The Effects of Self-Processes and Social Capital on the Educational Outcomes of High School Students

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(ABSTRACT)

This study seeks to offer a meaningful statement about the relative importance of self-processes and activated social capital in the process that links high school students and educational outcomes. The conceptual model for the study draws on the large and diverse body of research that aims to understand the process and effects of the interaction of the person and his or her environment. It is hypothesized that adaptive self-processes and social capital are positively related to school engagement, educational aspirations, and actual performance in school; and, that these factors mediate the effects of family background and other potential social capital on educational outcomes. The data for this study were obtained from a sample of N=1,176 in grades 9-12 from three school divisions in Virginia. Students completed the School Relationships and Experiences Survey (SRES), an instrument designed for this study. The study uses structural equation modeling (SEM) to model the relationships between the variables of interest.

Data were analyzed using LISREL 8.3 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). The covariance structure models tested include both single-indicator and multiple-indicator constructs. The analysis follows the two-step procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, a measurement model was tested using confirmatory factor analysis to develop a model with acceptable fit to the data. In step two, the theoretical model of interest was specified as an a priori model. This theoretical model was then tested and revised until a theoretically meaningful and statistically acceptable model was found.

In conclusion, the results of the analyses are discussed, and possible explanations for the results are proposed. Directions for future research are outlined, including the need for
cross-validation of this model on additional samples of high school students. Social capital has previously been conceptualized primarily as family resources and parent-child relationships. This study provides promising initial evidence that activated social capital (education-related support received by adolescents from the broader social network) has stronger and more meaningful effects on academic engagement and other educational outcomes than the more passive indicators of social capital used in previous research.

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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract...................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements.................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents....................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures ............................................................................................................ x
List of Tables ............................................................................................................. xi

##### CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Conceptual Framework ............................................................................................... 2

*Situating the Research: Persons in Context* ............................................................. 2

*Structure and agency* ............................................................................................. 2

*Symbolic interactionism* ........................................................................................ 3

*Psychological models* ............................................................................................ 4

*Summary* .................................................................................................................. 4

*Conceptual Model* .................................................................................................. 4

Community Profiles .................................................................................................. 7

*Alleghany County* .................................................................................................. 8

*Henry County* ......................................................................................................... 9

*Pulaski County* ....................................................................................................... 9

*Summary* .................................................................................................................. 9

Study Synopsis .......................................................................................................... 10

Organization of the Study ........................................................................................ 11

##### CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Capital in Educational Literature .................................................................. 12

*Intellectual History* ................................................................................................. 12

*Social Capital and Educational Attainment* .......................................................... 17

*Social Capital and Educational Achievement* ....................................................... 17

*Social Capital and Psychosocial Outcomes* ............................................................ 19

*Methodological Issues and Gaps* ................................................................................. 20

*Future Directions* .................................................................................................. 23

Family Background .................................................................................................. 24

*Family Background and Self-Processes* ................................................................. 25

*Family Background and Social Capital* ................................................................ 25

*Family Background and Achievement* .................................................................. 26

Self-processes ............................................................................................................. 26

*Self-processes and Social Capital* ......................................................................... 26

*Self-processes and Achievement* .......................................................................... 27

Engagement in School ............................................................................................... 27
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement and Self-processes</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement and Social Capital</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement and Achievement</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Aspirations</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Aspirations and Family Background</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Aspirations and Self-processes</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Aspirations and Social Capital</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation and Sampling</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale Development</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory Factor Analyses</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability Analyses</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct Validity</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endogenous Variables</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-processes</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation of social capital</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exogenous Variables</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential social capital</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis and Model Estimation</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses about Relationships Between Potential and Activated Social Capital</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses about Relationships Among Self-Processes and Social Capital</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses about Relationships Among Self-Processes, Social Capital, and Educational Outcomes</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive Statistics</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Social Capital</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-processes</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activated Social Capital</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Outcomes</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1
Figure 1 Model of mediating effects of self-processes and social capital on educational outcomes .................................................................5
Figure 2 Map of Virginia showing Alleghany, Henry, and Pulaski counties ..7

Chapter 3
Figure 3 Hypothesized relationships among latent variables ......................40

Chapter 4
Figure 4 Revised conceptual model of hypothesized relationships among model variables .................................................................71
Figure 5 A priori model of the mediating effects of self-processes and activated social capital on the relationship between potential social capital and educational outcomes ...............................................94
Figure 6 Final structural model of the mediating effects of self-processes and activated social capital on the relationship between potential social capital and educational outcomes ............................................101

