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

Sandra L. Dika, University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez
Kusum Singh, Virginia Tech/National Science Foundation

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
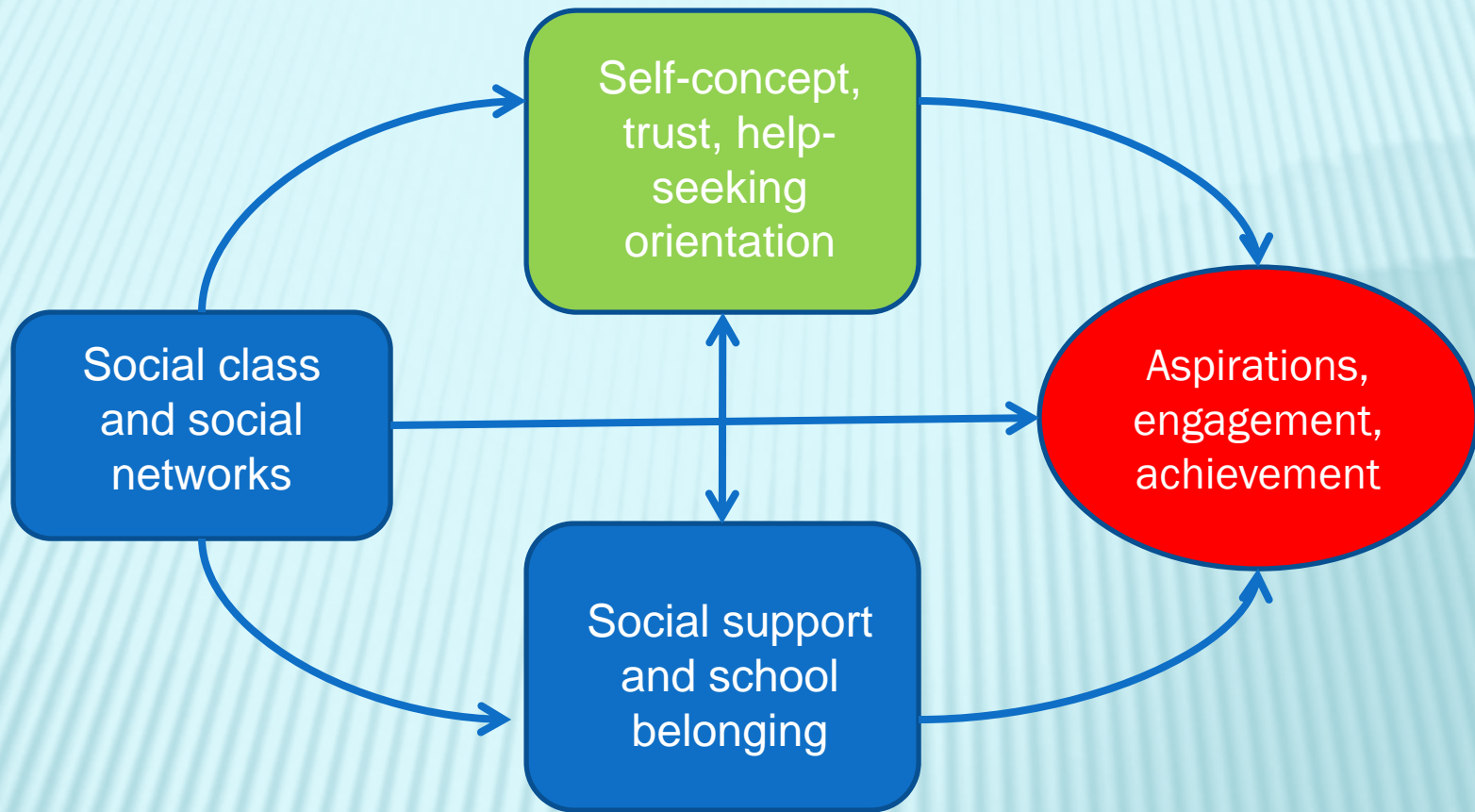
MODEL OF MEDIATING EFFECTS ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN HIGH SCHOOL

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

Construct	Reliability estimate	Number of items	Rating scale
Self-processes			
Self-concept	$\alpha = .89$	4	1-4
Trust	$\alpha = .72$	4	1-5
Help-seeking orientation	$\alpha = .90$	6	1-4
Activated social capital			
Perceived teacher support	$\alpha = .89$	6	1-4
Academic support	$\alpha = .75$	4	1-4
Sense of school membership	$\alpha = .82$	5	1-4
Aspirations	--	1	1-5
Academic orientation	$\alpha = .83$	5	1-4
Academic effort	$\alpha = .81$	4	1-4
Expected grades	--	1	1-5

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, α=.83)

