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Children's Role in Generating Social Capital

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Using data from the 500 Family Study, this study examines how adolescents contribute to their families' social capital. An instrumental variable model reveals that adolescents' social involvement has a positive effect on social support from sources outside the family, suggesting that parents connect to other parents in the community through their children. This finding provides an interesting revision to Coleman's model of social closure. It indicates that rather than being solely the outcome of parents' investments, the creation of social capital is a process also mediated by the children themselves, who can act as motivators of network building for their parents.

Introduction

Recent research has emphasized the role of social capital for child and adolescent development. Important outcomes, such as cognitive and social functioning, psychological well-being and educational achievement, have all been associated with high levels of social capital in families and communities. The mechanisms by which social capital in the community is created and accumulated, however, are still insufficiently understood. Coleman (1988, 1990) suggested that communities characterized by intergenerational closure – that is communities in which parents and children are highly interconnected – are especially conducive to forming social capital among their members. Closure, which provides role models and allows the flow of information, facilitates the monitoring of children's behavior and the reinforcement of shared norms. But Coleman did not specify how closure is created, or the mechanism through which parents connect to other parents.

   This study examines how social closure is formed in communities of working families by investigating the mechanisms through which social support from people outside the nuclear family is obtained. The model focuses on children and treats them as active social motivators of network building who play a key role in the process of generating social capital for their families. Longer work hours, extended commutes, growing stress and hectic work schedules have made it more difficult for working parents in contemporary society to establish social ties in their community and accrue resources needed for balancing work and family demands (Bookman 2004; Carnoy 2000; Hansen 2005). We argue that under these circumstances, children can serve as important social brokers for their parents. Not only do child-related activities, such as PTA meetings and after-

school programs, provide a framework for parents to create social networks, but parents also use the social ties their children have formed to connect them to other parents in the local community. This study tests the conditions under which such mechanism is likely to occur.

Background

Scholars have become increasingly interested in the role that contextual factors play in family functioning and child development. Consistent with the ecological approach, families are treated as entities embedded in a set of interlocking networks and child development is perceived as a process shaped not only by dynamics within the family but also by environmental forces beyond it (Bronfenbrenner 1986; Cochran, Larner, Riley, Gunnarsonn and Henderson 1990; Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder and Sameroff 1999; Sampson, Morenoff and Earls 1999). Studies in this tradition typically focus on the social environment in which children grow up and examine how social resources contribute to various child and adolescent outcomes (e.g., Furstenberg and Hughes 1995; Hoffreth, Boisjoly and Duncan 1998; Marshall, Noonan, McCartney, Marx and Keefe 2001; Stanton-Salazar 2001; Yabiku, Axinn and Thornton 1999)

Social resources, such as access to community services and assistance from family members, friends, neighbors and teachers, are commonly referred to as social capital. Although the extensive use of the concept in empirical studies has been criticized for lacking theorization, researchers generally agree that social capital refers to resources embedded in social relations that actors can use to garner benefits and improve their life chances (Lin 2001; Portes 1998; Sandefur and Laumann 1998). For Coleman (1988, 1990), social capital is considered crucial for the development of human capital. In his famous article, he shows how parent-child relationships promote children's educational prospects. Unlike Coleman, who treats social capital in a positive manner, Bourdieu (1985) views social capital as a major mechanism of social reproduction and uses it in a critical way to highlight class inequalities in access to institutional and other resources and opportunities to develop cultural capital.

While researchers have widely studied the question of how social capital develops inside the family (e.g., Crosnoe 2004; Furstenberg and Hughes 1995; Parcel and Menaghan 1994), with the exception of schools, less theoretical and empirical attention has been dedicated to investigating the development of social capital outside the family (Morrow 1999). The ways in which families obtain this type of social capital are still very much obscure. This study, which treats social support from people outside the family as a form of social capital, seeks to promote an understanding of the mechanisms by which social capital in the community is created.

