

THE EXTENT SOCIAL AND RELATIONAL CAPITAL IS TRASFERRED BETWEEN COLLEGE ROOMMATES AND
HOW IT MAY FACILITATE A BETTER ACADEMIC OUTCOME

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A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of

MCNAIR SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Of the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-SUPERIOR

Major: Sociology

Under the Supervision of

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Superior, Wisconsin

Summer 2013

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Abstract

Within the sociology of education and lifetime development, most conceptualizations revolve around the interplay between cultural capital and aspirations of young adults. However, there is also the influence of social and relational capital when it comes to how individuals progress academically, which essentially generates a mindset that correlates with that of a particular socioeconomic status. Being part of a particular social class largely shapes how an individual views their chances of succeeding when analyzing the probability of social mobility. In other words, the world someone grows up in plays a large factor in how that person views education and how one interacts within the educational system. This behavior closely correlates with those whom that individual spends the most of their time with, either reinforcing exceptional educational skills or hindering them. On the other hand, there are those who develop social tools that aide in social mobility by becoming aware of the social skills required to meet the standard for a higher level of education, which essentially means that it is possible to advance socially when it comes to socioeconomic status. Furthermore, this research examines how college roommates aide in the social transformation of one another by generating appropriate social capital, which allows one to advance academically and is essentially the reason one can increase their social class status.

Introduction

When people inquire about what it takes to be a college student, they most likely view it as a field in which only students with the required resources are able to attend; however, this is not necessarily always the case. There are students who come from various backgrounds that do not exactly correlate with the stereotypical college student. In other words, there are students who may not necessarily identify with the college student profile, but nonetheless takes on the challenge with some success. Therefore, it becomes curious as to why and how these particular students are able to compete in an institutional space that demands a certain way of doing things via a hidden curriculum that has specific “rules” that must be followed.

As was mentioned previously, there are students who do not come from a certain background that fosters aspirations correlating with that of higher education, but indeed choose to follow a path less traveled by students from their same background. History has shown that most students who have attended a university usually come from families whose other members were alumni of some college or university. With that being said, it can be assumed that the student had a good idea of what to expect and what resources to utilize when entering the college arena; however, those who enter the college arena for the first time will most likely not have a clue about college life and could perhaps experience feelings of inferiority. This question has led Petit, Erath, Lansford, Dodge, and Bates (2011) to believe that students who come from various backgrounds need to learn and adapt to this new environment, and, in order to do so, they need to acquire certain social skills which will allow them to feel more accepted. Once this feeling of acceptance is instilled, that person will then feel more comfortable to utilize the various resources necessary to advance academically.

Furthermore, it seems evident that one has to learn this new lifestyle from someone else. It could be from family members, peer groups, instructors, etc.

The researcher inquired further about the above phenomenon. As a first generation college student, it is curious as to where and when the motivation was acquired. This could perhaps be the result of peer groups who may have an influence on aspirations; although, once an individual moves from their original setting and places themselves in another, it seems evident that the individual must generate new social networks (DeCarolis & Litzky, 2009; Eskilson & Wiley, 1999; Pettit, 2011). For instance, once one moves to college they are most likely going to have a roommate. Whether it is on campus or off campus, that individual will be spending a lot of time with his or her housemate; therefore, it raises the question as to whether or not social resources can be transferred from one roommate to the next and if those resources can then be utilized for one's advantage in the academic area.

Literature Review

By looking at any individual's relationships while growing up, it should be evident that aspirations are somewhat shaped by that of family members and the social environment that have the most influence on an individual. In addition, there are those who have noticed the oppression felt by that of their social class and wish to advance economically, and to do this one has to obtain a higher level of education. Research has shown that one who comes from a family of lower class is usually less optimistic of the future (Eskilson & Wiley, 1999). Parents generate this feeling because they may stress challenges for their child that may be hard to overcome (Eskilson & Wiley, 1999). For example, parents may know they do not have the financial means or "connections" to send their child to college. With that being said, they simply do not force the notion of higher education. Because of this their child will not get the full support from the parents that is essential for further academic progress, and the decision to change his or her aspirations must be shaped by an outside force. One could argue that one's peer groups would have a large influence on one's decisions because of the vast amount of time spent together. Nevertheless, it seems evident that one learns from others besides their parents, and even though one does not come from a privileged family, having knowledge of the possible benefits from acquiring social networks gives one an advantage and ability to make a change.

Habitus and Dispositions

This explains how we are not solely individual thinkers. Much of how we make sense of the world is taken from those around us, which strengthens the argument that we have the ability to notice these things and learn from them. This contributes to the main research question stated previously. Parents from lower class families know how the world works and try to prepare their children for the harsh demands of life as an adult. Additionally, Eskilson & Willey (1999) revealed the fact that we generate a habitus which is formed from all of our dispositions. It is these dispositions that give meaning to what we do and shape are future goals and aspirations. Furthermore, it could be assumed that in order to make a change, challenging

original dispositions and ways of being and doing in the social world is a must, which has suggested being one of the most challenging aspects for first time college students.

