

**The Dark Side of the Force:  
The Downside of Social Capital and Indigenous Higher Education**

**Nikki Maree Moodie**

A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National  
University

May 2014



## ***Declaration***

I declare that the material contained in this thesis is entirely my own work, except where due and accurate acknowledgement is made in the text.

Signed: 

Date: *6 November 2014*

Nikki Maree Moodie

Word count (excluding front matter, references & appendices): 81 880

## *Acknowledgements*

My mother had to fight to give me choices. As a descendent of the Gamilaraay nation, I believe I have a responsibility to use the opportunities I was given to help recreate the possibility of choice for others.

I would like thank my supervisor, Professor David Marsh, for the academic, professional and personal support he provided throughout my candidacy.

I would also like to thank the Indigenous student support centres, their staff and students who made this research possible, for their time, knowledge and support.

This thesis could not have been written without the support of Robert Stephenson, my Mum, Donna Moodie, and brother, Ben Moodie.

*Publications that have supported this thesis*

Conference presentations

Stephenson, N. (2010), 'Approaches to the Downside of Social Capital', *Social Causes, Private Lives: The Annual Conference of The Australian Sociological Association*, Macquarie University, Sydney, 6-9 December 2010.

Iu, J. and N. Stephenson (2011), 'The Exclusionary Nature of Networks: Consequences for Social Exclusion and Social Capital', *Social Policy in a Complex World: Australian Social Policy Conference*, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 6-8 July 2011.

Refereed conference proceedings

Stephenson, N. and Iu, J. (2012), 'The Neglect of Economic Capital in Social Exclusion', *Emerging and Enduring Inequalities: The Annual Conference of The Australian Sociological Association*, University of Queensland, 26-29 November 2012.

## *Abstract*

Social capital has been a popular, yet contested, concept and the possibility that it has a 'dark side', has long occupied researchers and policymakers. However, the diverse heritage of the idea has led to theoretical incoherence and difficulties in operationalisation and measurement. This thesis argues that many of these issues can be resolved by revisiting Bourdieu's interpretation of social capital, which permits a more robust analysis of social capital's positive and negative outcomes.

In order to explore these ideas empirically, this thesis examines the downsides of social capital in the context of Indigenous tertiary education in Australia. Social capital has been identified as an important factor for academic success; particularly for minority, ethnic or historically marginalised groups, the creation of social capital is identified as a key factor in positive educational outcomes. Yet, narratives of dysfunction, disengagement and weak social norms are common in discussions of poor academic outcomes for Indigenous people.

Largely absent from this debate, particularly in Australia, is a discussion of how social capital mirrors existing patterns of inequality for Indigenous people. Consequently, also missing is a discussion of how social capital's downsides can impede a student's ability to succeed in the education system. This thesis therefore asks two questions:

1. What can a 'forms of capital' approach add to understanding the resources that Indigenous students use and need in tertiary education?
2. How does the idea of social capital's downsides explain the challenges Indigenous students face in tertiary education?

Rather than perpetuate a deficit explanation for the downside of social capital, this thesis argues that the negative effects of network membership can be understood as an effect of social location. For Indigenous Australians, this includes a history of colonisation, dispossession and marginalisation, which has had a profound effect on social norms and organisation. Bourdieu's interpretation of social capital offers a way to break with dominant versions of the theory which tend to see the negative effects of social capital as the sole responsibility of individuals and communities.

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## *Abbreviations and Acronyms*

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>ACER</b>	Australian Council for Educational Research
<b>AEP</b>	See NATSIEP
<b>AIATSIS</b>	Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
<b>ATSIHEAC</b>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (established 2012)
<b>ATSIC</b>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (disbanded 2004)
<b>AUSSE</b>	Australasian Survey of Student Engagement
<b>CAEPR</b>	Centre for Aboriginal Economic and Policy Research
<b>CYI</b>	Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership
<b>DEET</b>	Department of Employment, Education and Training (superseded by DEST)
<b>DEEWR</b>	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
<b>DEST</b>	Department of Education, Science and Training (superseded by DEEWR)
<b>FaHCSIA</b>	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
<b>HREC</b>	Human Research Ethics Committee
<b>HREOC</b>	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (renamed Australian Human Rights Commission in 2009)
<b>IEN</b>	Indigenous Ethics Network
<b>IHEAC</b>	Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (2005-2012)
<b>ITAS</b>	Indigenous Tutorial Access Scheme
<b>MCEECDYA</b>	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (superseded MCEETYA)
<b>MCEETYA</b>	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (1993-2009)
<b>NATSIEP</b>	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
<b>NATSISS</b>	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
<b>NHMRC</b>	National Health and Medical Research Council
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>RG</b>	Resource Generator
<b>RHEAOATSIP</b>	Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, also shortened to the <i>Behrendt Review</i>
<b>SCRGSP</b>	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision
<b>TAFE</b>	Technical and Further Education
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training

## *Terminology*

This thesis acknowledges that the terms ‘Indigenous’, ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Torres Strait Islander’ are colonial descriptions which do not recognize the diversity of the indigenous peoples of Australia, and remove the distinct cultural identities and sovereignty of Australia’s First Nations people. This thesis will refer to specific language groups and nations where possible, but must address a number of additional concerns, such as the anonymity of respondents, national-level policies, and the need to maintain consistency with the literature. Therefore, this thesis adopts the word ‘indigenous’ with a lower-case ‘i’ to refer generally to First Nations peoples, and issues or research concerned with First Nations peoples more broadly, and the term “Indigenous” to refer to Australia’s First Nations people, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander of Australia. Where other sources refer specifically to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people (or knowledges, policies or cultures for example) the terminology used in this thesis will reflect that in the original source.

## *Chapter 1 Introduction*

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Orthodox interpretations of social capital, most often based on the work of James Coleman and Robert Putnam, examine positive outcomes for individuals or communities that accrue as the result of building or possessing social capital. Although there are relatively few authors who treat social capital as a normative concept (such as Cox and Caldwell 2000; Rothstein 2005), and many who allude to the possibility that social capital may generate negative outcomes (for example, Putnam 2000; Cigler and Joslyn 2002; Winter 2000; Woolcock 2000a), the idea that there is a ‘downside’ (Portes and Landolt 1997) or ‘dark side’ (Putzel 1997) to social capital remains relatively unexplored in the literature.

The literature on social capital and education is extensive; substantial parts of both Pierre Bourdieu’s and James Coleman’s work are focused on explaining educational outcomes. Yet, scholars in both traditions have left the influence of negative effects of social capital on educational outcomes relatively unexplored. In Australia, discussion about social capital was largely sparked by Eva Cox’s 1995 Boyer Lectures (Cox 1995), and the idea has been adopted in research and in policy. However, here too there is little work attempting to understand the relationship between the negative effects of social capital and education.

In the context of Indigenous education, social norms that appear to restrict individual mobility and academic achievement have attracted both media attention and comment from academics and political leaders (Anderson 2012; Andersen, Bunda and Walter 2008:2; Behrendt et al. 2012; Gooda 2011a; Langton 2008). Governments have attempted to enact policies that either punish or compel parents to engage in particular behaviours, in order to improve educational outcomes for their children (Billings 2010). Using a critical social capital framework based on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) work, this thesis explores the utility of the idea of a downside of social capital in understanding the challenges Indigenous students face in higher education.

As such, a major part of this thesis is a critique of orthodox approaches to social capital, which are often based on the work of Robert Putnam (2000) and James Coleman

(1988a, 1988b). These approaches acknowledge that social capital: “can be directed towards malevolent, antisocial purposes, just like any other form of capital” (Putnam 2000:22). However, Putnam’s treatment of the so-called ‘dark side’ of social capital is limited to accepting the possibility that social networks may generate negative outcomes for those outside an individual’s network. Absent from Putnam’s theory is the possibility that social capital exists as an individual resource, or that it can constitute, or generate, negative resources for network members. Similarly, James Coleman, and work based on his approach, attributes negative outcomes for individuals to a lack of family engagement with schools and school communities. Coleman explains a lack of social capital, or the negative effects thereof, as an effect of the breakdown of family structures. These approaches tend to ignore any relationship between social capital and other types of resources, such as the intergenerational transfer of wealth or tacit knowledge about the operation of educational institutions. This neglects the context in which networks develop and, therefore, limits an analysis of how individuals are able to develop resource-rich networks. Both of these perspectives perpetuate a deficit approach to Indigenous education and social capital, which attributes poor outcomes to families and students, without interrogating the underlying historical, socio-political and economic causes underpinning the development of networks and the norms that are carried by them.

My argument here is that Bourdieu’s (1986) interpretation of social capital can provide a more flexible and rigorous explanation of negative outcomes and poor resources, because he theorises the relationship between different forms of capital as uneven and highly context-dependent. In my view, this perspective is able to inform a discussion of the downside of social capital in a more nuanced manner than either James Coleman’s or Robert Putnam’s interpretation of social capital.

I will begin by discussing the intellectual heritage of the concept of social capital, identifying the limitations of Robert Putnam and James Coleman’s work. I will then discuss a Bourdieusian<sup>1</sup> interpretation of social capital, considering its limitations and

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘Bourdieuian’, ‘Bourdieuian’, ‘Bourdieuian’ and ‘Bourdieuian’ all appear in the literature as eponymous adjectives. Although there is no clear consensus, the literature review indicates that a slight majority of work adopts ‘Bourdieuian’, and that is the terminology which is consistently applied in this thesis.

opportunities, before drawing on his theories to develop the concept of the downside of social capital.

The thesis will then briefly explore the political context of Indigenous education in Australia, before moving to a discussion of the results of the empirical research. In order to explore the downside of social capital, fieldwork was conducted with Indigenous students enrolled at two Australian universities: one regional university; and one metropolitan, dual sector, institution<sup>2</sup>. A range of methods were used to gather data on the types of capital to which students had access, including focus groups, surveys and interviews. However, the primary method used to explore the downside of social capital was a participant-driven photography project; images generated by participants were used to guide semi-structured interviews on the barriers they faced and support they received in their university career. These methods provide rich data on the resources individuals have access to, including those resources which constitute or generate negative outcomes, as well as participant's perceptions of the outcomes resulting from their resources and networks.

Research on the downside of social capital is in its infancy, and understanding individual's lived experiences of the negative consequences of social capital should provide an important contribution to the body of knowledge in this field. Of course, the research generated as part of this thesis is not representative and cannot claim to offer a definitive interpretation of how the downside of social capital affects Indigenous students at university. However, this thesis does aim to explore the relevance of the theory in this context and, in doing so, seeks to disrupt orthodox theories which function to perpetuate deficit and culturalist approaches to Indigenous higher education. Without minimising the importance and value of family and community connections, this thesis concludes that colonial structures continue to influence the types and effects of social networks accessible by Indigenous tertiary education students who participated in this research.

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<sup>2</sup> It was a condition of access to these sites that the universities and the participants remain anonymous, and all reasonable care has been taken to meet the wishes of participants in this regard.

## The Popularity of Social Capital

The concept of social capital has seized the imagination of policy makers, community workers, international organisations and researchers for more than a decade. The concept has been applied, to name but a few areas, in: international development (Bebbington 2004; Fox and Gershman 2000; Portes and Landolt 2000; OECD 2001; Vajja and White 2008); urban regeneration (Cattell 2004; Hibbit, Jones and Meegan 2001); waste management (Beall 1997); air pollution (Buzzelli 2007); sustainable development (Rainey et al. 2003); poverty reduction (Saracosti 2007); public relations (Ihlen 2005); sport (Seippel 2006); health (Lynch et al. 2000; Muntaner, Lynch and Davey Smith 2000; Reza Nakhaie, Smylie and Arnold 2007; Smith and Polanyi 2003); crime prevention (Graycar 1999; Messner, Baumer and Rosenfeld 2004; Salmi and Kivivuori 2006); human geography (Mohan and Mohan 2002); and disaster relief (Markandya and Pedroso-Galinato 2009).

The theorised benefits of social capital are extensive, including better health and access to jobs for individuals and stronger, more self-reliant and economically successful communities (Mohan and Mohan 2002:193). According to Robert Putnam: “social capital makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy” (Putnam 2000:289). Moreover, increasing social capital promised to be an inexpensive, actor-centred, solution to social and economic problems. This smorgasbord of positive outcomes is supplemented by research at all levels of social analysis: “individuals, households, communities, firms, regions, nations, and even the global system” (Daly and Silver 2008:556). When these factors are taken into consideration in the context of Robert Putnam’s ideas on declining civic engagement, it is easy to see how the imagery of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*<sup>3</sup> (Putnam 2000) provoked the popular imagination. Policymakers, academics, international institutions and the wider public embraced this seemingly dynamic, multidisciplinary interpretation of social capital and its agenda for a more cohesive civil society. Putnam’s social capital promised not only to explain any number of social maladies, but also enable inexpensive solutions to those problems. It was portrayed as a theory capable of bringing together the: “scientifically oriented discipline

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<sup>3</sup> *Bowling Alone* expanded on ideas outlined briefly by Putnam in *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Putnam 1993).



of economics ... and the more culturally or normatively focused study of politics, society and community” (Arneil 2006:2). The supposed theoretical and social contributions of Robert Putnam’s social capital were considerable.

Despite its popularity, Putnam’s interpretation of social capital and the intellectual heritage on which it is based is not without its critics. Indeed, DeFilippis notes: “Putnam’s redefinition of social capital is almost as dramatic as the widespread impact of his argument” (2001:785). An increasing number of thinkers have come to question the assumptions that underlie Putnam’s and Coleman’s ideas, looking to other authors, such as Pierre Bourdieu, to provide a more rigorous interpretation of the concept of social capital (Fine 1999, 2001; Leonard 2004; Portes 2000; Siisiäinen 2000; Smith and Kulynych 2002; Tzanakis 2013). This thesis aims to build on a Bourdieusian interpretation of social capital and examine how this may further understanding of its downsides.

### **The Problems with Social Capital**

Despite the quantity of work the concept of social capital has generated, the diversity of issues it has been used to address and the benefits it has meant to deliver, a definition of social capital remains elusive. As Silva and Edwards (2004) note, a substantial part of the debate on social capital is devoted to definition (e.g. Adler and Kwon 2000; Bebbington 2004; Boggs 2001; Brooks 2005; Falk and Kilpatrick 2000; Farr 2004; Fine 2001a; Fox 1997; Harriss and De Renzio 1997; Morrow 1999; National Statistics 2001; Navarro 2002; Portes 1998; Productivity Commission 2003; Putnam 2000; Robison, Schmid and Siles 2002; Sandefur and Laumann 1998; Schuller, Baron and Field 2000; Serageldin and Grootaert 2000; Stone and Hughes 2002; Szreter 2002; Winter 2000; Woolcock 1998; World Bank 1998). This prompts Adam and Roncevic (2003:158) to observe:

... even those authors who enthusiastically embrace the concept are well aware of the difficulties regarding its definition. This results in the interesting structure of the substantial body of work which employs the concept in one way or another. Even a decade after social capital started gaining relevance, it is very common that an author applying the concept in a particular analysis first discusses the concept and points to its

intellectual origins, to its diversity of applications and to some unresolved issues. Most authors then also adopt one of the schools of thought and sometimes contribute their own definition to the general framework of this school. Only then do they start dealing with their specific issue.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines social capital as: “networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups” (OECD 2001:41)<sup>4</sup>. However, this seemingly straightforward definition belies the lack of conceptual clarity that plagues the concept of social capital, which has been described as a “black hole in the astronomy of social science” (Montgomery 2000:2) and “the intellectual equivalent of the Hydra” (Hunter 2004:1). Disagreement exists about: whether or not social capital is a property of individuals, as Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986) maintains, or of the collective, as in James Coleman’s (1988a) and Robert Putnam’s (2000) works; whether or not social capital can be destroyed, created or appropriated by the state<sup>5</sup>; if it is a normative concept (Cox and Caldwell 2000:43-44); and whether or not it is a form of capital, and if indeed the language of ‘capital’ should be used (Mayer 2003). Smith and Kulynych (2002), for example, argue that the term *social capital* is ideologically driven and analytically flawed, so the term *social capacity* is more appropriate. Fine goes further to describe social capital as an oxymoron: “if social capital seeks to bring the social back in to enrich the understanding of capitalism, it does so only because it has impoverished the understanding of capital by taking it out of its social and historical context” (Fine 2001a:39).

The following excerpt from a World Bank (1998:1) report is indicative of the plethora of things social capital is meant to be:

The social capital of a society includes the institutions, the relationships, the attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development. Social capital, however,

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<sup>4</sup> This definition is also employed in the Australian policy context, with government agencies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004) and the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (2005) adopting this definition.

<sup>5</sup> Putnam’s central argument is that social capital bolsters economic and government performance: “Strong society, strong economy; strong society, strong state” (Putnam 1993:176).

is not simply the sum of institutions which underpin society, it is also the glue that holds them together. It includes the shared values and rules for social conduct expressed in personal relationships, trust, and a common sense of 'civic' responsibility that makes society more than just a collection of individuals.

The lack of theoretical coherence about the idea of social capital is further compounded by a tendency to define the concept in terms of the results it is meant to achieve, leading to the confusion of empirical measures with the concept and even its supposed outcomes: for example, surveys which use trust as a proxy for social capital (Stone 2001), or definitions which amount to little more than a laundry list of normatively desirable community attributes. In this vein, Cox and Caldwell define social capital as "a measure of the health of group processes and interactions" (2000:49) and go on to state that social capital is most easily identified when it is functioning to enable people, organizations and communities to: work together collaboratively; respect differences and recognize a common cause; resolve disputes civilly, in a manner that recognizes the common good over competing interests; recognize that building trust requires a perception of fairness and equity; build internal cohesion but not at the risk of excluding and demonizing 'others' (Cox and Caldwell 2000:59).

When laundry lists such as these replace definitions, social capital becomes confused with the benefits, or otherwise, that are derived from it and: "the term merely says that the successful succeed" (Portes and Landolt 1996:2). If the concept is to have any meaning, the ability to utilise resources must be different from the level or quality of those resources (Portes and Landolt 1996:2), despite the fact that examples of social capital 'in action' may indeed be *easier* to provide than a specific definition (Serageldin and Grootaert 2000:45). Interest in social capital is, however, driven by its supposed empirical insights, not its theoretical cohesion or incisive contribution to social theory (Spies-Butcher 2006). Woolcock argues that, social capital has: "been defined in so many different ways that it has become all things to all people, and because it is all things to all people, therefore it is nothing to anyone" (2000a:17).

The concept of social capital is also understood and utilised differently within different disciplines. Drawing again on Woolcock (2000a:17-18), sociological, psychological, economic and political approaches to social capital are identified:

- In psychological analyses, social capital is seen as the behaviours and attitudes that people have towards one another.
- In economic analyses, it is a resource to reduce transaction costs and informational asymmetries.
- In sociological analyses, the definition of social capital is tied to norms and networks that enable collective action.
- Woolcock also adds *political* approaches, where social capital is concerned with issues of good governance and the term is: “used as a shorthand for encapsulating the importance of themes like the rule of law and democratic institutions” (2000a:18).

Edwards and Foley (2001:11) identify two broad trends in the empirical research on social capital, where the concept is either treated as an independent variable, or as a dependent variable. In analyses which treat social capital as an independent variable, it is understood to affect outcomes, such as civic engagement, local and national economic growth, mortality rates, juvenile delinquency and organizational effectiveness. Where social capital is treated as a dependent variable, emphasis is placed on the sorts of organizations said to produce it, such as schools, network linkages, government policies and “even national elections” (Edwards and Foley 2001:11-12). The authors refine this categorization by identifying similarities in the approaches of political scientists, economists and psychologists who mainly refer to attitudes when they use the concept ‘social capital’. Political scientists and economists, they argue, tend to see associational membership as a source of social capital, not a form of it, and measure social capital through survey items, such as trust or norms of reciprocity and tolerance. In this tradition, social capital “or associational density has a direct impact on economic performance and the health of democracy” (Edwards and Foley 2001:12). By contrast, sociologists tend to focus on social capital as a “social structural variable” and use the concept to describe networks, organizations or other linkages between individuals or groups (Edwards and Foley 2001:12). It is the latter sense which is adopted in this research.

## **Research Significance**

There is no consensus on a definition of social capital. Research on social capital is driven by supposed empirical insights, yet measurement is problematic and the causal or generative mechanisms of social capital are not agreed. Nevertheless, the concept of social capital is important, not because of the sheer quantity of research which has been produced, the number of years it has occupied talented researchers or the policies it has driven, but because it can provide a nuanced account of an individual's position in the social world (Wall, Ferrazzi and Schryer 1998; Bourdieu 1986).

A review of the literature indicates that research on the downside of social capital is in its formative stages. This thesis will contribute to that literature by examining how a Bourdieusian interpretation of social capital can inform an understanding of its negative outcomes. Bourdieu's social capital, more so than either Putnam or Coleman's interpretations, allows us to differentiate between a person's social network and their knowledge of how that network can be used (Smart 2008:411-412). The literature suggests that those networks can determine access to resources and, thus, are a factor in perpetuating inequality (Edwards and Foley 2001; Daly and Silver 2008:556). I argue that a Bourdieusian interpretation of social capital calls attention to potential negative effects, because it enables a discussion on the structure of the distribution of social capital, as well as the importance of other forms of capital, such as economic and cultural capital, and the opportunities, or otherwise, this enables (Dinovitzer 2006:470).

Similarly, the literature exploring social capital in Indigenous contexts is in its formative stages, although emerging in a range of areas. For example, Hunter (2000, 2004) has made the most substantive contribution in the Australian context, focusing on social capital and Indigenous poverty. Christie and Greatorex (2004) have also explored a specifically Yolngu conception of social capital, noting the commonalities with Bourdieu's approach. Bandias (2009, 2010) worked with the Milikapiti community in the Tiwi islands to examine how information communication technology could support the growth of social capital, while Brough et al. (2006) has studied the complexity of social capital and Indigenous identity in urban settings. Despite this emerging body of work, research has not yet focused on the negative effects of social capital, nor on social capital and the experiences of Indigenous students in higher education.

The theory of social capital has long been applied to examining educational outcomes. Whereas Putnam's key contribution is popularising social capital as an inexpensive, grassroots solution to the social dislocation and anomie of late modernity, Coleman is also concerned with a "general deterioration of social conditions" (Wall, Ferrazzi and Schryer 1998:316), but he focuses on the role of familial networks in enforcing pro-academic norms. Bourdieu's framework has also been adopted in the sociology of education, particularly in examining the role of schools in the reproduction of social classes (Grenfell 2007). However, there is a gap in the literature in both critical and orthodox traditions which examines Indigenous higher education in the Australian context.

Narratives of family breakdown and dysfunction tend to dominate discussions of Indigenous disadvantage and disengagement from education. The approach of the orthodox school of thought to the downsides of social capital in this context suggests that families and communities bear sole responsibility for the development and perpetuation of social norms which contribute to poor academic outcomes. As this thesis will demonstrate, the orthodox perspective has limited analytic and interpretive power because it is an ahistorical model that neglects the colonial power structures that marginalise Indigenous people and knowledges, and the degree to which individual choice and autonomy is proscribed by those structural constraints across generations. This thesis argues that a Bourdieusian approach to social capital, and its negative effects in particular, provides a more nuanced account of norms, networks and resources which influence educational outcomes for Indigenous students, because it incorporates precisely those structural forces which orthodox approaches neglect.

Social capital has only a moderate impact on academic outcomes (White, Spence and Maxim 2005), and this thesis can only be a partial exploration of a more complex set of processes which influence Indigenous educational attainment. The benefit of Bourdieu's approach however, is that social capital operates in relationship to other resources (such as economic and cultural capital). This provides a theoretical framework to understand how networks function within broader socio-economic, political and cultural environments. Bourdieu too draws attention to the ways in which capitals are valued in specific locations, indicating the values, norms and social organisation pertinent within

Indigenous communities will not necessarily be valued in the institutions of the dominant culture. By adopting Bourdieu's framework, this thesis contributes to understanding how the negative effects of social capital emerge and are relevant in understanding the experiences of Indigenous students in higher education.

### **Intellectual Heritage of Social Capital**

There is a "seductive simplicity" in the way popular, or orthodox<sup>6</sup>, conceptions of social capital attempt to explain a plethora of social, political and economic effects (Mohan and Mohan 2002:191) and it is this orthodox conception of social capital which is embraced by governments and international institutions (e.g. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2002a; OECD 2001; World Bank 1998). The American or orthodox school focuses on the transformation of those social connections into various forms of trust or other social norms, which act simultaneously as social lubricant and glue, helping communities and economies function more cohesively (Arneil 2006:9). The European, heterodox<sup>7</sup> tradition is less dominant, but I argue that this perspective provides a more intellectually robust and empowering understanding of social capital.

#### *Coleman's social capital*

James Coleman developed a functionalist explanation of social capital, focusing on the ways in which relationships secure access to resources and enable the enforcement of social norms (Coleman 1988a; Sandefur and Laumann 1998:483). It is a rational choice model, Coleman's aim being to introduce the idea of social structure into the "rational actor paradigm" (Coleman 1988b:s95). For Coleman, social capital can be created by network closure, which enables the enforcement of norms and sanctions. Alternatively, social capital can be created by 'appropriable social organisation' which posits that organisations brought into existence for one group or purpose, can provide information or resources outside its original remit (Coleman 1988b:s108). Whilst this perspective has not enjoyed the same level of popularity as Putnam's reinterpretation of social capital, Coleman's thinking has been influential, particularly his argument that social

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<sup>6</sup> Identified in the literature as orthodox (Spies-Butcher 2006), neo-Liberalist (Davies 2001), or the American school (Arneil 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Identified in the literature as heterodox (Spies-Butcher 2006), neo-Marxist (Davies 2001), pluralist (Brooks 2005) or the European school (Arneil 2006).

networks based on trust and reciprocity reduce the transaction costs of collective action (van Deth and Zmerli 2010:632).

Coleman's social capital exists in three forms: as obligations or expectations, or 'credit slips'; as information channels; and as norms and sanctions. These aspects of the social structure constitute resources that are available to actors in their pursuit of interests (Coleman 1988b:S101). When applied to families, Coleman argues that social capital is the relationship between children and parents (Coleman 1988b:s110). To ensure successful academic outcomes, families must be able to pass on their human capital to their children using their social capital. When families experience "structural deficiencies", such as the absence of one parent, or two parents engaged in full-time employment, this reduces the amount of parental attention a child receives. In Coleman's world, less adult attention produces poor educational outcomes (Coleman 1988b:s112).

Coleman's interpretation of social capital is based on his attempts to understand society in terms of the aggregated behaviour of individuals (Fine 2001a:66, 73) and his adherence to rational choice theory and methodological individualism leads him to develop a theory of social capital which is: "profoundly asocial and ahistorical" (Fine 2001a:65). Harriss and De Renzio (1997:97) contend: "In Coleman's account social capital is an inherent aspect and – most significantly – an unintended outcome of the institutionalization of social relationships in 'social structure'". Not only does Coleman conflate what social capital is (relationships and social structures), with what it does (facilitate action) (Sandefur and Laumann 1998:483; Robison, Schmid and Siles 2002:3), he is unclear as to what those social structures are and where they come from (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993:1322).

### *Putnam's social capital*

According to Robert Putnam, associations generate trust, norms of reciprocity and a capacity for civic engagement (Edwards and Foley 2001:10). In this sense, an active civil society improves efficiency and facilitates coordinated actions (Putnam 1993). It correlates with better institutional performance (Whittington 2001) and improves a community's ability to deal with social and economic problems like: "unemployment,



poverty, educational nonparticipation and crime” (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005:5). The Putnamian version of social capital also introduced the categories of bonding, bridging and linking to describe different network types that support cooperation and trust between like and dissimilar people (Putnam 1993; Woolcock 2000a).

However, Putnam argues that social capital is in decline because contemporary Americans no longer possess the traits that have built and sustained it in the past. Norms of trust and reciprocity and the capacity for associationalism have been eroded by television, two-career families, commuting and generational change (Putnam 2000:283). For Putnam, Americans must “once again be as civically creative as our Progressive forebears” (Putnam 2000:403) and support initiatives like civics education, volunteering, civic discussion groups in workplaces, extracurricular activities in schools and greater religious engagement (Putnam 2000:405-411), in order to renew stocks of social capital.

The critique of Putnam is extensive (Fine 2001b; DeFilippis 2001; Putzel 1997; Serageldin and Grootaert 2000; Winter 2000). His approach fails to specify how social capital is generated by civil society, or how this shapes government performance and improves economic outcomes (Booth and Richard 2001:45; Szreter 2002). Social capital is reduced to ‘joining behaviour’ and associationalism, and his approach contains a particularly romantic understanding of ‘community’ (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005:5), one which is devoid of conflict or struggle (Siisiäinen 2000; Whittington 2001). Putnam also neglects social and economic inequality as a cause of anomie or disengagement. His account of the alleged decline of social capital ignores the influence of economic restructuring and the demolition of the welfare state (Edwards and Foley 1997; Tarrow 1996). Instead, lack of trust and civic engagement are determined by individual values (Muntaner and Lynch 2002:263). Muntaner and Lynch also argue that Putnam’s social capital is of minimal use, because it excludes class, race and gender relations, as well as political variables, from research on social norms like trust and reciprocity (2002:261).

Certainly, there is a problematic relationship between the individual and the community at the heart of Putnam’s analysis. His conservative account of human behaviour contains a particular construction of human agency, which, on the one hand, places

responsibility for social norms, poverty, marginalisation and underdevelopment on the individual (Martin 2004:85, Schuurman 2003:1000). On the other hand, social capital is redefined as a community resource (Portes 2000:3). The focus of literature based on Putnam's work is on the role of communities in building and using social capital. This ignores an individual's ability to generate or access social capital (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005:5). Putnam has redefined social capital as a community attribute, ignoring its original conceptualisation as an individual asset and glossing over the intellectual contortions required to make his version cohere (Portes 2000).

### *Bourdieu's social capital*

Bourdieu's interpretation of social capital is part of a "generalized theory of capital" (Wacquant 1998:26), which is inseparable from his other core concepts, habitus and field. Through these concepts, Bourdieu: "sought to rethink the constitution of social space and the dynamic articulation of practice, structure, and history" (Wacquant 1998:26). For Bourdieu, social capital has little to do with idealistic notions of pluralist democracy and participative citizenship and his use of the concept is part of a larger project, the aim of which is to understand: "how relations of difference, power and domination are created and sustained, and how social actors operate within these sets of relationships" (Bebbington 2007:155).

Unfortunately, Bourdieu has largely been excised from the social capital literature<sup>8</sup> (Fine 2001a:17, 72). Authors may cite his definition in their discussion of the history of the term that occurs at the beginning of most work on social capital, but this is rarely followed by any deeper analyses of the implications of Bourdieu's work. Indeed, Bourdieu's conceptual world is not easily digestible. He does not offer "tidy, well-delineated theoretical arguments but orienting themes that overlap and interpenetrate" (Swartz 1997:8) and this does not sit well with the "seductive simplicity" of orthodox interpretations of social capital (Mohan and Mohan 2002:191).

Bourdieu sees social capital as part of a more complex "social topology" which locates an individual's positions in the social world in terms of their possession of, or access to,

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<sup>8</sup> A telling example is the number of times Bourdieu is cited in Putnam's *Bowling Alone*: once (Putnam 2000:19).

a variety of capitals: economic; social; cultural; and symbolic (Wall, Ferrazzi and Schryer 1998:306; Bourdieu 1986). According to Bourdieu (1986:248-249) social capital is:

... the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.

An analysis of the relationship between the different forms of capital, even if we focus only upon social and economic forms, is missing from accounts of social capital that rely on Putnam’s or Coleman’s interpretation, as is any attention to wider economic and political structures (Morrow 2001:58). In contrast, Bourdieu’s analysis provides an opportunity to examine the intersection of individual dispositions, social structures and resources, and how this perpetuates exclusion.

Bourdieu has been criticised for his argument that action is always utilitarian and interested; conduct always appears to be directed towards accruing power and wealth (Swartz 1997:78). Field argues that this leads to a somewhat circular argument: “privileged individuals maintain their position by using their connections with other privileged people” (2003:23). Whilst this charge cannot wholly be dismissed, it is important to note that Bourdieu’s interpretation of capital is deployed in an effort to unmask relations of power and describe conflict. Through the concept of habitus, Bourdieu does however stress that actions are not reducible to rational, economic calculation (Svendsen and Svendsen 2003:617). Rather, agents are predisposed to particular behaviours, attitudes and practices, according to their social location. Moreover, neither Coleman nor Putnam acknowledges how historical disadvantage can restrict an individual’s access to social capital, nor the influence of this on identity or social norms. Despite the limitations of a Bourdieusian approach to social capital, this perspective addresses many of the weaknesses in the orthodox version of the theory.

## **The Downside of Social Capital**

The orthodox literature on social capital is strongly focused on its positive effects (Portes 1998:15) and the role of networks and associational activity in generating trust and normative behaviour. As Fine (2001a:92) notes however, there are widespread arguments which posit that social capital may, like any other resource, be used in negative or undesirable ways. Alejandro Portes (1998) provides the most complete analysis of the downsides of social capital, defining four negative consequences that can emerge from strong norms and networks: “exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward levelling norms” (Portes 1998:15).

Putnam does concede that social capital is not necessarily a positive concept; it has a downside and may contribute to negative outcomes. Social capital, as interpreted by Putnam, is focused on the ability of individuals and communities to utilize particular resources, regardless of the implications of those actions: “Networks and the associated norms of reciprocity are generally good for those inside the network, but the external effects of social capital are by no means always positive” (Putnam 2000:21). Social capital can: “be directed toward malevolent, antisocial purposes, just like any other form of capital” (Putnam 2000:22). As such, Putnam acknowledges that there can be a downside to social capital, and that it can be exclusionary (2000:340):

...associational ties benefit those who are best equipped by nature or circumstance to organize and make their voices heard. People with education, money, status, and close ties with fellow members of their community of interest will be far more likely to benefit politically under pluralism than will the uneducated, the poor and the unconnected...social capital is self-reinforcing and benefits most those who already have a stock on which to trade.

According to Thomson (2005:434) however, Putnam’s acknowledgement of social capital’s potential negative consequences is incomplete:

Because he assumes that individuals must be induced to join communal or organizational groups lest they fall into anomic or antisocial behavior, he views social capital as always positive. The only “dark side” of social capital that Putnam sees is the potential for generating individual

intolerance or reinforcing inequality. He is able to dismiss the issue by finding correlations between civic engagement and both tolerance and equality.

The idea that social capital has a downside is important if the concept is not to be romanticized, or seen as a guarantee of common good (Winter 2000:27-28). The possibility needs to be acknowledged that the same strong ties that could help a community may simultaneously enable that community to be exclusionary, distrustful of outsiders or silence minority voices (Portes and Landolt 1996, 2000). This becomes pertinent, for example, in the context of rural communities; Australian research demonstrates that, even though levels of social capital are often higher in rural areas than in metropolitan or urban areas (Onyx and Bullen 2000:38), strong social norms, the stifling of dissent and the removal of individual autonomy can be commonplace (Woolcock 2000a:18). Edwards and Cheers (2007) show how the high levels of social capital in such rural communities can have damaging consequences for same-sex attracted women, particularly young women. A high level of social capital may therefore be undesirable in and of itself, but, in some communities, high levels of civic engagement, social cohesion and social capital may co-exist with high levels of inequality and social exclusion (Wilson 2005). If social capital is seen as a resource used by groups to preserve their position, it can also be a factor in perpetuating inequality and social exclusion (Daly and Silver 2008:556).

A distinction must also be made between the network and the quality and quantity of resources that can be accessed through that network. Access to, the quality of, and knowledge about how to use social capital are context-dependent and, therefore, unequally distributed (Foley and Edwards 1999:146). Portes and Landolt (1996:4) argue that, whilst trust and associational activity have undoubted benefits, outcomes for disadvantaged individuals and groups are more dependent on what resources are available and who has access to them. Only Bourdieu's interpretation of social capital recognises that resources are more important than trust and joining behaviour (Foley and Edwards 1999:146).

## **Indigenous Education**

The disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians is well-documented and the causal relationship between historical colonial and contemporary practices and that disadvantage is well-established (Altman, Biddle and Hunter 2009; HREOC 1997; SCRGSP 2011). A large body of research exists which traces the contemporary structural conditions in which many Indigenous people live to the policies and practices of previous governments designed to control the behaviours, movements and cultural practices of Indigenous people throughout Australia (e.g. Gooda 2011a, 2011b; Lea 2012; Walter 2010a). Nevertheless, a discourse also exists which argues that the breakdown in social norms, lack of opportunities and disengagement from education and the labour market, are the responsibility of Indigenous people to overcome (e.g. Pearson 2011; Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership n.d.). In terms of education, social capital is often seen as a resource which families use to elicit normative behaviour and ensure compliance with the requirements of educational institutions. For example, where communities have low levels of education, or norms emerge which construct academic achievement or participation in the labour market as 'non-Aboriginal', social capital's downsides can become evident.

Moreover, the idea of social capital has been adopted by government (MCEECDYA 2011) and researchers (e.g. Brough et al. 2006; Hunter 2004; Lahn 2012) concerned with Indigenous education and Indigenous policy issues more broadly. For example, measures of social capital have been included in both the 2002 and the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey conducted by the ABS (ABS 2002a, 2008b). Social capital and cognate ideas, such as 'engagement' and 'social networks' are emerging as different ways to understand Indigenous disadvantage.

Whilst this thesis does not ignore the survival and renewal of Indigenous cultures, nor the possibilities of agency within broader systems of oppression, it argues that the negative effects of social capital usually emerge within, and can be exacerbated by, structural conditions. Bourdieu provides an analysis of education systems that privilege certain types of knowledge and social organisation (in this case, White knowledge/organisation) over other ways of being and knowing (such as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander practices and forms of knowledge). Where this occurs, not only

are Indigenous knowledges and forms of social organisation devalued, but this condition is compounded by restricted access to material resources and opportunities.

‘Indigenous knowledges’ is a contested and often misunderstood term. Contemporary discussions about Indigenous knowledges tend to adopt diverse terminology, such as: Indigenous knowledge (IK); traditional ecological knowledge (TEK); traditional knowledge (TK); Indigenous technical knowledge (ITK) (Nakata 2002:283; Anderson 2009:5). More importantly, attempts to define what constitutes ‘Indigenous knowledges’ can risk positioning Indigenous ways of knowing and practices as primitive and unscientific when compared to Western knowledge systems (Nakata et al 2005) or as restricted to the pre-colonial past (Nakata 2004:8). Consequently, there is a decolonizing intent to Indigenous knowledges which is based on the position that knowledge *about* Indigenous people (and how knowledge about Indigenous people, histories and experiences produced *by* Indigenous people) is categorised, understood, interpreted and taught within the disciplines of Western knowledge (Nakata 2004:12). Indigenous knowledges seek to disrupt the primacy of Western knowledge systems and the colonizing intent of the academy (Dei 2000; Nakata 2002; Rigney 1997; Shahjahan 2005).

Identifying specific features of Indigenous knowledges tends to reinforce a dichotomy between Western and Other knowledges, but drawing attention to the place-based, communal, and oral contexts in which Indigenous knowledge production occurs can contribute to an empowering and anti-colonial discourse (Dei 2000; Shahjahan 2005; Nakata 2002). As Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009:3) discuss in their exposition of Indigenous methodologies in social research, Indigenous knowledges derive from a long-term relationship to *place*:

...Indigenous peoples have developed their knowledge systems over millennia living on and alongside the land. Indigenous peoples’ knowledges are therefore predicated on societal relations with country. Thus, knowledge is experiential, holistic and evolving, and Indigenous knowledge systems are an integral part of living in the world. Epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies are interwoven into this knowledge system. While European colonisation of certain countries and peoples disrupted Indigenous ways of life and ways of living, Indigenous

knowledge systems remain intact and continue to develop as living, relational schemas (Moreton-Robinson and Walter 2009:3).

Similarly, Nakata et al (2005:18) draws attention to the oral and intergenerational natures of Indigenous knowledges, making the case to:

...conceptualise Indigenous knowledge as an oral tradition, deeply implicated in people's daily practices and attached to local cultural contexts which are, as well, inter-connected via various pathways and networks across the country. In this sense, Indigenous knowledge is more than 'heritage'; it is a dynamic and continuous system of knowledge. Indigenous peoples are the agents of this knowledge and require the means and authority to maintain continuity with their knowledge tradition according to their own understandings. This only increases the need to develop appropriate and, as much as possible, consistent practice in collaboration with Indigenous peoples themselves (Nakata et al 2005:18).

Indigenous knowledges are "grounded in a people, a place and a history" (Dei 2000:115): recognising the ways in which this knowledge is produced and represented in the academy is an important part of creating safer and more empowering learning experiences for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners.

### **Research Questions**

Restrictive or negative effects are implicit in Bourdieu's interpretation of social capital, although Putnam does, to a limited extent, acknowledge that social capital can have negative consequences. To date, most empirical research on social capital has examined the positive outcomes of social capital and its downside remains relatively unexplored (Foley and Edwards 1999; Portes and Landolt 1996; Schulman and Anderson 1999). In order to begin to address these gaps, this thesis asks two questions.

The research questions are informed by a need to examine the operation of social capital alongside other forms of capital. Bourdieu suggests that forms of capital are convertible under certain conditions. How then does the relationship between social capital and



other forms of capital, namely economic and cultural capital, contribute to understanding the downsides of social capital as they affect Indigenous students at university? The first research question which guides this thesis is therefore:

- *What can a 'forms of capital' approach add to an understanding of the resources that Indigenous students use and need in tertiary education?*

Having established the utility of a Bourdieusian 'forms of capital' approach, this thesis will then examine the idea of social capital's downsides. Of interest are the ways in which individuals understand and mediate the relationship between the positive and negative outcomes that their networks generate. In examining the experiences of Indigenous students undertaking tertiary education, the validity of social capital's downsides needs to be established, leading to the second question guiding this research:

- *In what ways and to what extent does the idea of social capital's downsides explain the challenges Indigenous students face in tertiary education?*

Answering these research questions provides an opportunity to address the critique that social capital is disconnected from other resources agents can use to pursue outcomes. It will also provide another lens through which to examine the barriers and opportunities Indigenous students experience in higher education. In these ways, responding to the research questions makes a contribution to both the literature on social capital and the literature on Indigenous higher education.

## **Fieldwork**

In order to answer the research questions, fieldwork was conducted with Indigenous students<sup>9</sup> at two Australian universities; one regional and one metropolitan university. The research questions were addressed using a mixed methods approach incorporating a survey, focus groups and a participant-driven photoelicitation, or Photovoice, project. These methods provided rich qualitative and quantitative data, which was used to develop an understanding of the types of resources to which participants had access and their experiences of the negative effects of social capital. The literature indicates that experiences of social capital's restrictive effects may include, but are not limited to: social exclusion; restrictions on freedom; downward-levelling norms; and excess claims

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<sup>9</sup> This research did not impose an external definition of indigeneity on participants, and used a measure of self-reported Indigenous status as sufficient indication of participant's cultural identity.

on group members (Portes 1998:15). The data collected through the mixed methods approach outlined here and elaborated upon in Chapter 6 will inform a discussion of these outcomes and the structure of the distribution of social capital, including the opportunities or otherwise it provides (Dinovitzer 2006:470). In these ways, this research will contribute to the literature on the downside of social capital and Indigenous higher education.

### *Survey*

A survey tool was developed to assess the economic, cultural and social capital accessible by participants. A Resource Generator (RG), adapted from Van der Gaag and Snijders (2005) and Alexander et al. (2008), was used to measure individual social capital. There are limitations involved in using this tool, however the primary advantage is that it measures the quality and quantity of resources that are accessed through an individual's networks. A key principle of Bourdieu's social capital, in contrast to Putnam's and Coleman's approaches, is that social capital is an individual resource, and the RG provides a theoretically grounded and tested tool for understanding the nature of these individual resources.

### *Photovoice*

Photovoice, or photoelicitation, is a participatory action research methodology which has been used to enable community members to "record, reflect, and communicate" information about their assets and concerns (Wang and Pies 2004:95). As a participatory method, it enables participants to retain control over what knowledge is shared, what information is generated and how that knowledge and information are used (Foster-Fishman et al. 2005:276). This is particularly important when working with Indigenous communities and participants.

In this vein, Foster-Fishman et al. (2005:277) describe how photovoice:

...puts cameras in the hands of individuals often excluded from decision-making processes in order to capture their voices and visions about their lives, their community, and their concerns ... By sharing their stories about these images, reflecting with others about the broader meanings of the photos they have taken, and displaying these photos and stories ...

Photovoice participants are provided with a unique opportunity to document and communicate important aspects of their lives.

Participants were invited to take photos of objects and places that represent the sources of support and obstacles or challenges to their academic career. Interviews were then conducted with participants to explore the images generated and provide an opportunity to elaborate upon the barriers and opportunities students perceive. The interviews also aimed to understand the role of institutions, families, friends and acquaintances, as sources of support or challenges to a successful academic experience.

Whilst operating with clearly defined research questions, this thesis is sensitive to the distance that often exists between the categories imposed by academic research and the understanding the individuals have of their own lives and experiences. The value of this method is its flexibility in allowing participants to generate images and meanings within the parameters of the research project. Whilst categories of ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ social capital usually have an appealing theoretical and methodological simplicity, this method allows such categories to be understood as more fluid and negotiated in experience than they are in theory.

### *Focus Groups*

Focus groups were also used at one location where participants who were external students were brought together for one week every semester. The focus groups were designed to engage with similar themes to those of the interviews conducted as part of the photoelicitation project; understanding student’s motivations for studying and the challenges they face in their academic career.

The combination of these methods provides an innovative strategy to examine, firstly, how social capital is only one type of resource available to participants and, secondly, how social capital’s downsides are experienced.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an introduction to the ideas this thesis will explore, and the methods employed to interrogate these propositions empirically. An overview of the main thinkers in social capital theory has been provided, together with a summary of the main critiques levelled at these approaches. This has provided an introduction to the argument that a Bourdieusian framework provides a version of social capital which has greater utility than the orthodox approaches of James Coleman or Robert Putnam. This is particularly important in understanding the downsides of social capital, where orthodox theories tend to perpetuate a deficit approach which sees the negative externalities of networks, or normatively undesirable behaviour, as the sole responsibility of a family or community to address. Rather, I suggest that a Bourdieusian approach to social capital, which incorporates the idea of habitus, can shed light on how practices can normalise self-defeating behaviour. Bourdieu's idea of field also demonstrates that norms, practices and knowledges may be strategic or beneficial on one arena, and devalued or counterproductive in another. This has significant implications for understanding the emergence and operation of contemporary social norms and networks within Indigenous communities. Narratives of dysfunction and disengagement are frequently adopted in policy and the media with regard to Indigenous education, yet little attention is paid to how these norms emerge from structural conditions, or how other social norms in Indigenous communities are devalued by the dominant culture and its institutions.

Bourdieu suggests that no type of capital exists in isolation. As such, this chapter has outlined two research questions that aim to explore the validity of a 'forms of capital' approach which contextualises the operation social capital and to examine how the downsides of social capital are experienced by Indigenous students at university. To explore this empirically, this chapter has outlined the mixed methods approach used to collect data from Indigenous participants at two Australian tertiary education institutions.

Chapter 2 will provide a more detailed discussion of the historical development of the concept of social capital, focusing on the approaches of James Coleman and Robert Putnam. The chapter will also describe the main critiques levelled at orthodox approaches, before moving on a more detailed discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's

interpretation of social capital in Chapter 3. Bourdieu's framework is used to establish a critical approach to the downside of social capital which is elaborated in Chapter 4. That chapter focuses on four key insights into group identity, social norms, resources and social context (or field) which are enabled by a critical framework, but absent in the theories of James Coleman and Robert Putnam.

The second part of the thesis focuses on the case study of Indigenous students undertaking tertiary education. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of contemporary Indigenous education outcomes, and the relevance of social capital and its downsides in this context. The limitations of adopting an orthodox social capital framework in the analysis of Indigenous higher education outcomes are identified and the efficacy of a critical approach is explored.

Chapter 6 identifies the methods and methodology used to explore these ideas empirically, with the findings discussed in response to the research questions. Chapter 7 analyses the data in response to the first research question on the utility of a 'forms of capital' approach, finding that a Bourdieusian framework offers a useful approach to understanding social capital as one of several different types of capital that individuals are able to access in their tertiary careers.

Chapter 8 discusses the findings with respect to the second research question on the downside of the social capital. The research indicates that some participants did experience negative effects of social capital, but these effects were always context-dependent and often actively negotiated. Moreover, this thesis finds that the emergence of the downsides of social capital occurs within a historical context directly related to the de-legitimisation of Indigenous knowledges and forms of social organisation, and the maintenance of a cohesive collective identity in the face of that marginalisation.

This thesis provides a critical interpretation of social capital which allows for a more subtle analysis of its negative effects. By exploring the possibilities created by a Bourdieusian approach, many of the sins of omission committed by research, theory and policy in the tradition of Coleman and Putnam are addressed. The fieldwork provides empirical evidence to substantiate the twin claims that orthodox social capital theory is limited in its explanation of the negative effects, and that a Bourdieusian approach is

more comprehensive in this regard. The perspectives of Coleman and Putnam offer a restricted analysis of how social networks and norms are influenced by structural conditions and their approaches fail to address many important aspects of the case study. For example, the orthodox approach is ahistorical, and does not account for the intergenerational effects of colonial occupation, the policy of assimilation or the destruction of Indigenous languages and knowledge, which continues to affect Indigenous people. A Bourdieusian approach understands these historical factors to have a substantive and ongoing influence on Indigenous identity. Moreover, this history continues to affect the relationship between Indigenous people and knowledges to the dominant culture. This has significant implications for the type and quality of networks and social norms, as well as the quality of material resources, which are available within Indigenous communities.

Critical social capital theory consequently enables an interpretation of the downside of social capital which is sensitive to these historical and political factors. This offers an alternative strategy for the discussion of social norms and networks that restrict individual mobility, information and resources; one which avoids the narratives of dysfunction which pervade discussions of Indigenous education outcomes. In doing so, this thesis makes a substantial contribution to the literature on both social capital, and Indigenous higher education in Australia.

## *Chapter 2 History & Critique of Social Capital*

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In the first chapter, I provided a brief introduction to the concept of social capital, the research questions and arguments this thesis will make. The popularity of the theory was discussed and some of the most significant limitations of orthodox versions of social capital were identified. The first chapter briefly outlined the contributions of James Coleman, Robert Putnam and Pierre Bourdieu and argued that, of these three thinkers, it is Bourdieu who provides the soundest explanation of the downsides of social capital. This chapter will explore in greater depth the contribution of the orthodox thinkers identified in the previous chapter: Coleman; and Putnam. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the theories of Coleman and Putnam, identify their limitations and examine why these perspectives offer an incomplete explanation of the so-called ‘dark side’ of social capital.

The theoretical development of the concept of social capital is generally attributed to Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and James Coleman (1988a, 1988b) and, later, Robert Putnam (1993, 2000). However, the conceptual heritage of the idea is extensive. As Putnam himself states, “‘Social capital’ is to some extent merely new language for a very old debate in American intellectual circles”, and he goes to argue that the concept has been reinvented numerous times throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Putnam 2000:24). Indeed, Robert Putnam was not the first, and will not be the last, political scientist or sociologist to engage with ideas of networks, participation and democracy. Farr (2004:23) acknowledges that the role of associations in facilitating economic life is an issue that has concerned political economists since Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Both Woolcock (1998) and Portes (1998) in turn state that the intellectual heritage of social capital extends through most of sociology’s greatest thinkers, including Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Simmel:

Despite its current popularity, the term does not embody any idea really new to sociologists. That involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the individual and the community is a staple notion, dating back to Durkheim’s emphasis on group life as an antidote to anomie and self-destruction and to Marx’s distinction between an atomized class-in-itself and a mobilized and effective class-

for-itself. In this sense, the term social capital simply recaptures an insight present since the very beginnings of the discipline. Tracing the intellectual background of the concept into classical times would be tantamount to revisiting sociology's major nineteenth century sources (Portes 1998:2).

It is interesting to note however, that Putnam identifies the “first known use of the concept” by Lyda J. Hanifan, a state supervisor of rural schools in West Virginia in 1916 (Putnam 2000:19). In contrast, in an extensive conceptual history of social capital, James Farr (2004) argues that the term was in use half a century earlier than Hanifan, being utilized in: 1867 by Karl Marx; 1883 by Henry Sidgwick; 1885 by John Bates Clark; 1890 by Alfred Marshall; and 1897 by Edward Bellamy. As Farr notes, these political economists of the nineteenth century used the term ‘social capital’ to draw attention to the social inadequacies of the capitalist system: a fundamentally different usage than today<sup>10</sup>. Later uses of the term by John Dewey (1900; 1915) Lyda J. Hanifan (1916) in the early twentieth century, are conceptually closer to contemporary usages, because they emphasise the democratic values of sympathy, cooperation and associativeness (Gabrielson 2006:660).

Arneil (2006) identifies American and European schools of thought on social capital. According to Arneil, the American school of social capital, recently typified by the interpretations of Coleman and Putnam (where social capital is largely synonymous with social connectedness and associational activity), is derived from the intellectual heritage of Alexis de Tocqueville, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, who all saw civic society as the critical component of a vibrant American democracy (Arneil 2006:4). The influence of de Tocqueville on Putnam’s social capital thesis has long been noted (e.g. Edwards and Foley 2001:10; Schuller, Baron and Field 2000:9; Szreter 2002:583; Walters 2002:378); indeed, Putnam cites him as the “patron saint of social capitalists” (Putnam 2000:292).

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<sup>10</sup> The nineteenth century political economists such as Marx and Bellamy were attempting to socialize capital, or reintroduce a “social perspective on capital”. However, Farr (2004:33) argues that it is not disingenuous to suggest that there is a connection between the way in which ‘social capital’ was used in the late nineteenth century and the way the concept is used today; writers then and today seek to “comprehend the social relations constitutive of modern capitalist societies, and to position capital as their governing asset.”



