

Children's 'Place' in the Development of Neighbourhood Social Capital

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Abstract

The restrictions many parents place on children's spatial freedoms are often tied to concerns about 'urban risk'. Concurrently, those children afforded greater spatial autonomy are often represented as threatening and disruptive to local social interaction. Little research has, however, explored the implications of children's spatial freedoms on social cohesion. Framed by the concept of social capital, this paper examines the role children play in developing the kinds of connection and relationship that build social networks, trust and neighbourliness. Focusing on children's lives in three inner-city and two suburban locations in England, the paper explores neighbourhood social capital in relation to two 'critical interactions': first, between social policy, parenting values and children's autonomy and, secondly, between children's and parents' local engagement.

Introduction

Parental concerns regarding the risks children face in urban environments underlie many aspects of urban and suburban life, not least outward migration, the creation of gated communities and segregation between family and non-family areas. The restrictions placed upon children's spatial freedoms are frequently the outcomes of such anxieties and many parents are often torn between wishing to protect their children and wanting them to

be streetwise. As a result, parents frequently adopt strategies, often centred on ideological constructions of 'good' parenting, in order to manage their child(ren)'s use of public space (Valentine, 1995; Weller, 2005). Such ideologies are dynamic, contested over time and space, and shape children's lives in diverse ways (see, for example, O'Brien *et al.*, 2000, 2001; Reay and Lucey, 2000). Alongside differing parental approaches, children's experiences are affected by broader societal concerns over the 'place' of children within

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neighbourhoods and other public arenas. On the one hand, children are frequently portrayed as inherently vulnerable, incompetent and in need of protection from the risks of urban life, thus representing pure, innocent, 'little angel' notions of childhood (Jenks, 1996). On the other hand, and somewhat paradoxically, the presence and behaviour of (often older) children in public space are also regarded as intimidating and anti-social, and so detrimental to wider neighbourhood interaction (Valentine, 1996, 2004; see also Pain, 2003). This understanding represents the inherently bad, 'little devil' notion of childhood (Jenks, 1996). In these terms, children are viewed as a threat to the spatial hegemony of what is commonly regarded as a 'naturally' adult domain (Valentine, 1996). Concerns about the 'place' of children within neighbourhoods and other public spaces represent the preoccupations of many media and policy debates. Fundamentally, such concerns mirror broader societal anxieties surrounding community cohesion, trust and neighbourliness. Nevertheless, little research has explored the relationships between children's differing spatial freedoms and social cohesion at the neighbourhood level despite renewed policy interest in local social relations and cohesion (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Cattell, 2004). Framed by the concept of social capital, this paper examines the role children play in developing the kinds of connection and relationship that build social networks, trust and neighbourliness.

Fuelled by anxieties regarding increasing individualisation and the decline of interaction, trust and collectivity within neighbourhoods, social capital has become increasingly popular in policy debates both within the UK and the US as a means of understanding community cohesion and social exclusion (Schuller *et al.*, 2000; Butler and Robson, 2001; Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Field, 2003; Franklin, 2004; Middleton *et al.*, 2005). Whilst definitions of social capital are relatively

elusive, in this paper we work with a broad understanding defining social capital as the resources individuals and collectives derive from their social networks. It is through social interaction that social capital is developed (Weller, 2006a, 2007a; see also Franklin, 2004). Definitions employed by influential theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam vary tremendously in their focus. Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1995) centre their writings on integration and collective goods such as trust and reciprocity, viewing social capital as a positive force for community cohesion (see also, Weller, 2006a). Alternatively, Bourdieu regards social capital as a source of inequality, rather than cohesion not equally available to all (Field, 2003; Kovalainen, 2004; Adkins, 2005; Holland *et al.*, 2007). Despite divergences between definitions of social capital, much of the discussion across a broad range of authors centres on norms, trust and values, in addition to the quantity, nature and strength of networks and ties (Granovetter, 1973; Jacobs, 1961; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001; Cattell, 2004). One popular typology has been proposed by Putnam (2000) who differentiates between bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital refers to exclusive, inward-looking connections amongst homogeneous groups, which permit people to 'get by', whilst bridging social capital denotes outward-looking networks between different groups, which enable people to 'get ahead' (Putnam, 2000; see also Weller, 2006a). Michael Woolcock (2001) furthers this classification with the notion of linking social capital, which comprises a vertical shift allowing individuals or communities to access resources or formal networks of information through their informal connections.