Characteristics of Social Capital

Obviously, once the student has made the decision to go to college, that individual is pretty much set in that decision once they are enrolled and all settled in. As outlined, the student who has no idea of what to expect may feel a little insecure right away. They may feel like they do not belong because there is a certain way of presenting oneself and communicating with others in college institutions. This may also be referred to as social capital, which can consist of two characteristics. The first is the depth of social networks, which explains how well one understands himself or herself in relation to those around him or her. The second is the breadth of social capital, which focuses on the diversity and size of one's social networks. Increasing both for an individual is said to have a positive effect on the individual and fosters positive adjustment outcomes, which in this case would be very beneficial for someone who is placed in the new college environment (Pettit et al., 2011). Consequently, one could argue that if one increases their depth and breadth of social capital in the academic arena, they will most likely have a wider range of "connections" and develop a way of portraying themselves that correlates with the "rules" of the institution.

This then raises the question as to how a student may perform the latter. First of all, students will have to learn from someone and since they do not know anyone right away, their roommate may be a good source for meeting new people and generating a larger social network. Second, by creating a larger social network, students may then be able to learn how to present themselves and communicate effectively with the power figures within the academic institution. Furthermore, it seems that if one can generate a positive relationship with his or her roommate, that person may be able to better the odds of acquiring useful social capital and create the individual's own social "connections" that are separate from the parents (Smith & Szelest, 2004).

The latter has mainly focused on how individuals challenge the way they were brought up and stray away from identifying as a working class citizen; moreover, one must not take for granted that students may use their analysis of the expectations and experiences of living the working class life to their advantage as well (Lehmann, 2009). For instance, someone in the working class may utilize their good work ethic and maturity and apply these characteristics to the new environment they have entered. Although these are characteristics, this will only get the student so far. As mentioned previously, students must adopt new social capital that is much different from what they are accustomed. Lehmann (2009) explained that this is achieved by generating more depth and breadth of social networks, which may be done by mimicking the behavior of those around the student. Needless to say, one who is in this position must utilize the most useful resources from all of one's social networks, which is why it is said to create large networks because one has more people to choose from.

Lehmann (2009) strengthened the argument for increased or altered social capital, which is an increase in size and or depth of a social network. This allows an individual to

generate more social ties that will give the initial person a larger social horizon when viewing the world through his or her particular mental lens. Lehman (2009) explained further the process of how one learns from others. For example, one who comes from a working class family may adopt the behaviors of a roommate who came from a middle class family. One could also argue that the middle class roommate could learn valuable insights from the working class student as well. Not to mention, the middle class student presents a broader social network to the working class student, while at the same time adopts a better work ethic from the working class student (Lehman, 2009; Lee, 2009). It could be argued that social capital is transferrable and can be utilized by both students for their own benefit.

In order to advance academically, one needs to broaden their social network as well as generate the right social capital (Petit et al., 2011). This is easier said than done because not all other people are going to have an influential effect on a person. For example, if someone from a working class background generates a social network with someone from the same social group, their thoughts and ideas are going to be roughly the same and the individual who is trying to make the change will not take anything away from the acquaintance (DeCarolis et al., 2009). So it would be beneficial for individuals to go outside of their comfort zone and try to meet and become acquaintances with people who come from families with experience going to college (Lee, 2009). Studies have shown that individuals with supportive and academically-oriented friends have a high contributing factor in higher academic achievement, which strengthens the reasoning for generating appropriate relationships that correlate with one's aspirations (Lee, 2009; Hall & Willerman, 1963). It then seems evident that if individuals can identify positively with a wider range of people from various backgrounds, they will be able to learn more and have an open mind about the possibilities there are in the world, which in turn may motivate the individual.

Relational Capital and Sense of Control

In a broader spectrum, one could argue that the social networks and relational capital one acquires have an effect on one's cognitive characteristics, which in turn generates feelings of optimism and self-worth (De Carolis et al., 2009). Moreover, individuals who are successful in acquiring a vast social network and develop a deep understanding of relational capital are said to have a sense of control over what happens in their life. With this sense of control one has the potential to feel less threatened by challenges he or she meets in life and better cognitively equipped to meet those challenges in an effective manner (De Carolis et al., 2009). On the other hand, those who do not acquire the social and relational capital are said to feel in less control and are more apt to meet new challenges in a negative way (DeCarolis et al., 2009). In contrast, those who realize their potential are more likely to advance academically because they will not view the stress as a threat; rather they will view it as a challenge they have the ability to overcome if they put enough effort towards their goals.

Risk Propensity

By being surrounded by people who are risk takers and who see stress as a challenge instead of a threat, the likelihood that those characteristics could be internalized increases

(DeCarolis et al., 2009). Needless to say, realizing the potential for people to succeed if they simply take a chance is a huge factor in whether or not a student is going to succeed or not. In other words, getting enrolled in college does not necessarily mean that one is successful. People must generate a feeling that they have the right to be there just as much as anybody else. This feeling may be fostered if one rooms with another person who has positive views of their self-worth, which in turn can reinforce the feeling that one has the potential to advance academically.

Birth Order and Attitude

Hall and Willerman (1963) discussed the relationship between college roommates. Their study revolved around dormitory roommates and how their relationship affected each other and their academic performance. In the study, dormitory roommates were questioned about their life prior to going to college and then questioned on how that has affected their first few years in college. Hall and Willerman (1963) then inquired about the roommate's relationship with each other as well as their own peer groups. What they found was rather interesting. One's past really seemed to greatly affect one's attitude towards school. Not to mention, the birth order of the student seemed to matter in which roommate was more susceptible to being influenced. It also mattered whether or not the students were mutually chosen roommates or assigned by the college. Students who mutually chose each other seemed to have many similarities, which did not really benefit one or the other; but on the other hand, the relationship was much more positive, which helped with positive reinforcement when it came to academic affairs (Hall & Willerman, 1963).