Conversely, the European school has its heritage in the works of Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato. Pierre Bourdieu is cited as the vanguard of this school (Arneil 2006:7-10) and his work on the interrelationship between different forms of capital provides the basis for most critical approaches to social capital. Bourdieu's work focuses on social capital as a resource that facilitates social mobility (Silva and Edwards 2004:3) and describes how the possessions of relationships can determine unequal access to resources (Edwards and Foley 2001).

What distinguishes the American from the European school, and Bourdieu in particular, is:

...both a critical perspective, and a preference for networks and resources rather than the functional theory of social capital, which depends on the transformation of connectedness into trust and with that, the lubrication and glue that make societies function better (Arneil 2006:9).

Arneil's strategy of grouping Bourdieu, Cohen, Gramsci and Arato's theories is designed to problematize Putnam's idealization of the Progressive Era (late nineteenth and early twentieth century America) and the "civic-mindedness" of the period that he lauds (Putnam 2000:149). Putnam does acknowledge the "troubling" racial segregation and social exclusion of the early twentieth century in his country, even going to so far as to stress the reinvention of the Ku Klux Klan in 1915 to enforce legal race discrimination (Putnam 2000:400). However, Putnam simply acknowledges this as an "instructive lesson", one which teaches us that social capital is "inevitably easier to foster within homogeneous communities" and that "emphasis on its creation may inadvertently shift the balance in society away from bridging social capital and toward bonding social capital" (Putnam 2000:400). Drawing on the European school of social capital, and Gramsci and Bourdieu in particular, Arneil views the Progressive Era, not as a high point of social capital in American democracy, but rather as a period in which civil society, characterised by exclusionary social boundaries, became a site of social contestation with dominant groups and norms increasingly contested by women and cultural minorities (Arneil 2006).

## Coleman

James Coleman draws attention to the way in which social relationships can give individuals access to resources through which they would not have had otherwise (Edwards and Foley 2001:10; Edwards, Cheers and Graham 2003:77). For Coleman, social capital is defined as social structures that facilitate action, it is a resource, and it exists in the relations among people (Coleman 1988a:383, 1988b:100-101).

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (Coleman 1988b:98).

Coleman's aim is to: "import the economist's principle of rational action for use in the analysis of social systems proper, including but not limited to economic systems, and to do so without discarding social organization in the process" (Coleman 1988b:97). In this sense, Coleman bears some similarity to Bourdieu in that they both adopt the language of economics, whilst attempting to negotiate a way between economism and subjectivism. There are also similarities in how both authors conceive social capital as a source of educational advantage (Schuller, Baron and Field 2000:7), although Coleman is not primarily focused on the reproduction of inequality, but, rather, attends to the role of social capital in the creation of human capital (Dika and Singh 2002).

Coleman argues that social capital exists in a number of forms: first, as obligations and expectations, which rely on trust in the social environment; second, as information channels, which reflect the extent of the movement of information in the social environment; and, third, as the norms and sanctions that exist in the social environment (Coleman 1988b:102-104). Coleman argues that the public goods aspect of *most* forms of social capital is what distinguishes it from other forms of capital (such as human and physical). However, the public goods aspect of social capital is precisely what leads to its underinvestment: "actors who generate social capital will normally only capture a small part of its benefits" (Coleman 1988b:111). An additional characteristic of

Coleman's social capital is that, while individuals or "purposive actors", not collectives, are responsible for the generation of social capital, it cannot be possessed by individuals (Coleman 1988b:98), nor is the creation of social capital intentional (Schuller, Baron and Field 2000:7):

The public goods quality of most social capital means that it is in a fundamentally different position with respect to purposive action that are most other forms of capital. It is an important resource for individuals and may affect greatly their ability to act and their perceived quality of life. They have the capability of bringing it into being. Yet, because the benefits of actions that bring social capital are largely experienced by persons other than the actor, it is often not in his interest to bring it into being. The result is that most forms of social capital are created or destroyed as by-products of other activities. This social capital arises or disappears without anyone's willing it into or out of being and is thus even less recognized and taken account of in social action that its already intangible character would warrant (Coleman 1988b:118).

Coleman and Putnam both position social capital as a public good, arguing it is non-rivalrous (using social capital or securing benefit from its effects does not reduce the value or quantity available to others) and non-excludable (it is not possible to exclude or cheaply prevent someone from using social capital). Putnam's argument is more nuanced, and he does acknowledge that there can be both private and public goods aspects of social capital: "Some of the benefit from an investment in social capital goes to bystanders, while some of the benefit redounds to the immediate interest of the person making the investment" (2000:20). However, both Coleman (1998b) and Putnam (2000) direct most of their attention to the importance of the benefits which accrue to families and communities from engaging in civic behaviour; the public goods aspect of social capital (Tzanakis 2013). By contrast, Bourdieu focuses on the ways in which individuals and collectives secure exclusive benefit by virtue of network membership (Bourdieu 1986:249-250). For Bourdieu, the benefits of social capital can indeed be excludable and rivalrous, with the opportunity to develop networks and the quality of the resources securable through those networks distributed unequally (Bourdieu 1986).

According to Coleman, social capital is created through the changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action (Coleman 1988b:100). The value of the concept is that it provides an account of how actors use the resources of the social structure in order to pursue their interests, and the value of those resources to actors (Coleman 1988b:100-101). By revealing this function, the concept of social capital can contribute to an understanding of different outcomes for individual actors (Coleman 1988b:101). Indeed, Coleman primarily used social capital as a way of understanding the relationship between educational outcomes and inequality (Schuller, Baron and Field 2000:5).

Coleman posits a functionalist theory of social capital that has its origins in rational choice theory (Spies-Butcher 2006:49). One of the most trenchant critics of social capital, Ben Fine (1999, 2001a, 2002, 2003, 2008), identifies Coleman's participation in the 'social exchange' debate of the 1960s and 1970s, as a precursor to his development of a rational-choice model of social capital. Social exchange theory attempted to base social theory on individual interactions and psychological motivations (Fine 2007:49, 2010:40), and its failure was, Fine argues, inevitable because: "the anatomy of society cannot be found in the anatomy of the individual" (Fine 2010:40). Following this, Coleman moved towards a rational choice model which understood relationships in instrumental terms, built by "self-interested agents" (Foley and Edwards 1999:144).

The basis of Coleman's theory in functionalism and economic rationalism is one theme in the critique of his work. Tautological reasoning is another; Coleman has also been criticized for conflating what social capital is (i.e. social structures) with what it does (i.e. facilitate action) (Robison, Schmid and Siles 2002:3). Similarly, Dika and Singh (2002:44) identify two key problems that arise as a result of defining social capital as the resources that exist within the structure of relationships. The first is that social capital is confused with the benefits (or otherwise) that derive from it. This leads to a circular argument which posits that those who have access to sufficient stocks of social capital are successful, and those who do not aren't (Dika and Singh 2002:44), and social capital only becomes identifiable when it works (Lin 2001:28). As Portes argues:

Saying, for example, that student A has social capital because he obtained access to a large tuition loan from his kin and that student B does not because she failed to do so neglects the possibility that B's kin

networks is equally or more motivated to come to her aid but simply lacks the means to do so. Defining social capital as equivalent with the resources thus obtained is tantamount to saying that the successful succeed (Portes 1998:5).

Secondly, Coleman's definition is unable to separate the possession of social capital from the ability, inclination or opportunity to use it. According to Dika and Singh, this makes it difficult to determine: "whether the ability to access social capital (in the home or community) or the ability to activate this social capital in the institutional context (the school) is associated with desirable outcomes" (Dika and Singh 2002:44). This creates significant gaps when applying Coleman's approach to understanding the potential negative effects of social capital (Stanton-Salazar 1997). Moreover, because Coleman is primarily concerned with the disintegration of traditional social structures, and the institution of mechanisms to ensure individual achievement and mobility in the absence of the social control previously provided by "primordial social institutions", little attention is given to other factors which influence the ability to accumulate or use social capital, such as gender, ethnicity and class (Lareau 1987; Stanton-Salazar 1997).

Although more extensively applied to education, Coleman's approach has not enjoyed the remarkable popularity of Putnam's approach. There are similarities in both approaches: a concern with the changing structure of families; an alleged disappearance of the types of social organisation that facilitate economic growth and stable democracies; a moralistic imperative to restore particular types of families and communities (Coradini 2010); and the divorce of social networks and norms from broader political and economic influences. Putnam's approach demonstrates a move away from Coleman however, and it is to Putnam that this chapter will now turn.

## **Putnam**

Robert Putnam's interpretation of social capital is based on the idea that social networks foster norms of reciprocity and trust that are essential to the functioning of modern democracies (Putnam 2000:18-20). In a significant move away from Coleman, Putnam draws attention to the ways in which social capital is not an individual asset, but rather a public or collective resource (Putnam 1993:167), defining the concept as follows:

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam 2000:19).

Putnam's central argument is that social capital bolsters the economy and government performance: "Strong society, strong economy; strong society, strong state" (Putnam 1993:176). Associations, particularly those which involve face-to-face, horizontal relationships between individuals: "generate trust, norms of reciprocity, and a capacity for civic engagement, which are essential to the functioning of a modern democracy" (Edwards and Foley 2001:10). In this sense, an active civil society improves the efficiency of society and facilitates coordinated actions (Putnam 1993:167): it correlates with better institutional performance and economic growth (Whittington 2001:21). Putnam argues that, in the absence of civic engagement, citizens lack the skills and attributes necessary to collaborate on economic and political projects (Edwards and Foley 2001:10). Conversely, he contends: "When economic and political dealing is embedded in dense networks of social interaction, incentives for opportunism and malfeasance are reduced" (Putnam 2000:21).

The three components of Putnam's social capital are norms of trust and reciprocity and networks (or civic engagement). Norms are the shared understandings, informal rules and conventions that prescribe, proscribe or modulate certain behaviours in various circumstances (Productivity Commission 2003:9). They provide a form of informal social control that tempers the need for more formal, institutionalised, legal sanctions (Onyx and Bullen 2000:107). Norms can increase pro-social behaviour and prevent anti-social behaviour, but can also reinforce conformity and limit dissent and social mobility (Onyx and Bullen 2000:108), as Putnam maintains (Putnam 2000:22). Putnam argues that effective norms of trust and reciprocity are supported by: "dense networks of social exchange" (Putnam 2000:136). A virtuous circle is created, with generalized trust creating reciprocity and social networks, and reciprocity and networks creating trust (Siisiäinen 2000:4). However, Morrow (2001:55) argues that this conceptualisation of social capital is "somewhat static" and "unable to accommodate social change."

Putnam's version of social capital has been heavily critiqued for its functionalism (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005:5), for being ahistorical (Smith and Kulynych 2002: 151), narrower than Coleman's rational choice model (Serageldin and Grootaert 2000:45) and influenced by a romantic, conservative communitarianism (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005:5). Putnam's social capital does not elucidate the specific mechanisms by which civil society generates social capital or specify how group involvement shapes government performance and enhances democratic processes (Booth and Richard 2001:45). Social capital is reduced to participation in voluntary associations and insufficient attention is paid to other institutions that may also contribute to social capital, such as families and schools (Winter 2000:32). Further, Putnam excludes any discussion on power or conflict (Siisiäinen 2000; Whittington 2001) and, indeed, contains no discussion of politics in his consideration of democracy (Putzel 1997). Overall, it is clear that linking social capital is the only area in the Putnamian interpretation of the concept where unequal power relations, or structural inequality, can be accommodated. As DeFilippis (2001:800) argues:

In Putnam's understanding of the term, social capital becomes divorced from capital (in the literal, economic sense), stripped of power relations, and imbued with the assumption that social networks are win-win relations and that individual gains, interests and profits are synonymous with group gains, interests, and profits.

### **Elements of Social Capital**

The major source of confusion in discussions of social capital are the elements which different authors view variously as sources, components or outcomes of social capital. The following section identifies the key features of orthodox definitions of social capital, providing a critique where these elements are poorly elaborated and add little to the interpretation or operationalisation of the concept.

#### *Networks*

Networks of relationships between individuals have been identified as a central component of social capital (Onyx and Bullen 2000:24), regardless of theoretical tradition. A network may be simply defined as: "an interconnected group of people who usually have an attribute in common" (Productivity Commission 2003:10). However,

Putnam tends to use social networks synonymously with civic engagement and associations: “Networks involve (almost by definition) mutual obligations; they are not interesting as mere “contacts”. Networks of community engagement foster sturdy norms of reciprocity” (Putnam 2000:20). The role of the family in the generation of social capital is also important for Putnam, but his focus is rather on changes to traditional family structures, such as the increase in working mothers and divorce rates (Putnam 1995a:204). For Putnam, membership in civic organisations is the primary driver of social capital.

For Coleman, the role of the family is paramount. Coleman sees the family or “primordial social organization” as the primary source of social (Coleman 1993a:610) and discusses at length the mechanism by which families generate social capital – through intergenerational closure and the enforcement of norms (Coleman 1988a:57). Other institutions, such as schools and religious communities, are also important mechanisms for the growth of social capital, but Coleman, like Putnam, is also concerned with changes in nuclear family structures and the emergence of what he termed ‘functional and structural deficiencies’<sup>11</sup> in families which has led to the decline of social capital. Unlike Putnam, Coleman emphasized that social capital, whilst generated by individuals or corporate actors, was an endowment of the social structure: “and he was disinclined to draw “community” into the family tree” (Farr 2004:9).

### *Bonding, Bridging and Linking Social Capital*

Putnam also focuses on different types of networks or social capital. He initially distinguished between horizontal networks, which bring agents of similar power and status together, and vertical networks, which link “unequal agents in asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence” (Putnam 1993:173). In his later work, this distinction becomes one between *bonding*, or inclusive, and *bridging*, or exclusive, social capital (Putnam 2000). Woolcock however, has argued for the addition of ‘linking’ social capital to this list, maintaining that it better describes relationships between people of unequal power (Woolcock 2000a:19).

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<sup>11</sup> Structural deficiencies include those families with working mothers, or sole parents. Functional deficiencies refer to the absence of a strong relationship between parent and child (Coleman 1988a:385)



Although other typologies have been developed<sup>12</sup>, the distinction between bridging, bonding and linking social capital has been widely adopted in theory, if not in practice.<sup>13</sup> The Australian Productivity Commission in an extensive literature review noted that: “these distinctions rarely find their way into empirical studies” (Productivity Commission 2003:45). Van Deth and Zmerli concur, noting that, despite the theoretical value of these ideas: “their explanatory power lacks empirical backing” (2010:633). The utility of this typology may also be problematic when applied to Indigenous communities because the creation of bonding, bridging and linking ties are so heavily influenced by identities, which are often excluded from the mainstream (Brough et al. 2006). However, Szreter (2002:603) notes that:

The analytical language of bonding, bridging and linking social capital provides a promising theoretical means to approach these more complex understandings of the state and of community, and to relative to changes in them to historical change in economics, ideology, and politics.

Table 1 outlines the key features of bridging, bonding and linking social capital.

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<sup>12</sup> In a sociological approach to international development, Woolcock (1998) has employed the concepts of embeddedness and autonomy to define four dimensions of social capital. At the micro level, or in bottom-up development, embeddedness and autonomy are described respectively as integration, or intra-community ties, and linkage, or extra-community ties. At the macro level, or top-down development, embeddedness and autonomy are described respectively as synergy, or state-society relations, and organizational integrity, or institutional coherence, competence and capacity.

<sup>13</sup> In Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics incorporates this distinction in its Social Capital Framework (ABS 2004); although unable to operationalise the distinction in their measurement framework, the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics (2005) emphasises its importance, as does Stone (2001) in her Australian Institute of Family Studies study. The Productivity Commission (2003) has also focused on these three forms of social capital.

**Table 1: Bridging, Bonding and Linking Social Capital<sup>14</sup>**

Type	Definition
<b>Bonding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationships among relatively homogeneous groups, e.g. members of family and ethnic groups; inclusive.</li> <li>- Strengthens social ties within a particular group and identifies inward-looking protective networks that provide both material and emotional support.</li> <li>- Reinforces homogeneity and produces strong ‘in-group’ loyalty;</li> <li>- “...builds strong ties, but can also result in higher walls excluding those who do not qualify” (Schuller, Baron and Field 2000:10)</li> <li>- Personalized trust</li> </ul>
<b>Bridging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Describes relationships between, or links across heterogeneous groups of individuals or organisations e.g. distant friends, associates, colleagues; exclusive.</li> <li>- Transcends various social divides e.g. generations, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender.</li> <li>- Relationships are likely to be more fragile than those identified by bonding social capital, but more likely to foster social inclusion.</li> <li>- Bridging and bonding social capital are not mutually exclusive<sup>15</sup></li> <li>- Generalized or social trust</li> <li>- Strength of weak ties (Granovetter 1983)</li> </ul>
<b>Linking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social relations with those in authority and positions of power.</li> <li>- Relations between individuals and groups in different social strata in a hierarchy where power, social status and wealth are accessed by different groups.</li> <li>- Describe the capacity of individuals and communities to leverage resources, ideas, and information from formal institutions beyond the immediate community radius.</li> <li>- Includes relationships between the government and the community; civic trust.</li> </ul>

The concept of linking social capital has the potential to incorporate an analysis of structural inequality and the role of government into the Putnamian interpretation of social capital, by emphasizing the importance of networks between people or communities who possess differential resources. However, at a fundamental level, Putnam’s concept reifies the ‘social’ and separates it from other forms of capital,

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from: Putnam 2000:22; Stone and Hughes 2002:4; Woolcock 2000a:19; Productivity Commission 2003:18; OECD 2001; Schuller, Baron and Field 2000:10.

<sup>15</sup> “Groups from a similar background are not similar in every respect, and may provide bridging links across, for instance, generations or sexes or educational achievement. Conversely, in groups from different ethnic backgrounds people may find others of the same age and sex with a common educational background and interests” (ABS 2004:103).

making it unlikely that simply adding more and different forms of 'social capital' will address its limitations (Morrow 2001:56).

### *Trust*

Trust is an important component of social capital for both Coleman and Putnam. Putnam maintains that: "Trust is an essential component of social capital" (Putnam 1993:176), and Coleman sees social capital as relying in part on "the trustworthiness of the social environment, which means that obligations will be repaid" (Coleman 1988b:102). Trust has become a significant part of the research on social capital and is usually defined as: "the level of confidence that people have that others will act as they say or are expected to act" (Productivity Commission 2003:11) or "a bet on the future contingent actions of others" (Sztompka 1998:20, quoted in Rothstein 2005:118). Where trust is absent, what Rothstein calls a 'social trap' can emerge: a situation in which individuals, groups or organisations are unable to cooperate, owing to mutual distrust and lack of social capital, even where cooperation would benefit all (Rothstein 2005:17-18).

Stone (2001) identifies three forms of trust relevant to social capital: personalized; generalized; and institutional. Personalised or particularised trust is trust which exists in established relationships and networks usually involving family and close friends. It is the trust which is built between people who know each other well (Hughes, Bellamy and Black 2000:225). Generalized or social trust differs from personalised trust in that it relies on the propensity of people to expect others to be dependable and honest (Hughes, Bellamy and Black 2000:225). It is defined as a "predisposition to rely on a stranger or organisation in the absence of specific knowledge about their past actions" (Productivity Commission 2003:11) and refers to the trust extended to strangers "often on the basis of expectations of behaviour or a sense of shared norms" (Stone 2001:26). Generalized or social trust also differs from personalised trust in that it relates to attitudes to strangers and casual acquaintances, not people who know each other well (Hughes, Bellamy and Black 2000:225). The third type of trust is institutional or civic trust; a basic trust in the formal institutions of governance (Stone 2001:26). Of these three forms, generalized or social trust is seen to be the most relevant for the study of social capital and is often argued to be a key contributor to economic dynamism and

effective government (Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 1993). Trust has become widely accepted as a central correlate of social capital and as a barometer of the health of democracy (Li, Savage and Warde 2008:404).

As Siisiäinen (2000:3) argues:

In the modern world we will need trust when we leave the sphere based on familiarity and enter a world dominated by contingency, complexity and risk. Trust is needed when role expectations and familiar relationships no longer help us to anticipate the reactions of our individual or collective interaction partners.

From the Putnamian perspective, generalized or social trust is interpreted as the most relevant to the study of social capital<sup>16</sup>, in terms of its ability to facilitate economic growth and accountable government (Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 2000; Stone 2001). The utility of institutional or civic trust is, reflecting the widespread adoption of Putnam's interpretation of social capital and the attendant dismissal of the role of government, largely disregarded in the literature. If, however, it is important that governments provide infrastructure, implement legislation or maintain accountable bureaucracies, for example, it is the responsibility of the state to build and maintain trust in its institutions. The policy agenda for investing in social capital therefore becomes largely an agenda for top-down state action (Bell and Hindmoor 2009).

As Fine argues: "social capital is not a substitute for effective public policy, but rather a prerequisite for it and, in part, a consequence of it. Social capital ... works through and within states and markets, not in place of them" (Fine 1999:11). Similarly, Tarrow (1996:296) argues that governments and policy makers who aim to address a deficit of social capital by encouraging the growth of associations are attacking the symptom, not the cause, of the problem:

Social capital is not a form of do-it-yourself civil elastoplast...the first task in building social capital in poor communities is, paradoxically, to restore collective faith in the idea of the state as and in local

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<sup>16</sup> As discussed earlier, forms of trust are generally defined as personalized (or trust of familiars), generalized (or social trust), and institutional (or civic) trust (see Hughes, Bellamy and Black (2000), Productivity Commission (2003), and Stone (2001).

government as a proactively effective servant of the community  
(Szreter 2002:613).

The focus on trust in the social capital literature is often problematic. Both Coleman (1998a) and Putnam (2000) posit that social capital is synonymous with trust, which has led to the widespread adoption of survey items measuring generalised and civic trust as proxies for social capital (Knack and Keefer 1997; Stone 2001). However, the basis for using trust as an indicator of the existence of social capital is questionable. For example, Claibourn and Martin (2002) use three waves of data from the Michigan Socialization Studies between 1965 and 1982 to examine the influence of trust on group membership, and the influence of group membership on trust. They find no evidence to support the hypothesis that trust increases associational membership and little evidence to suggest that membership in groups increases individual trust (Claibourn and Martin 2000). Similarly, Knack and Keefer (1997) find no evidence that associational membership is related to trust.

Foley and Edwards (1999) are also sceptical of the focus on interpersonal trust as the basis for economic growth and civic participation. They argue that comparative research on economic growth in higher income, industrial nations establishes that cooperation is not the result of trust or norms, but is rather achieved through “conflict, the threat of sanctions, and institutions” (Foley and Edwards 1999:153). For individuals, they argue that trust, and more importantly the absence of trust, is influenced by: “socioeconomic and minority status, noneconomic life events, religion, and age-cohort”. Misanthropy, or negative social trust, is higher among: “the less educated, those with lower incomes, and those with recent financial reversals, among subgroups toward the social periphery, among victims of crime and those in poor health, among non-church goers and fundamentalists, and among younger adults” (Foley and Edwards 1999:153). The assumption that high levels of trust must have positive consequences also needs to be disrupted. The existence of trusting relationships within families or communities is as relevant to the examination of social capital’s negative effects as it is to understanding positive outcomes (Åberg 2000:309)

Foley and Edwards conclude that there is little evidence that the proportion of a population who identify themselves as 'trusting' has any impact on the health of a democracy or prospects for economic growth (Foley and Edwards 1999:162):

On the contrary, such expressions appear to reflect the peculiar social, economic and political positions of the respondents: social trust is the result of a social, economic or political system that works well for some, if not others, not the cause of their felicity. Trust, moreover, is not the universal lubricant that oils the wheels of cooperation wherever it is applied. Rather, cooperation is achieved through a variety of mechanisms, not the least important of which is effective government regulation.

In terms of the case study adopted for this thesis, it is relevant to briefly draw attention to the concept of social and civic trust in the context of Indigenous-government relations. In Australia, like many other colonial states, it can be argued that there is little basis for Indigenous people to place trust in government and its institutions. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991), the *Bringing Them Home* report (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997) and the annual reports of the Social Justice Commissioner (Gooda 2011a, 2011b) all document government policies and practices which were designed to control, surveil and assimilate Indigenous people. The horrendous costs that continue to be borne by individuals and communities as a result provide little evidence that trust by Indigenous people in the police, courts, schools, the medical system, religious institutions, the welfare system, media or government can be justified. As Hunter somewhat mildly states: "the oral cultures of Indigenous communities tell too many stories of betrayal and bad faith for the present generations to do anything but distrust governments, churches, other groupings and organisations and many individuals" (Hunter 2004:13).

Whilst 'trust' may not be quite as important to either the micro or macro outcomes as Coleman and Putnam claim, it is a central component of social capital. Portes (1998:9), for example, sees 'enforceable trust' as an important source of social capital, describing the ability of a group to enforce obligations. It is not however synonymous with social capital, but rather facilitates an individual's access to the resources of a group depending on their compliance to rules and obligations. There is nothing in this

interpretation which mandates that the effects of trust are beneficial for either the group or particular members. Trust simply refers to the expectation that other's will follow the rules (either formal or informal) of social relations (Reimer et al. 2008:260), and it is analytically separate from the behaviours that are enforced by those sanctions or rewards.

### *Reciprocity*

A central principal of Putnam's concept of social capital is the norm of generalised reciprocity: "a relationship of exchange that is at any time unrequited or imbalanced, but that involves mutual expectations that a benefit granted now should be repaid in the future" (Putnam 1993:172). Reciprocity encourages individuals to strike a balance between their own self-interest and the interests of the community (ABS 2002b:6). According to Putnam, where the norm of generalized reciprocity is in play, communities are able efficiently to restrain opportunism and resolve problems of collective action (Putnam 1993:172). Generalized reciprocity reduces transaction costs and increases efficiencies (Putnam 2000:135):

Each individual act in a system of reciprocity is usually characterized by a combination of what one might call short-term altruism and long-term self-interest: I help you out now in the (possibly vague, uncertain, and uncalculating) expectation that you will help me out in the future. Reciprocity is made up of a series of acts each of which is short-run altruistic (benefiting others at a cost to the altruist), but which together typically make every participant better off (Taylor 1982:28-29 quoted in Putnam 2000-135).

Authors across the ideological spectrum, including Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, concur that norms of reciprocity or obligation are a key component of social capital. Portes (1998) maintains that reciprocity is one of the sources of social capital, where individuals provide access to resources with the expectation that they will be repaid at some point in the future. Various authors differ in their view about how norms of reciprocity are internalized, with Putnam largely absent in this discussion and Coleman presenting a somewhat over-socialised view (Portes 1988:7), which relies too heavily on norm adherence. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, Bourdieu's

concept of habitus resists this tendency and, instead, describes how norms predispose rather than predetermine an agent's rule-following behaviour.

The idea of reciprocity and sharing has also received a great deal of attention in Indigenous policy and research, particularly in the field of anthropology. It refers to the idea that reciprocal obligations are one mechanism for the allocation of resources in a moral economy (Altman 2011; Lahn 2012:7). However, as Altman (2011) demonstrates in a review of the concept of 'demand sharing', notions of reciprocity and sharing have become attached to narratives of dysfunction, and the ideas of *excessive demands* such as 'humbugging' have come to stand in for more nuanced discussions of obligations and mechanisms for resource allocation:

...the notion of demand sharing has increasingly been imbued with moral dimensions, positive and negative. On the positive side, demand sharing can be a mechanism for the redistribution of scarce resources. But on the negative side its operation can result in excessive demands generating hardship (Altman 2011:158).

Altman goes on to argue:

... much of the public policy discourse about demand sharing views the practice in highly moralistic negative terms and links it to the rhetoric of failure in Indigenous affairs; it is seen to slow integration into the mainstream individuated economy, to perpetuate poverty and disadvantage, and/or to aid and abet risky behaviour such as drinking and drug taking that results in costly social pathologies such as violence and child abuse. This discourse calls for an elimination of the practice of demand sharing – a fundamental change to culture – so as to empower Aboriginal individuals for advancement and modernity (Altman 2011:160).

This thesis cannot provide a review of the literature on reciprocity and demand-sharing in Indigenous communities; to do so would amount to a discussion of much of the anthropological research since contact. However, it is important to note that extended networks of kinship and reciprocal relationships are key features of Aboriginal societies in Australia (Daly and Smith 1996; Schwab 1995a).



It is the misappropriation of these ideas to focus solely on the negative effects of reciprocity that poses the largest risk for this discussion. The identification of downsides of social capital which are based on an assumption that reciprocity in Indigenous communities necessarily leads to excessive demands, contains a strong moralistic dimension which ignores how reciprocity and sharing are useful ways of understanding how resources are distributed. It may well be the case that excessive claims on group members are a negative effect of social capital (Hunter 2004:15), but it is important to recognise that these effects may be overstated for political ends (Altman 2011:277), and that hardship or deprivation occurs within a broader system of inequality and discrimination. As this thesis will demonstrate, Bourdieu provides a framework for understanding that social norms do not exist in a vacuum; a point which is critical for avoiding culturalist and deficit approaches to the negative effects of social capital.

#### *Level of Analysis*

Portes (2000:3) argues that a significant transformation has occurred in the conceptualisation of social capital, which he largely attributes to Putnam, whereby it has become possible to speak of the “stock” of social capital possessed by groups, communities, cities or nations. Portes identifies a conceptual stretch between earlier sociological analyses, such as Bourdieu and Coleman, which understood the individual as the unit of analysis and social capital as a source of social control, and Putnam’s qualitatively different interpretation of social capital as a community resource (Portes 2000:2-4).

Communities are outcomes of a complex array of power relations that exist both internally and externally and which are affected temporally and spatially. It is only by ignoring these relations of power that it becomes possible to assume that communities are solely the result of the people who reside in them (DeFilippis 2001:789). Similarly, it is only by ignoring power relations that it is possible to move from an individual to a community level analysis and also assume that individual gains and profits are the same as community gains and profits (DeFilippis 2001:789-790).

Portes (2000) identifies a number of consequences of defining social capital as a community resource, as opposed to an individual asset. Firstly, social capital runs the risk of becoming synonymous with: “all things that are positive in social life” (Portes 2000:3). Second, the concept is subject to a degree of circular reasoning when it: “is said to lead to better governance and more effective policies, and its existence is simultaneously inferred from the same outcomes” (Portes 2000:4). This is avoided when social capital is viewed as an individual asset, because its sources are based on a person’s networks and its effects are tied to material and informational benefits (Portes 2000:4). Third, the assertion Putnam makes that “generalized ‘civicness’ leads to better political results” ignores the possibility that this is a spurious correlation (Portes 2000:5)<sup>17</sup>. Given the issues involved in the reinterpretation of social capital as a community resource, it is apparent that Putnam's contribution to the literature has been both dramatic (DeFilippis 2001:785) and problematic.

As noted earlier, Putnam maintains that civic engagement provides the skills necessary for a community to collaborate on economic and political projects. Largely as a result of the ‘invasion’ of American homes by television, and some under-theorised ‘generational change’ (Putnam 1995a, 2000; Szreter 2002:595), Putnam argues that civic engagement has decreased since the 1950s and that Americans no longer possess the attributes necessary for collaboration<sup>18</sup>. This is loosely termed the ‘civic decline thesis’. Putnam argues that, since the 1950s, participation in many conventional voluntary associations has declined, the time Americans spend on informal socializing and visiting neighbours is down and membership in civic associations and church attendance have decreased (Putnam 1995a). Social capital has therefore declined as a result of the loosening bonds between families and a decline in social trust within communities (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005:5). As Szreter (2002:584) argues:

For Putnam the chief causes of the diagnosed deficit of bridging social capital in the United States today are the dangers of the detached, suburban lifestyle of “splendid isolation,” where too many Americans do

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<sup>17</sup> The relationship between democracy and capitalist growth is dubious. Putzel (1997) cites the significant economic growth that has occurred under the authoritarian political systems of East Asia since World War 2, concluding that “The patterns of accretion of social capital that have underpinned this growth have had very little democratic content” (Putzel 1997:941).

<sup>18</sup> Mowbray (2004) notes that Putnam is able to identify television and generational change for the decline in social capital, after absolving markets or states of any influence.

not know who their neighbours are because they spend too much in competitive workplaces, commuting alone in their cars and then slumped in front of the television, not even communicating with their families.

In Putnam's analysis, social problems, such as poverty, unemployment and crime, are a direct result of a lack of civic engagement. Civic engagement, in turn, is the responsibility of the family and the community to foster (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005:5): "networks of organized reciprocity and civic solidarity, far from being an epiphenomenon of socioeconomic modernization, [are] a precondition for it" (Putnam 1995b:65). So, O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh argue (2005:5): "It is the family's and the community's responsibility to foster such characteristics as trust, shared information, and positive norms of behaviour for everyone's mutual benefit".

A number of problems can be identified with this perspective. Firstly, it is unclear how the resources gained through networks are distinct from the ability to secure them. Secondly, by focusing on the role of the family and the community in accessing and using resources gained through networks, this perspective overlooks how individuals obtain and use social capital. If having (community-based) social capital is a precondition for positive outcomes, then individuals who have access to insufficient resources: "are in danger of being labelled powerless in their pursuit of outcomes" (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005:5). Putnam's argument blames the victim for her lack of social capital, and so responsibility for declining social capital is placed squarely on individuals, instead of the economic and political changes affected by corporate and state actors (Portes 1998:19; Schuurman 2003:1002):

In short, if you are marginalised, poor and underdeveloped it is basically your own fault. Not only that, you have the key to progress in your own hand ... according to the social capital logic the poor are expected to pull themselves out of a problematic situation by developing the right kind of social capital. In an era where structuralist approaches to understanding reality are increasingly traded for more actor-oriented approaches, this sounds just right (Schuurman 2003:1000).

## *Conflict*

Both Putnam and Coleman are concerned with ideas of 'social disintegration'. Coleman attributes the need for new sources of social capital to what he sees as the "rapid disintegration of the family" and diminished prominence of religious organisations (Coleman 1993a; Coradini 2010:570). Putnam's 'civic decline thesis' is similarly concerned with an apparent diminishing tendency for Americans to be engaged in community, political and religious organisations (Putnam 1995a, 1995b). Both authors are concerned with disengagement and anomie, yet neither substantially engages with the possibility that civic capacity, family structures and norm enforcement may be affected by factors such as economic restructuring or political environment (Tarrow 1996).

Putnam's neglect of the role of politics and conflict in civic engagement is most clearly demonstrated by his explication of the 'civic decline thesis' in the final chapters of *Bowling Alone* and his advocacy of the Progressive Era of American history as a demonstration on how to build social capital. Putnam bemoans America's diminishing social capital: "Our growing social capital deficit threatens educational performance, safe neighbourhoods, equitable tax collection, democratic responsiveness, everyday honesty, and even our health and happiness" (Putnam 2000:367). He draws on the Progressive Era, a time of supposedly greater civic engagement, to demonstrate the remedy. According to Putnam, the leaders of the Progressive Era "correctly diagnosed the problem of a social-capital or civic engagement deficit" (Putnam 2000:401), and his prescription is for Americans to "once again be as civically creative as our Progressive forebears" (Putnam 2000:403).

However, Putnam neglects the politics and conflicts underpinning the formation of many Progressive Era civic associations and reforms, and idealises this period of American history. Navarro (2002:429) finds it:

...plain overwhelming that the Progressive Era, which Putnam considers a building of communitarianism and social capital, can be presented as being an outcome of enlightened civic-minded leaders who developed and implemented reforms to increase the social capital of communities, with no mention of the political context in which these reforms took place.

In response to the massive industrialization of the nineteenth century, the emergence of the “robber barons” and their empires, unrestrained free enterprise, unsanitary urbanization and frontier expansion (Szreter 2002:589), Americans of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century supported a wave of economic, political and social reform on issues such as the labour movement, women’s suffrage and civil rights for African Americans. Szreter (2002) summarises the developments of the Progressive Era that Putnam considers in *Bowling Alone*:

- Ideological rejection of social Darwinism;
- Reaction of the middle class to the squalor of crowded immigrant tenements;
- The preaching of the ‘Social Gospel’ by religionists;
- Increasing prominence of women;
- Increasing organisation of workers and immigrants which eventuated in trade unionism (with skyrocketing membership between 1897 and 1904);
- Reform of federal government finances, including business regulations, protection for workers.

Gabrielson (2006:651) goes further in elaborating the nature of American citizenship at the end of the nineteenth century:

One of the responses of American intellectuals to the rapid and widespread changes of the late nineteenth century was a fear of social and political fragmentation. Unprecedented industrialization combined with economic depression fuelled conflicts between labor and capital, record immigration prompted nativism and fears of hyphenation, urbanization threatened the cultural norms and moral order that had been preserved by small communities. African Americans continued to press for full inclusion into the policy, cultural elites expressed alienation from a growing mass consumer society, and, for some, the suffrage movement threatened the home and family – the very foundation of the nation. Further, these macro-level phenomena were paralleled by individual expressions of concern over the integrity of the self. Many upper- and middle-class Americans wrote of the experience of fragmentation, detachment, liminality, double-consciousness, and alienation.

In contrast, Szreter maintains that Putnam implicitly acknowledges this anomie and the political nature of social movements in the Progressive Era: “Putnam is, in effect describing changes in the political ideology and in the dominant social and moral thought of these generations as being of great causal importance” (Szreter 2002:595). Yet, Putnam himself makes no attempt to acknowledge the fundamentally political nature of many social movements and associations in this period (Arneil 2006). The omission extends from his idealisation of associational activity and joining behaviour in late-nineteenth century America, through to his construction and depoliticisation of social capital in the contemporary era (Navarro 2002:429).

In an extensive critique of *Making Democracy Work* (Putnam 1993), Tarrow (1996) questions Putnam’s argument that “personal anomie and social disintegration” are the result of a lack of social capital. Tarrow suggests that this interpretation leads to a particularly Tocquevillian policy prescription: simply support the development of social capital networks. If, however, the absence of civic capacity is not due to a lack of social capital, but is instead:

...the by-product of politics, state building, and social structure, then the causes of the malaise...are more likely to be found in such structural factors as the flight of real capital...[or]...the instability of commodity prices and the presence of exploitative governments...while the indicators of malaise may be civic, the causes are structural (Tarrow 1996:396).

As Navarro (2002:427) notes, it is remarkable that a Professor of Public Policy is willing to uncritically adopt the language of economics and argue the benefits of social networks for economic capital accumulation (among other outcomes), but remain seemingly unaware that social dislocation: “may be rooted precisely in the existence of capitalism”. Certainly, there is a clear contradiction between Putnam’s desire for social cohesion and togetherness: “and his call for the competitiveness that capitalism forces on its adherents on the other” (Navarro 2002:427).

Putnam ignores any relationship between different forms of capital, as well as the broader economic and political structures that affect the distribution of the different

types capital. His conception of social capital is therefore restricted because of its focus on outcomes, rather than processes (Morrow 2001:58). As Whittington argues, “civil society must be placed within a political and institutional context” (Whittington 2001:31). He continues:

Once we move beyond the relatively innocuous components of Putnam's civil society - bowling leagues, choral groups, and bird-watching societies - to voluntary associations concerned with political mobilization - such as religious groups, ethnic organizations, and business associations - then the formation of social capital begins to raise difficult questions about social conflict and political ends. The proper functioning of democracy depends on a particular interaction of society and political institutions, and not simply on the maintenance of societal activity per se ... Given the possibility of social conflict, distrust of government and of others can be a reasonable political choice, and not simply the product of a weak society (Whittington 2001:31).

### *The Role of the State*

Orthodox social capital, with its focus on ‘togetherness’, is immensely useful for those who prefer to ignore conflicts of interests in communities, institutions or nations (Siisiäinen 2000:23), or the role of the state in mediating those conflicts (Szreter 2002:602). For example, many authors have argued that the World Bank’s adoption of Putnam’s social capital model enabled it to address criticism of the Washington Consensus by finding an increased role for civil society in economic development, while changing its neoliberal discourse to include a greater role for the state (Fine 2008; Harriss and De Renzio 1997; Mayer 2003; Schuurman 2003). The case of the World Bank’s use of Putnam’s social capital is just one way in which Schuurman demonstrates that the: “adoption of social capital [has] led to a domestication of critical social science” (Schuurman 2003:997).

Putnam does acknowledge a small role for government in his agenda for building social capital: “Government may be responsible for some small portion of the declines in social capital...and it cannot be the sole solution, but it is hard to imagine that we can meet the challenges I have set for America in 2010 without using government” (Putnam

2000:413). However, he goes on to argue that: “In the end, however, institutional reform will not work – indeed, it will not happen – unless you and I, along with our fellow citizens, resolve to become reconnected with our friends and neighbours” (Putnam 2000:414). A consideration of the role of governments in building social capital, or even of the nature of the relationship between the state and civil society, is largely missing from Putnam’s analysis in both his major works, *Bowling Alone* and *Making Democracy Work* (Harriss and De Renzio 1997; Leonard 2004; Levi 1996; Mayer 2003; Mowbray 2004; Putzel 1997; Schuurman 2003; Szreter 2002; Tarrow 1996).

Levi (1996) questions the assumption that effective government is a direct result of the interactions which occur within civil society. There is a significant gap between the types of civic associations Putnam endorses and organisations designed for political action, Levi argues, and it is unclear in Putnam’s analysis how membership in one kind of association leads to the capacity to make effective demands on, or sanction, governments (Levi 1996:49-50)<sup>19</sup>.

As discussed earlier, Putnam has a tendency to idealize the past and attributes American associations with a level of democratic tolerance that is not borne out by the deeply conservative and exclusionary roles that many groups have played in regional America (Putzel 1997:946). Taking into consideration the ‘dark side’ of social capital, and the capacity for bonding social capital in particular to reinforce exclusionary norms, makes it possible to understand how associations of like-minded people can become: “profoundly divisive and separatist” (Szreter 2002:584-585). As Whittington argues, trust may well grow within an associational society, but it does so along narrow and exclusionary lines and Putnam’s focus on the role of associations in building social trust minimizes the possibility of social conflict (Whittington 2001:26-27). It is therefore possible that the demands made by organisations may not be democratic or representative and that mobilization of large numbers of groups along ethnic, racial or religious lines, for example, may be disruptive and serve to undermine, rather than reinforce, democracy (Levi 1996:49; Whittington 2001:26).

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<sup>19</sup> Levi (1996) goes on to argue that the capacity of any association or organisation to influence government may be influenced by a range of factors such as the media, election cycles, lobby groups or simply the difficulty and cost involved in obtaining information about policies and policy consequences.



This thesis argues that a high level social capital may be undesirable in and of itself, and may well co-exist with high levels of inequality and social exclusion (Wilson 2005). Putnam's solution is an increase in the number of local, voluntary associations, with the assumption that these associations will transform into the 'right kind' of social movements and civic activity. Coleman's solution is to invest in institutional replacements for families. Orthodox social capital fails to enunciate the mechanisms by which civil society ensures effective government, or to discuss the role of government in building social capital. Indeed the role of government is consistently overlooked, for example, in mediating the often conflicting demands of civil society, or even in providing a legislative framework. Putnam's thesis, in particular, relies on an unsubtle and idealistic formulation of civil society which results in families and associations bearing the blame for the theorised decline of social capital and attendant political and economic problems (Levi 1996:50-51).

Research demonstrates that both inequality and social capital are transferred intergenerationally and that inequality undermines the formation of social capital (Gold et al. 2002; Li, Savage and Warde 2008). Indeed, Mowbray argues that, as inequality increases, trust and cohesiveness decline (Mowbray 2004:21). Thus, when the inequalities of wealth and power experienced by many people and groups are taken into consideration, alongside the possibility that associations may have narrow political objectives, the role of governments becomes critical. It becomes evident that: "Politics and ideas matter a great deal in determining the legislative outcomes of the conflicting and ambivalent interests that confront societies and their constituent individuals and social groups" (Szreter 2002:585). Apart from their legislative and redistributive role, Evans (1996) argues that governments have a role to play in building social capital, particularly through joint state-society projects, but most basically through the dependable supply of inputs citizens cannot produce on their own, from tangibles, like roads, to intangibles, like the rule of law (Evans 1996:1130). Universally state-provided resources and rights, as well as effective bureaucracies, can be a source of respect and trust and, therefore, facilitate the growth of social capital (Evans 1996; Szreter 2002; Rothstein 2005).

## Conceptual Implications of Orthodox Approaches

The critique of social capital is extensive, and this thesis identifies three key implications that must be addressed. First, there is a claim that the ideological and analytical consequences of the term itself have received insufficient attention (e.g. Harriss and De Renzio 1997; Smith and Kulynych 2002). Second, as has been mentioned, there are similarities between ‘social capital’ and other approaches such the ‘culture of poverty’ thesis, which tend to focus on individual responsibility to experiences of poverty and exclusion, rather than the objective conditions that determine inequality (Muntaner, Lynch and Davey Smith 2001:225; Welshman 2006). Third, a central critique is the neglect of the negative consequences of social capital, which this thesis rectifies.

### *The Term ‘Capital’*

A consistent theme in the literature debating social capital is the use of the term ‘capital’, and the way in which the influence of economic rationalists like Coleman and communitarians like Putnam, have furthered the colonisation of the social sciences by economics (Fine 2001b). For example, Smith and Kulynych maintain that economic language and modes of reasoning have become pervasive in social and political inquiry (2002:177) and that the language of ‘social capital’ serves to reinforce the depoliticisation and valorisation of capital and capitalism which occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century (ibid., p.164). These authors argue that, in addition to the ideological consequences of this focus upon ‘social capital’, there are a number of ways in which the term “impedes scholarly inquiry” (Smith and Kulynych 2002:177):

1. The term ‘social capital’ neglects how financial capital influences its constitution, and denies that access to social and political advantages are very different when secured by either financial or social capital.
2. When social capital is seen as a precondition for democracy and civic engagement, it supports the idea that these are simply forms of economic activity.
3. “...the word *capital* is historically associated with individualism and the pursuit of wealth, to view civic engagement and the resources of the economically disadvantaged as social capital is to obscure the meaning of words such as capitalist and solidarity” (Smith and Kulynych 2002:177).
4. When social capital is applied to political activities, it functions to ignore how

these activities occur in a historical context.

Similarly, Coole (2009) argues that the term 'social capital' enters political discourse as a strategy to ameliorate the anomie and fragmentation experienced by individuals and communities as the result of two different, but related, factors: the social costs of deregulated markets; and the effects of migration on ethnic and cultural diversity (Coole 2009:379-380). The strategies adopted by various levels of government to build social capital constitute an ideological response to these macro-level changes. Drawing on Althusser's distinction between repressive and ideological state apparatuses, and Foucault's discussion of the micro-operations of power, Coole argues that social capital is popular because it operates to reinvent state power (Coole 2009:392). Social capital functions as a: "...vehicle for the state to reconstitute lived experience by intervening in the very building blocks of society where social, familial and community networks, values and affects, circulate" (Coole 2009:393).

Coole (2009) argues that states are attempting to repair their ideological integrity, which has taken a battering as the result of significant economic and demographic changes over the past 40 years. Social capital facilitates this through its allusions to democratisation, trust, community engagement, good governance, lower crime, economic growth, and better health and education (Coole 2009:374). Orthodox social capital theory provides an opportunity for the state to intervene in the daily lives of its citizens, and extend its power through more dynamic forms of governance, place management and financial oversight, reducing the autonomy and decision-making power of individuals and their communities (Coole 2009:393).

As these authors demonstrate, the adoption of the language of social capital can be problematic, and can function to mask the historical, political and economic context in which social norms and networks develop. If the term 'social capital' is to be usefully employed, it must be located within a critical framework in order to avoid creating an artificial separation between social capital and other forms of power and resources.

### *Social Capital and Individual Responses to Inequality*

Several authors (e.g. Welshman 2006; Muntaner, Lynch and Davey Smith 2001) have also identified important similarities between social capital and approaches such as Oscar Lewis' 'culture of poverty' thesis, 'social exclusion' and 'third way' perspectives. What unites these theories is their emphasis on the behaviour of individuals in contributing to their own disadvantage and a resistance to ideas of structural inequality (Welshman 2006:273). The 'culture of poverty' approach states that disadvantaged communities invite poverty because of their inability to build community ties, that is social capital (Muntaner, Lynch and Davey Smith 2001:225). According to this approach, it is not structural or objective inequality which determines wellbeing, but rather the subjective responses of individuals and communities to those inequalities. This places control and responsibility for change solely on those individuals and groups (Muntaner, Lynch and Davey Smith 2001:225). Both Coleman's and Putnam's discussions of social capital contain similar reasoning. Social problems, such as poverty, unemployment and crime, are a direct result of family breakdown, and a lack of civic engagement or effective norms of trust and reciprocity, which are the responsibility of families and communities to foster. A failure to develop and enforce pro-academic norms, for example, is the result of deficiencies in contemporary patterns of familial organisation. Social capital becomes "yet another 'thing' or 'resource' that unsuccessful individuals, families, communities and neighbourhoods lack" (Morrow 1999:760).

Thus, the current social capital framework serves to describe rather than explain the effects of inequality on educational outcomes ... These theories are faulted primarily because they obscure issues of power and domination; that is, they do not address links between lack of ties to institutional agents, macro forces, and institutional-discriminatory patterns (Dika and Singh 2002:44).

### *The Dark Side of Social Capital*

The vast majority of researchers acknowledge that social networks can have negative effects, and there are very few authors who maintain that social capital is necessarily positive. Cox and Caldwell (2000) and Rothstein (2005) are notable examples, with Rothstein for example arguing:

Individuals who are socialized in associations to generally mistrust other people in their society and behave, through strategies of social isolation and segregations, in ways that others mistrust them, cannot be said to possess a large supply of social capital (Rothstein 2005:102).

This assumption, that individuals who do not meet mainstream normative standards of behaviour are not trustworthy or trusting, and therefore do not possess any social capital, is deeply problematic. Such a position is not supported by the literature on social capital more broadly and it fails to acknowledge how the propensity to trust is influenced by economic security, education, or membership in a marginalised group, as discussed earlier. It also obscures how network membership may deliver benefits for individuals, such as professional, emotional and financial support, whilst creating detrimental effects for non-network members. Inner-city gangs are often cited as an example of how strong networks can provide material and social support for members, at the same time as delivering negative consequences for broader communities (Pih et al. 2008; Portes and Landolt 1996; Short 1990).

Despite the moralist underpinning of both Coleman and Putnam's work, both authors acknowledged a range of negative effects that can impact individuals and groups by virtue of their network membership. Coleman, for example, constructed an "ethically neutral" model of social capital, which suggested that although closed networks are more likely to facilitate strong norms and high levels of trust, closed networks are likely to retain benefits internally (Claibourn and Martin 2000:269). From his economic rationalist perspective, Coleman acknowledges that:

... the dense network of relations that exists in a close community can serve to inhibit economic development by constraining innovation, and entangling potential entrepreneurs in a net of obligations that keeps them hobbled to the past (Coleman 1994:176, quoted in Albano and Barbera 2010:678).

Putnam does acknowledge that social capital has a 'dark side' (Putnam 2000: 21-22). However, the quality of the resources to which an individual has access through their network is also an important consideration when examining negative outcomes of social capital. This is neglected by both Coleman and Putnam, but addressed by Bourdieu,

who, as mentioned, defines social capital as “the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network” (Bourdieu 1986:248). As Portes and Landolt (2000:532) argue:

...an actor’s capacity to obtain resources through connections does not guarantee a positive outcome. Given the unequal distribution of wealth and resources in society, actors may have trustworthy and solidary social ties and still have access to limited or poor quality resources.

Despite the acknowledgement, either implicit or overt, by most major authors in this field that social capital has a downside, neither Coleman nor Putnam attend to the resources that are accessible through networks, whether those resources are material, cultural or symbolic. The work of scholars in the orthodox tradition of social capital therefore tend to disregard the social conditions in which networks develop and how that in turn influences the quality of resources individuals in those networks have access to. Chapter 4 provides a more extensive discussion of the downsides of social capital, building on Bourdieu’s framework and exploring in greater depth the role of access to resources in determining the negative effects of social capital.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a review of the social capital literature on the orthodox perspectives of James Coleman and Robert Putnam. Initially charting the origins of the concept, the chapter proceeded to outline the approach of each theorist and identify the contributions and limitations of each in terms of the key debates in the literature. To this end, a range of issues were explored, including: whether social norms are a source or an outcome of social capital; Putnam’s role in redefining social capital as a community attribute; each author’s approach to conflict and power; and the contribution of each author to understanding the ‘dark side’ of social capital.

Networks and the norms that sustain them are universally agreed to be a key component of social capital. However, the emphasis placed by scholars in the orthodox field on norms of trust and reciprocity is more problematic. For example, many of the arguments made by Putnam about the positive influence of trust and joining behaviour on economic performance do not withstand more rigorous examination, such as that

provided by Svendsen and Sørensen (2006:412) who find: “that social capital measured as the density of voluntary associations does not in any way influence levels of economic performance”. Whilst norms that proscribe or mandate particular types of behaviour can be seen as a source of social capital, defining social capital as those norms (such as equating social capital with trust) creates a tautological argument that results in social capital existing everywhere it is sought out. This is particularly the case with Putnam’s scaling up of social capital to a community, and even a national, level attribute.

Whilst there are different omissions in each of Putnam and Coleman’s approach, they similarly commit to an ahistorical, apolitical version of social capital that disconnects individuals and communities from broader political and economic movements. For example, neither author elaborates significantly on the causes of changes in family structures that both see as underpinning declining stocks of social capital (linked, in Putnam’s case to an increase in the consumption of television, and in Coleman’s case to the increase in sole parent families and an alleged diminishing role for religious institutions).

There is little room in either Coleman or Putnam for a discussion of power or conflict, and Putnam’s approach in particular: “with its emphasis on togetherness is more useful for those who prefer to overlook or downplay fundamental conflicts of interests in social institutions, localities or nations” (Siisiäinen 2000:23). For some critics, (such as Fine 2008; Harriss and De Renzio 1997; Mayer 2003; and Schuurman 2003), orthodox versions of social capital permit the (re)introduction of family and community into neoliberal discourse, without addressing in any substantive way the reasons why social capital delivers positive outcomes for some and not for others. Putnam and Coleman see the downside of social capital emerging when social norms don’t work, or they work too well, rather than analysing the causes of social fragmentation. This is a Goldilocks version of social capital, which relies on getting the norms of trust and reciprocity ‘just right’.

