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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community strengthening may be defined as a sustained effort to increase involvement and partnership among members of a community to achieve common objectives. This paper surveys those approaches to community strengthening most commonly discussed in the literature and employed in the community, with a particular focus on social resilience, an under-researched yet emerging concept which offers a clear direction for work aimed at unifying communities and sustainable community betterment.

**Community capacity-building**

Community capacity designates the ability of communities to identify and address social problems. No established definition of community capacity-building exists, and there are many overlapping descriptions of how community capacity-building works. Its nebulousness gives rise to some difficulties. Community capacity-building is both intervention process and outcome: there are no universally agreed measures of process, and understanding the course of change and differentiating cause from effect, may therefore be difficult. Furthermore, unexamined assumptions about communities being ‘safe’ and community capacity building being intrinsically valuable may conceal the question about whose interests community capacity-building programs serve. This is of particular concern for some allegedly apolitical accounts of community capacity building, which neglect conflict and issues of power, status and resources; or which assume that capacity building will allow communities to take more control and responsibility for their own development.

Governments and communities working together can bring about social change; social change cannot lay solely at the feet of communities, no matter how robust, vibrant and caring, especially when the levers for change are located at much higher levels. With those limitations in mind, proponents nevertheless identify the potential of community capacity-building for empowerment and health gains, through the development of skills, knowledge, and social and material resources.

**Social capital**

Social capital is conceptualised differently to other forms of capital, since it includes social networks, norms, trust and civic engagement that enable people to act collectively. It encompasses both the trust and reciprocity which holds a community together and the resources to which an individual has access and use, via her/his networks. Three types are described: bonding capital within communities; bridging capital between heterogeneous communities; and linking capital, such as vertical connections between political elites and the public or between social classes. Important debates include questions about consensus around tightly prescribed social norms, and acceptance of difference within the participative community, thus questioning the capacity of social capital to
account for conflict. Both bridging and bonding social capital are needed for building inclusive and diverse networks, problem solving and facilitating collective action. While considerable work has been undertaken on measures of social capital, there is (as with community capacity-building) a problem of differentiating process and outcome. Preselected sets of indicators may also obscure social capital which falls outside such indicators. This observation is of particular importance with marginalised and indigenous young people, who often experience little if any social capital in mainstream society and frequently create parallel sites to that offered by it, which may be invisible. Notwithstanding these critiques, social capital overall emerges as an important and useful concept.

**Social inclusion and exclusion**

Social inclusion and exclusion address questions of social disadvantage. They are not clearly defined, though they are arguably dependent on particular social or individual interpretations of belonging, membership and integration. They are relative to histories, social norms and expectations, result from individual, group or institutional agency, and involve economic, social and political dimensions. In transcending traditional approaches to disadvantage that focus on poverty, social inclusion and exclusion more comprehensively account for marginality, minority and disability, and also multiple and localised aspects of disadvantage, and are used to promote participation, accountability, non-discrimination and empowerment. Once again, there are no universally accepted measures, and it is difficult to capture processes that entrench disadvantage over time. Similar to community capacity-building, social inclusion is sometimes assumed to be a ‘good thing’, and its emphasis on integration and cohesion, its normative or ideal force, may foster alignment with social conformity and conventionality, potentially entrenching dichotomies between those who are ‘in’ and those who are ‘out’. The concepts are not necessarily opposites: social exclusion deals with social problems, social inclusion with social membership. Adopting certain approaches to social inclusion (e.g. programs that encourage (‘incentivise’) or coerce people into work) may drive or entrench other causes of social exclusion, unless not just governments but citizens are actively involved in defining and re-designing responses to their communities’ problems. Nevertheless they have been linked to human rights standards.

**Well-Being**

Well-being and community well-being have undergone re-definition to become wide-ranging concepts in recent years. Whether considered philosophically or empirically, community well-being involves the whole of life and ‘how well people live’, thus transcending economic issues alone, incorporating human, social and environmental well-being, and embracing concepts such as capabilities and an optimal quality of ‘healthy community life’. Well-being operates within broader considerations of human welfare and social justice, with a focus on positive aspects of people’s lives,
prevention of ill-health, and promotion and enhancement of community strengths. This breadth of focus is significant for many groups, such as indigenous people and young people. Community well-being indicators now abound, guiding decisions regarding policy and program development, informing data collection, improving consistency in development and evaluation, and facilitating dialogue between government and more socially disadvantaged groups about goals and priorities. There are debates about the choice of indicators, their comprehensiveness, their modifiability given social change, and their need to retain respect for and active collaboration with local knowledges and culture. The question of the connection between indicators and effective interventions remains wide open. For well-being as for all community-strengthening approaches, there is a continuing challenge of differentiating process from outcome, and cause from effect. Critics argue that there is a danger that it may be reduced to a focus on individual ‘lifestyle’ risk factors or health behaviours alone, whereas ‘whole of government’ approaches, cross-sectoral collective action on matters such as education and employment, and local or place-based initiatives, are required.

Community resilience
Community resilience has been defined as the capacity of groups to withstand, recover from, and respond positively to crisis or adversity, with a focus on one-off crisis situations. It is a dynamic process which varies with time and circumstances, and includes properties such as resistance, recovery and creativity, and concepts such as vulnerability, preparedness, and social and economic capital. The emphasis here is on reaction, adaptation and return to previous structural and functional states once a threat is no longer present. Related literature surpasses practical disaster responses to highlight the capacity of community members to engage in community action projects despite constraining events and structures. While resilience varies between communities, it can be fostered and strengthened over time, drawing on local and indigenous knowledges, and the experience and understanding of community members. Challenges include defining communities so as to reflect their dynamic nature, and enhancing local capacity. With some disturbances, the system must undergo significant transformations, rather than simply adapt: this is relevant in relation to communities living with chronic adversity and to sustained and ongoing threats such as those associated with globalisation or climate change: thus there is a need to understand how this resilience can be sustained and transform communities.

Social resilience
Social resilience articulates the structural, relational and communal aspects of resilience. In contrast with community resilience, some defining features of social resilience include its focus on chronic social and economic disadvantage and its intention to transform the status quo, by addressing the ‘political economy of risk’ which falls more heavily on some groups than others. While it supports
participation of all community groups, social resilience prioritises marginalised and excluded groups, and works with those historical, political and social factors that account for their circumstances. Social resilience avoids focus on individual risk which may be misconstrued as the failings of individuals rather than representing the outcomes of inequalities, discrimination and lack of opportunity. While resilience work has been built on normative ideas of young people in European and North American settings, this neglects the inputs of marginalised groups, such as indigenous and CALD young people. For marginalised groups, interrupting the ‘circuit of dispossession’ in chronic adversity may enable changes in agency and established power relations, thus making inroads on traditional structural ‘boundaries’ such as race and class, and achieving civic connectedness and community responsiveness. Social resilience achieves this by putting young people’s understanding at the centre of the approach.

Theoretically, social resilience draws on strong lines of inquiry, from waves of relational and community resilience research and theorising, and from critical post-modernism, drawing from it the importance of dissolving dualisms and totalising identities. Social resilience is in its formative stages and its provisional yet promising findings require grounding in further systematic research. A range of approaches deployed in community resilience and social resilience research focus on vulnerable group or community risk or aim to measure change in chronic situations. Approaches involving longitudinal observation and qualitative, community-level data are essential to mapping and conducting social resilience research and intervention. Among many unanswered questions include enquiries about how to sustain social resilience, and the contribution of information communication technology to the social resilience of marginalised young people. The exploration of developing social resilience with Aboriginal Indigenous young people in a rural community, as well as CALD and homeless young people within the context of their socio-economically disadvantaged community shows promising results.

**Summary observations and conclusions**

Each of the approaches discussed has strengths, but all are characterised by imprecision – by challenges with defining the core concepts and distinguishing causes from effects, and processes from outcomes. Overlap and borrowing are common, for example some community resilience measures draw on community capacities, and some community capacity-building and community resilience approaches import social capital. Some theoretical platforms (for example social capital and community indicators) are well developed, others are sketchy. Descriptive methodologies and unexamined values assumptions are not infrequent - for example, regarding cultural diversity, inequity and community ‘safety’ in some types of community capacity building. Approaches with
dichotomous underpinnings (for example social inclusion/social exclusion) may potentially accentuate community divisions: others, where marginalised people become central in community problem-solving, may dissolve dualisms.

