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Parental Involvement And Academic Outcomes Among First Generation College Students

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES AMONG FIRST

GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

Jordan A. Jaeger
Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2016

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

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May
2018

This Thesis, submitted by Jordan A. Jaeger in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Dr. Daphne Pedersen

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Dr. Elizabeth Legerski

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Dr. Justin Berg

This thesis is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the Graduate School at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

_____
Grant McGimpsey
Dean of the Graduate School

_____
4-23-2018   May 1, 2018

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PERMISSION

Title   Parental Involvement and Academic Outcomes among First Generation
                 College Students

Department   Sociology

Degree   Master of Arts

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                                                          Jordan Jaeger
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Higher education can be a challenging culture to navigate for any college student. One group of students that may be at a disadvantage when navigating the this culture is first generation students, those whose parents have not earned a four year degree, compared to their continuing generation peers, those who have at least one parent with a four year degree. The key purpose of this study is to use the theory of cultural capital, with parental involvement as a proxy, to examine relationships between these groups of students, parental involvement, and academic outcomes (academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance). Using the College Student Health and Stress Survey (2015), relationships were explored using independent samples t tests and OLS regression analyses. Findings from the t tests suggested there were no differences in academic outcomes between continuing generation and first generation students, but continuing generation students received more parental involvement that first generation students. None of the OLS regression models were significant, indicating that parental involvement did not predict academic outcomes. Findings suggest that although continuing generation students reported more parental involvement, parental involvement did not predict academic outcomes. Perhaps first generation students are becoming as affluent in navigating higher education as continuing generation students and future research may benefit from exploring other forms of cultural capital such as peer support.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The institution of higher education can be a unique experience to navigate. Some students may find it difficult if they have little knowledge of its culture. One group of students for whom cultural knowledge may be limited is first generation students. For the purpose of this thesis, first generation students are those whose parents have not completed a four year degree (Bui & Rush, 2016). According to Pascarella and colleagues (2004), in 1994-96 the percentage of first generation students in college was about 34 percent. This number is consistent with enrollment today: approximately 50 percent of all students are first generation and 34 percent of students enrolling in a four year university are first generation (Herbert, 2018)[1]. Universities are now reaching out to disadvantaged students in order to increase campus diversity, potentially increasing the number of first generation students attending college (Stephens et al., 2012).

Compared to their "continuing generation" counterparts (those who have at least one parent who has completed a four-year degree), first generation students are often disadvantaged within the institution of higher education. Before they even begin the

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[1] Statistics may vary somewhat depending on how institutions define "first generation," with some regarding first generation students as those whose parents have never attended college (Herbert, 2018) and others defining them as those whose parents may have attended some college but have not completed a four-year degree (Gist-Mackey, Wiley, & Erba, 2018).

college studies, first generation students report feeling ill prepared for college, with most scoring lower on pre-college assessments such as the ACT or SAT while also reporting lower high school GPAs (Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliot, & Pierce, 2012). According to Aspelmeier and coauthors (2012), first generation students are more likely to come from impoverished economic backgrounds. This lack of financial assistance from parents means they are often employed, and for a greater number of hours than their peers, giving them less time to prepare for classes. This was confirmed by Ramos-Sanchez and Nichols (2007), who found that first generation students worked more hours when attending school compared to continuing generation students. Because higher education is a way to move up the socio-economic ladder, it is important to identify areas where first generation students may be disadvantaged, such as academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance, to better help them succeed in college.

Research Question

The current study examines the academic motivation, class preparedness, academic performance, and parental involvement of first generation and continuing generation students. To frame this research, the theory of cultural capital will be utilized. This theory states that individuals must possess intangible assets, in the form of knowledge, to navigate specific cultures, especially those of the upper class (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). One of the main resources in transmitting this form of capital is parents who can share knowledge with their offspring. When parents lack cultural capital to pass down to their children, those children may be at a disadvantage when attempting to navigate institutions such as higher education. In turn, these parents may be less involved when their children attend college.

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To examine differences among first generation and continuing generation students, the relationship between generational status and parental involvement, academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance will first be explored. Using cultural capital as a framework, this study also attempts to answer whether or not parental involvement, a proxy for cultural capital, is associated with student academic outcomes (academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance) in school. Two main questions will be addressed in this thesis: 1) Do first generation students experience less parental involvement than continuing generation students? and 2) Does parental involvement predict academic outcomes for first generation students and continuing generation students? To answer these questions, I will be using data from the Student Health and Stress Survey, given to a sample of undergraduate students at the University of North Dakota in 2015. Because parents are seen as the main providers of cultural capital for their children, I predict significant associations between generational status and parental involvement, academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance. Further, I predict parental involvement will predict academic outcomes among first generation and continuing generation students, but that continuing generation students will have more parental involvement. This study will help shed light on the importance of parent-student relationships within the academic world and how different groups of students can be at an advantage or disadvantage within higher education.