Despite a burgeoning literature on social capital, there has been relatively little focus on the voices and experiences of children and young people (for exceptions, please see, V. Morrow, 1999, 2000; Raffo and Reeves,

2000; Bassani, 2003; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004; Leonard, 2005; Weller, 2006a, 2007a). Rather, many of the dominant theorists, such as Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, have tended to regard children as passive beneficiaries of their parents' social capital instead of active agents in their own right (see also Weller, 2006a). Moreover, the only attention afforded to children has been in the identification of neighbourhood social capital as the degree to which neighbours are prepared to intervene in children's ('anti-social') behaviour (Putnam, 2000). Children's experiences in and of public space may be viewed as a reflection of the level of trust developed in a locality and the degree to which common norms, values and reciprocity have been established (Schuller *et al.*, 2000; Weller, 2006a). Much of the literature suggests that, in areas where levels of social capital are high and trust is well-developed, parents will be more willing to afford their children greater autonomy. Levels of social capital are not only reflected in individual subjectivities, but are also generated cumulatively, and perhaps to some degree are limited, by local norms and notions of 'good' parenting. For example, the safer a neighbourhood is deemed to be, the more people will subscribe to that trust and neighbourliness. This paper seeks to further debate on social capital both theoretically and empirically by highlighting the ways in which children directly and indirectly contribute to the development of social capital within neighbourhoods.

To date, there has been limited discussion on social cohesion and neighbourhood social capital by children-centred researchers (for exceptions, see V. Morrow, 1999, 2000). This paper aims to frame theoretically children's urban geographies (please see Cahill and Pain, 2007) and in doing so seeks to promote children's voices in more mainstream (sub)urban debates. There has also been little discussion amongst social capital theorists over the role of space, place and geography

within such debates. The paper will also, therefore, highlight spatial differences in children's experiences. Whilst it is beyond the realms of the paper to discuss fully the contested notions of community and neighbourhood, it is important to note that such spaces are often problematically read as the only spatial containers of social capital thus neglecting the more complex arenas from which individuals and collectives draw meaning and a sense of belonging. Indeed, numerous children-centred studies have highlighted the importance of local micro-spaces to children and young peoples' lives (Percy-Smith and Matthews, 2001; Weller, 2007b).

Drawing on key findings from a four-year ESRC study,¹ which explored children's and parents' development and use of social capital during the transition to secondary school, this paper argues that both children's developing independence and sense of self derive, in part, from the neighbourhood social capital upon which they can draw. Moreover, many children play an important role in enabling the development of community cohesion and social capital, either directly via their own actions—for example, helping neighbours, 'hanging out' and building local networks—or indirectly by providing connections and networks for their parents and other members of the community. This paper is concerned with differences in children's experiences in relation to two key critical interactions which are tied to, and grow from, children's increasing independence. The first concerns the relationship between social policy, parenting ideologies and children's autonomy during the transition to secondary school. The second relates to the interaction between children's and parents' local engagement and the development of neighbourhood social capital. We begin by detailing the broader study from which this paper stems before moving on to outline key variations in children's levels of autonomy in different urban

and suburban locations. The remainder of the paper focuses on the ways in which the two key critical interactions are implicated in the development of neighbourhood social capital.

Researching Children's Neighbourhood Social Capital

The study from which this paper stems forms part of the Families and Social Capital ESRC Research Group programme of work. For the past four years, the project has been exploring the ways in which children and parents develop and deploy social capital during the transition to secondary school. The study was conducted in five contrasting locations comprising: two socially and ethnically diverse inner-city areas of London; one White working-class inner-city area in the Midlands; one predominantly White, lower-middle-class new town in south-east England; and one affluent outer London suburb.

In each of these sites, access to well-resourced schools was limited. The study adopted a mixed-method approach comprising questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and activity sheets with families from a number of different cultural, ethnic, religious and class backgrounds. We argue that a mixed-method approach comprising both children's and parents' accounts, coupled with wider quantitative data analysis allows trends and differences in children's opportunities for autonomy to be revealed, as well as illustrating the ways in which many contribute to the development of neighbourhood social capital and cohesion.