✖ Academic effort: "I feel I am responsible for my learning." (4 items, α=.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
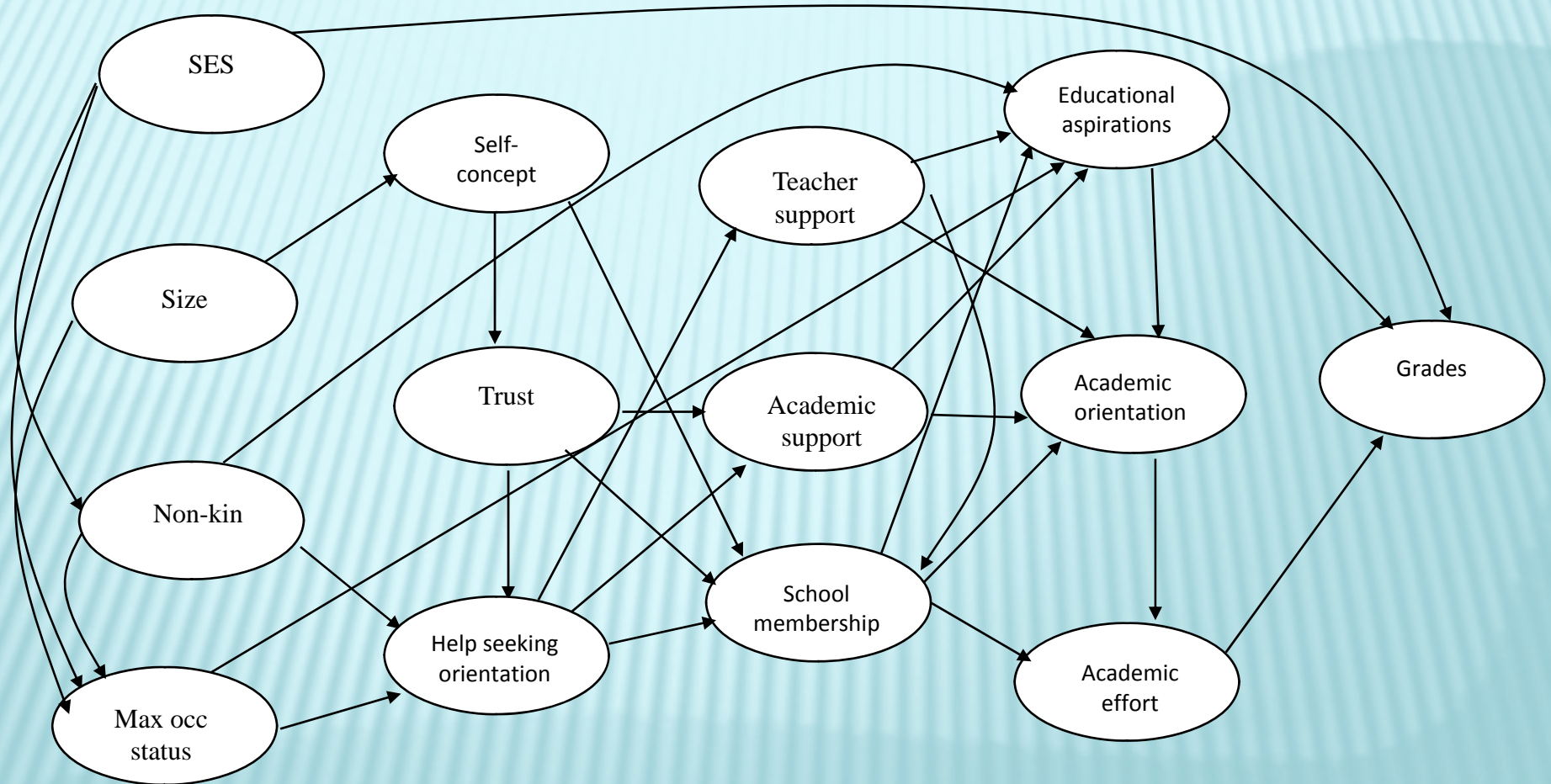
STANDARDIZED EFFECTS ON ASPIRATIONS

	Educational aspirations (N=517)		
	Direct	Indirect	Total
SES	–	–	–
Network size	–	.02*	.02*
Percent non-kin	.09	.00	.09
Maximum occupational status	.15*	.00	.15*
Self-concept	–	.13*	.13*
Trust	–	.09	.09
Help-seeking orientation	–	.13*	.13*
Teacher support	.05	.02	.07
Academic support	.13*	–	.13*
School membership	.13*	–	.13*

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

EFFECTS OF ASPIRATIONS ON ENGAGEMENT AND EXPECTED ACHIEVEMENT

✖ Positive direct effects of aspirations on academic orientation (.10) and academic effort (.11), but even stronger direct effects on expected grades (.34)

CONCLUSIONS

- 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

sandra.dika@gmail.com

THANK YOU!