Clearly, there is a lot to learn from those around us. As we grow we are taught to think and act a certain way, but it does not mean that our mental framework cannot change (Lee, 2009). When entering the college arena, it seems evident that we can generate social networks and relational capital that we can use to benefit us academically; however, this is difficult for some because they do not know where to start, which is why studying the effects of the transferring of social capital from one roommate to the next could be beneficial (Petit et al., 2009; Hall & Willerman, 1963). Thus, if one can pinpoint ideal roommate pairs, students could utilize that information and work towards finding a roommate they can benefit the most from, as well as teaching that roommate a little more about themselves in the process. It seems evident then that even though people may not be born into a life of opportunity, it does not mean they cannot create their own; it just helps to know what to look for, which seems to be the underlying theme of the articles presented. Once one realizes his situation, he or she will be far more likely to act in an appropriate manner that benefits him or her to the fullest.

Methods

With this particular research, a sample based survey was the most appropriate method for collecting data. This way one took a simple random sample and worked to make it generalizable to a larger population of students without having to conduct numerous interviews, which would have consumed much more time. In addition, making it random

allowed one to stray away from selection bias and made the results much more valid.

This project was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a questionnaire was dispersed throughout various general education classes that were the most likely to have freshmen students attending them. The first set of questions included demographic questions and questions pertaining to the student's relationship with their parents (Appendix A). This gave the researcher a better idea of the cultural capital the participants have acquired as well as where they stand in terms of social capital. Demographic questions included age, year in school, and academic and occupational status of both parents and the student. Questions relating to the relationship with parents included quality of the relationship, home environment, and number of siblings.

The next set of questions pertained to the individual's own thoughts about his or her socioeconomic status while growing up. This allowed for one to test for identity achievement and to determine whether or not the student was optimistic about his or her future. Also, since relational capital seems to make a difference in academic success, it was beneficial to ask questions about the participant's abilities to interact with others, which correlates with the depth and breadth of social capital.

In phase two, the students who met the criterion for the sample of being students with roommates were asked to take the same questionnaire home to their roommate to fill out. The second questionnaire contained questions that were exactly the same questions the initial roommate was asked to answer. Results from this set of questions were used to target similarities and differences among the roommates as well as where the participants stood when they compared themselves to their roommate. It would also reveal whether or not the student felt comfortable with their roommate. After receiving all the completed questionnaires, the researcher then analyzed the data and compared and contrasted each roommate's answers to find out whether or not there was influencing taking place.

All in all, this project reviewed social capital and how it is operationalized by students and how roommates from other various backgrounds act as beneficial resources in terms of generating appropriate academic social capital. In order for this to be true, the researcher needed to understand the student's past as well as his or her plans for the future.

In order to ensure validity, it seemed evident that one should test for an exceptional amount of variables to make sure that nothing is missing. This phenomenon seemed like it could be altered in many ways, which means that one had to pay attention to all the little details. However, the more variables that were tested meant that it became more valid and more generalizable. Making the experiment as random as possible also increased validity because one was able to stray away from selection biases and choosing participants that would have made the data results lean in the researcher's favor. One ethical issue that could have occurred is that roommates perhaps could have shared some extremely personal feelings about the other that could possibly have had a negative effect on the relationship. Therefore, the researcher did all he could to ensure the two questionnaires were kept separate and out of the

sight of the other roommate.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the next step was to apply an appropriate method of analysis. In this case, the data from the demographic questions was categorical with one using a nominal level of measurement for each of the categories, with the exception of the age and number of hours worked, which was reviewed using a ratio level of measurement. This way one was able to categorize certain sample subjects and target the students who met the criteria for the project. In addition, it gave the researcher a better idea of what the cultural capital of the students consisted. The next series of questions (relationship with parents) were analyzed using multiple levels of measurement. For questions pertaining to the quality of the relationships, the numbers ranged from 0 to 5, creating a value system that was ordered. Other questions pertaining to home environment were analyzed using a nominal level of measurement. The data was in the form of categorical answers which were relevant to how the student's social capital was established when growing up. Academic performance questions looked at the grades and study habits of the student. The data was analyzed using a ratio level of measurement for the study habits because the roommates would either spend no time doing homework or a lot of time doing homework. Grades would be placed into categories, which a nominal level of measurement was used to analyze. This data gave the researcher an idea where the participant stood academically in either correlation or contrast with his or her cultural capital.

The individual thoughts on the student's background had questions focusing on what that student thought of his or herself and how he or she was raised. Some of the data from questions pertained to the extent to which one felt he or she was responsible and mature was assessed using an interval level of measurement. Other questions in this series included more open ended questions that were assessed using nominal levels of measurement. One example of this included asking the student what he or she aspired to be. The data from this series of questions was useful in finding out the extent to which one has experienced identity achievement that correlates with one's social and cultural capital. The next set of questions inquired about how well the student communicated and interacted with others. Here an interval level of measurement was used because answers were then ranked as either high ability or low ability.