The literature explored in the following chapter demonstrates that a Bourdieusian reading of social capital provides opportunities that Coleman and Putnam do not, particularly the capacity to explore how resources accessible through networks are

influenced by social location, history and power. Both Coleman and Putnam's versions of social capital ignore how individuals as agents can accumulate and use social capital, yet manage to assign blame to individuals when they possess insufficient resources. Both also ignore that social relations occur in a broader context where governments, politics, businesses and economies influence the environment in which social capital can be accumulated. The influence of gender, ethnicity and class are similarly disregarded as forces which can influence the opportunity to access social capital, not to mention the purposes to which it is put. In contrast, Bourdieu's theory incorporates these broader forces, explains social disadvantage and explicitly describes the processes whereby individuals are able to marshal the resources necessary to effect change; themes which will be explored in the following Chapter.



### *Chapter 3 Bourdieu's Social Capital*

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This chapter will explore the Bourdieusian concepts of capital, field and habitus in order to demonstrate that an approach to social capital which incorporates these ideas addresses many of the critiques identified in the previous chapter. The chapter will also discuss how power and conflict, absent in orthodox approaches to social capital, are central to Bourdieu's theory. Finally, the chapter will identify and address the major criticisms leveled at Bourdieu's work.

Bourdieu's interpretation of social capital is part of a "generalized theory of capital" (Wacquant 1998:26), which is inseparable from his other core concepts, habitus and field. Through these concepts, Bourdieu sought no less than: "to rethink the constitution of social space and the dynamic articulation of practice, structure, and history" (Wacquant 1998:26). For Bourdieu, social capital has little to do with idealistic notions of pluralist democracy and participative citizenship and his use of the concept is part of a larger project, the aim of which is to understand: "how relations of difference, power and domination are created and sustained, and how social actors operate within these sets of relationships" (Bebbington 2007:155). According to Bourdieu, social capital is:

... the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu 1986:248-249).

#### **Capital**

It has been noted that Bourdieu's conceptual world is not easily digestible. He does not offer: "tidy, well-delineated theoretical arguments but orienting themes that overlap and interpenetrate" (Swartz 1997:8). Bourdieu's sees social capital as part of a more complex "social topology" which locates individual's positions in the social world in terms of their possession of, or access to, a variety of capitals: economic; social;

cultural; and symbolic (Bourdieu 1986; Wall, Ferrazzi and Schryer 1998:306). The inclusion of other forms of capital, namely cultural and social, is used to denote non-economic power resources.

Smart (2008) maintains that a Bourdieusian perspective is less prone to the questionable causal inferences of other approaches, because of its differentiated approach to non-economic capital. This allows the obligations between individuals, i.e. social capital, to be distinguished from the knowledge of how networks can be used, or cultural capital (Smart 2008:411-412). Table 2 provides a summary of the different forms of capital Bourdieu describes. Incorporating the various forms of capital into an analysis of social capital helps to overcome the problematic assumptions in orthodox approaches by making space to understand of the role of structural inequality and individual agency in the generation and transmission of social capital.

**Table 2: Bourdieu's Capitals<sup>20</sup>**

<b>Form</b>	<b>Description</b>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- e.g. money, property</li> <li>- Immediately and directly convertible into money</li> <li>- Institutionalized in the form of property rights</li> </ul>
Cultural	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Embodied form: an integral part of the person, represented by dispositions of mind and body.</li> <li>2. Objectified form: the material and symbolic appropriation of cultural goods, knowledge of how to use cultural objects.</li> <li>3. Institutionalized form: institutional recognition, such as of educational qualifications</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conditionally convertible into economic capital</li> <li>- Distinction based on ideas of 'competence' or 'aptitude'</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social obligations/connections/networks</li> <li>- Conditionally convertible to economic capital</li> <li>- Can be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility</li> </ul>
Symbolic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The form in which the different types of capital are perceived and recognized as legitimated bases of social positions</li> </ul>

In Bourdieu's analysis, the volume of social capital possessed by an individual is determined by the size of their network and the volume of capital possessed by each member of that network (Bourdieu 1986:249). As Lin (2001:22) states: "for Bourdieu,

<sup>20</sup> Summarised from Bourdieu (1986).

social capital depends on the size of one's connections and on the volume or amount of capital in these connections' possession."

The existence of a network, and the reproduction of social capital, is not however a "natural given, or even a social given", it is the result of a continuous investment in social relationships that are directly useable in either the short or long term (Bourdieu 1986:249). It is Bourdieu's argument that the: "profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible" (ibid.). The network is a result of the endless efforts of each member to "produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships" (ibid.); an endeavour which implies spending time and resources, that is, economic capital. It is the benefits which flow to each individual in the network by virtue of their membership that justifies the investment in the continuation of that network (Bourdieu 1986:249-250): "It takes repeated exchanges that reinforce mutual recognition and boundaries to affirm and reaffirm the collectivity of the capital and each member's claim to that capital" (Lin 2001:22). This draws attention to benefits that accrue to members as a result of adherence to norms and investment in reciprocal relationships.

Similarly, Ihlen (2005:494) argues:

Bourdieu's definition implies that social capital must be understood as having two components: the size of an individual's network and the volume of the capital that the other parts of the network have, and to which the individual gains access. Social capital accrues as a result of a conscious or unconscious investment strategy involving exchanges of, for instance, gifts, services, words, time, attention, care, or concern. It also implies "obligations" or "credit." The members of the network can subjectively feel gratitude, respect, or friendship; the relationship can also be formalized as rights and obligations. The credit can be called on, but without a guarantee that it will be recognized.

A key element of Bourdieu's conceptualization of the social world is that economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital: "The different types of capital can be derived from economic capital, but only at the cost of a more or less great effort or transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effective in the field in

question” (Bourdieu 1986:252). Non-economic forms of capital are effective: “...only to the extent that they conceal...the fact that economic capital is at their root” (Bourdieu 1986:252). Swartz argues that this process of concealment, or *misrecognition*, denotes a: “denial of the economic and political interest present in a set of practices” (Swartz 1997:43). Actions or resources increase in legitimacy the more they are separated from their underlying material interests, that is to the extent that they are represented as *disinterested* (Swartz 1997:43). For Bourdieu, the logic of self-interest underlies all practices and these practices are legitimized by the degree to which they are misrecognized as underwritten by the logic of disinterest (Swartz 1997:43): “Individuals and groups who are able to benefit from the transformation of self-interest into disinterest obtain what Bourdieu calls *symbolic capital*” (Swartz 1997:43, emphasis in original). Symbolic capital is the form in which the various different forms of capital – social, cultural, economic – are perceived and recognised as legitimate (Morrow 2001:41). As Siisiäinen (2000:12) states: “it is symbolic capital that defines what forms and uses of capital are recognized as legitimate bases of social positions in a given society”.

Portes (1998) notes that, whilst Bourdieu maintains that the other forms of capital are reducible to economic capital, the processes that produce them are not. Each form of capital possesses its own dynamics and transactions. Regarding social capital, the pertinent example, these transactions: “tend to be characterized by unspecified obligations, uncertain time horizons, and the possible violation of reciprocity expectations. But, by their very lack of clarity, these transactions can help disguise what otherwise would be plain market exchanges” (Portes 1998:4).

O’Brien and Ó Fathaigh elaborate on the transformation between economic and social capital (2005:8):

Economic capital on its own, however, is not sufficient to buy ‘status’ or position – rather, it relies on the interaction with other forms of capital. One other such form is social capital. This exists as a set of lasting social relations, networks and contacts. Like Coleman and Putnam the notion of reciprocity is important here, though Bourdieu emphasises individual (and not necessarily communal) gain that may be sought. Investment in social capital, then, acts as a kind of strategy which (unconsciously or

otherwise) further serves as a mechanism to exchange other capitals.

An analysis of the relationship between the different forms of capital, even if only social and economic forms, is missing from accounts of social capital that rely on Putnam's interpretation, as is any attention to wider economic and political structures (Morrow 2001:58). Coleman (1988b) does draw attention to the role of social capital in the development of human capital, primarily though the role of the family and school community in preventing high school attrition. However, Coleman's 'human capital' is much more a fitting target for claims of economism than Bourdieu's approach, because Coleman ignores how academic outcomes tend to be influenced by more than straightforward economic investment (Bourdieu 1986:244).

In contrast, Bourdieu's analysis provides an opportunity to examine the intersection of individual dispositions, social structures and resources, and how this perpetuates exclusion. Importantly, Bourdieu does this without reverting to the path dependency implicit in a Putnamian interpretation of social capital (Harriss and De Renzio 1997). Class distinctions, and institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition, are more relevant to the analysis of social capital for Bourdieu than is the concept of 'trust', which is used so problematically in Putnamian interpretations (Farr 2004:9). A Bourdieusian analysis is concerned with how economic capital underpins other disguised forms of capital and how social inequalities are reproduced by the interaction between the different forms of capital within broader social structures (Morrow 2001:41).

Bourdieu treats capital in terms of relations of power founded on quantitative differences in the amount of labor they embody (Swartz 1997:74). In Bourdieu's sociology, capital is power (Bourdieu 1986:241). It is his aim: "...to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and to establish the laws where the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another" (Bourdieu 1986:243). Distinct from orthodox formulations which see social capital as an "integrative or cohesive resource", Bourdieu, rather, uses the concept to: "explain the perpetuation of class and the differential distribution of power, privilege and economic domination" (Mowbray 2004:7).

As such, Bourdieu's definition of social capital is "highly socially and historically contextual" (Fine 2001a:65) and stresses unequal access to resources through the possession of relationships (Edwards and Foley 2001:8):

Capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. And the structure of the distribution of the different types of and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world (Bourdieu 1986:241-242).

Not all types of capital are equally available to everyone, nor is the power and opportunity to convert a type of capital equally distributed. Moreover, the value of a particular type of capital is determined through the conflict between agents in particular fields.

## **Field**

The social world is composed of structured arenas of social action, or fields, in which different forms of power (or capital) are relevant and active to various degrees (Wacquant 1998:26): "[a] field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:16). The active properties which construct the social world can be described as a "field of forces"; a set of power relations that is imposed on all agents who enter the field (Bourdieu 1985:724). Capital, in turn, is any resource that allows an individual to obtain the profits of activity within that field (Wacquant 1998:6). The different kinds of capital are sources of power that define the chances of success in any given field and, therefore, determine the position of an agent in the social space (Bourdieu 1985:724). The social world is constructed according to the distribution of capital and individuals occupy a particular region of social space according to the quantity and constitution of capital they possess (i.e. the amount of capital overall, and the relative weight of the different types of capital) (Bourdieu 1989:17). Central to the construction of a field is

the conflict between the interests of different groups in their struggle to determine and gain control of the capital valued in the field (McNay 1999:106).

According to Bourdieu, social space is stratified along three dimensions: volume of capital; composition of capital; and social trajectory. This defines the class structure of society, because individuals who share similar positions on the three dimensions, also share similar material and symbolic, or class, conditions (Swartz 1997:162-163). Changes in the volume of capital possessed by an agent can chart their trajectory through social space (Wacquant 1989:26):

The position of a given agent within the social space can thus be defined by the positions he occupies in the different fields, that is, in the distributions of the powers that are active within each of them ... One can thus construct a simplified model of the social field as a whole that makes it possible to conceptualize, for each agent, his or her position in all possible spaces of competition (it being understood that, while each field has its own logic and its own hierarchy, the hierarchy that prevails among the different kinds of capital and the statistical link between the different types of assets tends to impose its own logic on the other fields (Bourdieu 1985:724).

Bourdieu uses the analogy of a game to explain how a field is a structured space of forces (Grenfell 2007:55). Although not explicitly codified or deliberately created, the idea of *field* is roughly analogous to the 'rules of the game', where those rules are created in part by each player's belief that the stakes are worth competing for (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98). Various forms of capital constitute at once the weapons used in and the stakes of the game.

One of Bourdieu's most well-known works is *Homo Academicus* (1988), which examines the French academic field in the lead up to the student protests and general strike of May 1968. Some critics, such as McGee (1990) argue that the insights provided by *Homo Academicus* are restricted by the particular culture and structure of the French tertiary education system, and events of 1968. Others, such as Jenkins (1989) argue that insights are limited by the prose-style of the book, which, despite Bourdieu's claims that his choice of language is intended to disrupt and enable objectivity, simply

perpetuates a long tradition in the French academy, where: “the academic reputation of the author is inversely related to the clarity of his expression” (Jenkins 1989:644). Robbins, however, contends that *Homo Academicus* should not be read as a kind of inscrutable ethnography of the French tertiary education system, but rather: “as a model for the kind of analysis that should be undertaken reflexively of their own intellectual and institutional positions by sociologists operating from the inside” (Robbins 2004:418-9).

In the Preface, Bourdieu (1988:xii) rhetorically questions what could be obtained from an analysis of the academic field: “that site of permanent rivalry for the truth of the social world”. Insofar as the question contains the answer; *Homo Academicus* was intended as a sociological analysis of the production of sociological knowledge (Wacquant 1990). It also intended however to define a ‘field’ in the context of the broader operation of the ‘field of power’, which then enabled an interrogation of how agents’ habitus are both produced in, and perpetuate, that social space (Grenfell 2007:121). Bourdieu demonstrated how the intellectual positions adopted by agents in the academic field were part of their effort to convert the forms of capital they possessed into those valued in the field, or: “their attempts to trade power and status acquired intellectually for economic and political power and vice versa” (Robbins 2004:423).

*Field* is an integral part of Bourdieu’s approach to the sociology of knowledge; it describes a structured social space in which specific types or combinations of capital operate (Swartz 1997:117). Each field of struggle (whether, for example, the academic, economic or bureaucratic field) interacts with other fields, but is subject to the broader *field of power*, which “operates as an organizing principle of differentiation and struggle throughout all fields” (Swartz 1997:136). Cohen argues:

Contrary to the economic or bureaucratic or academic field, in which agents struggle to accumulate a certain type of specific capital in order to access and occupy dominant positions, the field of power is a field of struggle between agents already holding dominant positions in their respective social field in order to set the value of their initial capital and eventually convert part of this capital, thereby diversifying their portfolio



of capitals in occupying dominant positions in other social fields. (Cohen 2011:335)

The academic field can be seen as a site of contest in which a struggle for the legitimate type of power is fought. Education institutions contain the power to name, to consecrate, naturalise distinctions and privilege particular forms of knowledge over others. The struggle for the power to impose the legitimated vision of the world is, therefore, rarely more important than within institutions that are responsible for the production of knowledge.

### **Habitus**

If the field can be described as the ‘rules of the game’ and capital is the ‘skin in the game’, habitus can be described as an actor’s ‘feel for the game’. This describes a sense of both agency and strategy, but also of constraint and structure. In an effort to transcend the traditional subjective/objective antinomy, Bourdieu adopts the concept of strategy to distance himself from structural determinism and to stress the importance of agency within a structuralist framework (Swartz 1997:98). The idea of strategy is intended to convey the point that compliance to rules and norms does not necessarily provide the best explanation for actions. This does not however imply that actions occur completely outside normative constraints (Swartz 1997:99), but it does avoid Coleman’s over-socialised model and Putnam’s ahistorical version of social capital. Rather, Bourdieu uses the concept of strategy to imply that actions involve uncertainty and ambiguity. Strategies employed by actors are not based on rational calculation or conscious choice, but rather on internalized dispositions that provide a sense of what practical action seems possible or appropriate in a given situation (Swartz 1997:100).

In a Bourdieusian interpretation of socio-economics, Svendsen and Svendsen (2003:625) maintain that the benefit of this approach lies in its acknowledgement that actors have interests and consciously pursue strategies to fulfill them, yet, because these strategies are the products of individual and collective history, they are not *rational* in the strictest sense of the word. Rather, they are “relatively reasonable” in the context of the structural forces at play. Swartz (1997:100) explains that:

...choices do not derive directly from the objective situations in which

they occur or from transcending rules, norms, patterns and constraints that govern social life; rather, they stem from practical dispositions that incorporate ambiguities and uncertainties that emerge from acting through time and space.

This enables Bourdieu to move beyond the debates established by rational choice theory, arguing that the issue is not whether agents make choices or that those agents are *interested* or invested in outcomes. Rather, those choices are relatively reasonable in the circumstances agents occupy: “Bourdieu does not deny that agents face options, exert initiative, and make decisions. What he disputes is that they do so in the conscious, systematic, and intentional (in short, intellectualist) manner expostulated by rational-choice theorists” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:24).

Whilst all individual behaviour is located in a field of action, and the structure of the distribution of capital in each field describes the power imbalance between agents, determining the chances of access to profits produced by the different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1985:725), individual action is not wholly determined by the structure of a field. Bourdieu uses the concept of *habitus* to describe how both “objective structures and subjective perceptions” influence action (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005:7). Bourdieu defines habitus as the: “set of durable, transposable dispositions which...functions at every moment as a matrix of *perceptions, appreciations and actions*” (Bourdieu 1977:82-83, quoted in Laureau and Horbat 1999:39, emphasis in original). Perhaps it is more clearly described as a set of taken-for-granted ideas, assumptions and habits “through which individuals engage with, understand and move on through the world” (Bebbington 2007:155-156); the habitus functions, often without conscious recognition, to regulate thought and action (O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005:7). Bourdieu has explained the concept in variety of ways: “cultural unconscious”; “habit-forming force”; “set of deeply interiorized master-patterns”; “mental habit”; “mental and corporeal schemata of perceptions, appreciations, and action”; “generative principle of regulated improvisations” (Swartz 1997:101):

Habitus results from early socialization experiences in which external structures are internalized. As a result, internalized dispositions of broad parameters and boundaries or what is possible or unlikely for a particular group in a stratified social world develop through socialization. Thus, on

the one hand, habitus sets structural limits for action. On the other hand, habitus generates perceptions, aspirations, and practices that correspond to the structuring properties of earlier socialization (Swartz 1997:103).

O'Brien and Ó Fathaigh (2005:7) explain the dialectical relationship between agent and structure:

In essence, the habitus concept is a way of explaining how social and cultural messages (both actual and symbolic) shape individuals' thoughts and actions. It is not a static concept since it allows for individuals to mediate these messages, even to the point of resisting embodied beliefs. The habitus is thus not wholly structured, though it still remains strongly influenced by historical, social and cultural contexts.

The concept of habitus creates a link between social structures and the idea that individuals are practical and strategic. It also provides an explanation of how class differences and structural disadvantages are internalized and transmitted intergenerationally (Swartz 1997:103). Habitus facilitates the unconscious adjustment of expectations or aspirations, based on what seems likely, feasible or appropriate in the context of the social environment in which an individual was socialized. Hence, there is a collective basis for habitus, or a class dimension, derived from the shared, or similar, social space which agents occupy, and the consequent similarity of life chances internalized by individuals (Swartz 1997:105, 162-163). This approach emphasises that: "not all social worlds are equally available to everyone. Not all courses of action are equally possible for everyone; only some are plausible, whereas others are unthinkable" (Swartz 1997:107). The habitus expresses the social position in which it was elaborated (Bourdieu 1989:19), thus functioning as the mechanism through which the objective external world becomes embodied in the subjective internal world (Holt 2008:233). The internalization of the social order through the socialization that produces habitus provides an insight into how intergenerational disadvantage and socio-economic differentiation are reproduced.

Allard (2005) draws on Bourdieu's interpretation of social capital to understand the experiences of young women who are economically disadvantaged and 'at risk' of exiting the education system early. The author argues that Bourdieu's concepts of

habitus, field and social capital are useful in understanding how agents, who are located in relations that structure them as powerless, utilise various forms of capital strategically in different contexts (Allard 2005). Conversely, Allard finds that Putnam's interpretation of social capital, with its focus on families and community organisations, does not contain sufficient analytic power to contribute to understanding how individuals can be viewed as agents capable of making choices and accumulating social capital (Allard 2005:65). Allard argues that being 'at risk' is a "lived, embodied experience", where insufficient resources are available to individuals to assist them in negotiating the "(mine)fields of daily life". A Bourdieusian perspective provides the interpretive power to understand: "how the complexities of social practices, contexts and capital intersect in both productive and inhibiting ways" (2005:77).

Research by Morrow (2001) into young people's subjective experiences of their local communities, their quality of life and the nature of their social networks (both formal and informal) also demonstrates the utility of the Bourdieusian formulation of social capital. The author notes that, in analysing the data: "Bourdieu's interconnected forms of capital were in many ways more apparent and relevant to the children's accounts of their everyday lives than the 'social capital' in Putnam's version" (Morrow 2001:47). In researching these young people's largely informal networks, their awareness of their social status, as well as their appreciation of their physical environment, Morrow argues that Putnam's idea of social capital is limited because it is static and unable to accommodate social change (Morrow 2001:55). Bourdieu's interpretation however, allows for the existence of different social identities and the ability to analyse the interrelationship between different forms of capital. As Morrow argues: "a tool for analysis of social environments needs to be dynamic and able to accommodate the way families, children, friendships, social networks, institutions, norms and values change temporally...and spatially" (Morrow 2001:55). Bourdieu's social capital, compared to both Coleman and Putnam's versions, permits an analysis of the processes and practices of everyday life and how they relate to the structures of social exclusion (Morrow 2001:58).

Li, Savage and Warde (2008) examine the relationship between social stratification, class trajectory and the possession of formal and informal social capital in Britain, finding that social contact and civic engagement are deeply rooted in class structure and

that the reproduction of social capital is indeed subject to intergenerational processes (Bourdieu 1986). The authors find that the propensity to engage in civic activity is strongly influenced by class, and that upwardly mobile people have a larger number of contacts, and more contacts in higher status positions, than people in the service class (Li, Savage and Warde 2008:400-407).

Gender and ethnicity also play a role; the authors noting that, in their study, women and people from ethnic minorities tend to have smaller social circles and that the contacts in those social circles are more closely connected (Li, Savage and Warde 2008). In addition, not all associations are equal in their ability to build wider social connections; for example, religious and similar organisations support a form of involvement that does not translate into wider civic attachments (Li, Savage and Warde 2008:407)<sup>21</sup>.

The authors argue that associational membership is a feature of the service class (i.e. the professional or managerial class) and that associations are likely to have second-generation service class members (Li, Savage and Warde 2008:400). Hence, because:

...those with more contacts tend to have contacts in higher status positions, we are forced to conclude that social capital primarily operates to entrench privilege, within and across generations... Thus efforts aimed merely at increasing social capital by encouraging greater formal civic engagement without tackling the root causes of socio-economic disadvantage may well aggravate rather than ameliorate social division (Li, Savage and Warde 2008:407).

This research demonstrates that simply encouraging formal civic engagement doesn't address the causes of social disadvantage (Li, Savage and Warde 2008:407) and affirms the utility of a Bourdieusian interpretation of social capital, which emphasises structural constraints and examines how the intergenerational nature of capital accumulation entrenches social differentiation. Habitus describes how individuals internalise the conditions of their socialization. Together with the ideas of field and capital, this approach is able to directly engage with inequalities of power. The absence of power and conflict in orthodox approaches to social capital has been discussed in the previous

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<sup>21</sup> Alexander (2007) confirms the negative correlation between church attendance and social capital.

chapter. This chapter will now discuss Bourdieu's approach to power and conflict.

## **Power**

Unlike the approaches of Putnam and Coleman, the exercise and reproduction of power is a core concern of Bourdieu's work, as Swartz (1997:6-7) discusses:

...for Bourdieu power is not a separate domain of study but stands at the heart of all social life, and the successful exercise of power requires legitimation. The focus of his work, therefore, is on how cultural socialization places individuals and groups within competitive status hierarchies, how relatively autonomous fields of conflict interlock individuals and groups in struggle over valued resources, how these social struggles are refracted through symbolic classifications, how actors struggle and pursue strategies to achieve their interests within such fields, and how in doing so actors unwittingly reproduce the social stratification order.

Two concepts require further explication: symbolic capital; and symbolic power. As discussed earlier, symbolic capital reflects the form in which different types of capital are perceived and recognised as legitimate (Morrow 2001:41). As Siisiäinen states: "it is symbolic capital that defines what forms and uses of capital are recognized as legitimate bases of social positions in a given society" (Siisiäinen 2000:12). Symbolic capital is a form of power that is not seen as such, but is rather perceived as a 'legitimate' entitlement to: "recognition, deference, obedience, or the service of others" (Swartz 1997:90). Symbolic capital functions to disguise the underlying interests underpinning the other forms of capital and the ways in which those forms of capital structure the social world:

Owing to the fact symbolic capital is nothing other than economic or cultural capital when it is known and recognized, when it is known through the categories of perception that it imposes, symbolic relations of power tend to reproduce and to reinforce the power relations that constitute the structure of social space (Bourdieu 1989:21).

Secondly, Bourdieu sees symbolic power as resting on two conditions, the possession of symbolic capital and the ability *name*, to impose definitions and categories.

Symbolic power...rests on two conditions. Firstly, as any form of performative discourse, symbolic power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital. The power to impose upon other minds a vision, old or new, of social divisions depends on the social authority acquired in previous struggles. Symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition ...

Secondly ... Symbolic power is the power to make things with words ... [it] is a power of consecration or revelation, the power to consecrate or to reveal things that are already there ... a group, a class, a gender, a region, or a nation begins to exist as such, for those who belong to it as well as for the others, only when it is distinguished, according to one principle or another, from other groups, that is, through knowledge and recognition (Bourdieu 1989:23).

To Bourdieu, symbolic power is based on accumulated symbolic capital. Symbolic power does not reside in words, symbols or ideas, it is rather a *worldmaking* power: the capacity to impose the legitimate vision and structure of the world (Swartz 1997:89). This concept therefore acknowledges that conflict exists between symbolic powers, as they compete to produce and impose a vision of the social world and its divisions which is perceived as legitimate (Bourdieu 1989:22). Siisiäinen (2000:13) elaborates on this process:

Bourdieu's idea is that economic, cultural, and social capital becomes meaningful and socially effective only through the process of symbolic translation. That is why symbolic power, the power to make different entities exist by symbolic categorizing becomes decisively important within the total system of power. Knowledge of the social world becomes the object of political and ideological struggles. Influencing the categories and distinctions through which the world is perceived becomes a major way in changing (or conserving) the social world. It is by seeing things in the legitimate way that the implicit can be made explicit, and potential groups transformed into actual groups.

Bourdieu maintains that legitimation of the social world is not the result of purposive or deliberate action, rather it derives from the process whereby agents: “apply to the objective structures of the social world structures of perception and appreciation which are issued out these structures” (Bourdieu 1989:21). The dialectical relationship between objective structures and the subjective perceptions which derive from those structures mean that the social world is often unquestioningly taken as self-evident, providing an explanation for how objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in symbolic relations of power (Bourdieu 1989:21). Symbolic power therefore has a self-evident quality that elicits the consent of both the dominant and the dominated (Swartz 1997:89). The social world therefore presents itself as a highly structured reality, but can be constructed according to: “different principles of vision and division” (Bourdieu 1989:19). The power to define and impose those principles stands at the core of the conflict between different groups.

As mentioned earlier, Bourdieu’s conceptual world is not easily digestible. The language presents immediate challenges, and the complexity of the theory creates difficulties in operationalising the concepts. Thus, unsurprisingly, there are a number of substantive critiques of Bourdieu’s work, which the following section will address.

## **Critique**

The above discussion demonstrates a number of advantages in using a Bourdieusian interpretation of social capital, as opposed to Putnam’s more popular version and Coleman’s more user-friendly version. However, there are several criticisms of Bourdieu’s concept that must be addressed. Field (2003), for example, argues that there is no bright side to Bourdieu’s social capital, and it underplays the importance of the resource to disadvantaged groups. Moreover, Field argues that Bourdieu’s treatment of social capital is circular: “in summary, it boils down to the thesis that privileged individuals maintain their position by using their connections with other privileged people” (Field 2003:23). Unlike orthodox versions of social capital which function to mask the structural causes of inequality, Bourdieu’s social capital is concerned with the relative stasis of stratification. It does not preclude change, but it does call attention to the ways in which access to resources is restricted across generations, and how the exclusionary function of networks is their primary purpose. Field’s (2003) concerns are



perhaps less salient than the three other critiques which will be addressed here. First, this section will discuss the charge that the concept of habitus is reductionist. Second, the frequently cited arguments that Bourdieu's concepts are difficult to operationalise will be addressed. Finally, this section will discuss the trenchant criticism that despite his protestations to the contrary, Bourdieu is guilty of the economism much of his oeuvre explicitly rejects.

### *Habitus*

King (2000) argues that the concept of habitus demonstrates exactly the kind of objectivism Bourdieu attempts to overcome, despite the sophistication of his arguments. King maintains that Bourdieu's habitus is reductionist, fails to accommodate social and individual change and unnecessarily occludes his "practical theory" (King 2000:427), which does, according to the author, successfully overcome the impasse between objectivism and subjectivism (King 2000:431). Habitus, according to King: "reduces social reproduction to the mechanical imposition of prior social structure onto the practices of individuals" (King 2000:429). It is a static and timeless model which leaves no room for social change or transformation:

If the habitus were determined by objective conditions, ensuring appropriate action for the social position in which any individual was situated, and the habitus were unconsciously internalized dispositions and categories, then social change would be impossible. Individuals would act according to the objective structural conditions in which they found themselves, and they would consequently simply reproduce those objective conditions by repeating the same practices (King 2000:427).

However, social change is central to Bourdieu's "practical theory" which, King insists, accommodates the possibility of transformation because it is based on the idea that individuals negotiate social relations through exchange (King 2000:428):

Thus, even if individuals are not explicitly seeking to renegotiate their relations (as they often are), each subsequent exchange builds on the entire series of exchanges and, thereby, subtly transforms the meaning of

those past exchanges and, therefore, the relationship itself. Social relations can never be static for their mere maintenance requires further agency, which necessarily involves a transformation of the relationship.

Individuals are therefore constrained because they are co-located in social relations with other individuals, not because of external rules or structures which exist prior to individuals, as King argues the concept of habitus would imply (King 2000:421). King refutes the idea that his dismissal of the concept of habitus and the *carte blanche* adoption of “practical theory” constitutes a complete reversion to subjectivism (King 2000:431), maintaining that: “...all individual practice and the understandings which inform that practice are always social; they are always learnt from others and performed in reference to others, requiring the understanding of other individuals” (King 2000:431). King contends that the relationship between habitus and field goes some way, but not far enough, in ameliorating these concerns, given the strategic nature of individual action and the struggle in a given field. King maintains that, strictly speaking, Bourdieu’s definition of habitus *in isolation* precludes the possibility of change, while Siisiäinen adds that Bourdieu’s theory is limited in providing the opportunity to analyse processes of change caused by conflicting agents and movements (Siisiäinen 2000:16).

Swartz also critiques the notion of habitus, arguing that it is not able to capture any incongruity which may exist between: “hopes, plans and chances for different groups” (Swartz 1997:111). As such, values and expectations do not appear separable in the conceptualisation of habitus (Swartz 1997:109). Habitus may therefore be too broad to deal with certain research questions because it does not distinguish between actions based variably on morality, corporeality or cognition (Swartz 1997:109). Habitus also appears to rule out the miscalculation of objective probabilities: “Bourdieu gives insufficient attention to the range of conditions under which aspirations fail to synchronize with expectations and expectations with opportunities” (Swartz 1997:111).

Despite the limitations of the concept of habitus, it is important to restate that interpreting habitus *as* structure would oversimplify Bourdieu’s position. The habitus is creative and responsive, and “born as practice” (Siisiäinen 2000:15). It is also constantly subject to experiences that may lead to its reinforcement or modification, creating the opportunity for change and reflexivity (Adams 2006:515): “...thus the

reproduction of social structures is never one-to-one reproduction but extended and creative reproduction directed by the habitus” (Siisiäinen 2000:15). Bourdieu intended the idea of habitus to describe the dialectical relationship between an agent and their location, and whilst it does not preclude the possibility of change, it does imply that change is slow, if not unlikely. Given the focus of this thesis on applying Bourdieu’s thinking to the role of the social capital in Indigenous higher education, the apparently intractable nature of Indigenous inequality can be usefully conceptualised with this model. However, this thesis does acknowledge and takes into consideration the potential limitations of using Bourdieu to explain the possibility of change.

### *Operationalisation*

Bourdieu’s theoretical work has also been questioned on the basis of its utility for undertaking empirical research. Schuller, Baron and Field (2000:4) argue that the problem of operationalising non-tangible forms of capital remains significant. Lareau and Horvat (1999:38) concur, noting that research based on Bourdieu’s conceptual work “has often been disappointing”. However, these authors argue that this is the result of the decontextualisation of key concepts from Bourdieu’s broader theory (Lareau and Horvat 1999:38). They contend that empirical research based on Bourdieu’s theory does not adequately recognize three key points:

1. The value of capital depends on the field (i.e. social setting).
2. The difference between the possession and activation of capital, that is, individuals have a choice about whether or not they use the cultural or social capital in their possession, and those individuals may vary in the skill with which they use it.
3. Points 1) and 2) together suggest that social reproduction is not an “overly deterministic process”, rather it is uneven and “continually negotiated by social actors” (Lareau and Horvat 1999:38).

Despite the complexity of his theories, and the success, or otherwise, of scholars in applying them, Bourdieu’s approach was empirically driven and based in extensive field research (Wacquant 2004). Although the most extensive applications of Bourdieu’s work are in educational research employing the idea of cultural capital, there is a growing body of literature that adopts a ‘forms of capital’ approach (e.g. Anheier,

Gerhards and Romo 1995; Nee and Sanders 2001; Veenstra 2009; Zweigenhaft 1992). For example, Vryonides (2007, 2009) has developed quantitative measures for the analysis of social and cultural capital in order to understand how non-monetary forms of capital interact to influence educational outcomes (Vryonides 2007, 2009). He, like Annette Lareau (Lareau 1987, 2011; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Lareau and Weininger 2003), argues that middle class families are able to access non-monetary forms of capital and transform this into educational advantages for their children:

The financial capital of the middle classes allows them to “buy” better education and to pursue activities and own objects that signify a special relationship with knowledge and intellectual pursuits (cultural capital). Furthermore, parents’ social position often affords the possibility of accessing social networks that can be beneficial as sources of indispensable information for educational processes and prospects, and for materializing the occupational aspirations of their children by accessing powerful patronage or links to other social networks (Vryonides 2009:140).

This work explores the interconnection between cultural, social and economic capital, and to differing extents, the concepts of habitus and field. Outside of the sociology of education, Bourdieu’s concepts have been employed in a range of disciplines and areas of inquiry, relying on both quantitative and qualitative methods<sup>22</sup>. This literature acknowledges that Bourdieu’s concepts are complex and present difficulties in operationalisation, particularly the idea of habitus. There is, however, an established research tradition in this area, and this will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 6 Methods and Methodology.

### *Economism*

A more trenchant criticism of Bourdieu is that his economy of practices is utilitarian. This accusation is based on Bourdieu’s assertion that all action is *interested* and conduct always appears to be directed towards accruing power and wealth (Swartz 1997:78).

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<sup>22</sup> For example, a recent volume by Robson and Sanders (2009) collects research focused only on the quantitative exploration of Bourdieu’s key concepts. Dinello (1998) uses a mixed methods approach to demonstrate how the cultural, social and symbolic capital of Russian bankers intersects in the context of market building and the transformation of financial institutions in Russia.

Indeed, Bourdieu does appear to doubt the possibility of disinterestedness (Siisiäinen 2000:4): “If the disinterestedness is sociologically possible, it can be so only through the encounter between habitus predisposed to disinterestedness and universes in which disinterestedness in [*sic*] rewarded” (Bourdieu 1998:88, quoted in Siisiäinen 2000:17).

Smith and Kulynych (2002:162) argue that the use of term ‘social capital’, and the growth in its popularity is, more broadly, evidence that “concepts, methods, and modes of analysis traditionally associated with economics” are increasingly applied to issues more traditionally in the domain of political science and sociology. For these authors, the concept of social capital is located in the broader context of the linguistic, political and intellectual valorisation of capital and the depoliticisation of capitalism. Superficially, it would therefore appear that Bourdieu’s contention that all forms of capital are in the last analysis reducible to economic capital is simply another demonstration of economic imperialism. In contrast, this thesis contends that the charge of economism is more accurately levelled at orthodox approaches, as discussed in Chapter 2.

It is however accurate to note that Bourdieu does appropriate aspects of economic language and theory (Lebaron 2003:561). This quite deliberate strategy seeks to relocate practices or exchanges in a symbolic framework and avoids constructing a rational actor whose social interactions are stripped of the potentiality for multiple, even contradictory, meanings by purely economic approaches (Calhoun 2006; Guillory 1997):

A general science of the economy of practices, capable of reappropriating the totality of the practices which, although objectively economic, are not and cannot be socially recognized as economic... must endeavor to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and to establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another (Bourdieu 1986:242-3).

Whilst these charges cannot wholly be dismissed, it is important to note that Bourdieu’s interpretation of capital is deployed in an effort to unmask relations of power and describe conflict, not ignore them, as Putnam and Coleman do. As Holt argues, the principle advantage of using Bourdieu’s theory of capital is that it reveals the:

“concealed intergenerational processes that serve to reproduce socio-economic advantage, disadvantage and privilege” (Holt 2008:234). Putnam’s interpretation of social capital does not contain the conceptual or analytic power to contribute to this debate, and Coleman’s rational actor model fails to acknowledge how historical disadvantage can restrict an individual’s access to resources.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a discussion of Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of capital, field and habitus in order to demonstrate that social capital is a concept more usefully understood as one type of resource available to agents. By describing how (social) capital is given value in a field, and how agent’s dispositions are influenced by, and in turn reinforce, social distinctions, Bourdieu is able to provide a coherent framework for exploring the role of networks in securing access to resources. This approach to social capital is more concerned with explaining how social inequality is perpetuated (Pichler and Wallace 2009:320) than it is with normative judgements about trust and community cohesion. For Bourdieu, social capital is concerned with how networks are used to restrict access to resources and mask what would otherwise be plain market exchanges, by naturalising distinctions based on reputation or title, for example. This approach removes the problematic normative judgements inherent in Coleman and Putnam’s perspective, and restores social capital as a value-neutral resource whose worth is determined in the field in which it operates. As Wacquant argues, any type of capital: “may take on a different value and have divergent effects, depending on the arena of action in which it is invested” (Wacquant 1998:27). Wacquant (1998:27) goes on to provide an example of the value of capital being determined by the field:

...mastery of the Black English Vernacular and of the linguistic games it permits is highly valued on the streets and in the ghetto peer-group but its use is ferociously sanctioned in school (Kochman, 1973; Gilmore, 1985; Solomon, 1992). It functions as positive cultural capital in the first context, negative in the second. Likewise, affiliative ties and bonds of obligation with friends and associates in the ghetto constitute a resource for survival and success in the informal economy, but they create

impediments and obstacles when attempting to move up and into the official labor market – “ties that bind” and keep you down.

Just as the idea of bonding, bridging and linking social capital is a distinction more easily made in theory than practice, and the lived experience of network types is more fluid and complex, so too is the ‘dark side’ of social capital. It is only by separating the operation of social capital from its historical and political context, as Coleman and Putnam do, that it can be constructed as a resource that must deliver positive outcomes. This thesis does not ignore the reality of negative effects of social capital by adopting a relativist position which argues that social capital’s downsides are simply a matter of position. But it does suggest that the negative effects of social capital (exclusion from resources, restricted mobility, downward levelling norms, excess claims on groups members or downward levelling norms) may not be as aberrant as the term ‘dark side’ suggests. If social capital is shorthand for the positive effects of norms and networks, and the downside is simply a label for the negative aspects of sociability, it is far from useful social science (Portes 1998:22). Indeed, it tends to construct those who do not reap the benefits of Coleman and Putnam’s social capital as deficient in their ability or willingness to construct resourceful social networks. Blaming social problems on individuals who possess the wrong kind of social capital, or not enough of it, “misdiagnoses the problem” (Portes and Landolt 1996:4).

If, however, social capital is both a weapon and a stake in a field, it can be used to determine the legitimate symbolic exchanges or modes of social organisation in that field. In the field of higher education, for example, the networks, titles or reputation that secure benefits, such as permanent employment for academic staff or access to funding, may be of less utility in the Indigenous field (Radoll 2010, 2011), where names, families and reciprocal obligations play a greater role in securing resources. Conversely, a resistance to adopting White status markers, or individual symbols of achievement, may demonstrate adherence to important norms in the Indigenous field (Kwok 2011), but be constructed as oppositional or deviant in the academic field.

The following chapter will elaborate further on critical approaches to social capital’s downsides, based on Bourdieu’s ideas of habitus, capital and field. The chapter will address the popular argument that ‘bonding’ networks are the cause of social capital’s

downsides, and explore how the idea of habitus is a more useful way to discuss norms of sociability than the usual focus on trust. By building on the ideas just discussed, the following chapter will demonstrate an interpretation of the downsides of social capital that resists the deficit approaches of orthodox social capital theories.



## *Chapter 4 A Critical Approach to the Downside of Social Capital*

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Previous chapters have established that ‘orthodox’ social capital (typified by the rational choice perspective of Coleman and the conservative communitarianism of Putnam) can be a fragile and parochial theory. Sustained critique from across disciplines and theoretical perspectives, particularly from Marxist and feminist scholars, suggests that there is little hope, let alone rigor and coherency, in the social capital project (Fine 2003). Orthodox social capital has proved a slippery idea that is fundamentally disconnected from history, power and social theory more broadly (Fine 2010).

This chapter will argue that a critical, Bourdieusian approach provides a more useful understanding of social capital’s downsides, particularly when applied to the issue of Indigenous higher education. Orthodox approaches see the source of social capital’s downsides in too much ‘bonding’ social capital, but usually focus on the negative effects experienced by individual or communities located outside the network. Whilst dense, homogeneous, groups do tend to demonstrate parochial, exclusionary practices, and the negative externalities of group behaviour are an important manifestation of social capital’s downsides, focusing on these alone provides, at best, a partial explanation.

First, the focus on bonding social capital as the source of negative outcomes is too simplistic. Both bonding and bridging networks demonstrate inclusionary and exclusionary processes (Leonard 2004), but the distinction may not adequately capture the relationship between networks and accessible resources within Indigenous communities. For example, bonding social capital ignores the ways in which extended familial networks, as opposed to ‘bridging’ or ‘linking’ networks, deliver a wide range of personal and material resources, as well as employment opportunities, for Indigenous people (Lahn 2012). Hence, the distinction between bonding and bridging may not be quite so sharp as Putnam would suggest (Field 2003:89). Rather, I argue that the concept of bounded solidarity provides a more useful understanding of strong connections between people facing a shared situation (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993).

Secondly, this chapter will explore the role of norms in delivering negative outcomes. Orthodox social capital research focuses on norms of trust and reciprocity and, whilst trust may be an important source of social capital (Portes 1998), norms can emerge within a network that are opposed to individual or collective mobility. It is therefore useful to attend to the conditions in which these norms emerge and examine how social stratification influences their character. Bourdieu's concept of habitus is useful here, because it draws attention away from a simplistic model of norm adherence and enforcement, towards understanding the broader social environment in which attitudes and practices emerge and are perpetuated (Swartz 1997:103).

Norms which proscribe academic achievement, or the adoption of White status markers, are often discussed in policy (Behrendt et al. 2012:41), the media (Wall and Baker 2012) and academic research (Kwok 2011; Sarra 2006). Orthodox approaches to social capital tend to see these norms as the result of the breakdown of family structures and a lack of engagement with educational institutions (Coleman 1988b). This is not an adequate explanation for the emergence of such norms and perpetuates a deficit approach, which has long placed responsibility for overcoming the effects of colonisation and marginalisation on Indigenous people.

The role of individual and collective identity is largely overlooked in the discussion of social capital in Indigenous communities (Brough et al. 2006), but this is critical to understanding how social norms and networks function, and the kinds of resources that are valued and accessed through those networks. As Therborn (2002:870) argues:

... norms define the meaning of social membership, members' expected contribution to the social system, and the proper rewards of their membership and/or contribution. As such, norms are ubiquitous, and they are central to any functioning social system, large or small.

Bourdieu's approach draws attention to how historical and political conditions influence the development of individual and collective identity, and role of social norms in reinforcing that identity. In this respect, Bourdieu provides a more comprehensive framework to discuss the emergence of social norms, their character, and the effects of their enforcement by individual and communities.

Finally, this chapter will examine how the notion of field is useful for understanding the downsides of social capital. Field draws attention to the presence of conflict and struggle to determine the value and relevance of resources. An individual's position in any given field is therefore determined by the distribution of the relevant capitals, rather than, for example, any of their personal attributes or characteristics (Swartz 1997:23):

While each agent's *habitus* has a certain biographical, idiosyncratic dimension, it is also heavily structured by where it falls within wider relationships and structures of social difference: class, gender, ethnicity, and so on. These structures of difference are characterized by distinct distributions of capitals: social, cultural, symbolic and economic ... The different forms of capital are resources that individuals possess and mobilize, and which go a long way in determining their opportunities and well-being. This structural differentiation is accompanied by a certain functional differentiation of society into different 'fields' which have their own rules, purposes and ways of operating. *Habitus* (in its sense of 'feel for the game') and forms of capital are also central to the agents' ability to strategize and operate effectively in those fields. And so, for instance, forms of social and cultural capital that can be immensely useful in operating in the academic field and (say) engaging in debates on social capital can be completely unhelpful in operating in political or economic fields (Bebbington 2007:156).

This suggests that, if a form of capital is not valued in a field, it may have negative consequences. For example, if the kinds of networks or practices valued by an Indigenous familial network are not valued by tertiary institutions, then the norms, obligations and knowledges that are part of that network are unlikely to secure benefits in the institution. This approach enables a more comprehensive analysis of social capital's downsides as the result of an individual's location in a stratified social structure. From there, the emergence of social norms which are opposed to individual well-being or mobility, or access to poor quality resources, can be seen as an effect of that location.

This chapter argues that Bourdieu, marginalised from the research in this field, not only provides a more complex and critical understanding of social capital, but also implicitly acknowledges its downsides. The reductionist tendencies of Bourdieu's approach cannot be disregarded, as critiques from both Marxist and feminist perspectives demonstrate (Fine 2003). However, previous chapters have demonstrated that Bourdieu's social capital addresses many of the criticisms levelled at the orthodox interpretation of this theory. Extending Bourdieu to the downside of social capital similarly addresses many of the limitations of this body of research.

Bourdieu's approach to capital provides a framework that focuses upon many of the concerns scholars have attempted to address by adding more and different types of social capital<sup>23</sup>. The idea of social capital's restrictive effects or processes is inherent to Bourdieu's work on the reproduction of classes. Firstly, through the concepts of habitus and field, the centrality of systems of dispositions and location to the operation of capitals is addressed. Bourdieu (2000b) also focuses on how social capital is used by actors to gain a competitive advantage, implying that a gain to one individual through the use of social capital may potentially lead to a loss for another. Networks may be beneficial to members because of the resources they provide access to, but they are also exclusionary systems defined by boundaries and restricting access; social capital reproduces structures of privilege and power relations (Bourdieu 1986). It is therefore not simply a lack of social capital, or possessing the 'wrong kind' of social capital, that leads to undesirable outcomes. It is the discursive relationship between power, location and systems of dispositions that influences outcomes for individuals and groups.

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<sup>23</sup> For example, Woollock (2000a) adding 'linking' to Putnam's bonding and bridging typology, and Rydin and Holman (2004) add "bracing" in order to describe strategic partnerships or governance initiatives.

## **The Downside of Social Capital**

As has been discussed, the orthodox interpretation of social capital often focuses on its positive effects (Portes 1998) and the role of networks and associational activity in generating trust and normative behaviour. Whilst concepts of power and conflict are often absent from discussions of social capital, the possibility that networks and norms of behaviour may oppress and exclude has not completely escaped the attention of orthodox social capitalists. Indeed, the idea that there are ‘negative aspects of sociability’<sup>24</sup> (Geys and Murdoch 2008) has become established in the literature: market distortions, moral hazard, corruption, ethnocentrism, gender inequality, inter-group hostility have been described as examples of ‘unsocial’ social capital (Adhikari and Goldey 2010; Brody and Lovrich 2002; Callahan 2005; Geys and Murdoch 2008; Krivokapic-Skoko 2007; Levi 1996; Li, Savage and Pickles 2003; Portes and Landolt 1996; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Putzel 1997; Quibria 2003; Woolcock 2000a).

This ‘dark side’ of social capital is usually attributed to an over-abundance of bonding, as opposed to linking, social capital and the dense, homogeneous and parochial networks that term describes (Rydin and Holman 2004). It is these strong ties between similar people that can lead to undesirable outcomes at both an individual and community level; Putnam (2007) and others such as Hooghe (2007) identify an inverse relationship between social capital and ethnic diversity, where generalized trust decreases according to increases in community heterogeneity. Bonding networks between similar people do not receive all the blame for negative outcomes however. Literature in the orthodox school has started to stress the importance of the context in which social capital accrues and is deployed. Recent research emphasises the importance of the political and economic environments in which networks develop, and the role of networks in reproducing existing social and political divisions (García Albacete 2010; Paxton 2002; Roßteutscher 2010).

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<sup>24</sup> Terms used to describe the dark side or downside of social capital also include: counterfeit social capital (Reimer et al. 2008); non-communitarian social capital (Åberg 2000); perverse social capital (Rubio 1997, Field 2003); unsocial capital (Levi 1996, Boyas 2010, Iglie 2010); or illegitimate social capital (Pih et al. 2003). Quibria (2003:31) describes a “bad equilibrium of norms and values that are inimical to individual and collective development”, and Adler and Kwon (2000) discuss the “disutilities” of social capital.

Orthodox approaches to social capital do then acknowledge its downside<sup>25</sup>, albeit to a limited degree, and often in an attempt to address the criticisms frequently levelled at the theory. Downsides are often explained as a result of the density of the network and the character of norms that sustain it. However, some research has started to explain downsides as a by-product of ‘context’; the historical, geographical, political or economic factors which influence the formation and operation of networks. These piecemeal attempts to rectify or refine social capital frequently serve to reinforce the critique that orthodox approaches are focused only on the negative externalities of networks, rather than on the negative effects experienced by group members, as Putnam demonstrates: “Networks and the associated norms of reciprocity are generally good for those inside the network, but the external effects of social capital are by no means always positive” (Putnam 2000:21).

Whilst the qualification of ‘generally good’ for insiders is itself incomplete and ignores how networks regulate access to resources and behaviour for members, the argument that social capital is ‘just like any other form of capital’ does not consider either the Bourdieusian interpretation of capital as power, or indeed, any critical interpretation of ‘capital’. Putnam simply equates ‘capital’ with ‘trust’ and ignores the interrelationship between different forms of capital, individual or group strategies for the accumulation or preservation of capital(s), or how social location determines the value of a particular type of resource.

The focus on ‘unsocial capital’ usually attempts to explain antisocial or parochial behaviour at the micro-level, and the persistence of undemocratic structures at the meso-level. Normatively undesirable group behaviour is a consistent theme, and some of the social capital literature does examine the benefits of membership to a group that has negative effects on outsiders (such as Pih et al. 2008, who examine the utility and benefits of gang membership). This perspective also fails to provide insight into the role of the quantity or quality of resources available through networks, or the capacity of individuals or groups to utilise those resources. Nor is the influence of unequal power

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<sup>25</sup> For example, Issue 53 (5) of *American Behavioral Scientist* was dedicated to the ‘down side’ of social capital. Using a predominantly rational choice framework, many authors drew attention to the importance of socioeconomic factors, and the social, political and institutional contexts in which social capital operates (e.g. Albano and Barbera 2010; García Albacete 2010; Kaminska 2010; van Deth and Zmerli 2010).

relations, or intersections of ethnicity, gender and class, understood to influence those resources or capacity. The idea of social location or context has been similarly minimised. Membership in a network or group does not, in itself, say anything about the use-value or consumption of resources secured through the network, or the location of that group in social space.

The heterodox school argues that, like any other resource, social capital can constitute a risk or an opportunity (Dinovitzer 2006; Reimer et al. 2008) which can be deployed in negative or undesirable ways (Fine 2001a; Smart 2008). Despite the diverse terminology, there is a consensus in this literature that networks and the norms that sustain them can both constrain and enable opportunities for individual actors (Adhikari and Goldey 2010; Adler and Kwon 2000; Johnson and Ross 2009; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Woolcock 1998). Although there is often some departure from Bourdieu's original thinking on social capital and reproduction in this literature, there continues to be a focus on how networks exist to maintain privilege for members, at the expense of non-members or outsiders. Bourdieusian approaches to social capital's downsides are sensitive to the exclusionary nature of networks, and recognise that the unequal distribution of power and resources is not simply the result of the absence of the right kinds of networks. Access to poor quality resources is rather an effect of location in a stratified social system.

Bourdieu's definition of social capital has two components: the size of an individual's network; and the volume and types of capital that are possessed by other parts of that network (Ihlen 2005:494). Secondly, through his theories of habitus and field, Bourdieu provides a way of contextualising the operation of capitals and exploring social norms and sociability. Fundamentally, however, a Bourdieusian analysis is concerned with how economic capital underpins other disguised forms of capital and how social inequalities are reproduced by the interaction between the different forms of capital within broader social structures (Morrow 2001:41). Both Coleman and Putnam see social problems as the result of not enough social capital, or too much of the wrong kind. Consequently, the solution to those problems is more cohesive family and community networks. Whilst family and community connections have undoubted benefits (ABS 2004), greater complexity and analytical power is provided by a critical approach to social capital.

Although not without its own limitations, Bourdieu's framework provides a rigorous basis on which to build an understanding of social capital's downsides. This thesis argues that the downside of social capital must be contextualized by analysing the other resources to which an individual has access and acknowledging the location in which those resources are given value. Norms and practices that are opposed to wellbeing or mobility are therefore seen as a function of an individual or group's location in a hierarchical social structure. The concept of habitus provides a tool for understanding how the objective chances facing a group become internalized, leading, for example, to the emergence of self-defeating behaviours, or the continued occupation of a dominated social position (Swartz 1997:104). This is a more subtle, complex explanation of how resources and norms deliver poor outcomes for both network members and non-members, but it more readily explains the downsides of social capital.

