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A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of First-Generation Caucasian Student Perceptions

Cora Cross

Concordia University - Portland

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of First-Generation Caucasian Student Perceptions

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Higher Education

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Concordia University–Portland

2019

Abstract

This dissertation about first-generation Caucasian students' (FGCS') experiences is an original independent research project that will contribute to educators' knowledge regarding issues faced by FGCS when preparing for, deciding to attend, or persisting in college. This intent of this phenomenological research is to create awareness within the education community about the specialized needs of FGCS. Although FGCS appear to form the majority of those attending college, they do not experience privileged based on their race. FGCS often face significant issues in college because their parents have not attended college. Grit provided a significant contribution to the FGCS success in college. For purposes of this research, semistructured interviews were used, and five male and five female participants were recruited to respond to three research questions. Although the participants did not believe race significantly impacted their decisions and experiences toward college, through their responses it was indicated that the level of family support determined whether they attended college as traditional FGCS or nontraditional FGCS. This study suggests that family involvement in education creates the momentum necessary for FGCS to attend college and complete it as traditional students, despite the unforeseeable challenges during the process.

Keywords: Caucasian, first-generation student, grit, nontraditional student, phenomenology, privilege

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children Eric, Bruce, and Carrie. Eric and Bruce, you inspired me to complete college and Carrie you helped me have fun. It could not have been easy to patiently listen about the same topic repeatedly and yet you seemed so interested. You mean the world to me.

Belinda, you have helped me so much over the years, both personally and academically. You and Tim became the force that supported me, and I am grateful for that. Both of you are angels sent by God to look over my son. I could not have raised Bruce without you. You are our family.

I love you all so much.

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I would like offer to praise to God for allowing me to choose this path. I could not have done this without His support. He has a purpose for me and now it is time for me to find out what that is. Many thanks to Dr. Kluth for reviewing my work even when it was horrible. Your encouragement helped me improve my work and persist through difficult times. Dr. Hernandez and Dr. Creasman, your feedback provided me with the support I needed to develop a well-thought out study. I would like to thank my participants. Sharing your stories made this research possible. I hope your experiences will help other first-generation Caucasian students understand that they are not alone and that they can succeed as well.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

This study used phenomenological data analysis to investigate the lived experiences first-generation Caucasian students (FGCS) say supported college attainment. This study also examined whether the participants perceived themselves as more privileged than other first-generation students (FGS). For far too many students, graduating from high school signals the end of their academic career rather than continuing their education in college. Often, FGS do not persist in college because they fail to prepare for college or lack role models to encourage and support college aspirations (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Terenzini, Springer, Yarger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Researchers found that students with at least one parent who attended college will more likely attend college compared with families where no parent attended college (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Tate, Fouad, Marks, Young, Guzman, & Williams, 2015). College benefits individuals in many ways, is a social and academic endeavor, and provides young people with opportunities for self-actualization as they transition from childhood into adulthood (Wang & Nuru, 2016). While attending college, students can choose from a variety of learning opportunities, become well-rounded, productive citizens, and develop the skills required for a career (Knaggs, Sondergeld, & Schardt, 2015; Luzeckyj, McCann, Graham, King, & McCann, 2017). Attending college supports the development of college knowledge within a family.

The benefits of college knowledge can be vicariously transferred to subsequent generations and shared among families. In families where at least one parent attended college, the parent can mentor their child's college decisions because the parent possesses college knowledge (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2016). These families likely saved money for college, encouraged their children to enroll in challenging courses in high school, had conversations about

what to expect from college life and college systems, and shared and completed college applications and scholarship forms early. Conversely, Schrader and Brown (2008), similar to Karp and Hughes (2008), found that when parents have not attended college, offer little support to FGS. FGS families possessing insufficient college knowledge and limited social capital need to prepare their children for college. Therefore, students can participate in programs designed to address the needs of FGS.

Participating in college support programs improves college knowledge and helps FGS develop the skills required for successful college experiences (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Chunoo and Osteen (2016) suggested attending college serves a dual purpose—to develop students personally and intellectually and to produce competent, skilled workers; therefore, it is incumbent that researchers increase the number of studies to improve methods that prepare and motivate FGS to attend college. FGS need to graduate from college. West (2012) noted that educators who worked collaboratively to develop and facilitate meaningful practices to prepare, recruit, and retain FGS observed an increased number of students achieving college aspirations.

Although the body of research about FGS continues to grow, many studies have often focused on minority groups and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. A limited amount of research has described the experiences that influenced FGCS to attend college. Researchers have been concerned with increasing the total number of FGS graduating from college. Therefore, researchers should put more effort into learning about FGCS. Examining the experiences that influenced FGCS to attend college after high school could improve the strategies educators use to prepare, recruit, and retain other FGCS.

Graduating more skilled workers could make the U.S. workforce more competitive globally. Increasing the number of skilled workers entering the U.S. workforce requires an increase in the number of students graduating from colleges (Rouse & Kemple, 2009). To match the demand for skilled workers, the U. S. must increase efforts to recruit and retain more FGS in college.

Providing specific interventions to support FGCS facing perceived insurmountable issues can increase the number of FGCS graduating from college. Navigating the education pipeline into college represents a foreign and costly endeavor for FGC; therefore, many talented FGCS forego college in favor of jobs requiring limited skills and offering limited growth potential (Contreras, 2011; Sanchez, Lowman & Hill, 2016; Schrader & Brown, 2008). FGCS often lack a frame of reference that would put the benefits of college into perspective.

FGCS, like other FGS, are the first generation of a family to earn a college degree. FGCS belong to the FGS classification, researchers seldom include studies about the experiences that affected the FGCS' decision to attend college and their subsequent success. "Early educators in conjunction with a college education prepares students for careers and encourage the development of good citizens to populate the world" (Levinson, 2017, para. 8). Therefore, more needs to be done to help FGCS attend college to help individuals meet personal, professional, and academic aspirations.

Colleges are interested in improving the recruitment and retention strategies used to increase the enrollment of FGCS and minority groups. Contreras (2011) claimed the public education pipeline neglects the neediest students, or students which have limited support from their families academically, socially, and financially. These students do not attend college due to gaps in preparation to overcome academic, social, and financial limitations. The researcher developed

this study to examine the gaps found in the research concerning the struggles experienced by FGCS and to explain how FGCS, a subgroup of FGS, overcame the perceived insurmountable barriers that have perpetuated a dysfunctional generational cycle and have historically prevented college attendance among FGCS.

The incentive to graduate more FGCS is three-fold. Graduating from college allows students to increase self-esteem, improves marketability, and increases motivation to attain additional aspirations (Tate et al., 2015). Graduating from college also provides graduates with increased opportunities to contribute to their communities by joining some branch of the global workforce. As the demand for skilled college graduates increases but the number of students graduating from college remains static, employers fear a shortage of skilled workers to compete in the global job market (West, 2012). Therefore, educators in the U.S. must collaborate vertically and strategically to develop practical preparation and recruitment strategies that will entice more FGCS. Expanding and implementing effective strategies will increase the number of students attending and graduating from college to assure a well-educated workforce.

Background. Regardless of race, socioeconomic background, or culture, and through the efforts of many researchers, colleges recognize that FGCS experience obstacles that limit their aspirations to prepare and persist in college. FGCS often do not have successful role models and are unaware of the significance college plays in improving their financial and social status. FGCS parents possess insufficient knowledge regarding college decisions and are frequently unable to advise their child about the process of preparing, transitioning, and remaining in college (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Tinto, 2007). Therefore, FGCS must manage significant issues regarding exploring options such as engaging in challenging high school preparatory courses and selecting and attending a college that supports their career aspirations.

FGCS often fail to proactively participate in planning post high school academic college decisions (Pascarella et al., 2004). FGS tend to live in the moment rather than for the future (Opidee, 2015). Educators who form relationships with students can help students recognize educators as professionals who can support their college aspirations.

Educators who learn alter their position beyond the traditional educator student role can act in the position as a mentor to prepare students for a prosperous academic future. Opidee (2015) discovered that collaborating with supportive mentors empowered and improved FGCS' decision-making and created better-informed consumers and self-advocates. Developing a trusting relationship with students provides the educator with more collateral as they work to educate students. This type of relationship would help students more readily accept an educator's suggestions about the positive impact college attainment has on a student's future and make the challenge of college more relevant. However, to be successful, FGCS must learn to navigate short-term goals, including the financial, academic, and social systems of campus life.

Regardless of the FGCS' socioeconomic background, many FGCS forego college to pursue other interests or careers requiring limited specialized skills or advancement opportunities (Rose, n.d.). In an ideal educational setting, educators from kindergarten through high school work collaboratively to support FGS' college interests. FGCS likewise set and achieve their academic goals. Many students recruited into college are underprepared and do not understand college systems. Contreras (2011) argued, "Transitioning from high school into college is a critical step which establishes the foundation for a student's college preparation, degree attainment, career options, and social mobility" (p. 500). The students who struggle during the transition period into college might develop negative attitudes about attending college.

Context. Educators have a profound influence on the success of students who might one day decide to attend college. Purpose Built Communities (2017) noted that improving the education pipeline represents our best chance to decrease the disparity in class and increase college participation. Improvements to the education system require more community involvement; therefore, stakeholders must support learning initiatives in education throughout the community. Further improvement in the U.S. education system requires the substantial collaborative efforts of educators to improve the cradle through college pipeline preparation (Purpose Built Communities, 2017). Working with educators, parents and leaders can target FGS' needs and develop a rigorous curriculum and support programs to prepare students for college.

History. Transitioning from home to campus life presents a daunting experience for many students under the best circumstances. Contreras (2011) noted that in addition to facing the typical preparation, transition, and college life issues, FGCS experience difficulties particular to insufficient college knowledge. Educators who use research-based strategies can make a difference in the success FGCS experience as they negotiate the education pipeline by helping students plan to attend college. Early educators seldom have the opportunity to participate in professional development to improve the college preparation support they offer students.

Many school districts focus their efforts on developing a curriculum that meets the needs of students already prepared for school. Engle, Bermeo, and O'Brien (2006) discovered that educators need to learn about teaching strategies students can use to make a successful transition into college. Educators believed that FGS know less about college than other student populations attending college. Prospective FGCS do not understand the commitment colleges expect from students to experience success, and often received limited family support (Terenzini, Springer, Yarger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Deficits in knowledge about college systems and

college life increased FGS' risk for failure while attending college when compared with their traditional peers (Terenzini et al., 1996). Educators can take an active role in developing the college knowledge FGCS lack. Developing additional strategies and protective factors could improve FGCS' college outcomes. FGCS could successfully acclimate to college life and overcome typical first-year college stress (Falcon, 2015). The barriers FGS experience such as family issues, financial concerns, social confusions, and cultural issues can persistently stymie this population's success in college (Schrader & Brown, 2008). An improved understanding of FGCS' experiences could provide educators with practical strategies to support FGCS and validate FGCS' decision to attend college. Chapter 2 explains, in-depth, the issues experienced by FGS and indicates the limits of the information that pertains to FGCS.

Although educators recognize the significant obstacles FGS from all races and socioeconomic backgrounds must manage, most research about FGS pertains to minority groups or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Educators need to learn more about patterns that encourage FGCS participation in college as a step toward enhancing the education community's ability to graduate more students. The researcher performing this study advocates for developing research that focuses on increasing the number of FGCS who graduate from college.

Conceptual framework for the problem. FGCS represent a segment of FGS whose needs could be overlooked because they are Caucasian. In relation to the U.S. population, "Caucasians are the majority and often considered privileged; consequently," Applebaum (2016) suggested that, "little needs to be done to learn about the specific needs of FGCS. The participants' responses disputed Applebaum's claim that Caucasian students, unlike other FGS do not experience issues that require extensive support throughout their academic career to overcome college attainment barriers.

Increasing the number of skilled FGS strengthens the global workforce and improves the chance for subsequent generations to attend college, and develops social capital. Using the perspective of a professional educator, the researcher advocates increasing research that would improve strategies used to identify FGCS and support the academic and social growth of FCCS. The research associated with FGS has holistically focused on students from a low socioeconomic background or in minority groups. Limited research has examined explicitly the experiences that FGCS say supported or hindered their successful college attainment. Developing and using data-driven research focusing on FGCS' experiences could improve the strategies and support educators provide to support FGCS college aspirations.

This study used the critical theory of education and advocates adopting and adapting research-based strategies to match the evolving students' goals to improve and increase college preparation, student recruitment, college experiences, and graduation rates from college. Kellner (2010) argued that implementing research-based strategies could improve education outcomes, saving money and time. Moreover, the critical theory of education suggests that education must be reflective of the needs of the student population, supportive of career demands, and flexible. In short education needs to be overhauled, making it more relatable and relevant more technology based and cooperative as dictated by trends in the workforce demands (Kellner, 2010).

Through the years, Astin, Tinto, Terenzini, and Pascarella have provided educators with valuable strategies to guide how they support FGS academic aspirations. The delivery and substance must evolve to meet the needs of students and provide the workforce with graduates who possess relevant skills. Kellner (2010) suggested more research is needed to address the diverse

needs within the FGS classification. Continual improvement to existing strategies could effectively alleviate some FGCS issues and increase the number of FGCS deciding to attend and persist in college.

Educators are reflective practitioners whose mission reflects a desire to support the development of lifetime learners whose aspirations include college attainment. Access to sound research would provide educators with practical strategies to increase the number of students attending and graduating from college prepared to enter the global workforce. Research theories developed by Terenzini et al. (1996) concerning FGS' barriers to college success, Tinto's (2006) theories concerning FGS college retention, and arguments from Havlik, Pulliam, Malott, and Steen (2017) regarding improving social and cultural capital to increase FGCS recruitment and retention in college have profoundly influenced the scope of this study and increased this educator's awareness of the issues FGS experience. FGS participate in self-doubt which often prevents active preparation for college, affects their ability to assimilate college culture and persistence in college, and finding methods to fund college.

Statement of the Problem

FGCS like other members of the FGS classification of college students are designated FGS because their parents did not attend college and belong to the Caucasian race. Caucasian denotes a race of fair skinned people, which Applebaum (2016) referred to as privileged based on inherent advantages a person may receive based entirely on being Caucasian without regard to socioeconomic background. Although attending college profoundly affects career opportunities and social status, FGCS struggle with the decision to attend college. FGCS may refrain from attending college after graduating from high school because they often experience perceived insurmountable barriers that seem to outweigh the benefits associated with college attainment (Ward,

Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Attending college delivers life-changing opportunities to students regardless of their background (Terenzini et al.,1996). The benefits associated with a bachelor's degree include marketable skills, an academic degree, professional certifications, improved social capital, and increased earning potential. Each year, the number of jobs requiring qualified, skilled college graduates increases, but a limited number of students choose to enter and persist in college (West, 2012). Accordingly, employers are concerned that there will be a shortage of skilled college graduates to fulfill the newly created positions within the global job market.

The governing body of research concerning FGS focuses collectively on strategies used to prepare, recruit, transition, and retain minority groups or students from a low socioeconomic background in college. However, FGCS represent a distinct group of students whose early experiences, motivations, and successes likely vary significantly as a subgroup of FGS. Educators may overlook the varied needs of FGCS because of the limited amount of research published about FGCS' experiences and motivations related to attending college. The available research about FGS has provided educators with valuable strategies to guide FGS; however, the strategies do not adequately address the diversity which exists among the FGS classification. Knowing about the experiences that motivated FGCS to graduate from college could improve the strategies educators use to encourage students to graduate. Increasing the number of students graduating from college would increase the number of qualified, skilled job applicants and keep the U.S. competitive globally.

Purpose of the Study

Attracting underrepresented FGCS represents a probable solution to the shortage of qualified workers; however, FGCS represent a recruitment challenge. The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate and learn about the lived experiences FGCS encountered throughout their

lives that supported their decision to prepare for, transition into, and persist in college. The researcher developed a qualitative phenomenology study to investigate FGCS' experiences. Creswell (2012) noted that the phenomenological method is well suited to explore a phenomenon of interest. Phenomenology "reduces individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2012, p. 58). This study will benefit educators by simultaneously increasing what is known about FGS as a group and FGCS specifically. Learning about FGCS lived experiences could increase educators' opportunities to support and prepare FGCS for college.

A pressing need exists to understand which experiences helped FGCS overcome barriers to attain college. Unless more FGS prepare for and graduate from college, the U.S. will experience a considerable shortage of qualified applicants for middle-income jobs requiring college diplomas (Knaggs, et al., 2015). Successfully graduating more FGCS provides the U.S. with the means to remain globally competitive. Creswell (2013) suggested that the phenomenology research method can reveal experiences and histories related to a phenomenon of interest. The researcher designed this qualitative study to provide educators with more information about FGCS college attendance and the experiences that frustrated or supported the participants' college decisions and successes. The insight gleaned from this research could assist educators in transforming their teaching role to include advocating for FGCS.

Research Questions

The researcher used the qualitative phenomenological method to answer questions about the lived experiences associated with being an FGS and Caucasian, their challenges, and the sup-

ports that helped the participants succeed in college. Replicating this study with other participants could help educators learn more about how they can provide support to FGCS. The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What perception do first-generation Caucasian students have about being more privileged than other first-generation students?
2. Which support made the most significant impact on the participant's college decisions?
3. Which challenges developed the participant's awareness of the importance of attending college?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Rationale. Ladson-Billings and Applebaum have performed studies to learn about students from minority groups' education experiences. The meta-analysis performed by Ladson-Billings (1998) indicated that minority groups experienced notable inequality in education. Applebaum (2016) argued that little is done to promote equality regarding providing African Americans with education equality. Applebaum (2016) and Ladson-Billings (1998) found Caucasians dominate society and that the U.S. has failed to encourage the development of a more abundant society that respects the minority groups' perspectives in favor of the current majority. Although Ladson-Billings (1998) agreed that middle and upper classes have an advantage over lower class African Americans and Caucasians, Ladson-Billings' study does not acknowledge that underrepresented students, regardless of race, deserve an opportunity to participate in college and access programs that could support their success. FGCS are not considered members of a minority group; nonetheless, FGCS' experiences differ from other Caucasians students attending college. Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobo (2016) argued,

we cannot be satisfied with our efforts to prepare and recruit students unless our concerted efforts directed toward assuring the successful diversification of our campuses. A Student's exposure to other students who are different from themselves and the novel ideas and challenges that such disclosure brings leads to improved cognitive skills, including critical thinking and problem-solving. (para. 36)

Recruiting more FGS represents a means to diversify campuses (Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund, & Parente, 2001). FGCS represent an underrepresented group of students, which colleges struggle to recruit and graduate (Knaggs et al., 2015; Stuber, 2011; Tate et al., 2015). Colleges committed to diversifying their campuses should include strategies to increase the number of FGCS that are recruited and who graduate. FGCS represent a group of students on college campuses which might be overlooked because they look like the majority. Many potential FGCS make career decisions that do not include attending college. Encouraging FGCS to share perspectives could add to what educators know about FGCS' struggles, increase FGS recruitment, and increase open-mindedness as others learn about their experiences.

Relevance. Educators have learned a considerable amount of information concerning the barriers FGS face when considering college. However, less specific information is known about the experiences and strategies used to recruit and successfully transition and retain qualified FGCS. Performing more studies focused on successful FGCS procollege behaviors and experiences could help educators improve strategy alignment and support provided to FGCS.

Significance of the study. The researcher designed this study to learn more about the experiences FGCS say helped them overcome FGS issues. FGCS require significant academic and social support throughout the college process (Contreras, 2011). To overcome FGS issues, many FGCS require educators who possess an enhanced understanding of the benefits associated

with selecting and attending the right college (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). Examining FGCS' issues and developing specific strategies to address these issues could positively affect how educators prepare FGCS to approach college selection and persist in college. Learning about FGCS success could improve the strategies educators facilitate to challenge students academically, develop social capital, and prepare students to enter a career. As Rouse and Kemple (2009) suggested, successful access to college depends on the educator's understanding of the FGS': socio-economic background;

- level of cultural or social capital;
- level of family resources;
- financial assets; and
- high school student preparation.

