Social Capital and Social Justice: Why Liberalism Is Essential

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Abstract
Influential figures within communities are sometimes able to exploit their position and then leverage their social standing to avoid accountability, often in spite of their community's nominal commitment to just conduct. This outcome may lead individuals to blame social capital for injustice, abuse, and outcomes at odds with "social justice" (particularly social equality between racial, gender, ability, and other socially constructed groups). We argue that neither social capital nor hierarchies are to blame per se, but a lack of liberalism is. Hierarchies are more dangerous when individuals have fewer exit options and fewer alternative opportunities for social support and mutually beneficial exchange. Liberal institutions are necessary to foster the pluralism, polycentricity, and economic growth that create these types of exit options. To mitigate the abuses associated with hierarchy and social capital networks that face little competition, thoroughgoing liberalism that itself relies on social capital is necessary. Misdiagnosing the problem risks exacerbating it.

I. Introduction
In October 2017, the *New Yorker* released a report detailing the years of sexual harassment and assault Harvey Weinstein perpetrated against women in the entertainment industry. Despite numerous victims, extensive public attention, and even jokes about the matter on popular television programs like *30 Rock* over those years, it took an investigative report in the *New Yorker* to bring Weinstein to account. Why was a man who was well-known and who worked in a conspicuously public industry able to get away with such abuse? Why

was he not socially ostracized and professionally shunned long before reaching dozens of victims?

Weinstein's case is an instance of a more general phenomenon of individuals with substantial social influence evading responsibility for things that less influential individuals would never be able to get away with. These cases are generally surprising because interpersonal relationships are such an important part of their livelihoods. A high degree of social influence generally means lots of social connections, and lots of social connections generally means lots of monitoring.

We argue that Weinstein and others like him can get away with such objectionable behavior because of the perverse dynamics in organizational hierarchies. Such individuals can exploit their positions to force others into undesirable situations and abuse them. Social capital networks, which are likely to be present in concentrated industries, can exacerbate these dynamics, making densely connected hierarchies particularly prone to risk of abuse. We argue that the solution to these dynamics does not have to be, and in many cases cannot be, the abolition or abandonment of social capital, groups, or hierarchies. Instead, the solution is a set of institutions prized by liberal political theorists. By allowing individuals to freely exit groups and enter others, individuals may escape groups with perverse dynamics and find groups with desirable ones. Within a group, liberal organizational structures can help avoid social dynamics that facilitate abuse.

Our research contributes to at least three literatures. First, we contribute to the literature on organizational behavior in nonprice decision-making environments (Coase 1937; Alchian and Demsetz 1972). We discuss hierarchies' role in facilitating abusive behaviors and the (in)evitability of those dynamics, arguing that the nonprice dynamics and noncontestability of certain hierarchies and hierarchical positions enable abusers. Second, we contribute to the literature on social capital and economic behavior (Lin 2001; Granovetter 1973). We show how individuals with many social ties can use those ties to further their ability to act abusively and how institutional arrangements can help facilitate or prevent this abuse.

Third, we contribute to the literature on polycentricity and the benefits of exit rights (V. Ostrom, Tiebout, and Warren 1961; E. Ostrom 2010; Kukathas 2003). A system is polycentric if it is characterized by "many centers of decision-making that are formally independent of each other" (V. Ostrom, Tiebout, and Warren 1961). The benefits of polycentricity have been documented in diverse

contexts, including the scientific community (Polanyi 1951), metropolitan policing (Boettke, Lemke, and Palagashvili 2016; Boettke, Palagashvili, and Piano 2017; Ostrom, Parks, and Whitaker 1973), medieval cities (Young 2017), international trade law (Benson 1999), and corporate polities (Salter 2016). We build on this literature to argue that polycentric institutions, by enabling exit, provide important checks against sexual harassment and similar abusive behavior by well-connected individuals who hold power in hierarchies.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 explores the relevance and meaning of social capital and organizational hierarchy for the problems under consideration. We explore how hierarchies might facilitate abuse and how social capital may exacerbate such problems. In section 3, we examine solutions to the perverse dynamics described in section 2, prescribing liberal institutional features as the means by which to discipline hierarchies and social networks into desirable forms. Section 4 concludes with implications for activists concerned with avoiding and reforming abusive social systems and future directions for research on hierarchy, social capital, and abuse.

