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Support Provision in Greek Higher Education: Examining Students' Accounts

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Abstract

In the last decades, despite the implementation of policies aiming at widening the participation in higher education in many countries, inequalities persist. Drawing on survey data collected in the context of our research project exploring aspects of Diversity, Inequalities and Inclusion in Greek higher education, this article presents undergraduate students' accounts on the support measures provided in higher education. Our findings indicate that undergraduate students express rather reserved views on the effectiveness of the support measures provided. Some characteristics are of importance in these students' accounts as some groups consider institutions as less supportive such as females and students who have not completed their studies on time. A strong effect of the institution of study on students' views regarding support provision is also shown revealing the key role of institutions on the students' trajectories.

Keywords: higher education, social inequalities, student support provision.

1. Introduction

Increasing and widening participation as well as improving the quality and relevance of higher education have been prioritized by the European Commission the last decade (EC, 2019). Relevant policies have focused on promoting inclusion and equity (Reay, 2017; Shavit, Arum & Gamoran, 2007), but they also stress access to opportunities once at university (Crozier, Reay & Clayton, 2019; Archer & Hutchings, 2000) and student success (Troxel, 2010; Thomas, 2002). Research studies indicate that the participation of socially diversified groups in higher education triggers new forms of inequalities creating new challenges for higher education policy agendas (Burke, Crozier & Misiaszek, 2016; Archer, 2007). Despite the attempts to widen participation in higher education and democratize it, inequalities persist (Crozier et al., 2019; Reay, 2017).

Relevant literature shows that students, especially those coming from non-privileged backgrounds, confront difficulties throughout their academic life in relation to learning, responding to curriculum, relationships with teaching staff (Crozier et al., 2008; Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003; Purcell, Elias, Atfield, Behle, Ellison, Hughes & Tzanakou, 2009; Croll & Attwood, 2013; Reay, Crozier & Clayton et al., 2009) as well as academic and social inclusion

(Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010; Troxel, 2010; Trowler, 2010). Student support is critical in helping students progress and complete their studies (Barberis & Loncle, 2015). Financial support is significant, especially for students from poorer background, but not per se a solution to under-representation (Long, 2008). The importance of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is revealed by studies showing that the well-informed students have better chances to progress and also have better long-term employment outcomes (Thomas & Jones, 2007). Key to retention and success are supportive peer relations (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005; Foster, Lawther, Keenan, Bates, Colley & Lefever, 2011); family support (Foster et al., 2011); meaningful interaction between staff and students (Thomas, 2012); knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners (Crozier & Reay, 2008). The European Commission promotes the “social dimension of higher education” encouraging European countries to implement support measures in relation to access to higher education, progression and completion rates (EC, 2018). The same applies for the Greek context which is described below in more detail.

- In Greece, undergraduate students express rather reserved views on the effectiveness of the support measures provided in higher education.
- Some groups of students consider institutions as less supportive such as females and students who have not completed their studies on time.
- Students’ accounts on support provision in higher education get differentiated on the basis of the institution of attendance; this reveals the key role of institutions on the students’ trajectories.

HE in Greece is exclusively provided by public institutions (Saiti & Prokopiadou, 2008).¹ Students enter HE on the basis of the score accomplished at the nationwide (Panhellenic) exams in the end of upper secondary education on a *numerus clausus* basis; when the demand outnumbers the available places, the students with the higher grades are admitted (Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010). Therefore, despite the absence of official ranking tables for Greek universities, the Greek HE system is considered to be selective on the basis of the demand that leads to high admission qualifications at least for specific universities/departments.

In the Greek HE system, widening participation initiatives have been promoted (EC, 2019). Positive discrimination measures facilitate university access for groups of students through distinct routes, such as: (a) participation in different exams (e.g. Greek expatriates), (b) being offered lower limit grades/special places, such as students of the Muslim minority of Thrace (Askouni, 2006) and disabled students (Law 3794/2009), or (c) having the Panhellenic Exams grade requirements waived (e.g. students who have achieved distinction in academic or athletic competitions). Moreover, the current lack of a minimum limit performance (10 out of 20 points) for university entrance (Stamelos, 2020) facilitates students to access HE (Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010). However, research shows that students coming from disadvantaged groups often face problems that have a strong impact on their performance, completion of their studies and their academic trajectories (Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010).

Taking the above into account, it is expected that the diversity of student population has increased in Greek HE but the same is expected for the obstacles students meet. Indicatively, late or non-completion is a problem in Greek HE (EC, 2019; Stamelos, 2020). Existing data shows that from 2000 until 2015, the increase of university students who have exceeded the expected period of studies in Greece reached 108.6% (*Ibid.*). In response, support measures are provided for HE students.

¹ Currently 25 HE institutions operate as self-governed entities which are financed and supervised by the Greek Ministry of Education (Law 4009/2011) (Sianou-Kyrgiou & Tsipplakides, 2011).

The first type of support provided after university entrance is financial support. Despite the no-fee policy for undergraduate courses (EC, 2018), study costs should be considered especially under the financial crisis of the last decade (Zmas, 2015). Greece provides needs-based grants through which 1% of the undergraduate students benefits (EC, 2018).² Tax benefits for students' parents and rental allowances for undergraduates studying away from the family home are also provided (EC, 2018). Second, the Law 4009/2011 foresees the establishment of student support services at Greek HE institutions regarding academic guidance, psychological support, career, employability and counseling. Despite the importance of support provision in HE, relevant studies are limited (Stamelos, 2020). As regards monitoring practices, Greece performs poorly, a fact which prevents the effective implementation of the retention policies and the Greek research in HE (Stamelos, 2020). Widening participation for under-represented groups is addressed but work needs to be done in terms of monitoring of socio-economic background of students, recognition of informal or non-formal learning on entry to higher education, completion rates and performance based funding mechanisms with a social dimension focus (EC, 2019). This article explores this lacuna for the Greek context aiming at examining how undergraduate students account on the support measures provided in Greek higher education.

2. Method

This article draws on data collected for our research project entitled “Educational trajectories in Greek higher education: Diversity, Inequalities and Inclusion” (University of Ioannina, Greece, 2018-2019) which examined aspects of inequalities and student support in Greek higher education.³ The study was conducted in three Greek higher education institutions which were selected as having different institutional characteristics, such as historical origin, location development of infrastructure, degree of selectivity because, for the research purposes of the project, such institutional differences are examined as important for the Greek case⁴. Both institutions and individuals are anonymised. In particular, this article presents quantitative data from the questionnaire undergraduate students completed on their views on student support provided during their studies in Greek HE. The research question underpinning this study is as follows: “How do students account on support measures provided by Greek HE institutions?”.

The questionnaire has been originally developed in course of the research project to measure the perceptions, the knowledge and the values of the students on diversity, inequalities, exclusions and student support. The first part of the questionnaire consists of items about demographic characteristics and personal information (see Table 1 below) while the second part includes items which refer to (1) access to higher education: choices and expectations of studies, (2) academic and social integration to university life (satisfaction and difficulties encountered during studies), (3) inequalities and diversity at university, (4) support services and (5) future plans. Most questions have been designed on a Likert scale from 1 (not at all/extremely unimportant to me) to 5 (completely/extremely important to me). The questionnaire has been

² Indicatively, the Greek State Scholarships Foundation prioritizes the following characteristics when providing grants for socially vulnerable students (IKY, 2019): low annual family income (up to 7,500 euros), disabilities/health problems, being a member of single or large families, status of orphan – expatriate – refugee – Roma – migrant – member of the Muslim minority of Thrace – seropositive – ex-addict – ex-prisoner.

³ Our research project's methodology was based on a mixed methods approach which included (a) questionnaires examining students' views and experiences on inequalities and student support services in higher education; (b) interviews with students who confronted difficulties during their academic trajectories; (c) interviews with academic staff exploring academics' knowledge and experiences on the strategies that their institutions develop to address inequalities and provide support.

⁴ Relevant findings are under publication elsewhere.

piloted on an earlier cohort a semester before the data collection and improvements have been made. This publication presents data from the fourth part of the questionnaire on student support provision. In particular, three aspects of support measures have been investigated: (A) Support provided by teaching staff and student fellows (Amean); (B) Support provided by established institutional structures and practices (Bmean), and (C) Support provided for managing diversity and discrimination (Cmean).