Based on a critical interpretation of social capital, Alejandro Portes's work (Portes 1998; Portes and Landolt 1996) on the negative effects of social capital forms a major contribution to the literature. Portes defines social capital as the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership of a network or other social structure (1998:8), but argues that there is nothing about this definition that implies beneficial outcomes for individuals: "Social ties can bring about greater control over wayward behaviour and provide privileged access to resources; they can also restrict individual freedoms and bar outsiders from gaining access to the same resources through particularistic preferences" (Portes 1998:21). The chapter now turns to exploring how bonding social capital and bounded solidarity, both referring to the strong connections between like people, contribute to understanding the downsides of social capital.

### **Bonding Social Capital and Bounded Solidarity**

Networks are identified as a key component or source of social capital. A distinction between bonding, bridging and linking is often used to describe network structures. Bridging and linking social capital, describing connections between groups and individuals of varying status and power, are accepted as fostering such desirable social norms as tolerance and civic trust. These types of low-density networks, involving acquaintances, rather than friends, have long been identified as improving information



flows and mobility (Granovetter 1983). Bonding social capital strengthens social ties in dense or closed networks, which are characteristically homogeneous, inward looking and protective (OECD 2001:42; Stone and Hughes 2001:4). This type of network is the one usually identified as being most likely to deliver negative effects for group members and outsiders (OECD 2001:42; Woolcock 2000b).

However, there is a distinction in the literature between research that uses the concept of *bonding social capital* to describe the close ties of dense networks and that which uses sociological concepts such as *bounded solidarity* to describe group identification. The key epistemological difference is that bounded solidarity implies a shared ideology amongst network members, whereas bonding social capital does not require individuals to share an awareness of group identity:

For example, bonding social capital can be formed by the trust that arises from a neighbour watching an absent neighbour's house to make sure it is not broken into, or minding a neighbour's child. These actions can be driven by humanity, sympathy or altruism. In contrast, Marxian notions of bounded solidarity concern a class of actors moving from being a "class in itself" to a "class for itself" and consequently require a consciousness of being part of a group with shared interests which they wish to forward (Wilson 2006:352).

The literature on both bonding social capital and bounded solidarity suggests that the close ties which develop in relatively homogeneous or inward-looking networks may be detrimental to members, as well as non-members. Often, these inward-looking networks restrict: access to the network for outsiders (Quibria 2003:29); individual mobility and choice; and access to new information (Gargiulo and Benassi 2000:193). For Indigenous communities with a high degree of network closure, high levels of social capital within a family or community may ensure access to important personal, emotional or financial support, but may restrict other resources or services from reaching the group (Hunter 2004:15; White, Spence and Maxim 2005:70).

This section explores the concepts of bonding social capital, seen as a form of social capital in the orthodox literature, and bounded solidarity, which is seen as a source of

social capital in the critical literature (Portes 1998). In the orthodox tradition, bonding social capital is the form most frequently associated with negative effects. However, Leonard (2004) argues that the effects and operation of bonding social capital are more complex, location specific and politically determined, than orthodox approaches allow. As noted earlier, the bonding, bridging, linking typology rarely makes its way into empirical research (Productivity Commission 2003). When it does, the distinction between bonding, bridging and linking forms of social capital becomes murky: research conducted with urban Indigenous communities indicates that the clear conceptual demarcation between these forms of social capital requires a distinction between 'like' and 'different' identities which does not reflect the negotiated, hybrid and contested nature of contemporary Indigenous identities (Brough et al. 2006). Similarly, Lahn observes that, in research conducted with Indigenous families: "comparative measures of bonding, bridging and linking social capital were not good predictors of the degree of disadvantage experienced by participants" (2012:11). Indeed, bonding social capital maximized the resources from individual in family networks who occupied resource-rich positions (Lahn 2012:11). Therefore:

...in Aboriginal terms, bonding social capital again looms very large indeed – this is where the major resources for Indigenous identity are to be found. And in relation to periodic references to dysfunctional culture and mainstreaming etc., is the implicit suggestion that Indigenous people need more bridging and linking forms of social capital as against bonding simply a way of suggesting that Aboriginal difference is the problem? (Lahn 2012:12).

Hence, these observations indicate that, whilst the bonding/bridging/linking typology has an appealing theoretical simplicity, not only does it not provide the empirical or conceptual utility orthodox approaches suggest, it tends to thinly mask 'culture of poverty' arguments that seek to blame individuals and communities for not actively pursuing the right quantities of the right types of social capital.

### *Bonding Social Capital*

Bonding social capital can create strong in-group loyalty and constitute important material and emotional resources for members, but it can also be exclusionary and create strong out-group antagonism (Oorschot et al. 2006:152; Schuller, Baron and Field 2000:10). Negative external effects are commonly identified with bonding social capital, given its closed structure and exclusive nature; the Ku Klux Klan and the Mafia are often cited as examples (Patulny and Svendsen 2007:33). However, the examples of social capital operating for the benefit of group members at the expense of non-members need not be so extreme. The benefits of gang membership for young men are well documented (Pih et al. 2008; Short 1990) and Carroll and Stanfield (2003) list the monopoly of the New York diamond trade by Jewish merchants and the dominance of various immigrant groups in different states and sectors of the US economy as examples of networks which may have negative external effects. Similarly, Altschuler, Somkin and Adler (2004:1227) describe residents of a high-income neighbourhood who successfully fought public safety measures proposed by the local government, including the introduction of streetlights and measures to support brush abatement for fire prevention. Whilst these residents were able to maintain their neighbourhood aesthetics, from a public health perspective it can be argued that in this case, successful mobilization of bonding social capital led to outcomes which are potentially hazardous and detrimental to public safety (Carpiano 2006:171). These examples demonstrate that, whilst strong social ties can provide a range of benefits to group members, including access to resources such as financial credit and protection against discrimination, outsiders may be denied access to resources, or member's behaviour may be at odds with normative societal aspirations (Carroll and Stanfield 2003:402).

Geys and Murdoch (2008:362) note that the categories of bridging and bonding can often be used as stereotypes. However, they argue that, while an either/or distinction is not useful, there is value in a relative definition. Moreover, their findings support the argument that bonding social capital is less likely to deliver positive internal and out-group effects and that members of bridging networks are likely to be more tolerant and pro-social (Geys and Murdoch 2008:443). Members of bridging associations feel more politically powerful, have more tolerant attitudes towards immigrants and are less individualistic than members of bonding associations (Coffe and Geys 2008:364).

Bonding networks can reinforce negative attitudes towards democracy and its institutions (García Albacete 2010). This is most salient in societies with significant political cleavages or conflicts, where certain views or identities are underrepresented in the political sphere (García Albacete 2010:710). Where a political cleavage exists, more citizens are involved in bonding networks focused on a specific identity and those citizens feel less satisfied with democracy and less capable of affecting political change. The downside of social capital is said to be on display when network membership fails to guarantee more satisfied democratic actors:

... involvement in social networks, and particularly in informal and homogenous [*sic*] groups, can lead to lower levels of satisfaction with democracy, perceived opportunities to understand politics, and political interest. The effect of this type of involvement is not the same for all citizens but is mediated by their own identities. The negative relationships found affect those citizens whose identity is underrepresented in the political sphere. Precisely there, where the predicted internal positive effects of social interactions are needed, social capital does not work (García Albacete 2010:710).

However, this mechanism could be reversed: it may be precisely because individuals feel unable to affect political change that they choose to engage with homogeneous, identity-based groups, rather than with inclusive, bridging networks (García Albacete 2010:710). It is noted that political divisions can “affect the structure and outcomes of social capital” (García Albacete 2010:692), and the author goes so far as to acknowledge “the possibility that social capital is just a reflection of the political system in which it takes place” (García Albacete 2010:710). This draws attention to the idea that there are socio-economic, political, spatial and temporal aspects to the structure and distribution of social capital: “the structure of social capital is just a reflection of its context” (García Albacete 2010:692).

The rediscovery of context and social structure within the orthodox school indicates a move away from a naïve social capital framework and its concomitant prescription for communities of joiners. Social capital reflects existing patterns of disadvantage and perpetuates socioeconomic stratification (Baum et al. 2000; Pichler and Wallace 2009;

Schneider et al. 1997). Moreover, participation in social and civic activities is reflective of “distinct patterns” in income, education, gender and health (Baum et al. 2000:422). In the Australian context, this is confirmed by data from the ABS. If you are poor, old, unemployed, have a disability or a low level of education, you are: less likely to be able to receive and provide support in times of crisis; less likely to volunteer; less likely to participate in sport and physical recreation; less likely to attend cultural venues and events; and less likely to interact with family or friends at least once a week (ABS 2006). It is difficult to justify the use of social capital as *the* causal, independent variable when participation and social connections are so heavily influenced by factors such as gender and wealth. Bonding social capital may therefore not be as important in determining negative outcomes for individuals as access to other resources, and other structural conditions, such as ethnicity and gender. I argue that the idea of bounded solidarity as a source of social capital better attends to the complexities of close ties.

### *Bounded Solidarity*

In contrast to bonding social capital, bounded solidarity offers an alternative means of conceptualizing how strong relationships between similar people can lead to negative outcomes. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) identify bounded solidarity, or identification with one’s own group, as a source of social capital. Its key characteristics are: 1) it depends on the moral obligation of individuals to behave in certain ways; and 2) it emerges from awareness of a common fate or in reaction to common events or adversities (Portes 1998:8; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993:1327-8). This sense of belonging leads to the development of altruistic behaviour and norms of mutual support which can be appropriated by individuals, in order to secure access to resources (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Wilson (2006) also identifies *emotional solidarity* emerging from common experiences of relative deprivation as a source of social capital.

Demonstrating the development and operation of bounded solidarity as a source of social capital, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) describe how nationalist sentiments can emerge within immigrant communities where none existed before. Bounded solidarity emerges and becomes stronger when cultural differences between immigrant communities and the receiving society are combined with discrimination and prejudice.

This is exacerbated when there are few opportunities for immigrants to exit the situation (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993:1329):

Social capital arising out of situational confrontations is strongest when the resulting bounded solidarity is not limited to the actual events, but brings about the construction of an alternative definition of the situation based on reenactment of past practices and a common cultural memory (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993:1331-2).

Whilst bounded solidarity can constitute political and emotional support, where it is the dominant form of social capital possessed by an individual it delivers less positive outcomes than other forms of social capital. Dinovitzer (2006) examines the career trajectories of Jewish lawyers who formed part of the out-migration from Montreal prompted by Quebecois separatism. The author argues that these Jewish lawyers experienced a common set of social and political conditions in Montreal that led to the emergence of bounded solidarity, which persisted for significant periods of time after their move to Ontario (Dinovitzer 2006:459-60). However, Dinovitzer maintains that these lawyers enjoy less positive professional outcomes; they are more likely to be working in solo practice, and less likely to be working in prestigious areas of law (2006:469).

The idea of bounded solidarity may have more relevance to the discussion of social capital in Indigenous contexts, than the concept of bonding social capital. In Lahn's (2012) research, bonding social capital formed such a large source of personal and material support, as well as access to employment opportunities, that the claimed link between negative outcomes and bonding social capital did not capture the complexity of the resources accessed by, or relationships and experiences of, Indigenous families.

Bounded solidarity also acknowledges experiences that emerge in colonial societies and the intergenerational effects of systemic exclusion, particularly that of racist discrimination (Kwok 2011:163), which can lead to "the creation of a solidarity born of shared oppression" (Kwok 2011:161).

The literature on bonding social capital and bounded solidarity demonstrates that dense, often parochial, social ties can have negative consequences, or at least reduce the

likelihood of positive outcomes, for network members and non-members. It is argued that weak ties and bridging networks deliver greater benefits in terms of access to information, opportunities, pro-social behaviour and tolerance (Dinovitzer 2006; Geys and Murdoch 2008; Granovetter 1983). However, bonding networks are not necessarily as homogeneous as Putnam would suggest and can contain their own internal inequalities (Leonard 2004). The focus on bonding networks is not, therefore, as useful in understanding either the creation of individual and collective identities, or the negative effects of social capital, as is the concept of bounded solidarity.

As discussed, network composition is strongly related to level of education and socioeconomic status (Rankin and Quane 2000). As such, typologies of networks and network composition are central in understanding the downsides of social capital, but do not alone explain them. Different types of networks are effective in providing different resources to members, but the location of these networks in social and physical space, the nature of the norms within those networks and the other forms of resources to which individuals have access are central to understanding the operation of social capital and its negative effects.

### **Social Norms and Habitus**

Norms are a key component of social capital, but this aspect of social capital is usually discussed in terms of reciprocity, social commitment and trust. This thesis departs from orthodox theories of social capital again by arguing that, whilst trust may be important as a source of social capital, there are a range of norms that can function to deliver negative outcomes. The effect and character of norms, as well as the mode of enforcement is therefore also important.

Normative structures proscribe or prescribe behaviour in social relations (Therborn 2002, Reimer et al. 2008). Reasons for enforcing or conforming norms can range along a spectrum from subconscious habits or routines, to conscious rational calculation of consequences (Therborn 2002:869). Norms may be unpopular, deviant or destructive, yet enforced. Individuals may enforce norms they disagree with, particularly in the face of social pressure to conform (Willer, Kuwabara and Macy 2009:460). Indeed, Therborn (2002:868) notes:

Norm-following may be instrumental, either for the sake of its rewards or for fear of the costs of violation. We may conform out of a desire to belong and/or to be held in esteem and respect, or out of fear of ridicule, ostracism, dismissal, or legal punishment.

A norm is evident in two types of action. So, individual behaviour is shaped by norms when: a) the individual feels obligated to behave in accordance with the norm; or b) the individual holds the view that others are obligated to behave in accordance with the norm (Jasso and Opp 1997:947). Motivation for complying with a norm may derive from habit or calculation, or anywhere in between (Therborn 2002:869). However, strong and effective social norms, demonstrated by the capacity of a community to enforce sanctions, can restrict an individual's freedom to pursue opportunities and access external resources. Greater penalties may also be applied to those who violate norms. The type of behaviour normative structures proscribe or prescribe may not deliver positive outcomes for individuals or communities, let alone reinforce democratic or emancipatory ideals.

The ability of a community or network to enforce normative behaviour is often seen as indicative of a high level of social capital. However, the norms that regulate relations within and between networks have been identified as one of the aspects of social capital that can lead to negative outcomes (Portes 1998). Moreover, the identification of strong social norms, and the effective capacity of a community to enforce them, says nothing about the behaviour which that community is sanctioning. Here, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) provide a frequently cited list of the negative effects of social capital which derive from normative structures:

- Free riding: The normative structures which support the growth of trust also make it possible for free-riders to make excessive demands on more successful community members (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993:1339; Quibria 2003:30, Dinovitzer 2006).
- Constraints on freedom: The ability of a community to sanction behaviour integral to its success can also enforce conformity and restrict individual



expression and the development of external ties (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993:1341; Quibria 2003:30).

- Levelling pressures: Solidarity emerging from the experiences of inequality or oppression can be undermined by the departure of successful individuals (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993:1342). Norms then emerge which discourage individuals from pursuing external opportunities. Individuals are accused of being “wannabe’s” or “turnovers” (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993:1344). Research in Australia, New Zealand and Canada identify norms epitomised by accusations of ‘coconut’ and ‘too good for us’ levelled against Indigenous people by their communities when they engage and succeed in mainstream education or employment (Doerr 2009; Fiske 2006; Sarra 2006).

High levels of social capital can also facilitate stronger penalties for those who violate social norms. Brody and Lovrich (2002:117) examine the relationship between the level of social capital in 49 American States and the likelihood of a State Supreme Court providing enhanced protections to criminal defendants. The authors found that, as the level of social capital in each state increases, the level of constitutional protection for individuals charged with committing crimes decreases (Brody and Lovrich 2002:115, 127).

Individuals who violate the provisions of a state’s criminal laws have essentially violated the norms of conduct required by their society. As such, they are subject to penal sanctions enforced by the government. In the context of a high social capital setting, the constitutional protections afforded individuals charged with committing crimes may come to be seen as unduly inhibiting the ability of the community to regulate bad conduct and protect itself from nonconformist behaviors viewed as unacceptable (Brody and Lovrich 2002:116).

The previous example demonstrates that the political implications of strong social norms are by no means always positive; high levels of community connectedness and strong collective social norms can reduce the legal protections available to those who violate those norms. Zmerli (2010) explores the relationship between social trust and the norms of citizenship and finds that norms of social order are strengthened by *distrust* of other citizens. Distrust of others is also likely to be accompanied by a higher level of

trust in political institutions and state authority (Zmerli 2010 662, 670). Putnam's claim that increased social capital equates to increased support for democracy can therefore be questioned when the operation of networks and norms is separated from the political content of information transmitted through those networks and norms (Putzel 1997:941). Ethnic Chinese business networks in Asia have delivered significant market advantages to these communities to the exclusion of other ethnic or indigenous groups, and there is nothing in the functioning of these networks that would indicate support for democratization (Putzel 1997). Putzel (1997:943) also uses Fukuyama's analysis of the role of the German guilds in the rise of the National Socialism and Putnam's discussion of ethnic enclaves in the diamond trade to demonstrate that networks and norms may well facilitate economic exchange, but there is nothing intrinsically democratic or empowering about those networks. This demonstrates the importance of the content of information transmitted through networks, and the behaviour that norms enforce, in understanding how the possession of social capital can lead to undemocratic, politically undesirable, or negative social consequences.

This is not to over-determine the influence of normative structures or rules on individual action. Bourdieu argues that compliance to social norms can't be explained by simple rule adherence; the regularities of behaviour are not necessarily produced by conscious calculation of the costs or benefit of following a rule (Swartz 1997:99). Rather, adherence to norms is a tendency, and agents are more disposed to follow them than not, based on an internalised, habituated sense of what is reasonable, appropriate or possible in any given situation: "Actors are not rule followers or norm obeyers but strategic improvisers who respond dispositionally to the opportunities and constraints offered by various situations" (Swartz 1997:100). To reiterate:

Bourdieu's habitus may be understood as a system of schemes of perception and discrimination embodied as acquired through the formative dispositions reflecting the entire history of the group and experiences of childhood. The structural code of the culture is inscribed as the habitus and generates the production of social practice (Nash 1999:177).

## **Resources and Opportunities**

It is not useful to limit social capital to formal social relationships and norms of reciprocity, as do orthodox approaches (Carpiano 2006). Rather, and in line with Bourdieu's definition, this thesis views social capital in terms of networks, together with the actual or potential resources which exist in networks or groups for personal benefit.

Both the quality and quantity of resources that are available through networks are heavily dependent on spatial and socioeconomic conditions (Carpiano 2006; Portes and Landolt 1996; Rankin and Quane 2000). Any analysis of social capital's downsides therefore needs to incorporate a discussion of how unequal access to a wider range of resources can influence outcomes for individuals and groups.

Portes and Landolt (2000:546) disagree with this approach, arguing that social capital: "consists of the ability to marshal resources through social networks, not the resources themselves". However, this section argues that the value of social capital increases with the overall volume of capital an individual can access (Bourdieu 1986:250). If social capital needs to be converted into another type of resource to be useful in the relevant field, such as networks transformed into a new job, or another resource needs to be converted into social capital to be effective, such as transforming wealth into reputation, then it indicates that the total universe of resources an individual can access will influence the success or otherwise of that conversion.

This thesis argues that focusing on networks alone provides limited insight into how access to power and resources can contribute to the negative effects of social capital. As discussed, the emergence of bounded solidarity and strong norms restricting individual mobility are more likely when a group has experienced a history of discrimination and marginalisation. Field (2003:89) argues that the opposite also holds, and the greater the level of political, economic and cultural democracy, the less likely it is that the negative effects of social capital will emerge: "To some extent, this is another way of saying that inequalities – of power, of resource relationships – matter". Field goes on to contend: "It should now be clear that we cannot see connectedness as invariably positive.

Sometimes it can service negative ends as well as good; and frequently it forms part of a wider structure of systematic inequality” (Field 2003:90)

Networks are, by their nature, exclusionary. They are defined by their limits and operate for the benefit of the group, accruing and maintaining power, privilege and access to resources (Portes and Landolt 2000; Callahan 2005; Carpiano 2006:167). Reimer et al. (2008:267) argue:

Structure, norms and power affect access to social capital. The use of social capital may be inhibited by insufficient knowledge about networks or institutions, one’s location in the network, or the lack of ability to function within the normative structures they require (Reimer et al. 2008:267).

This draws attention to the Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital which, as discussed, leads to the inculcation of capabilities and behaviours that allow the: “appropriate sociability ... [required to] ... transform contingent relationships into relations of mutual obligation” (Holt 2008:232).

It is also necessary to note that possessing trustworthy social relationships does not guarantee access to useful resources (Portes and Landolt 2000:532). An individual may have dense, broad or strong networks, but this is no guarantee of the range or quality of the resources available through that network. Whilst access to poor quality resources or a low level of social capital cannot be equated with the negative effects of social capital, the available range of skills, knowledge and opportunities that are associated with using social capital to maximise individual benefit can be seen as dependent on social location.

Empirically, an approach which acknowledges different forms of capital is justified by research that demonstrates economic capital is more important than social capital in reducing crime (Lederman, Loayza et al. 2002), and both human and financial capital are more important than social capital in promoting improved health outcomes (Boyas 2010). The argument that increasing social capital increases wealth is also more complex than the Putnamian school allows. So, Rankin and Quane (2000) discovered

that, in neighbourhoods which experience low and moderate poverty, as poverty increases, participation decreases. But, in high-poverty areas, the opposite occurs, as poverty increases, participation increases (Rankin and Quane 2000:154). This suggests that an approach which separates network size and resources available through that network, as Bourdieu's does, is a useful way to understand the effect of social location on social capital, as Loury explains:

Individuals are embedded in complex networks of affiliations: they are members of nuclear and extended families, they belong to religious and linguistic groupings, they have ethnic and racial identities, they are attached to particular localities. Each individual is socially situated, and one's location within the network of social affiliations substantially affects one's access to various resources. Opportunity travels along these social networks (Loury 2000:233).

As mentioned, social capital may also need to be transformed into another resource in order to realise its utility, for example, friendship converted into a well-paying job, or parental economic capital converted into a credential for their children (Dinovitzer 2006:448; Ream and Palardy 2008; Veenstra 2009; Vryonides 2009). As demonstrated, both the accrual and conversion of social capital depend on a range of factors, including capability, network structure, adherence to norms, social location and access to other resources. Social capital is not equally available to everyone (Reimer et al. 2008) and, therefore, may not only have a downside, but is a resource which is dependent on spatial and temporal conditions for its effects.

According to Bourdieu's definition (1986), social capital has two components: the size of the network and the quality of resources possessed by each member of the network. The benefits of membership justify the continued effort by individuals to invest in the relationships that make those benefits 'useable'. Bourdieu's leaner definition of networks and resources includes the benefit to individuals as a result of possessing social capital. There is nothing in this definition that implies that a network will, or should, deliver benefits for individuals external to the network. Instead, this version of social capital is explicitly about how resources are created and used to secure benefit for individual members. Accordingly, this may be at the expense of non-members, as

resources and power are retained by group members. Åberg (2000:312), for example, points to 'non-communitarian' social capital as an effective resource maximisation strategy, or coping mechanism, in post-Soviet nations transition to market capitalism.

There is evidence that network size, the first component of Bourdieu's definition, is indeed important to outcomes for individuals (Fukui, Starnino and Nelson-Becker 2012; McLaughlin et al. 2010; Pressman et al. 2005). Individuals with large and extensive networks are usually able to secure information and resources more readily than those individuals who are members of predominantly small, dense and homogeneous groups (Granovetter 1983; Maulik, Eaton and Bradshaw 2009). The resources available through a network are the second component of Bourdieu's definition. Just as economic resources are distributed unequally, so too is the opportunity to develop networks not equally available to all (Pichler and Wallace 2009). The possession of low quantities of social, cultural or economic capital can limit an agent's ability to transform those resources into the resource which will most likely secure benefit in any given environment (Ryan 2011). Similarly, the social capital possessed by an agent may not be sufficient to access resources in the relevant field. Poor quality or low quantity resources do not necessarily equate to negative outcomes, but it does point to exclusion and inequality as important influences that increase the likelihood of negative effects of social capital (Bottrell 2009:499).

## **Field**

As discussed in Chapter 3, Bourdieu's concept of capital is inseparable from his theory of *field*. These concepts are used together in order to avoid over-determining social capital as 'resources' (Grenfell 2009:29; cf. Carpiano 2006, 2007) and to draw attention to how Bourdieu's framework incorporates social location and context. The orthodox literature is rediscovering the importance of social location and context (Albano and Barbera 2010; Kaminska 2010), for example, van Deth and Zmerli (2010:638) who stress: "the importance of both institutional arrangements and the social structure in order to understand the potential of social capital to produce either positive or negative outcomes".

Field theory offers a more cogent description of how location influences capital. The previous chapter notes that a field is an arena of struggle for position, where competition exists over what kind of capital is perceived as legitimate: “a capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field” and the distribution of capital(s) “constitutes the very structure of the field” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:101). In a field, certain ways of thinking and doing are valued over others. Individuals possess capital, but the field sets its value, determining the behaviours and attributes which are perceived as legitimate:

Bourdieu’s perspective brings to the foreground the structural tension between occupants of dominant and dominated positions within any social microcosm. It requires that any field be conceived of as a terrain of contestation among occupants of positions differentially endowed with the resources necessary for gaining and safeguarding an ascendant position within that terrain (Emirbayer and Williams 2005:692).

A field is neither a democracy, nor a meritocracy. The exercise of power within a field is successful to the extent that it is misrecognised, and the distinctions within a field therefore become naturalised as result of a failing or deficiency, rather than as an effect of dominance. The higher education system is an example, *par excellence*, of a field in which success is portrayed as the result of natural ability or hard work. Firstly the notion of ‘hard work’ presupposes the availability of a resource – time – which is required to invest in the labour of study, as opposed to paid work or family obligations. Secondly, Bourdieu (1986:243) uses *cultural capital* to explain how discourses of ‘natural ability’, ‘intelligence’ or ‘aptitude’ enable education systems to naturalise distinctions between students which are more accurately a function of their socialisation. The degree to which students are able to replicate the practices of institutions, adopt the required language, behaviours and knowledge is readily attributed to their ‘innate’ cognitive capacities, rather than as a function of the investment families make in socialising children in practices valued by the dominant culture.

The academic field can therefore be seen as unlikely to serve liberationist, emancipatory aims, especially for participants from marginalised positions who do not possess the cultural or social capital valued in the field. For poor, working class students or students

from non-dominant cultures, the opportunity to develop the capital(s) valued by higher education institutions can be challenging (Stanton-Salazar 2011). Moreover, the social and cultural capital that students do possess is unlikely to be valued in the field. As Grenfell (2009:28) suggests, the norms and cultural practices possessed by such students may function as ‘anti-capital’ when they are not valued in the field or do not conform to “the domain social norms of the state”.

The value of capital is determined within a field, and the determination of what is right, just or possible is likely to be in accordance with the norms of the culture dominant within that field (Gebauer 2000:79). The socially correct and incorrect are more likely to be dependent on an agent’s position in social space (Gebauer 2000:80), rather than on any apparently innate or natural ability to meet institutional expectations. If the capital possessed is not recognised by the other players in field as legitimate, it is more likely to be constructed as deficient or in terms of its failings. This serves to further problematize the idea of social capital’s downsides. This does not neglect the very real, often destructive and alienating, effects that networks can have on individuals that are restricted from accessing resources or prevented from moving into different social arenas. But, it does serve to indicate how the forms of capital, particularly social and cultural, that are valued in one environment, may be delegitimised, unrecognised or constructed as deviant in another, and that this is where the symbolic violence lies.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that the downsides of social capital are more complex than the work of either Coleman or Putnam acknowledge. In these approaches, the negative effects of social capital are seen as the result of either: (a) too much bonding social capital, or; (b) changes to traditional sources of social control, such as the nuclear family or religious institutions. In contrast, a critical approach based on Bourdieu’s work acknowledges the complexity of marginalisation and how this influences outcomes for communities and individuals.

This thesis has discussed how one of the key differences between orthodox and heterodox theories of social capital is that the former is based on ideas of cooperation, and the latter on competition and conflict for resources (Grenfell 2009:22). Both the



positive and negative effects of social capital can be seen as substantially influenced by the quality of the resources to which an individual has access, and the degree to which those resources are valued in a specific field. Social capital is only one of a range of resources to which an individual has access and the value of those resources is determined and legitimated within a field. In the context of Indigenous higher education, the character of, and the value accorded to, social capital is determined not by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students and their communities, but by institutions. The types of networks and the norms which have emerged in response to colonisation, to ensure a cohesive group identity, or to maximise the resources to which a family or community can access, may not be those valued by the institution. As the idea of field suggests, a resource that is not valued in a field may function as 'anti-capital', or be portrayed as irrelevant or deviant in that field.

A social capital framework which includes a broader understanding of the types of resources an agent has access to and can mobilise in a given field, is better able to explain the likelihood of mobility or success in a specific social arena. This incorporates the negative consequences of network membership and normative structures, but acknowledges that the downside of social capital is not limited to outcomes; it also includes processes by which individuals are excluded and how the value of the resources they possess is contingent on social location. The framework addresses the key limitations of orthodox theories by conceptualising social capital as a value-neutral resource that may have positive or negative effects, depending on its intersection with a range of other factors. Therefore, the downside of social capital can be seen as an effect of the intersection between networks and resources and the dispositions and locations of the actors in a hierarchal social system.

This chapter has established that the key ideas of networks, norms, field and resources, based in a Bourdieusian perspective, provides a better understanding of social capital's downsides than orthodox approaches.

Closed networks characterised by homogeneity, density and strong norms are more likely to restrict information, mobility and resources, and lead to outcomes associated with social capital's downsides. However, such networks are more likely to arise for disadvantaged groups when they have experienced an extended history of

marginalisation and develop a collective identity based on maximising resources in that position. Conversely, for such networks that are located firmly within the dominant culture, such as Rotary clubs, professional organisations or sororities, these types of networks do precisely what they are established to do; preserve privilege and resources for network members. As such, a focus on network type must also be supplemented by an examined of who benefits and who is excluded, and to what end. Where network members are restricted from moving out, on or up, attention to the historical determinants of social norms that enable control and sanction is justified.

Orthodox approaches focus on trust and reciprocity in networks as a means to enforce sanctions and elicit desirable behaviour. Previous chapters have established that 'trust' is deeply problematic when used in this context because it is so heavily depended on socioeconomic conditions. The notion of reciprocity is however crucial to understanding the obligations between agents, and draws attention to the importance of time, risk and strategy.

Adherence to norms cannot be reduced to rule-following behaviour. Creating an agent who is wholly determined by structure is as unhelpful and unlikely as one who is wholly autonomous. The idea of habitus posits an agent who can be creative and strategic within the constraints imposed by opportunity. Habitus draws attention to the ways in which individual and collective identities have a discursive relationship to social structure. Thus, actions are not strictly rational, but relatively reasonable in the circumstances agents face. Adherence to norms is a tendency, and agents are more disposed to follow them than not, based on an internalised, habituated sense of what is reasonable, appropriate or possible in any given situation. Therefore, adherence to certain norms, particularly those which restrict individual mobility or sanction destructive or exclusionary norms must therefore be analysed in terms of those circumstances.

The idea of 'field' is intended to draw attention to a wider range of factors and processes that the idea of 'context' would suggest. It requires a shift away from the thinking implicit in Coleman and Putnam's work that the underlying social order is one of mutuality and cooperation. Instead, field implies competition, struggle and conflict,

not only to determine control of the field and its profits, but also the power to determine what is legitimate and normative within that field.

In fields characterised by relative stability, such as higher education, the types of behaviours, norms and knowledges that are valued are largely pre-determined by the dominant culture. Agents who possess a habitus, types of networks or knowledge different to those recognised and valued by the institution (for example, the ability to speak a number of languages, but not the ability to write formal, academic English) are, therefore, more likely to have those differences constructed as personal, cultural or social limitations. Incorporating Bourdieu's field theory better explains why social capital may or may not be effective in a given situation, or describes an individual's chances of success in a field given the value that is accorded to the resources they have possession of or access to.

As Bourdieu (1986:250) argues, the value of social capital increases with the overall volume of capital an individual can access. The location of an individual in a stratified social system, or as a member of a group that has been historically marginalised, will restrict the quantity and quality of resources to which they have access. As has been established, inequality matters and it increases the risk that negative effects of social capital will emerge. This thesis does not argue that low levels of social capital (or cultural or economic capital) equate to a negative effect of social capital, but low quantities or poor quality resources in a given field necessarily reduces the likelihood of beneficial outcomes.

This thesis concurs with orthodox approaches that understand the 'dark side' of social capital as normatively undesirable outcomes, negative externalities of network membership and the 'ties that blind'. Where orthodox approaches are limited however, is in their utility in providing an explanation of these effects in stratified social systems, where what is right, good and desirable are rarely determined by those who occupy the most marginal, precarious, positions.

This allows a way of thinking that doesn't simply focus on obvious, destructive, 'dark sides', like gang violence, corruption or nepotism, in which the struggle for control and power are writ large. It creates a way to understand the smaller, everyday, violence that

is committed when a student has to choose between meeting the social norms and cultural obligations of their communities and the demands of the education system. It also creates a way to disrupt the narrative of disadvantage and deficit that constructs a group as disengaged, deviant or apathetic when their social norms do not correspond to those imposed by the dominant culture in a particular field.

Program and policy responses to the challenge of 'building social capital' usually adopt an approach that 'works on', rather than 'works with', marginalised communities (Grenfell 2009:28). The assumption implicit in these approaches is that students, families and communities possess norms and networks that create barriers to the adoption of mainstream values, and which therefore impede their success in the institutions of the dominant culture. When applied to Indigenous education, this perpetuates the assumption that Indigenous families have cultural values and social norms inimical to academic success. An analysis based in the critical social capital literature suggests rather that individuals and communities who occupy a historically marginalised position do not have access to the quality or quantity of capital(s) that could enable equitable participation, let alone force the restructure of those institutions to better reflect their own needs. These students and families face substantial challenges in converting the social and cultural capital they do possess into forms valued by the education system.

This chapter has explored a Bourdieusian framework for exploring social capital's downsides and has drawn attention to the ways in which this resource is dependent on the range of capital's to which an individual has access, and the value accorded to those resources in any given social location. The following chapter will introduce the background for the case study that has been adopted for empirical exploration of the ideas discussion so far.

Concepts like 'disengagement' and 'weak social norms' have become common in discussions of Indigenous education. Strategies that firstly construct and then seek to address these deficits have been adopted by governments and community organisations aiming to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Often, these strategies, implicitly or explicitly, reference a normative social capital framework, which has at its core the assumption that there is a cultural basis for the inequality in

academic outcomes. This fails to address the substantive and structural causes of poorer educational outcomes for Indigenous students and neglect how the negative and positive effects of social capitals may be more negotiated and fluid in experience than rigid frameworks allow.

## Chapter 5 *Social Capital & Indigenous Education*

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*If the coloured people of this country are to be absorbed into the general community they must be thoroughly fit and educated to at least the extent of the three R's. If they can read, write and count, and know what wages they should get, and how to enter into an agreement with an employer, that is all that should be necessary. Once that is accomplished there is no reason in the world why these coloured people should not be absorbed into the community. To achieve this end, however, we must have charge of the children at the age of six years; it is useless to wait until they are twelve or thirteen years of age. In Western Australia we have power under the act to take any child from its mother at any stage of its life, no matter whether the mother be legally married or not. It is, however, our intention to establish sufficient settlements to undertake the training and education of these children so that they may come absorbed into the general community.*  
(Neville in Commonwealth of Australia 1937:11)

The above quote is from AO Neville at the 1937 Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities. It demonstrates both the total and overwhelming control colonial authorities had over Indigenous lives until well into the twentieth century, and the role of education in the policy of assimilation. It also demonstrates the construction of Indigenous people as childlike and aberrant, and indicates the paternalism that has long characterised state relations with Indigenous people. As Billings (2010:180) argues: “[t]hen as now dysfunction in Aboriginal communities was attributed to individual’s failings”.

The previous chapters have examined how orthodox social capital has been used to justify a deficit model to explain the failure of specific groups to achieve mainstream social and financial success. This thesis argues that, more usefully, a critical approach to social capital demonstrates that its negative effects often point to structural limitations on individual or group choices and access to resources. This chapter will explore the use of social capital in the field of Indigenous education in Australia and how the downsides

of social capital are a feature of debates about Indigenous education and Indigenous communities more broadly.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the historical and political background for the case study. In Australia, New Zealand and Canada, the role of social capital in either improving or impeding educational outcomes for indigenous people has been a feature of policy and academic research (White, Spence and Maxim 2005). This chapter will problematize the ‘downsides’ of social capital in this context and demonstrate how these negative effects, including social norms that construct academic achievement as ‘non-Aboriginal’, are more comprehensively explained by a Bourdieusian approach to social capital.

This thesis does not adopt a totally relativist position that argues that the downsides of social capital are only determined as such from within the norms of the dominant culture. The denial of Indigenous sovereignty and ontologies (Moreton-Robinson and Walter 2009) occurs within a political and ideological framework that has long constructed Indigenous people as childlike, dysfunctional or exotic and this has clear implications for the determination of who judges social capital as negative and against what framework. However, social norms can emerge which restrict individual freedom and rights and which can be opposed to individual and collective wellbeing (CYI n.d.; Doerr 2009; Fiske 2006; Gibson 2010b; Langton 2008, 2011; Sarra 2006), and this thesis aims to explore these within the context of the power imbalance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

### **Indigenous Education Outcomes**

In Australia, the statistics for literacy, numeracy, high school retention and completion, and higher education success, demonstrate that Indigenous children do not receive the education they need to develop the skills and behaviours valuable to employers. By year 3 (when children usually turn 8 years old), 20% to 25% of Indigenous students are not achieving minimum literacy standards (SCRGSP 2011:4.40). Thirty-four per cent of Indigenous students will leave school before grade 10 (age 15), and amongst those who stay, around 65% will not achieve national minimum standards in scientific, mathematical or reading literacy (SCRGSP 2011:6.24-5). By the time they are 17, only

25% of Indigenous students are completing grade 12 (SCRGSP 2011:4.54). The statistics improve slightly in adulthood, when 34% of Indigenous people possess or are working towards a post-school qualification. However, Indigenous Australians are still approximately 25% less likely to engage in post-school education than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and those who do are 18% less likely to complete their courses (SCRGSP 2011:4.72). Despite increases in the absolute number of Indigenous people obtaining a post-secondary qualification, relative to the rate of improvement for non-Indigenous Australians there has been little gain (Hunter and Schwab 2003:14). Altman, Biddle and Hunter (2009:244) estimate that the gap in the incidence of tertiary qualifications amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is unlikely to close for at least another century.

This study draws attention to the systemic, material conditions facing Indigenous families in their attempts to get their children educated, and reinforces the argument that it is insufficient to examine only family or community background when explaining differences in education outcomes (Abbott-Chapman 2007:282). The material conditions facing Indigenous Australians are significant and appalling. Despite constituting only 2.5% of Australia's population, or around 517 000 people (ABS 2007), Indigenous people are:

- Dying 10 to 12 years earlier than non-Indigenous Australians;
- 23 times more likely to be in juvenile detention;
- 14 times more likely to be imprisoned as an adult;
- Eight times more likely to die from diabetes;
- Five times more likely to die from kidney disease;
- Two and a half times more likely to commit suicide;
- Twice as likely to have a profound disability;
- Three times more likely to be unemployed (SCRGSP 2011).

Neither do the statistics for higher education inspire confidence: Indigenous students constitute 0.7% of higher education numbers (Pechenkina and Anderson 2011:6). In 2009, there were 911 Indigenous staff at Australian universities, and only 243 of those – roughly one quarter – were identified as teaching and research staff (Pechenkina and Anderson 2011:13).



### *Barriers to participation*

The literature demonstrates a number of key themes in Indigenous higher education in Australia. These themes are frequently restated in government reports and policy documents and widely acknowledged in the literature as influencing the access, retention and success of Indigenous students in higher education. As Table 3 demonstrates, Indigenous students are more likely to be female, older, studying externally and to come from regional or remote areas of Australia and be from low socio-economic backgrounds (ACER 2011a:3). Accordingly, financial stressors are a main barrier to successful completion, however illness and disability, poor quality housing and cultural obligations may also combine to interfere with formal education (Fordham and Schwab 2007; Hunter and Schwab 2003).

Table 4 provides data from the 2009 Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) (ACER 2011a) on the top 25 reasons first year students provide for leaving university. The AUSSE is the largest, nationally representative data set on currently enrolled higher education students in Australia and New Zealand; the data here is taken from the 2009 (ACER2011a) and 2010 AUSSE (ACER 2011b). The AUSSE 2010 shows clear differences in the reasons Indigenous and non-Indigenous students give for withdrawing from study, with Indigenous students more likely to cite financial, health and family concerns. Students also often have numerous family and cultural responsibilities that can influence completion.

**Table 3: Selected domestic Australian students' demographic characteristics**

	<b>Indigenous students (%)</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous students (%)</b>
Female	73	70
Low SES	27	18
Age 25 years or older	43	22
Mean age	28 years	24 years
Median age	22 years	20 years
Provincial	29	22
Remote	5	1
<i>First in family</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>47</i>

*Source: Table 1 in ACER 2011a:9*

**Table 4: First-year student departure reasons**

<b>Departure Reason</b>	<b>Indigenous students (%)</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous students (%)</b>
Study-life balance	32	18
Needing paid work	27	15
Personal reasons	26	18
Difficulty with workload	26	16
Health or stress	26	15
Family responsibilities	26	9
Paid work responsibilities	21	5
Boredom	20	23
Financial difficulties	17	13
Commuting difficulties	17	12
Needing a break	15	14
Gap year or deferral	13	10
Change of direction	12	20
Travel	10	7
Academic exchange	9	15
Moving residence	9	5
Difficulty paying fees	9	5
Career prospects	8	13
Academic support	8	8
Social reasons	7	11
Other opportunities	7	7
Government assistance	6	2
High standards	5	5
Receiving other offer	5	3
Administrative support	5	3
Quality concerns	4	9
Institution reputation	4	7

*Source: Table 4 in ACER 2011a:9*

Strategies to overcome these barriers have been the subject of numerous reports and research projects (Bin-Sallik et al. 1994a, 1994b; DEET 1995; DEEWR 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2011; DEST 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005, 2006; Devlin 2009; Devlin and James 2006; Education and Training Committee 2009; IHEAC 2008; James et al. 2008; Mellor and Corrigan 2004; Pechenkina and Anderson 2011). Schwab (1995b) noted, nearly two decades ago, in a review of Indigenous education policy, that the key themes of access, participation and equity had not substantively changed since 1975. Parity in higher education remains elusive for governments and Indigenous people to achieve, and these themes still anchor current research and policy.

## Policy Context

Following the 1967 Referendum<sup>26</sup>, the Commonwealth Government assumed legislative responsibility for Indigenous people, and in 1974 the National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG) was appointed; the first national committee established to report on Indigenous education policy and funding (Schwab 1995:5). Over the next decade<sup>27</sup>, the NACG and its successor, the National Aboriginal Education Committee oversaw a number of significant reviews (House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education 1985; Miller 1985; Watts 1981). In 1988, the NAEC was replaced by the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force, and by 1989 the Commonwealth and the States and Territories released the first *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (NATSIEP) (Schwab 1995; Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee 2000:5)<sup>28</sup>. The four major goals of the NATSIEP were subject to a major review in 1994 (Yunupingu 1995). In response, the Commonwealth, state and territory governments restated their commitment to the NATSIEP in the 1995 *MCEETYA National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People 1996-2002* (MCEETYA 2000b:6; Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee 2000:5).

Schwab (1995) conducted an extensive analysis of the trends in three major reviews of Indigenous education: 'Education for Aborigines' (NACG 1975); the *Final Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force* (Hughes 1988); and the *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (Yunupingu 1995). Although each review focused on specific issues, the themes of: (a) consultation, responsibility and decision making; (b) curriculum; (c) support structures and instructional approaches; and (d) staffing, all remain constant. "While there are certainly new themes which have arisen over the course of 20 years, none have been fully resolved and are now absent from the policy agenda" (Schwab 1995:9). The most recent

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<sup>26</sup> On 27 May 1967, a Referendum was held regarding Section 51 and Section 127 of the Constitution of Australia. Section 51 exempted the Commonwealth from passing legislation regarding Aboriginal people, stating that it was the responsibility of the States to make "special laws" for resident Aboriginal peoples. Section 127 stated that Aboriginal people should not be counted in any census. The Referendum proposed the removal of Section 127, and the amendment of Section 51 to the effect that the Commonwealth would have legislative responsibility for Aboriginal affairs. The Referendum recorded the highest 'Yes' vote in Australian history, with 90.77% voting in support of the changes.

<sup>27</sup> A timeline of relevant committees, inquiries, policies and reports is provided at Appendix 1: Timeline of National Indigenous Education Policy.

<sup>28</sup> Appendix 2: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy Goals.

national *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al. 2012) provided an extensive report with 35 recommendations, yet the issues identified nearly twenty years ago by Schwab (1995) – consultation, curriculum, support and staffing – remain.

### **Parental Engagement and Social Capital**

As identified by Schwab (1995), in each national review of Indigenous education, specific issues emerge. One theme that has emerged in contemporary government policy and strategy is the idea of ‘social capital’ and cognate ideas such as ‘engagement’ and ‘community capacity’. For example, in June 2011, the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) released the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* (the Action Plan). The Action Plan describes six priority domains which, according to MCEECDYA: “evidence shows will contribute to improved outcomes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education” (MCEECDYA 2011:5). The priority domains are:

- Readiness for school;
- Engagement and connections;
- Attendance;
- Literacy and numeracy;
- Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development;
- Pathways to real post-school options.

The Action Plan uses ‘Engagement and Connections’ (Figure 1) to describe how “two-way” engagement between the school and community will increase social capital and lead to better outcomes for students. The Action Plan typifies an approach to Indigenous education which is well-established and firmly located in a normative approach to social capital. The role of the family and to a lesser extent the school, in developing networks and behavioural norms that support academic achievement, has been a central pillar in research conducted particularly by James Coleman and practitioners and academics cleaving to his brand of social capital (Greeley 1997; Brehm and Rahn 1997; Sandefur and Laumann 1998). This approach stresses that measures such as increasing parental involvement and participation in schools will improve student outcomes (Lea et al.

2011; Mellor and Corrigan 2004). Coleman (1988b) argued that social capital develops when families develop networks with each other through the school community and are able to develop a set of norms for monitoring and enforcing behavioural norms (such as regular school attendance, the completion of homework tasks) amongst their children.

**Figure 1: 'Engagement and Connections'**

Schools and early childhood education providers that work in partnership with families and communities can better support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These partnerships can establish a collective commitment to hold high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and foster learning environments that are culturally safe and supportive. Evidence shows that children who are expected to achieve at school and who have high expectations of themselves are more likely to succeed. A sense of cultural and linguistic identity, and the active recognition and validation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages by schools, is critical to student wellbeing and success at school. There are strong links between wellbeing and learning outcomes.

The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of educational decision-making and the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals, teachers, education workers or community members in schools and classrooms provides strong role models and builds connections, contributing to a positive impact on educational outcomes. Similarly, non-Indigenous school leaders and staff must go beyond the classroom and school in seeking to engage with communities. Increasing the involvement of principals, leaders and staff in cultural and community activities signals a valuing of cultural identity and community assets. A two-way approach to community engagement that results in interaction of school and community in locations both in and out of school will build social capital in the school community to enable authentic engagement and connection.

Governments through the National Indigenous Reform Agreement have committed to ensuring better connections across seven strategic 'building blocks': early childhood; schooling; health; economic participation; healthy homes; safe communities; and governance and leadership. These connections are critical as they recognise the complex interplay of factors that impact on learning and engagement.  
(MCEECDYA 2011:12)

This excerpt is worth quoting at length because it demonstrates two points. Firstly, that Indigenous people's involvement in decision-making is constructed in terms of increasing participation and networking, as opposed to any substantive role in curricula

design, incorporating Indigenous pedagogies or the devolution of power from government agencies to local communities. Secondly, this excerpt demonstrates language which is closely aligned to that used in orthodox approaches to social capital; 'partnership', 'high expectations', 'engagement', 'connection'. This language demonstrates the uncritical acceptance of a framework which constructs Indigenous families and students as lacking the social norms and networks that ensure success for non-Indigenous students. By focusing on the role of networks and 'engagement', the structural causes of disengagement from the education system, as well as the symbolic violence that education systems perpetrate against Indigenous people, are neglected.

Lea, Thompson, McRae-Williams and Wegner (2011) provide a brief history of Indigenous-parent school engagement, and identify three continuities: an assumption that parental involvement in schools is positive and necessary and will lead to improved student outcomes; an assumption about the relationship between loosely-defined 'engagement', student outcomes and the nature of Indigenous parenting; and the assumption that Indigenous parents don't know how to value education. Schwab and Sutherland (2001:7) argue that Indigenous parents have a long history of engaging with schools and bureaucrats in order to support the development of appropriate and effective programs for Indigenous children. Ultimately, however, this engagement is frustrated by staff changes in schools and government departments, the subsequent changes in communication and leadership requirements and, ultimately, the fact that the power to make decisions lies with the State or Territory education department:

Thus Indigenous parents and family members find themselves having to continually re-educate teachers, administrators and education department officers. They see their advice being ignored, falling like water off a duck's back, an experience that is both frustrating and disheartening (Schwab and Sutherland 2001:7).

It is also necessary to question the assumption that Indigenous parents don't value mainstream education. In the study mentioned above, Lea et al. (2011) argue that, in the face of the material deprivation, family commitments and cultural obligations facing Indigenous families, engagement with the education system is required when something goes wrong (Lea et al. 2011:332). The families involved in this research argued that

there were no barriers to engaging with schools should they wish to do so, and schools were seen as potential employers for parents and places of security and shelter for children (Lea et al. 2011:330). In this research, “the non-engaged parent is a trusting parent, one who believes schools are doing a good job” and engagement is necessary only when things go wrong, for example, when children are bullied or not attending classes (Lea et al. 2011:332). These parents trust that schools are working in their children’s best interests and, if they, in the face of immense daily challenges, meet their end of the bargain in getting children fed, clothed and to school, the education system will deliver good outcomes. In line with Lareau’s (2011) work on concerted cultivation, Lea et al. (2011) argue that these parents do not demonstrate the scepticism and highly interventionist behaviour of middle-class parents, who have the time and resources to be concerned with school reputation, teacher quality, curriculum content and pedagogical practices. Lea et al. (2011:333) argue that the parents involved in their research: “do not seem to realise that to overcome the class disadvantage inherent within education, outcomes have to be dredged from the school through ongoing interference in its effects”.

In 2008, the Commonwealth Government initiated a Review of Australian Higher Education (the Bradley Review). This review emphasised that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, those from remote areas and Indigenous people were significantly underrepresented in the tertiary education sector, and specific measures (such as scholarships, income support, embedding Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum) should be undertaken to address these gaps (Bradley et al. 2008). Recommendation 30 of the Bradley Review (Bradley et al. 2008:xxiii) stated:

That the Australian Government regularly review the effectiveness of measures to improve higher education access and outcomes for Indigenous people in consultation with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council<sup>29</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, in 2011 the Commonwealth Government announced the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

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<sup>29</sup> As noted in Appendix 1, IHEAC operated from 2005 to 2012 and has been replaced by ATSIHEAC; a new Council consisting of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics, union and business representatives.

*People*. The Terms of Reference (Figure 2) required the Review to make recommendations for increasing both enrolments for Indigenous students and the capacity of universities and the Commonwealth Government to respond to the need for more Indigenous staff, as well as embedding Indigenous knowledges in the tertiary sector.

**Figure 2: Terms of Reference of the RHEAOATSIP**

- The Review is to provide advice and make recommendations in relation to:
- i. achieving parity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, researchers, academic and non-academic staff;
  - ii. best practice and opportunities for change inside universities and other higher education providers (spanning both Indigenous specific units and whole-of-university culture, policies, activities, and programs);
  - iii. the effectiveness of existing Commonwealth Government programs that aim to encourage better outcomes for Indigenous Australians in higher education; and
  - iv. the recognition and equivalence of Indigenous knowledge in the higher education sector.

The Final Report of the Review (Behrendt et al. 2012) was released in September 2012 and made 35 recommendations regarding: staff and student targets; pathways to university; student support and staff development; funding; research; Indigenous knowledges; and comprehensive strategic advice to achieve its recommendations. Importantly, the Review provided an exhaustive analysis of the barriers that Indigenous people face in achieving entry to and success at university. Pertinent to this study, the Review also noted that many Indigenous students negotiated what can be described as the downside of social capital:

... the Panel heard from many students about how supportive and proud their parents were of them for going to university. But even with this support, there are significant personal and community factors such as a lack of encouragement from educators, lack of aspiration and lack of community understanding and support to take on higher education that



can act as disincentives to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people choosing to enrol in university (Behrendt et al. 2012:17).

The Panel also found:

... a lack of support from parents and communities can act as a barrier to higher education. During consultations, the Panel found that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students felt actively discouraged from participating in higher education by their communities due to suspicion about higher education. Some students reported family and community members questioning why they chose to participate in higher education; others said that their decision to go to university led to others bringing into question their Aboriginality and some were asked questions about the relevance of higher education to them and their culture (Behrendt et al. 2012:41; see also Craven et al 2005).

Similarly, Alford and James (2007) report on the findings of a project designed to explore the education, training and employment opportunities available to young Aboriginal people in the Goulburn Valley region in Victoria. The focus groups conducted with VET students identified financial barriers as a distant fourth in the list of barriers to education and training; participants identified peer influences, family influences and personal problems as the most common negative influences on their educational endeavours (Alford and James 2007:33). Similarly, research by Craven (2003, 2005) identifies family support as a key barrier for Indigenous students in achieving their goals. An absence of family support is most clearly related to level of parental education, acknowledged to be low in Indigenous communities, as well as negative perceptions of the education system (Behrendt et al. 2012:41).

