Belief Each Other Student and Counselor Associations in Various High Schools

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Abstract- Many minority, first-generation, and lowincome students aspire to college; however, the college application process can present a significant obstacle. These students cannot always rely on their parents for college information and must instead turn to their high schools, where counselors are in a key position. Drawing on a two-year field study at two racially and socioeconomically diverse high schools and interviews with 89 students and 22 school counseling faculty and staff, I examine the role of trust in creating successful student-counselor relationships that can facilitate the transmission of social capital during the college application process. My findings indicate that distrust between counselors and students are due to a lack of shared understanding regarding expectations and roles. My evidence suggests that the diverse nature of the school context created structural constraints that contributed to this distrust. By analyzing the strategies of one counselor who succeeded in connecting with students and working through these structures, I demonstrate ways that trusting relationships can be formed.

Index Terms- College Access, Trust, Counselors, Social Capital, Inequality

INTRODUCTION

Although college attendance rates have increased among all students, social background still remains a significant predictor of college attendance and graduation. Despite high aspirations, less advantaged students, who are disproportionately minorities and first-generation college students, are less likely to realize their college goals compared to their more advantaged peers. Such students encounter multiple obstacles in the college process, including lack of academic preparation, scant information on college, and limited finances. Despite wanting to assist their children, many parents who have not attended college find it difficult to provide concrete information.

Instead, these families tend to rely on the school, which puts school counselors in a key position. Students, however, may have trouble connecting with their counselors. Research finds that when students and counselors are able to connect, counselors have the potential to become empowering agents. Yet, few studies explore the dynamics of the counselor-student relationship.

Drawing on a two-year field study at two racially and socioeconomically diverse high schools interviews with 89 students and 22 school counseling staff, I examine the obstacles that less advantaged students face in developing trusting relationships with their counselors that could facilitate access to social capital. I use Stanton-Salazar's (1997) framework, which describes the conditions that make it difficult for minority and working-class students to gain access to social capital. Social capital encompasses those resources that facilitate the negotiation of schools and pathways of access, and institutional agents play a key role in assisting minority youth in accessing these resources (Stanton-Salazar 1997, 2011). Trust is a central component of Stanton- Salazar's (1997) framework, yet how trust functions as both a bridge and a barrier to social capital has not been sufficiently articulated. The majority of research on trust in schools focuses on what trust looks like on the organizational level among school faculty or how teachers develop trust in students. This work tends to depict trust as a oneway street, examining how only one party feels about another. While this research tells us about the power of trust among adults in schools, we know little about how students view trusting relationships with school faculty or how the dynamics of mutually trusting relationships work. I examine students' counselors' perspectives and what these relationships look like in the presence and absence of trust. My

(1997)Stanton-Salazar's findings build on framework and work by Bryk and Schneider (2002) and Schneider and colleagues (2014) on trust by explicating how trust operates on a day-to-day basis in the social exchanges between counselors and students. My findings identify the elements that are key to developing trust between students and This counselors. trust provides access to information— social capital—that can facilitate college attendance. Without trust, students may be less likely to meet with school counselors, ask questions, and take their advice regarding the college process. This may be particularly detrimental to less advantaged students who cannot access this college knowledge from their parents. How trusting relationships work to increase social capital in a diverse school context is particularly crucial as the number of racial/ethnic minority students enrolled in schools continues to grow. Whereas the majority of research on the role of schools and counselors focuses on homogenous student populations, I investigate these relationships in two mixed-races and mixed-socioeconomic status (SES) schools, which adds another layer of complexity.