Organization of Next Chapters

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows: Chapter Two will include a review of previous literature about first generation students and the theoretical framework

of cultural capital. Chapter Three will provide a discussion of the method utilized to answer the research question. Results of analyses will be given in Chapter Four. Chapter Five will include a discussion of the findings pertaining to the relationship between generational status and parental involvement, academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance while also discussing the findings pertaining to the relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes. Results will help support or deny the theory of cultural capital by addressing whether parental involvement among first generation and continuing generation students varies, thereby disadvantaging first generation students in regard to later academic outcomes.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of this study is to examine the relationship between generational status and parental involvement, academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance while also examining the relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes (academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance). In this chapter, background about first generation students will be presented along with previous research pertaining to the relationship between generational status and parental involvement, academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance. Hypotheses to guide the analysis will be proposed.

First Generation Student Background

First generation students tend to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, meaning there are fewer resources to finance higher education (Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). A lack of financial support may influence the choice of which college to attend. First generation students are more likely to select a university based on its proximity to home and thecost of tuition rather than the quality of education that is offered (Giancola, Munz, & Trares, 2008). The type of degree program that first-generation students

enroll in is also related to generational status, with first generation students pursuing

degrees that are more vocationally based due to the belief that these degreesoffer better

employment outcomes (Giancola et al., 2008). Socio-economic status is not the only

challenge that these students face when navigating through college (Ramos-Sanchez &

Nicholas 2007). They also face challenges when it comes to academic motivation,

preparedness for classes, and performance measures such as GPA.

Academic Motivation

According to Giancola et al. (2008), self-efficacy, the belief one can achieve or

accomplish a task in a given situation, is related to the likelihood that a person will

engage in a behavior. In a study conducted by these authors, first generation college

students had lower reported self-efficacy, achieved lower GPAs than their peers, and had

higher rates of attrition. In another study conducted by Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliot,

and Pierce (2012), first generation students had a less positive perception of their

academic potential than their continuing generation peers. When comparing first

generation students' parents to continuing generation students' parents, Bui and Rush

(2016) suggested that because continuing generation students' parents have been to

college they have high expectations for their children. These high expectations meant that

students had high expectations for themselves, thus promoting a better sense of academic

growth (Bui & Rush, 2016).

These findings are in line with other research that shows first generation students

have lower academic ambitions than continuing generation students (Jenkins et al., 2013).

According to Aspelmeier et al. (2012), most first generation students are motivated to go

to school not for academic reasons, but because they want to help bring honor to their families. Because these students are motivated by familial aspects, it is important for first-generation families to be involved in order for them to stay motivated. One challenge is that parents of first generation college students are more likely to have struggled in school, in turn potentially devaluing academic achievement and motivation (Bui & Rush, 2016). Based on this literature I propose the following hypothesis:

H1: First generation students will be less academically motivated than continuing generation students.

Class Preparedness

Students are often more successful when they are prepared for classes. This may be evidenced by knowing deadlines for assignments, completing readings for class, and studying for exams. First generation students often come from low-income families, and a lack of financial assistance from parents may lead these students to work more hours than continuing generation students (Giancola et al., 2008, Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols 2007). When first generation students' time is spent at work, they may have less time to spend studying. Not only do first generation students have disadvantages when budgeting time for studying, they are also less likely to ask for help from their professors and engage in activities with other students (Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017). Faculty and peers are sources of information about how to succeed in classes, including knowing important deadlines, what material to study, and whether there are extra credit opportunities. Based on the literature regarding class preparedness, I propose the following hypotheses:

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H2a: First generation students will be less prepared for classes than continuing generation students, doing assigned readings less frequently.

H2b: First generation students will be less prepared for classes than continuing generation students, completing assignments and taking quizzes less frequently.

Academic Performance

First generation students have lower overall academic performance than their continuing generation peers, as measured by GPA (Aspelmeier et al., 2012). This may be because first generation students often begin college ill prepared. Before admittance, first-generation students have lower scores on pre-college assessments, such as the ACT and SAT, and lower high school GPAs than continuing generation students (Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Giancola et al., 2008; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). When first-generation students sign up for classes they are often remedial level courses, especially in mathematics, and they tend to take fewer credits than their peers (Herbert, 2018). According to Stephens et al. (2012), first-generation students are more likely to require tutoring and mentoring in their classes. Because academic performance in the first semester is associated with the likelihood of continuing college, poorer academic performance among first-generation students may lead to problems with persistence and retention (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). Once in college, first-generation students have lower GPA's and higher dropout rates (Aspelmeier et al., 2012). Based on the literature regarding academic performance, I propose the following hypothesis:

H3: First generation students will have lower GPAs than continuing generation students.