The research was conducted from April to June 2019. The sampling was convenient. The researchers (who are the authors of this publication) approached teaching staff at each institution and, after their permission, visited the classrooms on times suggested, presented the research and asked undergraduate students sitting at least the 3rd academic year of their studies to complete the questionnaire during their break. Students in their last academic years were mainly asked to participate, anonymously and on a volunteer basis, as these students would have had a fuller account on academic life, experiences and support services. The respondents come from all faculties and schools of each institution and completed the hardcopy questionnaires during the course break or in the end of the course. Finally, 1,260 questionnaires were fully completed and used for the statistical analysis.

Regarding the ensuing statistical analysis we note the use of descriptive statistics techniques, independent samples t-test and analysis of variance and corresponding post-hoc procedures through the SPSS statistical software. More specifically, data analysis started with the descriptive statistics of the questionnaire items. For the set of questions under examination, we computed an average score; before computing these scores, we have checked the correlation values and Cronbach's reliability coefficients. Average scores for each of the items of the questionnaire have been calculated for the whole sample and have also been split on the basis of differences in demographic characteristics. As each item of the questionnaire was treated as a separate issue, they were not combined to form a composite score. This means that scores ranged from 1 to 5 for each item (not applicable responses were treated as missing data as the item was not relevant to that respondent) and were therefore measured at an ordinal level. Accordingly, all statistical tests used were non-parametric. Our analysis continued with assessing the effect of questions; in particular, the statistical analysis contained the assessment of the independence of the respondents' characteristics on Amean, Bmean and Cmean. We assessed the effect of questions included in Table 4 on the three average scores, using independent samples t-test and analysis of variance (and corresponding post-hoc procedures).

3. Results

3.1 *Students' profiles*

A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to obtain a general understanding of the students' profiles. Most students were females (68.9%) and 79.2% of the respondents were 3rd or 4th year students. This rate can be explained by the higher number of women studying in Greek HE, and by women's general tendency to take part in studies more willingly compared to their male counterparts (Buchmann & Di Prete, 2006). Annual family income ranges between 10,000 - 30,000 euros for a significant percentage of respondents (33.8%: 10,001-20,000 euros, 23.9%: 20,001-30,000 euros). Most students' fathers were occupied as employees or self-employed in specialised professional posts of mid-level status of the public or private sector (52.9%) while students' mothers were employed mostly as semi-skilled/unskilled workers or farmers (37.4%). As regards parents' education, 46.2% of the students' fathers had completed secondary schools and 35.7% had a bachelor degree, while 47.1% and 38% of students' mothers had secondary education qualifications and bachelor degrees respectively. 40.5% of the respondents were first generation students. The differences among the institutions in terms of size are reflected in the

representation of the respondents in the sample as 52.4% of the respondents attended UniA, 32% Uni B and 15.6% UniC. Table 1 presents the respondents' background information in detail.

Table 1. Demographic and socioeconomic background of the respondents

1. Gender	Male	Female			
	31.1%	68.9%			
2. Year of Study	<3rd	3rd	4th	>4th	
	13.1	23,30%	42.8%	20.8%	
3. First in immediate family to attend university	Yes	No			
	40.5%	59.5%			
4. Institution of study	UniA	UniB	UniC		
	52.4%	32%	15.6%		
5. Annual family income (€)	≤5000	5001-10000	10001-20000	20001-30000	>30000
	9.6%	18.9%	33.8%	23.9%	13.9%
6. Cost of studies per month (€)	≤300	301-500	501-700	>700	
	51.3%	28.8%	15.8%	4.1%	
7. Parents' occupation *	1	2	3	4	5
7.1 Father	9.4%	52.9%	29.1%	7.1 %	1.5%
7.2 Mother	14.0%	13.1%	27.8%	37.4%	7.7%
8. Parents' education	Primary	Secondary	Bachelor	Master/ PhD	
8.1. Father	8.9%	46.2%	35.7%	9.1%	
8.2. Mother	6.8%	47.1%	38.0%	8.1%	

- * 1. High-level executives or employers in the public/ private sector, self-employed in business or in high status professions (lawyers, doctors).
 2. Employees or self-employed in specialised professional posts of mid-level status in public or private sector (civil servants with university degrees, teachers)
 3. Employees in manual/non manual working posts of lower status in public and private sector, self-employed craftsmen/ practitioners, owners of small businesses.
 4. Semi-skilled, unskilled workers/farmers
 5. Never working, unemployed persons

3.2 Students' accounts on support provision

The data analysis section draws on data from three items of the questionnaire regarding students' accounts and experiences on the support they received during their studies counted on a five-level Likert scale, starting from "not at all" (1) to "completely (5).

First, students were asked about the support they received from the teaching staff and student fellows (variable Amean). In particular, the first item included the following sub-items: (1) The teaching staff encouraged me to improve during the courses; (2) The teaching staff is very friendly and willing to help with any problems related to my studies; (3) There is good cooperation and close communication with the teaching staff; (4) The teaching staff did everything they could to make the lessons more pleasant; (5) I hang out with people I met at university; (6) I think I do not have the same opportunities as my colleagues do; (7) My colleagues treat me fairly and equally during the courses.

Second, students were asked about their satisfaction about the support measures they met by their institution in order to have a better social and academic engagement (variable Bmean). The second item on support included the following sub-items: (1) Support of new entrants from the institution (informative meetings, events, material, etc.); (2) Support for active participation in student life and opportunities to meet other students; (3) Support for getting

familiar with the new environment of my university (buildings, secretariats, libraries, staff’s offices, services); (4) Update on the course selection process; (5) Update on course requirements; (6) Update on prerequisite courses and the suggested selection/sequence per semester; (7) Offering courses and educational activities according to the curriculum; (8) Use of knowledge and skills you have developed as students; (9) Opportunities to participate in clubs, cultural activities and sports.

Third, students were asked about their perspectives regarding the support measures institutions take in order to combat specific types of inequalities, in particular: (1) Combat gender inequality; (2) Support students from other nationalities; (3) Support students of an immigrant background; (4) Support students from low socioeconomic background; (5) Support students with financial difficulties; (6) Support students with disabilities; (7) Provide equal opportunities for the academic success of all; (8) Implement effective measures for managing diversity.

For each set of sub-questions of A, B and C variables, we computed a mean value. Before computing these scores, we checked the correlation values and Cronbach’s reliability coefficients for each set of items. Table 2 presents some descriptive data of the variables as well as their reliability index. It is observed that all variables are reliable scales (Cronbach’s Alpha > 0.6). According to Table 2, students, in their majority, express rather reserved views on the readiness and effectiveness of institutions to implement student support provision. The support students received from the teaching staff and colleagues has a larger mean value, satisfaction about the support measures students met by their institution in order to have a better social and academic engagement follows and last come the support measures institutions take in order to combat inequalities.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach’s Alpha scale

Variable	Mean value	Standard Deviation	Cronbach’sAlpha
Amean	3.00	0.68	0.705
Bmean	2.71	0.80	0.888
Cmean	2.56	0.93	0.930

Table 3 presents the correlations among variables A, B and C. All variables have a strong positive correlation. Thus, the less support students feel they received from teaching staff and colleagues, the less supportive they find the measures implemented for social and academic engagement as well as the measures institutions take in order to combat inequalities. The strongest correlation is observed between Amean and Bmean. In other words, the less students claim that they get support by teaching staff and colleagues, the less they claim that they get support by the institution.

Table 3. Correlations among variables A, B, C

	A	B	C
A	1		
B	0.532**	1	
C	0.375**	0.433**	1

Our interest in the research project focuses on groups of students which might be in greater need of support. Therefore, the statistical analysis continues with assessing the independence of the respondents’ characteristics (Table 1) on institutional support categories (A, B, and C) in order to explore possible characteristics which matter the most. The main statistical

tools used were independent samples t-test and analysis of variance (and corresponding post-hoc procedures). The results are presented in detail in Table 4.