LITERATURE

College Aspirations and College Application:

Understanding the dynamics of the student counselor relationship is more important than ever as more students aspire to higher education. However, college aspirations do not always lead to college attendance, particularly for minority and low-income students. These students face multiple obstacles in the college application process and are less likely to complete each step (e.g., meeting minimal academic qualifications, taking the SATs, and submitting an application) compared to their white and higherincome peers. Less advantaged students may have difficulty completing the college application process due to a lack of college knowledge. College knowledge is "information, formal and informal, stated and unstated, necessary for both gaining admission to and navigating within the postsecondary system". Despite wanting to go to college, many low-income students lack information about application policies and do not prepare themselves admissions via participation in for college extracurricular activities or researching schools. Such students may have difficulty navigating the college process because they lack access to dominant forms of cultural capital—the cultural preferences, attitudes, signals, and interactional styles valued by schools that can facilitate educational and social mobility. During the college application process, middle-class youth benefit from their and their parents' cultural capital by seeking out help from guidance counselors, hiring private counselors when such help is insufficient, and having knowledge of the admissions process due to their social networks. Working-class youth, socialized to respect teachers and handle problems on their own, may be less likely to seek out and demand help. More advantaged students gain much of their college knowledge from their parents, but less advantaged students often rely on the school. High school resources and organizational structures influence students' college attendance. The number of counselors, counselors' knowledge of the application process, their expectations for students, and their organizational practices in distributing college information can all influence students' educational attainments. Frequent student-counselor contact can increase a student's likelihood of attending college, and this is particularly true for lower-SES students.

Social Capital:

Schools clearly play an important role in helping students through the college application process, especially minority, low-income, and first-generation college students. Stanton-Salazar's (1997, 2011) social capital framework focuses on the role of relationships between such youth and institutional agents in providing support and information on how to navigate educational institutions. "Institutional agents" occupy positions of status and have the ability to assist youth by providing support, information, and connections (Stanton-Salazar 1997, 2011). In contrast, "gate-keeping agents" make subjective decisions regarding their support based on race, class, and gender (Stanton- Salazar 2011). While gatekeepers preserve inequality, institutional agents assist youth with social mobility by acting as empowering agents. They take action, mobilize resources, and recognize they are embedded within larger structures that may be working against the empowerment of minority and low-income students. Institutional agents may use strategies such as

"decoding the system" to figure out which actors control key resources they may also help students develop "coping strategies" to breach institutional barriers, such as "problem solving capacities, helpseeking orientations, networking skills and Stanton-Salazar's instrumental behaviors". framework has its roots in the work of Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988). For Coleman (1988), social capital is a resource social actors use to achieve certain ends and it consists of trust, information, and norms. For Bourdieu (1986), social capital is the collection of resources within a network of institutionalized relationships. It is enhanced by economic and cultural capital, so people who are well endowed with capital have the easiest time accumulating more of it, reproducing inequalities (Bourdieu 1986). Drawing on both theorists, Stanton-Salazar's (1997)framework emphasizes importance of social capital in a student's network in facilitating access to educational achievement and attainment. Networks reproduce racial, gender, and class inequalities by facilitating opportunities for privileged youth through interpersonal connections and acting as structural barriers for disadvantaged youth who are cut off from mainstream social ties (Stanton-Salazar 1997).

Trust:

Stanton-Salazar (1997) identified multiple barriers that prevent students from accessing social capital from school agents; however, he acknowledged that the core issue is a lack of interpersonal trust. Trust is also central to Coleman's (1988, 1994) concept of social capital, upon which Stanton-Salazar bases his framework. Stanton-Salazar (1997:17) conceptualizes interpersonal trust within the framework of "solidarity and shared meaning in the context of relations." Similarly, institutional Bryk Schneider (2002), also rooting their conceptualization in Coleman (1988, 1994), define what they term "relational trust" as a reciprocal understanding of expectations, obligations, and roles. Trust occurs at individual and institutional levels, influencing school outcomes. At the root of both concepts is the notion that trust is based on common understandings and expectations of relationship roles. This is a useful but instrumental view of trust, based on social exchanges and calculations of social obligations.