Fieldwork was conducted in two phases between 2003 and 2005. During the first phase, 588 children (aged 11–12) attending 12 primary schools (4–6 classes within each research locale) completed questionnaires which explored a number of issues including what changes they believed the move to secondary school would bring, whether they

would be moving schools with friends and/or siblings, and their interests and spatial freedoms outside school. At that time, 76 parents were also interviewed to determine their experiences of school admissions, concerns about their child's imminent move, parental networks, parenting practices and values, and trust in the local area, as well as their own educational experiences. The second phase of the study was carried out once the children had started secondary school. Participants moved from the 12 case-study primary schools to 103 secondary schools. Follow-up questionnaires were completed by 81 children aged 12–14. Focus group discussions were carried out with 75 children across a wide range of schools in order to glean peer group perspectives. These data were complemented with individual interviews comprising a sample of 20 children from a diverse range of backgrounds. These interviews provided more in-depth discussion of personal experiences, feelings, struggles and achievements and were conducted in participants' homes. This paper draws upon both quantitative and qualitative data from our own study as well as our analysis of large datasets such as the Time Use Survey 2000 (TUS).²

Children's Autonomy in Different Urban and Suburban Locations

Much discussion equates spatial freedom to independent mobility or exploring the outdoor environment (see, for example, Valentine and McKendrick, 1997; Spilsbury, 2005; Karsten and van Vliet, 2006). Nevertheless, children's freedom and autonomy are hard to define. Autonomy often refers to governance of the self and it is in these terms that we consider the transition to secondary school as a critical moment in children's lives allowing many to forge more independent relationships with, and also within, their local areas and beyond. As this paper will highlight,

opportunities for autonomy often occur at different spatial scales. For example, some children are not permitted to travel far but may enjoy a great deal of freedom within a small locality, whilst other children may travel unaccompanied over several London boroughs to get to school and yet are not allowed to play in their local park. Parents in this study discussed children's autonomy and freedom in a number of ways, often distinguishing freedom in decision-making at home from freedom to 'roam'. In relation to the latter, the majority of parents felt that their children have much less freedom to explore the local area than they were afforded as children (see also Karsten, 2005; Karsten and van Vliet, 2006). Some parents also felt their children had less freedom simply to 'be children', with the demands of school, or pressures to engage in teenage or adult activities. Alternatively, a significant group of parents, the majority of whom grew up in other countries, believed their children had *more* freedom than they had been afforded. What is meant by children's autonomy, however, remains complex, as spatial freedom is often dependent on a wide variety of contexts many of which are related to the activity pursued, the time of day, geographies of fear and trust, and local parenting cultures.

In our own sample of 588 primary school children, we constructed an index of autonomous travel drawing on children's experiences of travelling to school and to a wide range of activities outside the home including formal clubs and 'hanging out' in the park. The resultant index focused on the number of journeys children made unaccompanied by an adult. In constructing an index in this way, children who did not engage at all in any formal or informal activities outside the home were less likely to develop autonomous engagements than those who were accompanied by their parents, older siblings or another adult. Whilst the list was indeed prescriptive, our discussions with

children during the completion of the surveys and later interviews suggested that the categories used were useful indicators for determining the extent to which children are able independently to negotiate their surrounding neighbourhoods. The most significant correlates are detailed in Table 1.

Importantly, the index revealed two key geographical trends: a 'London effect' and a 'school effect'. Young participants living *outside* London were much *less* likely to travel autonomously than those in London. This echoes findings from Percy-Smith and Matthews' (2001) study which suggested that, whilst inner-city children are more likely to experience bullying, they were also more likely to be granted greater freedom to 'hang out' than those living in the suburbs. Suburban children generally had more space, but far fewer were able to conduct their lives outside parental surveillance. In this study, parents' accounts reflected these findings with many suburban families structuring children's activities and social networks (see also Fotel and Thomsen, 2004). At the same time, children who went to schools with high rates of poverty were less likely to travel autonomously, although at schools with similar levels of local poverty, inner London children travelled alone more than those living outside the capital. These variations did not simply relate to geographical differences between poverty, racial composition or local recorded crime, but reflected understandings of local parenting norms, as well as parents' and children's experiences of trust and mistrust in an area.