Developing this study helped the researcher recognize the role precollege behaviors and proactive preparation played in a student's uninterrupted transition into college.

Definition of Terms

Access: The pathways that provide students with the means to enter college (Sanchez et al., 2016).

Caucasian: The term used in the U.S. to describe white people (Moses, 2017, para. 1).

Class: A term used to categorize people within a society who possess the same socioeconomic status (Stephens, Hamdani, & Desdin, 2014)

Global competitiveness: A U.S. agenda centered around closing the global achievement gap between U.S. students and students in other developed countries (West, 2012).

Global workforce: A pool of international workers (West, 2012).

College Graduation: The persistence to the completion of or attainment of a college degree which is often beyond the comprehension FGS attainment due to inexperience and support (Knaggs et al., 2015).

Grit: A set of behaviors comprised of motivation, self-control, a positive mindset, and goal-directedness, and researchers have realized that each of these qualities can be influential in student success (Reed & Jeremiah, 2017, p. 253).

Minority group: Minority groups are individually separated into groups based on numbers, that is, compared with the majority (Luciak, 2004, p. 360).

Phenomenology: Creswell (2013) a phenomenological study “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57).

Socioeconomic background: This is the combination of “the economic and sociological measure of an individual’s or family’s economic and social position concerning others, based on income, education, and occupation” (Knaggs et al., 2015, p. 9).

Underrepresented population: A subset of individuals represented in numbers that are disproportionately low compared to other populations (Sanchez et al., 2016).

Whiteness: A skin color intimately related to the social construction of the concept of race (Applebaum, 2016, p. 3).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions. A college education offers FGCS the opportunity to improve their academic and social standing. FGCS represent a group of students whose successful graduation from college helps the U.S. remain globally competitive. The researcher performed this study to learn more about FGCS experiences. The researcher believed that using a phenomenological study would help her learn more about the experiences FGCS had that improved their college

outcomes. To produce a meaningful study, Creswell (2013) noted that the researcher performing qualitative research must follow strict protocol during interviews to produce valid data about the selected phenomenon. Therefore, as suggested, the researcher designed a study following the protocol suggested to learn about the lived experiences of the FGCS participants. The researcher designed a data collection tool to investigate FGCS, recruited FGCS, and bracketed bias. The researcher reduced the data collected during interviews, and coded the data. The coding process revealed 10 themes related to the FGCS' experiences. The findings from this study could be used to assist families, educators, and FGCS overcome issues related to college issues. Performing additional phenomenological research based on the experiences of FGCS could improve the support educators provide to FGCS.

Delimitations. This study included 10 FGCS who participated in a prescreening survey to determine eligibility for participation and a semistructured interview. The participants who qualified for this study were Caucasian, and their parents did not attend college. Although the FGS classification includes minority groups, individuals from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, and Caucasians, this research focused on the experiences of FGCS. Educators know less about the experiences that influence FGCS' academic decisions to attend college. As the FGCS population continues to grow, educators will require specific strategies to support FGCS' success. Researchers can use qualitative studies to examine and report FGCS' experiences. Utilizing findings from studies about FGCS can help educators understand FGCS' issues. The findings can help educators provide specific support to FGCS.

Limitations. This study included 10 FGCS who participated in a prescreening survey to determine eligibility for participation and a semistructured interview. Increasing a study's validity requires bracketing bias, recruiting participants who have experienced the phenomenon, and

carefully following the interview protocol. Polit and Beck (2010) suggested that participants self-reports might report what they believe the researcher wants rather than reporting actual experiences. Polit and Beck (2010) stressed that qualitative studies provide researchers with an understanding of human experiences and therefore increase knowledge about the select phenomenon. Although qualitative findings do not readily generalize to others, the findings will provide invaluable insight into the phenomenon the research is investigating.

Summary: Chapter 1

FGCS recruitment should be viewed with a growth mindset. Educators strive to support their students' educational aspirations. Research provides educators with the effective means to access strategies to help more students achieve their academic aspirations.

Supporting students' academic aspirations benefit students, fulfill employers' requirements, and support the mission of the college. As the number of skilled jobs continues to increase in the U.S., employers now need colleges to produce more skilled workers to help them remain globally competitive. The FGCS population represents a solution to meeting the increasing need for skilled college graduates. FGCS comprise a subgroup of FGS whose college outcomes could be improved if more substantial research was performed to learn about their successful access and graduation from college.

FGCS experience substantial issues associated with attending and graduating from college, but they persist nonetheless. Reed and Jeremiah (2017) found that some individuals possess characteristics or grit that help them persist and overcome difficult situations. FGCS who succeed in college possess grit. Grit includes strong morals that make them indispensable leaders in the work setting. Additional research that examines FGCS' grit could be used to explain FGCS determination, the source of their resilience, and their development of social capital. Bers

and Schuetz (2014) suggested increasing financial support, providing networking opportunities, building social capital, and working to engage students in campus activities, and free housing gives FGCS positive life-changing experiences while reducing FGCS stress makes campus life more enjoyable. Likewise, The Best Colleges (2017) found the following:

higher education institutions that promote the recruitment and retention of FGS will benefit not only the students but the nation as a whole by helping create a more educated workforce and increasing the nation's population of adults with degrees. (The Best College, 2017, para. 48)

Sharing this research with educators could improve how educators support subsequent FGCS and improve their chances to graduate from college. Critical research has been performed to improve the strategies educators use to support FGS. Conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the experiences FGCS say motivated them to prepare for and persist in college will improve how educators support FGCS interested in attending college. Chapter 2 provides the rationale for the continued study to assess the needs of FGCS.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This study also describes how FGCS, a subgroup of FGS, overcome barriers which allowed them to experience college success. Failing to recruit and graduate talented students from high school into college represents a loss to the U.S.'s workforce and restricts the U.S.'s position in the global workforce (West, 2012). Colleges concerned with improving and implementing useful FGCS recruitment and graduation strategies must perform their due diligence to find and apply research that reflects their commitment to increase the enrollment and retention of FGCS. As the demand for skilled college graduates increases but the number of students graduating from college remains static, employers fear there will be a shortage of skilled workers to compete in the global job market. Increasing the number of skilled college graduates increases a country's global competitiveness (West, 2012). The researcher's literature review demonstrates that educators recognize FGS face a significant amount of challenges that must be addressed to increase the number of FGCS graduating from college.

The concept of graduating from college is a milestone many FGCS fail to conceptualize without the support of others. FGCS could successfully assimilate to college life when they have the right support (Falcon, 2015). FGCS achieve this by overcoming typical first-year college stress and additional first-generation barriers to success including, family issues, financial concerns, social confusions, and cultural issues. Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, and Abel (2013) suggested that despite the barriers FGCS have, these students, similar to other college students, are motivated to seek autonomy, have a desire to learn, have the competence to earn good grades, and seek a better life beyond college. Performing research to develop an improved understanding of

FGCS' experiences could provide educators with practical strategies to support FGCS and their decision to attend college.

Problem statement. The term Caucasian describes an individual with fair skin. Applebaum (2016) referred to Caucasians as privileged; therefore, Applebaum suggested FGCS unlike other FGS, do not require additional support to prepare and encourage persistence in college. Systems in the U.S. are designed to specifically benefit Caucasians over other groups (Applebaum, 2016). FGCS, similar to other members of the FGS classification are labeled first-generation because their parents did not attend college, and they are therefore less likely to attend college or succeed in the college they attend. Race does not guarantee FGCS success in college. FGCS, similar to other students, must manage many challenges while attending college. Although an abundance of research has been performed about FGS, the majority of the research has not examined or explained the adversity or support experienced explicitly by FGCS. This study provides educators with examples of what motivated some FGCS to prepare for and persist in college.

A student's decision to attend college profoundly affects career opportunities and social status. Many FGCS refrain from attending college after graduating from high school because they often experience perceived insurmountable barriers when they consider attending college (Ward et al., 2012). Although the research has provided educators with valuable strategies to support FGS' education aspirations, the strategies do not address the diversity that exists among the FGS classification. Terenzini et al., (1996) noted that attending college delivers life-changing opportunities to students regardless of their background. A four-year college education imparts marketable skills, an academic degree, professional certifications, improved social capital, and increases earning potential.

Each year the number of jobs requiring qualified college graduates increases, but many FGS forego college; therefore, the number of college graduates remains static (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Accordingly, employers are concerned there will be a shortage of skilled college graduates to fill positions within their organization. The governing body of research about FGS focuses on strategies used to prepare, recruit, transition, and retain minority groups or students from a low-socioeconomic background into college. The research has examined FGS as a collective group and has not examined the experiences FGCS encounter when deciding to attend or forego college. Nonetheless, FGCS represent a distinct group of students whose early experiences, motivations, and successes likely vary significantly as a subgroup of FGS. Examining what compels and motivates FGCS to seek higher education despite their obstacles can help educators improve the strategies used to prepare, recruit, transition, and retain students. This study demonstrated that educators could do more to support students interested in graduating from college and keep the U.S. globally competitive.

Organization. The researcher organized the study into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study's focus and summarizes the rationale and importance of studying FGCS experiences. Chapter 2, the literature review, builds a foundation based on research for understanding why FGS struggle to prepare for and complete college. The literature review includes a conceptual framework, a review of literature related to FGS, describes methodological issues, synthesizes research findings, critiques the research, and summarizes the literature review. Chapter 3 provides a blueprint for replicating the methods involved in this study. Chapter 3 further delineates the limitations of the study, provides validation, explains ethical considerations, and concludes with a summary. Chapter 4 describes the participants recruited for the study and discusses the findings from the analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter 5 explains the importance of

focusing on the subgroups that comprise FGS and provides an account of 10 FGCS' experiences explicitly as they completed college. Chapter 5 reports the importance, meanings, and significance of the research findings, including recommendations for future studies, and summarizes the study.

Conceptual Framework

The challenges associated with FGS experiences may seem insurmountable but the benefits often outweigh the risks. Attending college provides a platform to change a family's opportunities for future successes by breaking the cycle of generational poverty or non-college attendance. The researcher is an early educator who works in a Title I school. The Title I designation indicates the students come from a low socioeconomic background. Many of these students have the potential to become FGS. The students' college aspirations will likely be unrealized due to a lack of parental support associated with a lack of college knowledge. Early educators equipped with strategies designed to support FGS academic focus could likewise support college aspirations.

Attending college provides transformative opportunities to minorities, students from a low socioeconomic background, or FGS. Oldfield (2012) found most people who have not attended college are unaware of their limits culturally, collaboratively, and societally. The individual's experiences are affected by limits poverty, education, and social capital. College attendance enhances how individuals spend their time, their transforms problem solving ability, and opportunities for perspective sharing among diverse population (Cotton, Nash, & Kneale, 2017; Luzeckyj et al., 2017). More FGS need to attend college to become engage in multi-cultural experiences, to increase holistic thinking, and to prevent shortages of skilled workers in the global workforce.

FGCS represent a segment of FGS students. Although members of this group often forgo college, few studies have been conducted to understand why they do not attend and what can be done to increase FGCS graduation rates. Applebaum (2016) suggested that “Whiteness involves a culturally, socially, politically, and institutionally produced and reproduced systems of institutional processes and individual practices that benefit white people while simultaneously marginalizing others” (para. 12). The researcher’s study disputes Applebaum’s claim that suggested FGCS, unlike other FGS, can manage issues that require extensive support among other FGS. FGCS require limited support to have their needs met in college (Applebaum, 2016). Attending college is lifechanging for the individual and their family and represents a solution to increasing the number of skilled workers in the U.S. to maintain a globally competitive workforce.

Utilizing the perspective of a professional educator, the researcher advocates for increased research to improve the repertoire of strategies used to recruit and support the academic and social growth of FCS entering college. Thus far, the majority of the research associated with FGS has focused on FGS holistically or minority groups within this group. Building a more comprehensive body of research related to the specific needs of FGCS could improve how FGCS are recruited and supported throughout their college experience and increase the number of FGCS graduating from college.

The present study used Kellner’s critical theory of education to advocate for the need to innovate the strategies used to graduate FGCS from college. As early as 1989 Kellner began developing research which suggested the critical need for education reform. Kellner (2010) noted an abundance of current and relevant research existed to improve how education was delivered to increase student engagement but not utilized. Through his research Kellner (2010) advocated utilizing innovative research to improve approaches used to educate and encourage students to

complete college. Kellner (2010) determined that relevant research is often discarded rather than applied to the issues students experience as they attempt to prepare for and persist in college.

Providing educators with access to a repertoire of relevant theories and strategies to enhance student engagement and college preparation and increase the effectiveness educators have with students and alleviate many issues students may experience when considering college.

Educators are reflective practitioners whose mission reflects a desire to shape their students' success. Kellner (2010) proposed "developing a critical theory of education for democratizing and reconstructing education to meet the challenges of a global and technological society." Creating equitable and relevant learning opportunities would positively impact most students' perception of why school is important (Kellner, 2010). Access to sound research and opportunities to implement strategies will decrease inequality in education and prepare students to actualize their personal, and academic goals, and to meet global challenges as members of a skilled workforce. FGCS represent a group of students who face significant issues related to college attendance. Increasing and applying relevant research focused on identifying and supporting FGCS could improve college outcomes for more FGCS.

Review of the Research and Methodological Literature

In the past, researchers have focused on the needs of FGS as a single group. Upon closer examination it is evident that the FGS group is comprised of varied groups with unique needs. Learning more about the specific issues affecting the groups which comprise FGS could improve college attainment among FGS. The following section uses previous research to demonstrate the need to learn more about the challenges FGCS experience and help more FGCS attend college. The studies underscore the need for more research to clarify the needs FGCS have throughout

their academic career. Understanding FGCS issues can provide educators with strategies to improve FGCS preparation and support college aspirations. Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2008) performed in-depth phenomenological interviews to improve educators' understanding of FGS and Tinto's theory about attrition. The theory includes separation, transition, and incorporation. Although Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice's (2008) study was well-developed, the finite number of participants' responses limited the study's scope. The results uncovered strategies to improve student experience through improved faculty engagement. This study indicated a need to seamlessly streamline the college process from application to articulation and the years between acceptance to completion.

One example of a frustration underprepared FGCS may experience is limited course articulation. FGCS students are often unaware of the importance of declaring a major or how to effectively schedule classes to complete a course of study once they enter college. Failing to strategically plan increases the time to and the expense of completing college. Karp and Hughes (2008) used a qualitative study to learn more about how to develop a model for guiding policies to provide middle- and low-achieving students with means to obtain college credit. After participating in the credits, the study examined whether the incentives increased students' motivation to attend and persist in college. The five programs examined by researchers shared no consistency in student admission but demonstrated that students admitted into college required additional support throughout their time there. The study demonstrated that motivation is a crucial component in determining whether students choose to attend college. Understanding that academic and social struggles occur in college can motivate students to persist.

FGCS deciding to forgo their college education due to admission frustration often find themselves in jobs which offer limited opportunities for growth. Havlik et al. (2017) noted that

more jobs are becoming available that require college skills. Many qualified FGS can fill those positions when they earn their college degrees. Havlik et al. (2017) combined an interpretive phenomenological method with an interpretive perspective to study first-generation African American students holistically and also used an intersectional perspective to understand the sociocultural aspects of these students because of their tendency to be marginalized in a setting where these students would be a minority group in a campus setting. Eighteen, full-time students from various cultures and various college students as well as nine retention specialists participated in focus groups. Havlik et al. (2017) reported that students in minority groups felt like outsiders on campus because they were socioeconomically disadvantaged and could not afford to participate in campus-sponsored activities and learning activities with peers and felt other students did not have empathy for their situation. Likewise, Oldfield (2012) asserted that disadvantaged students felt isolated because of financial and social struggles. They did not have the social capital and monetary support that would have made their college experiences more manageable. Havlik et al. (2017) found that the participants demonstrated resilience, stamina, and determination as they struggled to accomplish their academic goals because they relied on inner strength. Replication of this study at new colleges could improve varied cultural perspectives.

Culture. While performing this literature review, the researcher found studies that demonstrated bias within the college setting that potentially, negatively affect FGS. Ladson-Billings (1998) performed a metaanalysis of research concerning inequality in education. Ladson-Billings (1998) argued that little is done to promote equality when providing African-Americans with education equality. Although Ladson-Billings (1998) agreed that middle and upper classes have an advantage over African-American and Caucasians students in the lower classes, Ladson-Billings (1998) failed to acknowledge that every underrepresented student deserves an

opportunity to attend college. Applebaum (2016) likewise performed a metaanalysis of research that suggested, Caucasians, unlike other groups, require no assistance to become successful in college. Unlike Ladson-Billings (1998), and Applebaum (2016), Stuber (2011) performed a qualitative study with 28 FGCS that focused on understanding Caucasian what leads to their persistence in college. Stuber (2011) reported:FGCS like other FGS often experienced a sense of otherness in social situations and found college life exhausting as they straddled two worlds. FGCS are expected to behave a certain way at home and then master the often, different college culture and behave like educated college students. (p. 218)

Like Stuber, Bushey-Miller (2016) and Wang and Nuru (2017) found FGS struggled to with their decision to retain their identity in the college setting and worried about how their family and community would perceive them as they returned home for visits or to establish themselves as adults within the community. FGCS seldom possess the skills necessary to connect with peers and adults who could help them make decisions on campus and feared their community would reject them because of their success.

College provides academic and social opportunities to FGCS. Social networking and building social capital provide students with substantial benefits. FGS did not participate in social networking because they lived off campus or worked off campus to afford tuition (Corwin & Cintron, 2011). The inability to become immersed in campus life caused FGS to experience a disconnect with peers and college life. Corwin and Cintron (2011) argued that unless educators understand methods to support FGCS' needs while they attend college, FGCS' will find themselves unable to take advantage the benefits college offers related to self-actualization, social capital development and networking. Programs and activities intended to peak student curiosity frequently have limited participation among students unless they are encouraged to participate in

activities which can help students connect to campus life. FGCS in particular may struggle with decision making when they must rely on campus connection rather than family when making decisions.

Family. Family support levels and experiences are at the forefront of FGS risk for failure or success in college. Gofen (2009) performed a qualitative study to determine the extent of impact the student's family had on their decision to attend college. The study demonstrated that the family's attitude toward education impacted how the FGS prepared for college, whether they attended college, and how well they adjusted there (Gofen, 2009). The participants' responses were overwhelmingly positive concerning their family's college aspirations. The participants in this study shared their family's positive attitudes about education, respect for teachers, and involvement in their education. The participants in this study respected and trusted their parents' advice although their parents had not attended college. Similarly, the parents had faith that their children possessed the ability to graduate from college. The results indicated that students perform better in college when parents have faith in their ability (Gofen, 2009). Many families are unaware of the role they play in their child's success or how to support college aspirations.

The following study by Orbe demonstrated that FGS may have negative perceptions about the experiences within their family as they prepare to attend college. Orbe (2004), similar to Gofen (2009), performed a qualitative study to find out more about the FGS identity. Orbe (2004) interviewed African American FGS using broad, loosely structured interview questions. The participants in study by Orbe (2004) reported fewer positive comments about early experiences, parental support, and influences. As mentioned in previous studies the participants felt isolated on campus. The participants attributed their otherness to being an FGS, receiving less

parental support, and access to less money. The participants did not believe they were capable of college completion and resented the limited support their parents provided.

FGS could develop a negative self-image due to numerous negative interactions with their family. Many FGS struggle with their identity, that is, how they perceived themselves and how others felt about them (Orbe, 2004). Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, and Leonard (2006) conducted a qualitative study and determined that family support affected FGS' college aspirations and attainment. Inkelas et al. (2006) noted that students must be responsible for their education. Students who claim ownership of their learning can control their academic successes and failures by learning to regulate their responsibilities and prioritize tasks to meet assignment deadlines.

