

The Relationship Between Academic Success and Social Support

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### **Abstract**

The following research study was conducted since November 2019. This research focuses on discovering the direct positive correlation between academic success and social support. This study was influenced by Erikson's theory and Freud's theory due to identity development and how influences as children influence behavior as adults. The college environment of a student affects whether he/she will succeed in college as determined by motivational figures. This depends as well on the social support given to these students. Social support in college includes resources such as freshmen success courses on-campus. Student's identity development and manifestation is also affected by their integration into the college environment.

It's hypothesized that a direct positive correlation exists between social support and academic success. "Social support" is defined as interactions with others face to face. "Academic success" is defined as grade point average (GPA) and grades earned last year. The same hypothesis was correlated with gender, cultural groups, classification, and first-generation college students. The study utilized 119 participants (N = 119). The anticipated sample was 150 participants. Freshmen were disqualified from participation. Students were given the link to the researcher's questionnaire through the researcher's selected professor. They answered the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), which measured support from family, friends, and a "significant other" (Zimet et al., 1988). Application of the findings of this study are encouraged to be used in the development of student outreach and socialization programs. Future research will focus on integrating freshmen and determining a minimum score of social support and grade point average.

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

The following study focuses on discovering how social support affects academic success. It's theorized that this comes from their lifestyle and level of support they have from others. Other factors contribute to the development of social relationships, further contributing to academic success.

Problems

### **College Environment**

College life is a new beginning for people since they will have new responsibilities and meet new people. Meeting new people is a challenge. Rogers and colleagues (2018) suggest that “college transition” can increase independence but also cause “unanticipated challenges”, such as “academic routines” and “financial concerns”, causing stress and a negative “student experience” (Joo, Durband, & Grable, 2008; Kerr, Johnson, Gans, & Krumrine, 2004; Larose & Boivin, 1998). These relationships can be affected by microaggression and cultural paranoia. For example, Lee and Barnes’ (2015) research focused on how African American students as a “numerical underrepresentation” felt oppressed at a predominantly White college. They found that these students deal with the “stereotype threat”, or risk of acting like the stereotypes of their group, and microaggression, or “subtle reminders” of the stereotypes of their group (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Lee & Barnes, 2015). However, Lee & Barnes (2015) also mention that the transition into college is difficult for students no matter their “demographic characteristics or the academic institution”. Sometimes, the difficulty for students is their family support system. Kenny and Donaldson (1991) report that “connectedness to family and individuation” are important to “adaptive functioning” in first-year students. Students will be able to adapt to a

college environment if there's family support and individuation, meaning they take on new challenges. For example, Kenny and Donaldson (1991) found that support from parents in female college students helped them adapt well, as reported by the "higher levels of social competence" and "psychological well-being". With men, there was no effect (Kenny & Donaldson, 1991). Even though these studies demonstrate support for social relationships, Rogers and colleagues (2018) report that adjustment to college and "interpersonal dynamics that are associated" have little research. However, they state that adolescents experience challenges and "risk maladaptive adjustment" when transitioning to higher school grades (Gutman & Eccles, 2007; Rogers et al., 2018). That same challenge comes from how students look up to peers that are more successful and end up feeling less successful themselves because of it (Tesser, Campbell, & Smith, 1984; Cole, 1991; Cole et al., 1997). There are resources that can help support students in this area. As reported by Wei, Jean Yeh, Chao, and Carrera (2013), male Asian-American students did better in college with "more family support", particularly when discussing "their discrimination incident", helps them cope with feelings (Wei, Heppner, et al., 2010). This is relevant for two reasons. 1. It demonstrates that individuals with familiar support are successful in college. Their support system provides comfort. 2. It contradicts the ideas about perceived racism since racial attitudes can be overcome. These are some resources that can help students succeed by being supported.

### **Social Support**

To ensure the success of students, they must have access to resources in university that support their social and academic development. McCallen and Johnson (2019) conducted a study to determine if success in first-generation college students success is affected by people who "convey institutional resources". Their research found that "institutional agents" indeed

supported the success of first-generation college students (Cherng, Calarco, and Kao, 2013). Having a “supportive classroom environment” also contributes to success by promoting a “sense of belonging” or support (Gosnell, 2019). Social support from people, which can be peers or professors, are a resource to the development and success of students in college. There are programs that facilitate the transition of students through social support. For example, the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) (2019.) states that they “prepare all students for college, careers, and life” by providing students social support and academic support through trained educators. This program provides mentoring for students to prepare them for college and provide support. The level of support differs not only on campus, but also by ethnic group. Kenny and colleagues (2007) state that “aspirations, interests, and career decision-making skills” are similar across distinct groups. They further stated that “urban youth” have “supportive relationships” with adults both at home and the community, thus promoting positive support (Kenny et. al, 2007; Vera & Shin, 2006; Yates & Masten, 2004). A “supportive classroom environment” also has similar contributions (Gosnell, 2019). Both research groups suggests environment is influential too. Regarding culture, in the Latinx community, Llamas and Consoli (2012) state that “perceived familial support” predicts “social adjustment and institutional attachment” in college because family values are important (Cheng, 1998; Norris & Kaniasty, 1996; Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990; Kenny & Stryker, 1996; Maton et al., 1996). Family provides support to these individuals. In the African American community, “racial identity”, as Mushonga and Henneberger (2020) and Darrell, Littlefield, & Washington (2016) suggest, is key to success because of sharing a “common racial heritage” (Helms, 1990). Like the Latinx community, support for African American students comes from the support for one another in the community. The suggestion is that a familiar or group support, respectively, contributes to

academic success. However, the study will suggest the extent of that support and if it's correlated with it.

### **Relation to Current Study**

This project will determine the extent to which the amount of social support, whether present or absent, impacts the success of pupils in college. Gosnell (2019) reports that having a “supportive classroom environment” can support belonging, motivation, academic achievement, and “retention”. Through this research, the extent of that support will be determined. This can influence university success depending on adapting well to the college environment, whether sense of oppression (Mushonga & Henneberger, 2020) or “institutional agents” (Cherng, Calarco, & Kao, 2013) influence this. The ultimate questions are, how much social support is seen in these students, where does it come from, and does it influence academic success? This study will utilize ethnic groups, classification, amount of social support, first-generation status, and gender to determine the extent.

### **Importance to Psychology**

The purpose of this study is to reveal patterns of support among college students to discover what support is necessary for their growth. This is to determine what new mentorship or student life programs can be created to help students feel welcome and be supported.

### **Freshman Programs for Incoming Students**

Freshmen are adapting to a new college environment due to the new challenges in their life. In first-generation college students, as mentioned by McCallen and Johnson (2019), “examining factors” that contribute to the success of first-generation college students helps officials create better opportunities for success. These “examining factors” can help

“practitioners, policymakers, and higher education” schools create programs for “underserved students” (McCallen & Johnson, 2019). One of these programs is the “First Year Experience Program” for freshmen attending Houston Baptist University (HBU). HBU (2020) states that that the campus’s programs help freshmen “get comfortable on campus”, learn about the university, and “think of HBU as home”. Its focus is ensuring freshmen can adapt to campus life and understand the challenges of college. In addition, the campus also has a mentoring program called “First Year Seminar”, which HBU (2020) suggests helps students “adjust to college life” and “promote class discussion”. This promotes the “examining factors” described by McCallen and Johnson (2019) since freshmen can control their own learning. Furthermore, counselors can have the same mentoring impact.