II. Hierarchy and Social Capital

One can easily confuse social capital and hierarchy because paradigmatic examples of each often appear alongside the other. The distinction between them matters when analyzing the unique contributions each can make to abusive social dynamics.

A. A Distinction and a Relationship

Hierarchies, in the sense in which we use the term, exist as organizational forms wherein inhabitants hold positions relative to one another that give at least one individual the power to direct the behavior of some other(s). Perhaps the archetypical hierarchy is a military. Commanding officers have the power to issue instructions of varying degrees of specificity to their subordinates, who must then fulfill those orders. Firms also use this kind of organization to enable broad directives from executives to become specific actions on the part of laborers lower in the hierarchy.

Social capital is the usefulness to an individual of relationships in achieving that individual's goals. For example, during a job search, social ties with individuals who are socially distant may be useful, as those individuals are likely to have information about job opportunities yet unknown to the job-seeker (Granovetter 1973).

Close, strong bonds that form within social groups, called "bonding" social capital, are likely to be useful in preserving resources an individual already possesses, as those individuals are likely to have similar access to opportunities as the tie-holder under consideration (Lin 2001). Distant, weak ties, called "bridging" social capital that form between rather than within social groups are more likely to be useful in obtaining new or different kinds of resources from what the individual already possesses (Lin 2001). Social capital's usefulness lies in individuals' ability to request favors and expect reciprocation. By trading information, services, goods, and so on, individuals can utilize their social connections to achieve more than would be possible through pure contract, anonymous trade, or other organizational possibilities.

Hierarchy and social capital clearly have some relationship, and that relationship bears further exploration here. Social capital is not the same thing as one's position in a hierarchy. An individual may have a relatively low rank in a hierarchy, whether formally or informally, but nonetheless have considerable social capital. That is, having lots of social ties is compatible with having low position in a hierarchy, as one may develop many relationships with equals in the hierarchy. At the same time, one has an incentive to build relationships with those in higher positions, because those in higher positions have more resources. In higher positions, one may be able to issue commands to those lower in a hierarchy, but social ties with individuals lower in the hierarchy may nonetheless be useful for information transmission purposes, among other things. Furthermore, relationships between superiors and subordinates may assist in assuring tasks are accomplished in ways more conducive to achieving the organization's ends, as by enabling subordinates to obtain greater amounts information about superiors' goals and thereby better fulfill their ends. Such relationships also provide subordinates with the means to be more productive and thus earn better compensation.

Social capital's ability to facilitate the exchange of favors enables those with considerable social capital to influence a social network beyond their hierarchy. As when financial resources give an individual considerable purchasing power in a community, having significant social resources can enable one to request favors otherwise socially impossible. For example, a particularly well-connected businessperson may be able to request that other business owners donate to their favorite charitable cause at an event the first

businessperson hosts, as the maintenance of a connection between the businesspeople may be more valuable than, and even strengthened by, the cost of the charitable donation. Less socially connected individuals would be unlikely to have this request met. The desire to keep up relationships with a valuable contact, whose value is primarily generated by their large number of connections, may be sufficient cause for community members to fulfill that individual's wishes.

A person's social connections may also render that person more valuable to a hierarchical organization and/or better able to climb the hierarchy. An individual who can bring in lots of business for a firm is likely to receive a position that better utilizes their connections—a position that will likely be higher in the hierarchy. Furthermore, if they have lots of connections within the firm, they may be better able to coordinate action within the firm, making the production process more efficient and earning promotions.

The "whispering down the lane" game illustrates part of why well-connected people can be valuable within bureaucratic hierarchies. At each step in this game, information is transferred between people within the hierarchy, with noise and errors introduced every time, illustrating how longer chains of command in bureaucracies are more error prone (Tullock [1965] 2005). Individuals with numerous social connections, particularly in the form of bridging social capital, can shorten the information transmission chain between people and increase an organization's effectiveness. Even if they do not use their social connections within the firm to reduce the firm's costs, they may be better able to demonstrate their competency to superiors in the firm, decreasing the firm's risk in giving them more power and thereby improving the trade-off associated with the promotion.