While all apparently avoid trying to resolve social problems in individual terms (at least superficially), some adopt individual risk approaches to tackle problems with social equity, rather than addressing social factors with a documented relationship to their perpetuation. Identifying ethical, community-designed and community-driven strategies with workable timelines, expectations and resources has proved elusive.

Social resilience is of particular interest because it implies catalytic, transformational change. It addresses key dimensions of power relations, civic connectedness and community responsiveness, interrupting what has been called ‘the circuit of dispossession’.
Opportunities for co-operative social relationships within community are well known to be ‘protective’ and to enable communities and their members to cope with adversity. Recent years have seen the development of a number of approaches to community strengthening. Such approaches include ‘community capacity building’, ‘social inclusion’, ‘social capital’ ‘community well-being’, and ‘social resilience’. Social resilience is the particular focus of this review: however, each of these terms are at times used in conjunction with community strengthening. The present review overviews studies and discourses concerning these areas, using international and national published research literature, and explores social resilience from the standpoint of the field in which it sits. It examines each of the terms just mentioned: their definitions, strengths, measures relevant to each, and offers a critique.

The review discusses what distinguishes the emerging domain of social resilience from other approaches to community strengthening, and indicates how social resilience seeks to address problems that are generated by wider social and economic factors. It considers how social resilience is developed in communities: policy and principles that guide practice, effective partnerships, and lessons learnt from working within a social resilience paradigm. It asks what are the most effective actions that government can take to support social resilience, and highlights the research gaps, such as the contribution of social media to young people’s social resilience, and the dimensions of social resilience that lead to sustained change.
An initial literature of academic databases, using key words ‘Community resilience’, ‘Social resilience’, ‘Community capacity’, ‘Social capital’, ‘Social inclusion’ and ‘Wellbeing’ was conducted. These academic databases included ‘Informit - Humanities & Social Sciences Collection’, ‘Proquest Central’ and ‘SocIndex with Fulltext’.

Second, a further search was conducted using the generic data base ‘Google Scholar’ to locate literature on social resilience and community resilience, in particular. This search, however, also included the key words ‘Community capacity’, ‘Social capital’, ‘Social inclusion’ and ‘Wellbeing’.

Due to the large number of results returned, particularly on social and community resilience, the search limitations of ‘words to occur in the title of the document’, and ‘articles published after 2000’ were specified.

Third, three NGO based practitioners, each from a different organisation, working in the area of strengthening communities were asked to nominate the key literature, in this area, their organisation most utilised. These were the Chief Executive Officer for the Local Community Services Association (NSW) which has an overview of the work of neighbourhood centres in NSW; the director of Uniting Justice Australia, whose work in the area of community strengthening around social justice issues, has primarily a national focus, and, the Humanitarian and Program Effectiveness Coordinator from the Anglican Board of Mission Australia, whose work concentrates on community strengthening of communities in crisis at an international level.

A snowball sample search was also used to locate any additional articles in the bibliographies of the literature yielded from those sources described above.

The approach of triangulation of the data sources, described above, and commonly utilised in social science, validates the choice of literature through cross verification from more than two sources.

The final articles used for the review were drawn from peer reviewed journals spanning a range of academic disciplines including: social work, sociology, environmental science and ecology; psychology; community health; geography and social science. Additional documents include government and community organisation reports.
"Community strengthening is a sustained effort to increase involvement and partnership among members of a community to achieve common objectives”. It involves local people, community organisations, government, business and philanthropic organisations working together to achieve agreed social, economic and environmental outcomes (ACT Government, Chief Minister’s Department 2007).

Those approaches to community strengthening most commonly discussed in the literature and employed in the community, are reviewed in the following subsections. They are ‘community capacity’; ‘social capital’; ‘social inclusion’; ‘well-being’; ‘community resilience’ and ‘social resilience’.

Community capacity

Definitions

Voluminous literatures exist on ‘community’, ‘community capacity’, ‘capacity-building’ and ‘community capacity-building’. These concepts have been the subject of extensive scholarly debate in various disciplines (e.g. social policy, community development, sociology, public health, environmental management, contemporary philosophy and theology, to name but a few). Governments and civil society organisations widely use these constructs to shape practice guidelines, toolkits and resource booklets for addressing health and social challenges. Innumerable reports, studies, literature reviews, case studies, academic articles and books utilize these constructs.

The terms, like that of ‘community’ which underpins them, are imprecise, and there are no agreed definitions. As it implies, community capacity is concerned with the ability of communities to identify and address social problems (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). Some definitions of community capacity-building are overarching in nature. Others foreground processes, or are anchored in an explicit purpose, or are linked to concepts such as social capital (Verity, 2007). Importantly, community capacity-building is both an intervention process and an outcome. This flexibility of
usage, which has proved attractive to many, is also a source of weakness. The much smaller quotient of critical literature about these issues is considered below.

There are many overlapping descriptions of how community capacity building works. It operates at the individual, group, organisational, programmatic, and wider environmental levels (Verity, 2007; Foster-Fishman et al, 2001). In approach it may be top-down, bottom-up, create partnerships, or involve community organising. There are various types of community involved: geographical (e.g. rural vs metropolitan), demographic (e.g. indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), and intentional communities of friendship, shared interests, and occupation/vocation (e.g. schools, workplaces, cyber etc.). The key prerequisites for building community capacity include participation and leadership; the cultivation and use of knowledge, skills, structures, systems and resources; social and inter-agency networks; and the sense of community and commitment among community members. Also important are a community’s understanding of its own history and its aptitude to critically reflect, the way in which power is exercised within communities, and the norms, values and sense of shared purpose that a community espouses (Goodman et al, 1998; see also Norton et al, 2002; Verity, 2007). These might be interpreted as inclusive of a more progressive view of capacity-building. Some programs note the importance of community readiness and receptivity as key dimensions of capacity (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005).

**Strengths**

Proponents of community capacity-building refer to the potential for empowerment of communities, development of skills, knowledge and resources, improved linkages and partnerships, and health gains (Chapman and Kirk, 2001). The concept and practice of community capacity-building is relevant to situations where communities are required to collectively solve problems. This is exemplified in particular in the aftermath of disasters. Models of intervention can be presented that may enable communities to respond to their own challenges (Chaskin, 2001).

**Measures**

There have been various attempts to measure community capacity building (see for example Aspen Institute, 2004; Liberato et al 2011). Nevertheless, given the confusion between outcome and process in community capacity-building, this is a vexed area. The proposed outcome for community capacity-building is community well-being, for which there are various indicators— for example the social, environmental and economic realms and their intersection (Miles et al, 2008; Stubbs et al, 2009); or the framework of community indicators such as that developed in Victoria, which refers to and elaborates on five major domains including:
• Healthy, safe and inclusive communities;
• Dynamic, resilient local economies;
• Sustainable built and natural environments;
• Culturally rich and vibrant communities; and
• Democratic and engaged communities (Heine, et al., 2006).

However, although there are many models, strategies and descriptions in practice, the lack of common agreement on a definition of community capacity-building means that there are no universally agreed measures of process.

**Critique**

The concepts of ‘community’ and ‘community capacity’ are imprecise and poorly theorised (Freudenberg, Pastor, & Israel, 2011). One problem relates to researching and understanding this area. The nebulousness of community capacity-building, and the fact that it is both an intervention process and an outcome, creates a dilemma. While it is therefore not impossible to study changes over time, it may be difficult to understand how the changes occur, and to differentiate cause from effect.