Social Support as a Form of Social Capital

Several characteristics qualify social support as a form of social capital. First, social support is in essence a relational concept. It constitutes a resource flowing between interconnected individuals through their social networks (House,

Umberson and Landis 1988). Second, social support is instrumental and directed towards productive ends. People engage in social interactions with others to gain material, financial, emotional or other benefits and use them to achieve productive ends, such as balancing work and family demands or coping with illness (e.g., Thoits 1995). Third, people purposively invest in social relationships with the aim of obtaining support at some point in the near or distant future. The idea of investment in the formation and maintenance of social relationships is a critical concept in social capital theory. Bourdieu, for example, argues that social networks are deliberately constructed and institutionalized in order to "produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material and symbolic profits." (1985:249) (See also Burt 1992; Coleman 1990.)

Finally, social support is part of an exchange process that has consequences not only for the functioning of the individual but also for the functioning of others who share the same network of relationships. This approach, consistent with recent theoretical developments, highlights both the costs and benefits of social capital and calls for an analysis of social capital grounded in a contextual framework (Portes 1998). For example, the type of social capital obtained in densely-knit networks is helpful for obtaining support and information about network members, but not for accessing information that is typically found outside the group (Granovetter 1973; Sandefur and Laumann 1998). Therefore, in studying social capital, researchers need to specify not only the network of ties but also the communities in which they reside.

Although this study makes an argument about the type of ties prevalent in communities of working parents and their role in forming social closure, it is not a network study. There is no doubt that relational data would have allowed us to empirically test yet another important dimension of the model discussed here. Nevertheless, consistent with other studies, we use an indicator of relational properties to discuss network hypotheses related to social capital. In our study, social support treated as a form of social capital, serves this purpose. The concept of social support provides information about the more qualitative aspect of a social network by indicating the extent to which the network can be mobilized in times of need and the type of support that can be extracted from it.

Social Closure and the Creation of Social Capital: A Challenge for Contemporary Working Families

Access to social capital is determined by opportunities to interact with others, the characteristics of the individuals who compose the social network, and the configuration of the network itself. Coleman (1988, 1990) identifies social closure as the network structure particularly conducive to the creation of social capital. Social closure is defined as a densely-knit network attained, for example, when parents know and interact with the parents of their children's friends. Frequent contacts between parents are considered crucial for child development because they allow adults to "observe the child's actions in different circumstances, talk to each other about the child, compare notes, and establish norms." (1990:593) The flow of information about children's activities and whereabouts is necessary for effectively monitoring their behaviors. Using

this information, parents can evaluate how their children are doing and whether intervention is required. Through their ties to other adults, parents can also determine whether their children's friends share similar values and aspirations, and use this information to deter their children from socializing with the "wrong" peers. Furthermore, parents in closed networks can trust other parents and adults in the community to act according to shared expectations and intervene on behalf of their children. Under these circumstances, action can easily be taken to redress non-conforming behavior.

Hence, social closure is considered an important mechanism of socialization and social control, which promotes the creation of social capital and provides benefits not only to those individuals who directly interact with each other but also to those who share the same social environment, a community for example. It is consistent with the idea of cosocialization (Furstenberg et al. 1999) and the view that children's development is influenced by a whole network of parents who share child-rearing ideologies and practices (Harris 1995).

Scholars have recently raised the concern that deviant behaviors and attitudes among youth might not be easily detected, or may be ignored, in communities characterized by social closure. At times, families may attempt to prevent and discredit neighbors' interventions, such as reporting a child's mental state or misconduct, in order to maintain their privacy and social standing in the community (Newman 2004). This important critique suggests that social closure may not always be an efficient mechanism of control that generates social capital. Nevertheless, many empirical studies indicate that densely-knit networks are better able to generate the type of social capital needed for promoting the life chances of children. Most notably, Sampson and his colleagues (Sampson et al. 1999) show that collective efficacy, referred to as the existence of informal social controls, reciprocal exchanges and mutual support for children, is high in affluent and residentially stable communities (see also Hagan, MacMillan and Wheaton 1996; Hofferth et al. 1999).