### **Identity Development**

Mentoring helps college students succeed in college since they have a guide. The study is based off Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, focusing on his fifth (Ego Identity vs. Role Confusion) and sixth (Intimacy vs. Isolation) stages. According to Miller (2016), Erikson states that people develop their identity and relationships from adolescence to young adulthood in these stages, respectively. Self-confidence is affected by this, as reported by Cook and Coley (2017), who state that one’s “early school experiences” affect academic success. If there’s support from friendships, they are expected to be successful. Laninja-Wijen and colleagues (2019) suggests that social relationships impact one’s academic success due to “fitting in”. If one considers Erikson’s theory, “fitting in” affects the manifestation of identity. Psychologically, this encourages the use of mentoring programs, such as HBU’s “First Year Seminar” program (HBU Student Life, 2020). If students feel welcome and comfortable at

university, which also includes support, then they will be able to be successful in college. This also depends on the kind of support given, whether it's familiar support or support from friends.

### **Trend of Support**

Support from “social agents” as suggested by Song and colleagues (2015), which they suggest are those influences in adolescence that lead to academic success, promote academic success. Social support is crucial for psychological well-being. For example, Garriott and Nisle (2018) mention that female students receiving “high levels of parental emotional support” are less stressed (Sy et al., 2011). They also further report that “campus supports” are essential to first-generation college student’s success and well-being (Sangalang and Gee, 2012; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Garriott and Nisle, 2018; Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007). These social support aids facilitate coping with stress coming from these students’ first-year or consecutive years in college. Parental support isn’t the only support for these pupils. Social support can also come from people’s culture as mentioned before. For example, Sue and Sue (2016) mention how in Hispanic/Latinx culture, family supports one another. In addition, Llamas and Consoli (2012) found that “perceived familial support” predicts adjustment to college life, which they state is stronger in Latinx/Hispanic students than Caucasian students (Kenny & Stryker, 1996; Maton, Teti, Corns, Vieira-Baker, & Lavine, 1996). Thus, Latinos will be more successful in college because of support from family and easier adjustment. However, Llamas and Consoli (2012) also mention that the “poor college presence rates” of Latinx/Hispanic students can be attributed from separating from their culture. This idea challenges the support that was described since the suggested difficulty is adjusting to two distinct cultures, especially if there isn’t enough representation. However, Le and Raposa (2019) suggest that “positive social connections” is related to psychological well-being (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Taylor, 2007).

Plus, their article talks of culture of Asian American students, which Le and Raposa (2019) stated comes from “collectivist cultures”, which emphasizes working for the group requires more social support “for help” (Yeh, Arora, & Wu, 2006). Ideas like the “stereotype threat”, which Rutgers (n.d.) suggests is when people are afraid of confirming a negative stereotype of themselves, have impact too, with Rutgers (n.d.) further stating it interferes “with the subject’s performance”. Research on this subject matter can lead into building respect and acceptance/tolerance of minority students and motivational programs for students of any group/race. The amount of social support is important to their academic development.

### **Observational Learning**

People students interact with influence the success of pupils in college. Jim Rohn mentioned that one becomes like the five people they socialize with daily (Groth, 2012). If applied to this argument, this suggests that people students connect with daily influence their academic success and development. According to Smith (2002), Albert Bandura’s social learning theory suggests that people learn through observation and emulate “role models” behavior. From personal experience, I testify that college prepares people for both their career and adult life. Killoren and colleagues agree (2017), stating that Mexican American students believe success “in other areas of life” come from academic success. Role modeling contributes to this. Earlier, the First-Year Success program from HBU was mentioned. According to Robbins and colleagues (2009), who further explain this program, the “primary purpose” of “First-Year Experience” is to improve socialization and academic achievement through orientation. In the case of HBU (2020), the mentors assigned to students serve as role models since they utilize their own experiences to teach clients. Thus, students will succeed through observing and learning from a role model assigned to them. Having a supportive environment has the same

impact. For example, in Mexican-American students, Killoren and colleagues (2016) describe that “family support, peer relationships” community support, “parent-school connections”, and familism influenced “positive development”. Killoren and colleagues (2016) also mentioned that students believe “academic success” is important to “youth success”. With observational learning, first-generation college students also model behavior for students seeking college. Karin Kirk (2018) from SAGE 2YC (Supporting and Advancing Geoscience Education at Two-Year Colleges) refers to them “in many ways, pioneers” of their family and friends, meaning they are role models. Applying Bandura’s theory, students will be motivated to succeed when presented with an adequate role model and socialize with people who have their same motivation to succeed.

### **Relation to Project**

This project intends to discover the relationship between students’ academic success and the amount of social relationships they have. Again, as Jim Rohn mentioned, people become like the five they associate with (Groth, 2012). It’s expected that the study will contribute to developing mentoring programs with healthy relationships and high schools preparing their students to transition smoothly and successfully into college.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

The focus of the study is finding what impact do social relationships have on academic success. Inspiration for this research comes from the relationship patterns in students in grade school and how mentoring from guiding figures affects their motivation to academic success.

### **Influence of Social Relationships**

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory is focused on how people's childhood experiences influence them in adulthood (Miller, 2016). This applies to this research by suggesting that people who have positive experiences in school as children will succeed in later school years. Depending on the level of support, students will be successful in their academics and their careers, which is derived from the "motivational outcomes" as Wentzel (1998) suggested. The influence from these relationships comes from the motivation they provide and how they can provide support. Van Ryzing and Roseth (2018) found that "cooperative learning" helps students increase their socialization and academic achievement due to the collaboration between pupils. Having a shared goal will increase their social support since they have similar thinking. However, the influence could be beneficial or harmful depending on what interactions they have. Jim Roth once said that a person becomes like the "five people" one spends "the most time with" (Groth, 2012). Considering high school students' focus on academic achievement and making friends, as Wentzel (1999) and Allen (1986) suggest, this means that relationships can be positive influencers or negative influencers. For example, if a student compares himself or herself to others who are more successful, they can have feelings of "low self-competence" according to the "competency based-model of depression" (Tesser, Campbell, & Smith, 1984; Schwarts et al., 2008; Cole, 1991; Cole et al., 1997). Seeing others succeed will make them feel less self-confident according to this view, as if they wish they were like their peers. It doesn't

help that people will develop friendships with people who are similar to them, as found by Flashman (2012) and Laninga-Wijen et al., 2019. Thus, social relationships have an impact on students' academic success due to "fitting in" with others (Laninga-Wijen, 2019). Sometimes, fitting in doesn't have to include classmates. Other people in a student's life can provide support.