The previous studies indicated that the families of FGS' have mixed positions on how to prepare their child for college. FGS parents have not attended college and therefore have a limited frame regarding college processes and systems. Knowledgeable educators can serve as liaisons who provide families with access to information that would enable the families to support their child's educational aspirations.

Preparation. Many FGCS struggle with preparing for college. After completing many significant quantitative studies that developed educators' awareness of FGS issues, Tinto (2007) found that qualitative methods greatly improved the understanding of individuals who comprise FGS. Understanding the members' needs provides the educator with relevant material to develop support strategies. Fostering early achievement, positive peer, and teacher interactions, promoting increased intervention programs, and supporting the application process impacts the preparation, recruitment, and retention of students from a low socioeconomic background positively (Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman, & Vignoles, 2013; Terenzini et al., 1996; Tinto, 2007). Strategic support is possible when parents and educators employ a reliance on continual

change and growth mindset which includes implementing strategies designed to improve college outcomes.

Providing relevant professional development to educators can shape how educators interact with students. Havlik et al., (2017) developed a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis to study FGS' experiences and determine if retention specialists know about the issues FGS experience on campus. Havlik et al., (2017) asked 20 FGS to describe their experiences while preparing for and attending college. They also asked nine college retention specialists to reflect on the responses provided by the FGS to improve the services offered to struggling students. FGS can be successful in college, but they must receive mentoring that builds the student's confidence while gradually releasing responsibilities to the student.

Educators are often unaware of the impact they have to support or diminish college aspirations. King (2016) limited his study to find methods to improve African-American students' college experiences. King's (2016) findings could apply to the needs of FGCS. King (2016) suggested that "educators have become accomplices to racial and social injustice that limits African-American students' potential." King (2016), similar to Havlik et al. (2017), suggested that educators should proactively engage African-American students in college preparation rather than making their decisions for them (King, 2016). Likewise, FGCS share similar experiences because they come to college with a mindset which puts them at a disadvantage when interacting with professors and college staff.

The researcher teaches in a Title I designated school. Many of the students the researcher teaches are potential FGS. In Title I, the State Department of Education describes the Title I designation as follows:

1. Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.) is amended to read as follows: TITLE I—IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF THE DISADVANTAGED
2. meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance;
3. closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers. (State Department of Education, n.d., para. 1, 3, 4)

The significance of a Title I designation is in the admission that children living in poverty might not receive the support for school readiness or assistance regarding how to make sound academic choices throughout the education pipeline and about college. The majority of the students attending Title I schools could potentially become FGS.

Children living in poverty frequently enter kindergarten without adequate readiness and social skills, as indicated by preentrance assessments and subsequent behavioral issues within the classroom. Many students attending Title I schools successfully assimilate proactive educational behaviors. Learning proactive behaviors helps students overcome early barriers to academic success. However, the academic skills FGS learn before entering college often do not generalize to the college setting. The research performed by Tinto (2007), Gofen (2009), and Terenzini et al., (1996) indicated that students the majority of FGS including FGCS enter college disadvantaged because of early academic issues related to college preparation, the absence of social capital, and

family support. Research that has focused on FGCS' success could provide educators with the tools they need to assist other FGCS struggling to transition from high school to college. Relaying information about successful FGCS experiences college attainment to struggling FGCS could improve college outcomes. Subsequent students could vicariously learn to apply proactive academic behaviors and skills to improve college preparation throughout the education pipeline and persist into college.

Working together to help students meet their college aspirations is often critical to self-esteem, and academic and social goals, community improvement. Knaggs et al. (2015) designed the following study to learn about participants' successful college preparation and the effects of participating in a college prep program. Knaggs et al. (2015) noted that, in the future, there could be a considerable shortage of qualified applicants for middle-income jobs requiring some college experience unless more FGS graduate from college. Recruiting and graduating more underrepresented students represents a probable solution to this issue.

However, recruiting FGS represents a challenge because many FGS are underprepared. These students do not meet the minimum requirements for college recruitment. Knaggs et al. (2015) developed a quasi-experimental model to examine the effectiveness of GEAR UP, a college prep program that targets students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and minority groups. GEAR UP is designed to improve student awareness of college importance and urgency of proactively preparing for college. Knaggs et al. (2015) asked the participants currently participating in GEAR UP those participants who were graduating from college about their experiences. These programs created self-efficacy among the students and supported their aspirations to attend college (Knaggs et al., 2015). Understanding more about how these programs support

and motivate students could be the basis for increasing the number of federally funded programs and improve program implementation.

Therefore, continued research, program development and application of research findings would provide educators with a varied selection of strategies to support preparation goals. Likewise, Sanchez et al., (2016) examined the impact of the GEAR UP program related to the recruitment and outcome of underrepresented students who participated in this program. This quantitative study focused on the performance and persistence of students who participated in the GEAR UP program. Sanchez et al. (2016) indicated that the quantitative data supported the importance of at-risk students participating in college preparation programs because they prepare students to succeed by offering rigorous preparation for college. Contreras (2011) likewise examined the effectiveness of precollege preparation programs similar to GEAR UP and found precollege talent identification programs provided critical support to underrepresented students from secondary education through college degree attainment.

Retention. Students require strategies to create successful experiences as they negotiate their college environment. Many respondents' felt colleges failed to provide sufficient support beyond the first year of college. Rather than teaching support skills, some colleges reduced the students' responsibilities. FGS' do not have social capital; therefore, they have limited interactions with faculty and staff regarding fulfilling their needs. College faculty recognize FGS' struggle to complete college but might not possess the training needed to support FGS' success. FGS may be unaware of the support they need or be unable to communicate specific needs required for success. Terenzini et al. (1996) examined FGS college issues. Using a longitudinal, mixed-method longitudinal study, Terenzini et al. answered the following questions: Do FGS' precollege characteristics differ from those of "traditional" (i.e., not first-generation) students?

2. Do FGS' experiences during the first year of college differ from those of traditional students?

3. What are the consequences of these different characteristics and experiences? (p. 1)

Based on the responses, Terenzini et al. (1996), found that FGS represent a group of students marginally served by existing programs and parental involvement, and FGS education is limited because they do not have useful college knowledge that they can share with their children. The research by revealed good grades predicted the student possessed factors that would improve their success in college.

Interest in research about FGS and FGS issues began over 50 years ago. As Tinto (2007) developed research to support his theory of attrition, he noticed that students who did not assimilate into college social systems left college. Likewise, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found students who integrated personal characteristics into college and connect to faculty informally and on an academic level become more vested in completing college. The study questions addressed FGS' struggles, useful supports, and advantages found within college systems that improved college outcomes and suggested techniques to improve FGS' experiences while attending college. Emerging themes from the interviews included addressing FGS experiencing otherness, being an outsider, being misunderstood, not receiving the funds to live on campus, and the inability to build supportive relationships, which lead to loneliness.

Retaining FGS represents a change for educators due to academic, social, and financial issues. Havlik et al., (2017) and Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2007) performed qualitative studies to find strategies to improve retention or success in college. Havlik et al., (2017) analyzed and interpreted the FGS' responses from his study and theorized that specific FGS experiences encouraged them to remain persistent despite struggles. Retention specialists suggested it

would be useful for colleges to establish inclusion policies, train college educators to increase inclusive practices within the classroom, and require support services to offer appropriate interventions to improve FGS college experiences (Havlik et al., 2017). Understanding what encourages FGS to persist in college could provide educators with more strategies they can use when persuading FGS to remain in college.

Evidence suggests that FGS believe educators can provide support to FGS which can encourage them to persist in college. Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2007) interviewed four first-generation, working-class, white, male college freshmen. These students were asked to discuss their perceptions of faculty support and incorporate questions designed to elicit responses about the type and level of support the students felt they were receiving from their college faculty and staff at the university. Two other researchers have provided triangulation when coding and revealing cogent themes within this study. First-generation, working-class students, believed that effective retention programs should be continual and provided beyond the transition to fully integrate students into college life (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007). Positive college faculty relationships are critical to student retention (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007; Havlik et al., 2017; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975). Tinto (1975) suggested college faculty could improve student retention by meeting with students to discuss college experiences, encouraging students to join preprofessional and social clubs, developing relationships with mentors, and faculty involvement. Therefore, Falcon (2015) recommended that more professional development or involvement in studies could improve educators' understanding of first-generation, working-class students and their role in promoting student retention. Educators, like the students they provide support to need to receive support to improve their role as a college facilitator.

Regardless of their background to be successful in college, FGCS require extensive support to be successfully navigate college systems which are confusing and expensive. Stuber (2011) designed her study to learn more about first-generation, Caucasian, working-class students' college experiences, and how their experiences were affected regarding academic and social adjustment. FGCS often struggle to assimilate the college culture due to a range of competing issues. The study performed by Stuber (2011) included 28 in-depth interviews with first-generation, Caucasian, working-class students. Using an intersectional approach, Stuber (2011) explored factors that first-generation Caucasian, working-class students said promoted resilience, social persistence, and academic persistence in college despite perceived adversity. Stuber (2011) found the effects of dominance and marginalization by race and class to be an asset and liability regarding persistence in first- and second-generation college students. Stuber's (2011) questions included the following: "How do first-generation, white, working-class students understand their college experiences, especially concerning their academic and social adjustment? What factors seem to help or hinder adjustment into college life?" (p. 117). To answer these questions, Stuber (2011) used a random and purposive sampling method to generate a diverse sample of 100 Caucasian, first-generation, working-class first-year students and sophomores from a small private college and a large public university. Stuber disqualified 72 respondents; therefore, the sample included 28 qualified participants age 19–21 years and included 15 females and 13 males. Stuber (2017) reported that she used a qualitative approach that included open-ended questions and interviews lasting 90 minutes. Stuber (2017) recorded, transcribed, and coded transcripts from Caucasian, first-generation, working-class first-year on campus experiences. The results included the following:

Nearly half had positive remarks, a quarter found college experiences debilitating; another quarter said manageability made them persist, and family stability helped them continue. However, differences like not affording to stay on campus was a setback and finances constrained their acceptability or made them feel left out. The students were determined to do well. Some students said they found a niche and felt accepted did fine.

Others need to figure out where they belong. (Stuber, 2017, pp. 131–132)

Based on the statistical significance of the disparity among students, educators should increase their efforts to implement policies to mitigate the issue limiting first- and second-generation students' persistence. The heavy emphasis on attrition masks the extent that such students continue to be present on college campuses. The results demonstrated the importance of using the appropriate research tool to improve data collection and analyze results (Stuber, 2015). Moreover, race did not protect the participants from struggles they experienced while attending college. The participants relied on various support systems and grit when possible to relieve college stress.

Although researchers have explained the struggles of FGS, a limited amount of research has explicitly addressed issues regarding FGCS. Using a qualitative approach, Moschetti and Hudley (2015) performed their study based on the social capital theory to explore FGCS' perception of social relationships with college professionals designated to improve their success in community college and their peers. FGCS often have limited experience with college and campus matters because their families have not attended college. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) wanted to learn more about how a student's perception of college relationships impacted their college experience. Moschetti and Hudley (2017) included the following open-ended interview questions:

1. How do White working-class, first-generation, community college students manage academic and social integration, and what institutional or interpersonal agents do they identify as assisting them in this process?
2. What could have helped you more during your first year of college?
3. What did students perceive to be the most difficult aspects of their transition?
4. What, if anything, has made your time at college more difficult?
5. What factors did they identify as being the most valuable in making a successful transition?
6. What factors do you think will be the most valuable in attaining your goals? (p. 240)

The interviews were conducted using the grounded theory and the responses were transcribed and coded. The responses provided researchers with an improved understanding of how students managed unfamiliar demands and developed support networks to improve their functioning in an unusual setting. The emerging themes indicated that FGS often felt like they had no one but themselves to rely on and that they had no real support on campus.

Furthermore, the participants believed the necessity to work and live off campus created a sense of otherness because they did not have the time to join in campus activities and clubs that would have allowed them to build social capital. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) added that responses to this study indicated that students suggested that enhanced social support services, college transition resources, opportunities to build relationships, and increased financial assistance could have improved FGCS' college outcomes and experiences. Confusing and competing demands prevented these FGS from connecting to college life.

Essentials for college success. The above studies indicated that students need to connect to college life and build relationships to have a satisfying college experience. The following

studies demonstrated students require support throughout the college process. Sanchez et al. (2016) submitted a quantitative study that examined the effectiveness of participating in college readiness programs to proactively improve readiness, thereby increasing college recruitment, retention, and graduation rates. Sanchez et al. (2016) also examined data collected by the State Department of Education and compared the data from students participating in 298 GEAR UP GEAR UP programs to the data of 1,841 non-participant first-year students to determine if the program impacted the recruitment and retention of students. The GEAR UP programs mainly serve minorities and at-risk students, and the program's success dictates funding. Identifying more potential FGCS and encouraging them to participate in programs such as GEAR UP could improve FGCS preparation for college and social capital and increase the number of FGCS recruited into colleges.

Some federally funded programs meet their mission to support and prepare participants to achieve their college aspirations. The success of federally funded college programs can be measured by the increasing number of participants who enter college confident and well-prepared to self-advocate as they navigate college systems and campus life. Collecting data about the nuances of successful programs helps administration continue offering high-quality support to its participants. Sanchez et al. (2016) suggested researchers should utilize additional measures to evaluate the program's effectiveness, including the collection of data about gender, race-ethnicity, Pell Grant status, physical location, and parents' education level as well as participants' high school academic performance determined by grade point average (GPA), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and American College Testing (ACT). The results indicated that participants in GEAR UP programs were likely African-American or Hispanic, received Pell Grants, had less parental education, and lived at home during college. Sanchez et al. (2016) noted that although

GEAR UP participants were less prepared for college, they successfully persisted in college once admitted into college. Sanchez et al. (2016), like Moschetti & Hudley (2015), found students reported that living on campus and employment on campus, improved results for integration into campus life and improved social capital because students had more time to participate in campus activities. Competing interests limit time FGS can spend on campus. Opportunities to spend additional time on campus provided FGS with opportunities to become more vested in the college experiences

FGCS want experience success in college but they often find themselves underprepared to meet the challenges to succeed in college. Ishitani (2006), unlike (Bers & Schuetz, 2014; Engle et al., 2006), used a quantitative study that examined the coded characteristics and behaviors of over 11,000 FGS and tracked their college retention rates. Ishitani (2006) relied on statistical data from his research which indicated students receiving continual support were more likely to continue attending college and, using mixed methods, looked for reasons FGS might not graduate from college. Bers & Schuetz (2014) discovered that the majority of FGS completed their freshman year of college but did not earn a degree. Using transcript analysis, Bers & Schuetz (2014) discovered FGS who do not declare a major or failed to meet with their advisors chose courses that did not meet the requirements to complete a major. The inability to commit to a program and participate in advisement added cost and time to degree completion. FGS in this study reported they left college for a variety of reasons beyond those revealed in the transcript analysis.

The participants admitted they regretted their decision to leave college and would encourage other students to graduate from college as quickly as possible. Weaknesses in the study in-

cluded that the study was a self-reported student data report (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). Completing the first year of college alone did not guarantee positive college outcomes. Competing obligations or interests may interfere with a student's subsequent attendance. Providing additional guidance beyond the first year of college improves student retention and graduation outcomes (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). Implementing this study in more colleges and garnering similar results could build a consensus that FGS require support when making decisions about declaring a major and choosing a course that will lead to college completion.

FGCS students often find themselves unable to solve problems on their own and do not know who or what services are available to support their college success. Engle et al. (2016), like Bers & Schuetz (2014), performed a mixed methods study that failed to attract a significant number of targeted participants. Nonetheless, the responses from the participants indicated college retention improved when school communities demonstrated understanding of FGS struggles and improved communication channels to answers to their questions. Engle et al. (2006) identified several reasons FGS might put college aside. Many participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the college process from preparation to graduation. This suggests educators should emphasize providing adequate support services or connecting students to mentors who understand their background and are prepared to guide students through college decisions and processes beyond the first year to positively affect FGC college outcomes.

Review of Methodological Issues

Although educators are aware of issues FGCS experience, limited research is performed to understand their issues. Tinto (1975) suggested the "methodology should always follow from decisions concerning conceptual frameworks" (p. 120). Regardless of the methods researchers employ to study FGS, Pascarella et al. (2004) argued that historically FGS studies focused on

three broad themes: preparation, recruitment, and retention. Therefore, FGS offer researchers a broad topic for study.

Essentials for college success. Regardless of the students' background experiences, utilizing specific supports based on actual successful experiences increases positive college outcomes. Qualitative methods are uniquely suited to gain information that can be used to develop effective strategies for preparing, transitioning, recruiting, and retaining minorities as well as students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and FGS into college. Tinto (1975) discovered through his early quantitative research provided a basis for identifying issues about FGS, minorities, and nontraditional students. According to Tinto (2007), research should be longitudinal, goal oriented, and grounded to yield quality and relevant findings. Administrators who utilize recommendations based on findings from quality research to shape policies and strategies improve recruitment and retention and find ways to extend support throughout the duration of the students' college experience have better college outcomes. Tinto (2007) posited that although populations and practices varied significantly among colleges, student engagement influenced student retention and decreased stress experienced by students. Teachers interact with students daily, and therefore, higher learning institutions should provide the teaching faculty with professional development designed to develop student engagement within the classroom.

Characteristics for success. The best opportunity for educators to increase and enhance FGCS' college experiences requires educator's participation in professional development directly related to specific issue experienced by FGCS. It is imperative for mentors within colleges to understand the unique needs of FGCS (Stuber, 2011). By practicing advocacy, developing inquisitiveness, and promoting communication through our ethical behavior, we can learn from

FGCS and provide support, incentives, and strategies that will encourage future students to persist. Working closely researchers and educators can improve strategies to improve FGCS preparation, recruitment, transition, and retention. Stuber (2011) used precise questioning in her study to learn about FGS' feelings. She discovered that one FGS felt isolated because she believed no one else was experiencing financial problems. Once the FGS realized that others were also facing a similar issue, she became more involved in campus activities and formed supportive relationships with peers. Sharing the FGS experiences and feelings with other students could improve self-perception by reducing isolation. There is limited research pertaining to FGCS experiences that encouraged them to continue their education beyond high school. Additional qualitative data collected during interviewing and coding subsequent responses from FGCS could yield significant findings about the development, recruitment, support, retention, and graduation of FGCS and lead to additional areas for study. The researcher suggests that the literature review provides a strong rationale to develop research on understanding how strategies encouraging more FGCS to attend college can be implemented. Which early experiences affected the recruitment of FGCS? How did being a FGCS influence the decision to be recruited? Which sociocultural experiences affected the education decisions made by FGCS and what kind of support could be offered to FGCS who experience isolation and fail to participate in social networking in college.

Transitioning. FGCS are a segment of FGS. The FGS classification includes minorities, students whose parents did not graduate from college, and students with varied socioeconomic backgrounds (Engle et al., 2006). FGS receive little support as they make decisions about higher learning and prepare to transition into college due to their family's limited knowledge of college systems (Engle et al., 2006). However, participation in precollege programs helps improve preparation, recruitment, transition, retention, and graduation outcomes. Ross and Carnes

(n.d.) emphasized the importance of preparing and recruiting students and suggested that colleges must act deliberately to develop effective recruitment methods that focus on a range of student demographics. Martinez and Klopott (2005) suggested that multiple pathways to graduation exist. However, rigorous preparation programs often lead to more frustrations than successes. Therefore, further study is needed to understand other FGS recruitment and retention measures and causes for attrition. Although educators have learned a considerable amount about barriers FGS face when considering college, less specific information is known about recruiting, transitioning, and retaining qualified FGCS. Researchers need to perform additional studies to help colleges understand what motivates FGCS procollege behaviors.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Graduating from college changes people's lives regardless of their race or socioeconomic background. Shatkin (2015) referred to college as an education milestone that requires significant adjustment but provides avenues to improve one's economic status. Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice (2008) and Tinto (2007) demonstrated that FGCS thrive while attending higher learning institutions under the appropriate circumstances. Increasing FGCS graduation rates improves the odds of providing a sufficient number of well-educated employees in the workforce that would keep the U. S. globally competitive.

