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Review of "Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life."

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Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life by Mario Small illustrates the importance of organizations in producing network-based inequality. Small's argues that organizations play an underappreciated role in social capital research. Organizations are important because network connections often develop inside of organizations and the broader organizational context in which a network connection develops can determine how much the connection is worth. Small contrasts his "organizational embeddedness" perspective with theoretical frameworks that have focused on network consequences as the expense of network origins; adopted a rational actor perspective, where actors develop network connections in pursuit of the benefits those connections can provide; and ignored the broader organizational context in which network connections develop. He illustrates the value of his perspective with Childcare centers in New York City. If you are wondering why Childcare centers, finish the book and you will appreciate the critical role centers play in the lives of many New Yorkers.

As a parent with young children, it was easy for me to empathize with Iris and Naomi as they evaluated the merits of their childcare alternatives. While making the decision, each mother's primary concern was her child's well being. Small demonstrates, however, that once a mother enrolled her child in a center, she often experienced significant improvements in her material well being, especially if she was poor and developed at least one friendship at the center. Since the network connections were unanticipated, the material gains were unanticipated as well.

Most mothers didn't pick a Childcare center with network connections in mind. The relationships that developed between mothers were a by-product of their involvement in a center. In chapter 3, Small discusses the numerous opportunities Childcare centers provided mothers to develop meaningful relationships with each other and the center, including the times a parent can drop-off or pick-up a child, parties, fund raisers, field trips, and spring cleaning. The activities are mundane but it would be a mistake to dismiss the importance of the connections that developed. Indeed, in chapter 5, Small illustrates the emotional and social support these connections provided. And yet, some mothers who developed a close bond limited their interaction to the domain of the center. Small calls these ties compartmentalized strong ties. I enjoyed reading chapter 4 and especially the section on compartmentalized strong ties. I found myself asking what kind of person was more likely to be involved in compartmentalized strong ties? What kinds of mothers were more likely to be connected by a compartmentalized strong tie? Where some organizations more likely than other organizations to produce compartmentalized strong ties?

The second half of the book focuses on the centers in which the mothers were embedded. Most centers did more than provide childcare. The centers provided information (e.g., nutritional and school system information), services (e.g., housing support and school entrance exam testing) and material goods (e.g., scholarships, meals, and toys). Childcare centers that maintained more collaborative and referral ties with other organizations could do more for their mothers. Indeed, the

numerous resources available at a Childcare center help to explain why simply having a child at a center could improve a mother's material well being. The link between social capital and inequality is most apparent in these chapters. In chapter 9, Small articulates his vision of organizations as a critical interface between individuals and a variety of important outcomes, including employment and healthcare.

There is much to like about *Unanticipated Gains*. Small integrates ideas developing in disparate literatures. He combines multiple ethnographies with survey methodologies and statistical analysis. And there is a great deal more to the book than I could cover in my review.

There are a number of instances, however, when I worried about how Small characterized social capital research. For example, while some social capital researchers have adopted a rational choice perspective, the vast majority would emphasize the dynamics (i.e., social similarity and opportunity) Small discussed in chapter 3 in producing network connections. Another example is Small's treatment of trust. If a woman had to unexpectedly stay at work late or if she was running late and wanted to avoid being fined by the center, she might ask a mother she didn't know to pick up and care for her child. Small maintains that this kind of behavior violates James Coleman's rational actor based model of trust. I am not so sure. While the women's behavior illustrated the importance of the center in their lives, their behavior did not undermine Coleman's framework. Coleman discusses intermediaries of trust and the Childcare center was an intermediary that made the women trustworthy. In particular, any mother who mistreated a child left in their care risked her standing at the center. I would hope that any mother who felt compelled by extenuating circumstances to leave her child in the hands of a woman she didn't know would weigh the potential benefits (e.g., continued employment or avoiding a fine) against the costs (e.g., harm to her child) and also consider the safeguards (e.g., damaging the stranger's reputation or standing at the center) she has at her disposal before making the decision.

Finally, Small contrasts his "organizational embeddedness" approach with social capital frameworks that have ignored the social context in which individuals operate. Social capital researchers have considered how contextual factors shape the value of network connections. For example, Ronald Burt has documented how the returns to being a broker vary with features of a person's job. Joel Podolny has shown how features of the market determine if a firm would be better off with status or being a broker. Thus, instead of ignoring social context, social capital researchers have made context central to their theorizing and empirical analysis. These moments, and there are more than a few, unnecessarily undermine what is otherwise an excellent book.