Table 4. The equality of means among categories (using ANOVA and multiple comparisons), for the mean scores of the items A, Band

Demographics		Variables											
		Amean				Bmean				Cmean			
		N	Mean	S.D	p	N	Mean	SD	p	N	Mean	SD	p
Gender	Male	407	3.08	0.69	0.008*	401	2.77	0.80	0.11	340	2.67	0.94	0.037*
	Female	907	2.97	0.67		895	2.69	0.80		813	2.53	0.93	
Year of study	4th	1051	3.22	0.68	<0.01*	1050	3.76	0.61	<0.01	957	3.07	0.61	<0.01
	>4th	262	2.81	0.65		261	3.38	0.68		233	2.67	0.96	
First to attend university	Yes	539	3.11	0.68	<0.01*	532	2.74	0.82	0.116	476	2.58	0.82	<0.01*
	No	770	2.93	0.67		761	2.67	0.78		675	2.55	0.91	
Institution of study	UniA	672	2.89	0.614	<0.01*	663	2.54	0.74	<0.01*	581	2.51	0.91	<0.01*
	UniB	411	3.01	0.71		407	2.77	0.79		360	2.47	0.91	
	UniC	218	3.35	.69		213	3.12	0.83		197	2.89	0.99	
Annual family income (€)	<5K	119	2.73	0.85	0.897	120	3.03	0.70	0.647	46	2.38	1.00	0.704
	5001-10K	239	2.70	0.80		242	3.06	0.66		101	2.52	0.89	
	10001-20K	426	2.69	0.78		429	2.98	0.68		214	2.60	1.01	
	20001-30K	292	2.69	0.75		296	2.98	0.65		380	2.56	0.91	
	>30001	173	2.75	0.87		175	2.98	0.73		264	2.49	0.82	
Cost of studies per month (€)	<300	647	2.66	0.79	0.121	652	2.99	0.66	0.531	573	2.64	0.91	0.011*
	301-500	364	2.71	0.76		372	3.03	0.68		325	2.47	0.92	
	501-700	203	2.77	0.80		204	2.96	0.66		179	2.48	0.92	
	>701	51	2.90	1.01		51	3.08	0.86		573	2.64	0.91	
Father's occupation	1	121	3.02	0.69	0.085	117	2.83	0.78	0.165	104	2.51	0.87	0.668
	2	665	2.98	0.67		660	2.70	0.78		593	2.60	0.93	
	3	367	2.99	0.66		363	2.65	0.80		317	2.51	0.96	
	4	89	3.19	0.72		89	2.83	0.94		76	2.58	0.99	
	5	23	3.14	0.71		23	2.69	0.95		22	2.59	0.98	
Mother's occupation	1	181	2.75	0.83	0.705	183	3.16	0.69	0.001*	166	2.88	0.85	0.449
	2	169	2.66	0.87		170	3.08	0.66		154	2.83	0.89	
	3	351	2.72	0.76		355	2.99	0.69		321	2.89	0.79	
	4	475	2.68	0.79		481	2.93	0.65		439	2.79	0.79	
	5	100	2.76	0.87		101	2.97	0.73		93	2.78	0.84	
Father's education level	Primary	116	3.19	0.75	0.04*	116	2.84	0.82	0.224	105	2.89	1.11	0.011*
	Secondary	611	3.02	0.69		606	2.68	0.80		532	2.50	0.90	
	Bachelor	460	2.94	0.66		452	2.69	0.79		407	2.57	0.90	
	Master/Ph D	125	2.97	0.66		123	2.73	0.79		109	2.53	0.97	
Mother's education level	Primary	89	3.27	0.74	<0.01*	88	2.82	0.89	0.397	82	3.05	1.03	0.098
	Secondary	615	3.03	0.68		609	2.70	0.81		562	2.84	0.52	
	Bachelor	494	2.92	0.66		491	2.70	0.78		448	2.82	0.75	
	Master/Ph D	107	2.96	0.68		103	2.63	0.80		82	3.05	1.03	

Table 4 presents the analysis on the relationship between students' characteristics and their accounts on support provision. First, the variable Amean is significantly larger for male

students compared to females, students at their 3rd or 4th year of studies compared to those who have extended the official period of study, first generation students, students with low paternal and maternal educational level and students with unemployed mother and students attending UniC compared to those at the other two institutions under study. The aforementioned categories of students consider the support provided to be greater compared to students without these characteristics. Taking into account that these students have no privileged social, economic and academic background, their satisfaction from the current provision might reveal that the new forms of inequalities triggered make some other groups of students more vulnerable and in need of support in higher education.

Second, the variable Bmean is significantly larger for males, first generation students, students at their 3rd or 4th year of studies, students with low paternal education level or unemployed mother and students attending UniC.

Third, as regards variable C, it is significantly larger for males, students at their 3rd or 4th year of studies, students with low paternal and maternal education level, students whose cost of studies is less than 300 euros per month and students attending UniC.

4. Discussion – Conclusions

Drawing on a set of quantitative data collected for our research project, this article presents how undergraduate students account on the support provision in Greek higher education. Our findings show that students, in their majority, express rather reserved views on the readiness and effectiveness of institutions to implement specific practices of support regarding teaching staff and fellow students, their satisfaction about the support measures they met by their institution in order to have a better social and academic engagement and their perspectives about the support measures taken in order to combat inequalities. This finding is of importance as relevant studies show the significance of support services regarding information, advice and guidance (Thomas & Jones, 2007) and meaningful interaction between staff and students (Thomas, 2012) on students' progression.

Second, when students find university less supportive for some aspects, the same applies for all support aspects. This finding raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of student support services which have been established at Greek HE institutions after Law 4009/2011 to enhance students' retention and completion of studies (EC, 2019). However, relevant problems exist, inequalities persist (Crozier et al., 2019; Reay, 2017) and, although in the Greek context, the "social dimension of higher education" in relation to access to higher education, progression and completion rates is considered (EC, 2018), student support provision in higher education is under-researched (Stamelos, 2020).

Third, some aspects related to students' background and attendance relate to how they perceive student support. In particular, aspects, such as students' economic background, parental educational level, being a first generation student, which have been traditionally seen as key to inequalities in higher education, do not appear to impact on the respondents' views on how supportive Greek higher education institutions are. The implementation of widening participation initiatives and key support services, the provision of grants as well as the absence of fees for undergraduate studies might have had a positive impact on that. In contrast to the aforementioned characteristics, some others, such as gender, non-completion of studies on time and institution of attendance matter.

In particular, male students find university more supportive for the three categories of support under study. While females' entrance, attendance and completion rates are high (ADIP, 2019), this finding shows that gendered types of inequalities exist. This finding also seems of importance nowadays as most Greek higher education institutions establish committees on gender

inequalities. As regards the year of study, students who are attending their 3rd or 4th year of studies find university more supportive compared to those who run late. In the Greek context, late or non-completion is reported as a problem (EC, 2019). However, because of the fact that relevant policies have emphasized, up to now, these students' de-registration from the institutions' records as a policy measure to reduce their numbers, we suggest further investigation of these students' need for support. In addition, students who do not complete their studies on time might need to be seen in relation to mature students. Studies on such topics have not been conducted for the Greek case, however, studies at an international level show mature students' need for support (McVitty & Morris, 2012).

Finally, the most striking finding of the present study is that the institution of attendance is indicated as a factor differentiating students' accounts on the support measures provided revealing the key role of institution and institutional differences in students' academic trajectories for the Greek case. This finding informed our decision to further investigate aspects of institutional culture of the three institutions under study which is the scope of another article under publication.

We need to note that the statistically significant differences appear for the same characteristics of students as regards the three aspects of support provision, that is to say gender, year of study and institution of attendance. It is also worthy to note that aspects related to economic background and parental educational level are not raised as significant. Therefore, new insights are provided for understanding aspects of current inequalities in higher education.

The present study indicates the need to further examine the effectiveness of the existing student support services in the Greek higher education context, first in terms of what is provided and, second, how well it is provided. Moreover, the study shows that every attempt to implement HE policies for student support should consider the existing differences among higher education institutions.

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Getting a Barista Job: Adjudicating the Impact of Human Capital, Social Capital, Age and Gender

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Abstract

This study concerns the role of human capital, social capital, age, and gender in acquiring a job as an entry-level barista. Employment records were coded and analyzed in order to identify the key factors differentiating this applicant pool. The results from multivariate models produce fewer positive associations between human capital and social capital indicators than the literature suggests. Those with greater educational attainment are more likely to have high-status references on their applications. As seen in previous literature, the social capital of applicants is not very relevant in acquiring this entry-level job. Overall, educational attainment was most salient in increasing the odds of being interviewed and hired. The managers responsible for these decisions appear to favor formal higher education over work experience or references. The findings are discussed vis-à-vis women's gains in higher education, the growth of the service sector, and the aging of the U.S. population.

Keywords: job acquisition, human capital, social capital, social networks, service sector.

