

# **The Development of Social Capital through Micro Interactions in “Safe Spaces” Clubs for Adolescent Girls in Northern Nigeria**

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Senior Honors Thesis*

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## **Abstract**

This article is based on ethnographic field notes from the research conducted by UC Berkeley titled, ‘Pathways to Choice’. The qualitative data derived from participatory observation notes by ethnographers within safe space clubs, known as “safe spaces” for adolescent girls in Northern Nigeria. Qualitative methods using Atlas.ti were used to code and memo trends found through analysis. This article analyzes whether the safe spaces help the adolescent girls in the program build social capital, and whether the findings align with Bourdieu and Coleman’s theories of social capital. Findings indicated that communication, social solidarity, teamwork and skill development all occur during safe spaces sessions. Through this analysis, it is concluded that the microdynamics of the safe space clubs may contribute to the explicit development of social capital; however, a longitudinal study needs to be conducted before a definitive conclusion can be reached. In conclusion, the safe space clubs contribute positively to key aspects of social capital building such as effective communication, social solidarity, and teamwork. Furthermore, it seems that these findings do ascribe to both Bourdieu and Coleman’s theories of social capital.

**Key Words:** Social Capital, Bourdieu, Coleman, Adolescent Girls, Solidarity, Teamwork

## Introduction

Social capital is defined in the most basic terms as “the interpersonal relationships, institutions, and other social assets of a society or group that can be used to gain advantage.”<sup>1</sup> For the context of this paper, social capital can be defined within the following parameters: *it is the process of creating, as well as the resources created, by building social networks beyond the family by adolescent girls in Northern Nigeria.*

More specifically, social capital can be thought of as relationships between young women that are valuable and relevant outside of safe spaces. Social capital is a valuable concept for two key reasons: firstly, the concept focuses on the positive aspects of ‘sociability’, and, second, it places those positive effects in the larger framework of ‘capital’ as an economic and social tool that is more than just monetary.<sup>2</sup> In northern Nigeria, the development of social capital is intimately related to a woman’s economic and social power.<sup>3</sup>

Today, around a quarter of the world’s population consists of youth between the ages of ten and twenty-four. The region of Africa in which Nigeria is located has a disproportionately large number of young people.<sup>4</sup> In Nigeria, 62.2% of the population is under the age of twenty-four.<sup>5</sup> In developing countries like Nigeria, one in four young people are illiterate. Less than one third of secondary school age youth are actually enrolled in secondary schools, and more than half of do not have secure employment.<sup>6</sup> Prior research has indicated that a majority of the world’s out-of-school girls reside in sub-Saharan Africa. Girls in northern Nigeria are

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<sup>1</sup> “Social Capital” (2019).

<sup>2</sup> Portes , Alejandro. (1998). Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology.

<sup>3</sup> Van Eerdewijk (2017). White Paper: A Conceptual Model on Women and Girls' Empowerment.

<sup>4</sup> Perlman, Daniel *Niger Girls' Vulnerability Assessment Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project (SWEDD)*.

<sup>5</sup> "Nigeria Age Structure" (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Perlman, (SWEDD) p.7.

particularly at risk of not attending school due to numerous barriers including socioeconomic status, early marriage, and the threat of terrorist groups. Furthermore, risk of early marriage is exacerbated by poverty, debilitating gender norms, and a lack of viable alternatives.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in targeting this rural region it is possible to reach some of the world's poorest girls and mitigate some of the most pressing disparities in the developing world.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, to address the high fertility rate and rate of early marriage, there must be continued investment into reproductive health and empowerment of young women through secondary schooling and other opportunities that delay the age of marriage.<sup>9</sup>

The Centre for Girls Education (CGE)— a joint program of University of California, Berkeley's School of Public Health and the Population and Reproductive Health Initiative at Ahmadu Bello University—is a girls' education research, practice, and training hub located in northern Nigeria, operating in nine communities of the Kaduna State. Since 2008, CGE has sought to create educational enrichment opportunities for girls and young women by reducing school fees, engaging community leaders, and developing mentored girls' clubs.<sup>10</sup>

The safe spaces represent the primary intervention technique of the CGE program. The safe spaces are designed for young adolescent women who may or may not still be in traditional schooling. These clubs aim to delay early marriage, reduce adverse maternal health outcomes, and address barriers to girls' education. To do this, the safe spaces equip young women with critical life skills, like negotiation and decision-making, and academic competencies, including literacy, numeracy, and reproductive health knowledge. In addition, the safe spaces provide a

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid p. 6;

<sup>8</sup> Khalfay (2019). Safe Space Youth Clubs: Microdynamics of Empowerment for Adolescent Girls in Northern Nigeria p.3

<sup>9</sup> Perlman, (*SWEDD*) p.6.