Judging by the volume of research available and still being produced about FGS, these issues remain an area of considerable interest to educators and a subject that significantly impacts education. Pascarella et al. (2004) found that the majority of studies about FGS dealt with three broad topics:

- the demographics of FGS as compared to other college students in terms of high school preparation, the college choice process, and college expectations

- describing and understanding the transition from high school to postsecondary education
- examining persistence in college and degree attainment. (p. 250)

Over the years, researchers have studied FGS using a variety of methods to understand a variety of questions involving FGS. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggested that regardless of the instrument used in a study, the researcher's results will lack validity and reliability unless the design accurately captures what the researcher wants to investigate. Pascarella (2006) claimed that more studies are needed to examine underrepresented groups and increase educators' understanding of what works to increase college enrollment from the participants' perspective. Therefore, the focus, when considering which method or design to use, must be on using a sound research design to perform a credible and useful study.

Well-designed qualitative studies that help researchers examine problems and develop specific strategies to support FGCS can positively affect FGCS' choices concerning college. Stuber (2011) conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews to find out how FGCS perceived their college experiences. Like other researchers, Stuber found that several of her subjects failed to attend interview sessions. This caused Stuber to change her data collection methods. Nonetheless, Stuber (2011) captured essential results from her study. Some students experienced isolation. Transforming feelings of isolation into motivation and purpose helped students become well-adjusted. Students used additional strategies to avoid isolation. Networking provides students with benefits such as perspectives sharing, opportunities for advice, and improves coping skills (Stuber, 2011). Living on campus and having supportive families contributed to favorable college outcomes. Stuber (2011) demonstrated that FGS could overcome feelings of isolation once they realize others are in similar situations. Therefore, providing students

support services which support empowerment and connections to other students with similar experiences can make a difference in how FGCS solve issues. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) suggested FGCS experience all of the same stress their middle and upper-income class peer do but are further stressed by working, receiving inadequate financial assistance, and navigating ethnicity and gender issues. Learning more about FGCS issues can help educators and support staff improve strategies they use acclimate students to college life.

Protective factors. Regardless of a student's race, socioeconomic background, or culture, through the efforts of many researchers, colleges understand obstacles that often confound and limit FGS' aspirations to enter higher learning. Many FGS are unaware of the significance that college plays in improving financial and social status. Opidee (2015) suggested that educators can influence students by enumerating college benefits and making students informed consumers who can advocate for themselves while learning to navigate the financial, academic, and social systems of campus life. Negative episodes could be overcome by FGS actively participating in solutions to their problems or developing self-efficacy.

Many FGCS do not have role models to provide them with information about how to be successful in college. Zimmerman (2014) agreed that "vulnerable youth should be connected to positive role models who can mentor the development of self-esteem and self-efficacy." (p. 381). Developing protective factors such as supportive friendships or participation in campus life courses and campus activities builds student successes and confidence (Gofen, 2009). Zimmerman (2014) emphasized that extending resiliency shields FGCS from many stressors that could produce adverse outcomes and makes FGCS less vulnerable to stressful situations. Students possessing resilience develop compensatory and coping skills that improve college outcomes. Tran-

sitioning into college from high school represents the apex of a student's first 12 years of education. Karp and Hughes (2008) noted that students have varied needs. A successful transition into college requires support systems aligned to meet the needs of the student. Family, educators, counselors, college readiness programs, or friends contribute to the successful transition into college and beyond. Disadvantage and talent are not limited to a single race or gender.

Regardless of students' varied histories and agendas for the future, attending college provides opportunities to develop professional skills, work on career goals, and build social status via social networking. FGCS form a group of students who possess increased risk factors for failure due to a limited frame of reference about what to expect from college (Pascarella, 2006; Terenzini et al., 1996; Tinto, 2007). Moschetti & Hudley (2015) added that FGCS experience all of the same stress as their middle and upper-income class peers do but are further stressed by working, receiving inadequate financial assistance, and navigating ethnicity and gender issues that play roles in how an is FGCS recruited and persists in college. Therefore, examining issues and developing specific strategies to support FGCS can positively affect the choices FGCS make about college.

Graduating more people from college is life changing for the individual and beneficial to communities as well. Falcon (2014), like West (2012), found that increasing the number of college-educated graduates benefits society by producing candidates qualified to fill skilled positions and decreasing the number of people receiving public assistance. With the passing years, researchers have contributed findings that support the increased likelihood of success for students who graduate college. One example of this finding is the number of minorities graduating from college. Likewise, increasing research channeled to the needs of FGCS could increase the number of FGCS who graduate from college. The successful preparation, transition, retention,

and graduation of students from college requires extensive support, and more research is needed to elucidate issues concerning the preparation, recruitment, transitioning, and retention of FGCS (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Socioeconomic status, social and cultural capital, family influences, financial concerns, high school preparation, and access to higher education all impact an education system's ability to prepare, recruit, transition, and retain FGCS.

Actively engaging FGCS in their college success can provide improved college outcomes. Engle et al. (2006) argued that additional external forces including families, educators, counselors, and recruiters influence positive college outcomes in preparing, recruiting, transitioning, and retaining FGS. Zimmerman (2013) suggested resilience factors stemming from internal promotive factors, such as self-efficacy and self-esteem, along with resources such as parental support, mentors, and youth programs improved the likelihood that FGCS will decide to attend and persist in college. However, stakeholders require guidance to improve their understanding of what it takes to motivate and help FGCS experience success and duplicate these practices among subsequent FGS.

Family. Although parents of FGS offer limited insight into college systems, their input influences their child's success in college. Gofen (2009) discovered that family support impacts FGS success. FGS parents often lack college experiences and are frequently unable to advise their child about the process of preparing, transitioning to, and remaining in college (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Tinto, 2007). Therefore, these students face significant issues with regard to exploring options, selecting, and attending a college.

A family's attitude about education and their behavior toward a child who is considering college can impact the preparedness for college, whether he or she even goes to college, and which college he or she goes to. Falcon (2015) noted that although parents want their child to go

to college, their actions may fail to support their child's aspirations. The child experiences academic success in college when the actions of the family match the academic goals they set. Gofen (2009) found that in families where the children are the center of attention, the children valued education. Students from child-centered families reported positive attitudes toward education. The parents' attitudes and clear desire for their child to succeed engendered social capital and self-efficacy in the child. FGS represent a population of students who face challenges that frequently weaken their decision to attend college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Havlik et al. (2017) described FGS as those who are the first from their family to enter higher education. These students experience difficult issues because their families offer little support mentally, academically, financially, or socially Havlik et al. (2017). Experiencing family problems, financial concerns, or social issues can diminish FGCS' opportunity for success in college (Gofen, 2009). Havlik et al. (2017) also observed that the lack of family support, social capital, and cultural capital negatively impact college outcomes. Although the FGS offered limited experiential advice about college, the FGS experienced success in college due to the protective factors instilled by their family's values.

Preparing for college is often confusing to individuals who lack a working knowledge of college systems. Gofen (2009) found that first-generation families lack the social capital to prepare for and transition their child into college. Therefore, Zimmerman (2013) suggested that FGS must develop resilience and other protective factors to navigate college life successfully. FGCS who were able to increase resilience, overcame typical issues faced by college students. Rosenbaum (2011) proposed that college for all inherently promotes a collaborative network of peers, resilience, increases networking, and social capital. FGS who refrain from participation in

social networking experienced isolation. Zimmerman (2013) advocated placing more responsibility on educators and parents to work with students to support resiliency. Encouraging FGS to actively participate in activities connected with college and social awareness would increase social capital and build resilience. Providing FGS with additional financial knowledge, more academic preparedness, additional counseling services, increased community involvement, and equitable education policies would improve college outcomes. Zimmerman (2013) asserted that educators must work together as assets to improve student outcomes; however, he placed an over-reliance on educators and omitted the vital role families play in preparing their child for college.

If the burden of educating children lies overwhelmingly within the education pipeline or in the public education setting, we can expect failure. Redford, Johnson, and Honnold (2009) insisted that families, despite possible shortfalls, must be viewed as a critical factor when preparing children for college. Many parents are unaware of the support and nurturing a child requires from prekindergarten through the college pipeline. Therefore, encouraging parents to partner with educators collaboratively to prepare their child for college could improve college outcomes.

Many students entering college do not understand the commitment college completion requires. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) suggested that working-class FGS who manage to surmount barriers and matriculate to college may be at risk for academic problems or failure because they never had models for success in college. Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman, and Vignoles (2013) reported that low-income FGS drop out of postsecondary institutions at higher rates than their middle and upper-class peers whose family members graduated from higher education. Building a foundation for lifelong learning and career success starts as soon as a student enters formal education. While, Rouse and Kemple (2009) argued that the priority in education should be to not only prevent students from dropping out but include, prescriptive

transitioning programs, engaging instructional strategies, and a relevant and rigorous upgraded curriculum that prepares students for higher learning.

Cultural issues. As suggested above, parents can offer support to a child who wants to attend college, but well-informed and well-trained educators pose an additional connection for preparing students to enroll and persist in college. Mentors within the college setting need to understand the unique needs of FGCS who decide to attend college (Stuber, 2011). Promoting productive communication among students and educators can supply support, incentives, and strategies that encourage present and future students to persist. Ng, Shirley, Willis, Lewis, and Lincoln (2015) suggested FGCS must use strategies to overcome deficits in the cultural capital. FGCS fail to develop beneficial relationships due to commitments beyond the campus or lack of experience. Furthermore, Ng et al. (2015) reported that FGS rarely participated in campus activities because they failed to recognize the value in building social capital and networking among peers. The collaborative efforts of researchers to develop strategies and educators' commitment to implement strategies yields improved preparation, recruitment, transition, and retention for FGS.

Impoverished FGCS find their race becomes a liability when it comes to accessing programs intended to support students from a low socioeconomic background. Hartigan (1999), as cited by Stuber (2011), argued that being a poor Caucasian often carries a stigma and leaves members of this group marginalized by other social classes. Stuber (2011) found that limited research addresses the needs of FGCS who belong to the privileged race but could become marginalized due to their social class. Based on the HB 2722 Advisory Committee's (2008) report, it is evident that some researchers still believe only select groups of underrepresented populations require support to graduate from college successfully. The Committee raised awareness about

achievement gaps facing African-American students without citing the importance of improving outcomes for all individuals living in poverty.

Financial. Many FGS are financially disadvantaged. The cost of attending college might cause the student to feel guilty as impoverished families struggle to finance their child's college aspirations (London, 1989). FGS may be unaware of the benefits of applying for federal aid and earning scholarships. Many FGCS are unaware of existing options that could reduce the time and expense of attending college. Productive alternatives to part-time work to reduce college expenses includes completing courses that transfer as college credits, participating in early college programs, and participating in on campus work–study opportunities. Successful completion in dual enrollment and advanced placement courses before attending college reduces the overall cost of attending college. Similarly, during college, FGS work instead of joining college-sponsored events and clubs and avoid networking because they are unaware of the advantages of networking and feel pressure to work to fund college.

Funding for research and program to support students' success is often limited. Therefore, Dervarics (2011) advocated writing a bill to improve the preparation and funding of underrepresented students. The proposed bill would include programs to enhance preparation, develop social capital, alleviate financial stress, and positively support underrepresented students in continuing their formal education. Ndiaye and Wolfe (2016) suggested that providing financial advisement and participating in early college opportunities would improve how FGCS approached time and financial management. Learning about budgeting time and college funding would be empowering and save students time and money.

Preparation. Educators have a profound influence on the success of students who will one day make decisions about college. Limited research exists to motivate FGCS engagement as

they prepare for college. Traditional recruitment practices rarely entice FGCS; therefore, alternative recruitment incentives must be designed to motivate positive responses from this unique population of students (Karp & Hughes, 2008). FGCS possess the potential to help the U.S. remain competitive in the global market and obtain careers using skills gained from participating in college (West, 2012). Purpose Built Communities (2017) is a community-based organization whose goal is to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Members of Purpose Built Communities (2017) noted that improving the education pipeline would provide the best option to decrease the disparity among classes. Improvements in education require increasing community involvement; therefore, stakeholders, including families and students, must work collaboratively to improve curriculum alignment and student preparation for a seamless transition into college.

Recruitment and interest without action do not mitigate the lack of preparation or the specific support FGS require. Programs designed to increase the number of students prepared for college represents a positive step toward building college interest in students who lack the understanding of the benefits college provides (Miretzky, Chennault, & Fraynd, 2016). The State Department of Education (2016) reported that 3.9 million undergraduates dropped out of college in 2016. Although FGS experiences present barriers to college success, FGS display elevated academic performance and persistence and required specific bridging programs that focus on time management and financial support to ensure their success (Terenzini et al., 1996). The staggering number of students dropping out of colleges indicates more needs to be done to encourage retention over attrition.

Researchers have developed limited research designed to understand the experiences that influenced the success experienced by FGCS in college. Researchers discovered sound advice and strategies families could utilize to prepare and motivate their child to succeed in college.

Challenges exist in college that may make retention difficult for FGCS. Providing continual support through advisement programs, incentives, and postcollege career mentoring provide incentives for some FGCS to persist (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Through continued research, educators are discovering what motivates FGS to enter college. Successful access depends upon multiple areas and primarily focuses on the socioeconomic background, cultural or social capital, family resources, financial assets, and high school organization. Access to higher education focuses on the successful transition of high school students into college (Smith & Johnson, 2003). Smith and Johnson (2003) noted that successful student behaviors include frequently conferencing with their guidance counselor about college preparations and understanding the college transition process. Precollege student behaviors and preparation play an integral role in a student's seamless transition into college.

The responsibility of supporting students and the goals for students in college extends beyond recruitment. Many FGS enroll in less rigorous courses in high school (Knaggs et al., 2015). Baum et al. (2013) noted that many FGS lack the substantial preparation required to perform and acclimate to college socially and academically. Self-determination, resilience, and persistence play a vital role in assuring that FGS remain in their chosen college. Therefore, educators and families must prepare students to become good citizens and encourage students to participate in academically challenging courses. Educators prepared to implement best practices and policies can often provide the support which impacts FGCS entering and persisting in college.

FGCS represent a population of students who are sometimes called invisible because their physical features resemble the majority of students on campus. Contreras (2011) found FGS participate on the education pipeline from early education through secondary education and

may do well. The FGS fail to matriculate into higher education or are unsuccessful once they transition into higher education. FGS arrive on campus with multiple barriers that confound their efforts to assimilate into college campus life. A student's educational experiences before entering college impact postsecondary education choices. Contreras (2011) attributed minority underachievement to limited early academic support and therefore FGS do not understand the commitment required to complete assignments and participate in a college classroom. Entering the workforce after secondary education represents a viable career choice; however, educators and employers at-large know that failing to recruit FGS diminishes the number of skilled workers entering the workforce making the U.S. less competitive in the global market. Rouse and Kemple (2009) pointed out that the increasing demand for skilled workers requires more students to be adequately prepared to transition to college experiences that form barriers to a shared language and culture. The need exists to provide FGS with strategies which will assure their success and contribute to a more educated population.

Transitioning. Transitioning from home to campus life can be a daunting experience under the best circumstances. Students must be academically and mentally prepared to attend college. In addition to facing the typical preparation, transition, and college life issues FGCS experiences difficulties particular to their population. Educators who use research-based strategies make a difference in the success FGCS experience as they negotiate the education pipeline. Educators needed to learn about and promote strategies to encourage students can use to make a successful transition into college (Engle et al., 2006). Educators believed FGS know less about college, are unaware of the commitment required to be successful in college and receive limited family support (Terenzini et al., 1996). This college knowledge deficit increased FGS risk for failure while attending college when compared to their traditional peers.

FGCS experience everyday anxieties, feelings of dislocations, and the difficulties of any other college students along with the additional stress specific to FGS. FGS undergo enormous transformations as they negotiate the difficult transition into the college campus culture (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008). Cotton, Nash, and Kneale, (2016) stressed the importance of incorporating transition programs to help students assimilate college culture and persist to graduation. Successful transition programs involve cultural awareness, social awareness, academic support, and student involvement in campus activities. Cotton et al. (2016) noted that this first year is critical for incorporating students into college life and assures their persistence to graduation. FGS utilizing skills developed in support programs find trusted mentors who can guide decisions and provide pertinent information.

Developing additional strategies and protective factors could improve FGCS college outcomes. Multiple strategies currently exist to overcome FGS barriers to college success. Cotton et al., (2016) advocated developing precollege awareness and providing financial and social support as critical steps to seamless transition thereby equipping students with increased positive outcomes including persistence. Contreras (2011) proposed that colleges can develop campus-wide initiatives to recruit, retain, and graduate FGS. Students attending college require additional support from peers, faculty, and staff to avoid frustrations.

Retention. Educators and parents expect students to enter some form of college, training, or profession after high school completion. However, many FGS regardless of their socioeconomic background or race forego college and pursue other interests or careers requiring limited specialized skills. Educators must address the issue FGS' unwillingness to enter college presents if recruiters intend to recruit and graduate more FGS into and from college. Successfully

transition from high school to college represents a critical step toward independence and establishes a foundation for a student's future degree attainment, career options, and social mobility (Contreras, 2011). Building an awareness that college adjustment is difficult but possible with support can help students become more receptive to seeking campus resources to resolve issues. Colleges concede the importance of recruiting and retaining FGS (Zhang, Gossett, Simpson, & Davis, 2017). FGS successes increase an organization's success; therefore, more researchers are focusing on methods to prepare and motivate FGS to enter college. These studies focus on minorities and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Educators need more research that describes and explains the experiences that influenced FGCS to attend college, which could improve the strategies educators use to prepare, recruit, and retain FGCS in college. Recruitment by a college that matches a student's aspirations dramatically influences a FGCS success in college; however, many FGCS give little attention to the benefits each college offers (The Best Colleges, 2017). Social networking with peers and knowledgeable staff can help FGCS become better informed when choosing a college. Interest surveys and more information about colleges would help FGCS improve college selection. The Best Colleges (2017) reported FGS rarely pursue degrees from their first-choice learning institution nor do they decide to enter top-rated higher learning institutions due to their low self-esteem or confidence in their credentials and lack of preparation. Choosing the right college increases the retention of FGS (The Best Colleges, 2017). FGS need more information about finding a college that supports their social and academic development and career goals (College Board, 2018). Furthermore, educators can encourage students to access college websites to learn about college choices and what to expect from their chosen college. The right college represents a protective factor that yields improved recruitment, retention, and graduation rates.

In addition to providing an education, educators need to guide their students to success by building their awareness of what to expect in college. The successful recruitment of FGCS should include emotional and resilience counseling to provides an additional protective factor for the transition into college (Baum et al., 2013). Students must understand performance expectations and own the responsibility of acquiring a college degree throughout their education from preschool through college.

However, despite the advances made by researchers to understand FGCS, limited research exists to explain what can be done to improve FGCS retention. Once in college, the need for support continues. Gannon and Maher (2012) noted that educators must continue providing relevant learning opportunities to increase student engagement and motivation to remain in college. Martinez and Klopott (2005) offered the following suggestions to encourage student recruitment strategies: improve transition by developing engagement, provide financial incentives such as free housing, offer social opportunities to acclimate to campus life, and provide rigorous course expectations. Furthermore, colleges that integrate remediation within the core, credited classes reduce the expense of paying for additional courses without extending the students' time to graduation (Cotton et al., 2016). Similarly, Sanchez et al. (2016) and Miretzky et al. (2013) reported that investing in programs to bolster their diverse populations' success pays off with increased preparedness, recruitment, and success in college. Applying varied solution could bolster most students' success.