First generation college students experience less family support when attending college compared to continuing generation students (Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Giancola et al., 2008; Jenkins et al., 2013). Although peer support is very important during college, parents are the main source of information for their children during any life situation (Bui & Rush, 2016). According to Aspelmeier et al. (2012), traditional college students find adjustment to academic life to be much easier if they have a parent who also went to college. Because the transition to a new environment can be challenging for any student, having little family support presents a great disadvantage (Jenkins et al., 2013). One explanation for the lack of parental support may be that parents who have not gone to college do not have cultural capital to give to their children and are therefore not seen as a resource for navigating the university (Jenkins et al., 2013). Some examples of cultural capital in higher education include introducing oneself to professors, engaging in extracurricular activities, networking, and financing education (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Another explanation that has been proposed for limited parental involvement may be that because parents of first generation students come from a lower socio-economic status background, they may be working more hours and have little time or energy to educate their adult children about college and support them (Bui & Rush, 2016). This lack of parental education is associated with other disadvantages. According to Bui and Rush (2016), students whose parents have attended college have a positive impact on their children's involvement in school while also encouraging academic growth. These factors highlight the importance of parental involvement to college students and their role as a continued resource during college. Based on previous literature, I propose the

following hypothesis:

H4: First generation students will experience less parental involvement than continuing generation students.

Theoretical Orientation

This study uses the theory of cultural capital as a framework. The theory was first introduced by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron to examine whether culture has a relationship with social structure and the class system (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Cultural capital can be described as the intangible assets that a person must possess in order to navigate through a certain culture, usually one that is characterized as high status (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Bourdieu argued that a person is in possession of cultural capital if he or she has the ability to navigate and behave according to society's concept of "high class" (Throsby, 1999). Some of the skills identified as making up cultural capital are language skills, and the ability to navigate and adapt quickly through specific institutions such as academia; this may include networking, talking to instructors, study habits, and the ability to find and utilize university resources (Dumais, 2002). Schools often favor students with cultural capital by using this source of capital as a basis for university curriculum, one that promotes independence versus interdependence (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Research has shown that teachers' behaviors towards those who have cultural capital are different, as they perceive them to be more intelligent than their first generation peers (DiMaggio, 1982).

According to Throsby (1999), there are three forms of cultural capital: the embodied state, institutionalized state, and objectified state. The embodied state refers to

individuals' preferences and behaviors based on the knowledge they have within a specific culture, such as high-class society (Delerme, 2017). The institutionalized state involves the qualifications one possesses within the culture, such as those needed to be a professor or doctor (Delerme, 2017). Finally the objectified state involves the material objects that indicates a certain class or status within an institution. The embodied state allows individuals to navigate through institutions, because they are in possession of the skills and knowledge needed to behave appropriately (Throsby, 1999). Although a person may have the opportunity to learn how to act in a given institution through direct experience, they may never develop a sense of familiarity as great as someone who has been taught these skills from birth (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). One group of individuals who are at a disadvantage, and are not likely to possess the cultural capital needed for college life, is first generation students, those whose parents have not completed a four-year degree (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Not only are these students left feeling ill prepared for the schoolwork of academic life, they are also at a disadvantage when adapting to the culture of academia (Pascarella et al., 2004). Although all students may struggle with the new environment they face when transitioning to university (Pascarella et al., 2004), according to Jenkins et al. (2013), first generation students tend to develop specific stressors when adapting to the new culture of academia, referred to as academic acculturative stress (Jenkins et al., 2013). These stressors include navigating the expectations, norms, and values of higher education and cause first generation students to be at a disadvantage compared to their peers when transitioning into the college culture (Jenkins et al., 2013, Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). The hardships they face may cause many disadvantages for first

generation students as they may not have the cultural capital possessed by their peers.

According to Dumais (2002), students who come from higher class families are seen to have higher levels of cultural capital compared to those who come from the lower class. Because higher class students are exposed to cultural capital by their parents from birth, they feel more competent when it comes to their schooling. Parent are thus seen as the main source of cultural capital for all students with some parents providing more cultural capital to their children than others (Dumais, 2002). With parents being the main source of cultural capital, this study will be using parental involvement as a proxy for cultural capital. Based on the past literature I propose the following hypotheses:

H5: Parental involvement will be positively associated with academic motivation among both continuing and first generation students.

H6a: Parental involvement will be positively associated with class preparedness, as measured by frequency of doing readings for class, among both continuing generation and first generation students.

H6b: Parental involvement will be positively associated with class preparedness, as measured by frequency of completing assignments and quizzes, among both continuing generation and first generation students.

H7: Parental involvement will be positively associated with academic performance among both continuing and first generation students.

It is assumed that parental involvement will predict academic outcomes, and that this form of cultural capital will be important to both first generation and continuing

generation students.

