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Introducing the Congregational Bonding Social Capital Scale (CBSCS): A study
among Anglican churchgoers in South London

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Abstract

As social capital theory comes to play a part in quantitative congregational studies, so there is the need for established and tested measures of different forms of social capital to be available for inclusion in surveys. This paper reports on the psychometric properties of the newly proposed Congregational Bonding Social Capital Scale (CBSCS) tested among 23,884 adult churchgoers throughout the Anglican Diocese of Southwark in south London. The data support the internal consistency reliability and construct validity of this 7-item measure.

Keywords: social capital, congregational studies, psychology, religion

Introduction

Social capital theory has provided a fruitful lens through which to view and to interrogate the contribution of faith communities to three distinct areas of life, distinguishing between bonding social capital and bridging social capital (as rehearsed by Putnam, 2000) and linking social capital (as developed by Woolcock, 2001). According to Putnam (2000), broadly defined, social capital is based on ‘connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them’ (p. 19). In a similar analysis of the concept, Hall (1999) argues that social capital is ‘understood as the propensity of individuals to associate together on a regular basis, to trust one another, and to engage in community affairs’ (p. 417).

Emerging from such broad definitions of social capital, *bonding* social capital is seen as a dense layering of norms and trust that is found in homogenous groups and which tends to reinforce the group’s homogeneity. This kind of social capital ‘undergirds reciprocity and mobilises solidarity’ and acts as a ‘kind of sociological superglue’ in maintaining strong in-groups loyalty and promoting robust identity (Putnam, 2000, p. 25). *Bridging* social capital occurs when individuals or groups form linkages with others different from themselves (heterogeneous relationships), and so create new spaces where power, information and communication can be shared. This kind of social capital is seen by Putnum as a ‘kind of sociological WD40’ (p. 25). *Linking* social capital specifically addresses the power differentials within society and allows more marginal groups to link with the resources of more powerful groups ‘as a way of beginning to address the asymmetrical nature of power and influence in civil society (Baker, 2009, p. 171).

Using social capital theory employing these distinctions, research has discussed and identified the ways in which faith communities contribute to the development of social networks and social wellbeing among their members (*bonding* social capital); to the

development of social life and interpersonal networks extending into local and wider communities (*bridging* social capital); and to the development of connections between individuals and networks operating within different strata of society (*linking* social capital). An extensive, insightful and analytic overview of this developing field of enquiry has been provided by Baker and Miles-Watson (2010).

Against this background various attempts have been made to develop measures of social capital as particularly appropriate for use in congregational studies or for use in other church-related contexts. Walker (2011) employed a 4-item index of congregational social capital, using the following statements: I have friends in this congregation; I come to church to be with other people; there are people here who help me cope with things; being part of the church helps me feel at home in the community. Walker argues that the first three items lean strongly towards measuring bonding social capital, while the fourth contains elements of bridging social capital. Each of the four items was rated on a five-point Likert scale, generating a range of scores between 4 and 20. Data were provided by 1,185 individuals during their attendance at rural Harvest Festival services in the Church of England Diocese of Worcester. In this context Walker's instrument showed good properties of internal consistency reliability for such a brief scale, with an alpha coefficient of .68 (Cronbach, 1951). The analysis demonstrated that higher levels of congregational social capital were associated with being female, with being older, with greater frequency of attendance, and with greater frequency of personal prayer.

Williams (2008) designed a 12-item index of congregational social capital with particular relevance to cathedral congregations, which he named the Williams Religious Social Capital Index (WRSCI). This instrument combined three items concerned with bonding social capital, three items concerned with bridging social capital, three items concerned with linking social capital, and three items concerned with the notion of social

trust underpinning social capitals. Each of the 12 items was rated on a five-point Likert scale, generating a range of scores between 12 and 60. Data were provided by 720 participants in six cathedral congregations in England and Wales who completed the WRSCI together with a range of other indices concerning aspects of their religious, social, and personal life. In this context the WRSCI showed good properties of internal consistency reliability, with an alpha coefficient of .83 (Cronbach, 1951). The analysis demonstrated that higher levels of congregational social capital were associated with greater frequency of attendance.