The students were then asked about how they perceived their relationship with their roommate. Questions focused on how well the student knew their roommate and if they were influenced by that roommate in any way. Nominal levels of measurement were used to analyze the data showing the amount of time and ranking of importance of academic success. Not to mention, some questions were leaning towards finding out whether or not the roommate of the student had been helpful in introducing them to a wider range of social networks. Other questions were simply placed into categories (mutually chosen or assigned). Furthermore, this data should have shown the extent to which the students knew and understood their roommate, which was a good indicator of the quality of the relationship in relation to where the other roommate came from. This meant that social capital could have indeed been

transferred from one roommate to the other. Also, it would confirm who was more influential.

All of the above series of questions were asked in a similar manner for the roommate of the initial student. That being said, one then compared and contrasted the backgrounds of the roommates, how they perceived each other, their ability to interact and communicate with others, and their academic performance. Ultimately, the researcher looked for the extent to which one roommate was more influential and then looked for patterns in the quality of the relationships. This would allow one to assume that if the quality of the relationship was really good, one could say social capital was being exchanged and expanded for the roommate who was more susceptible to influence. One would then see if living on-campus or off-campus made a difference in relation to the roommates' relationship. Additionally, one also got a good idea of the different experiences of the roommates when they were assigned or mutually chosen. One also combined the last two notions to see if there was a difference when off campus roommates were mutually chosen or assigned.

Although this task of handing out and collecting questionnaires seemed relatively easy, there were some road blocks along the way. For instance, the researcher handed out as many questionnaires as possible but did not necessarily get an adequate amount returned. Since that was the case, the researcher continued to hand out questionnaires until an exceptional amount of participants for the first phase was collected. If the researcher had trouble getting a hold of them for phase two, one had to ask for an email address or phone number to call the participant. It was also beneficial to make sure it was mentioned on the first questionnaire that there was two phases. Getting the roommate information was difficult as well; however, if the researcher at least got the name, the researcher could have most likely looked the person up on the school website.

It seems evident that this empirical research would have some value to the author as well as other people interested in this topic. By conducting this project, the researcher expected to find that social capital does not necessarily have to correlate with one cultural capital and background. In addition, one expected to find some correlation between the quality of relationship between roommates and achieving higher academic success in the eyes of how our society views higher education as a means of a better life. Also, one assumed that living off campus in a large house, with possibly more roommates, may have changed how relationships were experienced as opposed to living in the dorms. Along with all of that, the other variables focused on strengthening past theories about the interplay between learning from those around us and our own individual cognition.

On the other hand, the data could have completely contrasted with what was originally thought to happen. The results could have shown no correlations between academic success and the relationship between roommates. In addition, the roommates may have hated each other and not spoken on a regular basis. In that case, one would have had to assume that there was not much influence going on and there was much social capital being transferred, which may mean that the roommate of lower ability and low class had to be getting the social capital to succeed in the academic arena from somewhere else. Not to mention, if the theoretical

position that was taken for this project was wrong, it could have had an adverse effect on the results that were expected. For instance, one could have perhaps misinterpreted the concepts and operationalized them in a completely inappropriate way, which would then mean the results were formed around the researcher's own thoughts and beliefs. However, by conducting a thorough literature review and getting feedback from peers and faculty, the researcher most likely strayed away from this issue. There may also be some limitations on this project, which would include the fact that this was a small sample at a small liberal arts college. The generalizability of the results could thus change in relation to larger universities, with larger samples. Not to mention, one only had a semester to complete this project, so the convenience of samples and resources were of utmost interest as opposed to someone who had more time to go more in depth and look at other variables.

Participants

The first phase of data collection was distributing a questionnaire (Appendix A) to three introduction level sociology classes, two of which were on the campus of a Midwest university and one a Midwest community college. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to the students in the Drugs and Society course at the community college. This ensured a relatively equal amount of participants from each campus. The sample consisted of 63 students, 35 of which were female and 28 were male. Over half of the participants were under the age of 20 and met the requirements of being a freshman. However, the students who were further along in their educational path were also taken into account. Thirty of the students claimed to be living on campus while the other 33 lived off campus, which was ideal for comparing the experiences of roommates in both conditions. As for the second phase of data collection, class a, class b, and class c at these same two colleges were selected to participate. Unfortunately, due to inclement weather conditions and school closings, the researcher was unable to acquire an adequate sample that would hold any validity. Nevertheless, the data that was collected from the first sample proved to be substantial for this study.

Results

A variety of different variables were found when questionnaires were examined. These included demographic questions, questions relating to the students family and parental educational obtainment, individual thoughts on cognitive and social skills, and the students' own perceptions of their relationship with their roommate (Appendix A). The results were analyzed in order to strengthen or disprove previous studies in this area. Certain variables revealed to be more statistically significant than others; however, those that were insignificant played a relevant role in the analysis because they showed how some characteristics of social and relational capital are not necessarily acquired solely through the relationship with one's parents (Appendix B). This strengthens the notion that there are indeed other external forces that have the ability to influence the student.

The statistically significant findings closely correlated to what other researchers found in previous experiments. For instance, participants were asked whether or not they perceived their roommate as having an influence on them, which was compared to the hours the

roommates spent with each other. How the initial roommate perceived their relationship with their roommate was not examined in previous literature, but strengthens the idea roommates indeed have the ability to influence each other as well as conform to particular behaviors that seem relevant. This data was analyzed using the chi square, which is the measure of association of nominal variables and suggested that they were statistically significant (Appendix B).