This study acknowledges that understanding the effect of social capital on educational attainment is important, but its effect is moderate and it only influences outcomes in conjunction with other resources (White, Spence and Maxim 2005:77). This research is also informed by an awareness that, in focusing on the downsides of social capital as experienced by Indigenous students in the context of education, many larger, arguably more critical, factors in determining academic outcomes are neglected. For example, the

role of Indigenous support centres and staff (Andersen et al. 2008; Bin-Sallik and Smallacombe 2003; Pechenkina and Anderson 2011; Sonn, Bishop and Humphries 2000; Trudgett 2009), university governance and embedding Indigenous knowledges in curricula (Williamson and Dalal 2007; Yunkaporta and McGinty 2009) are critical issues that must be addressed in order to improve outcomes for Indigenous people in the higher education sector. As Shah and Widin argue:

The education system itself at school, vocational and higher education is responsible for the underrepresentation of Indigenous students. The commitment of the school, VET and higher education institutions and leaders and appropriate support systems are the most important factors in ensuring participation, retention and success of minority groups such as Indigenous students (Shah and Widin 2010:31-2).

The 2008 Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley et al. 2008:32-3) contained a long-standing call for tertiary institutions to embed Indigenous knowledges in their curricula:

Indigenous involvement in higher education is not only about student participation and the employment of Indigenous staff. It is also about what is valued as knowledge in the academy. Indigenous students and staff have unique knowledge and understandings which must be brought into the curriculum for all students and must inform research and scholarship ... It is critical that Indigenous knowledge is recognised as an important, unique element of higher education, contributing economic productivity by equipping graduates with the capacity to work across Australian society and in particular with Indigenous communities. Arguments for incorporation of Indigenous knowledge go beyond the provision of Indigenous specific courses to embedding Indigenous cultural competency into the curriculum to ensure that all graduates have a good understanding of Indigenous culture. But, and perhaps more significantly, as the academy has contact with and addresses the forms of Indigenous knowledge, underlying assumptions in some discipline areas may themselves be challenged.

## **Community Closure and Norm Enforcement**

Calls for greater parental engagement with schools, attention to social norms which are opposed to academic participation and achievement in education, or obligations which place familial or collective interests ahead of individual or institutional interests, are all receiving greater attention in the literature. This thesis argues that these barriers fit within descriptions of the negative effects, or downsides, of social capital. As previous chapters have argued, the downside of social capital occurs when access to material or informational benefits is proscribed (Silva and Edwards 2004), or social mobility is impeded (Portes 2000). Using Portes' framework (Hunter 2004; Portes 1998; Portes and Landolt 1996; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993), the downside of social capital may be evident in Indigenous communities in a number of ways.

*Exclusion of outsiders:* This may indicate a high degree of community closure and the restriction of benefits to those within the group: "the same strong ties that bring benefits to members of a group commonly enable it to bar others from access" (Portes 1998:15). However, this can also involve restricting benefits, including information, services and resources, from reaching the network members (Productivity Commission 2003:22). As Hunter argues: "... in the case of Indigenous Australians the exclusion of outsiders prevents adequate service provision, especially in the areas of education and health" (Hunter 2004:15). White, Spence and Maxim (2005) adopt the bonding and bridging framework to explain how closed communities, with high levels of social capital, can have low levels of educational attainment, conversely: "Integrated and open cultural contexts that have much lower social capital will have more potential for educational attainment" (White, Spence and Maxim 2005:68).

*Excessive claims on group members:* Concepts like demand sharing have received considerable anthropological and policy attention. This thesis is not an anthropological account of the complex relationships of reciprocity and obligation that characterise many Indigenous communities. However, it does appear that the concept of 'demand sharing' has been appropriated to reinforce narratives of dysfunction within Indigenous communities (Altman 2010, 2011). Patterns of obligation and reciprocity are more nuanced than the concept of 'demand sharing' usually allows, particularly given the

complexity that has resulted from the disruption to cultural practices and the resulting: “unequal access to social, political and cultural resources and authority” (Gibson 2010a:85). Hunter (2004) notes that the existence of obligatory relationships can lead to excessive claims on group members, but it is worth noting that examples of excessive claims do not have to be as extreme as “humbugging” or “demand sharing”. For example, many Indigenous students bear a sense of responsibility in completing higher education in order to improve the condition of their communities more broadly. However, students may face a range of familial and cultural obligations that may compete with academic demands (Boulton-Lewis et al. 2000:485), which can lead to a complex and difficult negotiation between the two arenas.

*Restrictions on individual freedoms:* This can describe how the observance of social norms, or acting within predetermined cultural parameters, may restrict personal freedoms (Hunter 2004:15). In an ethnographic study of work and identity in Wilcannia, New South Wales, Gibson (2010b) argues that the maintenance of an Aboriginal identity is often seen in the context of making sacrifices, and positioning oneself in opposition to White values and norms:

Those who move away in order to ‘better’ themselves or who are seen to take on white values are judged harshly. Being seen to ‘get ahead’ can result in certain sanctions which seek to maintain equality. Asserting blackness often means positioning oneself against whiteness, and against white ways of working and being by means of particular identificatory practices, relations and alliances. However, such attitudes and practices can entail a continuation of subjection in certain terms – a self damning of sorts (Gibson 2010b:154).

*Downward levelling norms:* White, Spence and Maxim (2005:77) identify how low educational norms can be reinforced by high levels of social capital. Norms such as these usually emerge from the imperative to maintain a cohesive collective identity in reaction to economic marginalisation, outside discrimination or a common experience of adversity (Hunter 2004:16; Portes 1998). For example, recent attention to the issue of lateral violence (Gooda 2011b:5; Langton 2008) indicates how the internalisation of colonial stereotypes can lead to social norms which perpetuate unequal power relations.

Paradies and Cunningham's (2009) and Paradies and Williams' (2008) work on internalised racism also suggest processes whereby dominant stereotypes, attitudes or beliefs about the inferiority of a particular social group are incorporated into the worldview of members of that group (ibid:475). This thesis argues the emergence of downward levelling norms, or norms that are opposed to high academic achievement in Indigenous communities indicates an internalization of objective chances. Similarly Craven (2007:11) identifies the concept of 'stereotype threat', which results in students experiencing a 'fight or flight' type response to the stereotype held against their group; students usually either feel compelled to fight against the stereotype, or to disengage from the entirely from the arena in which the stereotype applies.

Acknowledging the problem of restrictive social norms or closed networks within Indigenous communities that prevent social mobility and access to resources does not imply ignorance of the resistance and renewal that has occurred and continues to take place across Australia. Nor does it posit a deficit and culturalist explanation for the emergence of these effects. What this research aims to do is problematize the idea of social capital's downsides. Bourdieu's approach provides a way to negotiate between: (a) an exploration of the socio-economic and institutional barriers without constructing Indigenous people as helpless victims of the colonial state apparatus; and (b) social norms and practices that construct academic achievement and success as non-Aboriginal, without ignoring the effect that two centuries of domination has on social organisation.

### **Normative Approaches to the Negative Effects of Social Capital**

In the field of education, orthodox social capital has been used to explain how parental behaviours and networks, such as involvement in schools, facilitate high academic achievement. Where this research focuses on explaining the continued underperformance of students from poor or minority communities<sup>30</sup> factors such as parenting styles, financial and time constraints and perceptions of the education system emerge as significantly reducing the likelihood that parents will be involved in their children's school community or demonstrate the kinds of behaviours expected by school

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<sup>30</sup> This body of research is predominantly located in the United States, and often focuses on students from poor, Latino and black communities and parental social capital. Similar research on ethnic minorities or marginalised communities in Australia is scant.

administrators and educators (Bodovski 2010; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Lea et al. 2011).

In the early 1900s, 'social capital' was first used to describe the benefits to be gained from developing a civic relationship between schools and the wider community, locating schools as centres of community life and proponents of social justice (Farr 2004). By the end of the twentieth century, normative social capital had come to be understood as network resources with three basic functions, as a source of: social control; family support; and benefits through extra-familial networks (Portes 1998:9; Monkman, Ronald and Theremene 2005:7-8).

In the work of James Coleman and Robert Putnam, social capital is a function of cohesive, functional families, which enable an individual to maximise her utility to society. This approach uses social capital to argue that students whose parents are highly involved in their school communities achieve better academic outcomes. Social capital and 'engagement' become closely related in this literature, and its influence on policy has been significant. However, Coleman posits that a breakdown in family cohesion is accountable for most social ills, and that the solution to this problem is alternative forms of institutional social control designed to deliver a functional, useful individual:

In some institutional areas primordial social organization is no longer effective, but appropriately constructed social organization has not yet come into being. Perhaps the most prominent of these is child rearing. As the strength of the family has declined and many of its functions have moved outside the household, child rearing has moved increasingly out of the household as well. Constructed social organization, in the form of the school, the nursery school, and the daycare center, have taken over many components of child rearing. Thus these child rearing institutions are not merely a supplement to the family, as they once were, but are primary child rearing institutions.

If we make that conceptual change - as we must, given the rapid disintegration of the family then the term most used by architects, design

becomes relevant, and terms most used by economists, maximization and optimization, become relevant as well: In thinking seriously about educational institutions as being constructed, the idea of designing the institution to maximize the child's value to society becomes appropriate (Coleman 1993a:11)

In the context of Indigenous history, Coleman's recommendation to design institutions to 'maximise' a child's value to society has appalling connotations. The effect of state institutions assuming responsibility for the care and education of children by forcibly removing them from their families has been devastating (HREOC 1997). At its most benign, a version of social capital based on this approach would minimise the history and impact of the Stolen Generations and the role of colonial states in using education and institutional care to prosecute assimilationist policies. At worst, it would be genocidal.

As established in previous chapters, orthodox approaches to social capital are ahistorical and apolitical. Social capital theory may be passé, but, whilst it and cognate ideas such as 'engagement' and 'inclusion' remained either embedded in the policy and program responses of governments, or simply continue to occupy researchers as a theoretical problem, the implications of such approaches must be made clear.

### **Critical Response**

A critical approach argues that social capital is a useful conceptual tool for understanding how access to resources is mediated through social relationships. When applied to the tertiary education sector, a critical reading of social capital draws attention to the ways in which Indigenous people have been historically excluded, their knowledges delegitimised and the education system used as a tool of assimilation. This chapter therefore argues for the concept of an "Indigenous habitus" in order to draw attention to the structural and objective conditions which shape contemporary Indigenous identities. Because the habitus is partially a product of history and the resources (economic, social and cultural capital) and material conditions available to a particular group, it provides an explanation for the persistence of disadvantage. It also provides one option for theorizing change, precisely because it draws attention to the

material and structural conditions which underlie inequality. Instead of using the development of social capital as a personalized strategy for Indigenous families to support higher academic achievement, a critical approach questions the types of knowledges and practices valued by the education system.

As previously discussed, Bourdieu uses social capital to explain how existing social structures are reproduced and access to particular types of resources is determined by social location (Burnheim 2004; Wilson 2006:353). Chiefly, Bourdieu is concerned with the way social hierarchies are reproduced without the intentional actions of individuals (Musoba and Baez 2009; Swartz 1997). Exclusion and domination tend to be enabled by distinctions which are assumed natural and obvious, rather than perpetuated by overt, state-sanctioned or individual acts of oppression.

As noted in previous chapters, educational qualifications are a form of cultural capital. Other forms of cultural capital include: language competence, aesthetic sensibilities, knowledge about institutions such as schools, and cultural awareness (Bodovski 2010; Lareau and Weininger 2003; Musoba and Baez 2009:156). The benefit of cultural capital, argues Bourdieu (1986), is that it functions to distinguish between individuals by using apparently objective and impartial mechanisms, such as schools and universities, to confer that distinction. The work of converting cultural capital to economic and vice versa is concealed and naturalised, and the distinctions between groups legitimised: “Cultural and symbolic distinctions are thus determined by socioeconomic structures, but they are supported by mechanism which obscure that determination” (Musoba and Baez 2009:158).

It follows then, that the education system cannot easily serve democratic or emancipatory aims. Entry to, and success at, university is largely a function of the skills and attributes acquired prior to enrolment, and usually as a result of parental investment. Lareau (2011), for example, highlights the ways in which middle-class parents engage in practices of “concerted cultivation” to inculcate skills and behaviours which maximise children's chances of success in the education system. Therefore, attempts to improve the performance of Indigenous students by focusing on academic performance can misrecognise the purpose of schools and universities. These institutions are systems of discernment and discrimination (Musoba and Baez 2009), allocating credentials to



those students most conversant with its culture, technocratic requirements and language and removing those students who are not. Successful students will be those who already possess, or whose parents possess, sufficient cultural and social capital to negotiate education systems with a degree of comfort. They are usually the products of families which have cultivated a set of dispositions and practices that provide familiarity with education systems, as well as the inclination and ability to comply with educator's expectations (Bodovski 2010; Lareau and Weininger 2003; see also, Lareau 1987; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Lareau 2011; Thurston 2005). These parents usually have a well-developed sense of entitlement about the outcomes schools and education policies should deliver, and are deeply interventionist in extracting those outcomes for their children.

Qualifications awarded by universities are therefore a mechanism for reproducing social structures, in part by providing access and ensuring success for those students who are already most likely to succeed, but also in part by naturalising those distinctions by conferring qualifications based on objective measures (such as grading schema, literacies, or technical skills). Failure then becomes not a result of insufficient finance, a lack of familiarity with the culture of tertiary institutions or a matter of overcoming generations of overt and symbolic state-sponsored violence. Rather, poor access and completion rates are the result of not meeting those objective standards of success. Distinctions are thus naturalised, the differences in what is possible or likely for individuals are reinforced. Strategies for addressing disadvantage are therefore usually focused on improving objective measures of achievement, without attending to the continuing structural conditions which perpetuate inequality.

### **Indigeneity and Habitus**

As discussed in previous chapters, habitus can be a problematic concept. Bourdieu's definition is opaque, but most criticism is based on the ways in which habitus understates individual agency (King 2000). A key criticism of Bourdieu is that this understanding of why change is unlikely leads to the creation of an agent who is more or less pre-determined and rule-bound. It is necessary to restate, however, that Bourdieu's theory is not one of individual mobility; it is theory of classes and of social reproduction. Distinct from Putnam and Coleman who argue that social capital is a strategy to facilitate individual advancement and community cohesion, Bourdieu's

social capital is a resource to facilitate social control and restrict benefit to network members. The role of habitus in this theory is as a mechanism which partially accounts for the persistence of class privilege and domination. Other key theorists of social capital, particularly, Coleman but also the less theoretically-inclined Putnam, offer a sociology of education which understates, or ignores, how social structures perpetuate inequality. Both Coleman's and Putnam's approaches fail to recognise that social mobility is rarely wholly within an individuals' power to achieve.

Bourdieu then, uses habitus to describe how social structures influence action and how individual practices can reinforce social inequality. It provides an account of the practices, action and dispositions which lie outside rational calculation (Mills 2008:80). Individuals in different social locations are socialised with access to varying levels and types of resources, resulting in differing senses of what is acceptable and possible (Bodovski 2010:14). The habitus is thus an unconscious, embodied set of dispositions informed by the social structure and providing individuals with a sense of what is possible based on their social location (Musoba and Baez 2009).

The term characterises the recurring patterns of social class outlook – the beliefs, values, conduct, speech, dress and manners – that are inculcated by everyday experiences within the family, the peer group and the school. Implying habit, or unthinking-ness in actions, the habitus operates below the level of calculation and consciousness, underlying and conditioning and orienting practices by providing individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives 'without consciously obeying rules explicitly posed as such' (Bourdieu 1990a, 76). That is, the habitus disposes actors to do certain things, orienting their actions and inclinations, without strictly determining them (Mills 2008:80).

The gradual process of socialisation and with it the inculcation of norms, behaviours and values, naturalises social structures making them seem obvious and common-sense.

The utility of the idea of habitus is that it provides one tool for exploring how particular practices and conditions are internalised and thus come to seem natural. Agents are

predisposed to certain values, types of behaviour and beliefs. This predisposition does not necessarily amount to predetermination, as Bourdieu acknowledges. The habitus is reflexive and enables agents to develop strategies and responses to ever-changing situations, but the dialectical relationship between the habitus and structure serves to reproduce the conditions which first informed the habitus (Bourdieu 1977:72; Throop and Murphy 2002:187).

Radoll (2011) has recently argued for the existence of an 'Indigenous agent' who is constructed through the objectification and embodiment involved in the Indigenous identity test used in legal and administrative systems in Australia. This test is universally accepted by all governments and legal jurisdictions within Australia and is the primary mechanism by which Indigenous organisations provide 'Certificates of Aboriginality' to individuals requiring proof of identity to access services and resources, such as scholarships targeted for Aboriginal people. The identity test consists of three criteria: self-identification (the person must identify as Aboriginal); racial or biological identification (the person must be of Aboriginal descent); and community acceptance (the Aboriginal community must recognise the person as Aboriginal) (Gardiner-Garden 2000; de Plevitz and Croft 2003).

Radoll (2011) argues that this test constructs an agent through the objectification of naming (through the first two criteria) and the embodiment required in the third part of the test; acceptance by other Aboriginal people of their indigeneity. This "Indigenous agent" inhabits a field or domain created by policy, education, legal, health and employment systems, and Aboriginal organisations, schools and programs. Consequently, agents in this field develop a similar habitus.

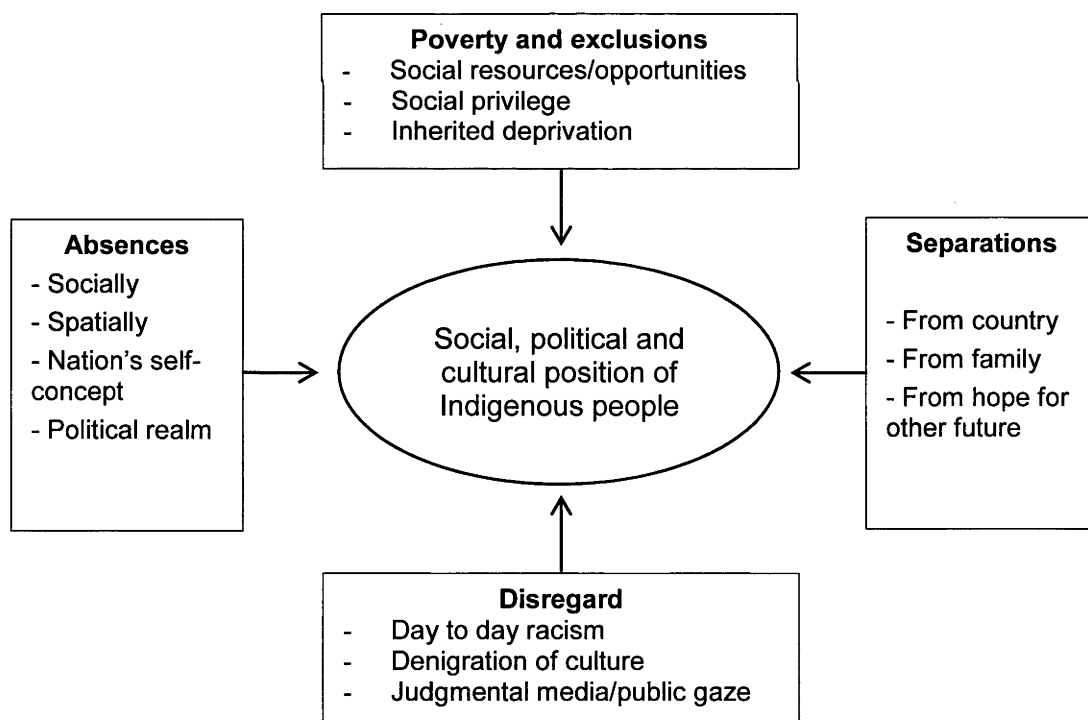
Whilst it is not the intention here to argue that every Indigenous person has the same experiences, in light of the historical effects of dispossession, assimilation and discrimination, and the contemporary policy and program frameworks which proscribe access based on the identity test, it is reasonable to argue that similar structural conditions affect many Indigenous Australians and thus influence a similar habitus.

In their discussion of *nayri kati*, an Indigenous quantitative methodology, Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009:13) include a framework for conceptualizing the power

imbalances which are characteristic of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Figure 3). Whilst acknowledging the complex and hybrid nature of contemporary Indigenous identities (Paradies 2006), Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009) establish the political and historical consistencies in the positioning of Indigenous people in Australia. Similarly, Walter (2009:11) argues that this position constitutes a specifically Aboriginal domain, and this domain includes processes and structures that naturalise Indigenous difference and inequality.

Habitus provides a way to understanding how a social position such as this influences individual behaviour. Where access to opportunity is proscribed and racism is systemic and overt, self-defeating or destructive behaviour can be normalised (Swartz 1997:104), and the choices and opportunities available to individuals to disrupt a field of power, constituted to position Indigenous people so totally as ‘other’, are limited (Walter 2009:12).

**Figure 3: Conceptualising Indigenous positioning within Australian society<sup>31</sup>**



<sup>31</sup> Appears as Figure 22.1 in Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009:13).

An example of how limited access to material resources can combine with intergenerational trauma to normalize aggressive behaviour is provided by Coffin, Larson and Cross's (2010) report on the results of a three-year project based in an Aboriginal community designed to understand bullying behaviour. The authors found that family and community influences, such as the chronic intergenerational trauma that results in domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse and high levels of incarceration, contributed to the perpetuation of bullying. More importantly however, these authors also draw attention to institutionalised racism and the broader economic and environmental conditions which increase the likelihood that bullying behaviour will emerge:

It is not a coincidence that the highest levels of reported bullying were in the more isolated and remote towns. These communities lack access to employment, transport and services such as counseling and other mental health support. Limited economic opportunities result in cycles of poverty that create jealousy within the Aboriginal community related to material possessions such as clothing, shoes, electronic equipment, school choice and even friend choice. These "possessions" are often scrutinised and if they are deemed by the perpetrator to not be "Aboriginal" enough, the person is targeted. Social determinants, such as low economic status create division and difference which contribute to the bullying behavior (Coffin, Larson and Cross 2010:84).

Again, this draws attention to ways in which unequal access to resources, such as economic capital, in the social structure contributes to the environment in which an agent's habitus, and the social norms condoned or enforced by communities, develop. In the context of education, this is compounded by an agent's access to the dominant forms of cultural capital. Buckskin (2002), for example, argues that a lack of dominant cultural capital is often a significant impact on the educational experience of Indigenous students. The effect of colonisation has been to disrupt the continuity of traditional knowledges and ways of being and, so, many Indigenous students also lack a deep understanding of their own cultures and peoples (Broadbent, Boyle and Carmody 2007). Despite the delegitimisation of traditional Indigenous knowledges, the emergence of contemporary expressions of capital and identities enable Indigenous people to mediate

their experience of exclusion, for example, through close family ties that provide support in times of crisis, or the reciprocity of kinship obligations (Fordham and Schwab 2007). However, to argue that these forms of capital are the same in effect, or valued as highly by colonial institutions, as the cultural or social capital possessed by the members of a Rotary Club or a students of elite private schools, for example, is to ignore the inequality lived by Indigenous people every day. All capitals are not created equal, nor do they have the same value or influence in different contexts (Warikoo and Carter 2009:373) and the type and quality of capitals possessed by most Indigenous people do not provide the opportunity for individuals to escape poverty, or the opportunity for the emergence of an alternative habitus (Forrest and Kearns 2001; Musoba and Baez 2009; Portes and Landolt 1996). An individual's scope for practice is delimited by their position in social space; and socio-economic status is not as fluid as many normative approaches would allow (Hinde and Dixon 2007).

There has been much attention given to the breakdown of social and cultural norms in Indigenous Australia (Devine 2005; Karvelas 2011; Pearson 2011; Rothwell 2008) and much commentary on strategies to address this breakdown. The Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership (CYI), and its Director Noel Pearson, are often seen to be at the forefront of approaches that seek to (re)institute social control in Indigenous communities:

Many Aboriginal communities have lost the social order which sustains mainstream communities. They are operating at a social order deficit. They are not only disadvantaged, they are dysfunctional. The social norms which guide individuals toward healthy behaviour have broken down.

This is most clearly seen in the destructive behaviours so common in Aboriginal communities: alcohol, drugs and violence. These behaviours are not tolerated when social norms are strong (Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership n.d.).

The objective social situation for many Indigenous people is characterised by discrimination, poor employment prospects, high incarceration rates, early death, illness and low levels of education (SCRGSP 2011). Bourdieu's habitus provides a way to

theorise how these conditions are part of the world into which an individual is socialised. The reality of these chances is incorporated into an agent's understanding of their ability to move through the world, thus individual behaviours are brought into line with objective chances and social norms that impede change are perpetuated.

Social capital, as conceived of by Coleman and Putnam, provides an unsatisfactory account of the effect and function of norms and networks in Indigenous Australia. Not because it neglects the culturally specific, but because it conceives of the negative effects of networks and the breakdown of norms of social control as ahistorical, apolitical and sees both causes and solutions as wholly within an individual's control. Conversely, Bourdieu's social capital sees the opportunity to develop networks, the resources accessible through them and the norms enforced by them as a direct effect of an individual's position in a stratified society. The downsides of social capital (such as the exclusion of outsiders or downward levelling norms) can be seen as a result of a group's historical access to material resources, the invalidation of different knowledges, and the maintenance and renewal of collective identities.

This is not to reduce the complexity of Indigenous social organisation or disadvantage to the theory of social capital. Rather, it is to provide an alternative explanation of how the negative effects of social capital may influence the experience of Indigenous students in education generally, and the tertiary education sector more specifically.

Bourdieu's framework also calls attention to the conversion between various types of capitals, the value accorded to those capitals in a field and the operation of an agent's habitus. This thesis argues that, in the field of education (which serves to reproduce dominant forms of knowledge), attributing value to Indigenous forms of knowledge or social organisation would undermine the legitimacy of the dominance of White, colonial, knowledge. Whilst this thesis cannot provide an anthropological account of modes of Indigenous kinship or social organization, it is informed by literature which demonstrates the complexity of contemporary Indigenous identities and cultural and family practices, and the representations of such in the modern Australian state (Altman 2011; Kwok 2011; Lahn 2012; Langton 1993; Paradies 2006; Yamanouchi 2010). The positioning of Indigenous people as a dominated class (Walter 2009) occurs not only through overt colonial structures of dispossession, control and surveillance, but also

through an agent's habitus, where those structures are internalised and function to delineate what is possible and likely for an individual. This is not to deny the complex and specific nature of Indigenous poverty, nor the role of agent in reflexively negotiating different fields, but it does contribute to understanding the intractability of marginalisation. The need to maintain a cohesive collective identity, changes in traditional modes of social control, resource allocation and family structures combine to suggest that the downsides of social capital, although enacted by individuals and groups, have clear structural and historical sources which are not wholly within the power of individuals to change.

Rather than attributing blame to individuals and families for a lack of engagement with service providers and institutions like school and universities, or social norms which proscribe the adoption of White status markers and require familial and cultural obligations dissimilar the dominant culture, this thesis posits that Bourdieu draws attention to two key movements. The first is the way in which the capitals accessible by Indigenous families are delegitimised or restricted by the dominant culture, the second is the way in which objective chances are internalised, leading to the perpetuation of self-defeating or destructive norms, which have nothing to do with 'culture' and everything to do with racism, structural disadvantage and marginalisation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the background to the case study, establishing the policy context for Indigenous higher education and exploring how the downside of social capital may operate. The utility of Bourdieu's concept of habitus was also explored in relation to the downsides of social capital. An examination of the structural conditions which affect the development of an 'Indigenous habitus' does not lead to a reified or essentialised 'Indigenous identity' or 'Indigenous agent', but rather provides insight into the ways in which the lived experience of many Indigenous people in Australia is circumscribed by power relations, usually outside of any one individual's ability to substantially change.

The following chapter will provide a discussion of the methods and the case study used to explore empirically the utility of a 'forms of capital' approach in understanding the



downsides of social capital. This thesis notes that the research on Indigenous education is typified by small, qualitative, one-off studies (Bin-Sallik et al. 1994a, 1994b). As Craven (2005:2) argues:

Existing research is also plagued by methodological flaws including: a preponderance of 'one shot' studies; weak research designs; a lack of empirical research based on large sample sizes; unsophisticated research methodology; crosssectional data rather than longitudinal data that would allow stronger tests to identify key variables and evaluate potentially powerful programs for change; and atheoretical approaches (Craven, Tucker, Munns, Hinkley, Marsh, & Simpson, 2005). Also of the intervention programs designed to address Indigenous educational disadvantage and teacher education, very few have been evaluated by sound empirical research to demonstrate that the stated aims of the intervention have resulted in tangible outcomes. Theory, research and practice are inextricably intertwined, and neglect in any one area will undermine the other areas. Hence it is unlikely that either Indigenous educational disadvantage or ignorance about Indigenous Australia in the broader community can be effectively addressed unless intervention is firmly founded upon theory and research

Mellor and Corrigan provide a similar critique of Indigenous education research techniques and identify the following flaws (2004:46):

1. Research has generally been either testing without context or small case study.
2. Research has generally focused on a specific set of the population.
3. Research findings have been equivocal, incomplete or unclear.
4. There has been a focus on the uniqueness of the Indigenous experience of education.
5. Indigenous education research has been, to an extent, isolated from the broader research discourses over teacher quality, ongoing professional development, class sizes and social and emotional readiness for formal education.

6. Indigenous education has not been integrated with discourses in other disciplines, such as developmental, cognitive and social psychology, paediatrics, sociology and public and community health.
7. Research has focused predominantly on 'problems'.
8. The relationship between cause and effect has been asserted, rather than the inferences tested through research.
9. There is a tendency to adopt and promote the significance of single solutions.

By exploring these issues from a sociological perspective, this research goes a small way to addressing several of these points (particularly, points 6, and 9). Adopting Bourdieu's approach, which adopts a social structural perspective on the reproduction of disadvantage, this research aims to disrupt the focus on 'problems' or deficits (point 7), and refocus attention on ways in which tertiary institutions can contribute to creating safe and empowering environments. In this way, this thesis aims to draw out a range of strategies which goes some small way to addressing Mellor and Corrigan's (2004) final point above. It is important to note that this thesis cannot address all of these concerns. However, by grounding this research in a theoretical tradition which has long explored the relationship between education and structural disadvantage, it makes a small but valuable contribution to the literature.

## *Chapter 6 Methods & Methodology*

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The previous Chapters provided an analysis of the social capital literature, arguing that a heterodox concept of social capital is useful in understanding how norms, networks and resources can deliver both positive and negative outcomes for individuals. Primarily theoretical in scope, this research aims to explore both how social capital's downsides are related to access to other forms of capital and the context in which those capitals operate.

In order to explore these relationships empirically, a mixed methods approach was adopted that combined a survey, Photovoice project, focus groups and interviews. Research was conducted with Indigenous students enrolled at two Australian universities<sup>32</sup>, in partnership with their Indigenous education and student support centres. The first site was a regional university: participants at this location were enrolled in a part-time, external, tertiary preparation or bridging course. The second site was a metropolitan dual sector university, with students enrolled in VET and undergraduate programs. All participants self-identified as Indigenous, with the exception of two of the staff members who were interviewed at Metro Uni.

These locations were chosen because the participants are involved in negotiating the higher education system, many for the first time and, as such, must adopt particular sets of knowledge and behaviours necessary for achievement in this system (Kirkness 1995). As Bourdieu argues, educational success has less to do with natural ability or intelligence and more to do with the inheritance of behaviours, knowledges and dispositions that ensure familiarity with the language, institutional norms or procedures within institutions (Sheridan 2011; Swartz 1997:75-6). The higher education system is not egalitarian; by privileging certain types of cultural knowledge over others and by “allowing inherited cultural differences to shape academic achievement and occupational attainment” (Swartz 1997:190) universities can serve to reproduce inequality. When students from historically disadvantaged or minority groups undertake

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<sup>32</sup> It was a condition of access to these locations that participants remain anonymous. Given the small population size of Indigenous communities, and low numbers of Indigenous enrolments at Australian universities generally, the research locations will not be identified. Site 1, the regional location, will be referred to Regional University, or abbreviated to Reg Uni. Site 2, the metropolitan location, will be referred to Metropolitan University, or abbreviated to Metro Uni.

a tertiary education, adapting to the culture of power within those institutions requires overcoming a range of structural barriers (Stanton-Salazar 2011). Given historical exclusion from the education system and the absence of Indigenous curricula or pedagogies in Australian universities, the question therefore arises how students from Indigenous backgrounds negotiate different forms of capital required for the success in the field of tertiary education.

This research will not attempt to artificially construct an “Indigenous class”; there is considerable variation in socioeconomic status, geographical location, cultural practices and languages amongst people who identify as Indigenous in Australia and talking about a reified “Indigenous class” simply perpetuates an “essentialised indigene”, with its attendant colonial discourses of disadvantage and exoticism (Langton 1993; Paradies 2006). Indeed, the continual negotiation and policing of indigeneity requires that any analysis must acknowledge the complexity and hybridity that characterises contemporary Indigenous identities (Brough et al. 2006). Whilst avoiding a hegemonic construction of indigeneity that relies on alterity, it is imperative to acknowledge the historical and structural conditions, demonstrated by ongoing statistical disadvantage (SCRGSP 2011), that continue to ensure Indigenous people do not enjoy the same opportunity for cultural, social, political or economic wellbeing as non-Indigenous Australians. To the extent that a class is defined as “a set of individuals who share similar objective opportunities and subjective dispositions” (Swartz 1997:157), it is useful to draw attention to instances in which common experiences of marginalisation lead to the development of shared understandings within groups (Portes 1998:9).

Given recent attention to issues of lateral violence (Gooda 2011a, 2011b; Langton 2008), and how social norms support or inhibit education outcomes for Indigenous people (Pearson 2011), this thesis makes a timely contribution to the literature. In the context of Indigenous education, narratives of welfare dependency, low student aspirations and low levels of parental engagement are common (Lea et al. 2011)<sup>33</sup>. These narratives rely on assumptions about an absence of social control or cohesion (Coradini 2010), and typify the rational choice perspective of social capital theorists

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<sup>33</sup> Current examples includes recent publications released by the Centre for Independent Studies (Hughes and Hughes 2012) and the Menzies Foundation (2010), which both focus on “low parental and student expectations” (Hughes and Hughes 2012:1) or a failure of parents and students to understand the benefits of education (Menzies Foundation 2010:9) as a major cause of poor academic outcomes.

such as Coleman (1988a). In reviewing the utility of a Bourdieusian approach to social capital's negative effects, this thesis seeks to disrupt those assumptions and offer a historically grounded, critical interpretation of social capital's downsides.

### **Research Questions**

Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction avoids both the determinacy of structuralism and the historical vacuum in which Putnam's and Coleman's theories of social capital operate. Applying a Bourdieusian interpretation of social capital therefore enables a discussion of the downsides of this resource to move away from simplistic arguments about individual autonomy and choice. Orthodox theories see the downside of social capital as an absence of trust, a lack of connections with people in dissimilar social situations or an inability to enforce sanctions on behaviour. A Bourdieusian approach suggests that the opportunity to build those networks, and the norms which characterise them, are an effect of the location of an individual in a stratified society. Where an orthodox approach stops at an individual's ability to develop new networks and enforce social norms, a critical approach moves beyond to a discussion of social locations and structures which influence an individuals' opportunity to build those networks.

This research is therefore guided by two key questions that emerge from the literature:

*Research question 1: What can a 'forms of capital' approach add to an understanding of the resources that Indigenous students use and need in tertiary education?*

Literature based on orthodox approaches often relies on the assumption that there is an inverse relationship between social capital and social exclusion; the less social capital an individual has access to, the greater their experience of social exclusion (Woolcock 2000b:3). For example, Putnam's argues that increasing a community's 'stock' of social capital leads to better social and economic outcomes for all (Putnam 2000). However, social capital is only one type of resource available to an individual and cannot alone account for success or failure in any field, let alone for Indigenous people in higher education (White, Spence and Maxim 2005). Following Bourdieu's approach then requires an attempt to map the constellation of resources to which an individual has access. Firstly, this research sets out to understand the feasibility and utility of mapping

the forms of capital to which participants have access, including the kinds of resources that can be accessed through their networks. This is the first question which guides this research: what can a 'forms of capital' approach add to an understanding of the resources that Indigenous students use and need in tertiary education?

*Research question 2: How does the idea of social capital's downsides explain the challenges Indigenous students face in tertiary education?*

Contextualising social capital as one type of resource avoids attributing to it a greater weight that it can theoretically and empirically bear. As stated previously, social capital, and both its positive and negative effects, can only be one part of explaining outcomes for Indigenous students (White, Spence and Maxim 2005:77). This acknowledgement is required by Bourdieu's approach in a way that it is not by orthodox perspectives on social capital. Nonetheless, it is one small part that has been overlooked in the application of Bourdieu's theories to Indigenous tertiary education. Given the dominance of agent-centred approaches, and the rhetoric on social norms and parental engagement that pervades discussion in this area (Lea et al. 2011; Wall and Baker 2012), a more nuanced approach is required.

Outcomes for disadvantaged individuals and groups depend less on joining and more on what resources are available and who has access to them (Portes and Landolt, 1996:4). Therefore, the negative outcomes associated with the so-called downside cannot simply be explained as 'too much of the wrong kind' of social capital. Attention to the complex interplay between history, identity, access to different types of resources and the value ascribed to those resources by the dominant culture is more likely to provide a coherent picture of the downsides of social capital. This then leads to the second question that guides this research: how does the idea of social capital's downsides explain the challenges Indigenous students face in tertiary education?

I argue that orthodox interpretations of social capital are not only theoretically inadequate, but also, when they are applied to interrogating the negative effects of this resource, they perpetuate an approach that tends to blame Indigenous people, parents and communities for not developing the 'right kinds' of networks. Consequently, the role of structural inequality or marginalisation in contributing to the downsides of social capital

is largely unexplored in the orthodox literature. The relationship between different resources, or forms of capital, and their distribution is a key contribution of Bourdieu's theory of capital. This approach argues that outcomes for individuals depend more on how different kinds of resources are distributed and mobilised in stratified societies (Bourdieu 1986). Consequently, the negative effects of social capital may have less to do with the ability or desire of individuals to build networks through which they can access high quality resources and foster norms of high achievement, and more do with the opportunity to do so.

### **Operationalising Capitals**

Studies of social capital are often limited to an analysis of networks and trust. However, previous chapters have established that network formation is strongly influenced by a range of other factors, including socio-economic status, health, culture and geographic location. Orthodox and dominant theories of social capital are reluctant to engage with the idea of a 'hierarchy of capitals' and tend not to explore the hypothesised relationships between different resources and social norms and networks, particularly in the generation of negative effects. Underlying this research is the argument that, while social networks are important, a range of additional factors are influential in the development and operation of those networks.

Social capital is largely portrayed as a positive asset, and a 'more is better' approach underpins much of the policy and research in this area. What has been demonstrated by the literature, however, is that there are circumstances under which high levels of social capital (strong connections within groups, powerful social norms, high levels of trust, and access to resources) can lead to undesirable outcomes for individuals. Individual mobility and choice may be restricted, as can be access to external information and resources. However, these effects depend on the social location in which they operate: the networks and resources that ensure the cohesion of an extended family may not be those that are valued in the education system. This research therefore argues, in line with Bourdieu, that social capital is more usefully conceived of as one type of resource individuals can access, and that the value of those resources is determined by the field in which they operate.

The operationalisation of Bourdieu's concepts can be challenging, primarily due to the complexity and ambiguity of his ideas (Swartz 1997:156); approaches to the measurement of capitals and habitus therefore vary widely (Robson and Sanders 2009:9). However complex, Bourdieu did intend his concepts to have theoretical and methodological utility. Although much research on social capital does not extend to the assessment of economic and cultural capital, this thesis will adopt a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and in doing so, identify the benefits and limitations of such an approach. This research uses quantitative methods to explore the amount of capital accessible by participants and qualitative techniques to explore the downsides of social capital, including: a survey tool, photovoice project and focus groups.

### **Resource Generator Survey**

The survey used in this research was constructed to provide an assessment of respondent's social, cultural and economic capital. Given the time pressures on students, and the likelihood of short interactions with participants, brevity was an important consideration in the development of the survey tool. Regional University requested that the survey be made available online to support the computer literacy component of the tertiary preparation course, so the survey was distributed in hardcopy and a link to the online survey was provided by email where requested.

The survey incorporated 15 questions from a range of sources including Alexander's (2009) egonet name generator survey and demographic questions from the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Health Survey (ABS 2001), the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (Evans 2009), the World Values Survey (World Values Survey Association 2005)<sup>34</sup> and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (ABS 2008a). The purpose in combining specific questions from these surveys is to facilitate comparison and secondary analysis, but also to develop a tool that measures different forms of capital. This research design cannot facilitate a probability sample, and can make no claims to generalizability. However, incorporating these

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<sup>34</sup> Although many questions on perceptions of fairness and trust in the World Values Survey and Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (Evans 2009) are often used by social capital researchers (for example: Putnam 1995a; Putnam 1995b; Hall 1999; Rothstein 2001; ABS 2004; Roßteutscher 2010) because this research posits a fundamentally different understanding of social capital, I argue questions on these items are interesting, but not immediately relevant to the research questions.



questions with an egonet survey provides a limited degree of comparability, as well as insight into the different types of resources accessible by an individual. The survey questions are provided at Appendix 3.

### Economic capital

Bourdieu argues that economic capital is “immediately and directly convertible into money” (Bourdieu 1986:243). As such, survey items included questions pertaining to economic assets, including: savings, household weekly income, home ownership and share ownership.

### Cultural capital

The interpretation and measurement of cultural capital is more complex, because it includes a: “wide variety of resources including such things as verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the school system, and educational credentials” (Swartz 1997:76). As Bourdieu (1986) argues, cultural capital exists:

- In its *embodied* form as cultivated dispositions, masking the investment families make in socialising children in particular mannerisms, languages or behaviours
- In its *objectified* form as material objects that require specialised cultural abilities to use (such as books or art)
- In an *institutionalised* form as academic qualifications

Although incomplete, an insight into part of the cultural capital possessed by students was gained by a survey question on level of educational attainment. This can only be a partial and incomplete proxy for cultural capital and the survey measure was supplemented by the use of qualitative measures (Photovoice, interviews and focus groups) in order to build a more complete picture of cultural capital.

### Social capital

Earlier chapters describe how the definition and measurement of social capital has been contested. However, Bourdieu’s definition of social capital is clear and presents few challenges to operationalisation: social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less

institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu 1986:248). This definition of social capital as involving the resources embedded in networks (Coradini 2010:576) removes the need to use population-level indicators and focuses on the actual or potential resources an individual may secure through their connections.

Grenfell (2009) does note that a limited focus on the resources accessible through networks neglects how the value of those resources is determined by the field in which they operate. By adopting a mixed methods approach and examining how the value of participant’s capitals are determined within the field of higher education, this research attempts to address those concerns about a reductionist approach to social capital.

The Resource Generator (RG) survey developed by the Dutch researchers van der Gaag and Snijders (2005) is an important development in the measurement of social capital. It has been replicated elsewhere (Webber and Huxley 2007) and forms the basis of the egonet survey (Alexander et al. 2008) used in this research. Unlike other surveys which often focus on measuring proxies for social capital like trust, the RG aims to understand the kind of resources that can be accessed through an individual’s network. The survey asks respondents about a fixed list of social resources that represent different domains of social capital and their relationship to the person through whom they can access that resource (Webber and Huxley 2007:483). However, the key contribution of van der Gaag and Snijders (2005) is the identification of four domains of social capital:

- Domain I: prestige and education related social capital;
- Domain II: political and financial skills social capital;
- Domain III: personal skills social capital;
- Domain IV: personal support social capital.

#### *Domain I: Prestige and Education*

This domain describes an individual’s connection to people in higher status positions. It is most closely aligned to the ‘linking’ type of social capital adopted by orthodox approaches (Woolcock 2000a), or Granovetter’s ‘weak ties’ (1983), and indicates resources owned by higher status persons in the network (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005:23). The survey used here only uses one item to assess this domain, however it is a

useful indicator of a connection survey respondents have to individuals with access to a greater level of material resources. Van der Gaag and Snijders also suggest that there is some relationship to Domain II, which examines instrumental action and connection to higher status individuals (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005:23).

#### *Domain II: Political and Financial Skills*

This domain is correlated to D-I and also provides an indication of the kinds of resources useful for instrumental action, or ‘making one’s way in the world’: accessing information regarding government institutions and systems and financial advice. Instrumental actions involve seeking out others who can access different and better resources in order to add to the resources that an individual does not yet command (Lin 2001:58; Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005:21). Although not directly comparable, this domain is most closely related to bridging ties, or the kinds of connections useful for “getting ahead” (Woolcock 2000a:19).

#### *Domain III: Personal Skills*

The third domain covers communication-related activities and applies to resources usually accessible through close or family networks. It consists of items which are usually very popular, which does tend to limit the utility of these questions (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005 :23). However, low scores in this domain may indicate a lack of usually quite common social resources.

#### *Domain IV: Personal Support*

This domain contains items that involve trust and more expressive actions, for example, giving advice on personal problems and moving house. These resources allow an individual to maintain “continuity in one’s personal life” and indicate the ability to draw on resources and support in times of need (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005:23). Both D-III and D-IV indicate common social resources, usually associated with ‘bonding’ social capital, or strong connections between similar people. As above, whilst this measure may have high popularity, where low scores occur it can indicate an absence of the social support essential for ‘getting by’.

Alexander et al. (2008) have used these domains to develop an egonet survey method which maps individual social resources through a name generator survey. The

respondent is asked to list the names (or pseudonyms or nicknames) of each person who they can access specific resources through, for each of the above domains of social capital. This produces a list of the respondent's (ego) social network contacts (alters), which allows mapping of the size of the network and the type of the resources that can be accessed through that network (Alexander et al. 2008). Because the egonet survey method asks network-sensitive questions and conducts analysis on each respondent's network, it can be adopted with a small sample size (Alexander et al. 2008). The survey questions for each domain are provided at Appendix 3: Egonet Survey Questions.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups were only used at Regional University, and incorporated into the timetable for the on-campus component of the tertiary preparation program. This created the time and space for recruiting students and conducting data collection and reduced the burden of participation on class and study time for students at the residential school.

Focus groups are well-suited to exploring the experiences of individuals and small groups and allow participants to use their own vocabulary and conceptual frames (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999; Bernard 2006). This research is centered on exploring the theory of social capital and its components; norms, networks and resources. Focus groups are ideal for exploring these issues because they: "enable researchers to examine people's different perspectives as they operate within a social network" (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999:5).

There is some debate in the literature regarding the use of pre-existing groups, and whether the heterogeneity or homogeneity of participants is significant (Bernard 2006:237). It has been argued however, that focus groups are useful in exploring shared, group experiences around a specific topic (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999). As members of a cohort enrolled in a tertiary preparation program, participants have claim to a shared experience. It is argued that this method is therefore well-suited to exploring how individuals access and negotiate resources, social capital in particular, in undertaking a tertiary preparation course. Using the additional methods proposed in this research does go some way to addressing concerns that members of a pre-existing group may have

established social norms and ways of communicating that proscribe topics of conversation or limit contribution from some members (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999:9). Using focus groups as one of a range of data collection methods will enhance the confidence of findings derived using this method (Kidd and Parshall 2000). Provided that focus groups are used to collect data about content and process, not personal attributes or population characteristics, this is an effective and valid method (Bernard 2006:236).

The literature stresses a number of potential difficulties involved in conducting focus groups and analysing the resultant data:

- The tendency of inexperienced researchers to be rigid and adhere to the questioning route too closely (Kidd and Parshall 2000:294);
- Managing group dynamics (Lunt and Livingstone 1996);
- Managing expectancy effects and social desirability bias (Bernard 2006).

Key ethical considerations in facilitating focus groups include: presuming group consent equates to individual consent; managing group dynamics; and the confidentiality of data given multiple participants (Farquhar and Das 1999; Gibbs 1997). This research requires consent from individual participants prior to attending a focus group and allows individuals to review, change or retract any information they provide at any point until publication. Gibbs (1997) advises that interviewers need to clarify at the beginning of the focus group that participants contributions will be shared with other attendees, as well as the interviewer. The researcher should also encourage participants to maintain the confidentiality of others' contributions and stress that all data will be made anonymous (Gibbs 1997) before it is shared with participants, or used by the researcher in any form.

Managing group dynamics, by encouraging quieter or acquiescent members to participate or dominant members to allow others space, is more challenging for an inexperienced researcher. Lewis (2000) provides a discussion of interviewer skills and attributes that contribute to successful focus groups and suggests that successful interviewers are capable of both asserting authority and being submissive. Practical strategies include: memorising the questioning route; practising listening to others in

group situations; and being able to listen and think at the same time (Lewis 2000). Callaghan (2005), however, discusses the suitability of focus groups in exploring the reproduction of social structures and notes that conformity to group norms is indicative of the formation and articulation of collective identity. The acquiescence of some participants, and the dominance of others, is therefore not necessarily a limitation of this method, and itself can be explored as an expression of collective identity.

Whilst Barbour and Kitzinger (1999:9) argue that pre-existing groups have established social norms and patterns of interaction that may limit discussion or proscribe certain topics, I argue that this feature of focus group research provides a useful insight into the operation of habitus and the expression of group identity. Group discussions can demonstrate shared understandings of issues and provide an insight into the collective identity held by the group, particularly when conversations cover events or issues which shape the lived experiences and perspectives of participants (Callaghan 2005). It is this iterative movement from the individual to the social structure and back that the idea of habitus captures (Reay 2004).

In managing identities there is a process of reference between individual and group that is constructed through talk. It is a process however, which is not entirely free and creative as in some conceptions of agency but one which recognises the significance of existing relations and structures and which mediates and develops individual and collective responses to them ... the group can provide access to this dynamic understanding of habitus (Callaghan 2005:7.9).

The questions used to guide the focus groups are based on understanding the students' motivations for studying and the challenges they face in their academic career (the structure of the group sessions and the questions used to guide the discussions are provided at Appendix 4: Focus Group Questions). By discussing participant's expectations, aspirations and the barriers they perceive, the formative conditions under which those emerge become available to the researcher for analysis (Swartz 1997:103). The way in which individuals and groups negotiate those conditions and interpret their experiences provides an insight into how, and to what degree, external chances and objective conditions are internalized. Correspondingly, focus groups also provide an

opportunity to understand what practices and strategies emerge when there is dissonance between objective conditions and individual aspirations.

According to Bourdieu's perspective, individual practices are derived from the interrelationship between present conditions and past conditions. Actors are predisposed to approach novel situations in "habituated ways", which tend to perpetuate inherited dispositions and structures (Swartz 1997:290). Habitus therefore describes the way in which, for members of a group, the structure and operation of the social world has a common-sense quality to it (Bourdieu 1989:19). This is not to imply that the idea of habitus translates to a wholly determined actor. Rather, it is to draw attention to the likelihood of stasis.

Focus groups are well-suited to engaging with the articulation of collective and individual identities, and through that develop an understanding of agent's habitus. For participants who are engaging in the field of higher education for the first time, it is likely that there is a degree of tension between the inherited dispositions of individuals, shaped by the structural and historical realities of Indigenous education, and the aspirations and expectations those participants bring to their academic career. Despite concerns regarding its limitations, this method is well placed to engage with these processes (Callaghan 2005).

### **Photovoice Project**

Photovoice is a participatory research method that involves providing people in the community with cameras in order to capture their own interpretation of their lives, communities and concerns (Foster-Fishman et al. 2005:277). Participants are given the opportunity to: "record and reflect their community's assets and concerns ... [and]...discuss issues of importance to the community in large and small groups to promote critical dialogue and produce shared knowledge" (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001:560).

Similarly, Foster-Fishman et al. contend (2005:277):

By sharing their stories about these images, reflecting with others about the broader meanings of the photos they have taken, and displaying these

photos and stories for the broader public and policy makers to view, Photovoice participants are provided with a unique opportunity to document and communicate important aspects of their lives.

Photovoice, or photoelicitation, is a relatively new method and does not have an extensive history of use in Australia. However, this method fits well with Bourdieu's use of photography (Wacquant 2004:400) and has been used successfully with Indigenous participants. For example, in Western Australia it was used to document young Aboriginal peoples perceptions of HIV and reasons why young people might be at risk (Larson, Mitchell and Gilles 2001), while Wilkin and Liamputtong (2010) recently adopted this method to research the experiences of female Aboriginal health workers.

This method has a number of advantages for both researcher and participant. For the researcher, this method generates rich data through images as well as through group sessions and interviews where participants reflect on their images. This process provides a glimpse of the social realities experienced by participants, as well as of broader community and cultural narratives (Foster-Fishman et al. 2005:277). In doing so, photoelicitation techniques provide another opportunity to understand the operation of habitus. For participants, this method empowers participants as experts on their own lives and their own communities, as well as creating a safe environment for reflection about their experiences (Foster-Fishman et al. 2005:285). Participants are given the opportunity to record, review and reflect on their assets and concerns, and to discuss issues of importance. The aim of this is to produce critical dialogue and shared knowledge. However, there are a number of ethical issues which need to be addressed, including:

- Consent and privacy issues for the people or places in the photos;
- Safety of the photographers and subjects;
- The possibility of embarrassing or misrepresenting subjects in the photos;
- Whether or not photos are used for commercial benefit (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001).



To address these concerns, participants were informed that images would only be used for the purposes of this thesis, and any future publication would only occur with their informed prior consent. Privacy and safety concerns were discussed when the camera kit was provided, and at the same time as the information and consent forms were read with each participant.