<sup>10</sup> Khalfay (2019) p. 4

peer group setting to build strong relationships, promote community and social solidarity, and ultimately enhance voice and agency. Thus, the safe spaces are able to foster young women's empowerment on individual and structural levels, offering opportunities to understand both its micro dynamics and broader mechanisms.<sup>11</sup>

This study will investigate whether the adolescent girls develop social capital through the Safe Spaces program in Northern Nigeria. While expanding girls' education is known to improve health and economic outcomes, little is understood about how it can be empowering, and more specifically how it encourages social capital development.

Social capital is a necessary component of long-term women's empowerment. As Naila Kaber explains, one way to understand power, the intended consequence of empowerment, is as the ability to make choices.<sup>12</sup> In this context, empowerment entails *power to*, the ability to make decisions and act on them; *power within*, the sense of self-dignity and self-worth; and *power with*, the strength of collective solidarity, action, and mutual support. The transformation of power relations involves expanding agency, access to and control of resources, and reform of institutional structures.<sup>13</sup> This is intricately related to social capital because social capital involves building relationships and broader social networks that can help strengthen one's power. Social capital is a key component of empowerment because it creates avenues to building power that would not exist otherwise.

Additionally, social capital is inherently relational. It cannot exist in a vacuum and is strongest when built in heterogeneous groups.<sup>14</sup> Currently, methods used to measure social

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid p. 5;

<sup>12</sup> Perlman, Daniel (2017). "Pathways to Choice: Delaying Age of Marriage through Girls' Education in Northern Nigeria." In *Women's Empowerment and Global Health*, 72-92.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid;

<sup>14</sup> Narayan, D., & Cassidy, M. F. (2001). A Dimensional Approach to Measuring Social Capital: Development and Validation of a Social Capital Inventory.

capital vary greatly across cultures and nations. Many prevalent studies including World Values, New South Wales, Barometer of Social Capital, Index of National Civic Health, and GSCS count ‘participation in local community’ as a key component of measuring social capital.<sup>15</sup>

This study provides a valuable test of whether existing social capital theories apply to an environment that was not designed primarily to build social capital. It will draw upon qualitative data from CGE’s safe spaces (school-based mentored girls’ clubs)— to gain a nuanced understanding of the micro dynamics of social capital development.

## Background

### *Overview*

The theory of social capital is multifaceted, and has been explained in different ways by multiple theorists since its conception. It has become an influential and popular theory to emerge in social science in the last twenty years because of attempts to increase the value of social relations in the political sphere, to establish a framework for studying the social sphere, and to develop concepts that accurately reflect just how interconnected today's world has become.<sup>16</sup> Despite being currently in vogue among sociologists, the concept is not new to those who have studied the history of the field. Both Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim, amongst other philosophers, discuss the positive effects of social relations; just under different names. In this sense, social capital simply repackages an existing concept that is better suited to explain today's world.<sup>17</sup>

The importance of social capital is highlighted by what it can serve as a predictor of. It allows researchers to understand school achievement and academic performance, children’s

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid;

<sup>16</sup> Portes (1998) p.1

<sup>17</sup> Rogošić, Sylvia, and Branislava Baranović (2016). "Social Capital and Educational Achievements : Coleman vs. Bourdieu."

mental development, sources of employment and job attainment, juvenile delinquency, and immigrant and ethnic endeavors. The practical power of social capital is based on two things. Firstly, it focuses on the positive aspects of sociability without harping on the negatives. Secondly, it places this within the larger conversation about capital. Social capital is equated to monetary and other forms of economic capital allowing it to serve as an “objective” metric. It gives policymakers less costly, and seemingly equally effective ways to address social issues through an economic lens<sup>18</sup>.