### Perceived Social Support

A student's success comes from the support and motivation other people show them. Song and colleagues (2015) state that "social agents", which are peers, teachers, and parents, are a predictor for students' academic success in adolescence due to their motivation and support. Success will come due to students feeling motivated to succeed. It's a crucial factor if one considers that adolescent students develop their identity and their unconditional relationships as suggested by Erik Erikson's fifth and sixth stages in his psychosocial theory (Ego Identity vs. Role Confusion; Intimacy vs. Isolation) (Miller, 2016). The United States Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) (2019) states that dating in adolescence supports an individual's "ability to develop positive relationships" in school, careers, or their partners "during adulthood". In school, that support helps students be successful in their careers and academics according to these findings. Mentorship, which is defined in this study as providing emotional, educational, and career support, has a strong influence on pupil's success as well. Considering that adolescence is when these relationships develop, the impact of said relationships can be a strategy or a setback. If "social agents" provide positive influences in teenage students' lives, then students will have high expectations of success and motivation to succeed (Song and colleagues, 2015; Cherng & Liu, 2017). It's not surprising why "early school experiences" are important to students' success (Cook and Coley, 2017). Feeling the motivation, such as the one mentioned by the HHS (2019), during childhood or adolescence will help that pupil prosper

because of “cooperative learning”, where peers work together to help others’ learning, and having professors that provide that support (Van Ryzin and Roseth, 2018; Tennant et al., 2015; Tardy, 1985). Teachers must be both a teacher and a mentor for pupils since they are responsible for teaching morals that will help them prosper. The mentorship of teachers provides the same motivation because the student will “feel cared” by the teacher providing that support (Tennant et al., 2015; Tardy, 1985). These can help facilitate the transition process when students attend university.

### Guiding Figures in the Students’ Life

As previously mentioned, Song and colleagues (2015) suggested that “peers, teachers, and parents” were the “social agents” that contributed to a young pupil’s success. That person is responsible for having a positive influence on their mentee. If one considers that “early social interactions and the quality” are important to academic success, being a mentor to these students when they’re young will help them prosper (Elias & Haynes, 2008). These individuals will feel support and guidance from them, which supports the “sense of belongingness” that Wentzel (1998) and Deci (1992) suggested in their research. This “sense of belongingness” can be achieved by those who inspire knowledge in them: students’ teachers. Previously, it was mentioned that teachers have the responsibility of teaching morals to their students. The responsibility is to mentor their students. The Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC) organization states that mentorship “has the power to impact” the success of students academically and in their “personal life” (Faggella, 2017). This organization focuses on having teachers being “the glue that binds students” academics and social lives due to the “human connection built on trust” between students and teachers (Faggella, 2017). Simply, the student has a person whom he or she can rely on for social support and guidance in their life. Students

will feel “cared about by his or her teacher” due to “the glue” between them (Tennant et al., 2015; Tardy, 1985; Faggella, 2017). Again, teachers have the responsibility of teaching students’ adequate morals alongside their academics. As suggested by Lev Vygotsky’s theory, the “more knowledgeable other” must be responsible for teaching the younger generation how to succeed in life (Miller, 2016). One example of this relationship comes from Houston Baptist University’s First Year Success program. Students will be able to have coaches or peer mentors who will advocate and empower them so they can “advocate for themselves” (Houston Baptist University, Student Success, 2019). These kinds of interventions honor the “teacher as guiding figure” discussion mentioned earlier.

To reiterate, Jim Roth stated that one becomes like the five people one socializes with regularly (Groth, 2012). If these “five people” have distinct ideas of success, then students will mirror those same ideas. This mirrors the studies by Laninga-Wijen and colleagues (2019) and Flashman (2012) where it was found that adolescents will become friends with people who they can relate to. If one considers academics, “high-achieving students” and “low-achieving students” will develop friendships with those who are similar (Laninga-Wijen et al., 2019; Flashman, 2012). Even though Cherng, Calarco, and Kao (2013) suggest that research of friendship influence on academics is scarce, they agree that friendships are an “important source of resources in adolescence” for long-term success. Again, their argument suggests that having people students can relate to can influence academic success, as seen in how adolescents seek “resource-rich friends”, such as those who have “adult, college-educated ‘role models’” (Cherng, Calarco, and Kao, 2013). People could argue that these may be convenient relationships, which is plausible, but it depends on the intentions and perceptions that the pupil has of the individual who is giving them support. In addition, Cherng, Calarco, and Kao’s (2013) study focuses on

best friends, so the trust and unconditional love between these individuals must exist for this to happen. The “adult, college-educated ‘role models’” is considered a benefit from these relationships. From this view, the transition into college will be facilitated based on people who provide resources or have family or friends who can be role-models for them. These kinds of relationships can be essential to academic success, especially if you are a student who is from a minority group or an international student.

### Cultural Impact

For minority or immigrant students, academic success and developing social relationships has its difficulties. It's commonly known that immigrants founded our country and continue to build it each day. A central culture was born from this, but immigrant students or minority students have difficulty building relationships, especially considering the perception that minorities are oppressed in the United States (Sue and Sue, 2016). Coming to the United States is not easy for immigrant students. DeAngelis (2011) reports that “language proficiency”, or learning a new language, and being taught in their native language is a barrier to their success, especially if one considers that “English-language teachers” receive “little support from colleagues”. DeAngelis (2011) also suggests that discrimination, particularly “towards immigrants of color”, is another difficulty, just like Sue and Sue (2016) suggested. In addition, Blume and colleagues (2012) suggested in their research that “students of color” felt more microaggressions at “historically White universities”. The difficulty depends on the perception that students have about being successful in a new country or succeeding as a minority member. For example, Asian-American students are pressured to be successful because of them being the “model minority” and promoting “immigrant bargain” (Cherng & Liu, 2017). “Model minority” means they must set the example (Cherng & Liu, 2017). In “immigrant bargain”, immigrant

students must succeed due to the sacrifices their immigrant parents made for them to live the “American dream” (Cherng & Liu, 2017). This could be a lovely or aversive experience depending on their perception.

Even though it is challenging for minority students to adjust to U.S. culture, academic success also depends on how much support they obtain from their loved ones. For example, Hall (2017) suggests that the Latin American idea of “familismo”, or the idea that one must show loyalty to family and seek their advice, helps students “from any cultural background” maintain good mental health. This comes from the student feeling supported by family members, thus promoting success and social support. It also incorporates the idea of “social agents” that Song and colleagues (2015) suggested. Kupermic and colleagues (2009) found that “family neighborhood connections” and familismo contributed to “positive development” in the Latino community, where the idea originates. This same idea exists in Asian-American students according to Hall (2017) and can promote good mental health among European-Americans, even though this group focuses on individuality. Depending on the perception and level of support, minority students will be able to succeed academically and socially. Even though covert racism and bias will exist in our nation as Sue ad Sue (2016) suggest, the U.S. is more diverse and people are more accepting of these distinct cultural groups, regardless of their own membership. This support and equality will be essential to help these students transition effectively from high school to college.