The mutual understanding of expectations and roles in social exchanges forms the basis of trusting relationships, but another layer binds people in an organization together and creates a social good that enhances a school—the intentionality behind one's actions in a social exchange. Schneider and colleagues define the four elements of intention as respect, competence, integrity, and personal regard; personal regard, or "extending oneself for others beyond what is formally required," can fortify social networks within an organization. Personal regard infuses an element of caring into student-counselor relationships, which is absent from the more instrumental view of trust. Counselors display personal regard when they care for students as people, not just as clients whom they are delivering a service to. Through personalizing their counseling, spending time getting to know students, and doing more than just the bare minimum, counselors can show their personal regard. Demonstrating this kind of care can help develop more effective college-going cultures, particularly among African American students. I incorporate both the instrumental social exchanges between students and counselors and the affective component that is created through personal regard in my analysis to more fully articulate the role of trust in the creation of social capital in interpersonal exchanges.

School Counselors and Trust:

Considering this definition of trust, what stands in the way of creating trusting relationships between students and counselors? Stanton-Salazar (1997:18) argues that barriers to trust can be institutionalized when the roles of school agents are inconsistent, contradictory and ambiguous. School counselors experience multiple and conflicting roles—they are tasked with college counseling, course planning, scheduling, facilitating communication between students, teachers, and parents; and acting as mental health counselors. Providing all these services to all students is virtually impossible, especially when counselors have high caseloads. Public workers tasked with servicing clients without adequate resources may selectively provide services to those whom they believe will benefit the most. Therefore, many counselors may be in constant triage mode, focusing only on students whom they think they can best help. When counselors selectively provide

services to students, this hurts trust. School counselors may also be ambivalent about their position as college advisors. Previously, counselors were criticized for their heavy-handed role as gatekeepers in the college application process. Twenty years later, researchers found that school counselors were encouraging all students to go to college; however, counselors were failing to adequately advise students about their chances of college success. Recent research finds that due to these conflicting pressures, counselors send mixed messages both encouraging and discouraging students from college attendance that may contribute to a lack of trust. Despite the difficulties of establishing such relationships, research emphasizes the transformative nature of trust in schools. Solid relationships between students and school agents can increase educational expectations and achievement and decrease disciplinary problems. Teachers' perceptions of trust are associated with higher academic achievement and successful school reforms. However, little research focuses on student trust in counselors; instead, research has examined what contributes to or hinders trust among teachers, between teachers and administrators, or the trust teachers have in students. Understanding how both parties interpret each other's actions in the context of trust is crucial to developing social capital. This is particularly true when examining diverse high schools, where race and class influence relationship dynamics. Research on trust emphasizes the importance of context and how processes may vary for different groups in different contexts. I build on the current literature and Stanton-Salazar's theory by identifying how different elements work together to inhibit or facilitate the development of trusting relationships within racially and socioeconomically diverse high schools. I focus on the following questions: How does the high school context influence the work and perspectives of school counselors during the college application process? What are students' and counselors' expectations for their relationship, and how does this affect trust? How is trusting student-counselor relationships developed in these schools?

METHODS

Research Sites: Data for this article come from a larger study examining how students navigate the

college application process. In conducting this research, I spent two years at two racially and socioeconomically diverse schools observing and interviewing students and counselors. Both schools are located in the northeastern suburbs, about 20 miles from each other. They were ranked in the top 100 public schools in Telangana State by 2012 and have similar graduation rates, rates of attendance at four-year colleges, and levels of diversity. Delhi Public High School (DPHS) 3 is 61 percent white, 15 percent Nalgonda, 20 percent Rangareddy, and 4 percent Mahaboob Nagar; Ramanthapur public City High School (RPCHS) is 49 percent Rangareddy, 41 percent Nalgonda, 6 percent Mahaboob Nagar, and 4 percent Karimnagar. About 20 percent of students at both schools receive free or reduced price lunch 4 Student to counselor ratios were 186:1 at DPHS and 212:1 at RPCHS, 5 both below the 2012 Delhi Public High School Counselor Association recommended ratio of 250:1. I chose diverse schools to compare how the same counselors interacted with students from different backgrounds. These schools also had many of the elements research has identified as key to college access, such as a college-centered culture and relatively low student caseloads that permit more frequent student-counselor meetings. This allowed me to focus on the particular role of studentcounselor trust and relationships in transmitting social capital during the college application process. By studying these schools, I was able to analyze how less advantaged students in some of the best high school circumstances negotiate relationships with counselors.