Participants were then asked whether or not they felt they were risk takers, which was then compared to that student's birth order within their family. The results showed that there was indeed a relationship between these two variables, which strengthens previous theories that have explained how these characteristics increased the likelihood that one can advance academically as well as the extent at which the student is susceptible to influence or being influential (DeCarolis et al., 2009). A chi square was also used for this analysis and it showed that there was a very significant relationship between these two variables (Appendix B). In addition, these findings seemed to be relevant when analyzing other variables that were insignificant by helping to explain why they may not be involved in the transformation of the student.

The next sets of variables were used to examine the experiences of first generation students and the resources that were of most use to them in their progress. Within the larger sample, a smaller sample was collected to focus solely on the first generation students. They were then asked roughly how many people they could contact in high school if they were to ever need help with anything. This was examined in order to reveal the breadth of social capital that the student initially had before entering college, which would reveal the importance of a larger social network. Previous literature has shown us that a larger social network is crucial for students when it comes to acquiring the "connections" and knowledge of the social requirements in order to advance academically. In addition, the quality of relationships within those networks is also an important factor when it comes to how the student will be influenced. The data revealed through using the chi square reveals this relationship indefinitely as being statistically significant for this project.

In addition to the latter variables, first generation students were asked further questions pertaining to their own cognitive characteristics, time spent with roommates, and their own study habits. It has been found in previous experiments that having a sense of control over one's life is linked to higher achievement, which was the basis for asking the first generation students if they felt they had control over their life when it comes to taking on challenging tasks. The results from the chi square were statistically insignificant. However, the information is still somewhat useful in the data analysis because it showed that there must be a specific criterion in order for roommates to influence each other in positive and that some things simply do not come into play when it comes to how roommates interact with each other. It was then examined if being a first generation student had an effect on how much time they spent with their roommates, which unfortunately upon further investigation, revealed an insignificant correlation between these two variables. Furthermore, testing for a relationship between being a first generation college student and their study habits also seemed as if it could be useful data in this project, but the statistics made it evident that the data results were not significant either.

Since the sample of first generation students was small, it was of utmost importance that one focus on the entire sample for further evidence to support the hypothesis. Since being a risk taker and birth order had a significant correlation, it made itself evident that one should look at the relationship between being a risk taker and whether or not the participants felt their roommates were risk takers. However, the data revealed through the chi square showed that there was not a significant relationship between the two. In addition, since perceived influence of the roommate and the hours spent together were statistically significant, it seemed if there would for sure be strong relationship between the hours spent with each other and class attendance. Unfortunately, there was no evidence to support this assertion.

The perceived influence of the other roommate by the initial roommate was then compared with perceived influence on academic performance and birth order. Upon analysis of these two variable sets, the data revealed to be not significant as well, but would be useful when compared to the findings of previous research. It then seemed important to switch gears on focus the attention on other variables besides the perceived influence, which is why the relationship between being mutual or assigned roommates with the hours spent with the other roommate was examined. The evidence also showed that this was not significant.

It also seemed important to look at how the participants' home life shaped their experience while in college. Since social networks have been said to have an adverse effect on one's success, the experiences the students had within their home growing up and the number of contacts they could rely on were compared. Also, the extent the students could understand others in relation to their relationship with their parents and being a risk taker was examined. This was done to see if this relationship was altered in any way due to the parent's educational obtainment. The data for both of these experiments provided evidence that there was indeed no significant correlation. The researcher then focused on the relationship between whether or not the students worked and if it had anything to do with the support they received from their parents. Unfortunately, once again, the data from the chi square revealed no significant relationship.

In addition to the quantitative questions examined previously, the questionnaire also included a qualitative question that asked the participants how they think their roommate(s) have influenced them. The data revealed that out of sixty-three participants, twenty-four of them had something either positive or negative to say about their relationship with roommate(s). The rest had said that they thought there was no influence taking place or they simply left the answers blank. Out of that twenty-four, sixteen of the students had positive responses. Most of the positive answers revealed that the participants' roommates have influenced them to work harder. For instance, one participant wrote "My roommate has influenced me to be more positive and to work harder." A few more examples of a positive relationship where there also seemed to be some influencing taking place included things like "Social Skills," "Time Management," and "Study harder."

Some participants even revealed that their roommates have contributed in helping them achieve a positive identity as well as encourage risk taking in a healthy way. One participant said, "My roommate has made me realize that if I want something, I can make it

happen.” Another example was, “My roommate has influenced me to be more outgoing and try new things.” There was also statement that could be taken as negative at first, but in the eyes of the individual it is a good thing and that is their roommate influences them to party more, but when that happens the opportunity to meet new people increases. Therefore, it seems as if many students do indeed take something away from their roommates that can positively affect their college experience.

There were also negative responses that may possibly say something about the quality of the relationship. For example, “My roommate makes me want to sleep in more” or “My roommate has influenced me to play more videogames.” Other examples explained that their roommates influence them to party too much or in some cases have had such bad experiences that they have had to move back on campus. Nevertheless, even though these responses are negative, it still strengthens the idea that there is indeed a relationship between one roommate’s behaviors as a result of spending time with the other.

Discussion

Having a limited sample and a limited timeframe to work within caused some issues when it came to the analysis of this project. If there would have been a larger sample some of the relationships could have perhaps proven to be significant and added more evidence for the hypothesis. The data that was collected, however, whether statistically significant or not, had revealed that there is indeed an ability to learn from those around us based on how individuals views themselves in relation to others as well as realizing what resources to utilize.