Another fundamental concern relates to values and power. Communities are sometimes assumed to be ‘safe’ and community capacity building is frequently assumed to be intrinsically valuable. In parallel with this, the term ‘community’ may be used across the political spectrum to designate a wide range of activities that are supposedly unrelated to values, power and resources. However ‘community’ has progressive or conservative interpretations, which in Australia may hinge on changing historical usage. Everingham (2001) presents evidence that earlier use referred to community action by local organisations and disadvantaged groups regarding issues of access, equity and rights, with whose representatives the state actively worked since they were seen as closer to the people. In this model, the state is conceived as part of the community. In the 1990’s there was a shift in Australian social policy from issues of social justice to questions of social order. ‘Community’ was disconnected from advocacy and represented as one partner, or alternatively as a neutral ground, in a state-sponsored meeting of businesses, charities, religious organisations, universities and the like. In this meeting, the state is often a player, a funder and a manager, governing the same territory, even though other players are asked to accept more responsibility for the game’s outcome (Verity, 2007; Everingham, 2001).
The imagined community behind this is commonly a free cooperative venture for individual advantage, where individuals’ interests are defined as pre- eminent (Mulhall and Swift 1992:15). In this contractual model, communities are a means to various individual ends rather than a means of self-understanding. In addition some people, for example those with various disabilities, may be unable to contract or join the market and therefore may find themselves outsiders. They therefore can easily become ‘the Other’. For example, the rhetoric of welfare reform and governments’ ‘workfare’ programs of ‘mutual obligation’ have been chiefly directed at those on welfare assistance (Everingham, 2001), who have ‘fallen by the wayside’ and need to be reintegrated into the community: this process is often not voluntary. Feminists have characterised this model as neoliberal and have criticised it for its masculinist bias, utilitarian view of relationships, economically self-sufficient view of families, and failure to address the issues of women’s labour and participation (Everingham, 2001). These observations are particularly the case for capacity-building in Australian Indigenous communities, where power imbalances with governments are paramount, institutional arrangements and services are fragmented and complex, programs are short-term and under-resourced, and indigenous participation in policy formulation is often limited at best (Hunt et al, 2005). For young people trying to get jobs in rural areas, many communities have declined. There are also issues of expert knowledge and professional power in researching communities (Shaver and Tudball, 2001).

A key issue therefore is whose interests community capacity building programs serve. This is of particular concern for some allegedly apolitical accounts of community capacity building, which neglect conflict and may seem oblivious of issues of power, status and resources; or which assume that capacity building will allow communities to take more control and responsibility for their own development. Government-fostered community capacity-building may have more to do with strengthening governmental agendas than community empowerment, argues Mowbray (2005). Social change cannot be simply laid at the feet of communities, especially when the levers for change are located at much higher levels. Some social change may be outside the sphere of influence of communities no matter how robust, vibrant and caring they may be (Verity, 2007).

A detailed discussion of communitarianism and its relationship to liberalism is outside the scope of this critique. However the prerequisites for community capacity listed above illuminate the above point. Some (participation and leadership; cultivation and use of knowledge, skills, structures, systems and resources; social and inter-agency networks; sense of commitment among community members) generally appear descriptive of community functions. Other items that refer to the community’s sense of history, power and values may foster critical awareness of how a community
operates and have the capacity to effect changes in the way power is distributed (Goodman et al, 1998). It is thus evident that the term ‘community’ that underpins community capacity may purport to be apolitical, or be alert to issues of power and resources. Community capacity-building is ambiguous about this all-important latter dimension.

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Social capital

**Definitions**

Social capital described as ‘a slippery but important concept’ (Onyx and Bullen 2000) has been debated extensively over the past three decades. Conceptions of social capital developed in parallel to understandings of human capital, physical/financial capital, political capital, natural capital, cultural capital and built capital (Chaskin et al 2001, Bourdieu 1986). There are overlaps between these capitals, yet social capital emerges as distinguished among the capitals (Magis 2010).

While definitional consensus of social capital is still lacking, most definitions maintain that social capital includes social networks, norms, trust and civic engagement (Bourdieu, 1993; Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1996). Social capital is defined by Stone (2001) as the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively. Social capital, she argues, is:

- A multidimensional concept comprising social networks, norms of trust and norms of reciprocity.
- Social capital is a resource to action (i.e. norms of reciprocity need to exist before civic engagement might be considered)
- Empirically distinct from outcomes.

Confusion over what social capital is and how it can be demonstrated is exacerbated by two fundamentally different approaches to understanding social capital. On the one hand social capital can be briefly defined as ‘a resource to collective action’. Most specifically this resource is the trust and reciprocity which exists within social networks that enable collective action to take place (Winter 2000). On the other hand, a more individualist perspective such as that described by both Coleman and Bourdieu defines it as the collection of resources owned by the members in an
individual’s personal social network, which may become available to the individual as a result of the history of these relationships (Van der Gaag and Snijders 2003). Social capital can be the glue which holds a community together or it can be the resources to which an individual has access and use, via her/his networks. Despite the difference in emphasis on the benefits of social capital what is consistent in all understandings of social capital is that it is premised upon notions of sharing (Bolzan, Gale and Skelton 2004).

Although difficult to define, social capital is generally accepted as referring to the processes between people which establish networks and norms, as well as social trust and which facilitates co-operation for mutual benefit (Putnam 2000). The literature defines three types of social capital; bonding, concerned with the ties that occur within communities; bridging which links heterogeneous communities; and linking which describes vertical connections such as those between political elites and the public, or between social classes (Kearns 2003). Within the literature a couple of readings of the nature of social capital are identified and debated. One reading coalesces around themes of the importance of consensus around quite tightly prescribed social norms. In other accounts, an acceptance of difference around quite tightly prescribed social norms. In other accounts, an acceptance of difference within a participative community is highlighted (Bolzan, Gale and Skelton 2004).

**Strengths**

Social capital can have powerful effects on the level and efficiency of production and well-being (Coleman 1988-9; Putnam 2000; OECD 2001; Woolcock 2001). A strength of the form of social capital known as bridging capital, is that it brings diverse and differently situated people together (Putnam 2000) enabling dissemination of ideas and resources across greater social distances and a greater number of people (Granovetter 1973). Thus resource availability is increased and people may also access a wider range of identities, which in turn enables additional bridging. The form of social capital known as ‘linking capital’, closely connected to bridging capital, centres on vertical relationships between networks and those with authority such as governments (Woolock 2001). Linking capital is said to be especially important for communities which are poor in resources (Magis 2010). In sum, social capital has been discussed in the literature as having the potential to diminish exclusion and marginality and act as an antidote to individualism and the erosion of social bonds. Some have taken this further arguing that social capital can ameliorate or even challenge socio-economic class disadvantage (Coleman 1988-9; Lauglo 2000).

**Measures**

The Australian Social Capital Framework, described by Edwards (2004), and developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, is a conceptual framework as well as proposing indicators for
measuring social capital. It has contributed to international dialogue around synchronisation of social capital data for international comparisons.

Onyx and Bullen (2000) and surveyed five Australian communities on factors of social capital then subjected findings to statistical analysis and identified three specific factors of community participation, agency and trust. The five communities, however, were found to differ significantly in terms of general and specific factors (see also Onyx, Wood, Bullen and Osburn 2005)

The Social Capital Community Benchmark survey, designed and developed by The Saguaro Seminar, led by Robert Putnam, of the Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard University, aims to provide a baseline in strengths and deficits in civic behaviour against which intervention can be measured.

While these are some of the more well known approaches which aim to measure social capital, many indicators of social capital have been developed and they all measure similar sorts of things.

The definition of social capital, as the shared norms and social relationships which provide a resource to action, clarifies what has been seen as the tautological problem with the concept of social capital. The finding that communities with high social capital have strong growth and the social capital is necessary for strong growth creates confusion concerning social capital. This confusion is further exacerbated by what Winter calls the ‘measurement rush’ (2000), resulting in confusion between the outcomes of social capital and social capital itself.

Generally all measures include some assessment of participation in local community, or civic engagement, as a sign that high social capital exists. This is a good example of where an indicator has been confused with what it purports to investigate. If you have high social capital you will participate in civic activities, but participation in civic activities provides you with social capital.

One of the other limitations of such indicators is that reliance on surrogates as indicators for social capital fails to reveal any social capital which falls outside such preselected sets of indicators. This is particularly important in the case of young people. The decision not to participate may be a very conscious decision based on a person’s social capital, that is the norms and expectations which exist in one’s own social network, rather than a sign that social capital is missing (Bolzan, Skelton and Gale 2004). Young people who do not go to school, or attend formal or socially acknowledged groups or organisations, for example, are said to be low on social capital. This may not necessarily be the case.

The social capital marginalised young people talk about is not necessarily that which would be captured in standard surveys of social capital. Being part of a network of young people who steal
cars for a variety of reasons provides young people with a set of norms and a degree of reciprocity consistent with social capital. It may put them at odds with the norms and expectations of the mainstream society, but marginalised young people do not experience mainstream society as a place in which they share norms of trust and reciprocity (Bolzan, Skelton and Gale 2004; Gale and Bolzan 2008).