There are three main functions of social capital that can be applied to a variety of contexts. The first function is as a source of social control which is often used by leaders in the community to maintain a level of control and implement compliance amongst those who they oversee. The second function is as a source of family support, and is in many ways a source of support from parents and other family members. The third and most commonly cited function of social capital is that is a source of benefits from a network that goes beyond your immediate family. This third function is also highly utilized in the field of stratification to explain access or lack thereof to employment, social mobility and success in entrepreneurial fields.<sup>19</sup> This third area is of particular interest given the subject matter of this paper.

It is important to consider negative aspects of social capital. There are two reasons to emphasize these. Firstly, it allows researchers to avoid the trap of making all of the consequences of social capital seem positive. Secondly, it allows the research to stay within the realm of sociological analysis rather than descending into moral statements. There are four well-known

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid ;

<sup>19</sup> Portes (1998) p.9-12

negative consequences of social capital: excluding outsiders, claiming group members, restricting individual freedom, and downward leveling of norms.<sup>20</sup>

### *Bourdieu*

In 1980, Pierre Bourdieu became the first social scientist to explore the concept of social capital, but since he wrote in French his work remained out of the popular literature in the field for many years.<sup>21</sup> Bourdieu defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.” His analysis is extremely valuable because of its focus on the benefits that individuals acquire by participating in groups, and the clear development of sociability for this resource to manifest. He states, “the profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible.”<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu cemented the concept that social networks are consciously created rather than naturally occurring, and that there are strategies that one must use in order to build social networks. Social networks form the building blocks for social capital development and maintenance.

Bourdieu breaks social capital down into two key parts. Firstly, it is the social relationship itself, not any other extraneous consequences of that relationship that allows people to gain access to resources that their connections may have. Secondly, social capital can be measured by the amount and quality of resources accessed.<sup>23</sup> Bourdieu posits that all forms of capital can be reduced to economic capital which is defined as accumulated human labor. In this framework, social capital allows people to gain access to economic resources, and allows them to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid p.15;

<sup>21</sup> Ibid p.3;

<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre (1986). ‘The forms of capital’ p.248-249

<sup>23</sup> Portes (1998) p.3



increase their cultural capital through building connections. They are also able to access prestigious universities and other institutions, commonly known as institutionalized cultural capital. In the reverse, Bourdieu declares that building social capital requires the investment of both economic and cultural resources. You have to have access to certain spaces that allow you to build social capital, and often this requires some sort of monetary or non-monetary economic investment.

Critics of Bourdieu call his theory reductionist in that it elevates economic capital at the ultimate source and currency for all other types of capital. He is also criticized for “assigning interest bound utility orientation in all human action.” Within Bourdieu’s framework of social capital, the concept becomes highly context-specific and it is difficult to derive direct consequence of relativity between social, cultural, economic and symbolic fields. This makes it difficult and problematic to automatically aggregate social capital as a community level or national level concept. Because of the intersectionality that social capital development requires, it becomes extremely complicated when trying to apply the concept to a large group of people, especially when taking into account cultural nuances and variances.<sup>24</sup>

### *Coleman*

James Coleman defines social capital by its function, which posits that social capital is “a variety of entities with two elements in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain action of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure.”<sup>25</sup> While this definition is considered by some to be vague, it allows for a relabeling of numerous processes that sometimes contradict one another as social capital.

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<sup>24</sup> Rogošić (2016)

<sup>25</sup> Coleman 1988a: p. S98, 1990, p. 302

Coleman thought that the mechanisms that generate social capital, the consequences of possessing social capital, and the social organization that allows the causes and effects of materialize are all parts of the concept that should not be ignored. It is important when analyzing social capital through Coleman's lens to remember that one must distinguish between the resources themselves and the ability to access them.<sup>26</sup>