#### Transition from High School to University

When one enters college, one is leaving behind their teenage life and adapting to a new adult lifestyle of responsibilities and priorities. One teacher I had in high school once said, “high school is one big day care”, suggesting that high school students are “babysitted” and that one

becomes an adult in college due to doing things individually. However, as suggested by Carnegie Mellon University (2019), university students are still preparing their “intellectual and social maturity” to succeed in college and their personal life. Thus, if one considers that the impact at the right time will help young pupils succeed in school, university students can be successful if intervention/motivation happens at an adequate time (Cook and Coley, 2017). It depends on what mediates or facilitates the transition from high school to college, which is challenging. As listed by Johnston (2010), one challenge is “college instructors and instruction” because of the “major responsibility” university students have of mastering the subject and seeking help on their own. “Fitting in” was also mentioned as a challenge by Johnston (2010) since students must “accommodate and learn about a new group”, meaning that they must find ways to connect with others. Based on Johnston’s (2010) findings, one can conclude it isn’t easy to transition into the college environment. Although, this depends on how well students connect with their peers. Deventer and colleagues (2018) found that “interpersonal relationships” are important for one’s “personality stability and change” (Reitz et al., 2014). This idea also follows the idea of Song and colleagues’ (2015) “social agents” and Groth’s (2012) mentioning of becoming like the five people one socializes with. The influence from these friends helps individuals mature and dedicate to their academic success because of their social support. Deventer and colleagues’ (2018) study focused on how those “transactions” helped individuals effectively transition “out of High School and Beyond”. Thus, his ideas suggest that interpersonal support will help people prosper. Furthermore, the mentoring argument made earlier is tied into this because of how students have a guiding figure. For example, the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program is aimed at facilitating the transition by allowing students to have educators who will provide mentoring for them during school time (AVID, 2019). This organization

focuses on teaching students how life will be in college, how to be successful in college, what challenges await in their courses, and how to be involved on campus.

As previously suggested, the “social agents” of students facilitate this process due to students feeling supported by their “peers, teachers, and parents” (Song et al., 2015). Boute and colleagues (2007) found that the “quality of relationships” had a “significant positive relation” to adjustment to university during their first year, especially if living on-campus. The idea is that building relationships with others will make students feel included, thus facilitating the educational process. This is tied to the present study since it is expected that students will be successful due to the connections made during that first year. Again, one sees how there are mentors for students to facilitate that adjustment to college life. The guiding figure will provide support and mentor students. The social support will facilitate the transition process and ensure that they will be successful in college. This is the focus of the present study: finding how that connection relates to academic success regarding grades and their grade point average.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

#### Purpose

This research project researches the direct correlation between social relationships and academic success. The purpose of the project is researching the influence of social relationships on academic success to inspire institutions to develop better student involvement programs and promote social relationships. It's hypothesized that there is a direct correlation between academic success and one's social support. "Academic success" is defined as what grades were earned in the participants' previous semester and what Grade Point Average was obtained. "Social support" is defined as the amount of social relationships and participants' relationships and interactions with them. These social interactions only include face-to-face, text, or calling.

#### Rationale

The inspiration for this project comes from the works of Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory.

#### **Erikson's Psychosocial Theory**

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory focuses on how one develops their social identity according to Miller (2016). For this research, the focus will be on his fifth and sixth stage since this is the age range for people attending university. Erikson's fifth stage, Ego Identity vs. Role Confusion, states that an individual develops their identity that allows them to contribute to society (American Psychological Association, 2018). The American Psychological Association (APA) (2018) states that in the sixth stage, Intimacy vs. Isolation, individuals begin to form their relationships with others. Interestingly, the APA (2018) also suggests that "development of a cohesive identity" contributes to forming relationships with others, thus suggesting a relationship

between identity development and social relationships. For this project, the understanding is that university students are beginning to practice their identity as discovered in adolescence. Thus, adequate motivation from their social relationships will facilitate the practice and generate academic success (Van Ryzith & Roseth, 2018; Tennant et al., 2015). The “social agents” have that contribution too (Song et al., 2015).

### **Freud’s Psychoanalysis Theory**

Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis theory suggests that one’s experiences in childhood will unconsciously influence one’s behavior in adulthood (Miller, 2016). As mentioned, Cook and Coley (2017) found that being motivated “in time”, meaning in childhood, contributes to academic success. In both instances, the influence usually happens early in life, which suggests that being motivated and having social support as a child can contribute to academic success in adulthood. Regarding this study, it is suggested that the participants will have relationships who will be mentors or guiding figures in their life, once again supporting the ideas of Song and colleagues (2015). In combination, social support and relationships will cause students to succeed.

### **Hypothesis**

The main hypothesis is that there is a direct positive correlation between academic success (grades earned and Grade Point Average) and social support. Four other hypotheses were formed for other variables: gender, cultural groups (Hispanic/Latinx, African American), classification (sophomore – continuing senior), and if the participant is a first-generation college student. The null hypothesis is that there is no direct positive correlation between academic success and social support. **Figure 3.1** showcases the hypotheses proposed for this study.

**FIGURE 3.1:** Hypotheses

Research Question	Null Hypothesis	Hypothesis	Variables	Statistical Procedure
Is there a relationship between social support and academic success?	H <sub>0</sub> : In college students there is no relationship between academic success and social support.	H <sub>1</sub> : In college students, there is a positive relationship between academic success and social support in college students.	Academic Success (Grades Earned and Grade Point Average) Social Support	Correlation Pearson r
Is there a relationship between social support and academic success?	H <sub>0</sub> : In college students there is no relationship between academic success and social support.	H <sub>2</sub> : In college students, there is a positive relationship between academic success and gender.	Academic Success (Grades Earned and Grade Point Average) Gender	Correlation Pearson r
Is there a relationship between social support and academic success?	H <sub>0</sub> : In college students there is no relationship between academic success and social support.	H <sub>3</sub> : In college students, there is a positive relationship between cultural groups and academic success.	Academic Success (Grades Earned and Grade Point Average) Cultural Groups	Correlation Pearson r

<p>Is there a relationship between social support and academic success?</p>	<p>H<sub>0</sub>: In college students there is no relationship between academic success and social support.</p>	<p>H<sub>4</sub>: In college students, there is a positive relationship between class year and academic success.</p>	<p>Academic Success (Grades Earned and Grade Point Average) Class Year (Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Continuing Senior)</p>	<p>Correlation Pearson r</p>
<p>Is there a relationship between social support and academic success?</p>	<p>H<sub>0</sub>: In college students there is no relationship between academic success and social support.</p>	<p>H<sub>5</sub>: In college students, there is a positive relationship between being a first-generation college student and academic success.</p>	<p>Academic Success (Grades Earned and Grade Point Average) First-Generation College Student (Yes or No)</p>	<p>Correlation Pearson r</p>

**Figure 3.1:** The main hypothesis focuses on the direct correlation between academic success and social support. Four other hypotheses, including social support, gender, cultural groups, classification, and first-generation college students, were also correlated.

## Method

### Sample

The study utilized students from Houston Baptist University (HBU). The target sample was 150 non-freshmen undergraduate students (N=150). However, only 119 students participated (N=119). Participants were sophomores, junior, seniors, or continuing seniors (4+ years in college) to participate in the study since they have completed one year of college. This “one year of college” condition is met under these criteria:

1. Participants have completed at least one year of college at HBU (Sophomores – Continuing Seniors)
2. Participants have completed one year of college through early college or a dual credit program in high school.
3. Participants transferred to HBU after completing one year in college.