As Meo argues (2010:152), talking about students' images is a useful way of unpacking the myriad of ways participants classify themselves and others. Through photoelicitation, participants generate a representation of their place in the world and the barriers they face, and demonstrate reflexive, creative and strategic responses to those challenges (Latz 2012:14). By focusing on the construction of collective identity through discussion in a focus group and drawing out the issues and events participants view as significant (Slutskaya et al. 2012:29), this method also provides scope to explore the concept of habitus:

Importantly, the method of photoelicitation calls attention to the fact that the visible does not just bring the world to us, we also use it to introduce ourselves to the world, to attach meanings and values to what we are and who we intend to be. In this way images provide a means for us to orientate ourselves to others, and "our selves" to ourselves (Slutskaya et al. 2012:17).

Photoelicitation methods also go some way to disrupting the power imbalance that exists between researcher and participant. Based in the familiar activity of taking and talking about photos, the participant is positioned as the expert on the images generated, and the interpretation and categorization of the images is derived from the respondent's own classificatory schema.

### *Regional University*

The process adopted at each location differed as a result of the time available to access potential participants and develop relationships with the staff and students at each university. At Regional University, the research project was conducted during a one-week residential school and all participants were external students enrolled in a tertiary

preparation course. This meant that many participants lived significant distances from the university in which they were enrolled. The process above was therefore adapted to be flexible enough to accommodate the geographical distances involved, however, the short period of time available meant that response rates were very low and the Photovoice project was not effective at this location.

During the three focus groups conducted at Reg Uni, the Photovoice project was discussed and initially generated some interest, particularly the possibility of producing a publication or online exhibition of participant's images in order to communicate to a wider audience the challenges and opportunities involved in completing their studies. At the end of each focus group session, and at the final morning meeting on the last day of the residential school, students were invited to drop in to a room at the centre and collect a camera kit. A total of 14 camera kits were provided at the end of the last focus group. The kit consisted of: 2 disposable cameras; a reply-paid padded envelope; an information sheet which included project and contact information, as well as ethical and safety issues; and copies of photo consent forms to be completed when the participant took photos of other people. Safety, consent and ethical considerations were discussed with each participant who collected a camera kit, contact details were collected in order to send a reminder to participants and participants were asked to return their cameras via post to the researcher at the end of one month. The intent was to digitize the images and return a set to the photographer. Depending on what the participant had specified as their preferred form of contact, the researcher would then contact the participant to discuss the images and the stories that go with them.

Facilitating group discussion of the images was beyond the scope of the research at Reg Uni, given that participants were external students who came together only for the purpose of residential schools. Following up participants proved difficult, and in some cases impossible, due to participant relocations, changes to contact details and the distances involved. The short period of time available to the researcher to recruit participants during their residential school limited opportunities for developing trust and rapport with participants, which may also have decreased participant's willingness to be involved in follow-up discussions.

Alternative methods were discussed with participants, such as online chat-rooms or

forums to facilitate group discussion and reflection on images, or to convene some locally-based participants for a group session. The research design was flexible enough to incorporate these possibilities, but participants expressed the wish to discuss and reflect on images individually with the researcher. It was intended that this discussion take the form of a semi-structured interview. The questions intended to guide this interview are outlined in Appendix 5: Photovoice Questions. However, only one participant from Reg Uni returned their camera. This response rate does not provide sufficient data and these images have been omitted from the discussion of results in order to ensure that participant's anonymity.

### *Metropolitan University*

In consultation with the staff at the Indigenous student support centre at Metro Uni, a different process was negotiated to recruit and engage with participants. The centre required that this research be approved by the metropolitan university's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and Indigenous Ethics Network (IEN), in addition to the approval granted by the Australian National University's HREC. As part of that process, it was a requirement of the Indigenous student support centre and the IEN that all students be offered financial or monetary acknowledgements for sharing their time, knowledge and experiences by participating in this research. The ethical considerations involved in offering financial acknowledgement and recompense are discussed in the following section.

Following these negotiations, I was introduced to a number of students at the centre and given space to work in the student's common room. Here, I was able to post signs on the common room notice board advertising the research and introduce myself and the project to students. Surveys and pre-prepared camera kits were handed out to students here. The camera kit provided to participants at Metro Uni consisted of a large pencil case containing: a notebook and pen; two small chocolates; one disposable camera; a \$10 gift voucher; copies of the information and consent forms; and photo consent forms. A total of 12 camera kits were distributed and 11 were returned with interviews conducted to discuss to the images.

Between two and three hours a day, approximately three days a week, for just over two months, was spent building relationships with students and staff and collecting data. Participants were contacted between one and four weeks after receiving a camera kit to arrange return of their cameras or send their images by email or text message. Participants were also able to leave their cameras and consent forms in a secure location at the Indigenous student support centre for collection by the researcher. The images were developed by a commercial photographer and the participants were then invited to meet for an interview to discuss the images. At the beginning of the interview, the participant was provided with a set of their images, a \$50 gift voucher for their time, and the information and consent forms were revisited. The combination of financial recompense and a considerably longer data collection period resulted in a larger quantity of higher quality data at this location.

### **Site Selection and Sampling**

A total of five tertiary education providers in eastern Australia were approached to participate in this research. The institutions were approached on the basis that they all provided tertiary preparation or bridging courses for Indigenous students. The two universities involved in this research were selected as a result of their response to an email approach. At the regional university this was facilitated by a personal relationship which secured an introduction to the director of the Indigenous student support centre. At the metropolitan university, several meetings followed the initial approach in order to establish the benefit that would flow to the participants, institution and wider community.

Obtaining a probability sample of participants was beyond the scope of this research and it instead relied on purposive (Donley 2012:96) or purposeful sampling in order to gather “information-rich cases” (Patton 2002:46). In partnership with the Indigenous student support and education centres at each of the two locations, I was provided with access to potential participants who would meet the criteria established for this study: Indigenous students undertaking higher education.

### *Regional University*

Participants at Regional University were enrolled in a tertiary preparation program delivered externally, except for two compulsory one-week residential schools on campus each semester. It was in one of these residential schools that I had access to students. The Indigenous student support centre allowed me to introduce myself to students in a housekeeping session at the beginning of the week and scheduled three, one-hour sessions in the student's timetable for focus groups to take place. It was made clear to students that it was optional to attend focus groups, or leave at any time. No financial recompense was provided for any component of the research at Reg Uni. A total of 13 participants were involved in the three focus group sessions and 11 surveys were completed.

### *Metropolitan University*

Participants at Metropolitan University were all currently enrolled in TAFE or undergraduate Bachelor programs in full-time courses delivered on campus. I was able to spend a little over two months at the centre, recruiting students and conducting data collection at the university's main campus. The sample of students included in this research is restricted to the students who used the services of the student support centre during the data collection phase, and who agreed to participate. Whilst a small number of participants became involved as a result of discussions with other students and staff, snowball sampling was not deliberately employed to recruit additional participants. A total of 13 surveys were conducted with students, 14 interviews were conducted with 11 students and 3 staff members, and 150 images were generated by the 11 students as part of the Photovoice project. Providing financial acknowledgement for the time and knowledge of student participants was also a condition of access to this location. Willingness to provide such recompense, in combination with the longer period of time spent at Metro Uni, enabled the credibility of the research project to be established with the IEN and staff, increasing the response rate and quality of data collected at this location.

### **Financial Compensation for Participants**

It was a condition of collaboration with the Indigenous support centre at Metro Uni that all participants were provided with financial recompense for their time attending focus

groups, completing surveys and sharing their experiences by participating in the Photovoice project. This was approved by a variation request to the Australian National University's HREC, and the HREC and Indigenous Ethics Network at the second site. The centre maintains a policy of financial compensation or acknowledgement for all students participating in research projects, as well as reimbursement for Elders who deliver guest lectures or provide other services. Funds were available for this purpose, and the researcher agreed to provide participants with a \$10 Coles-Myer gift voucher in the camera kit when they were initially approached and a further \$50 gift voucher on return of cameras. This was provided at the beginning of the interview held to discuss the photographs, and at the same time copies of the student's images<sup>35</sup> were returned. A \$5 note was also attached to every survey handed out to students to compensate them for their time in completing the survey. Whilst recompense of \$60 per participant or \$5 per survey may appear large for this type of research<sup>36</sup>, there were a number of students who declined to participate, left the research project, or completed a survey and returned the \$5 compensation.

The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council et al. 2007:10, para 2.2.10) states:

It is generally appropriate to reimburse the costs to participants of taking part in research, including costs such as travel, accommodation and parking. Sometimes participants may also be paid for time involved. However, payment that is disproportionate to the time involved, or any other inducement that is likely to encourage participants to take risks, is ethically unacceptable.

In this research project, participants were provided with a financial compensation for their time for each interview attended and on the return of cameras. When participants at Metro Uni were approached to participate, they were informed that compensation was for their time only, and that they were free to refuse to answer any questions, stop participating or end the interview at any time (Head 2009:341). The use of cash

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<sup>35</sup> Either digital images on CD, or printed copies, as requested.

<sup>36</sup> Given the expense of this research project, it was agreed with the centre at Metro Uni to limit the number of participants to 20. This number was not reached, and no willing participants were declined.

incentives or vouchers is also established in the Photovoice methodology (Wang and Pies 2004), which is based on the principles of respect for, and empowerment of, participants. In the context of research with Indigenous participants, who are often over-researched, the benefits of research rarely accrue to the individual or to the community. As such, participants in research such as this should receive an appropriate level of financial or monetary acknowledgement for sharing their time, knowledge and experiences.

It is argued that the amount of a \$20 per hour was not sufficiently large to constitute undue inducement, exploitation or coercion (Cleary, Walter and Matheson 2008), but avoids tokenistic compensation. Accordingly, payment to interviewees was justified on the basis of respect for participant's time and the privileging of their knowledge and is thus in accord with both the National Statement (2007) and the guidelines for research with Indigenous people (National Health and Medical Research Council 2003).

The wage payment model established by Dickert and Grady (1999) also provides justification for research participants to be paid an equivalent of the minimum wage. The Miscellaneous Award 2010 (Fair Work Australia 2010) sets a minimum hourly wage of \$15.00 for adult Australian workers. As a point of comparison, the most junior rate of pay for Aboriginal research workers suggested by the former Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre was \$25 per hour (DKCRC 2007). For this research, it was estimated that participants would spend up to three hours taking photographs, and another one to two hours completing the survey and participating in interviews or focus groups. Based on the minimum wage model, a total monetary compensation and reimbursement pool of \$65 is therefore justified and not excessive. Evidence also suggests that financial compensation can improve representation from people from lower socio-economic positions (Pentz 2004). Given the focus of this research on Indigenous university students, it is argued that this compensation improved participation and response rates by demonstrating respect for their knowledge and acting as an appropriate reimbursement for participant's time, without creating undue inducement.

## **Cultural and Ethical Considerations**

There is very little research undertaken in partnership with Indigenous organisations and individuals that aims to explore social capital (see Lahn 2012, Brough et al. 2006 and Lea et al. 2011 for notable exceptions). The participatory design of this research project aimed to empower respondents as experts in their own lives and resists imposing normative definitions of what constitutes 'positive' or 'negative' resources, norms or networks. A discussion of identity and social norms are a crucial, if neglected, part of social capital research (Brough et al. 2006). However, this project rejects a deficit model which assumes uniformity of experience and adopts a strengths-based approach which constructs individuals as experts in their own lives and cultures with their own knowledges and resource. Prescriptive policy solutions to 'close the gap' often rest on normative judgments about the nature, quality and function of Indigenous communities and Indigenous parents (Lea et al. 2011).

Any discussion of social capital located within a Bourdieusian frame of analysis, must attend to the concepts of habitus and collective identities. In order to examine the negative effects of social capital for Indigenous students in tertiary institutions, a discussion of networks and social norms and their relevance in perpetuating social stratification must also be included. Unlike populist, conservative approaches to these issues (Hughes and Hughes 2012; Menzies Foundation 2010) this research seeks to disrupt the narrative of dysfunction that often accompanies discussions of Indigenous families and education. The identification of social norms that construct participation in White institutions as antithetical to a cohesive Aboriginal identity, or the perpetuation of self-defeating behavior, must be contextualized by acknowledging the ways in which structural disadvantages are internalized and transmitted intergenerationally (Swartz 1997:104)

The *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (NHMRC 2007) and *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* (NHMRC 2003) asks researchers to address culturally-specific issues of research design, ethics, culture and language. This project aims to support the development of a relationship between the researcher and participants which is based on application of the six core values identified in the Guidelines: reciprocity; respect; equality; responsibility; survival and protection; and spirit and integrity. To



address values and issues identified in the *National Statement* (NHMRC 2007), *Values and Ethics* (NHMRC 2003), and the *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS 2011) this research adopted the following strategies:

#### Research merit and integrity

- The research methods, particularly the photovoice project and focus group, acknowledge the individual experiences of each participant by providing the opportunity for each individual to create and interpret data.
- There was communication with the local community through the Indigenous student support and education centres.
- The research created innovative qualitative and quantitative data about how individuals negotiate transitions and manage resources available to them in those transitions.
- Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and participants were also asked for their permission to use data gathered for the purpose of this thesis again, such as for conference presentations or journal articles. Participants were provided with the opportunity to specify if they wanted to be contacted prior to the re-use of their data, and also the opportunity to request a copy of a report which summarises this research.

#### Benefits of the research

- The benefits of this research project include the enhancement of computer literacy capabilities where participants choose to engage in the data collection and interpretation process using digital technologies.
- Benefits may also accrue to the Indigenous student support and education centers in the form a report which discusses the experiences of students at their institution. This report will provide detailed qualitative data for the centres to use in their evaluation of programs or future planning.

#### Respect

- The research is designed to be flexible enough to accommodate variations requested by the Indigenous student support and education centres. These centres are aware of the protocols which operate in their local communities and

are best placed to provide advice on how the research may support the teaching and learning goals of their centre.

- The research creates the opportunity for participants to be actively involved in the research process through the co-creation and interpretation of the research data.
- Being guided by participants in their preferences regarding how the Photovoice project is to be exhibited: online, in a public exhibition or publication, provided the opportunity for participants to control the dissemination and audience for their data.

### **Limitations**

There are a range of factors which, individually, and in combination, limit this research. Of greatest concern was the short period of time available at the regional location to build a relationship with potential participants, which may have improved the response rate for the Photovoice project. A greater period of time at this location would have also allowed interviews to be conducted with staff.

The questions used in the survey would have benefitted from pre-testing with a group of Indigenous university students, or researchers in the field of Indigenous education, to ensure their relevance to local contexts and refine the presentation of the questions (Webber and Huxley 2007; Wellman 2007). Despite this, extensive testing of the validity Resource Generator developed by Van der Gaag and Snijders (2005; also Webber and Huxley 2007) demonstrates the validity of the four domains of social capital and the questions constructed within those domains.

### **Conclusion**

Despite these limitations and the impossibility of generalising any results found here to wider populations, the innovative combination of methods adopted will demonstrate the utility of a 'forms of capital' approach in understanding the downsides of social capital. This chapter has identified the combination of methods used to explore the forms of capital to which participants have access. The quantitative measures in the survey tool are used to provide an indication of the economic, cultural and social capital possessed

by respondents. The focus groups and photovoice methods are employed to gather qualitative data on participant's experiences and perceptions of the barriers and opportunities they navigate in their academic career. These qualitative methods provide the opportunity to engage with the concept of habitus and explore how participant's individual and collective identities are constructed with regard to the objective and structural conditions they face. Whilst there are limitations with this methodology, the combination of methods enables a historically grounded, culturally sensitive exploration of the downsides of social capital.

The following two chapters explore the data collected at the two locations. Chapter 7 focuses on mapping the resources available to participants, with Chapter 8 exploring participant's experiences of the downsides of social capital.

## *Chapter 7 Economic, Social & Cultural Capital*

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The previous chapter outlined the methodology used to address the research questions. This chapter will analyse the results of the empirical research in light of the first research questions: What can a ‘forms of capital’ approach add to understanding the resources that Indigenous students use and need in tertiary education?

The first part of this thesis examined the theory of social capital, identifying significant limitations with the dominant orthodox approach and arguing that a Bourdieusian interpretation goes a considerable way towards addressing these flaws. In my view, a Bourdieusian approach provides a greater understanding of not only the downsides of social capital, but also the way in which different forms of capital relate and interact. In the context of Indigenous higher education, the literature identifies a large number of structural barriers to obtaining a tertiary qualification and has begun to identify some social norms which may also help explain the low numbers of Indigenous people completing university. By examining the forms of capital to which participants have access, and exploring the barriers those students experience, this thesis adds to the current research on social capital and its downsides in the context of Indigenous higher education.

One of the key benefits of using a Bourdieusian approach is the ability to draw attention to what forms of capital are valued in a particular field and how individuals may go about converting a capital they possess, inherit or develop into the form of capital valued in that field. This then enables an understanding of how the field is constructed, what the rules of the game are and how Indigenous students are then permitted and able to play that game. The aim is to explore two different strands of research on: social capital and its downsides; and Indigenous higher education in Australia. This will enable a better understanding of the barriers and opportunities facing Indigenous students at university.

This chapter considers the empirical evidence relevant to the first research question: What can a ‘forms of capital’ approach add to an understanding of the resources that Indigenous students use and need in tertiary education? To answer this question, the

empirical research focused on understanding the network resources that students are able to access and require, and interpreting those results within a Bourdieusian ‘forms of capital’ frame. This chapter initially summarises the data collected, before moving on to a discussion of the key themes emerging from this empirical research.

The data suggests that there is some justification for the idea that social capital has a downside. Respondents discussed being actively discouraged from going to university by family or friends, a lack of role models, and the difficulties that arise for them when trying to study in an environment where family members were not familiar with their academic obligations, despite those family members being proud of their academic pursuits. Some respondents identified connections outside of the university, such as their families, mentors, friends who weren’t studying, work colleagues or church groups as sources of support. The Indigenous student support centres provided students with access to information, academic support and tutoring and were a key source of social and cultural support for students at both locations.

Where institutions recognised Indigenous culture, such as in curriculum content, teaching styles or by creating culturally safe<sup>37</sup> spaces, this was recognised and appreciated by students. However, it was also clear that the student support centres provide a sense of community, and a connection to family and culture, that was absent in the rest of the institution. These institutions reflect and encourage forms of capital valued by the dominant culture and Indigenous cultures are largely invisible outside of student support centres or enclaves (Nakata, Nakata and Chin 2008). The institutional, social, financial, academic or cultural support provided by the Indigenous student support centres were seen by participants as central to both a successful transition to university, and their retention and completion.

For students at Regional University, who study externally and live in regional and rural areas, the distance to their university was a significant issue. For participants at Metro

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<sup>37</sup> Cultural safety is a concept that recognises the twin processes of disempowerment and resilience, and argues that it is essential to create environments where different identities and histories are respected and where Indigenous communities are strengthened in new, culturally relevant ways (Frankland, Bamblett and Lewis 2011:28). As Frankland, Bamblett and Lewis (2011:27) argue, cultural safety is about creating environments that are defined as safe by Indigenous people, "... where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening”.

University the provision of a number of scholarships appears to ameliorate some financial problems; whereas for participants at Regional University, support was provided for travel and accommodation, but daily living expenses were difficult to meet whilst studying. Cultural connection and the opportunity to meet, socialise and study with other Indigenous students were important to both groups of participants. The role of the Indigenous student support centres in facilitating this and providing access to other information and services was also evident, demonstrating the importance of institutional actors in the development of student's social capital resources.

### **Overview of sites and respondents**

As discussed in the previous chapter, research was conducted at two Australian universities in different states:

1. Reg Uni: A regional Australian university in a state with a large Indigenous population. The data collected at this site included 3 focus groups and 11 surveys. All survey participants and survey respondents were students and self-identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or South Sea Islander.

Some participants lived in the same city as the university, but most were from regional or rural areas. The 11 survey respondents at this university ranged in age from 18 to 53 and were nearly evenly split down gender lines – 6 respondents were female and 5 male. Four respondents had completed high school or a TAFE qualification prior to enrolling in the tertiary preparation course. The survey responses for Regional University are provided at Appendix 6.

2. Metro Uni: An Australian university in a major capital city. The state has a comparatively small Indigenous population. The data collected at this site included: 14 interviews (with 11 students and 3 staff members of the Indigenous student support centre); 13 surveys; and 150 images generated by the 11 students interviewed.

The 13 survey respondents at the metropolitan site ranged in age from 18 to 34 and three quarters of the respondents were female. Of these respondents, nine had either completed high school or a TAFE qualification. All participants attended on a full-time basis, although some frequently travelled back home to regional areas. All

except one survey participant indicated that they self-identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or South Sea Islander, and all were currently enrolled university or TAFE students. The survey responses for Metro University are provided at Appendix 7.

The average age of survey respondents at Reg Uni was 26.6 and 25.7 at Metro Uni<sup>38</sup>. However, survey respondents at Metro Uni were more likely to be female, have better self-rated health and have completed Year 12 before starting at university. They were also more likely to have a higher level of household income and have fewer people living in those households. These respondents had larger networks than those at Regional University, but were more likely to go to the same people within those networks to access different types of resources.

Respondents at Reg Uni were all enrolled externally in a tertiary preparation program. Nine survey respondents (82%) had not completed high school to Year 12. The respondents at the regional location were more likely to have borrowed money in the past year, rent from a public housing authority and have poorer self-rated health. Their households were larger and their weekly income was lower than participants at Metro Uni. The networks of respondents at Reg Uni were smaller, but these respondents utilised their networks differently and sought out a greater diversity of individuals in their networks to access various resources.

### **Financial Resources**

The financial disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people has been extensively documented: the unemployment rate for Indigenous people (16%) is more than three times the rate for non-Indigenous people (5%); and 39% of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over live in a household that is unable to raise \$2,000 within a week in an emergency (ABS 2008b), compared to 13% of non-Indigenous people (ABS 2007).

Similarly, the financial barriers to Indigenous participation in higher education are well-researched. Financial difficulties or responsibilities are cited more often by Indigenous

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<sup>38</sup> "In 2008, almost half (49%) of the Indigenous population was aged under 20 years and a further 16% were aged between 20 and 30 years" (ABS 2009).

students who ‘drop out’ of university (ACER 2011b) and Indigenous students experience a significant and greater level of financial difficulty than non-Indigenous students (ACER 2011a; Universities Australia 2007). According to the 2006 Student Finances Survey:

Financial concerns were widespread among Indigenous students and these concerns were at significantly higher levels than for non-Indigenous students. Close to three-quarters of the Indigenous students who were surveyed reported that their financial situation was often a source of worry for them compared with just over one half of their non-Indigenous counterparts. One-quarter of all the Indigenous students surveyed indicated they regularly went without food or other necessities because they could not afford them. This proportion is double that of the comparable proportion of non-Indigenous students (Universities Australia 2007:63).

Understanding the financial capital to which students have access was one aim of the research conducted at both sites. The survey tool was used to determine weekly household income, share and property ownership and the respondent’s sense of socio-economic security. All survey respondents indicated that their household income was less than \$1000 per week, regardless of household size; the median income bracket was \$300-\$399 per week bracket for at RegionalUni and \$400-\$499 per week for respondents at Metro Uni. Although these findings are not directly comparable to other data sets, the findings from this research are in line with the ABS (2011a) and NATSISS (ABS 2008b) data, which show that household income for Indigenous people is just over half that of non-Indigenous households. The 2008 NATSISS data indicates that the median equivalised household income for Indigenous people was \$362 per week, compared to \$642 per week for non-Indigenous people (ABS 2008b).

Respondents also report having larger than average households. In 2009-10, average household size was 2.6 persons per household, with an average of 2.4 persons in low income households (ABS 2012). Respondents at the regional university reported an average household size of 3.64 persons, with Metro Uni respondents reporting a smaller average household size of 2.75 persons. According to the ABS, “Indigenous households



are more likely to be larger than other Australian households”, with an average size of 3.4 persons per household (ABS 2008b:37).

**Table 5: Metro Uni – Household size and income**

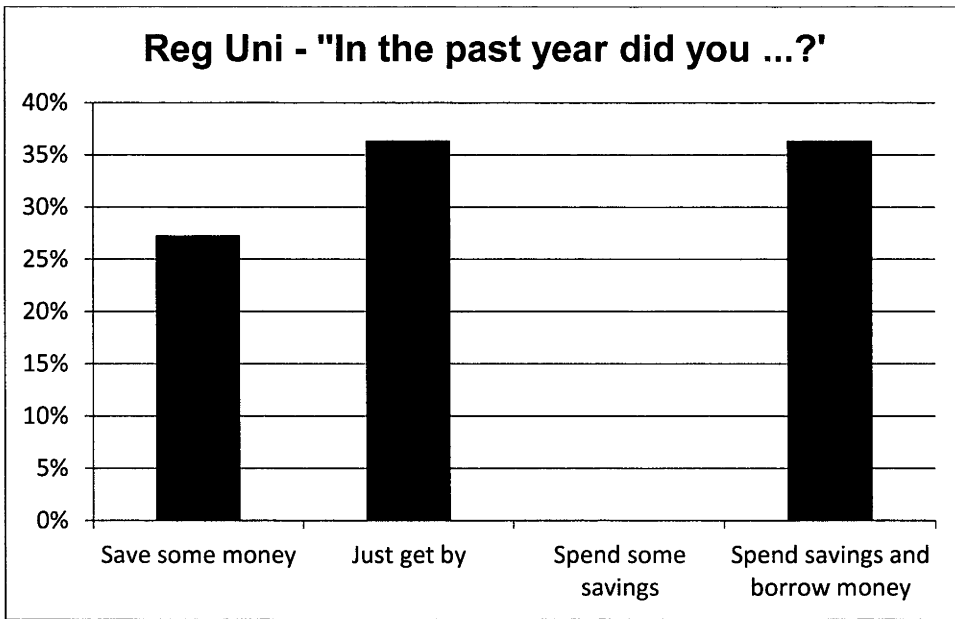
Weekly income	N =13	Household size (n=12, av=2.75)				
		1	2	3	4	5
\$1 - \$199	2			1	1	
\$200 - \$299	2	1			1	
\$300 - \$399	1			1		
\$400 - \$499	2			2		
\$500 - \$599	3		2			
\$600 - \$699	2		1	1		
\$700 - \$799	1			1		
\$800 - \$999	0					

**Table 6: Reg Uni – Household size and income**

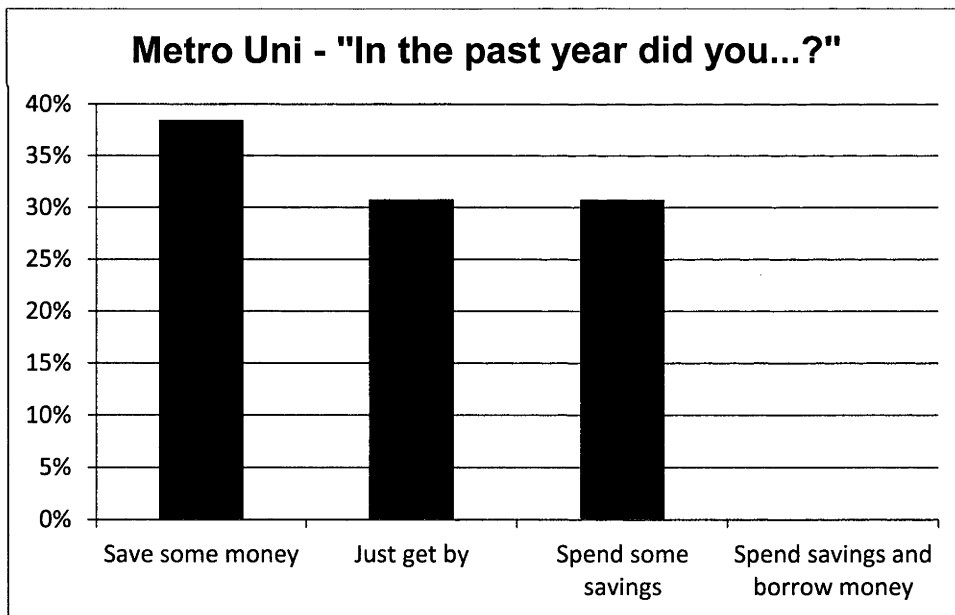
Weekly income	N =10	Household size (n=9, av=3.64)				
		1	2	3	4	5
\$1 - \$199	1				1	
\$200 - \$299	3		1		1	1
\$300 - \$399	3	1	1			1
\$400 - \$499	0					
\$500 - \$599	1				1	
\$600 - \$699	0					
\$700 - \$799	0					
\$800 - \$999	2					1

Figures 4 and 5 provide an overview of respondent’s sense of borrowing and spending in the last 12 months; respondents were asked if they had saved money, just got by, spent savings, or spent savings and borrowed money in the past year. Three respondents at Reg Uni and five respondents at Metro Uni reported being able to save some money, but eight respondents at each location indicated that they had either ‘just got by’ or had spent savings and borrowed money. Although this is not a particularly robust measure of financial stress, it does provide some limited support for the finding that respondents at the regional location had fewer financial resources to draw upon and experienced a greater level of financial stress than respondents at the metropolitan site.

**Figure 4: Reg Uni – Borrowing and Saving**



**Figure 5: Metro Uni – Borrowing and Saving**



Many participants discussed financial pressures and difficulty meeting daily living expenses, such as transport, medical expenses and utilities. Reg Uni respondents received some financial support for enrolling in the enabling program, but many still found it difficult to meet additional costs they associated with studying, such as

purchasing computers or an internet service at home. Centrelink was also a topic of conversation in every focus group at Reg Uni. These participants discussed what they viewed as the apparently arbitrary and unfair decisions made by Centrelink regarding eligibility for disability pensions and the income test<sup>39</sup> and the reporting conditions students had to meet to receive income support.

*RU.R1<sup>40</sup>: I had to get a job to help pay for this, so I'm working three days a week between 5:00 and 3:00, depending. But you start feeling that you're getting ahead a little bit and then Centrelink rings you up and says you've got too much money. I'm like, well I don't. It's a lot of bills and stuff, it's spent. It's my bank account, but it's spent already.*

Financial issues were raised by comparatively fewer respondents at Metro Uni, possibly as a result of the large number of scholarships available to, and taken up by, respondents at this university. Six out of 11 participants volunteered that they received a scholarship, cadetship or similar additional financial support for studying. Although these respondents felt that scholarships reduced the financial pressures of study, this support did not remove that pressure. The following respondent captured an image of four bills and overdue notices<sup>41</sup>, and discussed the financial stress this created:

*MU.R3<sup>42</sup>: That makes me feel very overwhelmed, that I have those bills due, that's actually – that is the middle one, that's a debt collectors notice for a uni fee, which is actually a bit annoying because I spoke to uni and I explained that, and tried to negotiate something, and they're like no ... they went this is already in place, we can't change it, and I went well that's shit, you're just going to have to wait to get your money then and I'll pay it when I can, so now they've sent it off to debt collectors.*

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<sup>39</sup> The Personal Income Test reduces a student's Centrelink payment by \$0.50 for each dollar earned between \$400 and \$480, and \$40 plus \$0.60 for each dollar over \$480 (DHS, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> The acronym 'RU' identifies that the data was collected during one of the focus groups at Reg Uni, with the alphanumeric code e.g. 'R1' allowing the tracking of discussants in the focus group.

<sup>41</sup> This image has been omitted due to the presence of identifying information.

<sup>42</sup> 'MU' indicates that this data was collected at Metro Uni, with the alphanumeric code e.g. 'R1' allowing respondent identification by the researcher.

*Yeah, so overdue bills, is a big issue, I think, especially when I don't have parents supporting me or anything like that, I do it all on my own.*

Reducing the experiences of Indigenous students to financial pressures neglects the complex relationships between a wide range of contributing factors, such as geographic location, family and cultural responsibilities, and the history of the education system in being able to meet the needs of Indigenous students. However, a lack of economic capital is a significant challenge for these students, with many discussing difficulty meeting daily living expenses and paying bills, and the influence that financial deprivation has on their ability to meet academic and family obligations. Several respondents were conscious that their lack of financial security was inherited, how access to financial capital creates a sense of entitlement to place, and how financial issues have shaped their interactions with friends and family.

*MU.R5: Being in the city without cash is just pathetic, you feel like completely excluded from the whole business of being in the city.*

*RU.R1: This house I'm moving into is just all students, all friends and stuff. No-one's got any money. It's just how it is. You just have to be poor. And it's weird too 'cause there's people my age that were in the same grade as me in school and they're loaded. They've got two cars, they've got the house. What are you doing – well, nothing.*

This analysis doesn't view exclusion simply in terms of a lack of money. The picture is more complex; so, Bourdieu argues that economic capital is central to understanding the operation of other types of capital and how they function together to perpetuate stratification. Indeed, whilst reducing the disparity in wealth and financial security between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is a laudable aim, in and of itself, there are other benefits that accrue as a direct result of higher incomes. For example, employment in higher status positions and higher incomes (as the result of a tertiary qualification) leads to improvements in non-economic indicators for Indigenous people, such as the ability to meet cultural obligations (Taylor et al. 2011:32).

The human capital model argues that average income for students is expected to be low; with the decision to pursue a tertiary education representing a choice to sacrifice potential current earnings for greater returns through higher wages in the future (Hunter and Schwab 2003:10). For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, a degree level qualification results in similar high employment rates (83.3% and 85.3% respectively), indicating that an investment in higher education has marginally greater returns for Indigenous Australians (Taylor et al. 2011:32). However, the pattern of Indigenous participation in education is different to the one this model would suggest, with Indigenous Australians not participating in higher education until later in life. Hunter and Schwab (2003:10) posit several explanations, including family formation at a younger age and a different interpretation of where the benefits of education accrue:

One possible explanation is that to Indigenous individuals the return from education is not the private gain of higher future earnings but rather a gain which is realised by the entire community in the form of increased cultural capital.

The beneficial flow-on effects of an individual's tertiary qualification to the wider community were identified by several participants in this study. Respondents were motivated by the possibility of being able to return to their communities with needed qualifications, such as in nursing or business, social justice for Aboriginal people or being able to financially support their families:

MU.R4: ... *I want to contribute to breaking cycles in families and stuff, because I like to think that I'm the beginning of breaking the cycle in my family.*

MU.R9: ... *growing up we had it really, really tough, there was just like me and my mum and we had to move around a lot and stay with a lot of people and when we moved to [this capital city] from [a regional town interstate] we stayed at my Auntie's house for a couple of years and then we moved across the road into somebody else's house and stayed there for a couple of years. It's taken a while for us to get back onto our feet. So now, basically what I'm doing now, like one of the main reasons of*

*why I wanted to go to uni was to get a good job and support my mum because she's had it really tough these past years. So, I just wanted to do it for her and make her proud.*

This indicates a more complex array of motivational factors than simply getting a better job or earning a larger income. An investment in the institutionalised form of cultural capital that is an academic qualification not only increases capacity to generate wealth, but also leads to a greater capacity to support one's family and community and better meet one's cultural obligations. Walker's (2000) study, amongst several others (Craven et al. 2005; DiGregorio, Farrington and Page 2000; Shah and Widin 2010; Sonn, Bishop and Humphries 2000), has established that the desire to make a contribution to their community and to society is a key motivating factor for Indigenous students in their decision to undertake further education. An investment in a tertiary qualification is thus not only a strategy for socio-economic advancement, but also a strategy to balance the forms of capital valued by the dominant society, with the forms of capital valued by Indigenous families, who may place a higher value on kinship obligations, than on wealth or status (Lahn 2012:7).

### **Social Capital**

Previous chapters note that the relationship between education and social capital has been the subject of extensive research. Much of this research has been based on the work of James Coleman, which places social capital at the centre of a successful academic career (Coleman 1988b). Coleman's social capital is a source of social control, which allows families, schools and communities to enforce certain behavioural norms that advance children's life chances (Dika and Singh 2002:34). More precisely, poor educational outcomes are the result of insufficient networking behaviour by parents, family breakdown, or the failure by the family to inculcate a set of behaviours and values endorsed in the academic environment: the weaker the ties between a family, a school and the wider community, the less successful that family will be in converting their social connections into educational opportunities for their children (Musoba and Baez 2009:166). Coleman's concept of social capital involves a theory of individual mobility (cf. Bourdieu's theory of classes) focused on explaining the successes of

traditional, usually White, heteronormative nuclear families in terms of their ability to promote desired behaviours from their children.

Bourdieu's idea of social capital, by contrast, is not quite as popular in the educational literature as his ideas of cultural capital (see Grenfell 2009; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Ream 2005; Stanton-Salazar 1997, for notable exceptions) and is largely absent from discussions of Indigenous education in Australia, although some authors such as Jorgensen (2011), Bandias (2010) and Radoll (2011) have started to apply his thinking on reproduction to the context of Indigenous disadvantage in a range of different areas. This approach sees social capital in terms of the resources available through social networks. A connection with people in higher status positions therefore broadens the resources an individual can access and increases opportunities for social mobility and information transfer.

An educational qualification or experience can be a powerful tool for building the skills needed to construct and maintain personal networks, as well as increasing access to a larger number and wider variety of potential networks (Stanton-Salazar 1997). For students from ethnic minorities, excluded or lower-status groups, constructing relationships with institutional agents or non-parental adults can be an important way to access information and develop skills. However, the opportunities to construct networks with institutional agents<sup>43</sup> or people in higher status positions are much rarer for children in lower-status groups (Stanton-Salazar 2011). The resources which are associated with expressive actions, or those which serve to maintain and protect resources which are already at the individual's disposal, are more likely to be abundant and frequently accessed (Lin 2001:58; Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005:21). Resources associated with instrumental actions (for example, making connections with people who can access different and higher quality resources) are rarer. Exploring the process by which instrumental actions become possible and successful is an important part of any theory of social capital (Lin 2001:59), but particularly one which aims to establish the relevance of social capital to the tertiary education of students from marginalised backgrounds.

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<sup>43</sup> An *institutional agent* is defined as "an individual who occupies one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority" (Stanton-Salazar 2011:1067).

*Social networks*

The previous chapter argues that the Resource Generator survey provides a short, reliable, measure for establishing the social capital resources available through an individual's network. It does not establish network density, nor does this survey explicitly examine the bonding/bridging/linking typology, although it may be argued that the first two domains relate to linking and bridging social capital, while the third and fourth domains apply to bonding social capital (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005). The key benefit of the survey is that it provides a straightforward method of establishing the resources that individuals have access to, according to the domains previously discussed and described again in Table 7.

**Table 7: Domains of Social Capital in the Resource Generator Survey**

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Do you know anyone who...</b>
I - Prestige and education	Can advise on travel to a difficult or unusual location?
II - Political and financial skills	Can give you financial advice? Can give you advice on dealing with the government?
III - Personal skills	Can help with computer setup? Speaks and writes a language other than English?
IV - Personal support	Can give you advice on personal problems? Would help you move house?

(Alexander et al. 2008)

The survey results indicate large differences in the type and quality of social capital resources accessible by students at the two different locations, summarised in Table 8. Respondents at Metro Uni have much larger networks than those at Reg Uni, with an average network size of 17.1 individuals or alters, compared to 5.5 alters. At both locations, respondents indicated that the social capital they had access to for personal support and skills was larger than for all other domains. These domains (D-III and D-IV) are associated with expressive actions, or behaviours that reinforce connections with similar individuals, in order to secure returns like physical and mental health and life satisfaction (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005 :21).



**Table 8: Summary of survey results**

	<b>Reg Uni (n=11)</b>	<b>Metro Uni (n=13)</b>
Domain 1 – prestige	1.0	5.6
Domain 2 – political	2.1	4.5
Domain 3 – personal skills	1.4	5.5
Domain 4 – personal support	2.9	7.5

*Domain I: Prestige and Education*

There were large differences in the scores for D-I at the two locations, with an average network size of 1.0 at Reg Uni, compared to 5.6 at Metro Uni. The gender differences in access to this type of social capital were marked at Reg Uni; although the network size is small, male respondents have an average network size six times larger than female respondents at this location.

This domain type is most clearly related to the “linking” social capital type adopted in the orthodox social capital literature. It best describes “weak ties” (Granovetter 1983, Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005:23) and the resources owned by higher status persons in the network. Of course, there is significant weakness introduced in the measures because the survey only uses one item to assess this domain. However, it is a useful indication of the connection survey respondents have to individuals in higher status positions with access to greater levels of material resources, and there is some relationship to Domain-II which also examines connections to higher status individuals and instrumental actions (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005:23). The survey results suggest that respondents at Metro Uni had greater access to resources through high-status connections, than respondents at the regional location.

*Domain II: Political and Financial Skills*

This domain is correlated with D-I and also provides an indication of the kinds of resources useful for instrumental action, or ‘making one’s way in the world’: accessing information regarding government institutions and systems and financial advice. Instrumental actions involves seeking out others who can access different and better resources in order to add to the resources that an individual does not yet command (Lin 2001:58; Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005:21).

This was the lowest scoring domain for respondents at Reg Uni and the second highest for respondents at Metro Uni. Even though Metro Uni respondents had their fewest numbers of contacts in this domain, it was still larger than the most extensive networks at Reg Uni. At Reg Uni, the gender differences in this domain are less pronounced than for D-I, but these results still indicate that male respondents have larger networks in this domain. Again, these results point not only to the influence of geographic location, but that the social capital accessible by these respondents has a gendered dimension.

#### *D-III: Personal Skills*

The third domain covers communication-related activities and consists of items which are usually very popular, which leads to a low variability and therefore potentially limited usefulness (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005 :23). However, given the low scores for respondents at Reg Uni, this domain can indicate a lack of very common social resources, applying as it does to resources usually accessible through close or family networks.

The networks of respondents at Metro Uni are nearly 4 times larger than those at Reg Uni in this domain. Because of the few male respondents at Metro Uni, the gender difference in the size of the networks could not be reliably determined. This domain also showed the least difference between male and female networks at Reg Uni, but did indicate comparatively smaller networks for women at the regional location.

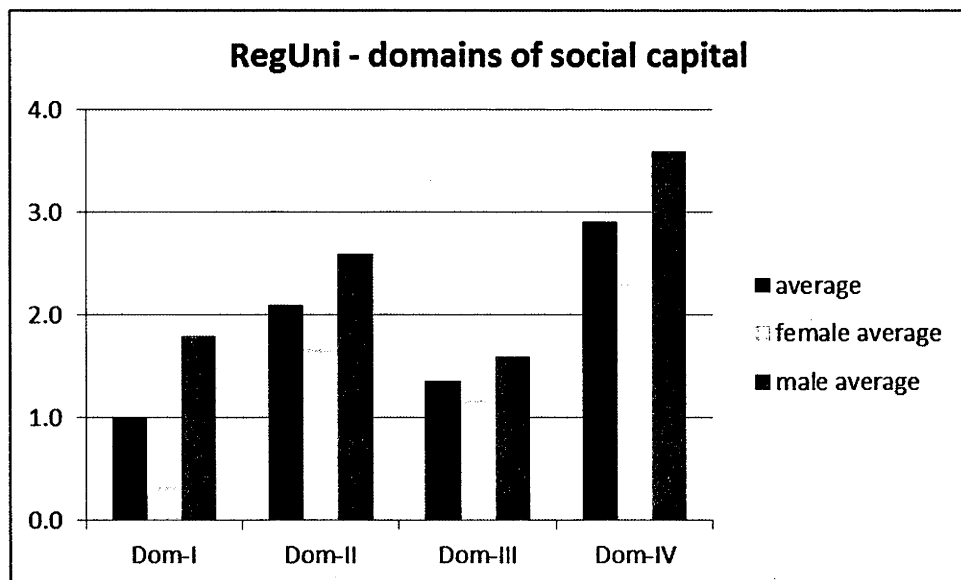
#### *D-IV: Personal Support*

This domain contains items that involve trust and more expressive actions, for example, giving advice on personal problems and moving house. These resources allow an individual to maintain “continuity in one’s personal life” and indicate the ability to draw on resources and support in times of need (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2005:23). Respondents at both locations scored the highest in this domain, although again networks of metropolitan respondents were more than twice as large as those in the regional location.

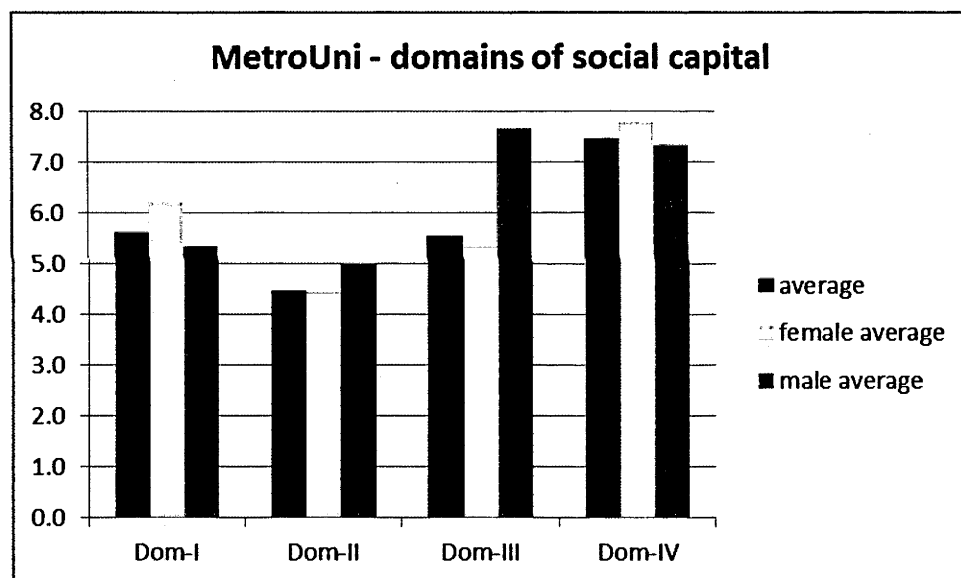
Students at both locations were able to access some level of personal support, but those items describing instrumental resources, such as accessing information from high status individuals, were comparatively weaker.

The results of the survey suggest marked differences in the level of social capital accessible by participants at the regional location, who were able to access comparatively lower levels of resources through their networks than respondents at the metropolitan location. The size of the sample does not permit a sophisticated analysis or generalizable results, but the results do indicate that the female respondents at the regional site had less access to resources useful for instrumental action, due to the absence of higher-status individuals in their networks when compared to either the network composition of their male counterparts, and respondents at the metropolitan site.

**Figure 6: Reg Uni – Summary of Social Capital Domains**



**Figure 7: Metro Uni – Summary of Social Capital Domains**



**Table 9: Reg Uni – social capital domain responses**

ID	Alters	Mentions	Multistrandedness	Dom-I	Dom-II	Dom-III	Dom-IV	Mean domain score	st dev	Gender	Age
1A	1	1	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.8	0.5	Male	27
1B	15	20	1.3	5.0	5.0	1.0	9.0	5.0	3.3	Male	23
1C	5	5	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	4.0	1.3	1.9	Female	34
1D	6	11	1.8	2.0	3.0	2.0	4.0	2.8	1.0	Male	22
1E	3	6	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.5	0.6	Female	19
1F	4	4	1.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	0.8	Female	26
1G	5	5	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	1.3	0.5	Female	54
1H	4	5	1.3	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.3	0.5	Male	21
1I	5	5	1.0	0.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	1.3	1.0	Male	21
1J	8	8	1.0	0.0	4.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.6	Female	26
1K	5	5	1.0	0.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.3	1.0	Female	20
<b>Av</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>6.8</b>	1.2	1.0	2.1	1.4	2.9	1.8	1.1		26.6
<b>F-av</b>	5.0	5.5	1.2	0.3	1.7	1.2	2.3	1.4	0.9		29.8
<b>V-av</b>	6.2	8.4	1.3	1.8	2.6	1.6	3.6	2.4	1.0		22.8

**Table 10: Metro Uni – social capital domain responses**

ID	Alters	Mentions	Multistrandedness	Dom-I	Dom-II	Dom-III	Dom-IV	Mean domain score	st dev	Gender	Age
2A	20	34	1.7	9.0	6.0	6.0	13.0	8.5	3.3	Female	35
2B	26	38	1.5	8.0	8.0	13.0	9.0	9.5	2.4	Male	-
2C	16	23	1.4	9.0	2.0	5.0	7.0	5.8	3.0	Female	28
2D	4	7	1.8	1.0	1.0	1.0	4.0	1.8	1.5	Female	20
2E	9	10	1.1	1.0	3.0	1.0	5.0	2.5	1.9	-	-
2F	4	4	1.0	1.0	2.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	0.8	Male	29
2G	17	22	1.3	5.0	2.0	4.0	11.0	5.5	3.9	Female	24
2H	71	36	2.0	19.0	18.0	18.0	16.0	17.8	1.3	Female	33
2I	17	34	2.0	7.0	5.0	10.0	12.0	8.5	3.1	Male	29
2J	4	9	2.3	3.0	2.0	4.0	0.0	2.3	1.7	Female	-
2K	8	11	1.4	2.0	2.0	3.0	4.0	2.8	1.0	Female	20
2L	18	25	1.4	6.0	5.0	3.0	11.0	6.3	3.4	Female	20
2M	8	12	1.5	2.0	2.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	1.2	Female	19
<b>Av</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>2.2</b>		<b>25.7</b>
F-av	18.4	19.9	1.6	6.2	4.4	5.3	7.8	5.9	2.0		24.9
M-av	15.7	25.3	1.5	5.3	5.0	7.7	7.3	6.3	1.6		29.0

### *Indigenous student support centres*

The Indigenous student support centre at Metro Uni provided a week-long residential orientation program for new students and this was discussed by four respondents who undertook the program. Although the orientation week familiarised students with university services and provided introductory sessions on academic skills, the primary benefit derived by the students was social:

*MU.R4: It was good, the main thing I got out of it wasn't the – when they were showing us the library, that wasn't really the – the important part was also us all clicking and getting along, we just had fun the whole week ... It was just like the group, we got really close really quick because we were staying together for the week ... and it made it easier with the second years, the second and third years I know, just little things, like there's a girl who's doing my course. She's third year, and I couldn't find the cover sheet on the Blackboard, so I asked her, or I couldn't find one of the lecture buildings, I just text [her], she's in second, like where's this building. Stuff like that made it good.*

For these students, many of whom are the first people in their families to go to university, developing these social connections with peers creates another opportunity to learn how to 'decode the university' and build networks with new and more established students. The role of the Indigenous student support centres in facilitating such opportunities for social interaction, providing common rooms and meeting spaces and access to information is an important part of this process, particularly for students who move from interstate and regional areas:

*MU.R3: Yeah and I just think – my partner is from a similar situation, he's come from ... a country town, it's not so country, but out there, come over here, same – he knows more people, but he doesn't know where to go to access all this sort of stuff, and it's sort of like hang on, do you know you can get this from over here, really, can you help me with that, yeah no worries. So he – but it's all the people that come into [the Indigenous student support centre] generally, very rarely are they*

*people that already live in [the city], they're people that have come from all over the place to come here. So, I think it's that shared knowledge, one person is going to know something that you might not, and then you can share your knowledge with other people as well, which has been really beneficial, just being here, because I didn't know about the Aboriginal Health Service when I first came here, and I found out through these guys that there was an Aboriginal Health Service. I was like whoa cool, where's that, how do I get there, all that sort of stuff. So finding out about that sort of stuff has been really invaluable because I would have had no idea, when I moved here if I hadn't had got in with these mob I'd still be paying to go to the doctors, I can't afford to pay the doctors, I can't afford to get sick.*

Not only are Indigenous student support centres “a haven of understanding” (Page and Asmar 2008:112), providing a constellation of emergency, personal, financial and academic support, they are able to do so in a culturally safe and relevant manner. These centres are also integral to improving completion rates for Indigenous students (ACER 2011a): “Universities with more complex Indigenous support and research infrastructure demonstrate higher Indigenous student completion rates” (Pechenkina, Kowal and Paradies 2011:64). The centre at Metro Uni had no academic or research function, but centres at both locations included community engagement and student support functions, in addition to providing a wide range of other services, such as meal preparation areas, study areas and computer labs, tutoring support, cultural celebrations, and culturally safe spaces for students. These centres are important sources of social support, particularly for students who have relocated and have few family or other support structures in the area (Behrendt et al. 2012:50). The role of Indigenous education or student support centres in academic and social support has been established by other research (Pechenkina, Kowal and Paradies 2011; Trudgett 2009):

Even Indigenous students who only occasionally use the services provided by a centre report that the very existence of the centre is an indicator that Indigenous education matters at the university and that there is a place for them to go if they need any help (Pechenkina and Anderson 2011:13).



The opportunity to access a space that was culturally safe and which recognised the importance of community and connection was valuable, particularly for one student who noted the absence of this in other areas of the university. The contrast between the environment created by the Indigenous student support centre and the business faculty where the student studied was stark. The photo of a painting in the Indigenous student support centre at Metro Uni represented a sense of community that this student felt was absent in other areas of the university:



MU.R1: *So I thought that the painting probably represents that creativity and diversity that's in the [Indigenous student support] Centre, and it's quite colourful as well compared to a lot of the business school stuff which is a little bit dryer ... staff here have been really helpful, probably they've really eased the transition of moving across here for me, and the support they've given me has been great. The first time I was at uni I don't think I had that type of support, maybe if I had it I probably wouldn't have dropped out, maybe, sort of ifs and buts ...I think especially if I look at say the business school, because it's a little bit colder perhaps than other courses, and it doesn't have the interaction that students have up here, I think that coming up [here] gives you that*

*sort of community or family type feel when you do come here. So it gives a little bit of warmth to balance the coldness of being down at [the business school], and being in that environment.*

These results suggest that Indigenous student support centres act as informational brokers, facilitating not only important cultural and social connections, but also acting as an institutional gateway to a wider range of resources that support and enable students.

### **Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital can take several forms, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 6. This research adopted a measure of prior educational attainment to assess the institutionalised cultural capital available to participants (Bourdieu 1986:243). Acknowledging that cultural capital is much more complex than this simple measure, this research also relied on the qualitative methods to build an understanding of participant's cultural capital in its embodied and objectified forms.

#### *Academic support*

Prior to enrolling in the bridging program at Reg Uni, or in a VET or tertiary qualification, survey respondents reported the following levels of education attainment (Table 11). Given that all respondents at Reg Uni were enrolled in a bridging or tertiary preparation program, it is perhaps not surprising that 64% of respondents at that site had not completed Year 12 prior to enrolling at the university. In contrast, only two of the respondents enrolled at Reg Uni had not completed high school to Year 12.