Summary and Organization of Next Chapter

In Chapter Two, background about first generation students was provided and was linked to parental involvement, academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance. The theory of cultural capital was explained, and parental involvement was introduced as a proxy for cultural capital. Hypotheses were then formulated based on evidence from past literature.

In the next chapter, the dataset and sample will be discussed, including a description of the data collection process, the measurement of each variable, and the statistical strategy used to analyze the data

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The current study examines the parental involvement, academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance of first generation and continuing generation students. The purpose of this study is to examine if there are differences in parental involvement and academic outcomes on the basis of generational status. Further, the relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes is also examined. In order to address the study hypotheses and aim of this study, a secondary dataset will be utilized.

This chapter will first describe the data set including the collection and sampling processes used. Next, the operationalization of generational status, parental involvement, academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance will be described including the coding for each variable. Finally, the analytical strategy will be outlined.

Data and Sample

This study utilized a cross-sectional quantitative research design. Survey data was used to test study hypotheses. Data was collected from a medium sized Midwestern liberal arts university of roughly 14,600 students that was located in a town with a population of approximately 54,900. Topics from the survey included academic life, timeuse, drug and alcohol use, parental involvement and school stress. Respondents were chosen using cluster sampling. Authors of the survey were provided a list of all the

campus undergraduate classes that were offered at the university. Every tenth class was selected for inclusion in the sampling frame. Instructors of the selected classes were emailed a link to the survey, and asked to share it with their students. IRB approval was obtained and with permission from the administrator of the survey, Dr. Daphne Pedersen, I have access to this data for my study. There were a total of 575 respondents, all undergraduates.

<center>Measures</center>

<center>*Independent Variable*</center>

Generational status is the independent variable for this study. Generational status refers to whether a student is the first member of the family with plans to graduate from college or if the student will be continuing the familial tradition of going to college. First generation students are those whose parents have not earned a four-year degree and continuing generation students have at least one parent who has earned a four-year degree. Participants were asked the level of education of each parent to determine generational status. An ordinal scale with 0 = Less than a high school diploma, 1 = High school diploma or GED, 2 = Some college or technical school, 3 = Four-year college degree, 4 = Graduate or professional degree, 5 = I don't know, and 6 = Not applicable was used. Responses were then recoded with 0 = continuing generation student (mother and/or father has a four-year degree or higher) and 1 = first generation student (neither mother nor father has a four-year degree). Responses coded as 5 or 6 were recoded as "missing" and were omitted from analyses.

Parental involvement is defined as parents' involvement in undergraduates'

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schooling. A six-item index was created by asking respondents how often their parents did the following: (a) Ask you about school, (b) Help you with homework, (c) Ask you about grades, (d) Ask you about your social life, (e) Ask you about your job and career plans, and (f) Visit the UND campus. These were measured on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = Never, 2 = Very rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, and 5 = Always. All of the items were summed and then averaged, with higher scores indicating greater levels of parental involvement ($\alpha = .78$).

Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable, a*cademic motivation,* is defined as one's attitude about schooling and how willing one is to engage in schoolwork. A three-item index was created by asking respondents to indicate whether the following statements reflected their feelings and behaviors: (a) I am a procrastinator when it comes to school work, (b) I avoid doing homework/studying, and (c) I don't feel very motivated when it comes to school. These questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. All of the items were reverse coded, summed and averaged, with higher scores indicating higher levels of motivation ($\alpha = .82$).

Class preparedness (readings) examines how often the student completed assigned readings for classes. Students were asked to indicate how often they do the assigned readings for class scored on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = None of the time, 2 = Some of the time, 3 = Often, 4 = Very often, and 5 = Always.

Class preparedness (assignments and quizzes) examines how often the student

completed assignments and quizzes for classes. Students were asked to indicate how often they completed assigned homework or online on a 5-point Likert scale with $1 =$ None of the time, $2 =$ Some of the time, $3 =$ Often, $4 =$ Very often, and $5 =$ Always.

For this study, *academic performance* is defined as a student's GPA. Respondents were asked, "What is your current GPA?" with options on an ordinal scale: $1 = 0.0 - 1.00$, $2 = 1.01 - 2.00$, $3 = 2.01 - 2.51$, $4 = 2.51 - 3.00$, $5 = 3.01 - 3.50$, $6 = 3.51 - 3.75$, and $7 = 3.76 - 4.00$.

Control Variables

Control variables for this study include gender, age, race, and class level. *Gender* was measured as $0 =$ male and $1 =$ female. *Age* was measured in years. *Race* was measured using a nominal scale with $0 =$ White and $1 =$ Non-White. *Class level* was based on responses to a question that asked how many credits the students had completed: $1 = 0$ to 23 credits (freshman), $2 = 24$ to 59 credits (sophomore), $3 = 60$ to 89 credits (junior), and $4 = 90$ or more credits (senior).