Overall, these studies indicate that Coleman's model of social closure best applies to middle-class Anglo-American communities and cannot be easily generalized. First, it is highly plausible that embeddedness in tightly-knit but resource-poor networks may not provide the same type of benefits to their members. Under circumstances of deprivation, particularly among minority groups, dense networks do not provide much access to resources typically found in middle-class institutions and settings (Granovetter 1983; Stanton-Salazar 1997, 2001), and may even constitute a source of stress that can impede opportunities for socioeconomic improvement (Stack 1974; Uehara 1990). Second, it is not clear to what extent disadvantaged communities are able to create social closure. Several studies indicate that residents of poor communities experience high levels of mistrust and low collective efficacy and are less likely to develop social ties with others in their neighborhood (Sampson et al. 1999; Wilson 1996). These issues are important to keep in mind, although they are less of a concern to the present study, which focuses on working families in middle-class communities.

Nevertheless, recent research suggests that creating social closure may also be a challenge for middle-class families living in more affluent neighborhoods.

Middle-class parents – working far from their community of residence, spending long hours at work and experiencing high levels of stress – often find it difficult to establish and maintain local social relationships and run the risk of becoming social isolates in their own community (Bookman 2004; Hansen 2005; Putnam 2000). We argue that under these circumstances adolescents can be an important social resource for their working parents and can play a crucial role in generating social capital for their families.

A Child-Centered Approach to Social Capital

Another important limitation of Coleman's model is its failure to account for children's role in creating social networks. By treating closure and the formation of social networks as being solely the outcome of parents' investments, his model underestimates children's agency in shaping their social environment (Morrow 1999). His analytic approach substantially diverges from contemporary views in the social sciences that emphasize children's active role in society and treat socialization, not as a process of internalization that portrays children as passive receptors, but as a collective activity in the course of which children create and negotiate their own social and cultural worlds (Corsaro 1997; Harris 1995).

Most notably, Stanton-Salazar's research (1997, 2001) shows that adolescents can develop trusting and sustaining relationships with peers and other adults, such as community leaders, teachers and counselors, from which they can draw support necessary for pursuing academic ends (see also Kahne and Bailey 1999). He finds that low-income Mexican-origin youths who engaged in help-seeking behaviors were able to develop social capital and use it to make a successful transition into adulthood. In this study, we seek to demonstrate that children can also generate social capital for their family.

Study Hypotheses

We believe that the flow of social resources between parents and children is bi-directional, especially when adolescents are the focus of analysis. Unlike younger children, adolescents exercise greater autonomy with respect to their personal social affiliations. At an older age, not only do children socialize independently from their parents (Holmbeck, Paikoff and Brooks-Gunn 1995), but they may also help their parents connect to other parents in the community.

Specifically, we argue that families form social closure through their adolescent children, from which they are able to obtain social support. Thus, by treating adolescents as social motivators of network building we answer the question, neglected by Coleman, of how parents connect to each other (see Figure 1). Because adolescents are very active in the local community, where they usually attend school and participate in extracurricular programs, they can act as social brokers for their parents who, using their children's social relationships, connect to other parents in the community. We therefore expect families whose children are socially active to have more social capital, which provides them with greater social support, than families whose children are less active.