Similarly, Indigenous young people who suffer multiple disadvantage, are marginalised in relation to mainstream social capital; yet they may also have access to unique resources, such as indigenous cultural knowledges, which may be a vital part of understanding social capital in their case. Baum (2007, p94) finds that limited attempts have been made to bridging the social capital between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, which leads to the exclusion of Indigenous Australians from economic, educational and social life in Australia. Effective legislation to prevent exploitation of such cultural knowledge, and harnessing digital technology, are just two approaches that are being explored in building social capital with indigenous young people (e.g. Malezar 2011; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2009; Bandias, 2010).

**Critique**

Both bridging and bonding social capital are needed for building inclusive and diverse networks, problem solving and facilitating collective action. A key concern, however, in social capital critiques is that dense networks and bonding capital can segregate a group and obstruct networking with other groups and networks. Communities may then become organised into small closed networks and homogeneity is maintained within the network (Putnam 2000). Marginalised young people, for example, often experience little if any social capital in mainstream society (Bolzan et al 2004; Gale and Bolzan 2008). They frequently create parallel sites of social capital to that offered in mainstream society. These are sites which afford them norms of trust and reciprocity and which can act as a resource to collective action. Such sites are not part of the indicators which are normally taken as measures of social capital. Marginalised young people’s social capital can be therefore invisible.

Young people, even the most marginalised have suggested they are eager to join with networks of adults in which trust and reciprocity exist and that act as a resource to collective action (Bolzan et al 2004; Gale and Bolzan 2008).

While there is considerable consensus that social capital describes important relations, and literature about it and its application continues to grow, some critics argue that the term ‘social capital’ is misleading. Social capital is conceptualised differently to other forms of capital. Capital is
said to be a thing possessed by individuals, so that even a socially isolated person can have capital; however the attributes of social capital such as trust and norms of reciprocity, describe relationships among people (Bowles 1999). Capital is also seen as being depleted by utilisation, but social capital is depleted by not being utilised (Haynes 2009).

In much of the literature, social capital has been construed as positive, but there have also been discussions of negative social capital, where trust is high in social networks that might be regarded as ethically dubious. Some authors also argue that if trust, value-sharing and common objectives are crucial to social capital, this suggests a view of social relations that is consensual. Thus they question its capacity to account for conflict (Schuller 2000).

Notwithstanding its critique, overall social capital emerges in the literature as an important and useful concept.

### Social inclusion

#### Definitions

Social inclusion and exclusion have had significant uptake among governments and civil society organisations in various Western democracies. The terms have their origins in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in France, where social exclusion was first enunciated and then progressively expanded; and in Anglo-American discourse where there was disquiet about the limitations of income poverty as a measure for social disadvantage (Hunter and Jordan 2010). Social inclusion and exclusion have been well accepted in Australia recently, the political forerunner being the Rann Labor Government’s Social Inclusion Initiative in South Australia in 2002. The Rudd Federal Labor government created a Ministry for Social Inclusion, a Social Inclusion Board and a national agenda and framework on social inclusion, entitled ‘A Stronger, Fairer Australia’. With four pillars of opportunity and capability for Australians to ‘learn’, ‘work’, ‘engage’, and ‘have a voice’, the Framework has particularly targeted jobless families, children at risk and in poverty, homeless people, Indigenous Australians, those with disabilities, and those facing multiple disadvantages (Hayes et al, 2008). Similarly, the Victorian Government’s framework, A Fairer Victoria, in addition to these groups, has sought to address disadvantage and create opportunities for refugees (Silver 2010). Social inclusion policies are underway in Indigenous communities and community-based organisations such as the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, the Smith Family, Mission Australia and Anglicare have implemented social inclusion programs to address homelessness (Hayes et al, 2008; Suicide Prevention Australia 2011).
Just as there is no agreed definition of society or community, so social inclusion and social exclusion also are not clearly defined. Some have argued that they are notoriously dependent on context – dependent on a particular vision of belonging, membership and integration – and thus difficult to define. Histories of how exclusion occurs and is perpetuated are vital to understanding social exclusion (Silver, 2010). Social inclusion and social exclusion are relative to social norms and expectations, they result from the agency of some individual, group or institution, and they are not just the result of current circumstances (Atkinson, 1998). While involving individuals, these are social processes involving social environments. Social inclusion and social exclusion are multidimensional in scope, involving economic, social and political dimensions, and encompassing equity, human rights, and participation. Exclusion in particular may also entail denial of or disconnection and disengagement from goods, resources and services (Levitas et al, 2007, p9; Suicide Prevention Australia, 2011). It may be wide (a large number of people being excluded on a single or small number of indicators); deep (exclusion on multiple or overlapping dimensions, often more entrenched); or concentrated (a geographical concentration of problems) (Hayes et al, 2008).

The ambiguities surrounding community capacity building also affect social inclusion/exclusion. For example, the paradigm as expounded in Europe identifies blockages to social engagement and the various causes and effects of marginalisation (Scutella et al. 2009). Yet, in Anglo-American liberal traditions, the concept of social exclusion emphasises individuals selectively exercising their choices and preferences in networks of voluntary exchanges (Suicide Prevention Australia, 2011).

**Strengths**

The concepts of social inclusion and exclusion transcend traditional approaches to disadvantage that focus on poverty. The concepts give wider accounts of marginality, minority and disability, and the multiple and localised aspects of disadvantage; as well as being used to promote participation, accountability, non-discrimination and empowerment. Moreover, they link to human rights standards, supplanting welfare agendas with rights agendas (Szoke, 2009). As frameworks, they have been deployed to interpret and respond to the social determinants of disadvantage, including the categories just mentioned (Queensland Alliance 2010; Long 2010). Proponents of social inclusion state that it incorporates a progressive approach rather than seeking to delineate differences, and argue that it is a means for achieving social justice (Government of South Australia 2006). Australia’s approach echoes the EU’s focus on full participation in economic, social and political life, (Silver 2010; Long 2010).
**Measures**

Various types of data (e.g. survey and census, administrative, longitudinal) have been used to measure social exclusion or inclusion: and some studies that measure social inclusion/exclusion explicitly invoke social capital as part of the measurement process (Spoehr et al 2007). However, the degree to which they reflect the phenomena in question is debatable, and there are no universally accepted measures. Hence the indicators mirror the viewpoint of the observer about the phenomena and the available sources of data (Hayes et al, 2008; Levitas et al, 2007; Hunter and Jordan, 2010). As with community capacity-building, it is difficult in particular to capture the processes that entrench disadvantage over time.

**Critique**

Similar to community capacity-building, there is an assumption that social inclusion is a ‘good thing’, and that there are positive outcomes from it, for health and well-being. Why is social inclusion valuable, what are the effects of social exclusion, and is there some necessary or optimal level of participation? Like certain versions of ‘community’, the emphasis on integration and cohesion in social inclusion, its normative or ideal force, leaves it open to alignments with social conformity and conventionality. If social inclusion/exclusion establishes a dichotomy between those who are ‘in’ and those who are ‘out’, maintaining group boundaries, how does this not potentially reinforce divisions and embed stigma? Who identifies those who are socially excluded, and does this correspond with their self-understanding (Hayes et al, 2008; Long, 2010; Silver, 2010)? Notions of cultural pluralism or multiculturalism may be seen as inevitable for effective, non-coercive social inclusion. However, these also beg questions about how one defines cultures and the meaning of inclusion, social justice and human rights; they also leave open important issues of equity, participation and access to resources (Freeman, 2002; Donnelly, 2003).

There are also definitional issues. Like community capacity-building and social capital, social inclusion and exclusion have been criticized for their imprecision. They are not necessarily opposites: the latter deals with social problems, the former with social membership (Silver, 2010). Who is socially excluded/included, and how: what criteria will be used for these states, and are there dynamic processes underpinning them? What are the differences between wide, deep and concentrated exclusion (sometimes one person may experience simultaneous inclusion and exclusion)? A focus on unemployment, in particular, may ignore other causes of social exclusion and reflect the valuing of paid work over unpaid. Programs that encourage (‘incentivise’) or coerce
people into work also fail to consider that some labour market participation may drive social exclusion (through low pay, stress, occupational health and safety hazards, fractured family and social relationships, casual or temporary employment). Indigenous people for instance may have different aspirations - and the focus on the labour market neglects their exclusion from land which is significant to the market. Indigenous-centred design in particular is important for policy implementation (Hunter and Jordan, 2010; Hayes et al, 2008; Long, 2010).