Appendix A
Figure A1 Map of Virginia showing Alleghany, Henry, and Pulaski counties.150
Figure A2 Median age (in years) .................................................................151
Figure A3 Percent school age population (5-19 years) ..............................152
Figure A4 Average household size ..............................................................153
Figure A5 Percent home ownership ..........................................................153
Figure A6 High school completion rate .....................................................154
Figure A7 College completion rate ............................................................155
Figure A8 Mobility rate .............................................................................156
Figure A9 Unemployment rate .................................................................157
Figure A10 Median income for households, male workers, and female workers (in thousands US$) .................................................................158
Figure A11 Family poverty rate (percent below poverty level) ..................159
Figure A12 Female-headed family poverty rate (percent below poverty level).159
Figure A13 Child poverty rate (percent below poverty level) .....................160
LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 3
Table 1 Results of Exploratory Factor Analyses for Scales in Pilot Study.....36
Table 2 Intercorrelations among Constructs...................................................38
Table 3 Constructs and Items for Endogenous Variables...............................41
Table 4 Constructs and Items for Exogenous Variables.................................47

Chapter 4
Table 5 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables .........................................53
Table 6 Correlations among Potential Social Capital Indicators (N=633) ....54
Table 7 Correlations among Self-Process Variables (N=1013)......................55
Table 8 Correlations among Activated Social Capital Indicators (N=823)...</56
Table 9 Correlations among Educational Outcomes (N=893)........................57
Table 10 Correlations among Model Variables (N=534).................................58
Table 11 Regression Models of Self-Processes and Activated Social Capital Indicators on Potential Social Capital Indicators...............................66
Table 12 Regression Models of Educational Outcomes on Potential Social Capital Indicators.................................................................67
Table 13 Regression Models of Educational Outcomes on Self-Processes.....68
Table 14 Regression Models of Educational Outcomes on Activated Social Capital Indicators.................................................................69
Table 15 Regression Model of Grades on Positive Educational Outcomes ....70
Table 16 Regression Models of Self-Processes on Potential Social Capital Indicators.................................................................73
Table 17 Regression Models of Activated Social Capital Indicators on Potential Social Capital Indicators.................................................................74
Table 18 Regression Models of Educational Outcomes on Potential Social Capital Indicators.................................................................76
Table 19 Regression Models of Educational Outcomes on Self-Processes.....78
Table 20 Regression Models of Educational Outcomes on Activated Social Capital Indicators.................................................................80
Table 21 Regression Model of Grades on Positive Educational Outcomes ....81
Table 22 Summary of Fit Statistics for Measurement Models of Self-Processes .........................................................................................84
Table 23 Summary of Fit Statistics for Measurement Models of Activated Social Capital Indicators.................................................................85
Table 24 Summary of Fit Statistics for Measurement Models of Educational Outcomes Indicators .................................................................86
Table 25  Summary of Fit Statistics for Full Measurement Model of Educational Outcomes (N=851) ........................................................86
Table 26  Summary of Fit Statistics for Measurement Model of Endogenous Variables (N=517) .............................................................................87
Table 27  Summary of Fixed Phi Elements in Final Measurement Model......88
Table 28  Properties of the Final Full Measurement Model ..............................89
Table 29  Summary of Specifications and Fit Statistics for Tested Models (N=571)..............................................................................................97
Table 30  Standardized Path Coefficients for Final Model (N=571).................100
Table 31  Standardized Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects (N=517) of Model Variables on Self-Processes ...............................................................103
Table 32  Standardized Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects (N=517) of Model Variables on Activated Social Capital ...............................................104
Table 33  Standardized Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects (N=517) of Model Variables on Educational Outcomes..................................................105
Table 34  Summary of Fit Statistics for Structural Models of White and Minority Students ...............................................................................111
Table 35  Squared Multiple Correlations for Structural Equations (Variance Explained)..........................................................................................112
Table 36  Standardized Coefficients of Models for White and Minority Students..............................................................................................113
Table 37  Standardized Total Effects of Model Variables on Self-Processes for White (n=415) and Minority (n=415) Students .........................................114
Table 38  Standardized Total Effects of Model Variables on Activated Social Capital for White (n=415) and Minority (n=415) Students...............115
Table 39  Standardized Total Effects of Model Variables on Educational Outcomes for White (n=415) and Minority (n=415) Students ..........116

Appendix A
Table A1  Racial/ethnic Composition ..................................................................................152
Table A2  Marital Status Categories (15 years and older) ..............................................155
Table A3  Occupational Profiles ....................................................................................157

Appendix E
Table E1  Means and Standard Deviations of all Model Variables by Group (Ethnicity, Class, and Gender) .................................................................195
Table E2  T-Tests for All Model Variables Based on Ethnicity, Class, and Gender .................................................................................................................196