Figure 1. Ties Between Children Help Parents Connect to Each Other
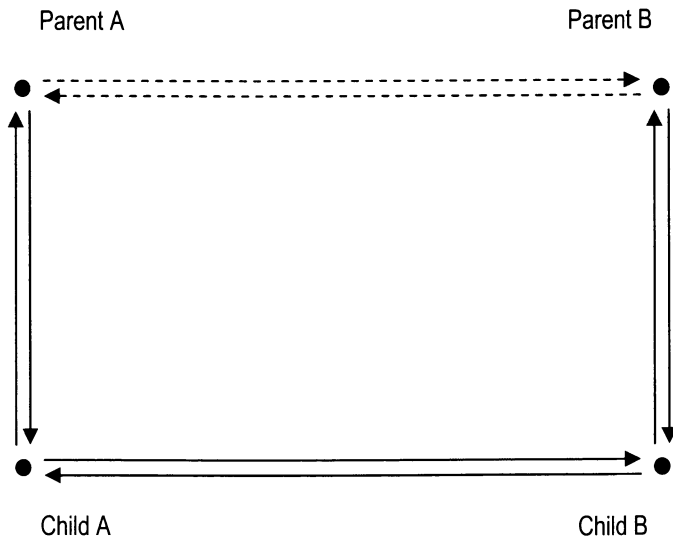
Data

The 500 Family Study

The data for this study are taken from the 500 Family Study, a study funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation that investigates the work and family experiences of middle-class families living in eight urban and suburban communities across the United States. Seven of these communities were initially included in a previous study, the Sloan Study of Youth and Social Development. An eighth community was added to the present study. At each site, participating families were recruited mostly by mail or phone through the local school (permission to contact families was obtained from school officials). Others were solicited by local newspaper advertisements or were referred to the study by participating families. Confidentiality was assured and explicit consent forms were obtained for all participants. Data were collected from 1999 to 2000.

The 500 Family Study is a predominantly white middle class sample that includes highly educated parents employed in professional occupations. Compared to parents with children who participated in the Current Population Survey (CPS March 2000), parents in the 500 Family Study appear to be of higher socioeconomic status (Hoogstra 2005). The vast majority of fathers and mothers in the study have completed college and many have jobs that require advanced degrees, such as executives, managers, physicians and engineers. Parents in the 500 Family Study work long hours and, not surprisingly, given their high level of educational and occupational attainment, report higher earnings than the average found in middle-class families in nationally representative samples. (More than 50 percent of fathers and 14 percent of mothers earn more than $75,000 per year.)

Although not entirely representative of middle class families in the United States, the 500 Family Study is unique in that it provides rich and comprehensive data about contemporary working families. The 500 Family Study includes data collected separately from fathers, mothers and children and thus makes it possible to study families as *whole units*. Furthermore, it uses a variety of methods to collect information about the daily experiences of parents and children. In this study data comes from several sources: parent and adolescent surveys and the self-report forms completed by adolescents who participated in the Experience Sampling Method (ESM). The ESM is a type of diary that uses preprogrammed wristwatches to randomly beep participants several times a day during their waking hours. When signaled, participants are asked to complete a questionnaire in which they describe their activities, location, companions and psychological state at the time of the beep (see Csikszentmihalyi and Larson 1987 for a review). The ESM is considered a valid and reliable instrument for collecting data about subjective experiences (Robinson 1999). Its advantage is that it allows researchers to obtain real time data about respondents' activities and feelings as they experience them in natural settings.

Analyses in this study were performed on a subsample of 321 families. The 500 Family Study includes both families with kindergartners and families with adolescents (approximately 65 percent of the total sample). Because only adolescents (children between the ages of 11 and 19) completed both the survey and the ESM, we include in this study families from the latter group. However, in 119 families information is available only for the adolescent but not for the parents, and in 66 cases the adolescent did not participate in the ESM. To deal with the problem of missing data, we used a multiple imputation method.