Finally, what processes or interventions demonstrably ‘bridge the gap’? How far are governments responsible for building inclusion, and are all or only some worthy of assistance? Will ‘the excluded’ be consulted and freely participate in social inclusion? What emerges as important from the literature is the avoidance of simply re-branding current government initiatives and instead, actively involving citizens in defining and re-designing responses to their communities problems.

**Well-Being**

**Definitions**

‘Community Well-being’ and community wellbeing indicators like closely related proceeding areas have generated a prolific literature. The concept of wellbeing may be considered philosophically – to do with concepts of the ‘good life’ - or empirically – to do with conditions that facilitate or protect against problems, or factors that may offer solutions to such problems (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010). Since wellbeing is such a wide-ranging concept, and measuring it involves mapping the whole of life, there is no single measure that will satisfy all parties (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). For demographers, however, it traditionally encompasses a range of domains (ie, population, family and community, health, education and training, work, economic resources, housing, crime and justice, and culture and leisure) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001, based on OECD, 1976). The concept of ‘community well-being’ has undergone definitional change, so that where a prosperous economy and ‘what people do for a living’ were once seen as the most important aspect of community well-being, now it is associated with a more holistic exploration of ‘how well people live’ (Stubbs et al 2009 p.15). This forms part of a move within economics and related disciplines away from narrow monetary definitions to broader considerations of human welfare. In broadening the definition of poverty to that of exclusion from participation in economic, social and other domains, Amartya Sen has invoked the concept of capabilities: substantive freedoms and opportunities for
doing and being that individuals may use to create valued outcomes. He thereby equates poverty with “capability deprivation” (1999).

Community wellbeing therefore has been defined as a concept that refers to an optimal quality of healthy community life, the ultimate goal of all the various processes and strategies that strive to meet identified community needs. It encapsulates the ideals of people living together harmoniously in vibrant and sustainable communities, where community dynamics are clearly underpinned by ‘social justice’ considerations (Rural Assist Information Network (RAIN), 2012). Indigenous concepts of wellbeing, in particular, explicitly operate with the broader considerations of human welfare just mentioned. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has described nine domains which attempt to provide a holistic view of Indigenous wellbeing, by including unique cultural and historical factors and distinctive elements of cultural difference. Elements such as ‘Culture, heritage and leisure’ and ‘Citizenship and governance’ are wider in scope than for the general Australian population and are of particular importance to Indigenous well-being (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

**Strengths**

Strengths of ‘well-being’ as a concept include its focus on prevention, health promotion and enhancement of the positive aspects of people’s lives, given understanding of their social contexts (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010). This is particularly important for young people. When as a group young people are not defined as being ‘at risk’, nor seen exclusively through the lenses of vulnerability and crisis, they can flourish and, paradoxically, escape negative outcomes (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2007).

The community well-being indicators contest the traditional position that community wellbeing is best gauged by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Wealth and wellbeing clearly do not connect, especially at higher levels of wellbeing. Also, GDP provides little direction about how to meet the needs of those in disparate situations in highly developed economies. Some authors discuss the value of the process of community indicator identification to enhancing community development (Fraser et al, 2006).

In this connection, indicators may improve consistency across government and non-government agencies in developing and evaluating initiatives to tackle social exclusion and enhance outcomes for marginalised groups. Indicators may also guide decisions regarding policy development and program
planning, informing data collection; and may enable socially excluded groups to dialogue with government about priorities and activities (ACT Government, 2007).

**Measures**

Indicators of community wellbeing, like the preceding approaches, have been popular in various Western countries (for example, the OECD Report on Progress – Society at a Glance, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, and the European Union Social Indicators). In Australia, they are known through initiatives such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ ‘Measuring Australia’s Progress’ and Community Indicators Victoria (CIV) and have been widely adopted at various levels of government (e.g. ACT Government, the City of Sydney, and local governments and government associations). As just noted and consistent with practice in the area of social inclusion/exclusion, these community indicators have moved beyond the concept of economic well-being to also incorporate the concepts of human, social and environmental well-being (or ‘capital').

**Critique**

Some critiques have concerned the choice of community wellbeing indicators: for example, some authors have observed the importance of truly measuring equitable, rather than average, outcomes (Baum and Fisher, 2011). Others have concerned their comprehensiveness: for example, some commentators have pleaded for qualitative indicators, reflecting a bottom-up approach to evaluation, as important complementary approaches to traditional quantitative indicators (Hall et al, 2009). The consultation implied here is vital for nuanced, layered understandings of its meaning for different groups. For example for young people speaking about this topic, the themes of personal agency, security and a positive sense of self emerge as crucial (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2007). Emerging areas of interest, such as ecological sustainability and change, also ensure that indicators will need continuous revision. Thus in response to the City of Sydney Wellbeing indicators, the multi-faith Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) (2012) has proposed that economic measures of prosperity should be supplemented by unpaid voluntary and domestic work and productive hobbies; that low carbon economies be supported through sharing floor space, reviewing jobs that require regular car travel/flying, promoting working from home, and increasing employment in green industries; and that greenhouse and energy issues be addressed through disaggregating greenhouse gas emissions by business and industry versus households; promoting high energy efficiency standards and technologies; improving access,
capacity and use of public transport; enhancing availability of locally grown produce; and reducing consumption of meat and animal products.

Other fundamental readings, however, have criticised the overall scope of community health and well-being indicators, as traditionally conceived. For example, Denaio et al (2012) in discussing appropriate health promotion for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have questioned the whole emphasis of indicators on ‘targeting’, ‘intervening’ and ‘responding’. Instead they have referenced the WHO and Global Alliance for Health Promotion’s ‘Culturally Appropriate Health Promotion’ framework, which highlights respect for understanding and utilising local knowledge and culture in active collaboration with communities as essential for any meaningful progress in closing the gap with Indigenous people. These observations are consonant with comments above about the need for wellbeing indicators to have a wide scope and be inclusive of a range of knowledges.

The question of the connection between indicators and effective interventions to achieve them is still unclear, particularly given (as noted in previous sections) the continuing challenge of differentiating process from outcome, and cause from effect. Despite the potential value of indicators, the pragmatics of how they may enable excluded groups to participate and overcome structural barriers remains to be tested. One analysis of the recent Australian government preventative program ‘Taking Preventative Action’ observes its aim to promote social equity is jeopardised by its emphasising individual ‘lifestyle’ risk factors or health behaviours (such as tobacco, obesity, and excess alcohol) (Baum and Fisher, 2011). For example, awareness-raising to control smoking in indigenous communities should be complemented by addressing documented social and historical determinants of Indigenous smoking, such as membership of the stolen generations and participation in land management (Baum and Fisher, 2011). This is especially so given that educational level and particularly economic resources are the most powerful determinants of current smoking (Layte and Whelan, 2009). Furthermore, Baum and Fisher (2011) cite evidence (Alvaro et al, 2011; Layte and Whelan, 2009) that social marketing campaigns which target individual risk factors effectively widen the health gap because they have much greater uptake with higher than lower socio-economic populations and other marginalised groups. The widening gap may also be observed internationally: again concerning smoking, richer inhabitants of rich countries and better resourced communities have generally stopped the habit, aligning with a shift in public opinion in this regard; but tobacco companies have been cultivating markets and communities in low income countries, where smoking is still socially acceptable and uptake is growing or stable (Slama, 2010). By contrast the Closing the Gap campaign for Indigenous
Australians which considers education and employment provides a more robust basis for tackling social determinants, while the Social Inclusion Agenda also deploys labour market participation and place-based initiatives to improve the lives of very marginal people (Baum and Fisher, 2011). Extricating indicators and policies from the purely individual risk focus also requires ‘whole of government’ approaches and cross-sectoral collective action (Alvaro et al, 2011).