1. Introduction

The process through which individuals gain employment has been investigated in numerous studies, yet the results are inconsistent. Data and methodological challenges are partially responsible since it is difficult to gather the pertinent evidence and the populations studied and operationalization of concepts vary. Even among comparable research, there are mixed results in basic questions such as who is more likely to use interpersonal contacts to get their jobs (Granovetter, 1995).

While most of the existing scholarship focuses upon high-skilled, professional occupations (Granovetter, 1995; Erickson, 2001; Lin, 2001), this study considers entry-level service work. Low-wage service sector work continues to grow, constituting a large proportion of the jobs that are available at any given time. Four major themes from the literature include the role of human capital, social capital, age, and gender in the job acquisition process. Rare and unique data including employment applications and employer records are used here in an effort to determine which types of applicants are most likely to be hired as a barista at a global coffeehouse chain.

This study's major research questions concern the characteristics of successful applicants into this entry-level work. While the possession of human capital such as college

degrees and work experience are well-known assets in the labor market, the role of the social capital of job applicants may be just as important in jobs that do not require experience or credentials. Have successful applicants acquired greater human and/or social capital than unsuccessful ones? Is there a relationship between human capital and social capital indicators? Do those with more human capital have greater social capital? How do age and gender impact social capital and job attainment?

- Human capital (educational attainment) is more salient than social capital in acquiring these jobs.
- Managers appear to favor formal higher education over work experience or references.
- These barista employees are predominantly young, highly-educated, and female.
- Compared to males, female applicants face no social capital disadvantage here.

Social theory and previous research are drawn upon in the following section to construct the theoretical model to be empirically tested here. Figure 1 depicts five different sets of associations expected to contribute to the job status of barista applicants.

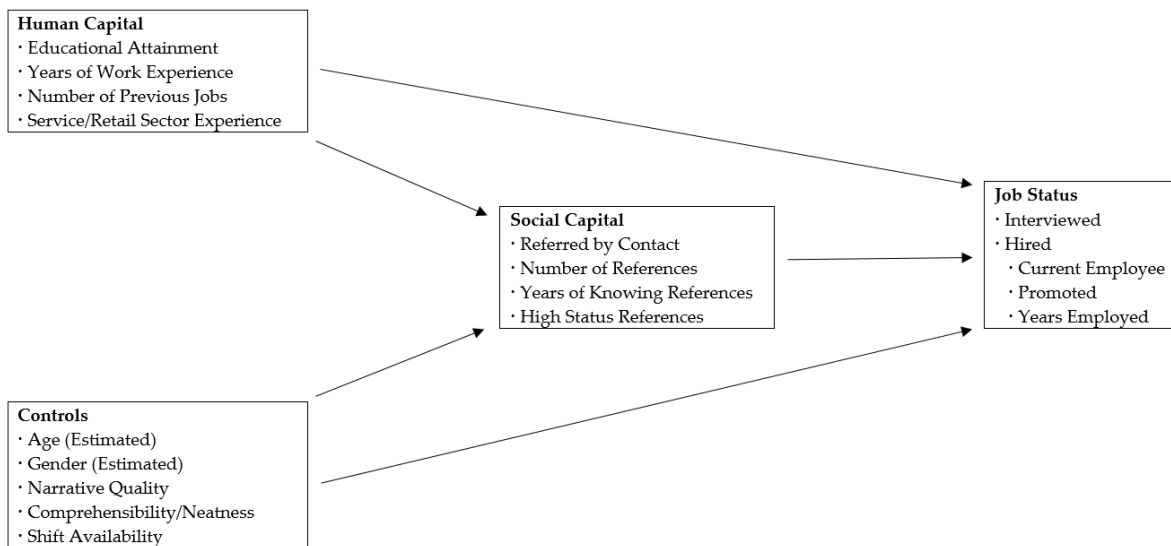


Figure 1. Theoretical model predicting barista job status

The concept of human capital is about an individual’s knowledge and skills that have value in the labor market (Becker, 1993). The idea is that people can invest in knowledge and skills to add value to their labor power. As Figure 1 above demonstrates, four indicators of human capital will be employed here. These include: educational attainment, years of previous work experience, number of jobs previously held, and previous experience in the retail service sector.

Social capital concerns resources embedded in our social networks (Lin, 2001; Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2001; Halpern, 2005). Social capital comes in a variety of forms such as useful information, obligations, someone exerting influence on your behalf, and social credentials seen by others. Some theorists (Lin, 2001) stress that individuals access these social resources through purposive actions while others (Small, 2009) argue that social capital is often nonpurposive and generated unintentionally.

Social capital is operationalized in this study through four indicators: being referred to the barista job by a contact, the number of references listed by an applicant, the length of time that the applicant has known their references, and whether the applicant has any references from a high-status occupation.

Previous research has found a positive association between education and work experience (key indicators of human capital) and social capital. Individuals with greater educational attainment have larger social networks of kin and non-kin confidants with whom they can discuss important matters (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Brashears, 2006). Those who attend college meet more new people and have access to organizational resources, increasing their social capital (Small, 2009). Those with better human capital have greater social network diversity, increasing the likelihood of receiving valuable information (Erickson, 2001). And generally, greater work experience leads to a broader set of work contacts (Bridges & Villemez, 1986; McDonald & Elder, 2006; McDonald & Mair, 2010).

In his foundational study *Getting a Job*, Granovetter (1995) finds that older male professional/ technical workers are more likely to use contacts than younger ones. Yet in his revisit of the literature, he concludes that the evidence is mixed as to who is more likely to use contacts to get jobs. More recent scholarship surrounding age effects demonstrates that these inconsistencies continue to be the case.

On the one hand, and corroborating Granovetter's findings, is the research documenting how employment experience (an indirect measure of age) creates greater job contacts (Bridges & Villemez, 1986; McDonald & Elder, 2006; McDonald & Mair, 2010). On the other hand, scholarship also shows that social interaction and network size tend to decrease with age (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Brashears, 2006; McDonald & Mair, 2010; Fernandez, Castilla & Moore, 2000). An analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (McDonald & Elder, 2006) finds that 47% of "early-career" (younger) workers got their jobs through contacts compared to only 21% of "mid-career" workers. Of particular importance given the applicant pool studied here, a study (Fernandez & Castilla, 2001) of telephone call center workers finds that young people are more likely to know other young people who want an entry-level job.

The effects of gender have been more consistent. Women are less likely to be exposed to weak ties containing job information (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). They are more likely to have lower social resources and are less likely to get their jobs without a search (McDonald & Elder, 2006; Parks-Yancy, DiTomaso & Post, 2006).

A certain degree of human capital is required in many types of work. However, human capital may be less salient in entry-level work. No previous experience nor educational credentials are required of the baristas working for this chain retailer. As Figure 1 above demonstrates, I will statistically test the impact of four indicators of human capital upon the applicant's job status. Human capital theory (Becker, 1993) suggests that the first two indicators will be positively associated with obtaining a job. That is, those with greater education and greater work experience may be expected to be more likely to be hired as a barista. The impact of the number of jobs previously held is less clear. Having held many different jobs, particularly in a short time period, may reflect an applicant's lack of performance or commitment. The type of previous job experience will also be considered. Those with experience working in the retail service sector are expected to be more likely to be hired as baristas. Again, while human capital theory is expected to be relevant here, the fact that this is entry-level work makes its impact less known.

The role of the age and gender of the barista job applicants upon job status will also be investigated. On the one hand, a relationship may be expected. Given that the barista position is low-paying, entry-level, retail service work, it is likely that most of those interviewed and hired will be relatively young. Yet the question is whether younger applicants will be hired at a greater rate than older ones. If they are (net of other factors), age discrimination may be playing a role. Employers in the retail service sector may be seeking to project a hip and contemporary image which is more likely to be displayed by younger employees.

Job segregation by gender has been well-documented by sociologists (Reskin & Padavic, 1994). While it is in decline, as more women make inroads into historically male-

dominated professions (and vice-versa), this retail food service work is expected to be carried out mostly by women. Yet again, the question is whether female applicants are hired at a greater rate than male applicants. Retail food service employers may assume that customers prefer to be served by a woman and therefore may be more likely to hire women.

On the other hand, organizational demography theory (Baron & Bielby, 1980; Huffman, 1995) suggests that age and gender will not play a role in job status here. The employer in this case is a large corporation that surely seeks to create a positive public image to gain customers. Larger companies face more scrutiny in their implementation of equal opportunity laws and likely wish to avoid any charges of discrimination.