Although students attending college have demanding schedules, FGS need time to assimilate and acclimate to campus life. Positive college experiences affect many FGCS' decision to continue their education once recruited. Contreras (2011) suggested that students who develop ownership of their campus community, by engaging in extracurricular events, organizing study

groups, facilitating support services, and participating in advisement, benefit by developing cultural capital through networking with peers or working with mentors; therefore, they feel more desire to complete their college program. Colleges invested in improving best practices in high-need areas of social interaction develop best practices for supporting FGCS in feeling more included in the school community.

Communities can work collaboratively to apply strategies which promote success among students. According to Tinto (1975), “the lack of integration into the social system of the college will lead to low commitment to that social system and will increase the probability that individuals will decide to leave college and pursue alternative activities” (p. 92). Community outreach programs are vital to the recruitment of FGCS students. Community outreach programs not only prepare students for college but also increase diversity within the college (Smith & Johnson, 2003). Furthermore, Wells et al. (2016) indicated that:

diversity fosters inclusiveness and equitability within the higher learning setting and that interactions among diverse student populations improve learning outcomes, intellectual engagement, motivation, citizenship, cultural engagement, critical thinking, problem-solving, and writing skills. (p. 1–2)

Fostering collaborative conversations across the student body could help educators reach a consensus on the best ways to integrate support services.

Preparation, recruitment, and retention are interconnected segments of the college experience. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) argued that FGS struggle when transitioning into higher education and that FGS need help to develop protective factors that would alleviate a significant amount of stress. Cotton et al. (2016) pointed out that strengthening resilience early on improves college experiences and outcomes in college.

More FGS need to find mentors who can develop protective factors when exploring college decisions. Cotton et al. (2016) suggested that resilience involves forging relationships with competent adults who serve as models for future networking and the bridge required to help students successfully cope with transitioning into higher education. According to Tinto (2007), college faculty require more professional development to learn about improving their rapport with FGS. Sanchez et al. (2016) noted that programs specifically designed to address perceived and actual deficits could successfully transition and acclimate FGCS into the higher education setting. Obtaining adequate financial assistance, rigorous preparation, knowledgeable mentors, and trusted peers mitigated the feelings of otherness FGCS experience and made the transition into college more manageable (Havlik et al., 2017). Admittedly, retention strategies do not need to be elaborate or expensive; however, they must exist within and beyond the classroom to successfully integrate students into college life and retain students.

FGS may be interested in attending college but are often unaware of how to facilitate resources to support the applying, transitioning, and persisting in college. FGS receive little support as they make decisions about higher learning and prepare to transition into college due to their family's limited knowledge of college systems (Engle et al., 2006). Participation in precollege programs represents a proactive investment in self-efficacy development. Colleges can likewise invest in taking steps that individualize how they approach FGCS recruitment. Ross and Carnes (n.d.) emphasized the importance of preparing and recruiting students and suggested that colleges must act deliberately to develop effective recruitment methods that focus on a range of student demographics. Providing initial support often builds self-efficacy which improves preparation, recruitment, transitioning, retention, and graduation outcomes.

Multiple pathways to graduation exist. Encouraging FGS to prepare for college by participating in rigorous course preparation programs led to more frustrations than successes (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). Further study is needed to understand other FGS recruitment and retention measures and causes for attrition. Studies performed by Pascarella et al. (2004) likewise demonstrated that FGS possess distinct disadvantages to understanding college expectations, college choices, and transitioning to college. Additional studies would provide administrators with strategies that would improve college recruitment and college outcomes among FGS.

An early educator's perspective. The researcher performing this research serves as an educator in an elementary school serving students with high poverty rates. The researcher shared many of these FGCS experiences and now recognizes factors that contributed to her academic success and disagrees with the Engle et al. (2006) research that indicated that teachers fail to prepare minority students for higher education and therefore these students lacked "college" knowledge. The researcher currently works with a second-grade team. The educators work hard to prepare the students for college and consistently provide high-quality learning opportunities to students. Many parents do not understand their role in providing support for their child's academic success regardless of attending college.

FGCS early academic experiences and family dynamics do impact the decision to attend college. Preparing students for higher education is not the sole responsibility of early and secondary educators and guidance counselors. Nonetheless, the educators persevere to and through improving the students' social and economic conditions. Precollege programs enhance student understanding of college expectations, pressures, and systems. The researcher works with students who may one day become FGS. A growing number of students from low socioeconomic

backgrounds come to school lacking readiness skills. Although the parents want the best education possible for their children, many families are incapable of providing their children with opportunities to engage in learning at home due to financial stress.

Furthermore, remaining competitive in the global job market will require more skilled workers to enter the U.S. workforce. Havlik et al. (2017) demonstrated there is an increasing demand for skilled college students in the workforce, and unless colleges respond by recruiting more FGS, these jobs will remain unfilled. Havlik et al. (2017) developed an intersectional qualitative research design to raise educators' awareness of the issues FGS experience. Havlik et al. (2017) noted that their study examined FGS holistically to determine strategies to improve college outcomes rather than focusing on individual groups.

Conducting a phenomenological study focusing on the experiences FGCS say motivated them throughout their education and encouraged them to prepare for and persist in college could improve an educator's understanding of why some FGCS successfully prepared for and persisted in college. This improved knowledge of FGCS motivations and needs will change how the education pipeline prepares FGCS for college, facilitates their transition into college, and supports FGCS financial needs when in college. Learning about FGCS proactive behaviors and persistence can give educators strategies to support future FGCS decisions to attend college.

Critique of Previous Findings

This literature review describes important themes and seminal research about FGS and FGCS. Early results derived from studies performed by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicated that FGS share characteristics that affect success in college, including family support, academic difficulties, limited guidance, social systems, and interactions. Therefore, as researchers continue to develop research that focuses on the importance of understanding the issues facing

FGS face educators can now understand why students struggle to remain actively engaged in college once they are recruited and more importantly how to reengage students who may not persist in college (Corwin & Citron, 2011; Havlik et al., 2017; Stuber, 2011; Terenzini et al., 1996; Tinto, 1993). The existing research indicated that protective factors introduced at any point in a student's life profoundly affect the recruitment and the outcomes of underrepresented students who choose to enter college after high school.

The findings from these studies underscored the necessity to perform additional research focused on specific strategies to improve outcomes for the groups that comprise FGS. The majority of the studies were well-developed qualitatively, included several quantitative studies, and included two meta-analyses of prior research. Although the studies produced beneficial results, Pascarella (2006) argued that the current trends in research often lack the precise, substantiated results longitudinal research yields over time. Most research about FGS focuses on FGS' success in college or what can be done to improve college outcomes. The researcher found limited studies that describe the experiences FGCS say prepared them for and supported them throughout college completion. The researcher posited that developing research that focused on the interventions, motivations, and strategies that encouraged and motivated FGCS to attend college could improve how educators support FGCS.

Educators need more strategies to improve outcomes for FGS. There is limited qualitative research providing details about the experiences FGCS encountered within their families, during their education, and within the community that inspired them to attend college rather than seeking employment. Interviews will provide the foundation for the development of the rich, descriptive, and collaborative narratives of the lived experiences that impacted FGCS to attend college. Giorgi (2012) suggested that devoting a few well-documented perspectives concerning a

phenomenon can make a significant impact on how people view a phenomenon. Conducting a qualitative phenomenological study will provide educators with insight into the experiences that made FGCS successful in college.

College provides FGS with prime opportunities; however, many students have pressing issues that they must overcome. Opidee (2015), like Corwin and Cintron (2011), pointed out that FGS need to build their social capital and stay positively motivated to be successful in the higher learning setting. Providing FGS with continual support once they enter college increases their chances of success. What is more, FGCS must understand they are not alone and that their experiences can be used to help other FGCS become successful—that is the crux of this researcher’s study.

Understanding that FGCS face many obstacles when entering higher education can help educators improve their planning and recruitment strategies when it comes to serving this underrepresented population of students. Although many FGS perform well during their secondary education, some FGS may experience struggles in college. Corwin and Cintron (2011) noted that students taught achievement strategies including time management and active learning were more successful in college. Students reported that making friends increased their self-efficacy and improved their overall persistence.

While colleges recognize the significant obstacles that FGS from all races and socioeconomic backgrounds face, most existing research concerning FGS pertains to minorities from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The current study provides vital information and strategies concerning the preparation, recruitment, transitioning, and retention of FGS in general. That research does not explicitly address FGCS issues. Studies designed to examine FGCS experiences would provide educators with strategies to enhance the preparation, recruitment, transitioning,

and retention of FGCS. Ng et al. (2015) likewise found that existing research describes barriers and strategies for success. Therefore, additional research needs to be performed to improve how educators provide FGCS with academic and social support when planning for college.

The methods in these studies present general strategies that support FGS who want to attend college. The studies explained relationships between student characteristics and college outcomes by examining FGS' relationships, academics, successes and roadblocks to attending college. Developing research focused on FGCS would improve the strategies available to support the preparation, recruitment, and retention of FGCS. The present study provides readers with the background necessary to understand the unique needs of FGS and support the additional needed to improve strategies to support FGCS.

College educators recognize that FGS struggle to complete college degrees. Once in college, FGS need to become involved with people who can continue to influence proactive decision-making and encourage the student to participate in positive campus experiences (Engle et al., 2006; Gofen, 2009; Opidee, 2015; Orbe, 2007; Wang & Nuru, 2017). As educators strive to increase the number of FGS recruited and graduated, researchers will likewise find it necessary to continue developing research to improve the preparation, transitioning, and retention practices utilized with FGCS. Researchers discovered certain proactive behavior improved FGS stress associated with transitioning into college.

Therefore, researchers implemented research accordingly to develop strategies to help FGCS experience more college successes. Zimmerman (2015) focused on the effects of developing the self, financial counseling, (Kuh et al., 2006) emotional counseling, and developing support programs (Gannon & Maher, 2012; Miretsky et al., 2016). Meeting goals for preparing

and providing continued support throughout college requires an advanced understanding of student need. The FGS reported stress was significantly reduced once recruited into college if they participated in preparation programs (Chowdry et al., 2013; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). The students also believed limited early in-home preparation for school added to college stress (Contreras, 2011). This can be achieved by creating and maintaining effective college preparation programs staffed with quality mentors who receive professional development (Sanchez et al., 2016). Therefore, developing research focused on learning about the experiences program participants say shored up preparation deficits could invigorate the approaches educators use to prepare students for college and support students attending college. The development of effective programs and relevant support will require educators' ability to access literature about FGCS issues and the strategies educators can use to improve preparation and access to college.

The literature review demonstrated that researchers have a considerable amount of information about the challenges FGS face. The increasing need to graduate more FGS from college justifies additional examination of FGS issues (Havlik et al., 2017; Terenzini, 2007; Tinto et al., 1996). Collecting additional data would be useful for educators who want to improve strategies to support FGCS. Researchers have analyzed the existing research to derive effective strategies to support FGS. Developing specific research to support FGS during their education career could mediate issues experienced in college and improve college outcomes. However, as Kellner (2010) suggested for change in education to occur, educators must put theory into practice. The methods section will describe in detail how the researcher collected and analyzed data to determine what supported the FGCS' success.

Family. A child leaving home to attend college deeply affects the family dynamics and causes concerns ranging from financial issues to separation anxiety and the fear of the unknown.

Wang and Nuru (2017) suggested families may feel concerned college will change their child or they will lose an integral part of their family. FGS are the first in their family to experience college since this is often financially due to the family's hard work, FGS may forget about their own needs and contributions to their success (Havlik et al., 2017 & Wang & Nuru, 2017). FGCS may experience additional stress as they make attempts to assimilate the prevailing culture into their frame of reference. These problems decreased the student's satisfaction with their college experience and decreased the time FGCS spent on campus. Therefore, students resist engaging in campus life to avoid acculturation as a protective factor or to extend loyalty to their family because their education represents sacrifices their family made for them.

Change can be terrifying; however, a satisfying career and opportunities for stability outweigh inactivity. Rice, Colbow, Gibbons, Cederberg, Sahker, William, and Wurster (2016) proposed that early educators play a critical role in mentoring families throughout the academic process, to scaffold learning paths and utilize best practices to support their child's success in education from prekindergarten through college. The opportunity to attend colleges delivers life-changing opportunities to students from all backgrounds by providing students with skilled career training and awarding academic degrees or professional certifications to students who complete a program of study (Corwin & Cintron, 2011; Opidee, 2015). FGCS and their families deserve support throughout the college process. These families need guidance from caring educators who understand the necessary steps to improve their situation. In the future, more FGCS need to graduate to fill skilled job vacancies. The majority of the existing research fails to address the needs and adversity experienced explicitly by FGCS or what more importantly motivates FGCS to persist into college despite their lack of familial support. Educators must also acknowledge the gap that exists in research concerning the preparation and retention of FGCS.

Cultural issues. The conclusions reached by these researchers could apply to the limited success experienced by FGCS. For example, less affluent students may feel concerned that the community will think they are showing off if they make education a priority. Ogbu (1995) and Tate et al. (2015) suggested that African American students fear that performing well in school could be viewed as acting white or cause them to lose their social identity. Tate et al. (2015) suggested students resist education when they feel educators prefer a culture or value education over race and culture or create a financial barrier to opportunities when money is charged to attend trips. Nonetheless, Tate et al. (2015) argued that an individual's cultural affiliation should not limit success. Completing college provides students with employment opportunities, social capital, and self-efficacy.

Some researchers would argue that the blame for limited diversity lies in recruitment practices. The responsibility and challenges lie within all facets of a student's desire, family, and education. Colleges struggle to recruit FGCS. Contreras (2011) suggested that issues perpetuated within the education pipeline can reduce potential FGS motivations and opportunities to attend college. Many educators advocate for increased training to improve their understanding of strategies to prepare, recruit, transition, and retain FGS, which would positively influence education outcomes (Moore, Slate, Edmondson, Combs, Bustamante, & Onwuegbuzie, 2010; Pascarella et al., 2004). Findings in this study possess the potential to provide educators with the strategies they require to encourage more FGCS to attend higher education.

Encouraging educators to look at need rather than race when it comes to educating students can ensure that students experience positive education outcomes. Minorities must receive compassionate guidance and specific support to experience academic success (Contreras, 2011). The researcher agrees that minorities need compassionate and specific support, but the support

should be inclusive and extended to all FGS. Early educators must understand their role in building each student's foundation for learning and additionally impress upon parents the role they play in securing their child's education success. Although Applebaum suggested some cultures resist becoming a traitor to their heritage, Baum et al (2013) demonstrated that education can improve a person's earning potential and social standing regardless of their background and therefore a represents a worthwhile endeavor.

Financial issues. FGCS make up a significant portion of low socioeconomic students who struggle to attend college. Chowdry et al. (2013) presented a cohesive and in-depth study that examined difficulties students from low socioeconomic backgrounds experience. Therefore, by using the fixed effects model, Chowdry et al. (2013) systematically examined the participation and the influence of peers and teachers within the education that demonstrated improved early preparation programs increased FGS college participation. Studies such as this reflect the need to increase support for FGCS who lack the understanding of how to prepare, apply, and plan for a degree, navigate college life, or meet college expectations by sharing their experiences with peers (Chowdry et al., 2013). Moreover, as the body of research about FGS continues to grow, educators can expand knowledge about how to apply effective social, emotional, and academic strategies to improve student outcomes. Stephens et al. (2014) suggested that in addition to improved preparation and financial support, FGCS need to know others "have their back" while they are acclimating to the rigors of college and that an all-out effort must be made to recruit, retain, and graduate students.

Learning self-advocacy helps students become more empowered to solve problems on their own. FGCS need to be aware that their status can be used to their advantage when it comes to finding financial and academic assistance while assimilating college life (Stephens et al.,

2014). FGCS need to improve compensatory strategies and learn to build social capital.

Equipped with the knowledge of how systems work, FGCS can access policies designed to improve study skills, increase financial support, develop social capital, or improve networking skills.

Recruitment. Recruitment represents a challenge to most colleges. Research theories developed by Terenzini et al. (1996) about the benefits and barriers FGS experience when deciding to attend college along with Tinto's (2006) theories about FGS college retention improved how educators support college decisions. Havlik et al.'s (2017) arguments regarding improving social and cultural capital to increase FGCS recruitment and retention in college played a vital role in bringing attention to the issues FGS face and support the researcher's position that educators need to look closer at the groups that comprise FGS. Tinto's (2007) and Havlik et al.'s (2017) structured arguments about social and cultural capital have helped colleges develop strategies that have increased FGS college recruitment and retention, but educators need ownership in developing and implementing these strategies. Educators can support FGCS engagement in education by developing compensatory education, and improving social strategies will increase FGCS' resilience during their preparation, recruitment, transition, and retention in college (Havlik et al. 2017; Terenzini et al., 1996; Tinto, 2007). Empowering FGCS to navigate the campus, academics, social life, and campus life successfully would improve college outcomes.

Transitioning. Improving student transition into college reduces stress and increases the number of students retained in college. Zhang and Smith (2011) performed a quantitative study comparing African American and Caucasian students' transition into college. The study investigated the social, academic, family, and support factors that affected the successful transition of

students into college and predicted positive college outcomes; however, the results do not delineate the impact family has on the successful transition into college. The study illuminated findings that compared Caucasian students' struggles with those of African American students. Duplicating Zhang and Smith's (2011) study on additional campuses could validate the idea that minorities and FGCS share similar issues when transitioning into college. The findings could be used to improve transition strategies used by colleges.

Educators need to learn more about the experiences which diminish a student's successful transition into college. Many factors and inequities affect students who transition into college only to discover campus knowledge stands in the way of their success (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2007). This meta-analysis examines the best research concerning recruitment, persistence, and retention but fails to make suggestions concerning how to improve strategies. Goldrick-Rab et al. (2007) provided a comprehensive approach to providing educators with overarching themes that stymie transition into college. Their analysis of other researchers' work augmented the existing body of research related to transitioning into college. Fike and Kuh (2008) performed a quantitative study that examined retention based on achieving typical milestones that included developing a strong academic foundation via successful completion of core developmental skills. Fike and Kuh (2008) admitted replication of the study at several institutions could verify results, strengthen the findings, and prove a causal relationship between preparation, parental education, and support systems. Despite some assistance, students with the greatest financial need were less likely to complete college due to insufficient financial assistance.

Attending college provides individuals with the tools needed to change and improve their life regardless of their background. Zhang et al. (2015) found that effective counseling tech-

niques could be applied to support increased student success. In this study, the counselors described the methods facilitated to support student self-efficacy throughout their college experiences systematically. Contrary to the other studies in this section, this study focused on the strategies that educators utilized to actively engage students in their decision to remain active in college. College counselors reported that students said they get better at college when they receive relevant support and guidance throughout the college experiences. Students admitted the guidance process supported proactive college decisions and helped them remain focused on completing college.