Muskett (2014) proposed a modification of the Williams Religious Social Capital Index for particular use within Friends' associations of Anglican cathedrals. In this context the 'congregation' is a dispersed network of individuals committed to the wellbeing of a specific cathedral. Like the original measure (WRSCI), the modified measure (WRSCIM) takes into consideration four distinct elements: trust, bonding social capital, bridging social capital and linking social capital. Data were provided by 923 members of six cathedral Friends' associations, who completed the WRSCIM together with a range of demographic variables. In this context the WRSCIM showed very good properties of internal consistency reliability, with an alpha coefficient of .93 (Cronbach, 1951). The analysis demonstrated that higher levels of social capital were associated with greater levels of activity within the Friends' association.

While Williams (2008) set out to provide a global measure of congregational social capital (combining the four fields of bonding social capital, bridging social capital, linking social capital, and social trust), Robbins, Francis, and Powell (2012) designed a five-item index of congregational social capital which concentrated specifically on bonding social capital. They named this instrument the Congregational Bonding Social Capital Index (CBSCI). Each of the five items was rated on a four-point frequency scale, generating a range of scores between 4 and 20. Data were provided by 2,065 participants in the 2006 Australian

National Church Life Survey who completed form D of the congregation survey that included the CBSCI alongside a range of other measures including the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005). In this context, the CBSCI showed good properties of internal consistency reliability, with an alpha coefficient of .91 (Cronbach, 1951). The analysis demonstrated significant associations between levels of congregational bonding social capital and the individual psychological type profile of the participants. Higher levels of congregational bonding social capital were found among extraverts (compared with introverts), among intuitive types (compared with sensing types), and among feeling types (compared with thinking types).

The five-items selected from the Australian National Church Life Survey by Robbins, Francis, and Powell (2012) may provide a rather limited view of the domain of congregational bonding social capital. For that reason a broader set of items was designed for assessing congregational bonding social capital in the *Signs of Growth* project conducted between 2009 and 2012 within the Anglican Diocese of Southwark in south London. This paper explores the psychometric properties of that new instrument, named the Congregational Bonding Social Capital Scale (CBSCS).

Method

Procedure

Each of the three Episcopal Areas within the Diocese of Southwark identified a Sunday and the following weekdays during which everyone who attended an Anglican ‘act of worship’ within that Episcopal Area would be invited to complete the *Signs of Growth* questionnaire. Of the 360 Anglican churches within the three Episcopal Areas, 348 agreed to participate in the project. All told 31,521 questionnaires were completed. This represents a good response rate when set against the average Sunday attendance reported for the diocese in 2008 as 43,450.

Measures

Congregational bonding social capital was assessed by seven items intended to reflect a range of issues salient to churchgoers, with each item rated on a five-point Likert scale: agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, and disagree strongly.

Frequency of church attendance (apart from weddings and funerals) was measured on a nine-point scale: less than once a year, once a year, for major festivals, six times a year, once a month, twice a month, three times a month, weekly, and at least three times a week.

Sample

The present analysis is based on the responses of those 23,884 individuals aged twenty or over who completed all the items used in this analysis. A third of the participants were men (34%) and two thirds were women (66%); 6% were in their twenties, 15% in their thirties, 19% in their forties, 17% in their fifties, 18% in their sixties, 16% in their seventies, and 9% were aged eighty or over.

Analysis

The data were analysed by the SPSS package, employing the reliability, correlation and analysis of variance routines. In view of the sample size and the number of factors being tested concurrently, the significance level was set at the one percent probability level.

Results

- insert table 1 about here -

The first step in data analysis concerned exploring the internal consistency reliability of the newly devised Congregational Bonding Social Capital Scale both in terms of the whole sample and in terms of key subsets of the sample defined by age and sex. These data are presented in table 1 in terms of the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) and the correlations between each individual items and the sum of the remaining six items for the total sample, for men and for women separately, and for three age groups separately. These data demonstrate

similar alpha coefficients across all subgroups, well in excess of the threshold of acceptability of .65 proposed by DeVellis (2003). The item-rest-of-test correlations confirm that each item contributes to the homogenous scale.

The item endorsements, in terms of the sum of the agree strongly and agree responses, show a high level of congregational bonding social capital among these churchgoers in South London. Eight out of every nine of the participants say that they feel a strong sense of belonging to their church (88%); 72% feel that members of their church care deeply for one another; 63% feel that the church is important for their social life; 49% turn to fellow members of their church when they need help; and 41% feel that they are part of their church's decision making. By way of contrast, one in five of the participants feel that their relationships are fairly superficial within their church (21%), and one in three feel that they are not involved in running their church (33%).