Community Resilience

Definitions

While definitions of community resilience abound, basically it has been defined as the capacity of groups to withstand, recover from, and respond positively to crisis or adversity. Community resilience has been described as having three properties: resistance, recovery and creativity. Resistance is disruption accommodated without the community undergoing long term change. Recovery is the community’s ability to survive or return to its pre-disaster state. Creativity refers to the community’s ability to learn and develop from a crisis or disaster. Highly resilient communities are highly endowed with these three characteristics (Murray and Zautra 2012). Just as community disruptions include various stressors, risks, threats or adversities (Ahmed, Seedat, van Niekerk and Bulbulia 2004; Berkes and Seixas 2005; Magis 2010), so community resilience encompasses concepts such as vulnerability, recovery, preparedness, and social and economic capital. It is a dynamic process which varies with time and circumstances (Wickes et al, 2011, pp63, 65).

Some community resilience literature highlights community ability and strategies to withstand natural hazards and disasters and one-off times of crisis (for example Spence, 2012; Tobin, 1999). Resilience here is a reaction or adaptation to a threat which dissipates once the threat is no longer present, implying a return to the previous state (Zautra et al 2010; Magis 2010). Thus the system is able to tolerate disturbances while retaining its pre-threat structure and function (Fiksel, in Zautra 2009). In the social sciences, this idea translates as the ability of communities to withstand disturbances so to maintain their social infrastructures (Adger 2000). Other literature emphasises processes that go beyond practical disaster response (Wickes Zahnow and Mazerolle 2011; Chenowith and Stehlik 2001). For example, some authors regard community resiliency as the capacity of community members to engage in community action projects within the context of their community despite constraining events and structures (Brown and Kulig 1996/97). Community resilience has no ‘integrated theoretical model ‘ (2011 p. 65); yet its different forms of definition may arguably offer possibilities for ‘more textured and richer understandings’ (Kent and Davis 2011). Magis (2010, p410), describing how community resilience can be applied in praxis, divides it into actionable, observable and measurable elements, and identifies the following dimensions:
Community resources, Development of community resources, Engagement of community resources, Active agents, Collective action, Strategic action and Equity. Since communities are capable of developing their own resilience, this active agency may be included as a community resilience dimension (2010; see also Chenowith and Stehlick 2001; Ahmed et al. 2004; Davis et al. 2005; Jackson et al. 2004)).

**Strengths**

While variation in resilience capacity has been found among communities (Pelling 2003; Vale and Campanella 2005; Chaskin, Brown Venkatesh and Vidal 2001) with some communities better able ‘to maintain growth and development and to respond to stressors such as economic downturns or natural disasters’ (Zautra, Hall and Murray 2011), communities are seen to have the ability to develop resiliency (Ahmed et al 2004). Resilience is not a fixed quantity within communities but rather can be fostered and strengthened over time (Magis 2010). The more diverse and complex the system, the better it is seen to cope with external disturbance, so diversity within networks along with links across networks is viewed as critical to community resiliency (Ahmed et al 2004).

In looking at the sustainability of communities within forest areas in Canada, social scientists recommended the community resilience approach rather than the community capacity approach. They argued that as these communities were affected by change the indicator used needed to focus on community capability with regard to change whereas community capacity they noted focused on capacity in general. Hence community resilience was selected as the new indicator to recommend for addition to the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicator suite (Magis 2010.)

Community resilience recognises the significance of local and indigenous knowledges, experience and understanding carried by community members (Berkes, Colding and Folke 2003) and actively draws on and integrates this. In fact, as previously noted, communities have a significant and unique role in developing their community’s resilience (Magis 2010; Chenowith and Stehlik 2001).

**Measures**

Approaches in the literature aiming to measure community resilience are many and varied. One approach to measures of community resiliency has involved appraising various forms of community capital (social capital, human capital, physical capital etc. see Social Capital discussion in this document) held by the community (Williams 2004). The Community Capitals Framework is a comprehensive example of this type of approach (Emery and Flora 2006). Of the community
capitals, social capital in particular is found to play prominent role (Emery and Flora 2006; Laverack 2001). Other examples include the Community Resilience Project, established to respond to changes facing small resource-dependent communities in British Columbia. This group developed the Community Resilience Manual which includes an assessment of community resiliency and an approach for developing a plan to foster community resilience. It focuses on building local capacity (Colussi 2000; Community Resilience Project Team 1999; Zautra et al 2011). Yet another example is ‘THRIVE: A Community Resilience Assessment Tool’ is one approach to social and community resilience development and measure designed to identify and develop community and social level resources that promote positive outcomes especially around health and safety (Davis et al 2005).

Despite advances in identifying factors of community resilience capacity, measuring factors of community resilience is notably difficult from a quantitative frame. There is little ‘hard data with which to discern how best to conceptualise and assess [factors of community resilience capacity]’ (Zautra et al 2011, Flower 1994). Moreover, uncertainties still persist in community research about how to define communities and isolate their effects beyond individual variables (Zautra et al 2011).

In the main, however, there is a consensus in community resilience literature that communities are the most appropriate unit of analysis for community issues such as community resilience (in particular communities are seen to be unique and make unique responses to change). There is also broad consensus that as communities are continually changing and resilience needs to be sustainable, any attempt to measure resiliency must match the dynamic nature of communities and so longitudinal observation is recommended (Murray and Zautra 2012; Zautra et al 2011; Jackson et al 2004; Colussi 2000).

**Critique**

Definitions of community resilience, generally cast it as adaptation and or renewal. However, some disturbances push systems to thresholds at which minor adaptations are no longer sufficient. Rather, the system must undergo significant transformations. These transformations are healthy and necessary for the systems’ continued survival (Magis 2010; Berkes and Seixas 2005; Smit and Wandel 2006) and such transformation is integral to the sustainability of any community in the face of disturbances of such proportions (Magis 2010).

Studies in socio-ecological systems, indicate that resilience includes not only sustenance and renewal, but also occasional transformation:
'the most appropriate response to systems disruption will vary from maintenance to adaptation to transformation. This more complete rendering of resilience shifts attention from controlling change in presumably stable community systems to managing the capacity of dynamic communities to cope with, adapt to and shape change (Berkes and Sexias 2005; Smit and Wandel 2006). It reinforces the notion of change as a constant in communities. Hence, it is resilience, not community stability, that is required for communities to thrive. Finally, it highlights the need for communities to develop the capacity to respond to, create, survive in and thrive in change’ (Magis 2010)

Thus resilience is beginning to be conceptualised not as simply or only adaptation, but as transformation. Writing in the field of education McMahon also comes to the point where she suggests that educators need to move from a compliance stance toward a transformational perspective of resilience (McMahon 2006). This approach has yet to be considered in light of response to a sustained threat. Previous work in the field of resilience has not fully considered the response required to an ongoing threat such as those associated with globalisation or climate change (Zautra et al 2010). Such threats may require a substantial change in functioning and a revision in ways of being that may need to be transforming. Current work around resilience has brought us to a point where we now need to investigate the capacity of resilience to assist communities’ living with chronic adversity, and how this resilience can be sustained (Zautra et al 2011; Chenowith and Stehlik 2001; Bolzan and Gale 2011). We now need to investigate the capacity of resilience to transform communities (see Zautra et al 2010; McMahon 2010). To date resilience research has shifted toward an appreciation of the importance of community in understanding resilience and has begun to focus on the permanence of the change brought about in terms of sustainability, but what is missing in the community resilience scholarship is how resilience might be invoked in the absence of any one, critical catalyst type event.

Social Resilience

Definitions

Conceptualising ‘social’ resilience is an attempt to gain a contextualised and less individually dependant understanding of resilience and one which articulates a structural, relational and communal aspect to resilience. Bottrell’s (2009) work suggests the importance of defining social resilience when she articulates the significance of social identities and normative constructions of positive outcomes in ‘defining’ young people, for example.
Resilience has been receiving a great deal of attention over the past 50 years, particularly as an important quality or capacity contributing to the overall wellbeing and health of young people (Healey, 2007). Several phases of research into resilience have occurred over this time. Focus has shifted from resilience as a quality of individuals to one of relations (Rutter, 2010) and cultural contexts (Ungar, 2008) leading to questions of how people, for example, young people, contextualized within their own communities or societies may cope and even thrive in the face of adversity. This approach emphasises the collective and relational nature of resilience, and the link between people and their context. Although defining social resilience remains slippery (Bottrell, 2009; Rutter, 2010), researchers have developed some understanding of how collectives might demonstrate social resilience. Reich et al. (2010) observes that social resilience concerns not only social networks and their capacity to deal with crises, but also the sustainability of such interconnected relationships. Zautra et al. (2010) argues social connection to be the central element in sustaining social resilience, while Fine et al. (2009) suggests responsiveness to social needs is key.