Analytic Strategy

To test the study hypotheses, univariate statistics will first be presented to describe the basic features of the data, including measures of central tendency and variation. Independent samples *t* tests and the chi square statistic will be used to determine whether significant differences in the study variables (parental involvement, academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance) exist for first-generation and continuing generation students. I will use OLS regression to examine the

relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes. These models will be estimated separately for first generation and continuing generation students to examine if parental involvement predicts academic outcomes more for first generation or continuing generation students.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This thesis examines the relationship between generational status and parental

involvement, academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance, while

also examining the relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes

(academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance). Specifically, the

College Student Health and Stress Survey given in 2015 ($N = 575$), was used to explore

the following research questions: 1) Do first generation students experience less parental

involvement than continuing generation students? and 2) Does parental involvement

predict academic outcomes for first generation students and continuing generation

students? To answer these research questions, results from the independent samples t

tests, chi square models, and OLS regression analyses will be discussed in this chapter,

following presentation of the descriptive statistics.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the variables are shown in Table 1. The average age of

students in the sample was 20 years ($SD = 1.84$). Over half (59.1%) of the sample

consisted of women and 40.3% of the sample consisted of men. The class-level

distribution for the sample was as follows: freshmen made up 20.5%, sophomores 31.5%,

juniors 22.6%, and seniors 25.4%. In terms of race, the majority (89.9%) of the

respondents was White and 10.1% of the sample was non-White. The majority (67.8%)

of the sample was made up of continuing generation students and 29.6% were first

generation students. Parental involvement had a mean of 3.13 (*SD* = .67), meaning that

on average respondents reported "some" parental involvement. The mean for academic

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics (N = 575)*

Variables	Scale Range	*M*	*SD*
Generational status[a]		.30	
Parental involvement	1 - 5	3.13	.67
Academic motivation	1 – 5	3.07	1.00
Class preparedness (readings)	1 – 5	2.81	1.18
Class preparedness (assignments and quizzes)	1 – 5	4.54	.79
Academic performance	1 – 7	5.47	1.27
Sex[b]		.59	
Age		20.46	1.84
Race[c]		.10	
Class level		2.53	1.08

[a]Generational Status is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent was a first generation student and 0 if the respondent was a continuing generation student. [b]Sex is a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent was female and 0 if the respondent was male. [c]Race is a dummy variable that was coded 1 if the respondent was non-White and 0 if the respondent was White.

motivation was 3.07 (*SD* = 1.00), meaning that on average, respondents were in the mid-

range of the scale. The mean for class preparedness (readings) was 2.81 (*SD* = 1.18), thus

on average respondents completed their readings "some of the time." The mean for class

preparedness (homework or online quizzes) was 4.54 (*SD* = .79), meaning that on

average respondents completed homework and online quizzes "always." Class

performance had a mean score of 5.47 (SD = 1.27), indicating that on average

respondents had a GPA between 3.01 and 3.50.

<div style="text-align:center">Generational Status, Parental Involvement, and Academic Outcomes</div>

A series of independent samples *t* tests and the chi square statistic was performed

to assess the relationships between generational status and parental involvement and

academic outcomes (academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic

performance). These models were used to test Hypotheses 1 through 4.

Table 2. *Means and Independent Samples t tests for the Relationship between*

Generational Status and Parental Involvement and Academic Outcomes of

Undergraduate Students (N = 575).

	Continuing Generation		First Generation		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Academic motivation	3.05	1.03	3.11	.95	-.70
Class preparedness (readings)	2.87	1.18	2.68	1.18	1.63
Class preparedness (assignments and quizzes)	4.56	.78	4.52	.81	.48
Academic performance (GPA)	5.51	1.28	5.43	1.26	.64
Parental involvement	3.21	.63	2.96	.71	3.80***

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Table 2 displays the results from the analyses. Hypothesis 1, first generation

students will report less academic motivation than continuing generation students, was

not supported (*t* = -2.01, *df* = 504, *p* = .50). Hypotheses 2a and 2b, which stated that first

generation students would report less class preparedness (2a: readings; 2b: assignments

<div style="text-align:center">21</div>

and quizzes) than continuing generation students were not supported ($t = 1.63$, $df = 511$, $p = .10$; $t = .49$, $df = 510$, $p = .62$). Hypothesis 3, first generation students will report lower academic performance than continuing generation students, was not supported ($t = .64$, $df = 552$, $p = .52$). Hypothesis 4 stated that first generation students will report less parental involvement than continuing generation students. This hypothesis was supported as there was a significant difference between continuing generation ($M = 3.21$, $SD = .63$) and first generation ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.71$) students' parental involvement ($t(280.40) = 3.80$, $p = .000$).