For these participants, it's assumed that they an active social life since their first year of college allowed them to adapt to being autonomous in college and form relationships with classmates. Data collection happened using SurveyMonkey. Freshmen are disqualified from this study since it's assumed that they are not familiar with the college environment. They are beginning to adapt to this new life. Participants were asked if the were/were not freshmen after the informed consent page. If they chose “yes”, they were disqualified. If they chose “no”, they could complete the questionnaire.

### Outreach

The researcher selected and contacted HBU professors via email and in person to collect participants. He disclosed them on the purpose of the study, asked for permission to use their

class in his study, give them a link to the survey so their class can participate. As an incentive, participants were encouraged to present the conclusion page of the survey to their respective professor. The extra credit was given at the discretion of the professor. If there's issues, the completion page has the phrase, "if your professor gives extra credit", which states that the extra credit portion is applicable to professors who agree to do extra credit. The professor choose what extra credit was given to their students. To receive the extra credit, they must participate in the study, whether they participated or were disqualified. Freshmen and participants were given their own page to present to their professor.

### **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)**

Answers were collected using SurveyMonkey. Only qualified participants (non-freshmen) answered this questionnaire. Participants answered questions from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), which mentioned how satisfied they were with their social relationships and their level of support. This scale consists of a "12-item measure" of perceived social support. This measure uses a seven-point Likert scale to collect responses (1 – Strongly Disagree to 7 – Strongly Agree). This was modified from the original version of the MSPSS (1 – Very Strongly Disagree, 7 – Very Strongly Agree) (Zimet et al., 1988). According to this scale, "social support" comes from three sources: family, friends, and a "significant other" (University of Miami's School of Nursing and Health Studies, 2019; Zimet et al., 1988). The participants were asked how satisfied they were with their social relationships. The questions include how their friends contribute to their life, if they have an unconditional friendship with someone, if they feel happy with them/him/her, or happy with their own life. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support has internal consistency. For this project, Cronbach's Alpha, which determines the consistency of all items in a measure, was 0.876, showing high internal

consistency (University of California Los Angeles Institute for Digital Research and Education Statistical Counseling, 2020). This is highly consistent across the 12 items of the measure.

**FIGURE 3.2:** Questionnaire Items (Original and Modified by Researcher)

Original	Modified by Researcher
1 – Very Strongly Disagree	1 – Strongly Disagree
2 – Strongly Disagree	2 – Disagree
3 – Disagree	3 – Somewhat Disagree
4 – Neither Agree nor Disagree	4 – Neither Agree nor Disagree
5 – Agree	5 – Somewhat Agree
6 – Strongly Agree	6 – Agree
7 – Very Strongly Agree	7 – Strongly Agree

### Procedure

Participants were chosen depending on the professor's approval. These were comprised of participants who completed the questionnaire. Simply, if they submitted the survey, they are considered participants. The researcher planned to have 150 responses (N = 150). After 150 responses, the researcher halted any further responses. However, only 119 participants (N = 119) responded.

After opening the link given to them by their professor, participants first saw the informed consent page. On the consent page, the researcher disclosed the purpose of the project and explained what was expected for the questionnaire to measure. Participants were also told that participation is voluntary, that their information will be confidential and will not link

directly to them, and that they can leave the study whenever they want, even during data analysis. By clicking “Yes”, they have given informed consent. Contact information of the researcher was given for questions or concerns on the consent page and submission page. If necessary, the participants were given contact information to HBU’s counseling services upon requesting it from the researcher. These services are provided by Juliana Poor Memorial Counseling Center of Houston’s First Baptist Church without cost to the participant if he or she is a current student (HBU, 2019).

Second, participants were asked if they are freshmen. If they clicked “yes”, they will be disqualified and directed to the page for them to receive extra credit. If they clicked “no”, they continued the survey. This was done so all students in the selected professors’ classes could participate. Freshmen were disqualified, but they still qualified for the extra credit (if the professor gave it). Qualified participants answered the MSPSS questionnaire. Twelve items were on the questionnaire, each with a seven-point Likert scale. Once the questionnaire was completed, participants answered demographic questions. These included gender, ethnicity/race, classification, GPA, what grades were earned on their previous semester, and if they were first-generation college students. After completion, the participant was directed to the conclusion page and thanked for participating in the research. They were once again given contact information of the researcher so they could withdraw from the study or to be referred to HBU’s counseling services. Disqualified freshmen had their own page to present to the professor for extra credit and participating in the research. Again, it is at the discretion of the professor if he/she wants to do this and what they decide “extra credit” will be.

## **Chapter IV: Results**

### Hypotheses

#### **Social Support and Academic Success (H<sub>1</sub>) – True**

Findings demonstrated a significant correlation between social support and academic success (null hypothesis rejected) Three variables were tested:

- 1) “Mean Support Response” (MSR), which are the means of all the means of the participants answers.
- 2) “Total Support”, which is the total score of all participants.
- 3) “Grade Point Average”, which is the Grade Point Average (GPA) of students, which determines academic success.

A Pearson correlation was done through the scores mentioned. The data showed a significance at a 0.05 level (2-tailed) with the Pearson Correlation ( $p > 0.05$ ;  $0.05 < 0.188$ ) when Grade Point Average and mean social support was compared. The same is true for total support and GPA, as it gave a correlation coefficient of 0.184, thus making it statistically significant at the same level ( $0.184 > 0.05$ ). This suggests that there is a direct positive correlation between academic success and social support. The more social support, the better a student’s GPA, at least by HBU’s standards. Although, the correlation is weak as shown by the n number.

**FIGURE 4.1** – Social Support + Academic Success

		<b>Correlations</b>		
		Mean support response	Total support	Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:
Mean support response	Pearson Correlation	1	.979**	.188*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.041
	N	119	119	119
Total support	Pearson Correlation	.979**	1	.184*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.045
	N	119	119	119
Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:	Pearson Correlation	.188*	.184*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041	.045	
	N	119	119	119

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Gender (H<sub>2</sub>) – True**

Findings demonstrated that there was a direct positive correlation between gender groups. Participants had two answer choices: Male (1) or Female (2). The data was also tested by using a Pearson correlation for each gender. Males did not show significance at a 0.05 level (2-tailed) when MSR and GPA were correlated ( $-0.214 < 0.05$ ), suggesting the correlation isn't true for males. In contrast, the correlation was significant for females at the same level, the strength of the relationship almost being the exact opposite of males ( $0.254 > 0.05$ ). Even though the study focused on social support, findings show a new understanding of how female students receive social support from families. Results were also affected by the representation from each group member. There were 22 males (N = 22) and 97 females (N = 97) who participated.