DATA COLLECTION

Observations: Over two years I spent time getting to know the schools and observing in classrooms, offices, hallways, and lunchrooms. I attended many college-related events, including college fairs, college representative visits; parents' nights, financial aid nights, and essay workshops. My first year in the field (2010–2011), I observed extensively at the schools; I followed up the next year by attending specific college-related events. I also shadowed five students, two males and one female at RPCHS and two at DPHS. I met these students in classes where I observed, or they expressed an interest in being shadowed. I interviewed all the females; I asked both males for interviews, but they did not return consent

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forms. Shadowing these students allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of how the school worked and how students and faculty interacted. I also shadowed three adults at the schools, a security guard at RPCHS and a counselor and an administrator at DPHS, which allowed me to understand more about how faculty and staff viewed students. I observed in the schools from one to six hours at a time. I took notes during my observations and interactions (when feasible) and used those notes to type up field notes within 24 hours. In total, I conducted 225 hours of focused observations across the schools.

Student Sample: I used a variety of data collection techniques to understand the student experience. I interviewed 89 students across the two schools. I interviewed a subsample of these students over time so I could see how students moved through the college application process. I also had students fill out a survey to gather demographic information and college application information (e.g., SAT scores) that I did not ask about in interviews. I chose the majority of my student sample using stratified random sampling (69 percent). The schools gave me lists of students stratified by race and grade, and I randomly chose students from that list.

School Counselor Interviews: Across both schools, I interviewed a total of 22 adults involved in the school counseling programs to understand their perspectives on how students navigate the college application process and to learn more about what kinds of college resources were offered. At DPHS, I interviewed all eight counselors, the college and career counselor, and the guidance director. At RPCHS, I interviewed eight of the nine counselors, 12 two guidance interns, one guidance secretary, and the guidance director.

Data Analysis: All interviews were audio recorded (when possible), 13 transcribed, and coded along with field notes. I coded these based on themes from my interview guide and used Atlas ti, a qualitative data analysis software program. The interview guide focused on examining how students engaged in the college application process, so these themes guided the coding of my interviews and my observations. My analysis was guided by Stanton-Salazar's (1997) theory and the concept of social capital. I was attuned to the influence of social capital on how students

navigated the college process, and I used my theoretical knowledge to make sense of my data. My analysis was deductive, guided by my theoretical framework, and inductive, based on the patterns that arose from the data. This allowed me to search for evidence that disconfirmed my original theory and be attuned to new patterns.

Trust worthiness: I shared raw data, memos, and drafts with other researchers to get feedback on my analyses. At the end of each school year, I shared my general findings with the principals at both schools and the guidance director at RPCHS to get their feedback. In addition, incorporating multiple data collection methods allowed me to triangulate my findings and verify information. However, I focused on the dynamics of the schools as students and counselors saw them, with an understanding that each party may have very different interpretations of the same relationship or event. As such, I report these interpretations, acknowledging that students' and counselors' perspectives on each other cannot always be verified, yet these perspectives are important because they likely shape how each party approaches future interactions.

Trust: The previous section described counselors feeling pulled in multiple directions and their reaction, which was to focus on providing more information without considering how to adapt their strategies for the diverse student population. In the next two sections, I show how important trust was in such an environment. I examine the structural foundation of trust by focusing on what students and counselors expected from each other, how they viewed the counselor's role and the consequences when expectations and roles were misaligned. In the third section, I examine the strategies of one counselor to show what trust looked like when shared expectations and clear roles were enhanced by personal regard.