Two of the other job status variables concern turnover (whether the hired baristas are still employed and their length of employment). Previous research has indicated that younger people have higher turnover rates as they experiment with different jobs and seek better ones (Hellman, 1997). Also, women have generally been found to have higher turnover rates than men since they tend to provide the majority of the unpaid household labor such as childcare (Moen, Kelly & Hill, 2011).

The last job status variable differentiates those baristas who were eventually promoted to become a supervisor. As in the case of being interviewed and hired, it is not clear if a relationship can be expected. Discrimination theory suggests that younger and male baristas would be more likely to be promoted. However, organizational demography theory suggests that this large corporation would likely ensure that protected groups would not be disadvantaged in promotion opportunities.

Research indicates that social capital can produce positive employment outcomes. Contacts within our social networks may have knowledge, reputation, wealth, and/or power that can be useful to us in getting a job. Thus, the size or extensivity of one's personal network has been hypothesized to be positively associated with status attainment and labor market outcomes (Lin, 2001). Those with larger networks have potentially greater resources available that are useful in getting a job. The role of acquaintances ("weak ties") has also been stressed since they are more likely to have novel information (Granovetter, 2003; Erickson, 2003). Being referred to a job by a good contact within the firm is often productive since referrals reduce uncertainty for the employer (Granovetter, 1995; Marsden, 2001). The "better match" hypothesis (Fernandez & Castilla, 2001) also predicts that those who are referred to their jobs will have lower turnover rates.

Granovetter (1995) found in his classic study of male professional/technical workers that 56% of his respondents used personal contacts to obtain their jobs and that the use of referrals increases the chances of getting a job. More recent firm studies have also shown that applicants who were referred to the employer were more likely to receive job offers than those who were not (Fernandez, Castilla & Moore, 2000; Fernandez & Weinberg, 1997; Petersen, Saporta & Seidel, 2000). However, some evidence from survey research has found that there is no general effect. That is, for randomly-sampled employees, the use of job contacts is not statistically related to getting an offer (Mouw, 2003). Thus, it is not the use of contacts per se that matters, but the quality and quantity of the social resources of the applicant (Marsden, 2001). Also, referrals are not as useful to the candidate when lower-level jobs are concerned (Erickson, 2001).

In addition to use of a contact, I will also investigate whether the number of references job seekers list on their application has an impact upon their job status (see Figure 1). The length of time that one has known their references is another measure that will be tested. Finally, the status of one's social ties is also important (Lin, 2001). A single high-status reference may be enough to make an application stand out.

2. Method

Unique, unpublished data sources are employed to adjudicate the salience of human capital, social capital, age, and gender in getting a job as a barista. Data resulting from a Maine Human Rights Commission investigation of Maine branches of a global coffeehouse chain were acquired. The first dataset is an employer database on 1,306 baristas from all Maine locations of this retailer over an 8-year period (2000-2008). This data file contains the start date, separation date (if applicable), promotion status, and birth date for each barista hired in this period. The Job Status outcome variables (seen in Figure 1) are able to be constructed from this data file.

The second data source consists of a pool of 599 employment applications from job seekers at several coffeehouse locations in the Portland, Maine area. These come from a three-year period (January, 2005 – December, 2007) surrounding the Maine Human Rights Commission investigation. These employment applications were coded by the author to create a dataset containing the four indicators of Human Capital, the four indicators of Social Capital, and the five control variables listed in Figure 1. Moreover, evidence that candidates were offered job interviews are also available from the paper applications. While this data has limitations (the employment applications cover only a short, non-random period from several Portland-area stores), the information yielded will be rich as the characteristics of the successful applicants from the pool will be identified. Moreover, with 599 applications, multivariate statistical modeling will be possible.

The employment application used by this company is a standard application form. The first Human Capital indicator is educational attainment. Candidates were provided blank fields to list high school and college attendance and graduation status. This permitted the construction of a degree variable distinguishing those without any formal degree (coded “0”), those with high school degrees (1), those with some college experience (2), and those with a Bachelor’s degree or higher (3). The employment experience portion of the form contains fields requesting dates of former employment, employer name, salary, position, duties performed, reason for leaving, and supervisor contact information for up to four previous employers. The total years of previous work experience were summed for each applicant. The number of previous jobs (0-4) was also coded. Finally, the position name and duties performed fields enabled estimation of whether the candidate had any previous experience in the retail or food service sector.

Five control variables were also coded from the applications. First, the age of the applicant was estimated. By law, employment applications cannot directly request the applicant’s date of birth. The birth date of those hired was available from the employment records. Analysis of the 1,306 baristas from all Maine locations of this retailer indicate that 88.8% of baristas hired in this period were 34 years of age or younger on their start date while only 11.3% were 35 years of age or older. Using this as a guideline to distinguish younger applicants from older ones, evidence to estimate whether an applicant was age 35 or older was searched for in the applications. If the oldest date of the candidate’s first employment was 19 or more years before the date of the application, they were considered to be at least 35 years of age (this assumes that the applicant was at least age 16 at first employment). Some applicants listed graduation dates in the education fields. Those who had graduated from high school 17 or more years before the application date were coded in the “35+” category (assuming an age of 18 at graduation). In the references field, applicants were asked to state the number of years that they have been acquainted with each reference. If any of these responses was 35 or greater, the applicant was coded “35+” on the estimated age variable. The application also contains a date field under the “personal information” section. Some applicants mistook this for a birth date field and provided their exact birth date there. Others attached resumes containing birth dates on them. Thus, five different pieces of potential evidence were employed to estimate age. The number of those identified as age 35 or older are absolute minimums. That is, there are likely other applicants over the age of 35 who could not be identified.

The gender of the applicant was also estimated. In most cases this was fairly clear from their stated first name or from the “other names you are known by” field. In the case of gender-ambiguous names, the employment experience fields were searched. Oftentimes gendered job titles were listed by the applicants there (“waitress” versus “waiter,” etc.). Three other control variables were coded from the applications. First, the quality of the narrative section of the application (which requested responses to three specific questions) was coded as low (1), average (2), or high (3). The comprehensibility or neatness of the handwritten applications was also coded as poor (1), average (2), or high (3). The seven-day shift availability fields were employed to determine if the applicant had limited availability (1), moderate availability (2), high availability (3), or complete availability (4).

Four indicators of the Social Capital of the applicant were coded. Under the “personal information” section of the application, there is a “referred by” field. Those who listed a name there were coded as being referred by a contact. The references section requested information on three professional references. Most applicants did list three, those who did not were coded “0” on the maximum references variable. The total number of years of knowing references was calculated by summing the years acquainted fields. Finally, the occupational status of the references was considered. The reference fields requested the “business” that the reference was in. Applicants often listed job titles there. Those who had listed at least one reference that was identified as being a doctor, lawyer, professor, engineer, or president or CEO were coded as having a high-status reference.

3. Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the 18 variables listed in Figure 1. The Job Status variables are the outcomes here and provide some important context. First, 13.9% of the applicants are coded as having been interviewed.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
<i>Human Capital</i>						
Education	1.67	2	2	0.91	0	3
Years Worked	3.63	2	1	4.02	0	34
No. of Jobs	2.61	3	3	1.19	0	4
Service Experience	0.76	1	1	0.42	0	1
<i>Controls</i>						
Over Age 35	0.05	0	0	0.22	0	1
Female	0.65	1	1	0.48	0	1
Narrative Quality	1.85	2	2	0.48	1	3
Neatness	1.98	2	2	0.27	1	3
Availability	3.03	3	4	0.94	1	4

Social Capital

Referred	0.09	0	0	0.28	0	1
Max. References	0.78	1	1	0.41	0	1
Reference Years	14.02	11	0	12.94	0	98
High Status Refs.	0.06	0	0	0.23	0	1

Job Status

Interviewed	0.14	0	0	0.35	0	1
Hired	0.09	0	0	0.29	0	1
Current Employee ^a	0.41	0	0	0.50	0	1
Promoted ^a	0.30	0	0	0.46	0	1
Days Employed ^a	399.53	332	38	322.52	2	1095

^a n = 54; all others n = 599

Some of the applications had attached interview scoring sheets, post-it notes, or written notes on the application itself indicating that the candidate had been interviewed or offered one. All of those who were hired were coded as having been interviewed as well. Yet 13.9% seems to be a particularly low interview rate, so this variable should be approached with caution. Nine percent of the applicants were hired (when coding the applications the employer database was searched for matches). The current employee variable identifies the 40.7% of hired applicants who were still active employees at the time the employer database was produced (in mid-2008). The promoted variable indicates that 29.6% of the hired baristas were eventually promoted to supervisor or beyond. The average employee hired from this three-year batch of applications had worked for the company for about 13 months (400 days).