**FIGURE 4.2** – Correlation with Gender

**Please select your gender. = Male**

**Correlations<sup>a</sup>**

		Mean support response	Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:
Mean support response	Pearson Correlation	1	-.214
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.340
	N	22	22
Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:	Pearson Correlation	-.214	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.340	
	N	22	22

a. Please select your gender. = Male

**Please select your gender. = Female**

**Correlations<sup>a</sup>**

		Mean support response	Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:
Mean support response	Pearson Correlation	1	.254*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.012
	N	97	97
Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:	Pearson Correlation	.254*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	
	N	97	97

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

a. Please select your gender. = Female

### Cultural Groups (H<sub>3</sub>) – True

For this study, five cultural groups were considered: White/Caucasian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian/Asian American, and “another race” (Middle Eastern, Australian, etc). A One-Way ANOVA was used to determine the correlation. Just like the past hypotheses, mean support response was correlated with GPA. The test determined there is a direct positive correlation in the variables between cultural groups. There is a strong relationship between variables ( $p < 0.05$ ;  $0.27 < 0.05$ ). Interestingly, mean GPA and mean support response, which related to answering the items on the MSPSS, was the highest in White/Caucasian students than other cultural groups. This group had a mean support response of 6.07 and mean GPA was 4.08, showing the correlation differs by race (see Chapter V). However, this can be attributed to the background of HBU. Regardless, the results showed that the more social support, as seen in the mean support response, the higher GPA (academic success).

**FIGURE 4.3** – Correlation with Cultural Groups

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Mean support response	Between Groups	8.845	4	2.211	2.859	.027
	Within Groups	88.174	114	.773		
	Total	97.018	118			
Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:	Between Groups	4.273	4	1.068	1.131	.345
	Within Groups	107.660	114	.944		
	Total	111.933	118			

### Classification (H<sub>4</sub>) – False

Findings with classification of students did not find a direct positive correlation. Four groups were correlated: Sophomores, Juniors, Seniors, Continuing Seniors (college students for

more than four years). A One-Way ANOVA between groups test was also used for this correlation. Mean support response was not significant ( $0.600 > 0.05$ ) and neither was Grade Point Average ( $0.062 > 0.05$ ). For all groups, there was a consistent mean GPA between groups, all centering around the 4.0 range. Seniors had the highest mean GPA (4.1667) and Juniors had the highest mean support response (5.8386). This further supports the inconsistency between GPA and mean support response. These results indicate that classification in college isn't related to amount of social support or academic success.

**FIGURE 4.4** – Correlation with Classification

		<b>ANOVA</b>				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Mean support response	Between Groups	1.556	3	.519	.625	.600
	Within Groups	95.462	115	.830		
	Total	97.018	118			
Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:	Between Groups	6.898	3	2.299	2.518	.062
	Within Groups	105.035	115	.913		
	Total	111.933	118			

### **First-Generation Students (H<sub>5</sub>) - False**

Findings with first-generation students also did not find a direct positive correlation. Only 56 participants (N = 56) reported being first-generation students. The responses were correlated using a Pearson correlation. Results reported no significance when GPA and mean support response was correlated for first-generation students in the Pearson correlation at the 0.01 and 0.05 level ( $0.195 > 0.01$ ;  $0.195 > 0.05$ ). There was no difference for students that were not first-

generation students neither ( $0.187 > 0.01$ ;  $0.187 > 0.05$ ). This suggests that being a first-generation college student has no effect on academic success nor social support.

**FIGURE 4.5** – First-Generation, Pearson Correlation

**Are you a first-generation college student? = Yes**

**Correlations<sup>a</sup>**

		Mean support response	Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:
Mean support response	Pearson Correlation	1	.195
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.150
	N	56	56
Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:	Pearson Correlation	.195	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.150	
	N	56	56

a. Are you a first-generation college student? = Yes

**Are you a first-generation college student? = No**

**Correlations<sup>a</sup>**

		Mean support response	Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:
Mean support response	Pearson Correlation	1	.187
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.142
	N	63	63
Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:	Pearson Correlation	.187	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.142	
	N	63	63

a. Are you a first-generation college student? = No

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

This study researched if the amount of social support given to college students, through family or friends for example, affects their academic success when it comes to Grade Point Average (GPA) and grades earned. The participants were given the MSPSS to answer questions relating to their social relationships. These included questions such as if they trusted their friends, was someone there supporting them, and if they trusted groups of friends or one specifically. Interestingly, the participants seemed to lean towards support in one person instead of groups of people, showing that they at least had one person that provided support and mentorship and who they trusted. I expected the research results to show how successful transition into college and development of relationships during freshman year helps upperclassmen be successful. Their experiences are assumed to facilitate their college studies. I expect that the research will lead to creation of new mentoring/student outreach programs that will allow freshmen and upperclassmen to connect with one another.

### Findings

#### **Social Support and Grade Point Average**

Regarding the main hypothesis, the main correlation of social support and academic success is true, but it's not strong ( $r = 0.188$ ). However, this is a good beginning to researching the distinct resources that can be used to help college students develop relationships in college, and therefore academic success. Wayt (2012) did a similar research. Her study focused on how "the connection between students' relationships" affected whether they would continue their college studies (Wayt, 2012). Her research determined that support from social relationships, although affected by the kinds of relationships, had a positive effect on sophomores, suggesting

that they continued attending college (Wayt, 2012). For my study, my focus was on sophomores to continuing seniors to determine if they were successful in college because of social support, not if they continued. When analyzing the data, it was determined that there was a connection. The 0.188 positive correlation determines that there indeed is a relationship between academic success and social support. This was also determined from how high mean GPA was reported with people with a high mean support.

### **Gender**

I had a good participant turnout by using 119 participants ( $N = 119$ ), even though I originally planned to have 150. Though, gender representation wasn't balanced. There were 97 females (81.51%) and 22 males (18.49%) who participated. I attribute this to how I sent the research questionnaire to psychology courses at Houston Baptist University, alongside a few alternatives such as writing or Spanish classes. From personal experience, I assumed this comes from how not many males are psychology majors at HBU. Plus, I theorize that it's related to enrolment patterns in universities. Like Dani Matias (2019) reported in the Houston Public Media website, there are more females attending college than males, also stating that the "majority of the U.S. workforce" employees will be "college-educated females". Jon Marcus (2017) in The Atlantic magazine suggests that this comes from how there's not much support for men attending college, mentioning that they aren't educated about college life and want to finish school immediately, which can be attributed to gender roles. I perceive that this pattern comes from how gender roles have evolved and now it's acceptable for women to take jobs and occupations reserved for men. This is supported with Jack Kelly's (2020) research mentioning that "there are now 109,000 more women" in the workforce than men. There's more support for females becoming successful.

## Cultural Groups

Cultural groups were tested to determine if the variation of support among groups because of culture affected the academic success of students. As discussed in Chapter II, social support varies by culture, whether it is the kind of support, as in the case of familismo in Latinx culture, or who provides the support, like Song and colleagues (2014) suggested (Sue and Sue, 2016). Though, the findings between groups could be biased. Interestingly, there was higher mean GPA in White/Caucasian college students in comparison to others. I expected there to be higher GPA and higher mean support response in Hispanic/Latinx students. Being a Latinx student myself, this idea came from how family unity is important in the Latinx/Hispanic community, just like Sue and Sue (2016) mentioned. The more unity, the more support. The Hispanic/Latinx community was represented well (N = 53) during this project and had a good mean GPA (3.8302). Though, Caucasian/White students had the highest mean GPA (4.0769), even though had the second highest representation (N = 26). I consider this comes from how HBU is a predominantly white university, which is ironic since the college search engine Collegesimply (2020) suggests that diversity here is “very high” and there’s a predominantly Latinx/Hispanic population. What I feel is the system at HBU’s system was originally designed for White/Caucasian Baptist students considering it was founded in 1960 (U.S and World Report News, 2020). This mirrors Lee and Barnes’s (2013) idea of minorities feeling oppressed at predominantly White colleges, especially if the system isn’t designed for them, just like speaker Brittany Packnett (2018) mentioned when discussing “women of color”. However, regardless of group membership, what matters is the support and dedication these students must achieve their academic goals. For all these groups, academic success correlated with social support.