Unshared Expectations—Help seeking: Considering the pulls on counselors' time, it is no wonder that RPCHS and DPHS had structural elements similar to what calls the clearinghouse strategy, a system that provides substantial resources but does not proactively try to connect students and parents with such resources. The counseling programs focused on

providing multiple opportunities for students to acquire college information: Both counseling websites had forms available online and hosted multiple workshops and parents' nights focused on college. However, this system relied on students having the necessary cultural capital to seek out, access, and use this information. Counselors believed there were ample resources available and multiple opportunities for students to get information. Although counselors acknowledged the class differences in college knowledge, they did not always consider that class differences might affect how students went about accessing college information. Counselors seemed to expect all students to take initiative in the college process in the same way, and expressed frustration when some students failed to do so. For example, one counselor at DPHS described how prepared students were for the college process come senior year as follows:

"Half are fine and they show up in September with all their applications done. The other half has no clue. Not because there aren't plenty of resources here, but because they're not ready. They're not engaged. They're not invested in it. They're not sure where they're going to go. They're scared they're not going to get in and they haven't made the effort".

Unclear Roles—Supporting Aspirations: In addition to having mismatched expectations about providing college information, less advantaged students and their counselors were not on the same page regarding counselor's role, specifically in terms of student aspirations. College was emphasized to all students from the moment they entered the high schools. Indeed, students' college destinations were made public through school bulletin boards that celebrated their acceptances (DPHS) and the local newspaper printing students' postsecondary destinations (RPCHS). As a result, students felt pressure to attend the most selective college they could, and at the very least a four-year school, leading to a stigma associated with two-year community college attendance. Because students believed the schools were encouraging them to attend a four-year college, they felt betrayed when their counselors did not live up to what they thought the counselor's role should be in supporting this dream. Pravalica, for example, said,

"My school counselor, she's okay. Sometimes I think she puts me down. When I came for college, she kept saying County, go to County, and go to County [community college]. But when I talk to other people, not students, other grown-ups and people who have went to college. In the college itself, they told me I had a chance".

Personal Regard in Action: Part of trust is developing a mutual understanding and emotional connection, and this was important to students and counselors. Without knowing someone on a deeper level, it was hard for students and counselors to go beyond their formal relationships and for counselors to be institutional agents. Felicity, for example, had difficulty getting help with financial aid forms due to her lack of a relationship with Mr. Madhu, a counselor whose role it was to help students with all aspects of the college process. She had made two appointments with Mr. Madhu and both times had been unable to find him. The second time she was in tears, and when she found Mr. Madhu, he apologized and said he was not able to meet with her because he was not supposed to help students with financial forms. Later, Mr. Madhu told me that he was not supposed to help, but if he knew a student, he probably would, and he knew most other counselors operated like that. Without knowing Felicity, Mr. Madhu did not trust her enough to provide help on a financially sensitive form that was not part of his job description. This example shows how a lack of personal regard could impede students from accessing critical social capital. Clearly, trusting students and developing relationships with them was important to counselors, as they were willing to go out of their way for such students. Students also valued these kinds of relationships; yet, few students felt they had close relationships with their school counselors. At DPHS, students did describe one counselor as being helpful. Mrs. Apoorva 16 was a black- Hispanic, middle-aged woman who wore glasses and bright scarves that coordinated with her dangly earrings. Her office was crammed full of student photos, letters, and college banners. I interviewed six students who had her as a counselor, but I was surprised that a number of other students brought up her name in interviews.