Findings from this study reveal much about the nature of social capital in different locations. It was apparent both in interviews with parents and in our focus group discussions with secondary school children that narrative relayed through social networks often shaped geographies of trust and fear. For example, participants often described places both within the immediate vicinity and

Table 1. Factors affecting the number of journeys participants made without an adult

	<i>Increases</i>		<i>Decreases</i>		<i>No significant effect</i>	
Participants' self-descriptions	Naughty	3.9	Obedient	3.0	Boy	3.4
	Has TV in room	3.6	In bed before	2.6	Muslim	3.2
	Went to a party recently	3.8	9 pm			
	By public transport to shops	4.1	Quiet	2.9	White	3.5
	Live near primary school	3.7	Only travels by car to shops	2.7	West African	3.8
Primary school	Inner London, low income, majority of students White	4.7	Asian	3.0		
			Midlands, exclusively White, high crime, very low income	2.7		
Local authority	Inner London, mixed area	3.8	Midlands, outer area	3.2		

Note: Number of journeys out of a possible total of 7 to the cinema, clubs, friends' homes, parks, school, shops and swimming (average = 3.45).

further afield as fearful places. Such accounts were based on both personal experience and constructed and reproduced through children's networks, as the following example highlights

The places where I don't really feels safe is [a local estate—the others in the group agree] and I'm not that confident on Ilford [fairly close to the participants' home] either 'cos down the market it's really crowded as I'm walking through to get into the Exchange and... Hackney [much further afield] 'cos there has been some rumours around there (Denis, focus group participant, East London).

Participants from a wide range of London schools 'othered' specific geographical locations, such as Hackney, despite having little direct experience of these areas. Concurrently, areas that are seen as fearful by some are not experienced as such by others, depending on the connections and relationships individuals have been able to develop.

Analysis of data from the TUS presents a different perspective on children's autonomy recording the time children aged 8–15 spend away from their parents during the period between the end of school and 8pm. In this

case, children living in London only spent an average of 28 minutes independently negotiating the environment compared with 39–40 minutes for children in other regions. In the TUS, but not amongst our own respondents, ethnicity was a key difference. In London, children from minority ethnic backgrounds averaged only 14.5 minutes autonomously in public space, compared with 31 minutes for children identifying themselves as White British. Indeed, O'Brien *et al.* (2000, 2001) found that children in their new town research site had more freedom to play outside than those living in inner-city London. Again, the complexity of defining children's autonomy is highlighted. Nevertheless, developing and examining quantitative data on children's autonomy provide valuable contextual material, which illustrates important spatial differences between children's experiences of 'freedom' within different urban and suburban settings. The remainder of this paper is concerned with exploring connections between children's autonomous interactions in such spaces and the formation of neighbourhood social capital.

Secondary School Transfer and the Dynamics of Children's Autonomy

For many children, the transition from primary to secondary school reflects a time of growing independence, greater spatial freedom and expanded social networks. Gill Valentine (1997, p. 74) depicts the period as a "watershed in children's independence". In their work on 'monitoring and supervision', Stace and Roker (2005) describe the move to secondary school as a time when parents often increase their emotional monitoring, whilst at the same time affording their child(ren) greater opportunities for independent mobility. Such findings were certainly reflected in our study, as Ashley highlights

When I was in Primary I wasn't really allowed out that much but now I'm allowed like down the park whenever I want if I don't have too much homework. I'm allowed to go to the cinema on my own (Ashley, focus group participant, East London).

The government's emphasis on parental choice in education means that for countless families, particularly those living in urban areas, children can seek to gain a place at a school some distance from their local neighbourhoods and away from their existing social networks. By the age of 11, 48 per cent ($n = 588$) of children in our survey travelled to school without an adult. This increased to 66 per cent during the first two years of secondary school. Girls were just as likely to travel long distances as boys. There was, however, a significant difference between the distance travelled to secondary school and the area in which the child lived. Children from the middle-class outer London suburb were far more likely to travel further than children living in our East London research site. In general, this reflected middle-class parents' desires for their children to attend selective grammar schools in neighbouring authorities. The first critical interaction this paper explores is,

therefore, concerned with the effect of current education policies and parents' responses to such policies on children's opportunities for developing neighbourhood social capital independent of their families (for analyses of the significance of children's social capital within school, please see Weller, 2006b, 2007a; Holland *et al.*, 2007).