Social scientists and statisticians largely agree that compared to other techniques, multiple imputation (MI) is a more suitable method for dealing with problems of item nonresponse because it uses observed data to predict missing values while taking into account the uncertainty about the unobserved data (Little 1992; King, Honaker, Joseph and Scheve 2001). Therefore, instead of imputing one single value such as the mean for each missing value, MI imputes m possible values for each missing data point and creates m completed datasets, each of which can be analyzed separately using standard statistical methods. In this study we used a multiple imputation method based on an algorithm outlined by King et al. (2001) and implemented with the software *AMELIA* (Honaker, Joseph, King, Scheve and Singh 2003) to create ten complete datasets. We then analyzed each dataset separately and combined the results to obtain the statistics presented here (King et al. 2001; Little 1992). For purposes of comparison, we also estimated the models using a listwise deletion method. The results did not differ from those obtained with MI.

Measures

Social Support

The social support measure refers to the *perceived* amount of assistance available in times of need from people *outside* the family. We treat social support not as an individual but as a familial resource embedded in a specific context and aimed at

achieving certain goals. Social support in this study is therefore measured at the family level as an aggregate of individual scores. For each family a social support score was computed as the mean of the mother's and father's scores on the social support index (r = .35, p < .001). Scores vary between 0 and 2 with higher scores indicating greater extra-familial social support (Cronbach's alpha = .68).

At the individual level, the social support index, upon which the family scores are based, is designed to measure the amount of perceived extra-familial social support available across several domains (instrumental, financial and emotional). It is based on the four following items: "If I need to work late, I can easily find someone to watch my children," "If I'm unavailable to get my child to the doctor, friends or family will help," "If I have an emergency and need cash, family or friends will loan it to me," and "If I have troubles or need advice, I have someone I can talk to" (never, sometimes, always). Since the various domains of social support in this study are highly inter-correlated, responses to these four items are averaged to create a single index.

Adolescent Social Involvement

Several measures of adolescents' social involvement are examined. School activities indicates the proportion of school-sponsored social activities the respondent reported participating in at least once during the past school year; these include school sports, music groups, school plays, student government, academic honor societies and the school yearbook or newspaper. The variable activities outside school refers to the mean of participation in various social extracurricular activities both at the formal and informal levels, such as visiting friends, attending youth groups or recreational programs, playing sports with friends, volunteering or performing community service, attending art, music or dance classes, taking sports lessons, and participating in a sports team. The range is from 1 (rarely or never) to 4 (everyday or almost every day).

To measure popularity, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the following statements are applicable: "I have lots of friends" and "I am considered 'popular' at school" (never, rarely, sometimes, often, always). A popularity index was computed as the mean of these two items (r = .49, p < .001). Scores range from 1 to 5 with higher scores indicating greater popularity. Friendship quality is the average response to the following three items: "I trust my friends," "I can tell my friends about my problems and troubles," and "I have friends that I can count on." Scores again range from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater friendship quality (Cronbach's alpha = .86).

Control Variables

Two demographic variables in the analyses are age in years and gender (male = 1; female = 0). In addition, a measure of friendliness is used as a control for one's propensity to be social and engage in social relations. Friendliness is based on the adolescent ESM data, and on a scale from 0 to 3 it refers to the extent to which respondent feels friendly when beeped (not at all, a little, somewhat, very much). Studies of social support have been commonly criticized for not

taking into account the intervening effect of sociability as a personality trait in social support processes (Dunkel-Schetter and Bennett 1990; Thoits 1995). By including friendliness as a proxy for sociability in the analyses of social support we control, at least partially, for this intervening effect.

We include two additional psychological measures to control for sociability, depression and self-esteem. Depression is measured with the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale (CES-D). The CES-D scale is a 20-item self-report scale designed to measure the frequency of depressive symptoms in the general population. It is a valid and reliable scale widely used to measure depressive symptoms (see Radloff 1991 for a review). The measure of self-esteem is based on the five following items, most of which are taken from the modified version of the Rosenberg self-esteem scale in National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS 1990): "I feel good about myself," "I am able to do things at least as well as other people," "I feel I do not have much to be proud of," (reverse coded) "At times I feel like a failure," (reverse coded) and "I feel in control of my life." Each adolescent was asked to respond to these items on a 0 (never) to 4 (always) scale. To form the self-esteem scale, the five responses were averaged, with high scores indicating greater self-esteem (Cronbach's alpha = .80).