Characteristics for success. Research demonstrated certain inherent characteristics supported college success. In many instances a lack of preparation may not be the problem but that students experience otherness that undermines their success (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Ng et al., 2015; Stuber, 2011). Fitting in while attending college improves outcomes for higher education success (Ogbu, 1995). Moreover, learning study and time management skills are critical to success. FGS tend to possess a myopic view of college success. Broad goals could make staying focused and achieving goals difficult. Favorable results come from the impact of a student's motivation, ability, family support, health, and education support (Rouse & Kemple, 2009). The Best Colleges (2017) noted that the students and the community benefit when higher learning institutions provide FGS with the support, motivation, and engagement required by FGS to graduate and supply the job market with skilled workers. Families must become actively involved in helping their child navigate the college selection process. Choosing the correct college preparation courses and the correct college affects the student's success from preparation through college completion (Rosenbaum, 2011). Enrolling in high-interest challenging learning opportunities can encourage students to increase engagement in their college success Educators engaging

in best practice for recruiting talented FGCS could positively influence more FGCS' decisions to enter college but FGCS must overcome unfamiliar barriers. FGCS who decide to remain in college learn self-efficacy when immersed in unfamiliar social situations. Educational researchers have performed many studies to investigate issues that influence FGS to avoid college. This information pertains to the first-generation population in general and explicitly addresses minorities and students from a low socioeconomic background; few studies examined the experiences of FGCS. More research needs to be performed to explain why some FGCS seek higher education while others do not. Conducting research to investigate why FGCS decided to attend college, how and where they get valuable information, and what motivates FGCS to enroll in college can potentially improve motivation or prepare educators to teach FGCS about the benefits college could provide for their future.

Summary: Chapter 2

The literature review explains the obstacles facing FGS as they prepare to enroll, transition, and remain in college; however, limited research pertains to FGCS. Recruitment of FGCS into college breaks the cycle of intergenerational poverty and affects the global job market. Therefore, understanding the FGCS mindset as they prepared for college could help educators teach skills to develop resilience, and social capital as FGCS prepare for and persist in college. Smith and Johnson (2003) pointed out that as our society's demand for more skilled college graduates grows, it is imperative for colleges to graduate more FGCS. Performing more research which examines the experiences FGCS say encouraged them to prepare and persist in college could help researchers develop strategies to support FGCS college aspirations.

College educators engage with FGS on a daily basis. This engagement provides educators with the opportunity to learn about the barriers FGS experience during college preparation,

while navigating campus life, and their academics and financial struggles. Ng et al. (2015) found that the right support programs and social connections increased student academic success and resiliency which lead to college success. Learning what empowers FGCS to persist in higher education despite initial struggles can provide educators with improved strategies to use with FGCS. Therefore, how educators and colleges prepare FGCS for college is critical to the success of FGCS. The Best Colleges (2017) noted educating FGS strengthens our nation's workforce; therefore, offering programs that will improve engagement and encourage FGCS retention are critical. Enhancing recruitment methods developed from research supports starting conversations about college which could improve resiliency in FGS.

Using known strategies and updating programs and strategies utilizing recent research could significantly improve recruitment, retention, and graduation outcomes for FGCS. Research demonstrates overwhelmingly that student populations are changing rapidly and their catering to their diverse needs will provide the incentives FGCS need to enter and persist in college. Bers and Schuetz (2014) determined that higher learning institutions can provide accessible, responsive, and precise advisement concerning financial aid eligibility and courses that decrease graduation time that meets the FGCS goal to become self-sufficient and competent. Smith and Johnson (2003) found that FGCS struggled with retaining the support of essential people throughout college. Therefore, college focused on implementing methods to improve college experiences make a difference when they interact with prospective and continuing students.

Critical education theory proved that educators at each level need to stay current to provide the changing student population with strategies that will support their academic goals. Bers and Schuetz (2014) suggested increasing financial support, providing networking opportunities, building social capital, and working to engage students in campus activities and free housing

gives FGCS positive life-changing experiences while reducing FGCS stress to make campus life more enjoyable. Likewise, *The Best Colleges* (2017) found that “higher education institutions that promote the recruitment and retention of FGS will benefit not only the students but the nation as a whole by helping create a more educated workforce and increasing the nation’s population of adults with degrees” (2017, para. 48). Educators need to understand why fewer FGCS are motivated to attend college.

FGCS often lack the cultural capital needed to successfully navigate experiences in higher education; this leads to frustration and stress that is unavoidable in their surroundings when they are unaware of cultural expectations. Inkelas et al., (2007) proposed that the first generation needs support to transition into and assimilate with the campus culture to be successful. Participating in dual enrollment, living on campus, interacting with mentors, and forming relationships with peers promote successful retention (Inkelas et al., 2007). Wang, and Nuru (2016) pointed out that adequate family engagement including strong communication positively affects FGCS preparation, recruitment, transition, retention, and graduation from college and thereby builds social capital. These differences may exacerbate FGCS attempt to master their surroundings utilizing the appropriate strategies

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

One fall day the researcher attended an English Language Learner (ELL) workshop. The workshop was designed to improve the strategies educators used in the general education setting to improve ELL learning outcomes. The instructor wanted the participants in the workshop to experience the frustrations students with limited proficiency encounter in the classroom due to their language barriers. Therefore, the instructor taught a lesson in German by omitting support strategies; predictably, all teachers failed the assessment given at the end of the lesson. When the instructor re-taught the lesson using graphic organizers, labeled pictures, and focused on the essential concepts, the teachers' scores improved dramatically.

FGCS face issues similar to ELL when preparing for and persisting in college. FGCS lack college knowledge, social capital, financial, and the language inherent among families whose members have previously attended college. Therefore, when planning for college, some FGCS might feel disadvantaged (Terenzini et al., 1996; Tinto, 2007). FGCS might think they know what college is like, but they lack the experiential knowledge that could improve their college experiences if their parents attended college.

Many educators possess limited knowledge about FGCS; therefore, through no fault of their own, are unable to channel efforts toward FGCS' college preparation through the admissions process or college completion. As noted in Chapter 2 of this study, the researcher agrees with Kellner's (2010) critical education theory, which explained the capacity for education to equalize society and provide participants with strategies to improve their lives, build social capital, and train for a career. The increasing number of FGCS interested in entering college reflects the need to adopt Kellner's critical education theory.

Remaining a global economic leader depends on how well the U.S. educates its citizens. A need exists for U.S. educators to evolve their attitudes toward providing education to benefit students and to help the U.S. retain its global position as an economic leader. Therefore, educators must apply successful research strategies to prepare, recruit, and retain FGCS.

FGCS are a subgroup of FGS that might experience issues beyond the typical ones FGS face. Most of the existing research does not discuss the lived experiences which encouraged FGCS to become the first in their family to prepare for, attend, and persist in college. More importantly, some educators are unaware of the impact they could have on motivating FGCS to attend college, due to the limited resources available to educators. Crowther, Ironside, Spence, and Smythe (2016) stated:

the phenomenology method shares common understandings of experiences as explained through crafted stories that resonate with us all. The interplay between parts and the whole is as eternal as phenomena. Hermeneutic phenomenology gathers glimpses through the use of stories that coalesce into revealing new possibilities and provoking further thinking and action. (p. 24)

Therefore, the researcher utilized qualitative phenomenology to explore the experiences of FGCS to learn how educators can support and prepare FGCS for college.

In the future, a considerable shortage of qualified applicants for middle-income jobs requiring college diplomas will occur, unless more FGS decide to prepare and graduate from college (Knaggs et al., 2015; West, 2012). Presently, limited research exists that examines the experiences which influence the FGCS' decision to graduate from college. Educators could impact a student's decision concerning college but they need to be aware what strategies will support

FGCS education aspirations (Contreras, 2011). A pressing need exists for educators to understand the experiences that encouraged FGCS to overcome barriers and complete college. Increasing the number of studies to learn about FGCS experiences along the education pipeline will improve how educators' approach, support, and motivate FGCS to attend college.

Increasing qualitative studies about FGCS experiences will provide educators with opportunities to share college experiences. As noted in Chapter 2, West (2012) suggested that attracting underrepresented FGCS depicts a probable solution to the shortage of qualified workers; nevertheless, FGCS represent a recruitment challenge. Heightening educator awareness of FGCS issues can transform the educator's role from that of an outsider into the position of an advocate. Successfully graduating more FGCS strengthens the U.S.' ability to remain globally competitive. Utilizing phenomenology research methods can effectively reveal the experiences and histories about FGCS, which could improve the way educators work with and empower FGCS to manage their education beyond high school (Creswell, 2012). Educators require research that will support and be made available to guide how educators prepare families and students, and communities and employers to support education.

Research Questions

Limited research exists that catalogs the experiences FGCS say encouraged them to become successful college graduates. The knowledge acquired from investigating the experiences that persuade FGCS to go to college could be used to increase the number of FGCS attending college. Therefore, this researcher used this opportunity to investigate the experiences FGCS say helped them meet their college aspirations. Examining the experiences of FGCS could significantly improve and increase the strategies educators use to support and prepare FGCS to attend college.

Preparing for and persisting in college represents a challenge for most students, regardless of their family and academic support, or socioeconomic background. FGS have all the stress typical students have and additional issues unique to FGS. As indicated by research from Wang (2014) in Chapter 2, qualitative phenomenology methods can be used to understand what educators can do to help FGS. Identifying and analyzing FGCS experiences and behaviors could help educators replicate favorable strategies and conditions that could be used to improve the support offered to FGCS. The interview script for this research was designed to answer the following questions.

1. What perception do first-generation Caucasian students have about being more privileged than other first-generation students?
2. Which support made the most significant impact on the participant's college decisions?
3. Which challenges developed the participant's awareness of the importance of attending college?

Purpose and Design of the Study

Purpose. The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences FGCS say influenced them to attend and persist in college. Although previous research had been performed to understand the issues FGS overcome to attend college, researchers produced limited information concerning the specific experiences associated with FGCS throughout their academic career or life that led to college completion. The literature review demonstrates that the data collected by researchers such as (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Pascarella, 2006; Terenzini et al., 1996; Tinto, 2007) brought FGS issues to educator's awareness. Nonetheless, continued research needs to be carried out to learn about the groups that comprise FGS. In Chapter 2, the researcher explained

how FGCS' experiences deeply affected their college success, and further determined that issues around race and class challenged academic and social adjustment of FGCS in college (Stuber, 2011). Continuing research that examines the groups comprising FGS will improve the strategies researchers developed to prepare, recruit, and retain more FGS.

Attending secondary school does not guarantee that students innately understand the process required for college admission and success. Gorard, See, and Davies (2012) found that the U.S. provides students with a free, public education from kindergarten to secondary school; however, when the time comes for FGCS to go to college, many students fail to matriculate due to issues they deem insurmountable. Most students, regardless of their background, require extensive support to decrease the amount of stress they experience associated with preparing for and navigating college systems.

Researchers typically study FGS holistically or focus FGS research on minorities or FGS from a low socioeconomic background; therefore, few studies focus specifically on FGCS experiences. Increasing studies that reveal the issues FGCS experience along with protective factors that supported college success could help educators become sensitive to the role they play in preparing FGCS for college. The results of this study could influence the strategies educators utilize to develop, recruit, and retain FGCS in college.

Design. Deciding on a suitable research method for this study relied on understanding the intricacies of each type of research method, the researcher's questions, and the researcher's objective for the study. Creswell (2012) suggested that any research design could serve as a valid research tool, but Creswell further argued that the researcher must weigh the merits and nuances of each method to determine what method will adequately address the study's research questions. After comparing methods used to study various phenomena, for purposes of this

study it was decided that the qualitative phenomenology method to investigate the experiences that supported FGCS decision to attend college would be used.

The researcher determined that phenomenology would provide the best method to learn about the experiences FGCS face when deciding to attend college. Researchers can utilize phenomenology protocol to develop a deeper understanding of a phenomenon based on the participant's self-reports (Crowther et al., 2016). As discussed throughout Chapter 3, Crowther et al. (2016) found qualitative methods to be uniquely suited for gaining information about experiences related to any population or phenomenon. The researcher transforms mundane lived experiences into relatable stories (Creswell, 2012). Sound research needs to be applied to improve issues related to FGCS. The researcher used phenomenology to learn about experiences that helped FGCS succeed in college. Crowther et al. (2016) noted that phenomenology could be utilized to develop a deeper understanding, to connect to, or to elicit a response to the phenomena. Qualitative phenomenology can be used to record, story, and disseminate hidden, personal information about FGCS experiences and provide readers with engaging and meaningful insight into what can be done to support FGCS' decision to attend college (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative phenomenology offers a platform for participants experiencing the phenomenon to explain and provide insider feedback. The participant's responses can be utilized to improve support strategies implemented by educators when preparing and retaining FGCS. Effective education practices must be applied to promote relevant educational practices (Kellner, 2010). Performing research is not enough. Applying effective strategies based on findings from research is the educator's best chance for supporting college aspirations.

The researcher wanted to learn about experiences that encouraged FGCS to attend and persist in college. Based on the characteristics involved in performing a qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher found utilizing the phenomenological research design provided her with the means to learn more about FGCS experiences. As noted in Chapter 2, Corwin and Citron (2011) discovered that utilizing phenomenological research provided researchers with a clearer understanding of their phenomenon of interest. That awareness becomes instrumental in highlighting everyday experiences that produce stories readers use to develop a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon, and to evoke connected feelings. Crafting this study will inform educators about the importance of aligning curriculum and experiences to meet their students' educational needs, and encourage more students to attend college.

Research Population and Sampling Method

Research population. Recruiting an adequate number of participants who have experienced the phenomenon improves the reliability of the findings. According to Creswell (2012), participant selection significantly impacts the validity of one's research. For example, Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2002) limited their study to four participants; nonetheless, the participants provided data that answered the researchers' questions about the issues FGS encounter in college and indicated the importance in helping FGS connect to improve perceptions about attending college. Limiting recruitment numbers could maximize the study's effectiveness and improve the quality of the researcher's storytelling (Creswell, 2012; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Regardless of the numbers recruited for a study, the goal is to recruit the number of participants who will provide useful responses and data to meet phenomenon saturation.

The researcher limited the study to 10 FGCS who have graduated or will graduate from college. The researcher achieved gender balance by recruiting and interviewing five males and

five females. The researcher wanted to investigate the experiences of FGCS as a group, rather than compare male FGCS experiences to female FGCS experiences. The 10 FGCS participants lived in various areas local to a small city in South Carolina (SC). Although the Census Bureau (2016) found the female population in this area is 12.8% greater than the male population, Town Charts (2018) found that 7% more males than females graduated from college. The population provided an adequate pool of FGCS to participate in the researcher's study.

Sampling method. The researcher decided 10 participants would likely provide topic saturation. The researcher posted recruitment flyers in various public locations (see Appendix A) to recruit participants for this study. The flyer advised that individuals who were interested in participating in this study should contact the researcher via email or by phone.

A total of 12 participants were recruited for the study but 10 recruits participated in this study. The flyer attracted one participant. The remaining 11 participants were recruited by the first recruit and two colleagues using the snowball sampling method. The interviews occurred during South Carolina's fall hurricane season. Two of the participants dropped out of the study to meet professional obligations related to weather emergencies. These participants were replaced by two additional participants using the snowball sampling method.

As volunteers contacted the researcher, the researcher provided the prospective participants with the Demographic Screener Survey to complete (see Appendix B). The Demographic Screener Survey was used to qualify participants for the study. The participant qualifications for this study included being the first in their family to complete college and being Caucasian.

Instrumentation. A qualitative study represents an effective method will increase what is known about FGCS. The successful qualitative researcher connects to the phenomenon of interest, controls researcher bias, and adequately reflects on the meaning of the data collected to

improve the storying process (Creswell, 2013). As discussed in the literature review, Moschetti and Hudley (2015) interviewed students to find out more about FGCS issues. The results from Moschetti and Hudley (2015) indicated that the label FGS cannot be used as an umbrella term for the students who comprise FGS. Although each member's experience is unique, the outcomes from this study could be used to understand FGCS college experiences.

The researcher is the instrument through which participants communicate; therefore, the researcher made being personable and prepared to interview participants a priority (Reid et al., 2005). In this study qualitative phenomenology will be used to provide insight into the experiences FGCS claim motivated them to attend college. The researcher hopes the findings from this study will help educators replicate conditions that will support FGCS college success. The researcher scheduled semistructured interviews and used open-ended questions to encourage the participants to provide in depth responses to the interview script. Reid et al. (2005) advised that researchers should follow best practice protocol when using interviews for data collection. Advanced preparation for the interviews included:

- recruiting eligible participants;
- building rapport;
- following a procedures checklist, (see Appendix C) to stay organized; and
- utilizing a precise, piloted interview script to assure high-quality interviews and data collection.

The researcher implemented semistructured interviews to learn more about the lived experiences FGCS had before and during college, which prompted FGCS to complete college. Understandings of FGCS experiences can support the development of useful education policies and improve the guidance educators provide to FGCS and their families about college. FGCS are

unique because they belong to the FGS classification but also belong to the majority campus population. Interviews provide researchers with the opportunity to collect lived experiences associated with the phenomenon studied by the researcher (Adam & van Manen, 2006). The individual's experiences determined how she responds to life. The researcher followed suggestions by Adam and van Manen (2006) during interviews, the participants were prompted to:

- give specific examples;
- tell what happened next;
- clarify event timing;
- encourage in-depth responses; and
- describe everyday life at school and home that supported their subsequent decision to attend and persist in college.

The researcher bracketed bias during interviews by writing comments during the interviews. The researcher also interjected comments to the digital transcripts related to personal experiences that influenced personal academic success.

Interview script. For this study, the researcher developed the interview script (see Appendix D). Colleagues vetted the interview questions and determined that the questions had good flow, would encourage FGCS to divulge substantial information about being an FGCS, and discuss the specific experiences that influenced them to attend college. The feedback provided by colleagues assured the researcher that the questions were culturally sensitive, nongender biased, addressed the research questions, and would elicit in depth responses. The questions were designed to encourage FGCS to reveal experiences that convinced them that college would be worthwhile endeavor, and helped them prepare for and persist in college. The researcher decided

that the interview script would not be provided to participants before the interviews. A phenomenology-based study is intended to encourage the participants to share lived experiences rather than opinions about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The researcher believed the participant's responses would be more spontaneous, if they had not reviewed questions ahead of the interviews.

The researcher scheduled and recorded individual face-to face interviews which were audio-recorded. Throughout the interviews, the researcher wrote notes to bracket bias. Creswell (2013) suggested that note-taking helps bracket bias and prevents data that reflect researcher bias. The researcher encouraged collaborative participation from FGCS encouraging the participants to respond freely without interruptions. Rather than asking questions or adding comments that could have coached the participants' responses, the researcher wrote notes about responses and personal impressions. The researcher asked questions to add context, clarify unfamiliar terms, and to prompt the participants to deeper reflection.

Data Collection

Preparation for prospective interviews improves data collection. Giorgi (2012) warned that an underprepared interview is a disaster. Moreover, carefully reviewing all aspects of the interview process from interview script development to participant selection, and deconstruction improves interview outcomes. Giorgi (2012) stressed the importance of building rapport to improve sustained, quality data collection with participants. Detailed data collection supports valid research about the lived experiences of FGCS. Therefore, before the interviews, the researcher took steps to maximize data collection effectiveness. The researcher suggested using Google Chat to save time or to meet in public places, so that the participants would feel physically safe,

and comfortable with sharing their experiences, and to protect their confidentiality. The participants preferred face-to-face meetings in public areas over the Google Chat option.

The participants and the researcher collaborated one-on-one on three occasions. The first meeting took place during the brief prescreening qualification survey (see Appendix E). During this time, the researcher conducted the prescreening qualification survey over the phone or in person before scheduling face-to-face interviews. The prescreening qualification survey included demographic questions about race, household status, social class, and economic background to determine eligibility to participate in the study.

After completing the prescreening qualifications survey with the participants, the researcher presented the research synopsis (see Appendix F). The respondents who remained interested in participating at the conclusion of the synopsis, scheduled interview dates, times and places. The researcher assigned qualified participants a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. The researcher suggested that, for the safety of the participants and the researcher, the interviews would take place via Google Hangout. The participants preferred scheduling face-to-face interviews in public places with a relaxed atmosphere such as McDonald's, Starbucks, and at the researcher's office. One participant with a background as a pilot arranged an interview at the local airport.