Family background, parenting values and responses to government policies on school choice affected the extent to which children were able to develop social networks and relationships within vicinity of their homes. Analysis of our individual interviews with parents and children suggested that those from working-class backgrounds or those keen for their children to attend relatively sought-after schools outside the immediate locality afforded their children the greatest autonomy in the neighbourhood. For some children, the move to secondary school had a dramatic effect on their autonomy and acquisition of local social capital as JP's story illustrates. JP lives with his mother, Liz, and older brother in a small flat in a fairly deprived area of South London. At primary school JP spent much of his free time at home, playing computer games, watching TV and doing his homework. Whilst he did spend some time in more organised activities or 'hanging out' with other children, he rarely went out on his own. At that time, Liz described her sons as follows

They're little home birds. I have to bribe them to go out, to go and get me something, I purposefully forget something, 'Oh can you go and get me something?' to make them go out or 'Can you go and post a letter?' because otherwise they wouldn't go out.

Liz herself had invested in developing social capital in the local area by joining several groups and organisations and was keen for the boys to do the same. Since starting his local secondary school, JP has grown in confidence. He now socialises with friends after

school, spending around four evenings a week 'hanging out' in the local area riding bikes and playing football

When I was in primary school I hardly went out 'cos I was insecure a bit more but now I think I can take care of myself a bit more. When I was in primary school every time I went out I had to be in about 5 or something and now I can stay out to about 7 or 8 and then come in.

JP now structures and creates his own after school activities and does not attend any formal clubs. Whilst his experiences are by no means idyllic, he and his friends encounter difficulties and challenges in the local environment; his new-found confidence has given him greater spatial freedom enabling him to develop local networks.

For families such as JP's, the idea that children ought to be streetwise was apparent, with notions of 'practice' or 'training' being particularly important. Caitlin Cahill's (2000) work on 'street literacy' and teenagers' negotiation of urban environments is useful to draw upon. She argues that 'the street' is an important arena for learning and street literacy refers to gaining and using knowledge about, and constructing the self through, experiences of the local environment. Drawing on such notions, Bill, a father from the Midlands, strongly believed that his son should learn to be independent:

We said to Jason that 'You need to be walking to school now and need to get that bit of independence and that bit of streetwise'.

Jason, however, took a different slant on independence, drawing on his own social capital to negotiate a lift to school with his friend's mum! Whilst for many children, the transition marked a time of increased independence, the spatial freedom they were subsequently afforded by no means matched JP's experiences. Nevertheless, several participants managed to carve out

'niches of freedom' on the school journey. For example, Kiera and her family live in a small flat in a densely populated area of East London. Her father, Cam, spoke a lot about his life in Vietnam and his experiences inevitably impacted upon his views of life in London. Cam believed that his family had a great deal more freedom in England than in Vietnam, although his daughters were afforded little autonomy whilst at primary school. Since starting secondary school, Kiera has not been afforded a great deal more freedom in her leisure time, although she does travel to school without an adult. This time with her friends is significant. Kiera and her friends call for one another every morning by 'buzzing' on the entry phone of each other's flats. Travelling to school with friends has enabled Kiera to gain greater confidence and she enjoys the social element of the journey. On the way home, they walk the 'long way round' which affords them more time and space to socialise. This new-found freedom represents a small but real change for Kiera allowing her to develop networks and relationships with peers on the journey to school. As a group, Kiera and her friends provide one another with important 'coping' resources enabling each to construct a relationship with the local area independent of their families. For children like JP and Kiera, attending a local secondary school has enabled them to develop and access networks situated within their neighbourhoods.

Those parents seeking to balance structured activities with autonomy in local public spaces were more likely to be socially mobile parents who were seeking relatively 'good' schools for their children at intermediate distances from home. Children leading the most structured lives came from middle-class or socially mobile families who favoured very selective or private schools. Whilst these children had some opportunities for autonomy and independent mobility during their journey to school, their free time mainly

comprised more formal after-school activities. Matthew's story provides one such example. Matthew was present during interviews with his parents in 2004. During these discussions, it came to light that Matthew was critical of his parents' emphasis on structured activities, as the following extract from an interview with his mother, Rosemary, suggests

Rosemary: I've been overly directing in making sure that they did something ... I didn't want them to sit on the sofa watching telly all the time. I wanted them out and about doing things because I think that's the only way you learn. Unless you've got to do it for yourself.