To illustrate these forces, consider a socially influential CEO. They may be able to make a corporation more profitable by obtaining information, skilled labor, contract opportunities, and other assets through their social capital. If someone else is just as capable as the current CEO along every other margin but they have a superior social capital stock, they will be better able to advance their own interests within the firm—for example, by influencing a board of directors' decision to replace the current CEO—and to advance the firm's interests (its profitability, for example).

Of course, just as lots of social connections make an individual a more attractive candidate for promotion within a firm, having a

higher position within an organizational hierarchy can make them a more attractive social tie. The more resources one commands, the more useful one may be to others, and so the more others may attempt to build social capital with them. This leads to a reinforcement of the original reasons for the individual's ability to climb the hierarchy and can cement their position. Other forces, such as the need for technical competence with other skills associated with the individual's position, are likely to counterbalance this reinforcement in many cases, but in industries heavily reliant on personal connections and hierarchical organizations, these other forces may not overcome the improvements associated with building social capital with a powerful person (and promoting a socially connected person) before that person reaches an organization's upper echelons.

B. Abuse

So far in this discussion, the focus has been on efficiency-enhancing uses of hierarchy and prosocial uses of social capital, but their use need not be directed in such desirable ways. They can also be tools of abuse. Recent, high-profile examples include the allegations of sexual misconduct leveled at Weinstein, whose accusers frequently mentioned his ability to influence their careers (Moniuzko and Kelly 2017). In these cases, Weinstein's influence enabled him to request, or even forcibly take, sexual "favors" in exchange for favors obtained through his organizational power and social connections. This kind of abuse is a good obtained through hierarchical ordering and social capital, though one that deserves moral condemnation.

Power within a hierarchy may enable an individual to impose costs on subordinates who turn down objectionable offers, thereby structuring the interaction in a way that would lead to the subordinate preferring to never have received the offer in the first place—what some call a "throffer," a portmanteau of "threat" and "offer" (Steiner 1974). The superior may be able to mandate that those whom they oversee not conduct business with someone who has denied their requests. If they force the subordinate into a nonconsensual interaction, the superior may command their other subordinates to have no dealings with someone who accuses them of committing a crime or otherwise conducting themselves inappropriately.

For example, in the Weinstein case, one may imagine him offering someone work, high-profile appearances, and other kinds of support in exchange for sexual favors. However, if the sexual favors

were turned down, he could then choose whether to (1) force himself on the other party or (2) demand that no one under his professional control work with the person who turned him down. Furthermore, he could issue a similar command regarding those on whom he forced himself who then went to the media or the justice system and accused him of misconduct. Knowing this in advance, anyone to whom he made such an offer would know that their options were, ultimately, either give Weinstein the sexual favors he requested or face professional blacklisting and possibly rape.[1]

C. Social Capital and Abuse

Concentrated social capital can exacerbate the dynamics hierarchies enable. Consider again the case of a throffer. If an individual can trade favors with others in influential positions in other hierarchies, they may be able to get their social connections to also forego working with the person who chose to face the threat rather than comply with the offer. The ability to leverage social connections with powerful members of other hierarchies increases the costs of not complying with the offer to a level beyond what the socially influential superior might be able to achieve using only their own hierarchy.

There is another aspect beyond the inherent incentives within a social capital network that makes a hierarchical organizational structure a potential site for social abuse: movement away from explicit dealings. Social networks, by their nature, run on social favors with implicit expectations of reciprocity, not explicit exchange with clearly stated terms. Social networks and anonymous exchange are incompatible in that social capital depends on parties to an interaction understanding who each person is and not requesting precise or specific terms (so as to avoid incurring the costs of negotiation, calculation, etc.). Family members who request clearly delineated contractual arrangements between themselves might end up destroying the sense of trust usually present in a family. In contrast, anonymous exchange requires predictable terms to a contract (though not necessarily formal or explicit ones) but not that any party to the exchange has any particular relationship to any other. Anyone can walk into a retail store and purchase goods from a complete stranger behind the cash register.