Modeling Communication Expectations: Apoorva gained students' trust and facilitated their help-seeking by modeling her expectations. She emphasized the importance of communication and modeled this by proactively seeking out students. She was constantly out of her office, looking for specific students, rather than waiting for them to come to her, as other counselors seemed to do. Anna, who did not have Mrs. Apoorva, noted how different this approach was compared to her own counselor: alright, she's helpful when you're there in the meeting but I know some people, that have Mrs. Apoorva, she'll them and ask them how their week is and she's way more involved." The day I shadowed Mrs. Apoorva, I ran around the school with her as she visited one homeroom after another and chatted with students. By the end, she had collected a group of students who trailed her as she moved around the school. Mrs. Apoorva made her expectation that students should communicate with her clear by constantly encouraging them to come to her office. This meant she almost never ate lunch by herself or went out to lunch with the other counselors. Instead, she would tell students to bring their lunch to her office. These lunch meetings indicated that Mrs. Apoorva was always available, and she was there for more than just crises. She modeled the kind of communication she wanted with students by being proactive, and she indicated her personal regard by seeking students out, eating lunch with them, and checking in on how they were doing on a deeper level.

CONCLUSIONS

I found that the high school context influenced counselors' work in significant ways. The diversity of the student population led counselors to feel pulled in opposite directions. More advantaged students and parents demanded personalized attention, whereas less advantaged parents and students were difficult to get in touch with and required more assistance. Counselors attempted to manage this by providing more information and waiting for students to come to them. While this strategy worked for some students, it hurt relationships with others due to conflicting expectations. More advantaged students were more adept at navigating the process and more likely to seek help from counselors when they needed it, conforming to counselor expectations.

advantaged students were less likely to seek help and expected more than just information when they did ask for it. When these students did not find the assistance they needed, they stopped coming, reinforcing counselors' feelings that such students lacked "follow through." Less advantaged students and counselors also had misunderstandings regarding the counselor's role in the college process. Whereas counselors saw themselves as guiding students toward appropriate and realistic college choices, students wanted counselors to reinforce their college dreams. When counselors failed to be cheerleaders, trust was lost. Lacking shared expectations and role understandings led students either to not seek out the help they needed to navigates the college process or to feel overloaded with information and little practical assistance when they did ask for help. This made the college application process all the more difficult for students and diminished their access to critical social capital from counselors.

Considering these barriers to trust and access to social capital, what can be done? One counselor demonstrated successful strategies in forming trusting relationships with students. Mrs. Apoorva's strategies—such as seeking students out, modeling communication, and the marriage analogy- led to social exchanges that reinforced common expectations and shared understandings of the counselor's role. In addition, Mrs. Apoorva infused her student exchanges with personal regard that indicated she truly cared. Mrs. Apoorva also examined the unique ways race and class structured students' experiences and their interactions with school personnel. This was in contrast to other counselors, who focused on how class differences created challenges that required them to do everything twice but who did not necessarily adapt their strategies. Mrs. Apoorva acted as an empowering agent who recognized that the institution created constraints for minority and working-class students that she had to work through.

This study contributes to our understanding of the role of trust in creating social capital and the dynamics of student-counselor relationships in two ways. First, little research examines how both parties feel about trusting relationships, which has limited our understanding of the way trust operates. By focusing on how both students and counselors view the relationship, I show how misunderstandings

regarding expectations and roles in basic social exchanges lie at the foundation of mistrust. I also highlight the perspective of students, which has been absent in studies of trust at the school level. Trust facilitates access to crucial college information, or social capital, and this study shows how students may avoid the counseling office and be cut off from information if they lack trusting relationships with their counselors. Second, my findings show how school context influences trust and relationships. Race and class differences created unique structural constraints for counselors at DPHS and RPCHS. Counselors acknowledged that class differences led to unequal stocks of college knowledge, but they did not consider how their strategies might need to be altered, instead focusing on providing more information in an effort to save time. This reaction failed to account for the ways race and class, individually and at their intersection, structured students' expectations regarding help-seeking and aspirations, which further hurt trust. Most counselors rarely acknowledged the different effects of race and class and instead focused on the correlation between the two. Mrs. Apoorva, in contrast, acknowledged the specific challenges minority students regardless of class, and this may have contributed to her trusting relationships.

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