Instrumental Variable

We believe that social participation gives adolescents the opportunity to develop high quality friendship ties which in turn contribute to family's social support, and use parental approval of friend as an instrumental variable for friendship quality. This variable is measured by the item "My parents approve of my friends" with response categories ranging from 1 (never true) to 5 (always true).

Results

Descriptive Results

Sample descriptives for social support and adolescent characteristics are summarized in Table 1. In this sample, social support is normally distributed with a mean of 1.27 and a standard deviation of .43. The average age of the adolescents in the study is 15 years. Forty-seven percent of them are male. On average, the adolescents in the study report moderate levels of depression and self-esteem (14.3 and 2.89 respectively). Adolescents report participating in a quarter of the social activities offered by their school, have a moderate level of participation in social activities outside of school (about two activities on average), and report relatively high levels of both popularity and friendship quality (3.58 and 4.1 respectively). On average, parents highly approve of their children's friends (mean of 4.32).

Next, the bivariate relationships between social support and adolescent and parent characteristics are examined. The results, displayed in Table 2, reveal that social support is significantly associated with most adolescent psychological and social characteristics. Families of adolescents who have higher scores on self-esteem and lower scores on depression report higher social support scores

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Social Support and Adolescent Measures

Variable	Mean (*SD*) or percent	Range	Data source[a]
Social support	1.27 (.43)	0–2	MS and FS
Adolescent social involvement			
School activities	.25 (.18)	0–1	AS
Activities outside school	2.06 (.50)	1–4	AS
Popularity	3.59 (.92)	1–5	AS
Friendship quality	4.10 (.83)	1–5	AS
Adolescent controls			
Age	15.35 (2.23)	11–19	AS
Gender (male)	46.85%		AS
Friendliness	1.40 (.69)	0–3	AESM
Depression	14.30 (8.72)	0–43	AS
Self-esteem	2.89 (.65)	0–4	AS
Instrumental variable			
Parental approval of friends	4.32 (.75)	1–5	AS
N	321		

Source: 500 Family Study
Note: Table entries are the combined descriptive statistics across ten imputed datasets.
[a]MS – mother survey, FS – father survey, AS – adolescent survey, AESM – adolescent ESM.

compared to families of adolescents who have lower scores on self-esteem and higher scores on depression. Note, however, that the correlation for depression is very small and only marginally significant.

With respect to adolescents' social involvement, participation in social activities outside school, but not inside school, is significantly associated with social support ($r = .15$). This finding suggests that social activities inside and outside school constitute two distinct social environments requiring different levels of parent involvement. Significant positive correlations are also found between social support and adolescents' popularity and friendship quality ($r = .19$ and .22 respectively). Finally, social support is significantly related to friendliness ($r = .20$).

Adolescents' Social Involvement and Social Support

Is adolescents' social involvement conducive to the formation of social capital? Using an OLS model we begin by examining the association between adolescents' social involvement and social support, controlling for adolescents' friendliness, demographic characteristics and psychological well-being. Interestingly, whereas most adolescent measures were found to be significantly related to social support at the bivariate level (Table 2), once they are all included in a multivariate analysis, most of the associations become small in size and statistically insignificant (see first column in Table 4). Results of the OLS model show that the relationships between social support and adolescents' popularity, participation in social activities outside school, friendliness and psychological well-being become insignificant.