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[1] Given Weinstein's influence, agreeing to sex acts with him would certainly not qualify as unambiguous, freely given consent.

Social networks need not necessarily behave this way. Under an anonymous exchange, all parties' expectations are generally clear and likely to be met (people tend not to agree to vaguely defined exchanges with strangers). Within a social hierarchy, terms can remain unstated, implicit, and variable to the extent that parties with inferior social influence are unable to hold parties with superior social influence accountable for their agreements. This move away from explicit, predictable, anonymous exchange and toward a system of implied, variable, and reputational dealings dampens the ability of individuals within the system to bargain on equal ground. As mentioned before, social abuse arises when one individual can force another into a choice that the other would rather have never been offered in the first place. By moving away from anonymous, explicit exchange, these undesired, harmful offers become more common, and social pressures, shifting terms of exchange, and opportunistic exploitation become socially acceptable—that is, less costly to those performing them for objectionable purposes.

III. Solutions

There are ways to prevent the undesirable social dynamics described above. Perhaps the most obvious method of preventing abuse is formal legal prohibition, such as rules against sexual harassment. However, laws against sexual harassment were on the books while Weinstein was harassing women with impunity. The presence of formal rules is insufficient. The rules in form need to be compatible with the rules on the ground, what Elinor Ostrom (2010) called "rules in use." Moreover, institutions beyond the formal legal system affect the relative costs of engaging in abuse or of standing up to an abuser.

Another strategy might be to eliminate reliance on hierarchies altogether. If individuals do not need support from superiors to advance their purposes, hierarchy cannot be a tool of abuse. The problem with such a strategy is that hierarchies cannot be eliminated. They naturally arise and increase productivity in significant and vital ways. Avoiding the transaction costs of explicit market exchange can be well worth the costs and ambiguities of using commands to allocate resources. For example, if one attempted to use explicit exchange, such as a contract, in place of transmission via organizational channels, such as word of mouth, for subtle information about workplace opportunities (e.g., a boss's expectations for a special project), a high degree of legal complexity

would probably be necessary to prevent market unravelling and other problems. Firms tend to form and direct economic activity through hierarchy rather than the market because transaction costs mean that market exchange is not feasible for all transactions (Coase 1937). Managers receive positions of power in order to monitor workers and ameliorate problems associated with team production (Alchian and Demsetz 1972).

Furthermore, eliminating hierarchy is implausible in part because it would mean foregoing some of the gains associated with bridging social capital. Bridging social capital accomplishes things that bonding social capital cannot. Bonding social capital, or close ties, tends to occur among people who largely have access to the same information. Bridging social capital brings together far more disparate people and therefore enables important information transfer. However, bridging social capital can contribute to hierarchy by empowering individuals with ties to large numbers of diverse people. The opportunities for abuse that hierarchies enable cannot be solved by leveling or obliterating hierarchies. Instead, researchers and activists should ask how the dangers within hierarchies can be mitigated while preserving hierarchies' functionality. Given that hierarchy is here to stay, what can be done to reduce the likelihood that powerful people will use their positions to abuse others?

We argue that liberal institutions are the solution to undesirable social dynamics in hierarchies. Liberalism, as a philosophy of individualism, provides a framework for understanding the problems of hierarchies that enable individuals to leverage power against one another and provides recommendations for a way out from these perverse systems. Liberalism is the philosophy of individual liberty that emphasizes equality of moral standing of separate persons. In social settings, this means liberalism recommends the independence of individuals from the groups to which they belong and condemns the subjection of individual persons to others' will, whether as a group or individually.

At first glance, hierarchies seem contrary to these liberal principles. Should internally illiberal groups and organizations, such as hierarchies, be abolished? Kukathas (2003) argues that they should not. Rather than advocating intervention within illiberal groups, Kukathas advocates strong rights to exit such groups. In other words, to avoid abuse, liberalism recommends improving the ability of individuals to escape others' control. Polycentricity is valuable for reducing abuse because it promotes exit rights and contestability.