Coleman thinks of social capital as a productive concept. This means that social capital allows individuals to achieve things that would not have been possible without it, and that it has a clear purpose. He sees it as a bonding mechanism that augments integration of existing social structures. For Coleman, the social structures already exist, and individuals use them as a resource to build social capital.<sup>27</sup> He highlights the social capital available within the family and the community, and demonstrates how building social capital can promote social mobility. Numerous studies have proven this link between existing social structures and social mobility following Coleman's analysis.<sup>28</sup> He tries to create a framework in which social capital can be thought of beyond the individual, and as a characteristic of the community measured at the level of educational institutions such as schools and universities. Organizational social capital, as is built in schools or the safe spaces, allows individuals to achieve personal goals, and furthers the goals of the organization itself.<sup>29</sup> Coleman also provides valuable insight into the concept of closure. Closure can be thought of as disquisition of sufficient ties between a group of people to guarantee observance of norms. Norms allow for easier facilitation of social interaction which can eventually lead to greater ease in building social capital.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Portes (1998) p.5

<sup>27</sup> Michael Tzanakis (2013) "Social Capital in Bourdieu's, Coleman's and Putnam's Theory: Empirical Evidence and Emergent Measurement Issues."

<sup>28</sup> Rogošić (2016)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid (2016);

<sup>30</sup> Portes (1998) p. 6

Coleman's critics argue that by equating social capital with the resources that it allows an individual to acquire can lead to circuitous, tautological statements. In addition, there are criticisms of his lack of distinction between the motivation of the recipients and donors in exchanges of social capital. It's not hard to understand why recipients want to access social capital, but donors' motivations are more complex. To systematically understand the concept as Coleman describes it, there must be a distinction between the possessors of social capital, the sources of social capital, and the resources themselves.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps most concerning, Coleman fails to adequately differentiate the social status distinctions between individuals.

### *Differences*

While both theorists have common aspects in how they think about social capital, there are also numerous differences between them. Coleman considers social capital to share numerous similarities with public goods, while Bourdieu disagrees. While the latter believes social capital can increase integration within groups, he does not think it reduces social inequality. Coleman believes that social capital building by individuals will benefit the whole community. In addition, Coleman considers social capital to be a product of social structure which has limited his analysis of other factors that may enhance or hinder social capital development such as conflict;<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu has made no such statement and consequently his theory allows for more flexibility.

Other differences include the fact that Coleman's concept for the measurement of quality of relationships applies within and beyond the family. Bourdieu only sees outside relationships as forms of social capital because he considers intra-familial relationships to be forms of cultural

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid p. 6;

<sup>32</sup> Tzanakis (2013)

capital. Furthermore, Bourdieu does not take into account familial structure even when discussing cultural capital within families. On the other hand, Coleman does include this variant in his analysis.<sup>33</sup>

### *Teamwork & Communication*

Given that social capital is built through interpersonal interactions, teamwork and communication would be expected to contribute to building social capital. Therefore, to understand how social capital is developed in this particular setting, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of teamwork and communication that exist between the young women among themselves, and with their mentors. Unfortunately, there are no existing published studies that explore the concepts of teamwork and communication within the framework of social capital theory and advancement. This is an area in which this paper fills an important gap.

## **Methods**

### *Setting*

The safe spaces are interventions, and data collected was designed to help improve the safe spaces functionality and enhance their purpose. The data also gives researchers insight into skills that these young women are picking up, both as explicit parts of the curriculum and as a by-product of being in the safe space clubs. The development of social capital falls into the latter category, and is therefore something that the safe spaces were not designed to facilitate. However, given the structure, content, and purpose of the clubs, they are an optimal setting in which social capital could be developed.

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<sup>33</sup> Rogošić (2016)

## *Participants*

Over 200 adolescent girls are enrolled in CGE safe spaces programs, with completion of primary schooling as a prerequisite to enroll. For this study, girls and mentors in the safe spaces were observed during sessions and were interviewed by CGE ethnographers. Parents, community leaders, and other key stakeholders were also interviewed. Study protocols were approved by the institutional review boards of both Ahmadu Bello University and the University of California, Berkeley.<sup>34</sup>

## *Data Collection*

CGE has conducted continuous monitoring and evaluation of its programs, adopting both qualitative and quantitative methods. In terms of qualitative methods, CGE employs anthropological methods of participant-observation and in-depth interviewing. CGE also collects quantitative data, tracking school and marital status.<sup>35</sup>