**Table 11: Prior educational attainment**

	Metro Uni		Reg Uni	
	%	No.	%	No.
No formal education	0.0	0	0.0	0
Did not complete primary school	0.0	0	0.0	0
Completed primary school	0.0	0	0.0	0
Did not complete High School to Year 10	0.0	0	18.2	2
Completed High School to Year 10	0.0	0	36.4	4
Did not complete High School to Year 12	15.4	2	9.1	1
Completed High School to Year 12	53.8	7	27.3	3
Trade qualification or apprenticeship	0.0	0	0.0	0
Certificate or Diploma (TAFE or business college)	30.8	4	9.1	1
Bachelor Degree (including Honours)	0.0	0	0.0	0
Postgraduate Degree or Postgraduate Diploma	0.0	0	0.0	0
Answered question		13		11
Skipped question		0		0

White, Spence and Maxim (2005:68) suggest that in communities which do not demonstrate high levels of educational attainment, bonding social capital can reinforce low educational norms. Colonial institutions like education systems have been destructive and assimilationist and this does not support high educational attainment or the development of pro-academic norms within Indigenous communities. This is particularly important where success in the education system is dependent on the fit between the norms of the dominant culture, and the socialisation process. In this context, White, Spence and Maxim (2005) suggest that supplementing the low educational norms of parental and community networks with higher norm roles, such as mentors and tutors, can provide additional resources to support to the development of higher educational norms. At both sites, respondents identified these types of connections as valuable resources to support their academic careers.

Respondents at both sites discussed the importance of tutors and lecturers in developing familiarity with the subject material, but also their importance in the development of behaviours and strategies that support studying. All participants had access to ITAS (Indigenous Tutorial Access Scheme), although for respondents at Regional Uni there was some difficulty in obtaining a tutor in the regional or remote location where they lived.

RU.R2: *No. I haven't had a tutor and that's what I've found really hard - being away up there near [a town 1700km away from the university], and I'm not even near a uni. So no-one in my social environment is into uni at the moment so it's really hard 'cause I don't have anyone to kind of - 'cause being with other people that are doing uni, it motivates you, you get help from them. That's been the hardest thing, being way up there. 'Cause distance education - I thought I'd be a good distance learner but it's actually really hard.*

Participants indicated that they required the greatest tutorial assistance with maths and statistics, although participants also used tutors for courses in social work, nursing, international relations and languages. At both sites, respondents reported frustration with tutors who were seen as 'going too fast', assuming too much prior knowledge on behalf of students or not paying sufficient attention to the learning difficulties faced by students. At Metro Uni, 6 of the 11 respondents reported using a tutor, mostly with success, although problems arose when the tutors were seen as inexperienced or unsure of themselves. Tutors and lecturers who were funny, patient and experienced in their field were lauded at both sites. Those students who received tutoring reported better grades, both in the bridging program at RU and the undergraduate programs at MU:

RU.R3: *Well, I wouldn't be able to do without a tutor, to be honest. And I think that some of these younger ones need that tutor because they don't have the education to be able to go in and do those things by themselves.*

This highlights the importance of previous educational experiences and the sense of mastery or competency that students arrive with at university. As Bourdieu argues, cultural capital requires a break with the idea that academic achievement is a result of natural aptitude, rather it is the result of a socialisation process (Bourdieu 1986) that enables a student to effectively 'decode the system' (Stanton-Salazar 1997). A lack of familiarity with, or competence in, specific subject areas, such as mathematics, information technology or languages, is not the result of a lack of aptitude or

intelligence. Rather, it demonstrates the absence of prior opportunity that these participants have had to develop competency in these areas (Jorgensen 2011).

*RU.R4: He [maths tutor] just – you know, going over it and over it and I just felt real dumb ‘cause I couldn’t understand it. And he’s just going over it and over it and over it and I still didn’t understand. I still didn’t understand when I walked out the door...I know he was trying to explain it the best way, but I just couldn’t get it into my head.....First thing I did when I got home was cried, hey Mum, I was that stressed out. ‘Cause you know what it feels like to sit there and he’s explaining it and then goes ... he’s sitting there and he’s trying to think of another way to tell me and it was just for an hour or two hours straight trying to learn something. And I still couldn’t get it ... Like never even got to the assignment, he just sat there and tried to teach me how to do something that I didn’t know. I know he was trying to teach me how to do it before I did the assignment, but I just – I can’t.*

These respondents are navigating their way through a process they are unfamiliar with, and subject material to which they have not had significant previous exposure. For many of these participants, there has been little opportunity to develop the learning strategies or skills which are taken for granted in the tertiary education system. For the following respondent, restricted opportunities to develop objectified cultural capital, or the specialised knowledge about how to use cultural objects, presented a challenge.

*MU.R4: I was talking to my tutor, and I don’t know how to use books for assignments, I’m not that good with researching, so I’ll just Google, just type in some key words. That’s how I do all my research, but my goal for this semester, is to start using books. I just finished high school, everything we do was on the computer; it’s always just Google.*

For students from minority backgrounds, learning to negotiate the “culture of power” can be an alienating and symbolically violent experience; they must simultaneously

acquire the behaviours and knowledges expected for success in this environment, at the same time as maintaining their cultural identity (Stanton-Salazar 1997:34).

Rather than perpetuate a deficit approach which focuses on the lack of positive educational experiences, or the sense of isolation and dislocation that these students often face in their transition to higher education, it may be more useful to focus on the institutional support provided to these student, and the recognition accorded to Indigenous culture and historical experiences with the education system.

### *Mentoring and role models*

The use of mentors was also a minor recurring theme, with four participants at Metro Uni discussing the benefits of having a mentor, or acting as a mentor in a paid or voluntary capacity. For some participants, having an Aboriginal mentor, or being a mentor for young Aboriginal people, was important. Indeed, one participant indicated that it was a condition of their scholarship that they maintain regular relationships with both an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous mentor.

For one respondent, having mentors fulfilled a need that their family and friends weren't able to meet:

*MU.R7: Whereas like family isn't sometimes enough, like, or friends sometimes. Because they're – like friends or whatever can always talk to you about, like each other and stuff like that, but it's never that "here's some advice" kind of thing. And I know sometimes I feel like I'm giving it – like I'm getting too much in terms of mentoring, but for me I give back, so I mentor someone else ...*

This respondent felt that a mentoring relationship had been a valuable source of support and continued to act as a mentor for other young people:



*MU.R7: I've always helped the young ones. So like the older one, the fuller one, represents, like, me. But the young ones represent, like, youth. So we can light each other's light ... we can work together. The more light we have, the better.*

Seeking the support of both formal and informal mentors can be an important part of developing instrumental relationships and widening access to information and opportunities (Martin and Dowson 2009; Stanton-Salazar 2011). In the undergraduate context, mentoring can provide assistance in understanding institutional culture, as well as provide a valuable source of social support (Jacobi 1990).

### **Cultural Connection**

Institutional recognition and celebration of Aboriginal history and culture can contribute to an environment where students feel that their identity is not threatened. A strategy employed at one of the Metro Uni campuses was to construct a walking trail identifying scar trees, cultural sites and events significant to the local Traditional Owners. The walking trail was an important form of recognition for this student, as the following image shows.



*MU.R10: Yeah they're for the Indigenous, there's like a walking track that takes you past and all that...They sort of follow a path around campus, and it sort of takes you pretty much all around, to every building and all that, and I see them every day, I walk past them.*

*It's good that they're representing the Indigenous community at uni, and it reminds me of [the Indigenous student support centre] there too, if I - always reminds if I'm near talk to them, I walk past I'm like "oh, I've got to do that" ... you don't have to hide it, you can show it and no one is going to judge you, it's good to have.*

Nuñez (2009:38) suggests that a sense of belonging can represent a form of social capital, because it “reflects students' feelings about their connection with the university and the quality of social ties within that community”. Although Nuñez (2009) identified diversity curriculum, and staff interest in student progress as important indicators of a sense of belonging, for this student, the symbolic recognition of her culture by the university contribution to a sense of belonging.

However, some respondents expressed a need to have tailored classes that understood and respected cultural differences, and were sensitive to the different educational experiences and levels of attainment that people bring with them to the classroom:

*RU.R5: If they want to encourage people to join the program – like even – I don't know about the full uni, but this [bridging] program, maybe they need to look at this sort of thing because – how would I put it – being Aboriginal – I come from an Aboriginal family, I've got Aboriginal blood in me. You get that shy. You get backed in a corner and you've*



*got nowhere to go and you just give up. That sort of thing. If that could be focused on – you get one group and you sit them down and you try to teach them the basics, and you've got another group over here – you know ...*

The importance of recognising the different cultural backgrounds of students was a consistent theme that emerged from the fieldwork. From the construction of infrastructure that recognised Traditional Owners and significant sites, to the acknowledgement of different ways of learning, participants identified a range of ways in which cultural recognition, and a sense of belonging, can contribute to their educational experience at university.

### **Distance and Relocation**

The issue of distance and geographic location was significant for respondents at both sites. Nine respondents at Metro Uni discussed issues of distance, being a long way from family or partners or moving to the city to study. Students at Reg Uni were on campus studying in block mode and, whilst some lived in the same city as the university, many travelled long distances to attend. For students at Reg Uni, the availability of academic support, delivered either formally through the program and ITAS, or informally through family or friends, was often directly linked to geographical location:

Nikki: What makes studying more difficult?

RU.R2: *I would say distance 'cause if I had a uni close I would come in to it every day. That'd be motivating itself, to be able to be on campus. And yeah, having no tutor, feels like I'm a bit isolated out there.*

Some of these respondents had made the decision to move away from family and friends to study, and endure the isolation of that separation in preference to the isolation of studying in a location with no or little academic support.

RU.R6: *I was going to say I moved down here to study 'cos I come from [a regional Indigenous community] and I couldn't get anything done there.*

*Moving down here, now it's easier. Like I say, not far so I can come into the uni, have tutoring and stuff. But I usually study at home now. I've got a nice little place set up so it's good.*

Nikki: Can I ask why you felt you couldn't get stuff done back home?

RU.R6: *It's too hard. There's heaps of distractions, no-one else studies there. Just moving down here it's easier, everyone else is studying.*

Nikki: Do you find that hard, being away from your family or does it – the trade-off is better 'cause you can do this, you can do your own thing?

RU.R6: *Sometimes it's harder being away, but I think it's better in the long term.*

Nikki: That's a hard decision to make.

RU.R6: *And I'm only [a minor], so it's kind of harder.*

Distance forms a real and structural barrier for Indigenous people accessing higher education:

A total of 49 cities and towns across Australia host a university or one of its campuses and offer degree-level courses ... it is significant to note that only 45% of Indigenous people live within one of these 49 cities and towns compared to 73% of the non-Indigenous population. This presents a spatial/structural barrier to university enrolment and completion that is multi-dimensional and raises issues about social and financial support structures, accommodation, travel arrangements, community role models and career expectation (Taylor et al. 2011:37).

The issue of distance was not only relevant for students who elected to move from their communities to study, but also for the following respondent, who lived at home with their family on the weekends and drove to the city for university during the week.



- MU.10: *That's a very long highway.*
- Nikki: Is that what you have to drive every week?
- MU.10: *It feels like it takes forever.*
- Nikki: How long is the drive?
- MU.10: *It can take me about an hour, if not more, mostly more. Once I hit [the city] then the traffic is pretty thick at 8:00 in the morning, so it's calming here, no cars.*
- Nikki: It's a beautiful shot.
- MU.10: *I think that's about - it's not even half way.*
- Nikki: Closer to home or closer to [the city]?
- MU.10: *That's closer to home, but you can see - the little hill in the background, you can actually see it from here, but it's like you just keep going, you can sort of see it, and I always look at it, I'm like "oh I'll be home soon".*

In addition to the absence of family and social support structures, relocation can lead to a sense of culture shock for students who are unfamiliar with living in urban or metropolitan areas. For students who come from communities that have maintained a connection to their country and cultural traditions, relocating to another group's country can mean becoming a stranger (Sonn, Bishop and Humphries 2000:131; Deyhle 1995). In this context, the support provided by the academic community, local Indigenous community and student support centres are crucial to the development of the expressive and instrumental actions required to build new support structures and networks.

### **Limitations**

It is important here to acknowledge several limitations in the survey design, fieldwork and theoretical scope of this thesis. Despite these limitations, this chapter has

demonstrated that a Bourdieusian approach to the forms of capital avoids many of the limitations implicit in Coleman's or Putnam's ideas. Particularly when applying the idea of social capital and its downsides to the experiences of Indigenous students at university, a 'forms of capital' approach demonstrates greater utility for understanding the intersection of access to material resources, previous experience with the higher education system and the role of networks.

Although this chapter demonstrates the applicability of Bourdieu's framework to the case study, incorporating different or additional measures in the survey would have facilitated greater comparability. For example, including a measure of relative deprivation, such as a question asking whether respondents could raise \$2000 in a week, would have enabled comparison with the larger, more established data sets, such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (ABS 2008a).

Additionally, the relevance of the domains of social capital in the survey to a specifically Aboriginal conception of social capital could be challenged as not being culturally relevant to the respondents. As White, Spence and Maxim (2005) note, there is little research establishing an "Aboriginal social capital" in the Australian context, and more focus on this in Canada and New Zealand. It is a limitation of this thesis that it does not address the question of an indigenous conceptualisation of social capital, either in the Australian context or for First Nations peoples more broadly. There is some evidence for an Indigenous, and culturally- and location-specific conception of social capital, such as Robinson and Williams (2001) who explore a Maori concept of social capital focused on the distinctions between 'giving' and 'sharing'. Walter (2010a) argues for a 'race capital' to be included in Bourdieu's forms of capital, and Radoll (2011) argues for an Indigenous version of social capital. Despite these limitations, this thesis makes a valuable contribution by focusing on the utility of Bourdieu's theories in understanding the negative effects of social capital in the context of Indigenous higher education.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an analysis of the data collected with regards to the first research question: What can a 'forms of capital' approach add to our understanding of

the resources that Indigenous students use and need in tertiary education? This research has found that a 'forms of capital' approach was useful in this instance because it enabled a picture of the economic, social, academic and culturally-specific resources participants were able to access. Some respondents at Reg Uni had mutually supportive relationships with other family members enrolled in the program, or who had participated in the program previously, and derived academic and social support from those family members. Respondents at Metro Uni have more extensive networks and wider range of resources to draw upon, but some experienced an absence of family and financial support, and had prior educational experiences which made transition to a tertiary environment difficult in some instances.

Access to financial resources was an issue for respondents at both sites. The availability of scholarships reduced, but did not remove, the financial hardship experience of participants at Metro Uni. Experiences with Centrelink and the tertiary institutions about financial issues, such as meeting reporting requirements and negotiating the payment of bills, was a source of anxiety and anger for many respondents at both sites. The provision of tutoring support through ITAS and access to staff at the Indigenous student support centres was identified by many participants as a significant source of support through their studies. Moreover, the cultural recognition and safety provided by these centres was central to a successful academic experience for many participants.

The following chapter addresses the second research questions: How does the idea of social capital's downsides explain the challenges Indigenous students face in tertiary education? The chapter provides a discussion of the results of the data analysis and identifies ways in which participants experienced the downsides of social capital. The data indicates that, far from being discrete categories of 'positive' and 'negative' social capital, participants experienced the effects of social capital differently in various situations and were actively involved in mediating these effects in particular environments.

## *Chapter 8 The Effects of Social Capital*

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The previous chapter examined the results of empirical research into the types of capital Indigenous students were able to access. The research indicated that there were marked differences between the two locations. Students at the regional location had fewer resources to draw upon, whether through network size, the availability of economic capital or previous levels of education. Respondents at the metropolitan location had larger networks, a higher level of education and were able to access greater levels of economic capital.

At both sites respondents were asked about the challenges they face in completing their studies. Financial concerns were most frequently identified and this is reinforced by both the research on student finances (ACER 2011b) and the extensive body of work on Indigenous socioeconomic disadvantage (Altman, Biddle and Hunter 2009; SCRGSP 2011). Accessing appropriate academic support, maintaining a connection to culture and the issues of distance and relocation were all identified by participants as challenges they faced in their academic career, and are all well-documented issues in Indigenous higher education (Behrendt et al. 2012; Nelson and Hay 2010; Nakata, Nakata and Chin 2008; Sonn, Bishop and Humphries 2000; Taylor et al. 2011).

As has been argued in previous chapters, social networks cannot be the sole measure used to explain educational success. Students are located in an education system which has been complicit in the destruction of Indigenous families, cultures and languages (HREOC 1997)<sup>44</sup>, and in institutions which struggle to make the most symbolic gestures of recognition to Australia's First Nations people. These students can rarely see themselves reflected in the university (Nakata 2004) and Indigenous student support centres are seen by many of the students who participated in this research as the only part of the institution which can recognise, reflect and support their cultural identities. As Warikoo and Carter (2009:374) argue, schools often erase "different histories and social and economic realities of their students, with only token nods to and discussions

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<sup>44</sup> For example, the recently overturned "Compulsory Teaching in English for the First Four Hours of Each School Day" policy of the Northern Territory Government, which prohibited instruction in students' first language for the first half of the school day (Murphy 2012).

of difference” by neglecting to represent different perspectives in curricula and pedagogy.

The participants involved in this research face a range of challenges, not the least of which is deciding to participate in an education system that has been used to prosecute policies of assimilation and cultural destruction<sup>45</sup>. The actions of child welfare services, the police and the education system throughout Australia’s short history does nothing to establish a basis of trust for a relationship between Indigenous people and state institutions<sup>46</sup> (Hunter 2004:13). Yet, the students participating in this research understand that a tertiary education should give them access to higher paying jobs, security and a greater ability to support their families and their communities. Many of the participants were willing to move long distances from their family and country, give up jobs and tolerate financial and emotional distress, in order to gain a tertiary qualification.

As the orthodox school of social capital suggests, family support, such as the expectations families establish, their relationship with the school community and the behavioural norms they enforce around, for example, studying and homework are an important component of academic success (Coleman 1988b). Where this approach falls short is in its failure to attend to the structural conditions in which the attitudes of families and peers towards education develop. This is one of the key insights enabled by a Bourdieusian approach to social capital and education: a group’s disposition towards education and the education system develops in a historical and political context, which for Indigenous people includes very real and symbolic violence.

In a country where negative stereotypes about Indigenous people have been perpetuated by legislation and are ingrained in the popular imagination, these stereotypes have become part of how Indigenous students perceive themselves (Wall and Baker 2012). When this is combined with an education system that continually denies the validity of

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<sup>45</sup> The Bringing Them Home report (HREOC 2007) documents how the promise of education was used to try to convince parents to accept the removal of their children, how schools were used as points from which children were removed, and how residential schools for Indigenous children not only provided a level of education suitable for the most menial employment, but enabled the sustained physical and sexual abuse of Indigenous children in state care.

<sup>46</sup> For example, half of the people whose deaths were examined by the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody were removed as children (Cuneen 2001:61).

Indigenous knowledges, teachers with low expectations of Indigenous students, financial barriers to education and the opportunity cost of a long-term investment in a degree-level qualification, low Indigenous participation and completion rates are hardly surprising. For the students in this research, and for many others (Craven et al. 2005; Golding et al. 2007; Sarra 2008) this is compounded by both low levels of social, economic, and (dominant) cultural capital *and* the negative effects of social capital.

This research indicates that we cannot attribute to families the sole responsibility for a lack of support provided to students or the growth and perpetuation of destructive norms. The data collected here demonstrates that many students do receive support and encouragement from families, who are proud and supportive. That does not however, mean that this pride and support necessarily translates into an awareness of the specific demands that are placed on students, nor into access to the full suite of resources, knowledges and skills that are required to comply with institutional standards (Lareau and Weininger 2003). Given the low levels of educational attainment in Indigenous communities, this is not controversial. However, a family's understanding the importance of education also does not necessarily create a willingness to overlook the familial and cultural responsibilities that students are expected to meet: nor should it. The maintenance and revival of cultural identities should not be compromised by participation in the institutions of the dominant culture:

To thrive, minority children must also learn to engage in the academic process communally, rather than individualistically; they must also learn that to attain the highest levels of human functioning, they must remain embedded in familial and communal support systems while they participate in other worlds (Stanton-Salazar 1997:33).

This draws attention to the struggle between different ways of knowing and the tension between balancing familial and cultural obligations which are not valued by education systems, with the behaviours, strategies and knowledges that are valued (Page and Asmar 2008; Sonn, Bishop and Humphries 2000).

It is important to recognise that social networks alone cannot provide all of the resources required to deliver positive educational outcomes (White, Spence and Maxim



2005:70). A Bourdieusian approach acknowledges this by focusing on how different forms of capital relate to reproduce disadvantage. Social networks are a product of a concerted effort to cultivate them, and the opportunity to do so is heavily prescribed by an individual's location in social space. The norms which govern the operation of those networks are, in turn, a product of the dispositions of their members and those dispositions do not emerge from a vacuum. For groups that occupy a marginalised position, dispositions can emerge that incorporate an understanding of their objective chances. This is not to suggest either a calculating, rational actor; or an essentialised Indigenous identity. Rather, it is to argue that dispositions and behaviours are a product of socialisation, of history and of encounters with the outside world (Reay 2004).

If students are socialised in an environment where the historical chances of success for Indigenous people in the education system have been low, where that education system is understood as a tool of assimilation, or where the benefits of education are not obvious or apparently attainable, then the emergence of norms which proscribe high achievement in that system should not be surprising. As Golding et al. (2007:49) argue:

Dispositions towards education, particularly higher education, are formed in a cultural environment in which communities, personal networks and most families have little familiarity or first-hand experience of university education. This leads to social and cultural barriers to proceeding to university that are at least as significant as the financial barriers and distance barriers.

Whilst structural factors, including economic marginalisation and racism, are compounded by other issues like geographical location, the normative barriers that emerge from objective conditions cannot be overlooked. I argue that, although social capital maybe only be one small part of explaining educational outcomes for Indigenous students, a critical approach incorporates the wider social and political context, and draws attention to the ways in which both low levels of social capital, and the negative effects of social capital, emerge and are perpetuated.

## The Downside of Social Capital

The positive and negative effects of social capital have been documented in previous chapters (Hunter 2004; Portes 1998; Portes and Landolt 1996). To recap, the positive effects of social capital are identified as social control, family support; and access to network-mediated benefits:

- *Social control*: This effect is close to Coleman's interpretation of social capital, and describes the capacity of network members to enforce desired social norms.
- *Family support*: This effect is close to what Bourdieu constructs as cultural capital, and describes the ability of families to facilitate access to resources and information, and transmit values and worldviews. In this research, an absence of family support manifests as a result of the low level of educational attainment by many Indigenous parents and a lack of familiarity with student's obligations.
- *Network-mediated benefits*: This describes the personal connections that facilitate access to information and resources and develops Granovetter's (1983) 'strength of weak ties' thesis. In the context of Indigenous education, this is evident in the tendency for Indigenous students to obtain career advice from kin or peer networks and rarely from institutional agents (Craven 2003:11). The implications of this for the quality and diversity of information students receive is significant, given the low levels of educational attainment in Indigenous populations (Craven et al. 2005:27). In this research, an absence of network resources was most clearly demonstrated by the absence of economic capital available to participants, but also through the low level of cultural capital, as expressed by low levels of prior education particularly for respondents at the regional site.

The negative effects of social capital have also been identified as: exclusion of outsiders; excessive claims on group members; restrictions on individual freedom; and downward levelling norms (Portes 1998):

- *Exclusion of outsiders*: This may indicate a high degree of community closure and the restriction of benefits to those within the group (Portes 1998), but it can also include restricting benefits, including information, services and resources from reaching the network members (Hunter 2004:15; Productivity Commission 2003:22).

- *Excessive claims on group members*: Concepts like demand sharing have received considerable anthropological and policy attention (Altman 2011), and this negative effect may indicate complex relationships of reciprocity and obligation within Indigenous communities.
- *Restrictions on individual freedoms*: This can describe how the observance of social norms, or acting within predetermined cultural parameters, may restrict personal freedoms (Hunter 2004:15).
- *Downward levelling norms*: These norms usually emerge from the imperative to maintain a cohesive collective identity in reaction to economic marginalisation, outside discrimination or a common experience of adversity (Hunter 2004:16). For example, recent attention to the issue of lateral violence (Gooda 2011b:57; Langton 2008) indicates how the internalisation of colonial stereotypes can lead to social norms which perpetuate unequal power relations.

For the participants in this research, both low levels of social capital and a number of these negative effects were identified. Most clearly, respondents identified a lack of family support or understanding from family and friends, in addition to the existence of norms perpetuated amongst family and friends that construct academic success as ‘non-Aboriginal’. Whilst low levels of social capital are not the same as the negative effects of high levels of social capital, poor quality resources still lead to detrimental outcomes. When unequal access, or access to poor quality resources, are compounded by an absence of family support, or the existence of norms which are opposed to engaging with mainstream education systems, the effects of social capital’s downsides become evident.

Even though it focuses on the barriers that students face, particularly where these barriers appear to emerge from within families or peer networks, this thesis does not perpetuate a deficit approach which blames students and their families for not possessing the “full repertoire of techniques required for extracting middle-class educational outcomes” (Lea et al. 2011:334). The benefit of a critical approach which examines the downside of social capital is that it draws out the social context in which attitudes to learning develop. An absence of understanding or support by families, or the emergence of downward levelling norms, must be located within a broader social structure which constructs Indigenous learners and families as disengaged and lacking

aspiration. The participants in this research were committed to their education and increasing the resources they could, in future, provide for their families and communities. However, for many participants, this required balancing the demands of higher education, with broader constructions of Indigenous identity.

### *Family support & obligations*

A lack of support by family and friends has been established as one of main barriers to higher education for Indigenous people (Alford and James 2007; Behrendt et al. 2012; Craven 2003; Craven et al. 2005; Shah and Widin 2010). During the consultation phase of the recent *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al. 2012:52):

...the Panel found that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students felt actively discouraged from participating in higher education by their communities due to suspicion about higher education. Some students reported family and community members questioning why they chose to participate in higher education; others said that their decision to go to university led to others bringing into questions their Aboriginality and some were asked questions about the relevance of higher education to them and their culture.

The Review goes on to argue:

These attitudes can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the benefits of higher education and to the negative perceptions of the system ... Having not experienced the benefits of higher education themselves, parents may not associate it with positive outcomes for their children (Behrendt et al. 2012:52).

It is estimated that 56% of Indigenous students are the first in their family to go to university (ACER 2011a:3). Given the low levels of education generally in Indigenous communities, and the assimilationist function of the education system, it is perhaps not surprising that the relevance and utility of participation in higher education is

questioned by many parents and communities: certainly, this research did find that a lack of family support was a barrier for some of the participants at university.

In this research, photographs taken by participants were used to guide semi-structured interviews. This allowed the discussion of sensitive topics, such as a lack of family support or family breakdowns to be limited by the respondent. As a result, some participants did not mention family support and some spoke of it in only positive and abstract terms e.g. 'they are supportive of me'. For others though, the opportunity to capture images about 'what helps and what doesn't' created the space to discuss difficult issues like the absence of support from families and friends. Although images weren't received from the participants in the focus groups at Reg Uni, the focus group discussion of the barriers to studying also addressed the support of families and peers, the socioeconomic disadvantage and health issues experienced by Indigenous people and the existence of social norms which appear to construct academic success as unattainable and undesirable.

For one student at Metro Uni, there was a strong connection between her parent's level of education and their ability to understand the obligations the participant needed to meet to finish Year 12. This respondent identified her home environment, in which her family was currently engaged in a custody dispute, as the most significant barrier to successfully completing her studies:

*MU.R7: My mum dropped out when she was 13 and so did my dad and no other kid went to – I was the first kid in my family to finish high school. So – and even year 12 was the worst, like worst year for me – a whole lot of family stuff happened. But like they didn't understand, like I'm in year 12, I need to study or whatever. They were just like "you can handle it, like you'll be fine".*

The absence of family support meant that, for some respondents, studying was an isolating experience, even before the social consequences of pursuing a life course different to one's peers or family is acknowledged. For many respondents there was a sense of having to 'get by on one's own', in the absence of family understanding or support. Usually, respondents identified a desire for family support in terms of

understanding the requirements of studying, and rarely in terms of a need for financial support.

As discussed in the previous chapter, many of these respondents were acutely conscious of a lack of economic capital in their families and of not having access to the material resources available to other, higher SES, students. However, these respondents did not identify an absence of material support from their families as a barrier. For one respondent at Metro Uni, the inability to receive academic support from their family was an effect of not having the financial resources to make contact:

*RU.R7: Cause my mum, she's up in Darwin, my dad's overseas. Closest family I have is [approximately 230km away]. So all I have is my boyfriend to ask for help, but he's – you do it yourself, you know. I have to come up here if I need help. It's a bit hard ... My dad, he's good at maths, so I'd expect – I want to give him a call or talk to him about it, but I can't because it's wasting money to pay for the phone.*

The absence of economic resources was not constructed by these students as a barrier in the same way as a lack of family support. A sense of isolation and getting by on one's own was indeed compounded by a sense of resentment about the availability of economic support. However, these students did not expect or seek financial support from their families, but they were upset when their families were not able to emotionally or academically support them. Money and wealth were seen as a means to an end; taking into consideration the motivations these respondents had for undertaking higher education, financial security can be seen as a way to both access and provide family support. For these students, the absence of financial support from their families was not seen as a barrier to education in the same way as their families' lack of familiarity with the demands of the education system.

For Indigenous students, family responsibilities are nearly three times more likely to be a contributing factor in a decision to leave university, than for non-Indigenous students (ACER 2011b:9). For some participants in this research, finding a balance between family expectations and their academic responsibilities was a significant, and ongoing, challenge. However, rather than the excessive demands that characterise an overtly

negative effect of social capital, this research found family demands and responsibilities were more likely to be conflicting, indicating a tension between the demands of institutions and kinship obligations (Shah and Widin 2010:31).

Many respondents had significant family responsibilities; from supporting grandchildren in court, to travelling long distances to visit and take care of family members, to securing housing for extended family. The weight of bearing considerable responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of other family members, with access to few resources, was discussed by one respondent who lived with members of his extended family:

*MU.R2: ... if I had the help minus that bullshit I could focus a lot more. But right now I'm looking for houses, I've got some boxes and it'll get done, I'll make some phone calls, the place will be moved, and money too – fair enough, but if you can provide the money to do all of that moving with a bond, and this, this, that. I do it all the time though, I do it once every year, once every two years I pull a rabbit out of a hat, because I have to, because no one else will. That's the thing, I'm tying this [family] unit together...*

Even without the considerable responsibility of keeping a family unit in stable housing, participants discussed the difficulties involved in meeting the expectations of families and creating the time and space for attending classes or tutoring or submitting assignments on time. One respondent indicated that her family was supportive of her decision to go to university, but that this did not necessarily lead to an adjustment of the expectation to spend time with family and friends:

*MU.R4: Yeah all my family are really happy I'm going to uni, because not many people in my family have gone, there might be someone but I don't know of anyone. So all my family is really happy I'm here, but I think everyone still – they're just starting to adjust to the fact that I don't have time to – like my brother wants to play Monopoly. You know what I mean, like I've got an assignment to do leave me alone, or my dad, come and do this with me for a while, or my grandma wants to catch up. I*

*don't always have the time, and my friends, they're like we only see you on the weekends and even then sometimes you have to cut it short if you've got too much to do. So, everyone's supportive, they just complain a bit when they don't see me enough.*

The quote from this participant demonstrates the complex negotiation between the time required to maintain and invest in important social and familial relationships and that necessary to learn and meet the demands of a tertiary institution. As Page and Asmar (2008:116) argue: “an individual's commitment to their Indigenous culture, identity and community comes up against, and may collide with, institutional norms which are entrenched or endemic”. Where children are the first in their family to go to university, their parents may not possess the behaviours and skills which are required to manage institutional interactions and expectations. If developing such skills effects the social and kinship relationships that usually hold considerable political and cultural meaning in Indigenous communities (Brough et al. 2006:399; Lahn 2012), students must engage in complex negotiations of identity and community, rarely expected of non-Indigenous students:

... in relation to the sharing and caring ethos many are feeling torn in ways which have little precedent as people negotiate their chosen path of higher education, a more nuclear style family and the accumulation of the material. This generally requires leaving town, and often means cutting certain kin ties and perceived obligations. These forms of intra-cultural social and economic change have created a realm of much misunderstanding, anger and confusion as values shift in relation to obligations and needs. The contradictions and impossibilities are here and at times a double bind and a double burden (Gibson 2010b:152).

The data collected here indicates that low levels of parental education, or cultural capital, led to an absence of family support for some participants. In part, this is due to a lack of familiarity with the education system and its requirements, but also because negative perceptions of the education system are rooted in a history of marginalisation and cultural destruction. However, a low level of parental education reduces the resources available to a student to support their academic career, and to overall lower levels of educational aspiration. Whilst the size of the effect of parental educational



attainment on student outcomes has been disputed (Homel et al. 2012), the effect of parental education on children's educational aspirations is significant (Dubow, Boxer and Huesmann 2009). Parents who have experience with the mainstream education system are better placed to transmit to their children the expectations, behaviours and norms valued by institutional agents (Lareau and Weininger 2003). Where this is absent, students are negotiating at least two sets of expectations: from the education system; and from their families.

### *Normative Barriers*

This research has so far demonstrated the complexity of the challenges that face these students in pursuing tertiary education. Whilst students' families and friends may not be familiar with the obligations placed upon students at university, many respondents discussed how proud their family were that they were studying. However, this pride did not necessarily translate into giving students the time or space they needed to study; indeed, participants often found themselves trying to balance the obligations to care for family members with their academic commitments. This balancing act is, of course, not peculiar to Indigenous students. However, as Craven et al.'s (2005:19) research demonstrates, Indigenous students are more likely to cite a lack of family support as a barrier to achieving their aspirations than non-Indigenous students.

For these participants, the disjuncture between academic and family commitments was compounded by what Portes (1998) has identified as 'downward levelling norms'. Chapter 4 argued that downward levelling norms usually emerge from a group's common experience of adversity, economic marginalisation or subordination, and where success in mainstream society has been historically proscribed by discrimination. High achieving individuals therefore tend to undermine the cohesion of the group because the group's identity is rooted in a collective understanding of the impossibility of change (Hunter 2000, 2004; Paradies 2006; Portes 1998). As Hunter argues:

A similar situation currently exists for Indigenous Australians. It [the downward levelling of norms] serves to increase the solidarity of group members and reinforce the exclusion of outsiders. Downward levelling of norms can impact indirectly though the failure to see the value in

gaining further education and in diminishing the skill acquisition that facilitates entry into the labour market (Hunter 2004:16).

The literature on Indigenous education and aspirations frequently identifies norms which appear to ostracize individuals who are perceived to be relinquishing their indigeneity for an opportunity of mainstream success. The following respondent spoke of being overtly discouraged from further study by peers in her community:

RU.R6: *I'm from [a regional Indigenous community] and no-one – they don't really study or anything. I used to travel an hour just to go to high school ... They're just like – they have that idea that I'm better than them...*

RU.R3: *They're jealous.*

RU.R6: *Some people don't like you having ambitions for yourself and want to have a goal and things. They do think that you're better than them.*

Rather than explicitly discussing their experiences of downward levelling norms in this way, participants tended to express internalised beliefs about the lack of aptitude Indigenous people had for particular fields or endeavours, such as undertaking tertiary education, entrepreneurship or mathematics. Alternatively, participants were conscious of violating social norms that construct education as something that Indigenous people 'didn't do':

MU.R4: *And then I never really thought Aboriginals did much, and that's because of what I've seen with my family, and I was just kind of like – and if you do hold a job you're like my dad and you work in the quarry plots, or you're a teachers aid, or you might work as a receptionist, or as a social worker maybe. Then when I got to uni I met people doing business courses and stuff that black people don't do, know what I mean?*

*I actually – somebody goes here, his family, they've all done higher education studies, my family likes to crack jokes and say they're coconuts.*

In its most base form, the epithet 'coconut' is an accusation of treachery and a denial of one's own indigeneity (Kwok 2011). It describes:

... people who are charged with keeping 'a white house'; people who, 'don't sit down with us', 'who don't share', who 'big note' themselves and whose patterns of work, consumption and communication leave them open to the charge that they are not Aboriginal enough (Gibson 2010a).

Being labelled a 'coconut', or 'flash', indicates a violation of a collective identity rooted in opposition to mainstream, non-Indigenous Australia. Moving away from one's own community to study or get a higher paying job can not only be a threat to the cohesion of the family and community and a rejection of one's own identity, it is also an investment in a society that condemns and denigrates Indigenous people (Sonn, Bishop and Humphries 2000; Kwok 2011). As such, statements about the ability of Indigenous people to succeed in particular domains or the likelihood of poor employment prospects and comments on the disloyal, inauthentic nature of people who choose to engage in mainstream institutions seem to involve two movements: firstly, a critical assessment of the historical chances of success for Indigenous people in colonial institutions; and, second, an internalisation of the dominant cultures' negative beliefs and stereotypes regarding Indigenous people.

Regarding the first, neither the male life expectancy gap, nor the incidence of tertiary qualifications amongst Indigenous people are expected to close for at least another century (Altman, Biddle and Hunter 2009:244); as mentioned earlier, non-Indigenous people are four times more likely (24%) to have attained a Bachelor degree or higher than Indigenous people (5%) (ABS 2011b). Given these objective circumstances, and the violence perpetrated against Indigenous people by colonial paramilitary forces (Nettelbeck and Smandych 2010), the police (RCIADIC 1991) and the welfare and education systems (HREOC 1997), the barriers preventing equitable outcomes for Indigenous people are historic, systemic and ongoing. This is not to overlook the substantial achievements of Indigenous people, nor the work of those engaged in maintaining and reviving cultural practices. However, it is to say that any discussion of Indigenous identity and social norms within Indigenous communities must include a

discussion of Indigenous history, which in Australia, as in most colonial nations, is one of dispossession and marginalisation. Despite the laudable aims of the Commonwealth Government's 'Closing the Gap' policy (FaHCSIA 2012), an assessment of the objective chances available to Indigenous people must acknowledge the reality of poorer outcomes compared to those for non-Indigenous people (SCRGSP 2011).

Secondly, the evolution within Indigenous communities of social norms that construct education as 'buying in' to mainstream values involves a collective internalisation of the beliefs of the dominant culture of indigeneity as deficient. Sarra (2006) describes workshops, conducted as part of his doctoral research, in which he asked participants to relate words and concepts that describe how mainstream Australia views Indigenous people:

At every forum, the participants reported that mainstream Australia perceived Aboriginal people as alcoholics, drunks or heavy drinkers. It was also widely held that Aboriginal people were privileged or that, in some way, they "got it good". Aboriginal people were regarded as "welfare dependent", "dole bludgers" and "lazy people who wouldn't work". On every occasion, many considered that mainstream Australia used pejorative terms such as "coon", "nigger", "boong", "black cunts" and "black bastards" in relation to Aboriginal people. These were the names my brothers and I were called at school (Sarra 2006).

In a study examining barriers and pathways to schooling and VET for Indigenous young people, Alford and James (2007) identify not only a lack of family support for Indigenous students, but also a perception held by non-Indigenous interviewees that Indigenous families were dysfunctional (Alford and James 2007:35). Whether held by community members and teachers, or perpetuated in the media, stereotypes of Indigenous inability and disengagement exist and are entrenched. In conjunction with the historical experiences mentioned above, these contemporary racist attitudes form part of the world in which a young Indigenous person is socialised (Hunter 2004; Kwok 2011; Paradies and Cunningham 2009; Sarra 2006; Wall and Baker 2012). The internalisation of negative expectations of Indigenous people leads not only to the normalisation of low academic achievement, but also to the belief that participation and

excellence in mainstream institutions is antithetical to the cohesion of Indigenous communities. This obviously has significant implications for the development of career aspirations and an academic self-concept (Craven 2005) and for the development of networks that include non-family members and institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar 2011). Although not representative, and only discussed by some participants in this research, the existence of these norms created yet another hurdle in the pursuit of higher education.

## **Conclusion**

A critical approach to the downside of social capital argues that social resources are distributed unequally and it is this differential access that restricts individual mobility. Where norms emerge that are in opposition to the dominant culture, or apparently inimical to the upward mobility of a marginalised group, these norms can be seen as an effect of the internalisation of objective chances. Those norms tend to ensure a coherent group identity in the context of discrimination and cultural and political marginalisation, and function to align behaviours and dispositions to those structural conditions. If an identification of the downsides of social capital is confused with a list of community and individual deficits, it will obscure the ways in which the dominant culture continues to exercise power over that group and the ways in which groups engage in resistance and the recreation of identities.

What the downside of social capital indicates is the quality of accessible resources and a group's internalisation of what is possible and likely, or habitus. A habitus does not spring fully formed, endogenously, from a class. It is the result of an iterative process whereby social conditions are internalised, and behaviours and expectations brought into line with the chances available in those conditions. Examining the downside of social capital highlights those processes which restrict mobility and perpetuate norms that are apparently inimical to individual or group mobility. For some of the Indigenous students in this research, the forms of social and cultural capital valued by their families and communities (such as meeting family obligations, and maintaining a coherent Indigenous identity) are not resources or behaviours valued by the institutions in which they study. A discussion of norms developed in opposition to mainstream institutions, or an absence of support from family and friends, cannot stop at the role of families

failing to develop extensive networks or modelling White, middle-class, norms for their children. As Hunter (2004:13) argues: “the social capital of Indigenous Australians is defined by their relationship with the rest of society”.

The application of Bourdieu’s theory of capital opens up a discussion of how the types of networks Indigenous students have, the resources accessible through those networks and the norms which are enforced through them, are developed in an iterative relationship with the dominant culture. If the downside of social capital is confused with a list of what is aberrant, it serves to obscure the ways in which groups function to protect their own interests, knowledges and identities, in reaction to marginalisation and discrimination. Whilst increasing the types and quality of resources to which students have access is a good policy principle, it does not attend to the social and economic causes of differential access.

Rahman (2010:72-4) provides a laundry list of factors that improve the likelihood of academic success for Indigenous students, including: knowing how to speak with teachers; having a strong commitment to completing high school; understanding the requirements and skills needed for success; help-seeking behaviour; family support of and involvement in education; the perceived importance parents place on school; students’ maturity towards school; regular school attendance; and positive relationships with teachers. Whilst identifying the skills and behaviours of students who effectively navigate the education system is important, it can lead to a circular argument which simply posits that successful students succeed. Avoiding the deficit approach, which is characteristic of the orthodox school of social capital, is critical to developing policies and institutions which reflect and build on the strengths of Indigenous students and families. However, neglecting the structural conditions of political, economic and social marginalisation, and the objective conditions which influence habitus, only removes attention from the conditions which perpetuate inequality. Indeed, focusing on nebulous attributes like ‘natural ability’, ‘dedication’ and ‘positive attitudes to education’, neglects how alienating and difficult learning the dominant “culture of power” can be for students from minority or disadvantaged backgrounds (Stanton-Salazar 1997:34).

Stanton-Salazar also suggests there is a much more pernicious consequence:

... the development and maintenance of heightened levels of motivation, when not rooted in systematic and consistent access to institutional support, represents a form of heroism sustainable by a most unrelenting misperception of structural reality... the suggestion - often implicitly in school ideology - that the adoption of this type of mindset is a precondition for individual school success tends to have psychologically violent consequences, whether it be a deepening sense of cynicism and quiet rage, or a nagging sense of personal moral failure (Stanton-Salazar 1997:33).

The orthodox school of social capital perpetuates a deficit model of Indigenous education which negatively labels students as having a shortage of a skill or resource needed to attain an outcome. For example, students lack the skills needed to decode a university environment because their parents did not obtain a tertiary education and pass those skills on to them. An alternative approach locates the source of the 'deficit' in the institution that fails to provide a culturally responsive learning environment, or improve the skills of institutional agents that can increase the resources students are able to access (Stanton-Salazar 2011).

A deficit approach places responsibility for norms which discourage achievement in mainstream institutions on the family or community. Both orthodox and critical approaches emphasise the role of the family as the primary site for the development and transmission of social capital (Hunter 2004). However, the orthodox school, the normative approach to social capital, operates in a socio-political vacuum, without paying necessary attention to social and economic history (Stanton-Salazar 2011:1083). This approach sees the family as responsible for the development of dense networks and relationships which enforce pro-academic norms and sanction undesired behaviour (Stanton-Salazar 2011:1082). Where poor academic outcomes arise, this approach posits that the family does not have adequate social interactions with the wider community and this reduces their ability to develop and enforce norms and sanctions.

The critical approach adopted here seeks to question that assumption by examining the context in which those norms develop. The role of the family in Indigenous societies has been disrupted by colonisation and many functions performed by families have been

subsumed by the state (Hunter 2004:12). However, the family anchors the development of Indigenous identities, as hybridised as they may be. Young Indigenous people may not want to seem ‘flash’, or become ‘coconuts’, and risk the possibility of separating themselves from their families and communities by adopting White behaviours or attitudes (Hayes et al. 2009:60):

The insistence on shared Aboriginal identity is accompanied by a compelling pressure to hold distinction and distance from whites. The propensity for disengagement from the mainstream is critical to the survival of an alternative socio-cultural order but is also implicated in the continuing reproduction of chronic levels of economic and social disadvantage (Kwok 2011:173).

The dominant approach to social capital suggests that families need to work harder to understand the requirements of the education system, engage with schools in ways with which teachers are familiar and enforce behaviours that White, middle-class, families adopt in order to achieve success in the education system. A critical approach to social capital allows the extent of social networks, and the norms that are carried by them, to be seen as the result of a much more complex process. The types of networks within Indigenous communities may not be amenable to the bonding/bridging/linking typology (Lahn 2012); and the quality of resources available through those networks are going to be, at least in part, defined by a history of marginalisation and the disadvantaged socioeconomic position that many Indigenous communities occupy. The norms that are propagated by those networks are also in part a reaction to two centuries of ‘Othering’, and in part due to the absence of control that Indigenous parents over their children’s education, let alone their life circumstances in general (Malin and Maidment 2003:92).

This is not a representative study, nor can it establish the relative importance of social capital and its negative effects to other types of capital. The data collected does, however, provide some evidence for the claim that both low levels of social capital and negative effects of social capital are important in understanding the experiences of these students.



This thesis does not hold to the argument that the downsides of social capital identified here are the result of the ‘wrong kind’ of networks and ‘anti-social’ norms. Such reasoning betrays a neglect of the cultural and political imperatives within Indigenous communities and the centrality of kinship to social organisation. Moreover, it fails to pay sufficient attention to the reasons underlying the development of norms which may be detrimental to personal and collective wellbeing. Rather than adopting a simplistic typology of ‘bonding’, ‘bridging’ and ‘linking’ networks, this thesis has argued for the historically grounded analysis of network functions and effects that a Bourdieusian analysis permits. It is too simple to argue that students whose families do not support their educational endeavours have a surfeit of bonding social capital that perpetuates norms inimical to personal achievement, or lack the social or academic skills to support their children. This fails to recognise how engagement with the state, in the form of its education system, has had real and devastating consequences for Indigenous people. It fails to recognise the rights Indigenous people have for the maintenance and revival of cultural practices and assumes that, if Indigenous people will only develop the ‘right kinds’ of norms and networks, entrenched disadvantage will be overcome.

Orthodox interpretations of social capital’s downsides are limited to discussing a parent’s ability to either model and enforce behaviours required by the mainstream education system, or to access appropriate material resources to support their children’s academic career. This does not go far enough in explaining low levels of educational attainment amongst Indigenous people. Attention to how different forms of capital interrelate in the field of higher education goes further in explaining why some forms of social capital are more highly valued, how norms emerge which are opposed to educational achievement emerge and why Indigenous students are more likely to disengage from university when they do get there.

For some participants in this research, the downside of social capital was demonstrated by an absence of family support and the existence of social norms which construct academic achievement as ‘un-Aboriginal’. The emergence of these effects can be, in part, attributed to the exclusion of Indigenous people from the education system, and a resistance to the assimilationist imperatives of White institutions. Whilst not representative, this research indicates that a critical approach to the downside of social capital identifies issues that are part of wider social phenomenon, in a way that orthodox

approaches to social capital cannot. It also draws attention to how access to low levels of economic capital, cultural capital, gender and geographic location all influenced the quantity and effects of social capital for these participants.

A discussion of the downside of social capital is not about what's wrong and needs to be fixed, it's about understanding how different imperatives may act upon a student, the barriers that they do face and what role institutions can have in removing those barriers. Instead of placing the blame for educational disengagement on students, families and communities, this approach justifies examining how that disengagement comes to happen in the first place. A 'forms of capital approach' allows an understanding of the downside of social capital which is more nuanced than an orthodox approach, which simply argues that students and families need to work harder to engage the education system. This places too much emphasis on nebulous ideas, like 'natural ability', 'dedication' and 'positive attitudes to education', and too little emphasis on the failure of institutions to provide opportunities for students and their families to get the kinds of education they want and to which they are entitled.

## Chapter 9 Discussion

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The title of this thesis 'The Dark Side of the Force' contains a reference to the mystical energy permeating the *Star Wars* universe. This energy – the 'force' – provides power, where it's good or evil effects depend on an individual's motivation; peace and justice, or self-interest and control. It suggests conflict, choice and the struggle for power. In this sense, the allusion to Bourdieu's view of capital as power is fitting. However, the language of the 'dark side' of social capital could also be interpreted as an immediate and deeply racist reference to skin colour and dysfunction. Using this terminology involves a risk that it could be seen as perpetuating racist assumptions that link cultural practices and economic or social exclusion. That would be a deliberate misinterpretation of the intent of this thesis.

As is clear from the literature review provided in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, the language of 'dark' or 'down' sides has been adopted to maintain consistency with the terminology used in the literature on social capital. Secondly, this thesis does not see the existence of negative social norms or exclusionary networks as peculiar to Indigenous communities. This occurs in many communities, but tends to be a characteristic of groups that experience extended periods of marginalisation; acknowledging the problem of social norms which lead to negative outcomes for individuals or communities is not in itself controversial. It is a culturalist determination of what constitutes a 'negative effect', the interpretation of its causes, and the apportionment of responsibility for change, which is deeply problematic.

Third, this thesis has exposed problems with a social capital framework that views strong networks and the norms enforced by them as operating in an historical vacuum. The problem is not Indigenous people, culture or social norms. The problem is the structural differentiation which perpetuates inequality and delegitimises the imperatives to maintain cohesive collective identities in reaction to extensive historical and embedded political, economic and cultural domination. Bourdieu provides a framework to understand how an individual's social location is internalised, which can lead to self-defeating behaviour. It is not an explanation of pathology, but nor is it a model of change. It is a model that is useful for understanding stasis and the intractability of

disadvantage. This is a framework that describes how individuals can be complicit in their own domination, but only to the extent that the social environment naturalises and obscures the structural causes and mechanisms of that domination.

It is simplistic, racist and disingenuous to equate the 'dark side' of social capital with 'Indigenous dysfunction'. The respondents in this study were actively engaged in, and sometimes struggling with, negotiating different obligations and norm structures, and low levels of financial, social and (White) cultural capital. Moreover, the quantities and forms of capital that many respondents inherited did not necessarily function as symbolic capital in the higher education system. Whilst some authors (Lin 2001; Portes and Landolt 2000) see social capital as separate from the resources it can secure, this thesis argues that access to different types of capital influences the development and effect of norms and networks. As Portes argues:

Social capital can be a powerful force promoting group projects but, as noted previously, it consists of the ability to marshal resources through social networks, not the resources themselves. When the latter are poor and scarce, the goal achievement capacity of a collectivity is restricted, no matter how strong its internal bonds (Portes and Landolt 2000:546).

This thesis has shown that the relationship between social capital and resources available through a network can be explored using Bourdieu's ideas. Whilst these may be analytically separate for authors such as Portes and Landolt (2000), this thesis has demonstrated that there is value in exploring Bourdieu's complete definition of social capital, alongside his ideas of habitus and field. Orthodox social capital theory does not give sufficient attention to how social norms and networks, and the resources they secure, are intimately connected. The availability of cultural, economic or social capital deemed valuable by the dominant culture can determine an individual's chance of success in the academic field. When access to those resources has been historically denied, and the social capital which does secure benefits in the Indigenous field is constructed as deviant or restrictive in the academic field, the downsides of social capital are more likely to appear.

This thesis provides a critical interpretation of social capital which allows for a more comprehensive analysis of its negative effects. By critiquing the orthodox approach to social capital and identifying the possibilities created by a Bourdieusian framework, many of the sins of omission committed by Coleman and Putnam are addressed. The data gathered here provides empirical evidence to substantiate the twin claims that orthodox social capital is limited in its explanation of negative effects, and that a Bourdieusian approach provides greater explanatory value to this case study. The perspectives of Coleman and Putnam offer a restricted analysis of how social networks and norms are influenced by historical conditions and access to other resources, such as cultural and economic capital. Moreover, these approaches fail to recognise how social norms may secure benefits in one field, but not another. Chapter 2 argued that the typology of bonding, bridging and linking social capital does not adequately capture the complexity of the relationship between network type, accessible resources and social norms.

Neither Putnam nor Coleman has space in their models to account for the effect of political and economic conditions on the development of social norms or the level of resources accessible through a network. A Bourdieusian approach understands these historical factors to have substantive and ongoing effects on individual and collective identity and uses the concept of habitus to describe the iterative relationship between an agent and the social location they occupy. This offers an alternative strategy to discuss social norms that restrict individual mobility, information or access to resources. In exploring how these ideas related to the experiences of participants in the case study, this thesis makes a contribution to both the literature on social capital and the literature on Indigenous higher education in Australia.

By examining the experiences of Indigenous students in the higher education sector, this thesis has explored how social capital is one of many resources individuals may access, and how these resources can have both constraining and enabling effects. It is apparent that the negative effects of social capital are experienced in complex ways, and may simultaneously enable an individual to receive support in one field, but be restricted in their choices and behaviours in another. How the negative effects of social capital manifest are, in large part, dependent on how social norms and connections are valued in the field in question. For students negotiating a pathway between different cultural

environments, there is an added complexity when the knowledges, norms and networks valued by their families and friends do not function as symbolic capital in the higher education system.