**FIGURE 5.1 – Cultural Group Data**

		Descriptives							
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Mean support response	White or Caucasian	26	6.0696	.64304	.12611	5.8099	6.3293	4.42	7.00
	Black or African American	21	5.7910	1.00385	.21906	5.3340	6.2479	2.91	6.83
	Hispanic or Latino	53	5.5475	.93388	.12828	5.2901	5.8050	2.00	7.00
	Asian or Asian American	16	5.4325	.84644	.21161	4.9815	5.8835	4.00	7.00
	Another race	3	4.7233	.89002	.51385	2.5124	6.9343	4.17	5.75
	Total	119	5.6683	.90675	.08312	5.5037	5.8329	2.00	7.00
Please select where your Grade Point Average (GPA) is currently at:	White or Caucasian	26	4.0769	.84489	.16570	3.7357	4.4182	3.00	5.00
	Black or African American	21	3.4762	1.07792	.23522	2.9855	3.9669	2.00	5.00
	Hispanic or Latino	53	3.8302	.93512	.12845	3.5724	4.0879	1.00	5.00
	Asian or Asian American	16	3.8125	1.16726	.29182	3.1905	4.4345	1.00	5.00
	Another race	3	3.6667	.57735	.33333	2.2324	5.1009	3.00	4.00
	Total	119	3.8151	.97395	.08928	3.6383	3.9919	1.00	5.00

**Classification (Sophomores – Continuing Seniors)**

There was no correlation for classification of college students. For classification, I omitted freshmen assuming that upperclassmen students that have more years in college have more experience and develop their relationships and therefore understand how college works. I also assumed that freshmen students are beginning to explore their relationships. Thus, I expected there to be a true correlation for classification and college students, particularly among

sophomores. However, no correlation was found. Although, it was determined that there was consistent GPA reported among the different classification. As seen in Figure 4.4, GPA was focused around the 3.5 – 4.0 range. Regardless, there still isn't a main effect. What I should've considered is that these students have different ages, even though their classifications suggest otherwise.

### **First-Generation College Students**

No correlation was found for first-generation college students neither. First-generation college students were tested to determine if there was the same support for them. This was based from how this environment is new to them, thus, having supports like the First-Year Success program from HBU (2020) or having friends of their own, as in the case of Wayt's (2012) research will provide positive results. However, no correlation was found between mean support response and GPA for this hypothesis/group. For this, the logic is that the environment is also new to them since they are new to the college environment. This challenges what was mentioned above since freshmen could have had a family member in college who was a first-generation college student. For this and hypothesis four, even though no correlation existed, both GPA and mean trended together, continuing the suggestion of the main hypothesis of social support and academic success.

Limitations

### **Exclusion of Freshmen**

This study did not include freshmen. If freshmen were included though, I feel the results wouldn't have changed. The reason they were excluded was that freshmen are beginning to experience their college years, meaning they are developing relationships and understanding the

behavior necessary to complete college. Wang and colleagues (2013) state that freshmen “must behave proactively in order” to be successful in their college years and post-graduation. Wang and colleagues’ (2013) also suggest that adaptation of freshmen is crucial to their success. For this study, it was considered that freshmen are continuing to adapt, especially considering that this was conducted in the fall semester. Adaptation is achieved by “freshmen’s proactive behaviors”, which include socialization or relationship building with professors (Wang et. al, 2013). Thus, it’s assumed in the study that freshmen haven’t yet achieved those “proactive behaviors” due to being new to the college environment. The University of California Santa Cruz (2016) mention that obstacles for freshmen include academic adjustment, building relationships with others, and homesickness. However, this transition can happen “as smoothly as possible” if freshmen have the correct resources and advice according to Maryville University (2020), who suggests the can provide resources. From this, it’s predicted freshmen can be successful just like the participants in the study, even with the same conditions. This creates a new confound, first-generation college students. First-generation college students are also new to the college environment, therefore the idea of Wang and colleagues (2013) applies. Moody (2019) also mentions that first-generation college students suffer from difficulties like social distancing and financial aid, also suggesting that these students may not succeed for “social and economic” reasons. It’s more apparent when it was determined that first-generation college students did not show a correlation. Thus, it’s suggested that first-generation college students suffer the same/similar challenges as freshmen.

### **Minimum Score for “Social Support”**

Upon analyzing the results, it was determined that the study did not define what score from the MSPSS suggested adequate social support. Zimet and colleagues’ (1988) scale

measures support from families, friends, and a “significant other”. From their suggestions, Zimet and colleagues (1988) suggestion is that they are measuring from what source test participants are getting the most social support from. However, this study focuses on the combination of the three, hence to why a total and mean score was calculated for each participant. However, this study doesn’t have a minimum score to determine if “social support” is adequate. Plus, if one considers Zimet and colleagues’ (1988) focus on friends, families, and a “significant other”, having at least one person that corresponds to these categories and helps the participant can be counted as support. In other words, social support cannot truly be measured since its definition varies. This was reflected in the study during data analysis since many participants were leaning towards social support from a “significant other”, as seen by their high scores with questions about a “significant other”. The MSPSS’s questions that measure this are questions 1, 2, 5, and 10 (Labeled as Q3, Q4, Q7, Q12 respectively) (Zimet et al., 1988). Figure 5.1 shows the highest and lowest responses for all answers. Of the 12 items, the four items for “significant other” had most responses for “strongly agree”, suggesting that social support can be small, coming from one person. Regardless of the result, the findings suggest that if social support exists for participants, even if it comes from one person, students can be successful.

**FIGURE 5.1** – Answers for Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support Items

Item Number (SurveyMonkey)	Subscale	Highest Score	Percentage (High)	Lowest Score	Percentage (Low)
1 (Q3)	Significant Other Subscale	Strongly Agree	37.82%	Somewhat Disagree	1.68%
2 (Q4)	Significant Other Subscale	Strongly Agree	41.18%	Strongly Disagree and Somewhat Disagree	Both 1.68%
3 (Q5)	Family Subscale	Strongly Agree	42.02%	Strongly Disagree and Disagree	Both 1.68%
4 (Q6)	Family Subscale	Strongly Agree	30.25%	Strongly Disagree	1.68%
5 (Q7)	Significant Other Subscale	Strongly Agree	41.18%	Somewhat Disagree	0%
6 (Q8)	Friends Subscale	Agree	36.97%	Disagree and Somewhat Disagree	0.84%
7 (Q9)	Friends Subscale	Agree	36.97%	Somewhat Disagree	0%
8 (Q10)	Family Subscale	Somewhat Agree	27.73%	Strongly Disagree	5.88%
9 (Q11)	Friends Subscale	Agree	39.50%	Strongly Disagree	0.84%
10 (Q12)	Significant Other Subscale	Strongly Agree	39.50%	Somewhat Disagree	0.84%
11 (Q13)	Family Subscale	Agree	32.77%	Strongly Disagree	0.84%
12 (Q14)	Friends Subscale	Agree	36.97%	Disagree	0%

### Risks and Confounds

Post-data collection, I did not have any participants removed from the study, excluding disqualified participants. Plus, no participants contacted me because they were affected by the content of the questionnaire. However, as was determined from designing this project, these are the risks my clients and my project had.