The results from the four Human Capital variables indicate that the applicants to this entry-level work have noteworthy experience. Nearly half (46.1%) of the applicants have attended some college (median and mode = 2) and 17.0% have a Bachelor's degree or higher (one missing case was assigned the median/mode of 2). The average applicant has worked for 3.63 years in 2.61 jobs. Around three-quarters (76.5%) have previous experience in the retail or food service sector.

The result of the age estimation exercise is that 5.2% of applicants are identified as being at least 35 years of age or older. This appears to be low (and recall that this estimate is an absolute minimum) given that 11.3% of the baristas statewide in the 2000-2008 period were 35 or older at the time of hire. There are several possible explanations for this discrepancy, none of which can be tested. However, as a means of testing the representativeness of this batch of applicants to the statewide employees, a one-sample t-test was computed. The average age of baristas in the state of Maine hired in 2005-2007 (the same year-range of the applications) was 26.1. The average age of the 54 hired applicants to Portland-area stores was 26.2 (t = .07; not significant). Thus, there is some evidence that this particular application batch is representative of all of this company's employees in the state.

The estimated gender variable resulted in 33.1% males, 65.1% females, and 1.8% unknown. To dichotomize this for statistical analyses, a female variable was created with males and the unknown group coded as "0." The narrative quality and neatness variables indicate that the vast majority of applicants were coded as average ("2"). Shift availability is high among these applicants: 33.6% have high availability and 38.6% are completely available for every shift.

Finally, descriptive statistics for the four Social Capital indicators are presented in Table 1. Only 8.5% of applicants listed a name in the “referred by” field. More than three-quarters (78.3%) filled all three spaces for references on the application. The average applicant listed 14.02 total reference years. Only 5.5% of applicants had a high-status reference.

The analysis begins with bivariate testing. Pearson’s r correlation coefficients from five of the 18 variables are not reported in Table 2. There were no statistically significant associations between the groups of variables depicted in Figure 1 for five of the indicators. Three of these are the outcomes variables for the 54 applicants who were hired. Current employee status, promotion status, and length of employment are not correlated with any of the human capital, social capital, nor control variables. Also, the female and shift availability variables are not correlated with any of the social capital or job status variables. Therefore, these variables will be excluded from the multivariate models.

Each human capital indicator is statistically and positively correlated with at least two of the social capital indicators and one of the outcome variables. Applicants with greater educational attainment are more likely to list the maximum number of references, have a high-status reference, be interviewed for the position, and be hired. Those with greater work experience are more likely to list the maximum number of references, have greater total reference years, and be interviewed. Those who have held a larger number of previous jobs are more likely to have been referred to the job, have the maximum number of references, have greater total reference years, have a high-status reference, be interviewed for the position, and be hired. Applicants with previous experience in the retail or food service sector are more likely to have maximum references, greater reference years, and to have been interviewed.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
(1)	1	.238***	.455***	.211***	-.014	.308***	.140***	.066	.202***	.029	.176***	.189***	.179***
(2)	.238***	1	.359***	.096*	.515***	.170***	.093*	.065	.194***	.237***	.037	.100*	.073
(3)	.455***	.359***	1	.388***	.088*	.348***	.161***	.089*	.380***	.148***	.090*	.178***	.126**
(4)	.211***	.096*	.388***	1	-.030	.274***	.111**	.028	.233***	.111**	.048	.120**	.065
(5)	-.014	.515***	.088*	-.030	1	.024	.014	.037	.032	.233***	-.023	.037	.005
(6)	.308***	.170***	.348***	.274***	.024	1	.407***	.081*	.406***	.181***	.151***	.194***	.158***
(7)	.140***	.093*	.161***	.111**	.014	.407***	1	.063	.192***	.135***	.042	.060	.041
(8)	.066	.065	.089*	.028	.037	.081*	.063	1	.045	.050	-.021	.085*	.029
(9)	.202***	.194***	.380***	.233***	.032	.406***	.192***	.045	1	.374***	.092*	.117**	.067
(10)	.029	.237***	.148***	.111**	.233***	.181***	.135***	.050	.374***	1	-.045	.045	.028
(11)	.176***	.037	.090*	.048	-.023	.151***	.042	-.021	.092*	-.045	1	.030	.001
(12)	.189***	.100*	.178***	.120**	.037	.194***	.060	.085*	.117**	.045	.030	1	.785***
(13)	.179***	.073	.126**	.065	.005	.158***	.041	.029	.067	.028	.001	.785***	1

(1) Education; (2) Years of Work Experience; (3) Number of Jobs; (4) Service Experience; (5) Over Age 35; (6) Narrative Quality; (7) Neatness; (8) Referred; (9) Maximum References; (10) Reference Years; (11) High Status References; (12) Interviewed; (13) Hired

n = 599
 ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

The three control variables in Table 2 have several significant correlations with the social capital indicators and one does with the outcome variables. Those applicants who are age 35 or older are more likely to have greater reference years. Those who have a higher quality written narrative in their application are more likely to have been referred to the job, to have maximum references, greater reference years, a high-status reference, to have been interviewed, and hired. Those who submitted neater applications are more likely to have the maximum number of references and greater reference years.

Finally, two of the social capital indicators are correlated with the interview variable. Those who were referred to the job and those who listed the maximum number of references are more likely to have been interviewed.

To better assess the theoretical relationships in Figure 1, multivariate models are employed. All of the model assumptions of multiple regression were met and multicollinearity did not pose a problem. Table 3 presents the regression models of the human capital indicators and control variables predicting social capital.

Table 3. Standardized coefficients from multiple regression of social capital indicators on human capital and control variables

	Maximum References ^a	Reference Years ^b	High Status ^a
<i>Human Capital</i>			
Education	.937	-.079	2.477**
Years Worked	1.093	.123**	.997
No. of Jobs	1.641***	.049	.995
Service Experience	1.237	.061	1.273
<i>Controls</i>			
Over Age 35	.640	.162***	.573
Narrative Quality	4.943***	.118**	3.184**
Neatness	1.217	.070	.666
Constant	.035***	-	.002***
R-square	.210	.109	.047

^a Odds ratios and Cox & Snell R-square reported

^b Beta weights reported

n = 599

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

The first thing to notice is that the model predicting use of a reference for the barista position is not included. While two of the variables had weak correlations with reference use in Table 2, neither the logistic regression model nor any predictor was statistically significant in the multivariate test. The maximum references model is presented first. Applicants with a greater number of previous jobs and those with a higher quality written narrative are more likely to have listed the maximum number of references on their applications. This model is rather strong with 21.0% of the variance explained. It is sensible that those who have held more jobs will have met more people and have a greater number of work references. Also, those who carefully constructed a high-quality narrative are likely to recognize the importance of references.

The next model in Table 3 predicts reference years. Applicants who have worked longer are more likely to have known their references for a longer period. Since many use co-workers and supervisors from previous jobs as references, this correspondence seems clear. Applicants aged 35 or older are more likely to have known their references for a longer period. This is also reasonable as older people will have had more time to know and use their references. Those with a higher-quality narrative are also more likely to have known their references longer. This may reflect the fact that some applicants are more professional and carefully craft their applications and maintain good relationships with their references over the years.

The last model indicates that applicants with greater educational attainment are much more likely to list a high-status reference on their application than those with lower education. Those who attend college have greater opportunities to meet high-status people (such as professors) who may eventually serve as job references for them. Also, applicants with a higher-quality narrative are more likely to have a high-status reference. This may again be related to college as those who write better are using professors as references.

Table 4 presents the models predicting the interviewed and hired outcomes. These were run in batches with the first set containing only the human capital and control variables, the second set only the social capital variables, and the last all 11 predictors. In the first set of multivariate models the results differ from the bivariate analyses in Table 2 as several of the human capital indicators are no longer statistically significant in predicting interview and hire status. While education and narrative quality continue to have positive effects on both outcomes, the number of years worked, the number of jobs, and possession of service experience are no longer significant in the interviewed model. This is very interesting since there is no minimum educational requirement for this entry-level work. It appears that managers are favoring formal higher education over work experience in selecting whom to interview and hire.