This idea that students realize they are susceptible to being influenced was evident with the comparison between their perceived influence of the roommate and the amount of time they spent together. Although this notion wasn’t explicit in the previous literature, it most definitely holds some merit. If the roommates are spending more time together then there is more of a chance that the influence they have on each other has more time to be internalized. In addition, this would assume that they have a good relationship with each other and are more likely to share their feelings about what is going on in their lives. With that being said, if an individual is comfortable, it seems as if that person would feel like that he or she would have more control over his or her life, which would then generate feelings of optimism, and in turn would put him or her in a good position to succeed academically. This was revealed through the students’ statements about how their roommates have influenced them to work harder and to have a more positive attitude.

Previous literature has also demonstrated that students who tend to take more risks achieve higher academic success (DeCarolis et al., 2009). In addition, birth order has been said to be related to the extent at which one is influential or likelihood they will be influenced. The findings from this study corresponded with both statements. Since there was a statistically significant relationship between these two variables, one could argue that the reason birth order has an effect on a person’s actions is because risk propensity could be shaped by the role that is taken on within the family. For instance, being later born could mean that one has been able to see their older siblings try and fail, which may hinder how much one wants to take a risk

or the other way around if the older sibling succeeds. On the contrary, if one is first born they may see taking a risk and succeeding as a time to shine, which is why they aspire to take a risk and hopefully increase the odds of advancing when it comes to socio-economic status. This may also have something to do with why first born students are more influential (Hall & Willerman, 1963). Within their family they are the ones who their younger siblings look up to and in a way have some authority over them. They may also feel like it is their duty to set a good example for the younger siblings.

Social networks have also been said to be contributing factors in achieving academic success. Obviously, for a first generation student who wants to succeed, social networks are something they want to take into consideration. This corresponds with what has been said about the breadth and depth of social capital. The larger a social network is, the more likely a person will be able to generate connections that may be able to guide them in the right direction. However, the data from this sample revealed that many of the participants had smaller social networks, which would seem to contradict the last statement. Perhaps it has more to do with the depth of social capital, which would mean that the student has a higher ability to communicate with others and understand them at a deeper level, which in turn generates a better quality relationship. As outlined, the better the relationship, the more likely one will be influenced because they will feel more comfortable, which opens the room up for discussion per se and allows the student to ask questions or voice concerns that they may otherwise have never been asked. Therefore, the number of people within one's social network may matter, but it seems evident that one would want to generate a larger social network of quality relationships instead of just racking up the numbers for the sake of it.

By focusing on first generation students and how various variables affected their experiences, it was important to analyze resources that the students may have utilized to give them an advantage when it came to academic performance. For instance, perceived influence and time spent with the other roommate suggested to be statistically significant, it seemed important to look at whether or not being a first generation student affected how much time they spent with their roommate. It was assumed that being a first generation college student would yield more time spent with the roommate because they would not have the best idea of what to do with their time based on the idea that they have never had an experience like going to college. However, the results showed otherwise, which was actually surprising. Although the results were insignificant, it could mean the student still relies on previous social networks while still in college, which brings up the idea that the student might spend a lot of time traveling back to their home town to be with that social network when they have free time instead of spending it with their roommate or spending time on campus. In addition, this could explain the relationship between the roommates and could simply mean that they do not feel comfortable with each other yet, or assume that the relationship between roommates takes time to blossom. This insignificant relationship could also be the result of the first generation student simply observing the other roommates behaviors and when the time is right may start to conform to their behaviors, which would then lead to them spending more time with each other. Perhaps it just takes time for barriers to be broken down and for the roommates to become more comfortable with each other.

When analyzing the relationship between being a first generation student and sense of control, the researcher found that there was not a significant relationship. This seemed to contradict what previous literature has said about how control increases the likelihood of academic success. One would have expected to see a significant relationship when comparing these variables, but it is possible the students did not know if they had control over their outcomes because they had not seen any immediate results for their actions up to this point. In addition, this relationship could be more implicit and not thought about because overall both non-traditional and traditional students felt they had control, which was the reason that they had made it into the college arena in the first place. Furthermore, it seems as if the small sample size could have made the results insignificant because when reviewing the sample as a whole, most of the students felt they had control.

The previous literature had also revealed the importance of risk propensity and birth order when it came to academic achievement and the extent at which one is influential or susceptible to being influenced. Additionally, when comparing these variables it was found that they were significant, which is why it seemed important to compare the risk propensity of both roommates. The results had shown that there was not significant correlation. However, this was most likely due to the fact that the responses of roommate "B" had not been able to be analyzed. Therefore, it was the perceived risk propensity of the other roommate by the initial roommate A. Interestingly, this could show that if roommates differed in their risk propensity, it would go along with what other research has said about roommates being too similar and that they will sink or swim if they share the same cognitive characteristics. One could also argue that one of the roommates is more influential and the differences in risk propensity could be the result of one being more comfortable with their ability to take risks.