### **Coercion of Extra Credit**

While designing this project, I realized that having an extra credit coercion can affect the internal validity of the results if a participant only “participates” for extra credit, therefore not contributing to the study. This happened five times, as was the case of participants 31, 35, 51, 78, and 115, where they all answered, “strongly agree” (7). In addition, it was considered if people may try to share the completion sheets with other students or falsely answer that they are freshmen to obtain the extra credit, therefore reducing my participant pool. To check for this, I created separate pages for freshmen and participants to reduce this risk. Selected professors were told that students could present a page or the picture of the page to receive the extra credit. The same is said for freshmen since they could falsely claim of being upperclassmen to participate. Though, this was an insignificant risk.

### **Biases in H<sub>3</sub>**

Bias is another risk to this because I am asking to mention what group the participants belong to, especially considering how Hypothesis 3 (H<sub>3</sub>) focuses on seeing how the trend differs by cultural groups. This isn’t helped when it mentions how the correlation is truer for White students, as determined during the statistical procedure. However, my bias was reduced with the diverse participant pool in my study. Also, I considered what was mentioned by Collegesimply’s (2020) data on HBU, which stated that the university was diverse. If the study is replicated, I would suggest for researchers to include groups like religion or more diverse groups in America.

### **Hypotheses Tested**

With the main hypothesis, more social support correlates with better academic success, one confound was that there wasn’t an accurate definition of “academic success”. As previously

mentioned, “academic success” was defined as grades earned and GPA. However, there was no required GPA that defined the minimum for academic success. Should the study be replicated, the minimum GPA must be 2.5 to be considered passing/successful. However, there’s no minimum for participations. From the participants, 92.43% of participants would meet these criteria should it had been implemented. I expect that the results would’ve been similar though, especially considering that not many participants had GPAs below 2.5.

### **Gender**

With gender, I expected there to be biased thinking as well, but I was surprised when I learned that there’s a stronger correlation with females than males. However, I consider this comes from the imbalance of representation of males and females in this study. As mentioned above, 97 females and 22 males participated. Because more females answered the questionnaire, which were more than half, the suggestion is that females have more support than males. This also comes from what was mentioned earlier that there are more females in college than males (Matias, 2019). This increases the idea that the bias is towards women since there’s more representation, especially considering Matias’s (2019) ideas. Plus, I feel it comes from the ideas of gender roles. Based on its design, the MSPSS is meant for participants to express their feelings about their relationships. It’s commonly known that women express their feelings openly while men must keep theirs to themselves. However, according to Schmitt (2015), males can also “be more emotional than women, too”. I consider as well how, from personal experience, there’s not many males who are psychology majors at HBU. Regardless, there’s still a stronger support for females according to the findings of this study.

## **Cultural Groups**

Another confound is representation of distinct cultural groups in this study. As mentioned earlier, Hispanics/Latinx were the most represented (N = 53), especially considering how Collegesimply (2020) suggests there is a predominantly Latinx/Hispanic group at HBU. However, the confound once again is biased considering the system at HBU wasn't originally made for minority students as suggested by their 1960 founding (U.S. and World Report News, 2020). Like motivational speaker Brittany Packnett (2018) suggested, minority groups are trying to adapt to a system not designed for them. However, what I consider is that Houston is one of the most diverse cities in the United States, so an issue with cultural groups is insignificant (Keever, 2012). The purpose of having these groups is listing if social support differed among different cultural groups, like in the case of "familismo" in the Hispanic/Latinx community (Sue and Sue, 2016). The research demonstrated that it did and that it was stronger in White/Caucasian students.

## **Future Research**

### **Addition of Freshmen to the Study**

Like it was mentioned in the limitations section, it's predicted that testing freshmen won't affect the results if the same conditions of this study were applied to them. Within this group, the level of support, whether from friends or "mentoring figures" like Song and colleagues (2016) suggest, must be analyzed to determine how this will help their success. What I consider is that the support is higher for this group if one considers the resources available for them. One example is the AVID program (Advancement Via Individual Determination) (2019). As mentioned earlier, this program is dedicated to aid the transition of high school seniors to college

by providing resources and teaching them about the college environment (AVID, 2019). The support exists even before one access the college environment. At HBU (2020), where this research was conducted, there's programs that allow incoming freshmen to have a mentor and allow them to connect with other students. As mentioned earlier, this "First-Year Experience" teaches them of resources and provides mentoring for students so their first year of college is successful (HBU Student Life, 2020). These two examples demonstrate that freshmen do have the same social support, even though college is a new environment for them.

### **Age of Participants**

Alongside adding freshmen, there must be consideration of age too since the demographic of college students vary. There's no limit to the age range for pursuing a college degree. In fact, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (n.d.) states that 7.4 million university students are 25 years old "and over" while 12.5 million students are under 25. Even though there's more students younger than 25 years old than older than 25, the statistic is still relevant since it shows that there's no minimum age for college. One example is Horace Sheffield from Barnesville, Georgia, who graduated college when he was 88 years old (Murphy, 2017). Plus, age should be considered since social support could differ between age groups, just like it was suggested for cultural groups and gender in my study. Also, the four classifications differ since these students can be of different ages as demonstrated by data from NCES.

### **Minimum Score for Social Support**

Finally, as mentioned earlier, adding a minimum score to determine social support can be used to determine if social support is adequate. This was one of the confounds for this study since no minimum GPA was labeled for "academic success". If replicated, my suggestion is

considering a 3.0 GPA as “academic success” but to not use this as a disqualifier. In my original plan for this project, a 3.0 GPA was required to participate, but that condition was scrapped to reduce bias and increase the participant pool. With the new study, having this condition of 3.0 GPA as academic success should reinforce the idea of a stronger correlation in comparison to the weak positive correlation in my study. This is because there is a minimum score, therefore considering that more students can satisfy the condition and reinforce the correlation.

### Conclusion

It was determined that my study indeed suggests that social support has a direct positive correlation with academic success. I expect this research to be used in the creation of new programs for college students who are starting their college studies. From personal experience, I testify that it isn't easy to adapt to the college environment but having adequate support will help students succeed. Whether it's family support or having a mentor or that the extent of support is big or small, college students do not have to endure the hardships of college on their own. Their social support will keep a student motivated and provide support so they can be determined and persistent in accomplishing their college career goals. Even with the limitations and confounds of this study, the suggestion is clear: having a healthy support system, whether it's family or friends, leads to academic success.

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