Table 2: Correlations between Social Support and Adolescent Measures

Variable	Social Support
Adolescent social involvement	
School activities	.06
Activities outside school	.15**
Popularity	.19***
Friendship quality	.22***
Adolescent controls	
Age	-.07
Gender (male)	.04
Friendliness	.20***
Depression	-.01*
Self-esteem	.19***
N	321

Source: 500 Family Study
Note: Table entries are the combined correlations across ten imputed datasets.
*p < .10   **p < .05   ***p < .01

The only effect that remains significant in the OLS model is friendship quality. That is, families of adolescents who report high friendship quality have greater social support. These results suggest that friendship quality, rather than degree of popularity, is what matters for social support.[1]

But how do adolescents develop friendships of high quality? To answer this question, we examine in the next analysis the indirect path between social involvement and social support using friendship quality as a mediating variable. Since no significant association was found between social support and participation in social activities in school, we focus only on participation in social activities outside school. We test a model in which adolescents, through their participation in social activities outside school, form high quality friendship ties that promote family social support.

We argue that social participation in the local community gives adolescents the opportunity to develop high quality friendship ties, which in turn contribute to the family's social support. Viewed in this way, friendship quality can no longer be treated as an exogenous variable that is uncorrelated with the equation's error terms, and using it as a predictor in an OLS model might provide biased estimates. To deal with this problem, we test a Two-Stage Least Squares model, TSLS (Kennedy 1998:165). In the first stage, the problematic endogenous variable, friendship quality, is replaced by an instrumental variable, that is, a modified variable similar to the original one but uncorrelated with the equation's error terms. The instrumental variable, *parental approval of friends*, is assumed to be only indirectly correlated with the outcome. A new variable is created by regressing the problematic endogenous variable on the instrumental variable and all exogenous variables. This new variable is then used in the second stage as a predictor of social support.

At the theoretical level, we argue that *parental approval of friends* is a valid instrumental variable because adolescents are more likely to form friendship

ties independently of their parents or other adults. Unlike younger children, adolescents spend more time without the direct monitoring and supervision of their parents and tend to socialize independently of their parents (Holmbeck et al. 1995:96). Consequently, becoming knowledgeable about their children's activities and whereabouts is crucial for parents. But parents might not view in a positive way all of their children's friends. We argue that those ties that receive parental approval are more likely to develop into meaningful and high quality ties, from which parents in turn can draw support by connecting to the friends' parents.[2]

Social Support on Adolescent Social Involvement and Controls

Results of the TSLS model (second column in Table 3) show that the effect of friendship quality is robust; even after accounting for problems of endogeneity in the model, its effect is positive and significant. An increase of one standard deviation in friendship quality is associated with more than a 25 percent increase in social support, holding other variables constant. This result provides empirical support to the claim that the social ties that underlie support derive from adolescents' contacts with other adolescents and, through them, their parents. In the TSLS model, the coefficient for gender becomes significant. Considering that girls are more likely to obtain parental approval of their friendships than boys, this finding is not surprising. An examination of the effect of instrumentation

Table 3: Ordinary Least Squares and Two-Stage Least Squares Regressions of Social Support on Adolescent Social Involvement and Controls

Variables	OLS β (SE)	TSLS β (SE)
Adolescent controls		
Age	-.03 (.01)	-.00 (.01)
Male	.08 (.06)	.20*** (.07)
Friendliness	.13 (.06)	.11 (.07)
Depression	-.01 (.00)	.05 (.01)
Self-esteem	.07 (.06)	-.04 (.07)
Adolescent social involvement		
School activities	-.00 (.17)	.02 (.16)
Activities outside school	.04 (.08)	-.02 (.08)
Popularity	.03 (.04)	-.14 (.05)
Friendship quality	.16** (.04)	—
Friendship quality[a]	—	.46*** (.16)
R^2	.11	.13
N	321	321

Source: 500 Family Study
Note: Standardized coefficients, standard error estimates (in parentheses), and goodness of fit measures are combined statistical results across ten imputed datasets.
[a]Friendship quality in TSLS model is instrumented.
*p < .10   **p < .05   ***p < .01

of friendship quality using a t-test indeed revealed that friendship quality is significantly higher for girls (results not shown).[3]