Since perceived influence and birth order seemed to hold some merit earlier in the analysis, it seemed relevant to investigate a correlation between perceived influence and birth order, which would have coincided with what previous literature has stated. Unfortunately the results proved to be insignificant. This may have been due to the fact that there was an implicit relationship and the initial roommate was first born and felt they were the ones who were more influential, which is why they would have seen their roommate as less influential. In addition, this could also say something about the quality of the relationship between the two roommates, which if it were a negative one, the odds of them influencing each other would decrease. In other words, perhaps birth order affected how an individual sees their roommates as influential, which ultimately would shape their answer in a way that would show it as an insignificant relationship. This argument would also support why perceived influence and perceived academic performance showed no significant correlation. Perhaps the initial roommate (A) was the one who viewed himself as more influential and viewed his success as a result of his own actions and knowledge of what to do.

It then seemed important to review whether not being mutual or assigned roommates effected the time spent together between the roommates. No significant relationship was found. The time spent together when assigned varied and when mutually chosen, the roommates either spent a lot of time together or none at all. This may further support something about the quality of the relationship. In addition, one could argue that if the

roommates did not spend time with each other, they must have spent time with other people, which would mean that they were expanding their social network.

As was previously discussed, cultural capital can shape one's aspirations, which ultimately guides one in a direction towards higher academic achievement or not, which is why the experiences within the home and number contacts within a social network was compared to see if there was a relationship. This was to see whether or not one's home life affected one's abilities to generate an appropriate social network. The results were insignificant, which was actually significant because it strengthened the argument that students could generate a quality relationship and a good social network not matter what their home life was like, which reinforces the notion that those who do not come from academically oriented family can still succeed within the academic arena. In addition, the numbers of contacts were consistent for all home life experiences, which say that these college students had learned something from others outside of the home that aided in their success. In addition, when comparing the extent at which the participants understood others views and their relationship with their parents, one found that there was not a significant relationship. This strengthens the previous argument even more that peers perhaps have more influence than parents because the initial student most likely spends more time with them than their parents as they get other. Therefore, it is evident that students indeed learn from those around them other than their parents, and the resources that are acquired to progress academically are learned outside of the home.

Risk propensity and parents education seemed to be relevant to this study as well. The reason for this was because one would assume that if their parents had obtained higher academic success then the student would see his or her chances of making it as more likely, which allowed them to be more comfortable when taking the risk of going to college. However, the results revealed to be statistically insignificant. Fortunately, this strengthens the argument that students can be risk takers no matter what their parents' education obtainment is, which shows why there are first generation students in the first place. In other words, social capital does not solely rely on one's cultural capital, which means one can escape their supposedly pre-destined fate. Therefore, this supported what previous literature has said about risk propensity and if one feels they can better themselves by taking the risk than they are far more likely to advance academically.

Whether or not a student worked while going to college was also a topic of interest because it seemed as if one had to work that their academic performance would be hindered to some degree. It seemed as if that the amount of financial support the student had received from their parents would aide in whether or not the student would have to work. However, the results had shown that this was not the case. This suggests that some students may choose to work for a variety of reasons. Perhaps some students realized their financial situation at a young age and know they have to work as well as go to school in order to advance academically. A steady income makes one feel more comfortable and in control because they do not have to worry about from where they are going to get their next paycheck. Needless to say, this supports what was said about feeling comfortable and in control and how that contributes to academic success. One could also argue that if parents wanted their children to be independent and teach them how to fend for themselves, which in turn also generates a

sense of control when one faces a new situation alone. Not to mention, working and going to school teaches the student to manage their time effectively, which is ultimately what it takes to succeed while going to college. Working also allows one to generate a larger social network, which as we have outlined, has many benefits when it comes to achieving academic success. Therefore, the decision to work is not solely based on the amount of financial support received from the parents. In some cases it is, but the results from the data analysis show that students who receive full financial support still decide to work. It is possible that students feel this is an important learning tool as well as means of feeling more comfortable and in control.

Along with all the quantitative data, the qualitative data showed how college students viewed their roommates and how they impacted each other to various degrees. For instance, many of the participants agreed that their roommates indeed had some influence on their behavior. Some revealed that their roommates have influenced them to be harder workers as well as generate a more positive outlook on school and educational attainment. In addition, there were responses that included the idea roommates had the ability to influence the initial student to take risks in a healthy way. Furthermore, these examples correlate with what literature has had to say about what resources are necessary for the educational advancement.

Although most of the responses were positive, there were the select few that had negative experiences with their roommates. However, this just shows that the initial roommate was able to notice what “not” to utilize. Not to mention, it shows that if roommates are really similar they can rub off on each other in negative way, which enforces the notion that students may sink or swim together. These examples also show that roommates can adapt to the behavior of their other roommates, which is the argument that this research is working towards reinforcing.

Conclusion

Although a large sample from both phases of the study was not gathered, the data from the first phase revealed that roommates indeed have the ability to influence each other in positive as well as negative ways. In addition, the data suggested that students do acquire much of their social and relational capital from those within their social networks and not simply from their parents. It seems as if the social and relational capital that is acquired and internalized by students in their adolescent years stays within them through their years in college, which is then either reinforced or hindered by their interactions with their roommates and those in their newly generated social networks.

In order for roommates to truly influence each other, it seems as if there has to be particular criteria that have to be met. For instance, the birth order of both roommates can be assumed to shape their mindset as to who is more influential or susceptible to being influenced. However, if both share the same birth order, the influence may be less likely to take place because they may see their successes as a result of their own actions. In other words, if they are both later born they may both be more susceptible to forces of influence, which would also leave them at somewhat of a neutral state. In addition, birth order seems to have an adverse effect on whether or not someone sees themselves as able to conquer new tasks.