This subset study relies on CGE's qualitative data collected between 2012 and 2017, incorporating ethnographic field notes and interview transcripts. All qualitative data collection was carried out by full-time Nigerian ethnographers.<sup>36</sup>

One set of observation field notes was recorded during safe spaces sessions and were guided by predetermined questions. These questions focused on actions of the young women and the mentor, along with interactions between the two parties. The interview guides were comprised of open-ended questions meant to elicit subjects' perspectives on how safe spaces have impacted their wellbeing and livelihoods.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid p. 5;

<sup>35</sup> Ibid p. 5;

<sup>36</sup> Ibid p. 5;

The other two sets of observation field notes were also recorded during safe spaces sessions, but were not guided by predetermined questions. Instead, the researcher's focus was on capturing what the young women learned holistically during the safe space sessions. The field notes are organized by date of session, and dedicate time to explaining the topic of the session, and how the young women picked up on the material. Transcripts from focus groups conducted with small groups of girls from this cohort were also used.

### *Data Analysis*

All qualitative data were transcribed, translated into English, and uploaded to Atlas.ti software. The field notes and interviews were then analyzed through open coding, using the grounded theory framework to search for emerging themes. Themes were synthesized into theoretical memos, which were then used for program evaluation, including the refinement of observation and interview questions.<sup>37</sup> These memos, along with both Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman's social capital theories, formed the basis of the theoretical model of social capital development presented in this paper.

### *Coding Methodology*

Since the intended function of the field notes is to provide researchers with a better, more holistic understanding of what is happening in the safe space clubs, it is necessary to have a clear framework when trying to draw secondary conclusions from the data— especially meaningful conclusions such as those proposed in this paper with regards to social capital.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid p. 6;

In order to achieve this, it was necessary to determine a consistent set of codes that addressed the different aspects of social capital behind assessed. At the same time, it was important not to impose limitations that would cause the coder to miss a novel aspect of social capital that may appear in later coded field notes.

This was done by coding each set of field notes multiple times over a time period of one to two months to ensure that all instances of every aspect of social capital being explored was recognized and noted clearly.

## Findings

As there is a lack of literature on how interpersonal relations contribute to social capital, these findings add new information to the existing pool of information. Building social capital for these young women, through the program, is contingent on the development of strong social solidarity, support, and teamwork as outcomes of the safe spaces. The microdynamics of social capital were built upon through encouragement, affirmation, and assistance from either the other young women in the class or the mentor. Teamwork is a key theme that is often facilitated in the clubs and can contribute to the practice of social capital, which the young women can transform into collective empowerment in their lives and communities. There are few explicit examples of social capital being developed, but there are numerous diverse examples of skill building that is necessary to social capital development. The skills that these young women develop in the safe spaces include assertiveness, negotiation, and self-esteem/confidence. Additionally, the focus of the safe spaces on literacy skills is important to clearer communication, and relationship building for social network development. Each of these areas is explored in greater detail with examples

from the field notes to highlight not only the young women lived experiences, but also how they are similar or unique across different girls in the cohort.

### *Communication*

Effective communication skills form the cornerstone of tapping into and further building social capital. Communication between the young women generally took place during the discussions about life skills, large group discussions, small group discussions and role play sessions. Group discussions of life skills were especially common. There were multiple sessions where young women were *'negotiating and suggesting which options to write'* in smaller groups regarding how to best handle a practical, real life situation. This required teamwork, and to a notable extent the young women were observed to be doing a great job.<sup>38</sup>

There was also a focus on communication as a topic of the safe spaces. Throughout the lesson, the mentor further taught the young women how to communicate more effectively and how to think about communication. There was a focus on the ideas that communication is a two-way process, the importance of nonverbal communication, and the necessity of building trust. In addition, young women were exposed to concepts such as that good communication leads to situations that are mutually beneficial. Regarding nonverbal communication, all the young women agreed that *'to send a message using the features on your body such as your eyes, mouth, hands and body [is] to communicate with others.'* In the group discussion, an example was presented of a girl who's request not to be married was accepted because of her effective communication skills. As the mentor emphasized, the manner in which they make their request

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid p. 25;



would determine if they would be granted that request or not and so *'it was very important that everyone be polite so that there can be a clear understanding and there would be a free flow of education'* The explanation through example and discussion helped solidify the abstract concepts of communication in the young women's minds. Furthermore, the mentors assigned the young women homework to write up the ways in which they practice good communication at home and in school environments, which highlights the weight given to this particular idea within the safe spaces.