- insert table 2 about here -

The second step in data analysis concerned exploring the mean scale scores according to the total sample and according to sex, age, and frequency of church attendance. These data are presented in table 2. These data demonstrate: that there are no significant differences in the levels of congregational bonding social capital reported by men and by women; that there are significant differences in the levels of congregational bonding social capital reported by the different age groups, with the lowest levels among those in their twenties and thirties and the highest levels among those in their sixties; and that levels of congregational bonding social capital increase in step with frequency of attendance.

Conclusion

This study set out to introduce and to test the psychometric properties of a new measure of congregational bonding social capital among a sample of 23,884 Anglican churchgoers from the Diocese of Southwark in south London. Two main conclusions emerge

from these data. The first conclusion is that the new instrument displays satisfactory internal consistency reliability when tested not only on the whole sample but also on sex groups and age groups separately. The second conclusion is that the new instrument displays satisfactory construct validity in terms of the clear association demonstrated between scale scores and levels of engagement with congregational activity in terms of frequency of service attendance. This finding is consistent, for example, with Putnam's (2000) basic thesis that frequency of association generates the connections between individuals that nurture and sustain social capital. It is also consistent with the empirical findings reported by Williams (2008) and by Robbins, Francis, and Powell (2012), employing different measures of congregational social capital, that also display significant positive correlations between frequency of attendance and levels of congregational social capital. On this basis the Congregational Bonding Social Capital Scale (CBSCS) can be commended for future studies among Anglican churchgoers. Similar studies are now needed among other denominational groups to test whether similar psychometric properties are reported within different contexts. There is also the need now for similar levels of attention to be given to the development of comparable measures concerned with congregational bridging social capital and congregational linking social capital.

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Table 1

Congregational Bonding Social Capital Scale: scale properties

| | Total | sex groups | | age groups | | |
|--|-------|------------|--------|------------|-------|---------|
| | | male | female | 20-39 | 40-59 | 60 plus |
| I feel a strong sense of belonging to my church | .57 | .58 | .56 | .60 | .59 | .50 |
| My church is important for my social life | .51 | .54 | .49 | .51 | .50 | .50 |
| My relationships are fairly superficial within my church * | .36 | .38 | .35 | .27 | .42 | .36 |
| I feel part of my church's decision making | .55 | .59 | .53 | .55 | .57 | .52 |
| I turn to fellow members of my church when I need help | .53 | .53 | .54 | .56 | .54 | .48 |
| I am not involved in the running of my church * | .40 | .45 | .37 | .39 | .44 | .35 |
| Members of my church care deeply for one another | .42 | .41 | .42 | .41 | .44 | .41 |
| alpha | .75 | .77 | .74 | .75 | .77 | .72 |
| N | 23884 | 8171 | 15713 | 5007 | 8744 | 10133 |

Note: * these items were reverse coded to calculate the item-rest-of-scale correlation

Table 2

Congregational Bonding Social Capital Scale: Mean scale scores

| | N | Mean | SD | F | <i>p</i> < |
|--------------------------------|-------|------|-----|-------|------------|
| <i>Total sample</i> | | | | | |
| all participants | 23884 | 25.4 | 4.6 | | |
| <i>Sex groups</i> | | | | | |
| male | 8171 | 25.3 | 4.8 | | |
| female | 15713 | 25.4 | 4.5 | 4.0 | NS |
| <i>Age groups</i> | | | | | |
| 20-29 | 1529 | 24.2 | 4.7 | | |
| 30-39 | 3478 | 24.2 | 4.6 | | |
| 40-49 | 4591 | 25.1 | 4.7 | | |
| 50-59 | 4153 | 25.8 | 4.8 | | |
| 60-69 | 4348 | 26.0 | 4.6 | | |
| 70-79 | 3725 | 25.8 | 4.2 | | |
| 80 and over | 2060 | 25.5 | 3.7 | 88.4 | .001 |
| <i>Frequency of attendance</i> | | | | | |
| less than six times a year | 654 | 20.1 | 4.5 | | |
| at least six times a year | 507 | 20.7 | 4.0 | | |
| once a month | 1061 | 21.8 | 3.9 | | |
| twice a month | 2429 | 23.2 | 4.1 | | |
| three times a month | 3843 | 24.4 | 4.1 | | |
| once a week | 14303 | 26.4 | 4.2 | | |
| more than once a week | 1087 | 28.3 | 4.4 | 780.4 | .001 |