Before the interviews commenced, the participants signed the informed consent agreement that informed the participants of the potential limited risks involved in the study. The researcher informed the participants that the questions could cause the participants some discomfort. The researcher informed the participants of the steps she planned to implement to protect confidentiality. The measures included:

- securing recordings and field notes in a designated protected area;

- logging off the password-protected computer when not in use;
- erasing recorded interviews after transcription; and
- shredding all transcribed and digital data three years after the study's conclusion.

Identification of Attributes

The attributes for this study included parental education level and race. The researcher informed the prospective participants that qualifications for participating in this study included coming from a home where neither parent completed college and both parents were Caucasian. The recruits acknowledged these requirements and agreed to participate in this study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher used qualitative phenomenology to learn about FGCS' lived experiences. Although significant research has been performed holistically to learn about FGS, more research needs to be developed to learn about the experiences of individual groups of students housed under the general FGS title. Data collected for this study involved:

- screening for qualified participants;
- scheduling interviews with FGCS;
- recording responses to questions designed to capture experiences that described family and community support, college preparation, and college persistence;
- coding data;
- analyzing data to develop themes; and
- storying the reduced data (van Manen, 2016).

Creswell (2013) suggested that, due to the complexity of performing a qualitative phenomenology, the researcher should limit the number of participants to improve the quality of the results.

Therefore, the researcher limited this study to 10 participants. Two additional FGCS were recruited in the event members of the study discovered they could not participate in the first two stages of the study. Engagement with the 10 participants provided phenomenon saturation and supported the validity of this study. The researcher's attention to detail and the interpretation of data using a two-step reduction, should involve bracketing preexisting assumptions to suspend bias and allow the researcher to focus on lived experiences (Adam & van Manen, 2014). Husserl, as cited by Giorgi (2012), described the process of bracketing as an internal examination of the researcher's lived experiences that occurred as the participant recalled lived experiences. During this process, the researcher took notes about reported responses. Bracketing allows the researcher time to reflect on the participants' responses in an effort to set aside biases and assumptions and analyze data with an open mind.

The participants' responses provided the bases for understanding the phenomena. As meanings were clarified, understandings evolved, and incorrect assumptions required revision. van Manen (2017) recommended that the researcher organize data in stages. In the first and second stages, interviews were transcribed, read, and reread to collect significant points and cluster related findings. During stages three and four, the researcher focused on additional clustering and coding of data into essential themes to produce concentrated themes. Finally, as van Manen (2017) suggested, the researcher used member checking and feedback to evaluate data for storying. The feedback improved the accuracy, usefulness, coherence, and the validity of the study.

Finally, in stages five and six the data was condensed into themes and the researcher began the storying process. During these phases, the researcher integrated the participants' relevant quotes into the study to answer the researcher's questions. The researcher wrote detailed

field notes to bracket interviewer bias and to capture additional impressions and behaviors witnessed during the interviews. The researcher maintained accurate data collection by self-auditing and transcribing audio-recorded interviews, and sent participants a copy of Chapter 4 so that they could provide feedback. This step provided the participants with the opportunity to participate in member checking. The input provided by the participants improved triangulation and added to the trustworthiness of the data collection methods, analysis, and results.

Coding data. Coding is an essential and time-consuming task in qualitative research that may be performed in tandem with or before analyzing data. Creswell (2012) indicated that coding the data launches the data reduction process. The accurately transcribed interviews and field notes provided the basis for organizing the data into related themes. The coding process provided the researcher with a vehicle to collect useful details from the data about the phenomenon of interest (Giorgi, 2012). Similarly, van Manen (2016) explained coding as the identification of topics, and the comparing and contrasting of issues that are developed by the researcher's interpretation of the participant's perspective of the interview questions. This measure facilitated the systematic examination of the data related to the study's research questions. Researchers should consider limiting category codes to as few as three overarching themes, to limit the scope and to improve the focus of coded categories (Creswell, 2012). Utilizing open coding, axial, and selective coding, the researcher rigorously and systematically reduced the complexity and volume of data to identify themes and make the storying process manageable.

A coding plan helps the researcher view data with a problem-solving lens. The researcher coded the interviews using the strategies suggested by Saldaña (2009): in vivo coding, narrative coding, and emotion coding. The researcher used ATLAS.TI software to expedite anal-

ysis, improve data management, facilitate data retrieval, present data more efficiently, and enhance the data outcomes (ATLAS.TI, 2018). The researcher evaluated the usefulness of using ATLAS.TI to assist with coding and decided to sort quotes under emerging themes. As discussed more broadly by Saldaña (2016), the researcher is a novice researcher who found using coding software problematic. Hard copy coding gave the researcher more control over data manipulation and theme development. Further analysis revealed 10 themes (see Appendix G) which were further narrowed to four focused themes. The researcher used coding to reduce the participants' memories or grouped epochs and added direct quotes to improve storying. Significant quotes were added to the Interview Coding Matrix (see Appendix H) and storied in Chapter 4.

The systematic coding provided the basis for comparing and contrasting differences among participants and summarized the relationships between the themes. The researcher used inductive reasoning to analyze the coded data to develop themes about:

- being Caucasian;
- academic preparation for college;
- family impressions about attending college;
- family support;
- college knowledge;
- their friends' influences; and
- college experiences.

The integration of field notes and responses to questions contributed to a well-developed storying process.

Limitations of Research Design

Although this study provided accurate and valuable insight into the lived experiences that shaped FGCS' decisions and behaviors that made college attainment possible, qualitative phenomenology can be adversely affected by researcher bias. The researcher worked diligently to bracket bias that enabled the delivery of a study that accurately described the experiences that influenced FGCS to attend college. The researcher was not a FGCS but a second-generation student. Many of the struggles that the participants experienced resounded with the researcher because she witnessed many of her father's struggles as a first-generation Caucasian non-traditional student.

The researcher wrote field notes to provide context to the how the issue could have similarly impacted her academic experiences. The researcher listened without adding personal experiences and encouraged the participants to fully explain and clarify meaning. Throughout the interviews, the researcher wrote notes describing similar personal experiences when applicable. For example, several of the participants revealed that their family provided no support beyond high school and never encouraged them to attend college. The researcher noted her family likewise believed an uninformed teenager could successfully navigate college systems without guidance. One participant admitted that he found the admission process discouraging. The researcher recalled when she felt too shy to ask how to obtain financial aid, or get assistance with choosing a major. Rather than requesting assistance from the registrar's office the participant gave up. Likewise, when the participants explained how college changed their lives, the researcher noted the profound affect earning a college degree had on her life without relaying her experiences to the participants.

The complex and lengthy data collection process used in phenomenology limited the number of participants in a study. Fewer participants can improve the quality of data coding in qualitative research but sacrifices a large sample of participants (Creswell, 2012). The researcher must remain neutral and ask non-biased questions to avoid contaminating the participants' responses. Creswell (2012) admonished that researcher-based rules profoundly influence data coding. Data reduction is a time-intensive process. Therefore, as Creswell (2012) suggested, the researcher used 10 participants to maintain the quality of transcription and reduction of data. Although the results from this study are non-transferrable, the research did provide more insight into the experiences of FGCS. The researcher did uncover additional research topics related to FGCS.

Validation

Creswell (2012) found in qualitative research, the richness of descriptions and new and engaging insights create the validity of the study. The researcher who carefully records impressions and brackets bias during interviews, transcription, and coding improves reliability. The researcher's careful attention to details during data reduction and carefully recording the steps the researcher takes also improves validity makes replication possible. Although phenomenology studies are not generalizable to a wider population, well-written methods and documented processes can be used by other researchers to reproduce the study in different settings using other participants to strengthen knowledge about a phenomenon.

The researcher increased the study's validity by engaging participants with extensive in-depth interviews to obtain rich, thick descriptions of experiences. The researcher audited record-

ings and carefully transcribed interviews to improve accuracy. The researcher also used collaborative revision and reflexivity that assured ongoing critical reflection to prevent bias. The collaborative nature of member checking strengthened the research.

The member checking phase was optional. Nonetheless, the participants were encouraged to provide feedback to increase the accuracy and validity of the study. Phenomenology is designed to capture the distinct first impressions of the participants' experiences related to the researcher's phenomenon of interest (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walters, 2016). Although member checking increases validity, it also provides participants with the opportunity to revisit responses and unintentionally provide rehearsed responses to the study. The rehearsed responses may not match the participant's initial spontaneous reactions to the interview script. Member checking disparity could require the researcher to make lengthy revisions to the research.

Credibility. Credibility is confidence in the truth of the data. The researcher achieved credibility as van Manen (2016) suggested through:

- prolonged engagement;
- rich, thick description;
- member checking;
- debriefing;
- researcher reflection; and
- employing reflexivity to strengthen the credibility and dependability of data. (p. 1214)

The researcher added rigor by accurately transcribing interviews and engaging in repeated readings of transcribed interviews. Furthermore, adhering to interview schedules and participating in well-planned discussions, increased the quality of data collected from participants. Therefore,

the researcher bracketed bias to prevent bias, accurately coded, developed themes to support accurate storytelling, and used member checking to increase credibility. Strictly adhering to the qualitative phenomenology method assured that the researcher integrated the data precisely to accurately reflect the experiences that encouraged FGCS to discuss how race affected their inclination to prepare and persist in college and divulge the role race played in their success.

The third phase of interviews involved member checking. During the member checking phase, the participants provided feedback on the accuracy of the transcribed interviews. Member checking offers an effective method to assure validity; this step can lead to awkward situations if participants disagree with findings (Creswell, 2012). Contested studies required additional revisions that could improve the story about the participants' experiences.

Dependability. The researcher carefully recorded the decisions she made regarding conceptualization, sampling procedures, data collection, data interpretation, and reporting results. Dependability shows that the data are consistent and stable based on the researcher's methods. van Manen (2016) added that member checking and feedback can be used to improve accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability (p. 1214). Ensuring dependability within this study was incumbent upon the researcher's actions.

Expected Findings

The researcher focused on Caucasian students for this study. The researcher expected this study would indicate the need to investigate other groups that comprise FGS, including students from a low socioeconomic background, African-Americans, Hispanics, and other minority groups. This would provide a more comprehensive approach to understanding the needs of FGS. It was expected that the participants would:

- explain all the ways educators influenced them to attend college; discuss the ways their high school counselors helped them find the college they wanted to attend;
- admit that their parents profoundly influenced their decision to attend college;
- admit their parents wanted to see them do better than they had in life;
- admit that they struggled to find the right people to help them through the college process; and
- admit to varied levels of family and social capital, which affected their college outcomes.

Continued research related to the individual groups that comprise FGS would improve the strategies used to recruit and retain FGS.

Ethical Issues

Statements from Concordia University's Institutional Review Board guided the development of the ethical issues section of this study. These sections included the conflict of interest statement, the researcher's position, and discussed ethical issues. The researcher maintained ethical practices throughout the study. Examples of ethical practices included:

- requiring participants to review and sign the informed consent agreement (see Appendix F);
- correctly citing seminal work;
- providing the informed consent agreement to participants; and
- discussing the informed consent agreements with participants.

The informed consent agreement alerted participants to the limited risks and benefits associated with participating in the study. The risks associated with this study were nominal and limited to the possible discomfort the participants might experience when responding to the questions about

their family and preparing for and attending college. The benefits of participating in this study included the ability to share their story to assist struggling FGCS. The researcher ethically collected data by protecting confidentiality. The researcher achieved confidentiality by:

- assigning numbers and pseudonyms to participants;
- utilizing a password-protected computer; and
- securing data in a locked room or safe when the data was not in use, to protect participant confidentiality. (Crowther et al., 2016)

Conflict of interest statement. The researcher produced this study as a novice researcher and student. The researcher did not receive payment or use coercion to secure participants. The researcher held no power over the participants. The researcher is not affiliated with any organization and did not receive payment to produce this study.

The researcher's position. This research did not involve deception. The researcher designed her study to stimulate ongoing dialog about FGS and promote utilitarian debate among educators based on topics related to issues facing FGCS. However, the researcher's statements and practices may not reflect all educators' views, they were developed in an ethical manner using sound research methods, practices, and observations. The data was collected using scholarly research practices, well-developed questions, a collaborative spirit, extensive data analysis, and well-written prose. The researcher collected and analyzed experiences related to being a FGCS. This study will help educators learn more about strategies to help FGCS prepare and complete college.

Beneficial fieldwork is the result of researchers' intention to solve problems or investigate a social issue. Well-developed, quality research is influential, extensive, and has lasting results that help others understand some phenomenon of interest. Researchers utilizing ethical practices

provide the means to develop educational research that can benefit educators and students (Crowther, 2016). Researchers have a responsibility to build community and respect among researchers and participants. Community building should support the development of a willing pool of future participants. Researchers are responsible for maintaining ethical standards in research and interacting with participants positively, to ensure an active participation pool. Respect for the participants' decision to participate in this study demonstrates the researcher's commitment to continued ethical research.

The researcher protected the data collected for this study and used the data to appropriately to learn about FGCS experiences. The researcher protected the identities of the participants and the data obtained from the participants, against exposure or misuse and used data as stated. The researcher maintained a professional and trusting working relationship with the participants. The researcher erased each audio-recorded interview after completing transcription. The researcher informed the participants that three years hence, all field notes, transcribed interviews, and digital data will be shredded manually or electronically.

Ethical issues in the study. The researcher ethically developed and recruited participants for this study. The researcher informed the participants that their race and their parents' level of education ensured their eligibility for recruitment. Signing the informed consent agreement confirmed that the participants were willing to participate and were aware of limited unforeseeable risks associated with this study. Although the participation received limited personal benefits beyond discussing issues they experienced as they prepared for college and during college, their responses could help educators improve the strategies and educational practices used to prepare, recruit, and support FGCS college aspirations.

Summary: Chapter 3

Chapter 3 described the purpose, methods, design, recruitment methods, the population, and explained the importance and rationale for the study. This study used qualitative phenomenology to learn about the experiences that encouraged FGCS to attend, persist, and succeed in college. As Crowther et al. (2016) suggested, this phenomenology study utilized open-ended questions to transform everyday lived experiences into rich, deep stories that can help people understand they are not so different from one another. The researcher scheduled the interviews, reduced data by coding, developed themes from coded the data, and storied the participants' experiences.

Chapter 3 explained the methods the researcher utilized to maintained validity and assured the ethical progression of the research. The researcher explained the nuances of the study to the participants and clarified questions. Precautions were taken to assure the participants were comfortable throughout the study. The researcher conducted interviews at McDonald's, Starbucks, a local airport, and at the researcher's office. The participants controlled their comfort level. The researcher informed the participants they could stop the interview at any time and have their data destroyed at any point. Chapter 4 discusses the results of this study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

FGS represents a multifaceted population of prospective students consisting of individuals from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, races, and abilities. The National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.) reported that nationally over 21 million students benefit from Title I funding. The Title I designation indicates that at least 40% of the students attending that school come from a low socioeconomic background. This designation makes the school eligible to receive funding that provides additional educational services to at-risk students to bridge education gaps by increasing achievement. The students attending Title I schools could become FGS despite limited guidance, financial, and academic support beyond the classroom.

The purpose of this research was to investigate whether FGCS experienced more privilege than other students as they prepared for and persisted in college. Using the phenomenological method, the researcher interviewed 10 participants to collect experiences associated with the phenomenon of being Caucasian and a FGS. The researcher developed the following questions to guide her study about FGCS.

1. What perceptions do FGCS have about being more privileged than other FGS?
2. Which support made the most significant impact on the participant's college decisions?
3. Which challenges developed the participant's awareness of the importance of attending college?

The 10 themes derived during the reading and coding of the transcripts included:

- a sense of urgency before and while attending college to achieve college aspirations;
- family influences, family issues, or a lack of family support;

- the perceived role of friends or the perception of having someone to turn to;
- the determination to achieve academic goals;
- their understanding of the role race played in completing college;
- increased career options;
- academic issues before and during college;
- financial issues; and
- their perception of career advancement as significant motivation in college completion.

Earning a college degree represents a positive change within the family dynamics and the community, due to the increased opportunities for social mobility, networking, and improves the participants' ability to attain a successful career. Jones and Workman (2016) suggested that earning a college degree plays a critical role in the development of a well-rounded citizen and career choice. Rouse and Kemple (2009) asserted that increasing the number of qualified applicants within the global job market increases the likelihood that subsequent family members will attend college. The issues could diminish the aspirations FGS created for college attainment (Havlik et al., 2017; Terenzini et al., 1996; Tinto, 2006). Early research demonstrated that FGS students face persistent social, family, self-esteem, and financial issues.

The research the researcher found concerning FGS collectively examines the issues experienced by FGS. Research is rarely focused on differences that might be experienced by FGCS. Applebaum (2016) suggested that Caucasian students, regardless of the students' socioeconomic background, are privileged. Therefore, FGCS might require limited assistance to promote successful college outcomes. Utilizing the phenomenological method to study FGS experiences could increase knowledge about FGCS and could improve and add to the repertoire of strategies

currently used to prepare, recruit, transition, and retain FGCS. The framework, for this study, indicated that performing research remains the key to understanding a phenomenon of interest. Educators should place a greater emphasis on understanding FGCS issues and utilizing improved preparations, recruitment, and retention strategies developed from current research that could increase college outcomes.

The researcher assigned each participant a pseudonym. Throughout the interviews, the researcher wrote field notes and bracketed bias by noting personal impressions to improve reflections. Transcribed interviews were coded to identify themes. The researcher derived 10 themes during the coding process. Quotes that addressed the effect of race, described FGCS experiences, or were relevant to this study were placed into the 10 corresponding theme matrices. The analysis of transcripts concerning the coding process produced the themes and quotes that supported the development of the following description of the participant and storied narratives about FGCS experiences. The data collected from the 10 participants provided phenomenon saturation.

Description of the Sample

The researcher recruited 10 FGCS to discuss their experiences. Based on suggestions from the researcher's advisors, the researcher recruited 10 participants for the study to achieve phenomenon saturation. Two of the 10 participants initially recruited could not participate due to professional obligations associated with flooding emergencies in South Carolina. Therefore, the researcher recruited two additional participants to maintain 10 participants for the study. The researcher protected the participants' confidentiality by assigning each participant a name based on characters from the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, and securing data collected from participants in a locked safe and using a password-protected computer.

Elizabeth, Jane, William, and Bennet lived locally to the small city in South Carolina where this study occurred and Kitty, George, Darcy, and Bingley lived in counties local to the city. Charlotte and Georgiana were born and raised outside of South Carolina. Charlotte, George, Elizabeth, Darcy, Jane, and Bennet came from two-parent families. Kitty, Georgiana, William, and Bingley lived with a single parent or within a joint parental custody agreement. Darcy, William, Bennet, and Georgiana were nontraditional students.

Although Elizabeth and Jane were traditional students, they did not live on campus, or participate in traditional campus activities. Georgiana dropped out of high school but later, earned her high school diploma, attended a community college to earn her associate's degree, and attended private college while parenting full-time. George, Darcy, Jane, and Bennet attended public South Carolina universities. Each of the participants worked while attending college.

Table 1

Participant Descriptions and Biographical Details

	Char.	Geo.	Dar.	Jan.	Kit.	Ben	Georgia	Will	Bin.	Eliza.
Trad. Student	X	X		X	X				X	X
Non-trad. Student			X			X	X	X		
Born in SC		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Lived on Campus	X	X			X				X	
Single Parent					X		X	X	X	
Public College		X	X	X			X			
Private College	X				X	X	X	X		X
Family Stress	X						X	X		
Poor	X						X			X
Middle Class		X	X	X	X	X			X	
Wealthy								X		
Worked to finance college	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note. Participants self-reported on biographic details during qualification interviews and during one-one-one interviews. Rose (2016) defined the social class upward limits based on a family of three earnings as follows: 29,999 described as poor, 49,999 described as lower middle class, 99,999 described as middle class, 349,999 as upper middle class, and described families earning above 350,000 as rich. The participants' names are truncated in the table above.