<div align="center">Parental Involvement and Academic Outcomes:</div>

<div align="center">*Academic Motivation*</div>

Table 3 displays the results of the analysis pertaining to academic motivation. OLS regression was performed separately for first generation and continuing generation students to assess whether direct relationships existed between parental involvement and academic motivation. Hypothesis 5, parental involvement will predict academic motivation, was not supported for either continuing generation or first generation students. The regression models for both continuing and first generation students were not significant, and the explained variance was low (*Adj. R^2* = .01).

<div align="center">*Class Preparedness (Readings)*</div>

Table 4 displays the results of the analyses pertaining to class preparedness (readings). To test Hypothesis 6a, OLS regression was performed among first generation and continuing generation students separately to assess whether a direct relationship existed between parental involvement and class preparedness (readings). Before the results related to the proposed hypothesis are discussed, it is important to note that two

control variables–sex and age–were significantly associated with class preparedness

(readings) among first generation students. Sex was positively associated with class

preparedness (readings) ($\beta = 0.251$, $p < .01$), indicating that women did class readings

more frequently men. Age was positively associated with class preparedness (readings) (β

$= .224$, $p < .05$). This means that older students reported doing class readings more often

than younger students. Hypothesis 6a, parental involvement will predict class

preparedness (readings), was not supported. The model for continuing generation

students was not significant. Although the model for first generation students was

significant ($F = 3.70$, $df = 5$, $p = .004$), parental involvement was not significantly

associated with the dependent variable.

Table 3. *OLS Regression for the Relationship between Parental Involvement and*

Academic Motivation

Variables	Continuing Generation (N=348)			First Generation (N = 158)		
	B	*S EB*	*β*	*B*	*S EB*	*β*
Parental Involvement	.09	.10	.05	.11	.12	.08
Sex	.13	.12	.06	.04	.17	.02
Age	-.01	.05	-.02	.10	.05	.22
Race	.42	.20	.11	.32	.27	.10
Class-Level	.02	.07	.02	-.08	.10	-.08
F	1.32			1.23		
Adj. R²	.01			.01		

$*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $*** p < .001$

Class Preparedness (Assignments and Quizzes)

Table 5 displays the results of the analyses used to test Hypothesis 6b. OLS regression was performed among first generation and continuing generation students separately to assess whether a direct relationship existed between parental involvement and class preparedness (assignments and quizzes). Before the results related to the proposed hypothesis are discussed, it is important to note the control variable–sex–was significantly associated with class preparedness (assignments and quizzes) among

Table 4. *OLS Regression for the Relationship between Parental Involvement and Class Preparedness (Readings)*

Variables	Continuing Generation (N = 352)			First Generation (N = 161)		
	B	S EB	β	B	S EB	β
Parental involvement	.22	.11	.12	.08	.11	.05
Sex	.15	.13	.06	.62	.20	.25**
Age	.03	.06	.04	.12	.06	.22*
Race	.23	.24	.05	.56	.31	.14
Class level	-.09	.08	-.08	-.17	.12	-.15
F	1.84			3.70**		
Adj. R²	.01			.08		

*p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001

continuing generation students. Sex was positively associated with class preparedness

(assignments and quizzes) ($\beta = 0.194$, $p < .001$). This means that women more frequently

completed assignments and quizzes than men. Hypothesis 6b, parental involvement will

be positively associated with class preparedness, as measured by frequency of completing

class assignments and quizzes, among both continuing and first generation students, was

not supported. The model for continuing generation students was significant ($F = 3.32$, df

$= 5$, $p = .006$), although the model for first generation students was not significant ($F =$

1.11, $df = 5$, $p = .36$). Parental involvement was not significantly associated with the

dependent variable.

Table 5. *OLS Regression for the Relationship between Parental Involvement and Class*

Preparedness (Assignments and Quizzes)

Variables	Continuing Generation (N = 351)			First Generation (N = 161)		
	B	S EB	B	B	S EB	β
Parental involvement	.05	.07	.04	-.00	.10	-.00
Sex	.31	.09	.19***	.13	.14	.08
Age	.02	.04	.04	-.06	.04	-.18
Race	-.15	.16	-.05	-.23	.22	-.09
Class level	.03	.05	.04	.09	.09	.12
F	3.31**			1.11		
Adj. R²	.03			.00		

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Academic Performance

Table 6 displays the results of the analyses used to test Hypothesis 7. OLS

regression was performed among first generation and continuing generation students

separately to assess whether a direct relationship existed between parental involvement

and academic performance. Three control variables–sex, age, and class level–were

significantly associated with academic performance among continuing generation

students. Sex was positively associated with academic performance ($\beta = 0.179$, $p < .001$),

indicating that women reported higher GPAs than men. Age was negatively associated

with academic performance ($\beta = -.242$, $p < .001$). This means that younger students

reported higher GPAs than older students. Class level was positively associated with

academic performance ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). This means that upper level students reported

higher GPAs than those with fewer credits. Hypothesis 7, parental involvement will be

positively associated with academic performance among both continuing and first

generation students, was not supported. The model for continuing generation students

was significant ($F = 7.82$, $df = 5$, $p = .000$) and the model for first generation students

was not significant ($F = .85$, $df = 5$, $p = .52$), but parental involvement was not

significantly associated with academic performance in either one.