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to shed light on processes that are conducive to the creation of social capital among contemporary working families. Using a child-centered approach, we examined how adolescents' social relationships are related to parents' perceptions of social support. Consistent with our hypothesis, we found that adolescents' social involvement, specifically their participation in social activities outside school, is positively related to social support, and that this effect is mediated by the formation of high quality friendship ties. This finding provides an interesting revision to Coleman's model of social closure. It suggests that rather than being solely the outcome of parents' investments in their children, social closure and the creation of community social capital are processes also mediated by the children themselves. Parents will be more likely to connect to the parents of their children's friends and create social closure, if their children have good friends, that is, friends who are likely to be approved by their parents. Participation in social activities outside school gives children the opportunity to develop these high quality friendships.

One could argue that the effect of adolescents' social involvement reflects a different mechanism than the one presented in this study. For example, having a shared biology could explain similar patterns of behavior among parents and their children in that both are social and reach out to others (Harris 1995). By including a measure of sociability, however, we have at least partially controlled for this possibility and can therefore conclude that the model tested in this study is likely to occur above and beyond the effect of shared traits. Children's sociability could also be the result of behaviors children learn from their parents, as Cochran and Brassard (1979) suggest. But as mentioned earlier, we believe that this mechanism is more applicable to younger children than to adolescents, who exert greater autonomy in choosing friends and engaging in social relationships. Yet other alternative explanations could be that parents who have greater social resources have children who are better able to form high quality friendships and, as a result, are more likely to participate in social activities, or that parents are more likely to approve of friends with whose parents they already have connections. We do not argue that our model necessarily rules out these other causal explanations. On the contrary, it is more likely to assume that many of these mechanisms occur simultaneously. Nevertheless, we believe that social scientists should be more sensitive to the complexity of familial processes. This study provides sufficient empirical evidence to suggest that focusing only on the flow of resources from parents to children can lead to an inaccurate depiction of family dynamics, and that future research should attribute a more active role to children and seriously investigate the ways in which they shape familial processes.

Finally, this study reveals the complex dynamics of social capital and raises important questions with respect to variations by socioeconomic status. To what extent is the mechanism described in this study, adolescents' social involvement, relevant for parents in depressed communities? Research clearly

shows that families in poor neighborhoods use various preventive strategies, such as having their children stay indoor, to keep them away from negative environmental influences and socializing with the wrong peers (Edin and Lein, 1997; Furstenberg et al. 1999). The disadvantage of living in a poor community might therefore be twofold. Unlike more affluent families, low-income families not only experience greater constraints in their family management strategies because they cannot select neighborhoods and schools for their children, but they may also be denied from accruing the benefits that come from having their children socially involved in the community. In trying to protect their children, parents may distance themselves from other parents who may share similar values and norms. By distancing from these parents, they are also less likely to become involved in exchanges that could lead to social support. Considering the role social capital plays in educational and occupational success, the mechanism described in this study could yet be another source of inequality that should be tested in future research with more diverse populations.

Notes

1. Interestingly, this result supports the view that peer acceptance, measured in this study by degree of popularity, and friendship quality are two distinct social concepts. As Asher and his colleagues (1996) point out, both are essential for healthy development but they refer to different interpersonal skills and developmental stages. This study further suggests that popularity and friendship quality have different implications for adolescents' social integration.

2. It is important to note that in certain cases, adolescents may seek to associate with other adolescents that their parents are likely to disapprove of (or that friendship ties that are not approved by the parents will persist rather than dissolve) as part of adolescents' attempts to reject parental authority and develop an independent identity. Overall, this is not the case with the adolescents in this particular sample, in which parental approval of friends is high and strongly correlated with other measures of adolescents' social involvement.

3. We conducted separate analyses by age groups to examine whether the mechanism described here varies by stage of development (one can expect the results to be more pronounced for older adolescents because of their increased independence in selecting friends), but did not find any significant difference. It is important to note, however, that the relative size of the sample might not be suited for revealing such an effect.

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