There is increasing recognition that different populations conceptualise and understand resilience in different ways (Rutter, 2010; Ungar, 2004, 2008). Considering young people as an example in their work, Bolzan and Gale (2011 a & 2011 b) emphasise the importance of understanding social resilience from the perspective of marginalised youth. As Boyden (2003) points out resilience it is still very much studied in relation to normative ideas of children in North America and Europe. Consequently, until we can more thoughtfully access the knowledges from marginalized youth living in highly stressful situations we will remain locked in adult, western-centric constructions of resilience, and our understandings and practices will remain limited (Boyden 2003).

A defining feature of social resilience is its focus on social and economic disadvantage. This includes charting the influence of economic political and historical factors, in which social life occurs, on the resilience of diverse groups in the community. Work in social resilience has evolved, in part, as a response to the way in which social determinants of resilience can become obscured by a focus on particular individual risk factors in understandings of resilience which primarily focus on the individual. (In the juvenile justice system, for example, a person's gender, being male, and their cultural identity, such as being Indigenous, are reduced to individual 'risk factors' (Cunneen, 2008, p. 53)). Certain characteristics are reinterpreted as representing the failings of individuals rather than as the outcomes of inequality, discrimination and lack of opportunity, that is, as Choo argues, of long term systematic structural disadvantage and chronic adversity (1990).

In work on the contribution of the ‘social’ to resilience, chronic disadvantage can be understood in terms of 'the political economy of risk' (Boyden, 2003) which allows the burden of risk to fall more
heavily on some groups than others; particularly, for example, on minority cultural groups, such as CALD and Indigenous peoples.

Chronic adversity acts to create division and marginality in communities. Such threats may require a substantial change in functioning and fundamentally different transformed responses. In community resilience the circuit breaker for the status quo is a catastrophe or significant event, however the community returns to its pre-functioning status once the crisis resolves (Zautra et al. 2011). Social resilience, however, aims to change the status quo by introducing different elements and unsettling established power relations.

Given that chronic adversity can be conceived of as a threat without there necessarily being a flashpoint around which responses can coalesce, the issue then presented is how the transformative nature of social resilience may be invoked, for example, in communities experiencing chronic adversity? How does chronic adversity provoke a ‘resilience’ response in the same way that a catalyst type event might? This has been reframed as the question ‘what might interrupt the ‘circuit of dispossession’?’ (Fine 2010; Bolzan and Gale 2011a & b; Gale and Bolzan 2012).

Interrupting the ‘circuit of dispossession’ (Fine 2010) whether through an ‘interrupted space approach’ (Bolzan and Gale 2011b) or through other means, enables those factors identified as contributing to social resilience to be promoted i.e. through enabling changes in agency, established power relations, civic connectedness and community responsiveness. The invoking and development of social resilience with marginalised young people in their community contexts, for example, enabled traditional structural ‘boundaries’ between different social groups in the community, for example race and class divisions, to be opened up and crossed (Bolzan and Gale 2011b; Gale and Bolzan 2012).

**Strengths**

Social resilience has a strong theoretical platform, and draws from two main bodies of theory. Firstly its lineage is four waves of resilience research and theorising (Zautra et al. 2011), in particular, social resilience builds on understandings emerging from the fourth wave of relational resilience and community resilience. Secondly, social resilience as a concept draws on current work in critical post-modernism for insight in to the importance of dissolving dualisms (such as ‘marginalisation/inclusion’; ‘power/powerlessness’ and totalising identities [for example the
association of ‘Aboriginal young male’ with a problematic identity – see work by Cunneen 2008]) to promote unified, socially resilient communities.

In some key respects the social resilience paradigm consciously arises from reflections on the limitations of other paradigms and attempts to redress them. Hence the social resilience paradigm was developed with the limitations of resilience work developed in European and North America in mind. This has been built on normative ideas of young people in these settings however it has traditionally been imposed on Indigenous and CALD young people without their input. Social resilience work however, has enabled effective partnerships with groups such as young people, CALD and Aboriginal people; it puts their understanding at the centre of the approach (Gale and Bolzan 2012). Social resilience has been shown, for example, to have the capacity to be responsive to marginalised young people’s active participation in its formation and direction. The circularity here underlines the importance of social resilience as both process and outcome (Bolzan and Gale 2011b). Preliminary investigations suggest that whilst policy is moving towards incorporating Indigenous and local knowledges the imperative for this remains that social resilience has at its base an orientation towards participation of all groups in communities. It priorises marginalised groups in so far as they have previously been excluded.

Also, while community resilience has prototypically dealt with one-off crisis situations rather than chronically adverse situations, social resilience by contrast is about developing resilience in situations of chronic disadvantage, taking account of historical, political and social factors on the resilience of communities and groups. Social resilience is in its formative stages and its findings are provisional, but nevertheless are promising. They require grounding in further systematic research.

**Measures**

In much of the literature on community resilience there is blurring in the ways the terms ‘social resilience’ and ‘community resilience’ are used. They are often used interchangeably with no clear differentiation. Consequently measures described in research are confounded. Accommodation to this has been made by drawing on established writing in the area of community resilience and identifying those approaches which aim to measure change in chronic situations.

As resilience is posited as a response to risk, numerous assessments focus on vulnerable group or community risk (for example, Urban Hardship Index 2004; Community Stress Index (CSI) 2002; and
measures of neighbourhood problems (Steptoe and Feldman 2001). Preliminary work in social resilience by Magis (2010) and further work by Bolzan and Gale (2011 a & b) has identified factors of social resilience, however descriptive analyses identifying factors of community resilience are often critiqued in traditional quantitative resilience research as lacking integrative focus (Zautra et al 2011); it thus seems reasonable to assume this same critique may be applied to social resilience.

However, community resilience literature and the social resilience literature to date, maintain a consensus that for communities and community groups, such as young people, the most appropriate unit of analysis is at the level of the community. Moreover change is dynamic and social resilience, specifically, which aims for sustained change at a community level, therefore requires an approach of longitudinal observation (Zautra and Murray 2012; Jackson et al 2004; Colussi 2000).

Longitudinal studies may utilise case studies, focus groups, interviews, surveys and public meetings (Jackson et al 2004; Colussi 2000). Inclusion of qualitative evidence from life-changing narratives has also been suggested (McAdams, 2006). Easily measured social indicators such as employment, crime statistics and income levels may not be good measures of social and community resilience as they are too simplistic argues Colussi (2000). Local knowledge is seen to be crucial, as previously noted, and face to face interviews recommended to gather this kind of data (Magis 2010).

Information collected at the community level will most likely be embedded in customs, traditions and experience of community members and offer variety and rich detail (Magis 2010). Community and group level data should be shared with all interested community members, and social resilience indicators made available to communities to analyse their own resiliency, Magis proposes. Further, community level data may be aggregated to investigate issues of social resiliency from a state or national perspective (Magis 2010).

**Critique**

An understanding of resilience in the context of ‘the social’ is a fairly recent and fledgling development in the broader conceptualisation resilience. Social resilience is promising, however, this is a grossly under-researched area because social resilience is still formative. Research required needs to investigate: Those features of social resilience which are central to its sustainability, and to extend theorising of social resilience and sustained change. What enables resilience once involved to be sustained is still unclear, Zautra argues that social and civic connection appears to be a key feature in sustainable social resilience (2010) while others suggest responsiveness to social needs is central (Fine et al. 2007). Bolzan and Gale’s work suggests that while both these are important to
sustaining social resilience, structural change (in relation to chronic disadvantage) is perhaps most significant in the sustainability of social resilience (Bolzan and Gale 2011a &b). Thus an issue which remains to be clarified in future research concerns identifying those dimensions of social resilience which lead to sustained change (Reich et al 2010).