The concept of trust is one that comes up consistently in the field notes as something that the mentors try to emphasize. Trust also appears to be a quality that is a clear priority for the young women to cultivate in themselves and seek in their trusted companions. As the young women hypothesize, building meaningful relationships means *'you'll get someone who would uphold your trust.'* This is all the more significant because the young women are constantly discussing the importance of being obedient to parents and staying out of trouble. For them trust and loyalty are prerequisites to who they choose to expend their energy on outside of their families.

### *Social Solidarity*

There are numerous examples of solidarity through support or more practically, through encouragement and help with their learning.

Affirmation was constantly afforded to the young women by their peers when they did something right, even if it followed a struggle. Affirmation in the form of applause seems to be the most basic form of social solidarity that is observed in a majority of the safe spaces. In one case, the young women offered constructive criticism for their peer *'when a girl was asked on*

*how to make moimo (bean cake)*'. The young women offered different suggestions on what the correct actions were in a discussion mediated by the mentor. They were there to help one another understand what exactly was happening: *'the young women also spoke to and about each other at other times when they had to either interpret or relay the Mentor's instructions to them'*. Once, a group of young women managed to help their peer see that she was misbehaving, and advocated on her behalf to the mentor who is understanding of the situation following their advocacy.<sup>39</sup>

The young women also helped each other out when they found the mentor's questions too difficult to answer on their own or got a little bit confused. This included defending young women who were being bullied, or who were too shy to talk to the mentor themselves. Generally, young women helped each other out by *'whisper[ing] answers to each other'*. In another, *'they always assist each other where necessary when discovered their fellow young women [were] confused sometimes even without waiting for mentor's instructions'*.<sup>40</sup>

Discussion of social solidarity was also encouraged in how the young women were taught to build friendships. Meaningful friendships as a form of social solidarity appears consistently throughout the safe spaces field notes. In one lesson, a friend was defined as someone *'who you can tell your secret to, help you in difficulty or assist you even when you didn't ask for the assistance'*— essentially someone with whom the young women find social solidarity and act upon it. The safe spaces lesson also honed in on the idea that relationship building always involves two people, and that you need to build trust, and confidence to have a meaningful relationship. Girls say their *'friend is very generous; friend gives her good advice; friend is*

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid p. 25;

<sup>40</sup> Ibid p. 25;

*respectful and greets everyone she comes across*' respectively. The young women built up their own perception of what being a friend means, and their interpretations demonstrate that they do not view friendships as superfluous or transitory. Instead they think of friendships as relationships that are built on trust, respect, generosity and lifting one another up. The young women also identified friends as the people they can ask for favors when necessary. This is a small, but significant example of gaining resources through their social networks.

### *Teamwork*

Teamwork is a theme that emerges from the safe spaces due to how commonly and consistently it arises. Speaking specifically about teamwork as a form of support took on many forms. During math and literacy sessions the young women would check their answers with each other, and when working in groups young women would *'put [their] heads together to find an alternative word'*. Supportiveness was seen within teams and in the greater classroom space. In one case, *'the young women helped each other to come up with ideas, spell certain words, and write them out, and while the young women presented for their groups, the young women were really attentive to the presenters'*.<sup>41</sup>

Often, the young women work together to solve a problem, or encourage one another to say something to the mentor that they did not have the courage to do alone. In a few cases, the young women did disagree: *'the young women did not reach a consensus on who to take some roles in the play. The group work also generated heated argument. A few young women had a different opinion while some other young women had theirs'*. However, in most of the cases

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid p. 26;

where young women discussed solutions to a problem the mentor had presented them, even if there was argument, eventually the young women would come to an amicable agreement.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, given that the young women are adolescents, there are some instances where some groups function better than others, and some instances of teasing. However, overall there is a high level of cooperation between the young women both for safe spaces related material and beyond. In one activity, the young women self-identified as '*work[ing] with others well in a friendly way*' which indicates that they personally believe that they are engaging with their peers and working in effective teams.

