of class. Blacks, Hispanics, and mixed-race individuals have only recently populated the American middle and upper classes in any significant degree. We have evidence here that it may be some time before the advantages of centuries of established social and cultural norms associated with the White American middle class are assumed to the same degree by the other racial and ethnic minorities who have begun to sit down at the well-appointed supper table of middle and upper class America.

It is important to note that other researchers have argued that American Black families, in particular, do not suffer from diminished social capital, but rather operate in a White-created and operated system that marginalizes, devalues, and/or discourages their involvement (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Yan, 1999). Lareau (2002) and Horvat et al. (2003) argue that once class is controlled for, social capital differences by race essentially disappear. However, their research was based on small sample qualitative data. Using a national-level database, Ream and Palardy (2008) conducted an excellent quantitative study examining the relationship between class, various forms of social capital, and academic outcomes. They too, like us, conceptualized social capital in three dimensions. However, though they included race as a variable in their study, they unfortunately never elaborated upon these findings. Their published table reveals, though, that upper-class Black families have significantly less parent–child social capital (their best predictor of this construct) than other upper-class families. We encourage further large-scale, quantitative research on these important questions, expressly elaborating upon the connection between race and social capital, controlling for class.

Of course, there were some obvious limitations to our study. For one, the items used to measure parent–child social capital, in particular, seemed a bit

indirect, and might account for this measure being the weakest component of total social capital. Future measures of this construct should experiment with different items suggested by other researchers such as educational and cultural activities like visiting museums, reading to the child (Coleman, 1988), and participating in course selection (Ho & Willms, 1996). Future similar research should include a larger sampling of Asian families, who seem to buck certain trends in social capital compared to other ethnic groups (Bankston, 2014; Zhou, 2007). Future research should also consider asking a broader range of questions relating to parent–parent social capital (to avoid the cross-loadings we had in our study). Also, our effect sizes were generally small, perhaps due in part to less than perfect measures of social capital. Our study also has all the weaknesses of cross-sectional research.

If forms of social capital are truly part of a larger multidimensional social capital construct, then just working to increase parental involvement in schools (e.g., as mandated by NCLB and Race to the Top) only addresses one dimension of this social good and is likely not sufficient to address wide racial/ethnic gaps in academic achievement. In fact, Ream and Palardy (2008) found that among lower-class families in their study, more parental involvement in school was actually associated with lower student academic outcomes (probably as a result of the reasons for the parental involvement, e.g., low test scores and discipline issues). On a final, related note, future studies like our own should attempt to include measures of academic outcomes (as did Ream & Palardy, 2008) and investigate whether these also relate to total social capital, which much previous research has suggested is indeed the case.

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Appendix A: Parent Questionnaire (from McDonald & Moberg, 2002)

For Parent–School Social Capital Questions PS1–PS5: 1 = None, 2 = A Little, 3 = Some, 4 = A Lot

(School staff refers to principals, teachers, and counselors.)

PS1. How much do you trust the school staff to do what is best for your child/children?

PS2. How much do you feel respected by staff at this school?

PS3. How much do you feel that the school staff works to build trusting relationships with parents?

PS4. How much does the school staff share YOUR expectations for your child/children?
PS5. How much of a problem are cultural barriers between parents and staff at this school?

For questions PS6 and PP1: 1 = 0–1, 2 = 2–3, 3 = 4–5, 4 = 6+
PS6. How many of the school staff could you approach if you had a question about your child/children?
PP1. How many parents of your child's/children's friends at this school do you know?

For Parent–Parent Social Capital questions PP2–PP8: 1=None, 2=A Little, 3= Some, 4 = A Lot
PP2. How much support do other parents in this school provide you in services (babysitting, shopping, car pools, etc.)?
PP3. How much support do other parents in this school provide you in emotional support (sharing feelings)?
PP4. How much support do other parents in this school provide you in leisure (getting together for meals, parties, etc.)?
PP5. How much support do YOU provide other parents at this school in services (babysitting, shopping, car pools, etc.)?
PP6. How much support do YOU provide other parents at this school in emotional support (sharing feelings)?
PP7. How much support do YOU provide other parents at this school in leisure (getting together for meals, parties, etc.)?
PP8. How much do other parents at this school share your expectations for your child?

For Parent–Child Social Capital questions PC1–PC6: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3= Neutral, 4= Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree
PC1. I am a nurturing parent.
PC2. I have trouble expressing affection for my child/children.
PC3. I consistently encourage my child/children to express his/her emotions.
PC4. I often tell my child/children how I feel when he/she misbehaves.
PC5. I regularly talk to my child/children about his/her school activities.
PC6. I regularly participate in activities at my child's/children's school.