Both of these make potential victims less dependent on any single organizational hierarchy and therefore reduce the cost of refusing an abuser's demands while increasing the costs of being abusive.[2]

The first important liberal institution that mitigates the dangers of hierarchy is exit rights. In order for a potential victim of abuse to feel comfortable refusing a well-connected individual's "offer," that individual must be able to exit the social realm within which the abuser exerts power. To understand why, consider communities where exit is not possible, such as prisons. For a prisoner, exit is illegal, and prisons are built to make exit arduous. This setup leaves prisoners vulnerable to abuse by guards and fellow inmates. Since prisoners cannot escape either group, they can face retaliation if they report abuse. At the Ohio Reformatory for Women, for example, "women who reported sexual abuse were intimidated by staff members and subjected to lengthy periods of time in solitary confinement" (Law 2009). Evading abusive actions from race-based prison gangs' leaders is also costly due to the intentionally high cost of exiting the gang (Skarbek 2014).

Even in situations where exit is possible and permitted, the cost of exit matters as well. If resources are not mobile between social groups, exiting a social capital network means foregoing most of your previously acquired resources. In this situation, again, someone with power can present a set of options that the recipient might wish she had never been forced to choose between. The power-holder can exploit the formidable cost of exit to make putting up with their impositions just barely worthwhile. For example, LGBT youth leaving homophobic and transphobic communities may have to give up their access to familial resources, like shared housing, transportation, and aid during emergencies to get away from the abuse suffered at the hands of some community members.

Liberal institutions aim to make resources more mobile between social groups. A liberal society features strong private property rights, which allow individuals to maintain ownership of goods even when they leave social groups and hierarchical organizations. Another move in the direction of liberalism, and one that would significantly

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[2] Returning to the Weinstein example, this solution could play out in the entertainment industry by facilitating independent producers. Suppose an actress gets harassed by an executive at a major studio, she may be able, someday, to simply move into the crowdfunded, small producer, or indie sector(s) and maintain a career without anyone being able to exclude her from future jobs for not acquiescing.

reduce the costs of a quite literal, geographic form of exit, is the liberalization of zoning and land-use regulations (Somin 2016). Land-use regulations prevent housing construction, which restricts housing supply and raises housing prices. This expense prevents people from moving to new areas, closing off an avenue for moving between social networks.

Contestability is a related feature of liberal institutions that can prevent abuse. When an individual within a hierarchy becomes abusive, they may be able to impose on others below them in the hierarchy and below those in other hierarchies with whom they have social connections. In the extreme, this may include everyone in an industry, if their position is at the top of a large firm within a concentrated industry. However, if a new firm might displace the large firm relatively easily, then there is a high cost to making working for a particular firm unpleasant.

It is not enough for a firm to simply command a large market share or for an executive to have extensive influence. It must also be difficult to build alternatives to the existing hierarchies in an industry. New production technologies, competition from internet video stars, and other innovations may have been what made Weinstein's replacement possible after so many years. Once the recipient of a throffer can simply build an alternative, not needing to find one already existing outside the influence of abusers, then abusers' ability to continue making throffers without considerable financial repercussions dwindles.

The contestability of social capital networks as a whole is another important means to reducing abuse. If members of a social capital network can form new social capital networks, then they reduce their dependency on the first network. Groups that respect individual members' ability to form connections outside the group are therefore likely to be less vulnerable to abuse. Requirements that individuals avoid close ties with nonmembers are one aspect of cults that can make them dangerous. Malleable social identities are more conducive to contestability in this sense. If group members require a rigid commitment to that group identity above all other identities, then that may deter them from forging new social communities.

Another important aspect of contestability is whether individuals' positions *within* a hierarchy are contestable. Within an organization, are individuals given permanent and entrenched positions of power or can they strive to acquire influence and status? If some people occupy positions that do not permit new entrants, then these people

have a greater ability to use their position and social capital to abuse others. However, if influential positions within the hierarchy are contestable, then abusive yet influential people will likely face competition from new entrants within their professional network. Positions of influence are more likely to be contestable when individuals do not have blind loyalty to their leaders, colleagues, or friends. If respect is subject to accountability, rather than unconditional blind loyalty, then acting badly can mean losing power and influence to a new entrant. In addition to outright replacement, superiors' positions can be made contestable by ensuring that subordinates in the hierarchy have multiple superiors to whom they may report, forcing superiors to be accountable for how they treat subordinates.