### *Development of Social Capital*

Since safe spaces demonstrate interactions at a micro level in a contained, controlled, and monitored space it is difficult to directly track its explicit development. However, there are few examples that explicitly demonstrate social capital building, such as when a girl '*promised [the mentor] that she will help [another girl] at home the girl also told the mentor that they are neighbors.*'<sup>43</sup> This is notable because it identifies an example of where relationships developed in the safe spaces are maintained and leveraged outside that space to benefit both young women involved. While other examples like this are not noted in the data, it is also necessary to consider that the primary function of the results is not to identify social capital, its processes, or benefits. So, while other instances of similar social capital building may have been occurring, the current field note taking template is not designed to highlight, emphasize, or even necessarily record that information.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid p. 26;

<sup>43</sup> Ibid p. 25;

### *Other Skill Development that Builds Social Capital*

There are examples of the development of social capital through the development of the necessary skills for it to eventually manifest. During a reflection exercise on what they have learned through the safe spaces, some young women mentioned skills that will eventually help them with building social capital. One declared that the young women *'have learnt how to handle positions of authority, how to be sincere, to have integrity and to be honest.'* Another one iterated that she has learned how to be confident and speak in public.

Other qualities that the young women are taught include negotiation, assertiveness, and development of self-esteem.

Assertiveness is a skill that is formally taught in the safe spaces. It is presented both as a tool for communicating effectively with parents, husbands, and other elders in society and as a tool to build and increase self-confidence. The young women are also taught that assertiveness is a way to avoid peer pressure. All of these aspects are important because of how they allow the young women to take control of their relationships and recognize behavior that they should and should not accept. The girls are taught health boundaries and that *'assertiveness is a good way to achieve balance between aggressive and passive.'* This allows for building of stronger social networks.

Negotiation becomes especially important when considering that these young women are constantly working with parents and other elders as their own advocates to avoid marriage, get permission to do certain activities, and maintain certain friendships. In order to maintain strong relationships with people outside the home, the girls with stricter parents need to be able to negotiate why they should be allowed to fraternize with these other girls and spend time and

energy outside of family. There is a specific lesson plan where girls are taught *'three ways to negotiate'* when someone is trying to persuade them to do one thing, and they want to do something else.

Both assertiveness and negotiation are key parts of self-esteem building. By explaining that *'people with high self-esteem respect themselves and know that they are worthy of love and respect from other people'* the safe spaces are teaching these young women to not settle for toxic relationships from which they will garner no real added benefit. This concept of self-esteem building is also a constant across safe spaces field notes demonstrating the importance of the concept.

These examples demonstrate the indirect ways in which the safe spaces help build social capital. These should be given equal weight as instances of direct social capital building because they are imperative and necessary parts of the social capital building process which is essential to understanding and analyzing the effectiveness of the safe space clubs; especially given the limitations of this not being a longitudinal study.

A final aspect to consider within skill building is that the young women are learning literacy skills in both Hausa and English. Literacy building sessions are a constant in every safe space session which is important because language is an extremely valuable and transferable skill. Knowing how to read, write, and speak both English and Hausa can help immensely in building social capital, because of the opportunities that it allows the young women to access, educationally and socially, within their own communities and in the wider Nigerian state.

## Discussion

Social capital is the means by which these young women developed the necessary connections to benefit themselves, their families, and, based on which theory's framework is being considered, perhaps even their larger community. While social capital is not a perfect metric because of limitations outlined in previous literature, it still allows researchers to gain a better understanding of how the safe spaces might allow these young women to build connections that outlive the length of the safe spaces sessions themselves. One would think that an avenue such as the safe space clubs would be the perfect place to both explicitly build social capital, and develop the necessary skills to continue acquiring social capital beyond the space itself. Building social capital in the safe spaces was measured in four concrete ways: communication, social solidarity, teamwork, and the explicit development of social capital. This is what the young women in the safe spaces exhibit in their everyday life. They are developing necessary 'horizontal relationships' with one another and their mentors.<sup>44</sup>

As demonstrated through the data on communication, the safe spaces place emphasis on the importance of building good communication skills. There is a focus on different types of communication as well as the importance of building trust in all relationships that the young women choose to engage in both within and beyond their families. Through group activities the young women also are augmenting their communication skills.