Table 4. Odds ratios from logistic regression of job status on human capital, control variables, and social capital indicators

	<u>Interviewed</u>	<u>Hired</u>	<u>Interviewed</u>	<u>Hired</u>	<u>Interviewed</u>	<u>Hired</u>
<i>Human Capital</i>						
Education	1.533**	1.815**			1.552**	1.870**
Years Worked	1.001	1.008			.998	1.009
No. of Jobs	1.273	1.140			1.242	1.147
Service Experience	1.810	1.224			1.812	1.231
<i>Controls</i>						
Over Age 35	1.484	.951			1.555	.912
Narrative Quality	2.665**	2.586**			2.553**	2.716**
Neatness	.800	.683			.767	.664
<i>Social Capital</i>						
Referred			1.991*	1.338	1.650	1.059
Max. References			2.811**	1.932	1.342	.902
Reference Years			1.000	1.001	.998	1.001
High Status Refs.			1.273	.933	.781	.525
Constant	.005***	.006***	.062***	.056***	.005***	.006***
Cox & Snell R ²	.072	.049	.022	.006	.076	.051

n = 599
 ***p<.001, **p<.01,
 *p<.05

The second set of models focus only on the social capital indicators. The results here mirror the bivariate ones: those who were referred to the job are about twice as likely and those who listed the maximum number of references are 2.8 times more likely to be interviewed. In the last set of models containing all of the predictors, these social capital indicators are no longer statistically significant. In the end, it is only education and narrative quality that increase one's odds of being interviewed and hired. The total variance explained is rather low with only 7.6% in the interviewed model and 5.1% in the hired model. The results indicate that human capital is more salient in producing favorable job outcomes than social capital.

4. Discussion

The results of the multivariate analysis of human capital predicting social capital produced fewer positive associations among these applicants than the literature suggests. Only 3 of the 16 possible relationships are statistically significant. None of the human capital indicators (nor the control variables) predicted the key example of social capital focused on in much of the previous research: being referred to the job by a contact.

The relationship between work experience and social capital found in earlier research did receive additional empirical support here. Those with a greater number of previous jobs are more likely to have listed more references and those with greater years of work experience have a higher number of total reference years. One's work is an important source of one's social capital. Also, those with greater education are found to be more likely to have a high-status reference. Colleges and universities can serve as rich organizational contexts for students to develop influential ties (Small, 2009).

Age and gender were treated as key control variables here. Surprisingly, the gender variable was not statistically significant in the models predicting social capital levels and job outcomes. While it was estimated that nearly two-thirds of the barista applicants were women, they did not differ from the male applicants in terms of social capital nor job outcomes. The fact that female applicants face no social capital disadvantage has important implications. It may reflect the entry-level labor market studied or be a by-product of the gains women have made in higher education. In either case, it is an area ripe for future research.

Previous research investigating the association between age and social capital has exhibited mixed effects. Here, there were mostly noneffects as the estimated age variable was only correlated with the total number of reference years. Moreover, the age variable was not significant in the job outcomes models. This is positive news as age discrimination does not appear to be playing a role here. The aging of the U.S. population and the expansion of the service sector are well-documented trends. They are particularly salient in Maine, the U.S. state with the highest median age and a decimated manufacturing sector and paper and pulp industry. Some of the elderly are delaying retirement or reentering the labor force in order to maintain their desired standards of living and others recognize the social and health benefits of working (Bjelland, Bruyère, von Schrader, Houtenville, Ruiz-Quintanilla & Webber, 2010). Thus, there could be a potential "win-win" situation with older people filling jobs in the growing service sector. This would ameliorate staffing shortages for service sector employers while providing elderly employees with additional income and social interaction.

5. Conclusion

This study has concerned the role of human capital, social capital, age, and gender in acquiring a job as an entry-level barista. Employment applications and employer records were coded and analyzed in order to identify the key factors differentiating this applicant pool. The

effects of social capital on the odds of these applicants being interviewed or hired disappeared in the final multivariate models. In the end, educational attainment, the key indicator of human capital, was more salient. These results support Erickson's (2001) finding that social capital's role is less relevant in gaining an entry-level job.

The role that education plays in this entry-level work is noteworthy. In this case, it seems that managers favor formal higher education over work experience or references. These findings correspond with the larger mismatch in the labor market of too many over-qualified applicants for work that does not require any credentials or experience (Kalleberg, 2007). Presumably, most college graduates desire better jobs than that of a barista. With this level of competition, lesser-qualified applicants are edged out and have fewer opportunities. While this study has only focused upon one job in one region during one time period, the findings demonstrate that future research on the process of job acquisition and its implications across various sectors is still sorely needed.

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Early Adolescence Today: A Theoretical Approach to Particularities and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper aims to present the main features of early adolescence today (also known as preadolescence). The paper refers to this age period on three levels: the physical level and sexual maturation, the cognitive level, and the socio-emotional level. Thus, we propose a theoretical approach to the main characteristics of early adolescence, but also the analysis of a series of particularities and challenges specific to this stage of life. Despite the fact that childhood, preadolescence and adolescence are certainly difficult, most young people manage to get through these stages of development due to the relationships with family and friends, motivated by academic success or activities that help them build their personality and self-esteem.

Keywords: early adolescence, physical level and sexual maturation, cognitive level, socio-emotional level.

1. Introduction

The early adolescence (or preadolescence) period, considered to be usually in the age range of 10-13 years, is bordered by two other important periods in human development: childhood and adolescence. In this article we propose a theoretical approach to the main characteristics of early adolescence, but also the analysis of a series of particularities and challenges specific to this stage of life. At the same time, we will refer to this age period on three levels: the physical level and sexual maturation, the cognitive level, the socio-emotional level.

2. Physical level and sexual maturation

We believe that, given the relatively small number of studies on early adolescence, on the particularities and the challenges that characterize this distinct stage of development, it is necessary, for a good understanding of these, to turn our attention to a wider range of studies which deal in parallel with the other two stages of human existence that frame early adolescence (preadolescence): childhood and adolescence.

Being concerned with the emotional problems that occur in preadolescents, Alves (2013) argues that, in order to complete the relatively limited researches on the emotional problems in preadolescence, it is necessary to rely on a research corpus regarding both childhood and adolescence. And this is because the amount of information about preadolescent emotional

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issues is smaller compared to the amount of data available for adolescence. Secondly, because what is known about the post-childhood stage that precedes adolescence, is added to the knowledge regarding the development of emotional problems in general.

- The early adolescence (or preadolescence) period is usually considered to be in the age range of 10-13 years.
- Adolescence brings with it countless changes in a person's life. The relatively uniform growth during childhood is suddenly altered by an acceleration of the growth rate.
- The adolescent is in a construction that exposes him in the relationship with the other.
- The relationships with family and friends, accompanied by academic success and activities help children, preadolescents and adolescent build their personality and self-esteem.

However, the adolescence is not necessarily synonymous with problems. It is true that during this period there may be emotional or behavioural changes that, although not particularly annoying, they are consistent themselves (Buchanan et al., 1992).

Adolescence brings with it countless changes in a person's life. The relatively uniform growth during childhood is suddenly altered by an acceleration of the growth rate. To this, we add hormonal, cognitive and emotional changes. Given that all these changes create special nutritional needs, adolescence is considered a vulnerable period of life, especially from a nutritional point of view, as there is a high demand for nutrients due to growth and physical development; it also changes the lifestyle and the eating habits of the teenagers. In addition, those who practice sports or who suffer from a chronic illness follow a strict diet or consume alcohol and drugs, require a special attention from this point of view (Spear, 2002).

According to Lunde (2009), the early adolescence is a period in which both girls and boys risk becoming more and more dissatisfied with the way they look (satisfaction with their own body). Depending on the gender, the preadolescents react differently to the experiences of victimization of the colleagues. The boys who are especially teased about their appearance tend to think that others don't find them attractive. On the other hand, for the girls, a higher frequency of peer victimization experiences tends to affect especially the assessment of the body weight.

It has been determined that there are significant associations among the onset of puberty (pubertal timing), issues regarding body image and self-esteem. At the applicative level, the same research suggests that improving the self-esteem of the preadolescent girls could be made possible by changing the way they see and cope with the different aspects of physical development. The educational strategies could help girls to understand and see in a positive way the physical, psychological, and social changes their bodies undergo during puberty, thus reducing their likelihood of experiencing a negative body image or a low self-esteem (Williams & Currie, 2000).