Table 6. *OLS Regression for the Relationship between Parental Involvement and*

Academic Performance

Variables	Continuing Generation (N = 387)			First Generation (N = 167)		
	B	*S EB*	*β*	*B*	*S EB*	*β*
Parental involvement	-.05	.11	-.02	.13	.16	.07
Sex	.46	.13	.18***	.05	.22	.02
Age	-.24	.06	-.31***	-.08	.07	-.13
Race	.17	.23	.04	-.20	.33	-.05
Class level	.20	.08	.17*	.16	.13	.13
F	7.81***			.85		
Adj. R²	.08			-.01		

*p < .05, **p < .01, *** p < .001

Summary and Overview

In this chapter the results of the analyses exploring the relationship between generational status and academic motivation, class prepared, academic performance, and parental involvement among undergraduate students were presented. Hypotheses 1 – 3 were not supported. A significant relationship was found between generational status and parental involvement with continuing generation students reporting higher levels of parental involvement than first generation students, supporting Hypothesis 4. Next, the results of the analyses exploring the relationship between parental involvement and academic motivation, class preparedness (readings), class preparedness (assignments and quizzes), and academic performance were presented. There were no significant relationships found between the variables and Hypotheses 5 – 7 were not supported.

These results will further be discussed in Chapter Five. Connections of the results to the theory of cultural capital and previous literature will also be made. Limitations of this thesis and suggestions for future research will also be presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which academic outcomes and parental involvement are related to generational status. First generation students were the focus of this thesis because they tend to report poorer academic outcomes than their continuing generation peers. Data from the Student Health and Stress Survey (2015) was used to address two research questions: 1) Do first generation students experience less parental involvement and poorer academic outcomes than continuing generation students? and 2) Does parental involvement predict academic outcomes for first generation students and continuing generation students? The first research question sought to confirm relationships between generational status and academic outcomes that have already been established in previous scholarship. The second question sought to establish a model in which it was predicted that parental involvement, a proxy for cultural capital, would be associated with academic motivation, class preparedness, and academic performance among both first generation students and continuing generation students.

This chapter will summarize and discuss the results. In doing so, the findings will be tied to the theory of cultural capital and past literature regarding parental involvement and academic outcomes among first generation students. Limitations for this thesis will then be discussed along with suggestions for future research. Finally, a conclusion will be

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provided that will briefly summarize the findings of this thesis along with discussing the overall contribution to the larger body of literature.

Discussion of Results

Generational Status, Academic Outcomes, and Parental Involvement

The first research question asked if first generation students experience less parental involvement and poorer academic outcomes than continuing generation students. Findings showed that there was a significant relationship between generational status and parental involvement but not between generational status and academic outcomes. The relationship between generational status and parental involvement is consistent with past literature indicating that continuing generation students tend to have higher levels of parental involvement than first generation students (Aspelmeier et al., 2012; Giancola et al., 2008; Jenkins et al., 2013). In a study conducted by Hamilton and colleagues (2018) findings indicated that parents who were more affluent in academic culture were able to provide resources to their children to maximize their performance in school. Parents who were less affluent felt like outsiders and expected the school system to provide their children with the same resources as their more affluent peers. The insignificant relationships between generational status and academic outcomes were surprising, as past literature indicates that first generation students are more likely to have less ambition and motivation (Giancola et al., 2008), less time to prepare for classes (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007), and have lower GPAs (Aspelmeier et al., 2012) than continuing generation students. This finding may suggest that first generation students are finding ways to navigate and succeed in college at the same level as their continuing generation peers, despite having parents who are less involved in their academic lives.

Parental Involvement and Academic Outcomes

      The second research question asked if parental involvement predicted academic outcomes for first generation students and continuing generation students. To address this question, OLS regression was performed for each group of students separately for each of the academic outcomes (academic motivation, class preparedness (readings), class preparedness (assignments and quizzes), and academic performance). Findings indicated that there was not a significant relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes in any of the models. This finding is not consistent with past literature on cultural capital that suggests cultural capital promotes academic growth and success (Dumais, 2002). This may mean that students potentially experience some equalizing situations that bring them to the same level as one another, such that first generation students are becoming more proficient in schooling and continuing generation students are experiencing stressors that put them at a disadvantage (Hamilton, 2016).