This thesis began by critiquing the literature on social capital, particularly research which adopted an orthodox framework. Both Coleman's and Putnam's approaches to social capital were documented and the key themes in both were identified. Although there are different themes in each author's work, there are commonalities which justify the inclusion of both under the 'orthodox' umbrella. Similarly, there are limitations in both theorists' work which restrict the application of their ideas to understanding the negative effects of social capital.

Coleman and Putnam derive their understanding of social capital from different intellectual traditions: Coleman (1988b) constructs a rational choice model of social capital, whereas Putnam's (2000) communitarian approach focuses on associations and civil society, yet both have been criticised for being unclear about the mechanisms that generate social capital (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Smith and Kulynych 2002). Coleman's social capital is an almost accidental side effect of institutionalised relationships (Harriss and De Renzio 1997); Putnam's social capital transforms joining behaviour into civic trust (Foley and Edwards 1999). For both scholars, and research conducted in their tradition, social capital is a public good that is almost synonymous with trust, albeit a specific type of generalised or civic trust that is produced by heteronormative families who build social connections with schools, religious institutions and other civic associations.

Both Coleman and Putnam divorce social norms and networks from broader political and economic influences and this is where ideas of trust, power and inequality become problematic in the orthodox approach. Trust is an important source of social capital and, alongside norms of reciprocity, it enables a group to enforce compliance with its rules and expect that obligations will be met (Portes 1998). Norms like trust and reciprocity are central to all conceptions of social capital, regardless of the intellectual tradition of the author. However, these approaches differ in their understanding of the role of trust: Coleman and Putnam see trust as an outcome; critical approaches see trust as a source of social capital.

As Chapter 2 discussed, trust is influenced by a range of factors, such as age, religion, health and socioeconomic status (Foley and Edwards 1999). For Indigenous communities, there is little basis for social or civic trust in the Australian state, its institutions or its representatives (Hunter 2003:13; Hughes 2000:225). Such distrust is a function of domination since contact and can lead to the emergence of closed networks reinforced by a shared sense of oppression (Kwok 2011; Portes 1998). Coleman and Putnam tend not to acknowledge situations where placing trust in external actors has, historically, led to betrayal and cultural destruction (Levi 1996; Putzel 1997).

This thesis did not measure the degree of civic or social trust respondents had in the Australian government or the wider community. It was not within its scope to quantify how social trust contributes to the generation of social capital amongst Indigenous university students. Nor can this thesis make any claim regarding the relationship between distrust and the quantity of social capital an individual can access. Despite this limitation, what this thesis can do is point to how an absence of civic trust can be an effect of an extended period of cultural, political and economic discrimination. This has profound implications for the development of resourceful social networks. Although this may be manifest at an individual level, norms of distrust can have structural origins.

As this discussion of trust demonstrates, Coleman and Putnam's approaches are ahistorical, and disconnected from the reality of structural inequality and conflict. This limits their applicability in the case study examined here; the experiences of Indigenous Australian students in higher education.

It is clear why 'social capital' has fallen out of favour. There is a double movement in the orthodox version of social capital that valorises economic models of social life, at the same time as it obscures conflict and privilege (Smith and Kulynych 2002). Such an approach tends to be adopted when individual or community practices are constructed as problematic, or deviant, rather than when the structural conditions that cause or exacerbate anomie are the focus of analysis. This is where the narrative of the 'dark side' enters and attention is focused on strong ties within dense, homogeneous communities that are often closed to information or resources from external sources. There is no doubt that closed communities, with strong social norms, are more likely to

experience the negative effects of social capital, than those with more open structures. But, the language and implications of 'bonding social capital' do not adequately capture how stratification and inequality influences the formation of collective identities and social norms.

In the world created by Coleman and Putnam, social capital is an asset of cohesive communities that function well in market economies. In such a world, communities altruistically invest in a public good that will reduce transaction costs and increase compliance. Stocks of social capital are therefore low when individuals do not trust each other or the state, and norms of reciprocity break down. Orthodox approaches argue that the downsides of social capital emerge when social norms are enforced too strongly by closed, homogeneous, networks. Despite the critique, there are elements of this approach which are useful; it does provide some insight into the effects of community closure and the operation of norms, including their breakdown and enforcement. The absence of power, history and context in this model however, weakens the framework.

Coleman and Putnam fail to explain how connections are valuable in one field, but not in another. Bourdieu's approach to social capital offers a corrective. Seeing social capital as one of many types of capital allows the interactions between wealth, knowledge and networks to be conceptualised. This approach allows for the value and effect of social capital to be determined in a field.

### **Indigenous Higher Education**

Social capital has a long history in the study of educational outcomes; in this sense Coleman's work has more in common with Bourdieu. Putnam's focus is rather on economic growth and community cohesion, but his work too is concerned with social norms that enable positive outcomes. In Australia, comparatively little research has been conducted on social capital in Indigenous communities, let alone the effect of social capital on Indigenous higher education. However, literature in this area is growing (Bandias 2010; Hunter 2004; Jorgensen 2011; Lahn 2012; Lea et al. 2011; Radoll 2011), which suggests that, although orthodox versions of the theory are



acknowledged to be problematic, there are insights enabled by social capital which are relevant in Indigenous research and policy.

For example, the recent *Review into Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al. 2012) noted that social networks and norms are an important part of understanding the barriers to, and enablers of, a successful tertiary education for Indigenous people. As Chapter 5 noted, however, there is a tendency to focus on deficit models and narratives of dysfunction in Indigenous education, and themes familiar in the orthodox social capital discourse – individual responsibility, family breakdown, parental engagement – have been noted in policy, research and commentary on Indigenous Australians and the education system (Anderson 2012; Andersen, Bunda and Walter 2008; Behrendt et al. 2012; Bodkin-Andrews, Dillon and Craven 2010; Gooda 2011a; Langton 2008).

Ideas of family and community breakdown or dysfunction are often identified in the literature as evidence of the downsides of social capital. There is also a growing body of work which explores the connection between individual and collective identity in Indigenous communities and the emergence of social norms which restrict individual mobility (Brough et al. 2006; Gorringe, Ross and Fforde 2011; Kwok 2011; Sarra 2006). An orthodox approach to social capital suggests that communities which can enforce downward levelling norms have too much bonding social capital: the ties within a homogeneous community are strong enough to prevent mobility into or out of the group. As this thesis has shown, however, this approach to social capital leaves too much out.

### **A Bourdieusian Model of the Downside of Social Capital**

A Bourdieusian model of the dark side of social capital draws attention to the ways in which networks reserve privilege for members. Networks are, by definition, exclusionary. Whilst some have argued that this approach to social capital leaves only a “dark side for the oppressed and bright side for the privileged” (Field 2003:31), I argue that a Bourdieusian approach is more nuanced than this implies. Habitus and field together provide a model for exploring the iterative relationship between individual dispositions and the environment in which they develop. If the political environment

constructs indigenous knowledges or forms of social organisation as deficient or deviant, this can become naturalised through the reproduction of exclusion through the colonial education system, but also through the internalisation of information about objective chances of success in that system. Bourdieu shows that social capital can preserve cultural and social norms within a community, excluding outsiders and enabling a strong collective identity. Through the idea of habitus though, Bourdieu also shows how these norms can also perpetuate self-defeating behaviour (Swartz 1997:104).

Participants in this research identified a lack of family support and restrictive social norms, which have been noted elsewhere in the literature on Indigenous education and identity (Alford and James 2007; Craven et al. 2005; Gibson 2010b:154, Golding et al. 2007; Gorringer, Ross and Fforde 2011; Sarra 2008). Most clearly epitomised by slurs like ‘too good for us’ and ‘flash black’, such norms indicate the negative effects of social capital, where communities are focused on preserving group identity in reaction to an extended period of discrimination and marginalisation.

This effect is not restricted to Indigenous communities. Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) work on “acting white” identifies similar processes amongst African American students, where social sanctions can be enforced against students who are seen to adopt White attitudes or behaviours (Ogbu 2004:24). Ogbu (2004) argues that sanctions against assimilation emerge as a strategy to maintain a collective Black identity, in reaction to historical and ongoing racial discrimination. Similarly, Portes’ work on social capital and educational attainment in minority immigrant communities suggests that low academic norms amongst Mexican students have less to do with ethnicity or social capital, and more to do with the negative reception Mexican immigrants receive in their host country (Portes 2000:10). That is, social structural forces have a significant impact on the academic expectations that students, their families and their peers, develop.

Bourdieu’s approach to social capital acknowledges how a history of oppression and exclusion restricts both the absolute quantity of resources that are accessible through an agent’s network, and how that history can shape an agent’s habitus and the collective identity of a community. This complexity is not accommodated by orthodox approaches to social capital, which tend to blame the negative effects of social capital on individuals, rather than accounting for the structural causes of closed communities and

restrictive social norms. Participants in this research identified how low levels of economic capital, familiarity with the education system and family support created barriers to their education. In other words, the relationship between the social supports these participants were able to access through their networks was inextricably linked to structural constraints.

Emerging from the critique of orthodox social capital, and a discussion of Bourdieu's contribution to the theory, this thesis identified two research questions:

- What can a 'forms of capital' approach add to understanding the resources that Indigenous students use and need in tertiary education?
- How does the idea of social capital's downsides explain the challenges Indigenous students face in tertiary education?

Firstly, the thesis proposed to explore what a 'forms of capital' added to understanding the diversity of resources that Indigenous students use and need in tertiary education. This research question was focused on drawing out the relationship between social capital and cultural and economic capital, and exploring the utility of Bourdieu's definition of social capital. The second research question was focused on exploring to what extent, and in what ways, the idea of social capital's downsides explained the challenges Indigenous students faced in their experience of tertiary education.

A mixed methods approach was adopted to answer these two research questions. Chapter 6 discussed the case study locations and the mixed methods approach adopted to explore empirically the types of capitals accessible by participants at the two sites. In order to examine the downside of social capital, participants took part in a photoelicitation project, which enabled them to influence the themes that were discussed under the broad topic of 'what is supportive and what makes studying difficult' at university.

In response to the first research question, the findings demonstrate that social capital is usefully conceived as one of a variety of resources available to an individual, and that access is determined in the context of history and social structure. In response to the second research question, this research demonstrates that the idea of 'downsides' is useful in understanding the experiences of restrictive social norms or an absence of family support for some participants, and these negative effects of social capital are, at

least in part, influenced by social structural and historical forces. These findings provide justification for the use of Bourdieu's forms of capital model in this case.

### *Economic capital*

The findings show that participants at the regional location had fewer financial resources to draw upon: their households were larger and those households had incomes approximately half the Australian household median income (ABS 2008b, 2011a). The quantitative data indicated that respondents at the metropolitan location had a slightly higher household income, approximately two-thirds of the median equivalised household income for non-Indigenous Australian households (ABS 2008b). The qualitative data showed many of the respondents at Metro Uni received a scholarship that provided financial assistance to study and this may have contributed to a larger household income. However, respondents at both sites identified the same financial difficulties in meeting daily living expenses, such as utility bills and medical costs. For respondents at the regional location, costs associated with study, such as transport between home and university, purchasing a computer or internet service at home, were often beyond their means. Respondents at both locations were conscious of how their experience at university was influenced, not only by a different cultural background to other students, but also by the financial resources they were able to draw upon. These students were conscious of a 'classed' dimension, as well as a 'racialised' dimension to their experience at university.

Assessing financial resources available to participants is an integral part of using a Bourdieusian approach. Portes (1998:5) argues that social capital cannot be equated with the resources obtained through a network and this thesis concurs to the extent that social networks are not synonymous with the benefits or otherwise they obtain. However, analysing what an agent might *prefer* to obtain through their network is not as useful as understanding what they are *able* to access. This position argues that, although an agent's family or community may wish to support her financially, for example, they may be unable to do so. Examining the different types of support an agent can access and mobilise is therefore important, and including the Resource Generator survey tool in the data collection allowed a range of different types of support to be mapped.

A social capital approach requires understanding the quantity of resources that can be accessed, as well as the ability to access them. Developing an understanding of what resources are available to participants enables a more accurate representation of their social location. Resources alone do not equate to social capital, but they are an integral part of understanding the utility and effects and social capital.

### *Cultural capital*

This research adopted a measure of prior level of education as a proxy for cultural capital, in line with Bourdieu's understanding of institutionalised cultural capital represented by academic qualifications (Bourdieu 1986). Here again, there were stark differences between the regional and metropolitan location: 64% of participants at Reg Uni had not completed Year 12 before undertaking their tertiary preparation course, compared to 15% of respondents at Metro Uni.

The qualitative methods also created an opportunity to discuss other forms of cultural capital relevant to the field in question. During the focus groups at Reg Uni and the interviews at Metro Uni, a range of issues emerged that can be used to describe the cultural capital, which was: (a) valued in tertiary education institutions; and (b) accessible by participants. Participants at both sites identified a lack of familiarity with study and research techniques, and the specificities of academic English as difficulties, which suggests an absence of these other forms of inherited cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) argues that material objects require specialised cultural abilities to use, which is relevant here in terms of participant's knowledge about research techniques, timetables and sources of support. Similarly, Bourdieu suggests that, in its embodied form, cultural capital can manifest as the ability to use particular languages, such as the ability to write formal academic English.

Cultural capital is inherited, and this functions to mask how aptitude, skills and knowledges are transmitted through socialisation (Bourdieu 1986:246; Lareau and Weininger 2003). Although this research design is limited by a lack of data on parental cultural capital, measures such as previous level of education, in conjunction with the qualitative interviews and focus groups, suggest that many of the participants in this research had limited opportunities to develop the cultural capital valued by tertiary

education institutions. As Chapter 5 argued, success at university is largely determined by skills and attributes acquired prior to enrolment, usually as the result of parental investment (Lareau 2011). Indigenous people and knowledges have been historically excluded from the education system in Australia and data suggests that educational attainment, although improving, remains significantly lower for Indigenous people than for non-Indigenous Australians (SCRGSP 2011:4.49).

In contrast, the social and cultural connections enabled by the Indigenous student support centres provided a culturally safe space for participants to access information and resources through institutional agents, as well as opportunities develop social networks with second and third-year students.

### *Social capital*

This thesis has argued that Bourdieu's understanding of social capital is more useful in understanding the experiences of this participant group, than orthodox approaches to the theory. Here, it is worth restating Bourdieu's definition of social capital as:

... the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu 1986:248-249).

This definition draws attention to the resources accessible through membership in a group and the investment each member makes in the cohesion of that group. In this study mapping the social capital an individual has access to required understanding the diversity of resources participants could access through their networks. The Resource Generator survey developed by Van der Gaag and Snijders (2005) enabled the measurement of four domains of social capital, and the information or resources that are available through those domains.

The survey results indicated that respondents at Metro Uni had larger networks, but both sites demonstrated low scores for accessing information from high status individuals. Respondents at both locations indicated that they were able to secure personal and social support through their networks. However, there were large differences in the network size of male and female respondents at Reg Uni: male respondents had larger networks and were able to access a wider range of resources through their networks. In this case study, the female respondents at the regional location had lower levels of social capital than their male counterparts, and both their male and female counterparts at the metropolitan location.

### *The downside of social capital*

Bourdieu's analogy of the game describes how fields establish 'rules', and the habitus describes an agents 'feel' for the game; different types of capital are the weapons and prizes in the game (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Grenfell 2007). For participants in this research, access to the 'weapons in the game' varied according to gender and geographical location. Many respondents did not have access to the cultural and economic resources they felt their peers at university were able to secure, adding a classed dimension to their tertiary education experience.

The quantitative and qualitative data provided information on both the level and effects of social capital. Respondents received both tangible and intangible support from their families, such as assistance with childcare and encouragement to study. The positive effects of social capital could be seen when participants were able to obtain support and resources through mentors, their families, friends and the Indigenous student support centres. Networking with other students, connections with Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff at the student support centres, and receiving tutoring and mentoring provided these respondents with opportunities to access a greater range of information and resources through an expanding social network.

The family responsibilities and demands placed on respondents were not conceived of as 'negative'; participants did not question their responsibilities for caring for children, grandchildren or siblings, or spending time with their friends, parents and grandparents. Negotiating a balance between their familial and cultural responsibilities and their

academic responsibilities was, however, complex. These participants worked hard to navigate not only significant familial responsibilities, but also their tertiary institutions. They did this with low levels of financial support, little familiarity with tertiary education system, and often few opportunities to secure support or resources through their networks. Whilst these participants were able to secure social support, access to information and resources through higher status individuals was not as frequent, particularly for respondents at the regional location.

Access to low levels of economic, cultural and social capital compounded the difficulties many students experienced in making the transition to higher education. Participants were negotiating the demands of high education, in addition to significant family responsibilities. Occasionally, participant's families and peers did not understand the requirements of studying and these participants reported difficulties in managing the expectations of their families with the expectations of the university. Some participants also identified restrictive social norms, such as when their friends or families identified people who had a tertiary education as 'flash blacks', or when they were accused of thinking that they were 'better' than their peers because they were studying. These findings suggest that, whilst social capital has a protective function, providing access to social and emotional support, there are also negative effects of social norms and networks which can further compound the challenges experienced by students negotiating the tertiary education system.

### **Contribution to the Literature**

This thesis has established the argument for a Bourdieusian interpretation of the negative effects of social capital. By examining the experiences of Indigenous students in the higher education sector, this thesis firstly explored how social capital is one of many resources that individuals negotiate to secure support. Secondly, this thesis established that the social norms and networks which are used to secure support and access to resources can have both positive and negative effects.

It is apparent that the negative effects of social capital are experienced in complex ways, and may simultaneously enable an individual to receive support in one field, but restrict their choices and behaviours in another. How the negative effects of social capital are



manifest is, in large part, dependent on how social norms and connections are valued in the field in question. The emergence of social norms and the maintenance of a cohesive collective identity are also influenced by historical conditions. For many of the Indigenous participants in this research, these conditions include intergenerational marginalisation from the education system and not only the failure of educational institutions to represent their knowledges and cultures, but the assimilationist agenda of those institutions. Moreover, the opportunity to develop resourceful networks is dependent on social location and access to cultural and economic capital. On central indicators of wealth and education; home ownership, weekly household income, and tertiary qualifications, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is not expected to close for another 100 years (Altman, Biddle and Hunter 2009:214). The effects of norms and networks cannot be separated from the resources that are accessible through a network. The negative effects of social capital are not the same as the effect of possessing a low level of social capital. However, a situation of intergenerational economic and political marginalisation contributes to the emergence of a habitus which can naturalise and compound exclusion, and it is this mechanism which a Bourdieusian approach to social capital illuminates.

This thesis provides a critical interpretation of social capital, identifying significant limitations in the dominant, orthodox versions of the theory. By critiquing this orthodox approach and exploring the Bourdieusian alternative, this thesis addresses many of the sins of omission committed by Putnam and Coleman. The application of the theory to the case study demonstrates that the orthodox approach does not adequately address many of the themes emerging from the fieldwork; the interpretive power of the orthodox theories is limited, as the case study demonstrates.

The importance of moving beyond orthodox social capital has been demonstrated by the possibilities created by adopting a Bourdieusian approach to explore the experiences of Indigenous students in the higher education system. This approach addresses the limitations of Putnam and Coleman by providing a historically grounded interpretation of social networks and norms which incorporates a greater focus on social structural constraints. This approach also addresses the primary critique that orthodox approaches offer limited opportunities for a comprehensive analysis of the negative effects of social capital:

... with the exception of Bourdieu, the leading theorists of social capital have taken a largely benevolent view. If they cannot be convicted of mindless optimism and Panglossian complacency, neither do they sufficiently appreciate the risks inherent in defining social capital as a public good without constant qualification (Field 2003:74).

In applying a Bourdieusian approach to social capital in the field of Indigenous higher education, this thesis has also provided an alternative theoretical framework to examine continuing disparities in academic outcomes for Indigenous people in Australia. By adopting an innovating mixed methods approach, this thesis has also provided an example of how Bourdieu's approach to social capital can be operationalised. Applying Bourdieu's theory in these ways creates another way to move beyond circular debates about 'engagement' and 'responsibility' towards a more nuanced analysis of the influence of structural constraints on the development of individual and community networks and social norms.

### **Limitations**

Bourdieu's approach to social capital provides a model for exploring the dialectical relationship between an agent and her social location. Access to wealth and networks, and the opportunity to develop fluency with the mores of the dominant culture, are never wholly within an agent's ability to determine or change. The attitudes and dispositions of an agent are formed in this environment. These insights are not provided by an orthodox approach to social capital, which neglects the constraints or opportunities provided by social structural factors, and ignores how an agent internalises those constraints or opportunities. When applied to the issue of the negative effects of social capital, Bourdieu shows how a habitus developed in a condition of marginalisation can perpetuate that domination by internalising and naturalising structural differentiation. Restricted access to wealth, information or networks simultaneously causes, and perpetuates, that oppression. This thesis has demonstrated that this approach enables a better analysis of how social capital is connected to other forms of capital and how, in conjunction with field, this influences the positive and negative effects of social norms and networks. Despite the complexity that Bourdieu offers however, there are a number of limitations in using this theoretical perspective.

First, this thesis acknowledges that Bourdieu may not adequately address the possibility of change. The intersection between capital, field and habitus better addresses the intractability of disadvantage, rather than explaining any change in an agent's habitus or social location. This implies some legitimacy to the claim that Bourdieu's approach: "virtually allows only for a dark side for the oppressed and a bright side for the privileged" (Field 2003:28). This thesis concurs to the extent that Bourdieu's interpretation of social capital, rather than Coleman or Putnam, better explains the persistence of Indigenous disadvantage in Australia. Altman, Biddle and Hunter (2009), as well as the biennial Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage reports (SCRGSP 2011), provide ample evidence that 'closing the gap' is slow work. Indeed, so slow that it will take at least another century before weekly household income and tertiary qualifications for Indigenous Australians converge with non-Indigenous Australians (Altman, Biddle and Hunter 2009:241).

Change is occurring, however slow, both at the national level (Altman, Biddle and Hunter 2009; SCRGSP 2011) and for the participants involved in this research. Many participants were the first people in their families to complete high school or go to university. Hence, this thesis acknowledges that Bourdieu's approach appears to militate against the possibility of change and the application of his theory to this case study may overlook the changes that are occurring for these participants; although, it is critical to note that these participants are not finding their cultures, knowledges or familial networks reflected in the institutions they join. Outside the Indigenous student support centres, these tertiary institutions did not tend to create culturally safe spaces for these participants.

It is another limitation of this research that a specifically indigenous conception of social capital is not explored. Research in New Zealand, for example (Robinson and Williams 2001; White, Spence and Maxim 2005), has started to develop local and culturally-specific versions of social capital which may better reflect forms of social organisation and control within First Nations communities. Similarly, Walter (2010a) has extended Bourdieu's model to include 'race capital' as a fourth dimension of social stratification, arguing that racial hierarchies are a powerful and continuing determinant of social position, where Whiteness facilitates the acquisition of resources in a

fundamentally different way to the privileges associated with class or gender. As Walter argues: “All evidence indicates Euro-Australians deploy their racial capital across fields from the top of the stratification ladder with Indigenous peoples firmly welded to the bottom” (Walter 2010a:48).

This thesis also acknowledges a number of limitations in method and fieldwork. In particular, the survey tool would have benefited from the inclusion of a measure of relative deprivation, such as the ability to raise \$2000 in a week. This item is used in the World Values Survey (World Values Survey Association 2005) and by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008a) and would have enabled a more robust analysis of financial deprivation and the use of personal networks to secure access to financial resources. In retrospect, the inclusion of a survey item measuring levels of parental cultural capital, such as the highest level of education reached by mothers or fathers, may also have provided the opportunity for a discussion of intergenerational change, which this thesis has accepted as a limitation in the use of Bourdieu’s theory.

Pre-testing the survey may have identified these issues at an earlier stage in the research. However, despite these limitations, this research has successfully addressed the research questions and made a contribution to the literature on both social capital and Indigenous higher education, within the constraints imposed by time, access and the requirements of participating individuals and organisations. This thesis has made a valuable contribution by focusing on the utility of Bourdieu’s theories in understanding the negative effects of social capital in the context of Indigenous higher education.

## *Chapter 10 Conclusion*

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This thesis has established a framework for exploring the downsides of social capital using a Bourdieusian approach, which addresses many of the overt and implicit limitations in orthodox social capital theory. I began in Chapter 2 by detailing that critique and identifying the omissions of Coleman's and Putnam's work in adequately exploring the downsides of social capital. Chapter 3 provided the Bourdieusian perspective on social capital, in particular drawing out the ways in which the idea of field, habitus and capital allowed the negative effects of social capital to be seen, at least in part, as an effect of the internalisation of objective chances or structural conditions. One of the many benefits of this approach, in comparison to the theories of James Coleman and Robert Putnam, is the opportunity to move beyond the traditional agent/structure dualism which positions negative social capital as wholly within an individual's ability to overcome. The fourth chapter explored how critical approaches have been applied to the issue of social capital's downsides, and noted the 'contextual turn' of the orthodox literature. Whereas orthodox approaches have recently acknowledged social location or context as an important factor in determining the effect of norms and networks, Bourdieu's field theory goes further to explore how the value of capital is determined differently in various social environments.

This thesis then explored how, and why, these ideas are relevant in the field of Indigenous higher education. Narratives of engagement and participation are familiar in orthodox social capital discourses and particularly in Indigenous education policy. The downsides of social capital have been identified in different fields and areas of research, but restrictive or downward levelling norms and an absence of family support have been in particular, noted in the educational and anthropological research with Indigenous communities.

Chapter 6 outlined the mixed methods approach used to collect data at two locations, one metropolitan and one regional tertiary institution. This was followed by two chapters which explored, firstly, the evidence regarding the types of resources participants were able to access. This demonstrated the utility of a Bourdieusian 'forms of capital' approach, and provided evidence for differences in the types and quantities

of resources participants were able to access. This chapter also noted differences in the social capital available to participants according to gender and geographic location. Secondly, these findings provided evidence that social capital can function to have both positive and negative effects, depending on how that capital is valued by the field in question: access to low quantities of economic or cultural capital, as well as restricted opportunities to develop extensive or resource social networks, influence the effects of norms enforced by communities.

Chapter 9 discussed these findings in greater depth, arguing that, although there are limitations in the theory and methods used in this thesis, it makes an important contribution to both the literature on social capital, and the literature on Indigenous higher education. In conclusion, this thesis will elaborate on the opportunities created by, and the implications of, the findings identified here. In particular, the implications of this research for higher education providers will be discussed. This concluding section will also identify points of convergence with, and divergence from, the recent *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al. 2012), in order to draw out the broader policy implications of this research.

### **Opportunities for Future Research**

Identifying the limitations of this research, in theory and in execution, draws attention to a number of opportunities for future research. For example, a longitudinal study of social capital amongst Indigenous tertiary students may address the difficulty in using Bourdieu's theory to conceptualise change, by mapping resources over time. This may also allow for a more in-depth analysis of a specifically indigenous conception of social capital, particularly one which is sensitive to geographic location. It is also important to note that, whilst this thesis has focused on the three predominant forms of capital Bourdieu identified (social, cultural, and economic), there is no theoretical incoherence introduced by adding more or different types of capital (Wacquant 2013:in press). Bourdieu suggests that any non-economic form of capital is effective to the extent that it masks the operation of economic capital (Bourdieu 1986). Moreover, a field is defined by the struggle to determine the legitimate sources of power (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), such that social and cultural capital may not be as relevant as political, religious

or race capital in a given field. Economic and cultural factors are the most potent differences for Bourdieu, however these are never so totalizing that other principles, such as ethnicity, nationality, gender or religion, are precluded (Bourdieu 1989:19). As Walter (2010a:47) suggests, race can operate as a medium for social inclusion or exclusion, and is: “both a predictor and determinant of our social positioning”. Research focused on exploring the intersections between social capital, race capital and lateral violence would make a substantial contribution to the literature on the downsides of social capital. The congruity between the ideas presented in this thesis, and research on internalised racism and lateral violence requires greater attention.

Professional bodies that accredit tertiary courses, such as the Australian Association of Social Workers (2012) and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (Ryan 2009), are also beginning to require that students graduate with an understanding of Indigenous histories and the skills to practice in culturally safe ways. As Australian universities continue to marketise higher education and search for new customers, the representation of Indigenous knowledges in the academy takes on a new significance. A critical approach requires a degree of scepticism in implying that such changes may improve the status or power of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people or perspectives in Australian universities, but this does suggest another opportunity to explore the application of Bourdieu’s ideas in Indigenous higher education research.

This thesis has demonstrated the utility of a Bourdieusian approach in exploring how a ‘forms of capital’ approach provides a more rigorous analysis downside of social capital, and extending this analysis should be a priority of future research in this field. Nevertheless, the research presented here has significant implications for both Indigenous higher education policy and tertiary education providers.

## **Implications**

### *Institutional capacity*

The findings of this thesis concur with a number of recommendations of the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Behrendt et al. 2012). In particular, Recommendations 10 and 11 encourage universities to continue their support of Indigenous Education Units or Indigenous

student support centres: “to provide a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students” (Behrendt et al. 2012:65). Participants in this research viewed the provision of tutoring services, culturally-appropriate support and community engagement by the Indigenous students support centres as integral to their continued success in higher education. This draws attention to the role of institutional agents, including, but not restricted to, Indigenous student support centres and education centres, in brokering access to information and resources. Institutional agents often occupy high-status positions relative to students from minority or marginalised backgrounds and, as such, have a powerful role to play in facilitating the acquisition of control, skills and resources to enable students to determine their own success (Stanton-Salazar 2011). This is, however, dependent on the networks, cultural competencies and resources available to those institutional agents, and the degree of importance that education for Indigenous people has within an institution.

### *Social norms*

Like the Behrendt Review (2012:52), this research also identifies the existence of restrictive social norms that usually manifest in the form of a lack of support from peers and families for undertaking tertiary education. As noted in Chapter 8, the Review argued that: “These attitudes can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the benefits of higher education and to the negative perceptions of the system” (Behrendt 2012:52). This thesis adopts a more critical interpretation of the causes of the downsides of social capital, arguing that these attitudes can be attributed the absence of Indigenous knowledges in the academy and the assimilationist agenda of an education system, which has perpetuated values often antithetical to Indigenous worldviews (Moreton-Robinson and Walter 2009).

Academic success is “rooted in systematic and consistent access to institutional support” that empowers students academically and culturally (Stanton-Salazar 1997:33). Therefore, this thesis concurs with the approach of the Review in simultaneously recommending both a community-based approach to Indigenous higher education (Behrendt et al. 2012:189) and the development of university-wide Indigenous teaching and learning strategies (Behrendt et al. 2012:96). By working in partnership with communities, tertiary education providers can offer more culturally and professionally



relevant value proposition. The ability of universities to work with communities, support wider involvement in decision making and understand the legitimacy of the various demands placed on students, may then begin to remove some of the structural barriers that make closing the gap so difficult.

## **Conclusion**

Beginning with a critique of the dominant models of social capital, this thesis has shown that a critical approach enables a sound analysis of the downsides of social capital. Examining how Bourdieu's ideas of capital, field and habitus apply to Indigenous students in the tertiary education system has led to two key insights. Firstly, any capital can have a negative effect if it is not valued in the field. For example, the kinds of norms and networks that secure benefits in the Indigenous field are not only different to the norms and networks that will secure benefits in the academic field, they are also more likely to be devalued and delegitimised within the education system. The downsides of social capital draw attention to how behaviours, norms and knowledges can constitute a beneficial resource in one field, or be constructed as deviant or problematic in another.

Secondly, strong norms and networks that are formed in a position of marginality are likely to be complicit in the perpetuation of that oppression. Young Indigenous people are brought up in a nation that has not only denied and devalued their cultures (Wall and Baker 2012), but has Othered and constructed Indigenous people as inferior (Herbert 2012). As Walter argues: "The tenor of non-Indigenous/Indigenous relations is built on a normalization of disrespect" (Walter 2010b:130). Bourdieu suggests that, when an agent is socialized in such an environment, the iterative relationship between an agent's habitus and the social structure leads to an internalisation of those structures; the development of a habitus in a position of marginality tends to naturalise social distinctions, leading to the alignment of an agent's sense of what is possible to structural constraints. Thus, inequality tends to be perpetuated, not only by the maintenance of privilege by the dominant culture, but also by a largely unconscious and internalised sense of what is possible or likely for people who occupy marginal positions. Objective chances become internalised, which tends to perpetuate self-

defeating (Swartz 1997:104) or self-damning (Gibson 2010b:154) norms and can result in “[l]earned helplessness and lack of motivation” (Wall and Baker 2012:60).

The findings of this research demonstrate that agents are not wholly determined by social structures and can demonstrate considerable resilience and creativity in negotiating the effects of capitals in different fields, as well as challenging restrictive social norms in those different fields. However, learning and negotiating the dominant “culture of power” can be an intensely isolating and alienating experience for students from minority or disadvantaged backgrounds (Stanton-Salazar 1997:34), even before the effects of social capital’s downsides are acknowledged. Moreover, the failure of successive reviews and policies to ‘close the gap’ in any meaningful way (Altman, Biddle and Hunter 2009) suggests that a decision to participate in the higher education system based on an objective assessment of historical chances of success, is ultimately, an act of heroism (Stanton-Salazar 1997:33).

This thesis argues that academic success should not require Indigenous students to perform a “cultural cost-benefit analysis” (Schwab 1997:8), in addition to the challenge of developing fluency with the culture of power, whilst negotiating material inequality. However, nor should student’s cultural obligations, or their desire to engage in cultural revival, enjoy a lower priority than academic success. The maintenance and revival of cultural identities should not be compromised by participation in the institutions of the dominant culture and it is only by remaining “embedded in familial and communal support systems” that students can achieve success in all worlds (Stanton-Salazar 1997:33). As Noel Pearson argues:

Radical hope for the future of Aboriginal Australia ... will require the bringing together of the Enlightenment and Aboriginal culture. This reconciliation is not of necessity assimilation: just ask the Jews. The education of our children in both traditions, at the highest level of effort, ambition and excellence that we can muster, is, I have no doubt, fundamental to this hope. If our hopes are for our children, then we must take charge of their education (Pearson 2009:105).

Challenging social norms that limit the aspirations of Indigenous students relies, in part, on the acknowledgement that these norms, and cognate issues like internalised racism

and lateral violence, manifest at an individual level. However, a large part of the responsibility for changing the structural conditions in which inequality is normalised lies with the institutions that, ultimately, determine what knowledges and cultures are deemed important.

It is therefore necessary to provide a critical addendum to the substantial work undertaken by the Behrendt Review. A Bourdieusian reading of any education system suggests that institutions are unlikely to serve emancipatory aims for students from marginalised positions. Increasing enrolments of Indigenous students, or even achieving parity with non-Indigenous Australians is a laudable aim. But, this thesis suggests that the struggle is more accurately over the power to determine what norms, networks or knowledges are legitimate in the education system. This is a struggle for world-making power (Swartz 1997:89) and the ability to determine the rules of the game.

Insofar as measures that support broadening participation are not perceived as a threat to the reputation, credibility and exclusivity of the institution, they will likely be deemed to fit well with the social justice aims or emancipatory potential of the higher education system. Where, for example, the types of social capital valued by Indigenous families or the cultural capital required to understand Indigenous knowledges of astronomy, mathematics or music, have the potential to destabilise and undermine the system of domination naturalised by the higher education system, they are more likely to meet resistance. Increasing enrolments of Indigenous students does not, in itself, change the rules of the game, or who has the power to determine the stakes of the game:

... social stratification is not threatened by granting access to select individuals who have been traditionally left out, so long as the dominated classes enter the game under the rules of the system and generally against their own interests (Musoba and Baez 2009:176).

Broadening participation therefore requires removing structural and institutional barriers (Harrison and Waller 2010:479) that construct Indigenous students, cultures and knowledges as deficient, or higher education as financially unattainable. Seeing oneself, and one's culture and history, accurately and sensitively represented in the tertiary education sector is an important part of removing these barriers and beginning to change the broader environment in which young Indigenous people are socialized.

This thesis maintains that drawing attention to the downsides of social capital should not be controversial, and does not perpetuate a deficit approach to Indigenous education. Restrictive social networks or downward levelling norms are not specific to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities and tend to emerge from an extended period of historical discrimination and marginalisation. Moreover, the ability to enforce social norms, regardless of the content or impact of those norms, is a central component in the development of any cohesive collective identity. However, when those social norms restrict access to opportunities, individual freedoms, enable onerous claims on group members, or perpetuate downward levelling norms (Portes 1998), attention to the formation and consequences of social capital become urgent.

The orthodox approach is “naively optimistic” (Field 2003:28) and constructs social capital as a resource that simply enables families, communities and nations to cooperate for mutual benefit. It is a feature of communities that are trusting, engaged and altruistically invest in social capital as a public good. Transaction costs are reduced as social capital enables communities to enforce compliance with norms and develop networks that facilitate information exchange. Despite the critique of orthodox social capital as unsophisticated and ahistorical, this perspective does acknowledge that negative effects can emerge when social norms are enforced by closed, homogeneous networks. The literature presented in this thesis has shown though that the rosy view of social capital requires “constant qualification” (Field 2003:74). Coleman’s and Putnam’s versions of social capital are created in a world without conflict or struggle, not in a world where distrust of the state is a reasonable cultural survival strategy. By contrast, a social capital framework based on the work of Bourdieu may not provide all the answers to the problem of social capital’s dark side, but it does provide a far more comprehensive analysis of its causes and effects.

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## Appendix 1: Timeline of National Indigenous Education Policy<sup>47</sup>

Year	Policy/Report
1967	Commonwealth Government holds a Referendum to amend the Constitution to include Aboriginal people in the Census and acquires the ability to make legislation for Aboriginal people.
1969	Introduction of the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (Abstudy)
1974	National Aboriginal Consultative Group established (superseded by NAEC in 1977)
1975	Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission by the NACG
1977	National Aboriginal Education Committee (superseded by AEPT in 1988)
1981	Aboriginal Futures: A Review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines (Watts 1981)
1985	Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs
	House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education
1988	Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce (Chair: Paul Hughes)
1989	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
	Hobart Declaration on Schooling
1990	Introduction of Aboriginal Education strategic Initiatives Programme (now IESP)
	Introduction of the Aboriginal Education Direct Assistance Programme (now IEDA)
1994	Review of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (Chair: Mandawuy Yunupingu)
1995	Report of the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Yunupingu 1995)
	MCEETYA National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002
1996	National Strategy for Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Paul Hughes)
	Formation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council (now AITAC)
1997	Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) first reporting period 1997-2000
1999	Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century
2000	The goals of the AEP legislated in the <i>Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000</i> , No. 147, 2000
	Report of the MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education
	Launch of the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS)
	Katu Kalpa: Report on the Inquiry into the Effectiveness of Education and Training Programs for Indigenous Australians
2004	Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council established (2004-2012)
2005	Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008

<sup>47</sup> Compiled from: Cadzow 2008; DEST 2003; MCEETYA 2000; Schwab 1995

2008	Review of Australian Higher Education (Chair: Denise Bradley)
	Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians
2012	Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (Chair: Larissa Behrendt)
2012	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council established (supersedes IHEAC)

## ***Appendix 2: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy Goals***

### **Major Goal 1 - Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Educational Decision-Making**

1. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children.
2. To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and contemporary society, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
3. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.
4. To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.
5. To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate in educational decision-making.
6. To develop arrangements for the provisions of independent advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities regarding educational decisions at regional, State, Territory and National levels.

### **Major Goal 2 - Equality of Access to Education Services**

7. To ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children of pre-primary school have access to pre-school services on a basis comparable to that available to other Australian children of the same age.
8. To ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have local access to primary and secondary schooling.
9. To ensure equitable access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to post-compulsory secondary schooling, to technical and further education, and to higher education.

### **Major Goal 3 - Equity of Educational Participation**

10. To achieve the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in pre-school education for a period similar to that for other Australian children.
11. To achieve the participation of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in compulsory education.
12. To achieve the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in post-secondary education, in technical and further education, and in higher education, at rates commensurate with those of other Australians in those sectors.

### **Major Goal 4 - Equitable and Appropriate Educational Outcomes**

13. To provide adequate preparation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through pre-school education for the schooling years ahead.
14. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attainment of skills to the same



standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.

15. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.
16. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attain the same graduation rates from award courses in technical and further education, and in higher education, as for other Australians.
17. To develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
18. To provide community education services which enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people develop the skills to manage the development of their communities.
19. To enable the attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults with limited or no educational experience.
20. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.
21. To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary cultures.

## *Appendix 3: Survey Questions*

### About Money

1. In the past year, did your family
  - Save some money
  - Just get by
  - Spend some savings
  - Spend savings and borrow money
  
2. Do you own outright, are you buying or renting the dwelling in which you now live?
  - Own outright
  - Own, paying off mortgage
  - Rent from private landlord
  - Rent from public housing authority
  - Other (boarding, living at home, etc)
  
3. Do you own shares in any company listed on an exchange, such as the Australian Stock Exchange?
  - Yes
  - No
  
4. What is your household income?
  - Gross income, before tax or other deductions, from all sources.
  - Please include any pensions and allowances, and income from interest or dividends.
    - \$1 - \$199 per week (\$1- \$10,399 per year)
    - \$200 - \$299 per week (\$10,400 - \$15,599 per year)
    - \$300 - \$399 per week (\$15,600 - \$20,799 per year)
    - \$400 - \$499 per week (\$20,800 - \$25,999 per year)
    - \$500 - \$599 per week (\$26,000 - \$31,199 per year)
    - \$600 - \$699 per week (\$31,200 - \$36,399 per year)
    - \$700 - \$799 per week (\$36,400 - \$41,599 per year)
    - \$800 - \$999 per week (\$41,600 - \$51,999 per year)
    - \$1,000 - \$1,499 per week (\$52,000 - \$77,999 per year)
    - \$1,500 - \$1,999 per week (\$78,000 - \$103,999 per year)
    - \$2,000 - \$2,499 per week (\$104,000 - \$129,999 per year)
    - \$2,500 - \$3,499 per week (\$130,000 - \$181,999 per year)
    - \$3,500 or more per week (\$182,000 or more per year)

### About Education

5. Before starting [LOCATION], what was the highest educational level that you finished?
  - No formal education
  - Did NOT primary school
  - Completed primary school
  - Did NOT complete High School to Year 10
  - Completed High School to Year 10
  - Did NOT complete High School to Year 12
  - Completed High School to Year 12

- Trade qualification or apprenticeship
- Certificate or Diploma (TAFE or business college)
- Bachelor Degree (including Honours)
- Postgraduate Degree or Postgraduate Diploma

### About People You Know

For each question write the first names or nicknames of people you know who could help you.

- If two people have the same name add something to tell them apart (like Ally B and Ally C). Repeat names as often as necessary.
- When it says “*know personally*” that means that you feel you know them well enough to trust that they will give you an honest response if you ask them about something.

#### *Domain I*

6. Who do you know personally that has travelled enough that they could give you advice about a trip to a difficult or unusual location? (e.g. Africa)

#### *Domain II*

7. Who do you know personally who could give you financial advice (e.g. advice on a budget, getting a loan, tax, investment, or superannuation)?
8. Who do you know personally who could give you advice about dealing with the government?

#### *Domain III*

9. Who do you know personally who could help with computer setup and installation in your home?
10. Who do you know personally who speaks and writes a language that isn't English?

#### *Domain IV*

11. Who do you know personally, not at work or home, who could give you advice on personal problems at home or work (like problems with a workmate, parent, or children)?
12. Who do you know personally who would help you move house?

### About You

13. Are you?
  - Female
  - Male
14. What year were you born in? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Do you identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or South Sea Islander?
  - Yes
  - No

## *Appendix 4: Focus Group Questions*

The following outline was used at the regional location, which was the only site where focus groups were conducted.

### Session One

- The researcher will provide a brief personal and professional introduction, and provide overview of the research.
- The researcher will provide information about the aims of the research project and detail how participants can be involved.
- This session will provide an opportunity for individuals to ask questions and get to know the researcher before committing to participating in the project.

### Session Two and Three

During these two sessions the researcher will act as a moderator for a semi-structured group discussion on the following topics:

- Student's motivation for enrolling in the tertiary preparation
- What student's hope to get out of the program
- What are some of the challenges involved in studying?
- What kinds of help and support do students get? From where do they get that support?
- What has made studying harder? For example: balancing work and family commitments; having to develop new skills; health; money; support at home?
- What have been the responses of student's families and communities to their decision to study?

The third session also provided an opportunity for the researcher to clarify and revisit any emergent issues.

## *Appendix 5: Photovoice Questions*

When respondents return their cameras or images, and participate in a semi-structured interview to discuss those images, the following questions are used as a guide:

- Can you describe this photo?
- Why did you want to share this photo?
- What's the story behind this photo?
- What were you looking for/feeling when you took this photo?
- What else in this photo is important?
- Is there something about this photo you wish was different?
- How did you feel when you took that image/look at it now?

## *Appendix 6: Regional University survey responses*

### **1. In the past year, did your family**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
Save some money	27.3	3
Just get by	36.4	4
Spend some savings	0.0	0
Spend savings and borrow money	36.4	4
Answered question		11
Skipped question		0

### **2. Do you own outright, are you buying or renting the dwelling in which you now live?**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
Own outright	9.1	1
Own, paying off mortgage	0.0	0
Rent from private landlord	54.5	6
Rent from public housing authority	36.4	4
Other (boarding, living at home, etc)	0.0	0
Answered question		11
Skipped question		0

### **3. Do you own shares in any company listed on an exchange, such as the Australian Stock Exchange?**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
Yes	0.0	0
No	100.0	11
Answered question		11
Skipped question		0

#### 4. What is your household income?

- Gross income, before tax or other deductions, from all sources.
- Please include any pensions and allowances, and income from interest or dividends.

	Per cent	No.
\$1 - \$199 per week (\$1- \$10,399 per year)	10	1
\$200 - \$299 per week (\$10,400 - \$15,599 per year)	30.0	3
\$300 - \$399 per week (\$15,600 - \$20,799 per year)	30.0	3
\$400 - \$499 per week (\$20,800 - \$25,999 per year)	0.0	0
\$500 - \$599 per week (\$26,000 - \$31,199 per year)	10.0	1
\$600 - \$699 per week (\$31,200 - \$36,399 per year)	0.0	0
\$700 - \$799 per week (\$36,400 - \$41,599 per year)	0.0	0
\$800 - \$999 per week (\$41,600 - \$51,999 per year)	20.0	2
\$1,000 - \$1,499 per week (\$52,000 - \$77,999 per year)	0.0	0
\$1,500 - \$1,999 per week (\$78,000 - \$103,999 per year)	0.0	0
\$2,000 - \$2,499 per week (\$104,000 - \$129,999 per year)	0.0	0
\$2,500 - \$3,499 per week (\$130,000 - \$181,999 per year)	0.0	0
\$3,500 or more per week (\$182,000 or more per year)	0.0	0
Answered question		10
Skipped question		1

#### About Education

#### 5. Before starting [LOCATION], what was the highest educational level that you finished?

	Per cent	No.
No formal education	0.0	0
Did NOT primary school	0.0	0
Completed primary school	0.0	0
Did NOT complete High School to Year 10	18.2	2
Completed High School to Year 10	36.4	4
Did NOT complete High School to Year 12	9.1	1
Completed High School to Year 12	27.3	3
Trade qualification or apprenticeship	0.0	0
Certificate or Diploma (TAFE or business college)	9.1	1
Bachelor Degree (including Honours)	0.0	0
Postgraduate Degree or Postgraduate Diploma	0.0	0
Answered question		11
Skipped question		0

For each question write the first names or nicknames of people you know who could help you.

- If two people have the same name add something to tell them apart (like Ally B and Ally C). Repeat names as often as necessary.
- When it says “*know personally*” that means that you feel you know them well enough to trust that they will give you an honest response if you ask them about something.

6. Who are people you know personally that have travelled enough that they would be able to advise you about a trip to a difficult or unusual location? (e.g. Africa)
7. Who do you know personally who could give you financial advice? • Like advice on a budget, getting a loan, tax, investment, or superannuation
8. Who do you know personally who could give you advice about dealing with the government?
9. Who do you know personally who could help with computer setup and installation in your home?
10. Who do you know personally who speaks and writes a language that isn't English?
11. Who do you know personally, (outside work and home) who could advise on interpersonal problems at home or work? • Like problems with a work mate, a parent, or children?
12. Who do you know personally who would be able to help you move house?

### 13. Are you?

	Per cent	No.
Female	54.5	6
Male	45.5	5
Answered question		11
Skipped question		0

### 14. What year were you born in?

Age	Per cent	No.
15-19	9.1	1
20-24	45.5	5
25-29	27.3	3
30-34	9.1	1
35-39	0.0	0
40-44	0.0	0
45-49	0.0	0
50-54	0.0	0
59-59	9.1	1
Answered question		11
Skipped question		0



**15. Do you identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or South Sea Islander?**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
Yes	100.0	11
No	0.0	0
Answered question		11
Skipped question		0

**16. How many people live in your house (including you)?**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
1 person (you)	9.1	1
2 people (you + 1)	18.2	2
3 people (you + 2)	9.1	1
4 people (you +3)	27.3	3
5 or more people (you + 4 or more people)	36.4	4
Answered question		11
Skipped question		0

**17. In general, would you say your health is:**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
Excellent	0.0	0
Good	36.4	4
Fair	63.6	7
Poor	0.0	0
Can't choose	0.0	0
Answered question		11
Skipped question		0

## *Appendix 7: Metropolitan University survey responses*

### **1. In the past year, did your family**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
Save some money	38.5	5
Just get by	30.8	4
Spend some savings	30.8	4
Spend savings and borrow money	0.0	0
Answered question		13
Skipped question		0

### **2. Do you own outright, are you buying or renting the dwelling in which you now live?**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
Own outright	0.0	0
Own, paying off mortgage	7.7	1
Rent from private landlord	53.8	7
Rent from public housing authority	0.0	0
Other (boarding, living at home, etc)	38.5	5
Answered question		13
Skipped question		0

### **3. Do you own shares in any company listed on an exchange, such as the Australian Stock Exchange?**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
Yes	7.7	1
No	92.3	12
Answered question		13
Skipped question		0

**4. What is your household income?**

- Gross income, before tax or other deductions, from all sources.
- Please include any pensions and allowances, and income from interest or dividends.

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
\$1 - \$199 per week (\$1- \$10,399 per year)	15.4	2
\$200 - \$299 per week (\$10,400 - \$15,599 per year)	15.4	2
\$300 - \$399 per week (\$15,600 - \$20,799 per year)	7.7	1
\$400 - \$499 per week (\$20,800 - \$25,999 per year)	15.4	2
\$500 - \$599 per week (\$26,000 - \$31,199 per year)	23.1	3
\$600 - \$699 per week (\$31,200 - \$36,399 per year)	15.4	2
\$700 - \$799 per week (\$36,400 - \$41,599 per year)	7.7	1
\$800 - \$999 per week (\$41,600 - \$51,999 per year)	0.0	0
\$1,000 - \$1,499 per week (\$52,000 - \$77,999 per year)	0.0	0
\$1,500 - \$1,999 per week (\$78,000 - \$103,999 per year)	0.0	0
\$2,000 - \$2,499 per week (\$104,000 - \$129,999 per year)	0.0	0
\$2,500 - \$3,499 per week (\$130,000 - \$181,999 per year)	0.0	0
\$3,500 or more per week (\$182,000 or more per year)	0.0	0
Answered question		13
Skipped question		0

**5. Before starting [CONFIDENTIAL], what was the highest educational level that you finished?**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
No formal education	0.0	0
Did NOT primary school	0.0	0
Completed primary school	0.0	0
Did NOT complete High School to Year 10	0.0	0
Completed High School to Year 10	0.0	0
Did NOT complete High School to Year 12	15.4	2
Completed High School to Year 12	53.8	7
Trade qualification or apprenticeship	0.0	0
Certificate or Diploma (TAFE or business college)	30.8	4
Bachelor Degree (including Honours)	0.0	0
Postgraduate Degree or Postgraduate Diploma	0.0	0
Answered question		13
Skipped question		

For each question write the first names or nicknames of people you know who could help you.

- If two people have the same name add something to tell them apart (like Ally B and Ally C). Repeat names as often as necessary.
- When it says “*know personally*” that means that you feel you know them well enough to trust that they will give you an honest response if you ask them about something.

6. Who are people you know personally that have travelled enough that they would be able to advise you about a trip to a difficult or unusual location? (e.g. Africa)
7. Who do you know personally who could give you financial advice? • Like advice on a budget, getting a loan, tax, investment, or superannuation
8. Who do you know personally who could give you advice about dealing with the government?
9. Who do you know personally who could help with computer setup and installation in your home?
10. Who do you know personally who speaks and writes a language that isn't English?
11. Who do you know personally, (outside work and home) who could advise on interpersonal problems at home or work? • Like problems with a work mate, a parent, or children?
12. Who do you know personally who would be able to help you move house?

### 13. Are you?

	Per cent	No.
Female	75.0	9
Male	25	3
Answered question		12
Skipped question		1

### 14. What year were you born in?

Age	Per cent	No.
15-19	10.0	1
20-24	40.0	4
25-29	30.0	3
30-34	0.0	0
35-39	20.0	2
40-44	0.0	0
45-49	0.0	0
50-54	0.0	0
55-59	0.0	0
Answered question		10
Skipped question		3

**15. Do you identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or South Sea Islander?**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
Yes	100	12
No	0.0	0
Answered question		12
Skipped question		1

**16. How many people live in your house (including you)?**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
1 person (you)	8.3	1
2 people (you + 1)	25.0	3
3 people (you + 2)	50	6
4 people (you +3)	16.7	2
5 or more people (you + 4 or more people)	0.0	0
Answered question		12
Skipped question		1

**17. In general, would you say your health is:**

	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>No.</b>
Excellent	41.7	5
Good	50.0	6
Fair	8.3	1
Poor	0.0	0
Can't choose	0.0	0
Answered question		12
Skipped question		1