Matthew: But it did mean that I couldn't invite anybody around because I was busy every single day of the week ... more and more.

Rosemary: Umm? True!

Matthew: Which I wasn't too happy with, surprisingly enough!

Matthew was interviewed again once he had started secondary school—a small private school some distance from the family home. His life had changed very little and whilst he spent less time in structured activities, his time was now taken up with his studies. Indeed, Matthew's networks within his own neighbourhood were very limited except for involvement in the church and he discussed only occasional interaction with a local boy who also attended his school

Occasionally but not very often and it depends ... sometimes we come home together if we come home at the same time but, today for instance, he had cross-country and I had choir so we came home at different times.

Discussions with highly ambitious middle-class parents often drew attention to contradictions in parenting, for whilst some parents were happy to allow their children to travel long distances to school alone or with friends, many did not afford their children similar spatial freedoms within the local environment.

Social policies, parents' (often class-based) responses to such policies and broader parenting ideologies are closely intertwined, affecting children's opportunities for autonomy. Policies on school choice in particular have important implications for children's development of local social capital, with those attending schools some distance from home less likely to develop or maintain networks in their neighbourhoods. As the final section of this paper highlights, children's development and maintenance of local social capital is integral to wider interaction within neighbourhoods.

The Interactive Nature of Children's and Parents' Local Social Capital

An important concern of many social capital debates is the notion that families and parenting styles and norms shape the way communities develop (Edwards *et al.*, 2006). In particular, Coleman (1988) argued that parental involvement is fundamental to instilling values and norms in children, and countering 'negative' peer group culture. His influential work controversially inferred that children living in large families, those living with lone mothers or with both parents in work and those new to an area were likely to acquire less social capital from their families and communities (see also Edwards *et al.*, 2006). Accordingly, Coleman (1988) believed that, in neighbourhoods where parents' networks were strong, where children were supervised and where common norms and values were instilled, intergenerational closure was achieved. In these terms, he regarded peer group interaction in a negative light, believing that it would lead to anti-social behaviour and the development of alternative values and norms. By neglecting children's *own* social capital, authors such as Coleman have failed to understand fully the relational nature of social capital within and across families.

In the same way that parents' social capital can provide a wide range of resources for children, many children also provide resources for their siblings and wider family (Morrow, 1999). Edwards *et al.* (2006), for example, detail the role older siblings play in broadening the spatial and social horizons of their younger brothers and sisters. Similarly, many parents in this study stated that it was only when they had children that they developed local friendships. The second critical interaction this paper explores is the relational nature of children's and parents' local engagement and its effect on neighbourhood social capital.

As alluded to in the previous section, parents' own social capital, norms and values affect children's opportunities for developing autonomy and neighbourhood social capital. During interviews, parents discussed their own involvement in the local community and the fears and aspirations they had for their children. There were clear examples where parents' local involvement (and non-involvement) affected children's autonomy in quite similar environments. Those parents actively involved in the local area were more likely to afford their children greater autonomy. Liz, a working-class mother living in a deprived area of South London, was actively involved in a number of local associations and was keen for her two sons to spend time exploring the neighbourhood and building their own networks. Whilst many middle-class families in the suburbs were often more restrictive, those living in pockets of affluence within disadvantaged inner-city areas were particularly keen for their children to seize the opportunities inner-city London offered, as Fern discusses

[Older daughter] has friends whose parents will not let them go on public transport and that's at 13! One is driven in from Greenwich every day and picked up so that's the congestion charge for a start. I am not like that! I always joke to [older daughter] 'I'm a slack mother!'. I'm not, but I do feel quite strongly that if you

live in London, you cannot live on tenterhooks the whole time (Fern, mother, South London).

Parents involved in evangelical churches were also much more relaxed with regard to their children's negotiation of the local neighbourhood. For example, one middle-class Christian mother living in a deprived area of East London felt strongly that people should be trusting rather than suspicious of others. Again, discourses around 'learning to be streetwise' and 'letting go' often clash with notions of 'good' parenting. Such ideologies interact with factors such as class, faith, location and so on in complex ways. What is apparent is that parents' own social capital and involvement in an area often means that children are afforded greater autonomy. Similarly, when parents have fewer local connections, children also tend to have less opportunity to develop an autonomous relationship with the local area.