      Past scholarship indicates that parents who have gone to college encourage greater academic growth and involvement in school activities among their children (Bui & Rush, 2016). Although these parents may help their children, they could also be creating stressors for their children, who then must try to meet their parents' expectations. This may in turn disadvantage continuing generation students. According to Hamilton (2016), "helicopter parents" are those that are intensely involved in their children's schooling. This heavy involvement may actually inhibit their development by limiting independence and may result in overdependence of these children.

      Another reason for this finding may be first generation students are finding other sources of cultural capital to assist them through college. According to Bui and Rush

(2016), peer support is very important during college and may help students who don't have family support. As well, the measure of parental involvement used here may not tap into the type of support that students rely on. Perhaps the parents who are involved in their children's schooling more readily provide emotional support but try to give their children space and freedom so they may become more autonomous in their academic career. Dumais (2002) argues that those who possess cultural capital have the ability to succeed in college with little external help. This may suggest that students are coming into college with the amount of capital needed to succeed whether they be first generation or continuing generation students.

There were four control variables in this study: age, sex, race, and class level. Age and sex were significant in predicting class preparedness (readings) for first generation students with findings indicating that women and those who were younger more frequently completed their assigned readings for class. Sex was also a significant predictor of class preparedness (assignments and quizzes) among continuing generation students with findings indicating that women completed assignments and quizzes more frequently than men. Consistent with other research on gender and academic performance indicating that women report higher levels success in school (Dumais, 2002), including earning a four year degree (Dumais, 2002), age, sex, class level were significant predictors of academic performance. Findings indicated that women, those who were younger, and those of a higher class level were more likely to have a higher GPAs than men, those who were older, and those who had less credits. This is surprising such that age and class level seem to contradict each other. When looking closer at the sample

data, there were some differences in performance by age with those who were 18 to 22 having higher GPAs; by age, those who were 23 to 24 showed a decline in GPA.

Implications

This study has important implications for universities that want to encourage academic growth and success among their students. College is seen as one of the main ways to climb the social economic ladder (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). Although this may seem like an easy path for many to take, college life comes with many challenges to navigate. The findings from this study indicate that there was a difference in the level of parental involvement among continuing generation and first generation students, but academic outcomes did not vary by generational status. There also was no relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes. This may suggest that parents need not be directly involved in their adult children's academic lives in order for them to succeed in college. It may be more effective to provide all university students with appropriate resources as identified and implemented in the university system, thereby encouraging all to succeed.

Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations to the current study that should be taken into consideration. First, the data set for this research was cross-sectional. Using a longitudinal sample may have shown variation in the level of parental involvement from freshman to senior year, and differences in academic outcomes as students progress through school. Another limitation is the sampling of students from a single university. A larger sample including students from multiple universities including community college and commuter campuses, for example, may better explain variation between first

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generation and continuing generation students and their academic outcomes. Lastly, results may be skewed since the majority (89.9%) of the sample was White. Past research has shown that first generation students are more likely to be non-White (Aspelmeier et al., 2012). Future research would benefit from greater inclusion of non-White students in more diverse samples.

The results of the current study indicate that there was no difference between first generation and continuing generation students in academic outcomes but continuing generation students received greater parental involvement in their academic lives. Perhaps cultural capital was not an appropriate measure to compare to academic outcomes. Duckworth and colleagues (2007), proposed the idea of grit, the ability to continuing working towards a goal until it is complete, and conducted six studies to examine the relationship between grit and academic outcomes. Findings indicated that those with more grit had higher levels of education and were older. Perhaps the amount of grit between continuing generation and first generation students differs, and this may better explain why the academic outcomes between the groups were not significantly different.

Future research should consider whether other groups, such as peers, help students succeed in college. Peer support has been found to be very important during college (Bui & Rush, 2016). Some other possibilities to consider are pre-college programs that aid students in the application process and provide information about the culture of college, such as TRIO. Another type of support group to study is college programs that help students through additional counselling and mentorship, such as the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program. Lastly, future research

may benefit from in-depth interviews that help indicate which groups are most beneficial to these students by directly asking them. If first generation and continuing generation students use different resources to succeed in college, it is important to identify these resources so they can be strategically implemented by universities.

Conclusion

This thesis, guided by the theory of cultural capital, examined the relationship between generational status and academic outcomes, using parental involvement as a proxy for cultural capital. The findings from this thesis suggest that continuing generation students reported higher levels of parental involvement but that parental involvement did not predict better academic outcomes for either continuing generation or first generation students. This study adds to the body of literature on generational status and academic outcomes, supporting the assumption that continuing generation students receive more parental involvement, but there may be no difference in academic outcomes between the two groups. Thus, first generation students may not be as disadvantaged within university systems as is assumed.

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