Simultaneously, another study concerned with the timing of the onset of puberty (pubertal timing) has indicated that it is more strongly associated with educational attainment and orientation towards achievement than the pubertal status. It is of real interest the fact that, according to the same research, the boys who mature later had the poorest results, while the girls with late maturation had the best results (Dubas et al., 1991).

Regarding sexual maturation, one study states that a normal or a deviant sexuality of the preadolescents and adolescents is related to other behavioural developments that occur simultaneously. These include individual behaviours such as alcohol or drug use/abuse, school failures or successes and the development of social skills. Although it is recognized that the normal and abnormal sexual behaviours of the adolescents and even of the adults originate in the preadolescent development, this aspect is often ignored (Araji, 2004).

The reactions to sexual intimacy are an integral part of attachment patterns. An attitude of security in attachment promotes intimacy and communication; the fear of attachment, on the other hand, includes general concerns about rejection and abandonment, which are easily transposed into sexual situations. Similarly, avoiding attachment causes a state of discomfort caused by the physical closeness and psychological intimacy specific to sexual intimacy. The research on these issues has concluded, among other things, that the attachment manner is linked to the emotions experienced during sexual episodes, thus, the adolescents with a safe attitude enjoying sexual intimacy significantly more than those who are anxious (fearful) and those with an avoidance attitude (Tracy et al., 2003).

The physical level and sexual maturation also include health issues. When thinking about this, most people associate this term with doctors and hospitals. Therefore, a good level of health can mean for them the absence of the disease. However, the notion of health encompasses many components, including the satisfactory level of physical and mental health of a person and the extent to which individuals in a society are able to live healthy and prosperous lives. Anyway, a healthy society too is not the one that waits for people to get sick, but one that notices the way health is shaped by social, political, economic, cultural, commercial and environmental factors and takes measures for the well-being of the present and future generations. A good health is a fundamental human right, and was presented in 1948 in the well-known *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (art. 25) of the United Nations Organization. However, the initiative of Sir William Beveridge from 1942 is less known. He published a report denouncing the lack of healthy housing and the public health problems of the time, such as malnutrition and making recommendations aimed at combating unemployment and childcare measures. His action has acted as a catalyst of the movement to equalize society (Lovell & Bibby, 2018).

3. Cognitive level

According to Kaestner (2009), the cognitive ability of the adolescent, along with a non-cognitive trait, namely self-esteem – has a significant and direct association with health in adulthood. For men, the cognitive ability and self-esteem are more correlated with health than to income. For women, on the other hand, cognitive ability correlates less with health and earnings.

At the same time, it has been stated that, in addition to cognitive and motivational variables, the academic achievement is affected by indicators such as popularity and parental involvement. Along with the teachers, who provide the tools needed to improve students' performance, the parents and the colleagues are also variables that can be seen as either a support or an obstacle to achieving better school performance. Also, when it is intended to predict educational achievement, the non-cognitive variables are as significant as the cognitive variables (Veas et al., 2015).

Regarding the changes in the social behaviour, a group of researchers showed that they are determined by both social and biological factors. Thus, during adolescence, it is possible that the peer interactions and societal influences, as well as the genetically determined hormonal framework, influence social behaviour; moreover, the brain matures considerably during adolescence, which has prompted the emergence of a number of evidences that have indicated the role of neural maturation in the development of social cognition during adolescence (Choudhury et al., 2006).

The social competence is seen by the authors of a study as a key feature of non-cognitive ability in toddlers. Social competence includes both the ability to complete tasks and manage responsibilities, and the skills needed to control social and emotional experiences. This can be assessed, the authors add, by educators, who observe many situations in which children have to manage relationships with their peers and adults. The school environment offers the

opportunity to observe children's abilities to interact interpersonally while cooperating with the others to complete daily tasks and to solve conflicts. Such skills, the study notes, are important for progress in the early years of study (Jones et al., 2015).

4. Socio-emotional level

Difficulties of internalization and outsourcing – these are the two major categories in which the most common forms of psychopathology that occur in childhood and adolescence, have been included. Thus, while outsourcing difficulties are characterized by harmful and disruptive behaviours directed at others, the internalizing disorders involve a disorder in punitive internal emotions and moods (feelings of sadness, guilt, fear, and worry). In fact, both types of dysfunction have behavioural and affective components, as well as specific cognitive characteristics (Zahn-Waxler et al., 2000)

The adolescent is in a construction that exposes him in the relationship with the other. Whether it is about the relationship with family, school, friends and social environment in general – the signs of depression onset (emotional difficulties) can be found in the context of changing this relationship. Manifestations may occur in three main areas of adolescents' lives: at school, in extracurricular activities and in relationships. At school, the study participants reported deterioration in their academic performance, partly due to difficulties in understanding and focussing that have contributed to their exhaustion and discouragement. In terms of free time, there is a decrease and then a loss of pleasure in carrying out previously satisfying activities. Relational life: some participants mentioned going through a particularly painful state in their relationships. During their experiences, they stated the feeling of being different from others, isolated in their suffering and often chose loneliness instead of relating to others, among whom the persistent and painful feeling of isolation did not subside (Révah-Lévy et al., 2012).

At the micro level, the preadolescents are affected by what happens in the families in which they grow up. Because preadolescence is a unique and important stage in an individual's development, the family plays a crucial role in socializing and cultivating preadolescent values. Therefore, family conflict has effects on his relating capacity and feeling of autonomy of the preadolescent and is related to his externalization through antisocial behaviour and aggression (less verbal aggression) (Kader & Roman, 2018). The manifestation of such reactions towards the undesirable family climate, undoubtedly leads to a decrease in the level of social and emotional well-being of the preadolescents.

The relationship with grandparents is also very important. According to a study, adolescents perceive their grandparents as relevant figures outside their immediate family, who play an active role in the lives of their grandchildren. Therefore, grandparents can be quite a resource in supporting adolescents and stabilizing family life (Attar-Schwartz et al., 2009).

The Report of the children and young people's health outcomes forum – Mental health sub-group (2012) reaffirms that a child's early experiences lay the foundations for his or her future life chances. He or she develops more harmoniously if he/she is cared for in a way that shows "safety, warmth and receptivity" (p. 4). Such an approach supports their healthy growth and allows them to acquire the basic skills of emotional adjustment and social communication, as well as the ability to learn more easily, to develop better social relationships, while reducing the chances of further risk behaviour (*Ibid.*, 2012).

Regarding the *parenting* style used by parents, we note its influence on children's development path. The latter reveals, later, what kind of teenagers make up today's society, what traits they have and what challenges they face.

The results of the study conducted by Aunola and her team show that parenting style plays an important role in developing strategies for success by adolescents. It seems that the family relationships that emphasize, on the one hand, the child's discovery and trust in parents and their involvement, and, on the other hand, the control and monitoring of children by parents, tend to favour the development of strategies aimed at achieving success; conversely, family relationships characterized by lack of involvement, lack of parental trust and parental control, seem to lead to strategies doomed to failure. However, as the school achievements are the foundation of adolescents' subsequent success in socializing during adulthood, the impact of parenting style can have long-term consequences for adolescents' general development (Aunola et al., 2000)

The study of Fosco and his collaborators highlights the importance of considering parental practices and family relationships (relationships with parents and siblings) as factors that determine the development of a difficult/risky behaviour of the young person. It also emphasizes the contribution of parenting practices, parent-child relationships and sibling conflict in the development of the young person's problematic behaviour. The research's results suggest that the interventions aimed at reducing the risk of adolescents participating in antisocial behaviours, avoiding substances use and preventing deviant friendships can be improved if they promote a good father-son relationship (whether the young man lives with the biological father or not) and are oriented towards mitigating conflicts between siblings (Fosco et al., 2012).

According to a study, although it may be difficult for the parents to remain involved in the lives of their preadolescents, given the complexity of the modern life, of the changes that take place during preadolescence and of the impersonal climate of many schools, still, by overcoming these obstacles, parents can contribute to facilitate the adaptation and the involvement of children in the school environment. The challenge of the preadolescents' parents, the authors add, is to find ways to stay active in their children's lives, while leaving room for friendships. The latter are an important source of influence on adolescent's behaviour, and parents can exert some influence on the choice and development of friendships during this period (Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009).

5. Take-home message

As a conclusion, we may say that, despite the fact that childhood, preadolescence and adolescence are certainly difficult, most young people manage to get through these stages of development due to the relationships with family and friends, motivated by academic success or activities that help them build their personality and self-esteem.

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