UNDERSTANDING ASPIRATIONS

The role of adaptive self-processes and activated social capital

2008 Annual Conference of the Sociology of Education Association
February 22-24, 2008

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FRAMEWORK

- Social capital for adolescents includes the ties that link them to institutional funds of knowledge embedded in schools (Stanton Salazar, 2001)
- These ties are the primary mechanism for the pursuit of educational goals
- Study model places adaptive self-processes and some forms of social capital as mediating variables in explanation of educational aspirations, engagement, and achievement
FRAMEWORK, CONTINUED

- Model differentiates between forms of social capital, including network characteristics, social class, network support, school-based support, and school belonging.
- Acknowledges the Bourdieuian notion that habitus and capital interact in a field to produce practice.
- Aims to model a more dynamic view of social capital activation within the limits of survey research data.
MODEL OF MEDIATING EFFECTS ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN HIGH SCHOOL

- Social class and social networks
- Self-concept, trust, help-seeking orientation
- Aspirations, engagement, achievement
- Social support and school belonging
LITERATURE ON EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

- Status attainment models link SES and aspirations, but some research suggests a less deterministic relationship (including research presented at this conference).
- Self-esteem and efficacy are positively related to aspirations; as well as are parent involvement and peer values.
- Recent research examines interactive effects of race and class on aspirations and achievement using theoretical concepts of Bourdieu (Horvat 2003).
METHODS

- Theoretical model was developed using confirmatory factor analysis
- A priori model tested and revised using goodness of fit criteria
- Fitted model cross-validated by randomly splitting data into two parts
DATA SOURCES

- School Relationships and Experiences Survey, developed by the authors
- Administered in 2002 to over 1,000 high school students in Virginia
- Students provided information about their school experiences and details about important adults in their lives (network members)
- Sample characteristics: 54% female, 76% White, 60% grades 9-10, 58% general education program
# MEASURES – ENDOGENOUS VARIABLES

## Table 1. Constructs and Items for Endogenous Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Reliability estimate</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Rating scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-processes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-concept</td>
<td>( \alpha = .89 )</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>( \alpha = .72 )</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help-seeking orientation</td>
<td>( \alpha = .90 )</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activated social capital</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived teacher support</td>
<td>( \alpha = .89 )</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic support</td>
<td>( \alpha = .75 )</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of school membership</td>
<td>( \alpha = .82 )</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic orientation</td>
<td>( \alpha = .83 )</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic effort</td>
<td>( \alpha = .81 )</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected grades</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MEASURES – ADAPTIVE SELF-PROCESSES

- Self-concept: “I am able to do things as well as most other people.”

- Trust: “Other people understand me.”

- Help-seeking orientation: “It’s okay to ask favors of teachers and counselors.”
MEASURES – SCHOOL* SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Perceived teacher support: “I have a friendly and trusting relationship with a number of teachers.”
- Academic support: “Network members push me to do a good job in school.” (based on average support provided by named network members)
- Sense of school membership: “I feel like a real part of this school.”

* educationally useful (Ream & Lewis)
MEASURES – EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

- Educational aspirations: “How far do you expect to go in school?”
- Academic orientation: “Academic success is important for success in life.” (5 items, $\alpha = .83$)
- Academic effort: “I feel I am responsible for my learning.” (4 items, $\alpha = .81$)
- Expected grades: “What kind of grades do you expect to get this year?”
MEASURES –SOCIAL CLASS AND SOCIAL NETWORK COMPOSITION

- Family SES: Weighted mean (50/50) parents’ mean occupational level and highest parent educational level
- Network size: Number of adults* that are important to you (*over 18 years of age)
- Network density: Percentage of network members who are non-kin
- Compositional quality: maximum occupational status among network members
FINAL STRUCTURAL MODEL

- SES
- Size
- Non-kin
- Max occ status
- Self-concept
- Teacher support
- Educational aspirations
- Academic orientation
- Academic effort
- School membership
- Academic grades
- Help seeking orientation
- Max occ status

Diagram showing relationships between SES, Self-concept, Teacher support, Educational aspirations, Academic orientation, Academic effort, School membership, Help seeking orientation, and grades.
## Standardized Effects on Aspirations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational aspirations (N=517)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SES</strong></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Network size</strong></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.02*</td>
<td>0.02*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent non-kin</strong></td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maximum occupational status</strong></td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-concept</strong></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust</strong></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Help-seeking orientation</strong></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher support</strong></td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic support</strong></td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School membership</strong></td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EFFECTS ON OTHER OUTCOME VARIABLES

- SES is a strong, direct predictor of expected grades (.36)
- Adaptive self-processes have positive indirect effects on academic orientation and effort
- Teacher support has positive direct effects on academic orientation and positive indirect effects on academic effort
- School membership has positive direct effects on academic orientation and both direct and indirect effects on academic effort
Positive direct effects of aspirations on academic orientation (.10) and academic effort (.11), but even stronger direct effects on expected grades (.34)
The findings of this study suggest that certain forms of social capital (occupational status of network members, academic support from network members, and school membership) play a role in increasing educational aspirations for students.

Certain student dispositions (positive self-esteem, help-seeking orientation) interact with social capital in the school setting to help foster higher aspirations.
LIMITATIONS

- Nature of the data to understand the process of social capital activation in schools – students provided data at one point in time
- Sample characteristics limit generalization of findings to broader groups of students - only one region of US and did not include sufficient number of students from minority groups to test model on separate groups
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Further work to understand the ability of this model to predict educational outcomes for under-represented minorities (i.e., does the interaction of dispositions and social capital work in the same way?)
- Continued improvement of the measurement of social capital in educational research
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THANK YOU!