Whilst the examples cited so far illustrate the way in which parents' values, experiences and involvement shape children's autonomy and acquisition of social capital, we also had examples where children's local connections exceeded those of their parents. Indeed, in some situations, young participants concealed their local networks, as the following story illustrates. Michael, a West African boy living in South London, leads a relatively structured life attending many after-school activities. He goes to a prestigious school some distance from the family home and commutes daily across several London boroughs. Despite this, he and his brothers have only just been allowed to play football in the local park, within sight of the family home. Michael's mother, Folami, has few connections in the immediate vicinity and was not keen for her sons to mix with local children

Susie: So you know quite a few local kids through the park?

Michael: Yeah, you get to know them all.

Susie: So in this area here, there aren't many children?

Folami: There is only one child here.

Michael: No there's two! My friend and then there's a family who have got two children.

Folami: Yeah, but you don't see them?

Michael: I see them when I go and ride my bikes.

Susie: So you see some of them down the park?

Michael: Yes. I see quite a few people that come to the park regularly but most of them live sort of at the far back there and come from different estates around the area.

Susie: How do the local people treat children?

Michael: They actually treat you okay unless you do something that they don't really like and they'll tell you off but, apart from that, they're...

Folami: How do you know that !?

Michael: No, but I see other people getting told off.

Folami was shocked by revelations that Michael and his brothers were mixing with other local children in the park, calling into question the assumption made by several theorists that social capital is unitary within families. Many of the influential writers on social capital regard children as the future beneficiaries of their parents' social capital rather than active social capitalists in their own right (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 2000). Findings from our study challenge this view as children both indirectly and directly forged relationships and connections for their parents. In terms of children's indirect involvement in their families' social capital, many parents suggested that they had established more networks and friendships in the local area through their children than by any other means—via antenatal classes, nursery and the primary school, or through their children's friends' families. Some parents found firm friends through their children's

connections and in one case went on holiday together. Similarly, another mother, Beverley, described her relationship with some of the parents she befriended at her child's primary school

When we see one another on the street, it's almost like an old brother or sister we haven't seen for a long while and it's a big excitement.

Such networks provided a wide range of resources including friendship and support. One common example, cited by a large number of participants, was the support provided by the networks parents established in the primary school playground during the process of secondary school applications. Whilst such networks could be exclusive and divisive, echoing the darker side of social capital, for many they formed important sources of support and information enabling them to negotiate the secondary school admissions process with greater ease.

The study also revealed numerous instances where children were instrumental in developing parental and neighbourhood social capital by more direct means. For example, in the process of teaching their children 'street literacy' before starting secondary school, several parents first had to learn about the local area and the local public transport system. Car-bound parents in particular gained new insights into the local area as a result. Furthermore, in individual interviews with secondary school children, several discussed relationships with their neighbours. Young participants often looked after their neighbours' homes, plants and pets. In London, JP watered his elderly neighbours' houseplants while they were on holiday, whilst in the South-East Molly took care of the guinea pig next door and in the Midlands Troy tended to his elderly neighbour's garden. In return, children sometimes received small amounts of money, Christmas presents, souvenirs from holidays, as well as regular, dialogue. In these terms, children actively

engaged in fostering bridging social capital across generations, sometimes bridging ethnic and religious differences.

Importantly, the development of neighbourhood social capital, on the part of families, needs to be understood in terms of the interactive nature between children's and parents' networks and engagement. One pertinent example of this is mother and daughter, Raveena and Kat, who live in a quiet residential neighbourhood in a relatively deprived borough in East London. Raveena is fairly active in her local community, and enjoys living there. She has been involved in a number of campaigns—for example, on road safety. Her involvement and determination have been passed on to Kat, who is a class representative on the school council and is currently campaigning for a girls' football team with the support of her mother and teacher

Kat: No. I wanted to enter a football club though ... a local football club.

Susie: Is there a girls' team?

Kat: No. I'm writing a letter to Tony Blair.

Susie: Are you?

Kat: The teacher says 'I will help you write it'.

Susie: You'll have to get a team together.

Kat: Mum's trying a lot of things like you know getting a local Youth Project teams and more girls' stuff around here. It *will* happen one day!