Research is required that considers the potential of social networking to contribute to social resilience. Some pressing questions include: Does the co-mingling of offline and online social worlds create new forms of social resilience? Does marginalised young peoples’ use of social networks contribute to building social resilience for them and their communities, or does it, as some social commentators suggest, undermine non-cyber communities? How can digital technology be used to engage young people in bringing about community change including as a mechanism for increased participatory citizenship of marginalised young people in their communities? There is the need for the provision of a range of practical, contextualised and evaluated interventions for communities wishing to foster resilience in young people, using technologies which are emerging as significant in their lives. Social resilience research to date (Bolzan and Gale 2011b, Gale and Bolzan 2012) also indicates that further development of mechanisms through which government can work in genuine partnerships with multiple voices in the community is necessary. Moreover, there is a need to ‘interrupt the space’ by which government is seen as distinct from community.

**Social Resilience in Practice**

The development of social resilience with Australian Indigenous young people in a rural community, as well as culturally and linguistically diverse young people (CALD) and homeless young people within the context of their socio-economically disadvantaged community has been explored by Bolzan and Gale (2011a &b; see also Gale and Bolzan 2012). The catalyst for invoking social resilience is interrupting ‘the circuit of dispossession’ (Fine & Ruglis 2009). While there may be many ways of doing this, Bolzan and Gale utilised what they term ‘interrupted spaces’ (Bolzan and Gale 2011b). This particular approach in which the young people direct the research and frame what social resilience might comprise for them from their values and perspectives is a form of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and is derived from Blaikie’s work (2007). It provides the opportunity for social actors to experience something different, something outside of their usual daily routine, and make meaning of it. Not only does it function as a research approach to investigate social resilience, it also serves as a scaffold for the participants - Indigenous young people, CALD and homeless young people - to experience the phenomena first hand by granting them a space to define and experience
social resilience for themselves. Marginalised young people may not have had any experience of 
social resilience and therefore may not be expected to engage in discussions of resilience. Moreover, 
there is increasing awareness among those working with young people to address the power 
imbalance which exists between adults and young people. This power imbalance is accentuated in 
particular for Indigenous young people. Reflecting on previous experiences in undertaking research 
with young people (Bolzan, Gale, & Skelton, 2004), Bolzan and Gale (2011b) sought to resolve the 
inevitable context of adult authority that even participatory approaches involve (Blackbeard & 
Lindegger, 2007) by turning over to the young people the rights and resources to explore social 
resilience as they understood it. Bolzan and Gale (2011b) recognised the limitations to the power 
that could be given to the young people, with the funding authority (Australian Research Council), 
ethical requirements, and power imbalances between adults and young people (Fleming, 2010) 
acting as constraints. The young people had the promise of responsibility over an 18-month project, 
with regular funding and a youth worker instructed to act as a resource for them. This was offered in 
the context of asking the three groups of young people to identify what they were concerned about 
in their communities, what they would like to change and an opportunity to ‘fix it’.

Thus, social resilience for these young people concerned being actively involved in defining what 
their concerns about the community were; creating solutions as well as opening up opportunities to 
a range of identities and resources. The young people all observed the importance of having agency 
and being authors of their own solutions (Bolzan and Gale 2011 a & b; Gale and Bolzan (2012), 
which, for Australian Indigenous young people was seen as particularly important in the broader 
context of the failure of imposed programs for Indigenous people (Green & Baldry, 2008). For the 
young people, a sense of safety or trust between themselves and members of their community, the 
valuing of their contribution by the broader community, and community responsiveness to their 
efforts at civic engagement was very important.

The action research underpinning the project in which social resilience was invoked and developed 
has a direct relationship to the counterfactual (Cummings, 2006) i.e. it is based on interrupting the 
normal cycle and daily events in order to allow the participants to experience something different. 
This approach was seen as being able to extend the understandings of social resilience by creating a 
space in which marginalised young people were able to explore new ways of being and to have their 
perspectives sought and respected by adults. The young people were able to forge resilient 
identities by doing as Bottrell (2009) reveals, breaking out of the social constructions which limited 
and defined them as ‘at-risk’. In this interrupted space they demonstrated how ‘the power of 
practical resource as well as discursive relations is central to disadvantaged young people’s
resilience’ (Bottrell 2009 p.326). Rather than the social cohesiveness of the community enforcing social standards of behaviour, what was observed was the accommodation of the young people into the social fabric of the community.

One result of invoking of social resilience with the young people is that effective partnerships have been established across a range of sectors. For example, the social resilience project that the Indigenous young men chose was to train and work with working dogs; naming their group ‘Paws Up’. An Indigenous community in central Australia invited Paws Up to their community to help them round up wild horses with the working dogs. In the wake of the Paws Up social resilience project, Aglads, an organisation created by the indigenous young men has negotiated with rural industries to provide employment for the farming sector, in particular meeting labour needs of local farmers. The same young Indigenous men have also established Iron Man Welders, which at first was unable to obtain insurance because of the age of the young people; however the local credit union in this rural community and a local insurance group collaborated to provide insurance. There are many examples of collaboration between community groups emerging from the Paws Up social resilience project. Some others include: the young indigenous men on the invitation of the local school taking the dogs to school and teaching school children how to handle the dogs; local nursing homes invite the young people to take their dogs to visit farmers who want to see ‘real working dogs’. The Indigenous young people also volunteered and travelled to those rural communities affected by severe flooding in early 2012, working to repair the damage caused. These Indigenous young men, from a NSW rural community and homeless young people from a disadvantaged, regional urban community in NSW, as a result of instigating processes of social resilience have established economic, educational and civic links into their broader communities. Thus social resilience in concept and practice has the potential to interrupt the circuit of dispossession.

In sum, social resilience is an emerging concept which has been under researched, yet offers a very clear direction for work aimed at unifying communities and sustainable community betterment.

CONCLUSIONS

There is much to recommend the various approaches described above, as noted in the sections that consider their strengths, however, all the community-strengthening constructs appraised are
characterised by imprecision – that is, by challenges with defining the core concepts and distinguishing causes from effects, and processes from outcomes. Some theoretical platforms for constructs (for example social capital and community indicators) have been well developed, but others are sketchy. Primarily descriptive methodologies have sometimes resulted from this, with underlying values assumptions often not being unpacked – for example, values regarding cultural diversity, inequity and notions of community ‘safety’. This is exemplified in some forms of community capacity building and some discussions of social inclusion and exclusion. Critical evaluation in some areas (for example community capacity-building, in which there is a proliferation of manuals, guidelines, toolkits, resource booklets) has been relatively infrequent.

There is also considerable overlap and borrowing between the approaches, for example some measures of community resilience which involve drawing on community capacities, and some approaches to community capacity-building and community resilience explicitly import social capital.

While the notion of ‘strengthening’ in ‘community-strengthening’ is one of action, some of these approaches are arguably about providing insights into what strengthens communities, without necessarily prompting or implying action approaches for change, that is practices through which change can be achieved. For example, community capacity-building and community indicators, while they provide benchmarks for well-being, do not in themselves suggest particular change strategies. However, social capital and community and social resilience offer an understanding and also delineate fundamental processes which can be evoked to realise change.

Another distinction which needs highlighting is that some approaches to community strengthening, for example social inclusion/social exclusion, have dichotomous underpinnings which potentially can accentuate divisions within communities. By contrast, approaches where those who have been seen as marginalised become central in community problem-solving (for example, through active agency, local knowledge, civic connectedness and community responsiveness), in effect may dissolve dualisms.

All of these approaches ostensibly deal with the social domain, and superficially at least, appear to avoid trying to resolve social problems in individual terms. However, in unpacking some community-strengthening approaches, it was found that some adopted individual level approaches to risk to tackle problems with social equity. For example, within the community well-being and indicators approaches, it was noted that the Australian Government’s preventative program ‘Taking Preventative Action’ focussed strongly on ‘individual’ lifestyle factors such as drugs and obesity
without also tackling social and historical factors (e.g. Stolen Generations, socio-economic disadvantage) that have a documented relationship to the perpetuation of these social problems.

The identification of ethical, community-designed and community-driven strategies that do not have inordinate expectations attached, which have workable timelines and are also appropriately resourced has proved elusive.

The last of these approaches, social resilience, is of particular interest because it implies catalytic, transformational change. It aims to dissolve dualisms in the quest to achieve a unified community. In the research available to date, the young people who are the main initiators of the change define the problem, and as active agents, implement solutions. Social resilience addresses key dimensions of power relations, civic connectedness and community responsiveness, interrupting what has been called ‘the circuit of dispossession’. Importantly, social resilience although emerging and under-researched, does present a strong theoretical platform for the frameworks that it offers for promoting unified communities.
REFERENCES


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