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<sup>44</sup> Narayan (2001);

Social solidarity is something that is demonstrated numerous times throughout the course of the field notes. It can range from instances of young women helping each other out when confused, to affirming one another when they choose to participate in the club in a meaningful way. Social solidarity is also encouraged in the way that the young women are taught to build friendship and beyond the safe spaces.

The data on teamwork confirms that the safe spaces prioritize team building activities and encourage the young women to think of each other as resources and friends, rather than competition for limited opportunities. It is the most commonly occurring category out of the four as manifests in number of different meetings.

Explicit development of social capital is harder to track at such a small scale without temporal continuity to follow the young women and see how these skills benefits them in the future. The study not being longitudinal is definitely one of its limitations; however, there are examples of development of necessary skills that will eventually help with building social capital.

To answer the question of whether what the data shows fits into social capital theory, it is first important to consider just how diverse the theories of social capital are across the field. Overall, all of the aforementioned aspects of the safe spaces fit into the broad idea of social capital being inherently relational. In addition, since the safe spaces serve as an avenue for social mobility, the argument could be made that the young women could not do this if they did not build social capital. The functions of social capital are not well explored through the safe spaces, but the most applicable one is the third, where it is seen as a source of benefits through networks



beyond the family. The safe spaces do not seem to exacerbate any of the negative aspects of social capital.

Looking at the results within the framework of Bourdieu's theory, there are some important conclusions that can be drawn. First of all, given that Bourdieu's definition of social capital involves "less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance," the relationship the young women are building with one another through teamwork and communication is in line with this. He also emphasizes the importance of participating in groups to accrue social capital which is perfectly in line with what the space allows these young women to do every week. The safe spaces do follow his assertion that social networks are consciously created through meaningful strategies like those discussed. Additionally, he touches on the concept of solidarity, and the ways in which the profits of group membership contribute to the building of solidarity. The young women would not be building solidarity with one another if they were not part of the safe spaces group. Where the data fall short is in that it restricts analysis on the second key part of Bourdieu's theory on social capital. That is, given the lack of a longitudinal study, it is not possible to determine the quality or amount of resources the young women are obtaining through the safe spaces.

Coleman's theory also allows for interesting conclusions that are similar, but not identical to those that would be formed through Bourdieu's framework. Coleman's theory of social structures becomes important if we consider the ways in which the safe spaces fill the gap for young girls who do not have access to education or are attending substandard educational institutions. Coleman's emphasis on the mechanism, consequences, and social organizations that allow for social capital to develop are all important when considering this study's data. The safe

spaces could be considered mechanisms for, as well as social organizations that allow social capital to be built. Additionally, social capital is a consequence of the skills developed in the clubs in this way. Social capital as developed in the safe spaces follows Coleman's definition. Coleman considers social capital to be a productive concept that allows for the creation of something that could not have occurred otherwise. In the case of this study, communication, social solidarity, teamwork, and skill development for these women could not occur without the safe spaces.

Limitations of this study include that there is no complementary longitudinal study, i.e. being able to follow the girls through their trajectories and see where they end up. Another limitation is that the safe spaces field notes were not designed to study social capital development, so researchers may have missed key aspects that contribute to its development because it was not something they had been trained to look out for.

## Conclusion

Overall, it is difficult to definitively say that the safe spaces build social capital due to the study not being longitudinal, but there are promising signs in the data that it does contribute positively towards the development of communication skills, social solidarity, teamwork, and other skill development; all of which are integral aspects of the safe spaces and of building social capital. Both Bourdieu and Coleman's theories of social capital can be used as a framework to analyze the activities within and effects of the safe spaces on the concept, and each offers a different and extremely valuable perspective on the topic. While there is no definitive proof that the safe spaces build social capital, there is no evidence to disprove this theory.

Short term next steps include interviewing the girls with a social capital specific questionnaire that will questions such as: *Do you see the other girls outside of the club?* Long term next steps for this study would be to conduct a longitudinal study on adolescent girls that pass through the clubs. This will help researchers determine long term effects, and allow for the possible establishment of causation.

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