Kat's story is an example of interactive social capital where a parent is helping their child to build social capital out of a concern for children's lack of local facilities. At the same time, parents also develop social capital through such processes. For other children, interactivity was based around, and situated within institutions such as schools and churches. Children's activities within and around such spaces illustrate examples of what Putnam (2000) referred to as bonding

and bridging social capital. Jamie, whose family originates from the Philippines, highlighted how through both his school and church he developed bridging social capital with other members of his East London neighbourhood

Most of us get involved in the community a lot like when we have a school project and stuff for like the elderly when we make food parcels for the elderly, we help by giving food to them and stuff ... Because my Mum is like the leader of the Church, our Church gets involved in the community so

Such levels of neighbourly and community interaction were far from universal and instances of difficulties with local residents often impacted upon children's feelings towards the wider neighbourhood. Indeed, children's autonomy could also be constrained by the presence of destructive neighbourhood social capital, as the following story details. Tor started travelling unaccompanied in his final year of primary school, taking the bus from his South London estate to his school half an hour away. Tor's estate is notorious for the killings of several young Black boys, including Damilola Taylor in 2000 and, during the writing of this paper, Michael Dosunmu (*BBC News*, 2007). During my visit to interview his father, Tor proved to be an eloquent and confident 11 year-old. For the past 18 months, however, he has opted not to venture out in his local area after school

I don't really go and play out because the last time I played out someone was trying to pick a fight with me. So I don't really like to play out anymore. I like to stay inside and play games inside so I don't really ... I've witnessed lots of fights but it's not really safe for me to go outside and start playing with other people because once ... I was playing with my own ball and one boy came out and said 'That's my ball!' and I said 'No it's not your ball' and then he got angry and he jumped over the fence and he wanted to start fighting with me ... then one girl came to sort it out and I

just went upstairs and from that day I didn't want to play outside anymore because I just don't want to get into trouble all the time and then there'll be calling their parents and [saying] if I hurt them ... they'll call their parents and then there'll be a war between the parents and there's no need for any more [for war] ... That's what I know this area to be. It's quite an area that has war and it's not really a good area ... because usually you see big boys around ... 14 and 15 carrying these pocket-knives.

Amongst the children we worked with, Tor's story was not unique. Several parents and children detailed examples of incidents that had affected perceptions of safety in the local area, thus illustrating how children's and parents' experiences of the darker side of social capital affect children's spatial freedoms.

Conclusions

The concept of social capital provides a useful theoretical framework for exploring the implications of children's differing spatial freedoms, as well as the interactive nature of families' networks and relationships within different neighbourhoods. The paper has pointed to two key critical interactions significant in shaping children's 'place' in the development of neighbourhood social capital. Whilst these interactions are by no means exhaustive, they serve as useful illustrations of the interconnection between policy, parenting and children's agency in relation to neighbourhood social capital and community cohesion. Challenging the writings of dominant social capital theorists, we argue that social capital is not unitary within families. Rather, children are active agents in the development and maintenance of social capital at the level of the family and neighbourhood. Moreover, findings from this study suggest that the process of social capital formation and maintenance is iterative.

If parents are fearful of the surrounding environment, then children are less likely to become immersed in local networks and familiar with local geographies. Likewise, the fewer connections children have in their neighbourhoods, the less likely parents are to establish relationships with other parents and the wider community. At the same time, parents' views are not fixed and children's acquisition of local social capital may indeed help to build parents' confidence in the local area, in the same way that parents' connections appear to have a positive affect on the opportunities for autonomy and independent mobility afforded to children.

Children's experiences are diverse and, whilst some are constrained by negative social capital within neighbourhoods, many are involved in developing networks with children, parents and the wider community helping to foster cohesion amongst neighbours. At the same time, a number of key policies, particularly those relating to parental choice in education, appear to contradict other policy statements that argue for the need to use social capital to build greater community cohesion and social integration. Attending a school outside the immediate neighbourhood potentially provides children with fewer opportunities to develop local social capital (Holland *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, policies that either neglect the needs of the young (Karsten and van Vliet, 2006; Weller, 2007b) or criminalise their activities in public space do little to promote children's engagement in their local neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, many of the examples cited in this paper run contrary to popular concerns both about community cohesion and the 'place' of children within neighbourhoods.

Notes

1. Families and Social Capital ESRC Research Group (www.lsbu.ac.uk/families), award reference: M570255001.

2. The Time Use Survey 2000 is a national dataset of diaries detailing the time participants dedicated to different activities.

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