Related to contestability, growing alternative hierarchies and social networks helps prevent abuse in several ways. First, it forces hierarchies, individuals, and social networks to compete with one another, which provides incentives for better behavior. It also generates a process that selects for better norms and institutions. Norms and institutions, which vary between different networks and hierarchies, affect the success of the network or hierarchies, which leads to an evolutionary process of group selection. Groups in this sense compete for individuals' membership and resources. Individuals select which groups to belong to based on the degree to which the individual advances their own ends through group membership, as in a professional society, or enjoys being a member of a group for its own sake, as in sincere religious expression.

This means both abusers and potential victims select groups based on what the norms, members, resources, and other characteristics of those groups enable them to accomplish. Groups therefore face incentives to compete both for abusers' and victims' membership, and which class of individuals gets their way will depend on the competitive forces to which groups respond and that decide what groups survive in the long run. If the groups that facilitate abuse can avoid competition with groups that do not, then norms that facilitate abuse are likely to persist. However, if groups compete harder for the membership of individuals likely to face abuse than they compete for individuals who would like to abuse others, then this competitive process is likely to select for norms that deter abuse.

Liberal institutions offer a way to mitigate the dangers of hierarchy and social capital by embedding them within a context of

competition. Contestability and exit subject those near the top of hierarchies to incentives that can restrain their worst impulses. When individuals in a social network can easily move from one hierarchy to another and/or easily form new social capital, the cost of imposing high undesired costs on one's social connections is likely to be the loss of one's social position altogether. Imposing such costs, as in Weinstein's case, can mean losing one's formal position,

IV. Conclusion

Our analysis has implications for activists and researchers alike. For activists, our analysis suggests that in terms of both policymaking and efforts to improve organizational culture, a broader range of issues is relevant for preventing abuse and harassment. Rather than narrowly focusing on sexual harassment law, activists and policymakers may be able to reduce abuse by liberalizing areas of the law that at first seem unrelated. For example, liberalizing land-use regulations would reduce the cost of moving to a new city, which would empower people to exit abusive communities. Similarly, removing barriers to entry for new firms would make industries more contestable and competitive. This would allow new competitors to displace hierarchies, organizations, and networks that enable abusers.

Unfortunately, many types of regulation impose barriers to entry. As a result, seemingly disparate areas of the law, such as occupational licensing, financial regulation, and even counterterrorism policy,[3] may be relevant to countering abuse. Knowing the effect of entry barriers also provides an important caution for activists and reformers: regulations intended to restrict abuse or protect marginalized people are likely to backfire if those regulations create barriers to entry or exit.

In terms of efforts to improve organizational culture, our analysis suggests looking beyond addressing harassment and misogyny directly. A culture that values individualism and accountability is likely to respond to abuse better than one that values blind loyalty or even critical support. While an organization's norms regarding harassment and gender are important, a broader range of norms influences harassment and deserves scrutiny. Whenever possible, organizations ought to adopt norms permissive of entry and exit, to the extent that such norms allow for the increased productivity

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[3] Dolar and Shughart (2007) find that the USA PATRIOT Act's money laundering provisions have increased the costs of doing business in the financial services industry, particularly for smaller firms.

hierarchies can facilitate, and work to make sure that group members have multiple points of social contact with superiors in the organization's hierarchy.

Our analysis generates a variety of questions for future researchers to explore. If we are correct, then industries with more regulatory barriers to entry are likely to experience more sexual harassment. Future research could test this hypothesis using empirical measurements such as the Mercatus Center's RegData, a database that quantifies federal regulation. However, such research may suffer from measurement error, because more reported instances of abuse and harassment may reflect that people are more comfortable reporting abuse rather than that more abuse is happening. Some of our theories could also be examined through detailed case studies that focus on organizational culture and examine norms within hierarchies and social networks. Analytical narratives focusing on the spread of the #MeToo movement and other social movements promoting openness about harassment could also illuminate the causes and correlates of hierarchy-facilitated abuse.

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