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*Review of Theories of Social Capital: Researchers
Behaving Badly*, by Ben Fine

Sanford F. Schram

Bryn Mawr College, sschram@brynmawr.edu

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many directions, sometimes from the top down, but also from the bottom up, as radical engagement by poor people's groups in Mumbai and the ABC Region of São Paulo set agendas and sparked collaborative action. His understanding of partnership accommodates inevitable conflict and inequalities of power since these can hardly be wished away, and since responsible democratic actors must seek to enhance governance even while battling persistent inequalities. His best cases incorporate some version of responsible bargaining and genuine policy learning within partnerships, moving beyond simple interest-group models, but also beyond forms of deliberative democracy that tend to stress large public forums and/or representative samples of participants. In the author's model, the complexity of problems, relationships, and coproduction within extended networks for public value creation requires building forms of trust and mutual accountability that are more dense, persistent, and reflexive than typically found in many forms of deliberative democracy—though some do tend to focus on recurrent problem solving, reducing inequalities of voice, and institutionalization (e.g., Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation*, 2004).

The analysis of the creative role of civic intermediaries is the great strength of the book, although Briggs could have given us more measures of organizational capacity (resources, networks, staff, public communication, membership mobilization). In one case at least, the dynamic has been even more robust than he shows. Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, which spearheaded the successful San Francisco ballot campaign in the 1990s for a children's budget and generated independent youth and parent groups to ensure passage and reauthorization, was also at the center of the struggle to establish a citywide youth commission. Composed of young people, ages 12 to 23 years old, the commission helps organize through youth networks across the city, and it has official responsibilities for public deliberation and reporting to the board of supervisors on all policies affecting youth. When Margaret Brodtkin, the dynamic leader of Coleman, was appointed to head the city's department of children, youth, and families in 2004, she brought her frame of youth empowerment to the process and criteria by which the department managed grants, sparking a culture change within the department, as well as within some of the traditional nonprofits in the field (see Carmen Sirianni and Diana Schor, "City Government as Enabler of Youth Civic Engagement," in James Youniss and Peter Levine, eds., *Policies for Youth Civic Engagement*, 2009).

This example represents one way to bring innovations to scale, a key challenge noted by the author. While he is right to warn against relying on the public sector and to highlight diverse avenues, I think that the enormous challenges of building and sustaining civic and partnership strategies and capacities for public problem solving calls for a much more systematic approach by public agencies

at all levels of government (see Carmen Sirianni, *Investing in Democracy*, 2009). We have a good number of cases from the United States and around the world where local as well as national government agencies enable civic engagement, collaborative problem solving, and democratic network governance. We have available many practical tools, templates, and policy designs that can be leveraged for much greater scope and impact. But we need to look at the concept of policy design for democracy, civic policy feedback, public administration, and planning in broader ways, especially when tailored to local/regional policy challenges, and we also need to be willing to view public spending through the lens of investments in democracy.

Briggs's book is an indispensable contribution for those figuring out how to make collaborative problem solving a core component of vibrant, effective, pluralist, and just democracies in the twenty-first century.

Theories of Social Capital: Researchers Behaving Badly. By Ben Fine. New York: Pluto Press, 2010. 304p. \$110.00 cloth, \$45.00 paper.

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— Sanford F. Schram, *Bryn Mawr College*

Ben Fine has been writing about the limitations of the concept of social capital for more than 20 years. The 34-page bibliography in this book includes 44 separate publications authored by Fine on the topic. He tells us at the outset that he had recently tried to resist writing further about it, but just when he thought he had escaped its clutches he was pulled back in, when folks at the World Bank invited him to participate in a session designed to show the concept's utility for addressing the problems of economic development around the globe. It was at that point that Fine knew he had to go back into the trenches to fight the good fight on this topic. The result is a book meant to be a synoptic critique on how the concept of social capital continues in an era of globalization to be far too fashionable a social science conceit and needs to be taken down a peg or two (at a minimum). The text delivers on its promise, providing an exhaustive, if at times exhausting, blow-by-blow analysis demonstrating that the trendiness of the social capital concept has led to its ever-widening trivialization across a growing number of academic disciplines, such that its contribution for helping us understand how to respond to the problems of globalization could well be negative.