Therefore, if these social characteristics differ for both roommates, they may have the ability to help each other reach their goals in an effective manner.

The depth of social capital also seems to play a more crucial role in the development of one's social and relational capital as opposed to the breadth of their social networks. This suggests that although one's social network may be small, the ability to take something away from the relationship really depends on how invested the individual is in the relationship and whether or not they feel comfortable sharing personal information with those within in it.

The quality of the relationship also seems to come into play in whether or not roommates see their roommate as influential. The evidence also suggest that this also shapes how much time the roommates spend together, which lead to further internalization of social and relational capital that is transferred between them. Not to mention, with increased time spent together, one can assume that they feel comfortable enough to share things with each other as opposed to if they had seen each other as having no influence.

All in all this study suggested that students do learn from those around them and are able to generate the social and relational capital that is necessary to reach their academic goals. The data from this research hopes to shine light on how social resources are acquired and how they benefit students throughout their lives. In conclusion, the findings from this study hope to reveal some interesting information about roommates, which may aid in the decision making process for up and coming college students when they are choosing who to live with.

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Questionnaire Distributed to Participants

Appendix A

1.) Age of Student _____

2.) Gender Male____ Female____ Other____

3.) Do live on campus or off campus? (Circle one)

4.) Year in College

 Freshman

 Sophomore

 Junior

 Other

 If other, specify _____

5.) Are you a part-time or full-time student?

 Part-Time____ Full-time__

6.) Do you have a job outside of going to school? Yes____ No____

7.) How many hours a week do you work?

 0 to 10 11 to 15 16 to 20 21 to 25 over 25

8.) Would you consider your hometown to be rural or urban?

9.) Has your parent(s) obtained any education beyond high school?

 Some, but never finished____ Four year Degree____

 Two year degree____ Master's/Doctorate____

10.) How would you rate the quality of your relationship with your parent(s)? (Circle the number that best fits your answer)

Poor		Neutral		Good
1	2	3	4	5

11.) How would you rate the support you receive from you parents financially? (Chose one)

Not at all		Somewhat		Full Support
1	2	3	4	5

12.) How would you rate the emotional support you receive from you parents? (Chose one)

Very Little		Somewhat		Full support
1	2	3	4	5

13.) On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate the importance placed on education by your parents? (Circle one)

Low importance		Neutral		High importance
1	2	3	4	5

14.) What was you experience like while living at home with your parents? (circle one)

Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive
1	2	3	4	5

15.) How many siblings do you have? _____

16.) What is your birth order? (i.e. First child, second, third etc.) _____

17.) If you have older siblings, how many of them have enrolled in post-high school education?

18.) How would you rate your ability to understand others views? (Circle one)

Very Poor	Somewhat poor	Neutral	Somewhat Well	Very Well
1	2	3	4	5

19.) In high school, roughly how many people could you contact if you needed help with something?
 1 to 5___ 6 to 10___ 11 to 15___ 16 to 20___ 21 to 25___ over 25___

20.) How would you rate your social skills compared to others that you spend most of your time with?

Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very good
1	2	3	4	5

21.) To what extent do you feel comfortable and in control when experiencing new situations?

No control	Some control	Full control		
1	2	3	4	5

22.) Are you a risk taker? Yes___ No___

23.) To what extent do you give up on a task when you feel it is difficult?

None of the time	Some of the time	All of the time		
1	2	3	4	5

24.) How many roommates do you have? _____

25.) How would you rate your roommate(s) work ethic?

Very poor	Poor	Neutral	Good	Very good
1	2	3	4	5

26.) To what extent do you feel your roommate(s) are responsible?

Not at all	Somewhat	Very much		
1	2	3	4	5

27.) Do you think your roommate(s) are risk takers? Yes___ No___

28.) How many hours a week do you spend time with your roommate?

0 to 5 6 to 10 11 to 15 16 to 20 over 20

29.) Do you think your roommate(s) have influenced you in any way? Yes___ No__

If yes, in what ways do they influence you?

30.) How many hours a week do you spend studying?

0 to 5 6 to 10 11 to 15 16 to 20 21 to 25 over 25

31.) What is your approximate GPA? _____

32.) How would you rate your relationship with your instructors?

Very Poor Poor Neutral Good Very Good

1 2 3 4 5

33.) How often would you say you attend class each week?

Never Sometimes Always

1 2 3 4 5

34.) May the researcher contact you after the questionnaire is complete? Yes___ No___

If yes, write your email here. _____

35.) May the researcher contact your roommates in order to distribute the questionnaire to them as well? Yes___ No___

If yes, please leave a phone number or email address your roommate(s) could be reached at here. _____

Chi Square Results: Measure of Association for Nominal Variables

Appendix B

Hours Spent with Roommate	10.86*
Perceived Influence of Roommate	

Risk Taker	19.76**
Birth Order	

First Generation College Student	15.75**
Social Network (Contacts)	

Risk Taker	5.34
Parent's Level of Education	

Home Life Experiences	23.33
Social Network (Contacts)	

Understanding Other's Views	13.95
Quality of Relationship with Parents	

Perceived Influence of Roommate	2.21
Birth Order	

Perceived Influence of Roommate	3.52
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Perceived Academic Performance	
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Calculated Number = Chi Square Value

X* or X** = Level of Significance