Theories of Social Capital is not your usual academic monograph; it is not, strictly speaking, a focused study of a particular topic based on empirical research, qualitative or quantitative. There are some index searches and other attempts to demonstrate how the concept of social capital has achieved its hypertrophied status. Nor is it the usual theoretical investigation of an idea or concept; it lacks sustained attention to the development of the idea's

component parts or a demonstration of the concept's uses and applications. Instead, the book is a no-holds-barred critique of the growing literature that exemplifies the popularity of this concept in the current period. And it is quite polemical. Its subtitle is *Researchers Behaving Badly*. The text is studded with puns (some better than others).

Fine critiques James Farr's attempt to examine the intellectual history of the concept of social capital by saying that social capital has no intellectual history! Yet, throughout, the book relies heavily on George Ritzer's idea of the McDonaldization of social relations in an era of globalization to drive home the point that in the hands of social scientists today, social capital has become a cheapened version of the original idea. The problem is that one cannot really say this without implying that the concept has an intellectual history. In over-the-top polemical style, as it moves to its central object of concern—Robert Putnam's thesis about the decline of social capital in his widely read book *Bowling Alone* (1995)—Fine's narrative invokes both the bowling obsessions of the movie *The Big Lebowski* and the fact that the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh used a bowling club to organize the bombing of the federal building there. The looseness of this polemical level of discourse is exemplified by Fine's calling *The Big Lebowski* *The "Great" Lebowski*. This is a polemic with very little time for attention to detail. But only in part.

While the polemical style can be its own form of McDonaldization of arguments that are deserving of a more nuanced presentation, the book's narrative is redeemed by its relentlessness. *Theories of Social Capital* held this reader's attention throughout by consistently revealing in detail, on the one hand, the shortcomings of most of the many analyses it examines and, on the other hand, effectively underscoring the insights of the few studies found worthy of commendation. In the end, in spite of the polemics and not because of them, the case is convincingly made that what started out as a nuanced concept has become a trivialized fad. Social capital is its own form of social capital that social scientists can invoke to make their study of other things superficially seem to be new and different, trendy and cutting edge.

The book begins by highlighting how social capital continues to grow in popularity, spreading across disciplines and recently becoming even a popular topic at the World Bank in its efforts to address underdevelopment in a globalizing world. Fine returns to his earlier writings to provide background on how two main forms of the social capital concept arose of the last 30 to 40 years. The first is indebted to rational choice models that stress economistic thinking. For the author, this first school of thought is best exemplified by the writings of the economist Gary Becker (inadvertently missing from the index) and the sociologist James Coleman.

The second version of the concept grows out of the writings of Pierre Bourdieu and provides a more nuanced

sociological account of how social capital is but one form of capital that people can trade on in order to negotiate their way through social networks. Bourdieu is at pains to stress the importance of human, economic, and cultural as well as social capital, with all having the ability to be expressed in order to realize symbolic capital. Fine does criticize Bourdieu for allowing culture and social relations to trump how economic structures, say, the capitalist economic structure, create the rules and resources by which people can make their way in the world; however, he still prefers Bourdieu's to Becker's and Coleman's more individualistic rational choice framework that occludes altogether consideration of political-economic context. Fine goes on to show that in spite of its advantages over time, Bourdieu's perspective got marginalized, the rational choice perspective got overemphasized, as in the prominent work of Putnam, and even though there has been a BBBI (Bringing Bourdieu Back In) movement, it has largely reemphasized Bourdieu's ideas in a piecemeal fashion that reinforces the economistic rational choice perspective. For Fine, what remains neglected is the Bourdieuan sensitivity to context concerning how social actors use social capital to work their way in a social field.

By the time the World Bank arrives with its attempts to build social capital in the Third World, we lose the ability to account for context, structure, political economy, and the limits of global capitalism. At this point, social capital is not just a trivialization of its original self but also a rationalization for neoliberal policies that promote a globalizing capitalist economy.

This, then, is a very worthwhile polemic. It generates critical thinking about the social sciences and their complicity in the neoliberal failure that goes by the name "globalization." Public policies designed to get the poor to acquire more social capital so that they can better themselves are just the latest way to ignore the power of economic structures that oppress the poor. As a concept, social capital has been reduced to the newest version of the culture-of-poverty argument that the poor have only themselves to blame for their poverty.

Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America. By Jason Frank. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. 360p. \$89.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Hybrid Constitutions: Challenging Legacies of Law, Privilege, and Culture in Colonial America. By Vicki Hsueh. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. 208p. \$74.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.
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— Andrew R. Murphy, *Rutgers University*

In her 1990 APSA presidential address, Judith Shklar noted that much of the tradition of American political thought over the years has consisted of "a profound meditation upon our political experiences and our peculiar and often