Participant biographies. Charlotte is a 50-something retired business administrator and educator, who grew up poor but provided for, in Virginia. Charlotte experienced significant family stress including poor physical health, maternal mental illness, and alcoholism issues while living in poverty. Despite a limited education, Charlotte's father recognized the value of an education in conjunction with an upwardly mobile career and social status. Therefore, Charlotte's father consistently pushed her to attend college rather than start a family. Charlotte modestly described herself as a good student who graduated eleventh in her high school class before attending a small, private, same-sex college as a traditional student.

Elizabeth is a 40-year old middle school teacher who encountered unique academic challenges during her kindergarten through high school education. Although Elizabeth's parents possessed a limited education, they supported her aspirations of becoming a teacher by moving to schools that could meet her academic needs, and built a schoolroom so that she could teach her imaginary students. Elizabeth recalled that while still a child she often walked the campus of the small private women's college she attended after graduating from high school. On one of these walks, Elizabeth remembered telling her grandfather, "that's where I am going to college."

Elizabeth's family, like Charlotte's, was not wealthy. She attended a private college after graduating from high school. Elizabeth did not have traditional college experiences such as living on campus or participating in campus activities. Elizabeth admitted, "I don't believe I would have got into a school like the University of South Carolina."

Jane's story is similar to Elizabeth's and Charlotte's, but Jane's teaching career is just starting. Jane is a 22-year-old early childhood teacher whose college success was fueled by her parents. Jane, like her mother, had aspirations of becoming a teacher. She became determined to avoid the frustrations of a limited career in education by attending college. Jane saved money by

attending a community college before transferring to a 4-year public college. Jane worked hard and did well, but she did not have a traditional college experience.

Georgiana recalled that her mother never talked about college and she never envisioned herself graduating from college. When a high school teacher asked the students to, “Raise your hand if you are going to college.” Georgiana was the only one who did not raise her hand.

Georgiana started her family during high school, but later decided she would become a positive example for her children. Georgiana earned her high school diploma in an adult education program, attended a community college, and later transferred to a private college. Georgiana’s husband pointed out, “My wife is smart. She graduated second in her class because nontraditional students cannot graduate first despite their grades.” Georgiana’s mother never expected her to be so successful. She cried when her daughter graduated.

Kitty was a 22-year-old traditional student who felt like she owed it to her family to graduate from college. Kitty had a traditional college experience. She lived on a small private campus, received an athletics scholarship, participated in campus events, and worked multiple jobs to pay for college. Kitty was the only participant who admitted she believed her responses could improve research related to the needs of FGCS. Kitty offered, “Since I’m a teacher to a majority of students who may be FGS as well, I wanted to raise awareness on its importance of attending college.”

George, an 88-year-old veteran, admitted he was told by a high school teacher, “You are not college material.” With those words in mind, George became determined that he would not drive a trash truck, he would attend college and would succeed at becoming a pilot. George believed, “High school limited a students’ potential, but I fit in with everyone else in college.” George did not graduate the top of his class, but he did make “good enough grades” in college.

High school educators labeled George as unqualified for college; nonetheless, he successfully met his academic and career goals.

Darcy is a middle-aged, nontraditional student who briefly attended a local community college, before being hired by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Darcy understood career advancement within the FBI depended on having a college degree. Serving two years in the Army provided Darcy with the means to pay for college and subsequent agent training and career advancement. Although Darcy met his career goals, he regretted missing out on a traditional college experience.

William is a 34-year old nontraditional student who expressed frustration over having attended two years of community college before attending a small private college to complete his 4-year Bachelor's degree. William commented, "My 4-year degree took six years." William set two objectives for completing his degree; he wanted to set a positive example for his children and to make himself more marketable in his career. Advancement within the organization required a college degree. William pointed out, "These people getting promotions were not more talented, and they could not negotiate with the clients. I was doing the same job with more work-related experience but I did not have the college credentials to back me up."

Bingley is a 21-year-old traditional student who attended a small private college an hour from his home, with the assistance of a baseball scholarship. Bingley knew he would attend college. His family and teachers assured him that attending college would prepare him for a successful career. Although his parents did not attend college, they sacrificed to support his success on the field. Bingley's dedication and talent earned him a baseball scholarship. Bingley admitted,

I wasn't pushed into college. I understood the benefits of earning a college degree. I earned a scholarship, and I knew I couldn't have a good career and start higher up unless I committed myself to earn a degree. I needed a degree to pursue the career I am interested in.

Bingley received consistent support throughout his academic career from his family, but he did not enjoy school. He only persisted in school to play baseball and to improving his career opportunities.

Bennet is a 40-year-old nontraditional distance education student, who went from high school to a successful career at a local factory. Bennet's family considered him successful due to his 23-year employment with the same company. Although ownership of the factory changed throughout the years, Bennet has remained an indispensable member of the organization. Despite Bennet's 23 years of employment, the lack of a college degree limited Bennet's opportunities for advancement within the organization. Bennet pointed out:

College is an accomplishment. When I tried to talk about the challenges I have, people were dismissive of what I am going through. People who haven't attended college can't understand why I would put myself through this. They say, "You are doing it to yourself." They had no sympathy. There is a couple that helped me. They were non-traditional students too. They understood many of the difficulties I've had.

Unlike the majority of the participants in this study who relied heavily on their families for sustained support, Bennet received his support from other nontraditional students.

Research Methodology and Analysis

This researcher used qualitative phenomenology to investigate FGCS experiences. Throughout the study development and data collection, the researcher facilitated bracketing techniques to recognize personal bias related to the research. Therefore, during the interviews, the researcher recorded field notes related to thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about the participants' responses and personal experiences. The qualitative phenomenology methods facilitated the development of rich, thick accounts of experiences that lead these FGCS to make choices that motivated them to complete college. The questions revealed information about the participants' education, family, career aspirations, and issues they experienced that encouraged them to attain a college education.

The qualifications for participation in this research included being a FGS, Caucasian, and a willingness to reveal family, academic, and college experiences that influenced their decision to complete college. Five males and five females, with ages ranging from 21–88, shared their backgrounds, college experiences, and career. The participants read and signed the informed consent agreement.

The agreement informed the members that their participation was confidential, optional, and had the potential to help other FGS. Although the researcher told participants that sharing their experiences could be used by educators to improve FGS preparation, transitioning, and retention, the participants admitted that this statement had a limited influence on their decision to participate in this study. The participants noted they agreed to participate in this study because they were asked to, because a friend was participating, or because they understood participation in this interview would help educators learn more about how to help more FGCS attend college.

The recruitment flyer recruited one participant, two colleagues agreed to participate, and nine participants were recruited using snowballing. Weather issues forced two cancellations, but the two recruits agreed to participate via Google Hang Outs if I could not find additional participants. The data collection tools included the researcher and a researcher-created interview script designed to elicit responses about race, influences, challenges, college decisions, and other lived experiences. During the semistructured interviews, the participants responded to questions about their:

- background;
- career aspirations;
- family challenges or support;
- education influences;
- global challenges; and
- their decision to become a FGS.

Flexible interview scheduling accommodated the participants' busy schedules. The participants' interpretation of the questions dictated the flow of the interviews and contributed to the rich, thick responses. The researcher refocused the interview as needed. Phenomena saturation occurred using the first 10 participants. Therefore, rescheduling the missed interviews was unnecessary.

The researcher's goal included ascertaining whether being Caucasian made these FGS privileged; thus, mitigating issues that other FGS often experienced while preparing for or attending college. The researcher bracketed bias by including similar and dissimilar personal ex-

periences that she noted as she collected field notes during interviews and coding. The researcher used ATLAS.TI, a qualitative data analysis tool, and Word Excel 2016 software to organize and reduce the data from interviews.

Throughout the coding process the researcher bracketed bias by identifying and writing personal impressions. Bracketing bias allowed the researcher to remain focused on developing themes from the participants' responses. The researcher used the following coding strategies as suggested by Saldaña (2013): in vivo coding, narrative coding, and emotion coding, which revealed 10 themes from the coded data. Themes were related to the lived experiences these participants had with their family, throughout their academic career, and motivations and challenges that led to college completion. Finally, the researcher printed coded transcripts, cut the responses apart, and using inductive reasoning, sorted the responses under the 10 preselected themes based on coding with an emphasis on four themes, and added quotes into theme specific matrices. These final measures improved the researcher's interpretation of the data and facilitated connections between themes and data coding.

Summary of Findings

Coding revealed the following 10 themes related to:

- a sense of urgency before and while attending college to achieve college aspirations;
- family influences, family issues, or a lack of family support,
- the perceived role of friends or the perception of having someone to turn to;
- the determination to achieve academic goals;
- their understanding of the role race played in completing college;
- increased career options;
- academic issues before and during college;

- financial issues; and
- their perception of career advancement as significant motivation in college completion.

The 10 FGCS participating in this study came from varied backgrounds, were in different stages of life and careers. Five of the participants were males, and five were females. One female and three males described themselves as nontraditional students. Their commonality was being the first in their family to attend college. Their goals for completing college included the desire to improve their lives, a better career, fulfilling a dream, proving they could do it, and setting an example for the family.

Presentation of Data and Results

This qualitative study aimed to increase knowledge about FGCS. Learning about FGCS lived experiences represents educators' best chance to meet their needs as they progress through the education pipeline and matriculate into college. Educators need to learn more about the unique challenges FGS experience regardless of their demographics. Actively becoming involved in identifying FGCS and applying preparation and retention strategies will improve college outcomes for this complex student population. The following sections answer the researcher's study questions through the integrated themes to provide storied data that will improve what educators know about FGCS challenges and supports.

First-generation Caucasian student challenges. FGCS experience many issues as they move toward the decision to become a FGS. Not every FGS student struggles with college preparation and navigating college systems. Kitty, like Charlotte, Elizabeth, Jane, and Bingley was “groomed” to attend college. She was a member of a child-centered family with multiple sup-

port systems that provided her with protective factors. Due to her well-developed family and social capital, Kitty easily navigated college systems. Kitty excelled in college but she missed opportunities to spend time with her family and network.

Charlotte's family situation was dissimilar to Kitty's. Where Kitty's family received extensive support from within the family, from friends, and acquaintances; Charlotte's family relied on themselves. They trusted Charlotte to, "take care of whatever needed to be done to attend college." Charlotte overcame her dysfunctional family, poor health, financial difficulties, and found stability in graduating from college and starting her career.

Attending high school was a discouraging step toward attending college. George had to overcome the negative messages he received from the public education system. Throughout high school, educators told George he "was not college material." Ignoring the negative messages from high school educators, George worked hard to build his college success. George remembered, "In high school, the well-off people hung around, and the poor people hung around. I was cast into a certain group in high school, but in college, I fit in with everybody."

Elizabeth, like Kitty, belonged to a child-centered family. Unlike Kitty, Elizabeth struggled throughout her academic career. Elizabeth pulled for resource to amend learning gaps in reading. Despite this academic difficulty, Elizabeth's family actively supported her academic aspirations, encouraged her to do her best, and believed she would graduate from college. Two examples of how Elizabeth's family supported her included moving across town so she could attend better schools and creating a college fund.

Darcy's family provided the necessities during his childhood. Darcy's family did not plan or prepare Darcy for college. Upon graduating from high school, Darcy's family expected him to move out and go to work. His family did not believe college was necessary. Darcy

worked full-time and attended night classes. Darcy regretted that he was unable to have the traditional college experience. Jane's college experience was similar to Darcy's. Jane never participated in campus events or activities. Jane regretted that she missed out on spending time family and with friends.

William's high school grades were not good enough for college, and he received counter-intuitive advice concerning the importance of taking challenging courses in high school. Bingley did not want to go to college and might not have gone if he had not received an athletic scholarship. Bingley attended college so that he could have a career. Bennet worked all day and completed college courses in the evening. While in high school, Georgiana never considered going to college. College was not for people like her. Georgiana decided to attend college so she could set a good example for her children.

FGCS like other FGS, lack the background knowledge related to college systems. Pascarella et al. (2004) noted that most FGS struggle significantly throughout the college process. Assimilating college life and meeting academic goals proves difficult without substantial support and guidance from knowledgeable mentors. The following narratives describe FGCS experiences that answer the researcher's question and reveal themes uncovered during the coding process. This study demonstrated that family capital and personal characteristics such as resilience and determination, play a significant role in FGCS college success.

Race and college success. This study demonstrated FGCS, like other FGS experience issues that could limit their success regardless of the students' race. Applebaum (2017) and Ladson-Billings (1998) suggested that race is synonymous with privilege. This researcher found family support, the participants' grit, and adequate support improved the participants' college outcomes. Grit, as explained by Reed and Jeremiah (2017) is: The involvement of hope, purpose,

practice, passion, and interest that can also be evidenced in people as student success. . . . Removing the stress and pressures on students can truncate the growth and grit of the student thus prohibiting the persistence and tenacity needed to be successful in life. (p. 255)

The participants' accounts of their experiences indicated that grit helped them overcome issues and achieve college aspirations.

Race and privilege. Although Applebaum (2017) and Ladson-Billings (1998) reported that race and privilege play a role in assuring a student's successful education outcome, the participants in this study reported to the contrary. Similar to other FGS, barriers to college success existed for these FGCS. The participants did not find being Caucasian made them more privileged than other FGS or supported their college aspirations.

Charlotte's family life presented many issues. She struggled through emotional stress throughout her academic career due to her parents' illness and received limited support beyond her family. Charlotte's family could only provide encouragement. They left the details of attending college up to her. Charlotte noted, "Attending college was less stressful than remaining in the home." College provided her with an escape from her family's dysfunction. Charlotte worked hard to maintain an exceptional academic standing despite family stress. Charlotte recognized the alternative to a college degree and a career was working jobs that would lend themselves to frustrations due to limited advancement opportunities. Charlotte, "I wasn't more privileged because of my race. Life was not easy for me. My parents had health issues, but I made good grades in high school. I earned my college degree."

High school proved challenging academically and socially for George. Although George worked hard, his prospects for college were low. George's determination to become a pilot in the U.S. Army drove his college aspirations. George admitted, "I knew I would have to study a

lot and I worked hard because I did not want to work on the farm or drive a trash truck. The teachers in high school told me, “I was not college material.”

Learning challenged Elizabeth due to learning disabilities. Elizabeth’s early childhood experiences left her unmotivated to learn; nonetheless, Elizabeth’s parents were committed to her academic success and they encouraged her to do her best by reminding her she would attend college. Elizabeth’s struggles with learning prompted her to take advantage of free learning opportunities. Elizabeth pointed out,

My race did not open doors for me. My mother dropped out of high school. I achieved my goals by my parents' hard work and my own. I did this with my family’s help. It was hard. I had to overcome learning difficulties. I had to go to free tutoring. My race or being poor never decided whether I attended college or not.

Elizabeth remained focused on her academic success and broke the cycle of generational poverty. Similar to Charlotte, Elizabeth realized that starting a family or being a traditional student would have been a distraction.

Darcy reported that race did not provide him with privileges as he navigated his college career. Darcy’s parents placed the responsibility of attending college or attaining employment after high school on Darcy, making it his decision. Darcy’s GI Bill provided him with the means for attending college but not the knowledge of college systems or the drive to meet his career goals. Darcy was determined to be successful. He did not expect anyone to do it for him. Darcy admitted,

You don’t have to go to college, but you need the drive to succeed and be self-sufficient that doesn’t have anything to do with race. Working full-time and attending college every night was like having two jobs. It was not fun.

From experience, Darcy knew he would have to rely on personal resources to achieve his academic and career goals. Darcy understood the benefits of attending college outweighed the challenges he faced working full-time and attending college full-time.

William was a nontraditional student and like Darcy worked throughout his college attendance. He attributed his success to his dedication to succeed and support from his wife. William's family was wealthy but dysfunctional and he was not a member of a child-centered family. William was smart, but he struggled in school due to family distractions that caused him continual stress. William argued that race and financial advantages do not guarantee college success. William said:

Race is not an accurate measure of ability. Some people just don't work out. If you work hard, you're going to do well in college. Businesses don't care who you are they want to make money. All students are assigned success coaches. Students choose whether to take advantage of this critical success opportunity.

Initially, William was embarrassed because he knew so little about college systems. William did not receive support from his family to attend college. He learned to accept support from his learning community.

Kitty attended college as a traditional FGCS who worked hard to prepare for college and enjoyed school. She attributed her college success to hard work and support from her family. "Students are groomed for college," William suggested. "Their family has been to college, so they know how to help their children prepare for college." When I interviewed Kitty, I realized that she, similar to Elizabeth and Charlotte, had been groomed for college life. Kitty's family encouraged her academic achievement and accompanied her on campus tours to help decide which college would be best for her.

Although Kitty's parents did not attend college, they took steps to prepare her for college and life. Her family's support improved her self-confidence. At an early age Kitty learned to network and participated in experiences that enhanced her social capital. Kitty noted, "Minorities went to my college. I was not chosen based on my race. I had great grades and I was offered an athletic scholarship." Kitty participated in extracurricular activities throughout high school and college, wrote essays to earn additional scholarships, and found employment to fund her college education.

Bingley's family also groomed him for college. Although his parents could not provide insight into college life and systems, they knew that excelling in baseball could lead to an academic scholarship. Bingley attributed his college success to hard work rather than race. He said, "My race didn't make me privileged. Regardless of who you are, there are minimum requirements for getting into college. I think a lot of people were like me in college (FGS)."

Colleges recruit talented athletes to maintain the competitiveness of their athletic programs, and they are willing to offer athletic scholarships to students who demonstrate a commitment to hard work. Earning a scholarship does not make attending college any easier. Bingley said, "I worked hard, and my family sacrificed to get an athletic scholarship for me. I have a back injury because of my overworked muscles. Just like others who love their sport, I worked hard to get my scholarship."

Conversations in Georgiana's family did not focus on going to college or achieving in school. Georgianna's early academic achievements did not prepare her for college, and she earned her high school diploma through an adult education program. She also believes that her race did not increase her chances of getting into college. She said, "I had a lot of childhood

problems. I had to overcome a lot to be successful.” Georgiana’s college aspirations were inspired by having children and by God’s grace.

Following graduation from high school, Bennet went to work. He received no encouragement from his family to attend college. His family merely expected him to find a good job after high school. Similar to William and Georgiana, Bennet attended a community college before transferring to a 4-year college, Bennet, like the other FGCS’, wanted to attend college to improve his career and have more life and career options. He attributed his success to hard work. Bennet noted, “It doesn’t matter what your race is. I don’t feel privileged. I have worked hard for 23 years, but I still needed a degree to advance.”

Family experiences or influences. Because going to college can be highly stressful, students often require extensive advice and support to help them select the right college, to meet admission deadlines, and to prepare a cohesive application. Although many FGS families are able to offer only limited support regarding college matters, the traditional students in this research suggested they were supported in other ways by their families, which ultimately led to their successful completion of college. Although these families knew little about how college worked, they were able to provide support by listening, offering advice, providing financial support, or encouraging their children to seek out someone who could answer their questions. Families that provided significant academic support to their children during their formative years helped their children to develop academic growth mindsets. This form of empowerment helped the children to become engaged in the college planning process as they navigated complex college systems. Family capital extended to acknowledging that the child was capable making sound choices regarding the most appropriate college to attend, which course to study, and how to navigate financial systems. The researcher explored how families provided the types of support that encouraged

children to leave home despite having multiple unanswered questions about college. Positive family influences supported students' decisions to attend college. Six of the participants responses suggested that they achieved success because their parents determined the appropriate time to release control and trusted in their child's resilience to help them assimilate college life. The parents' early support provided their child with the support necessary for college success. Charlotte struggled with the stress caused by being part of a dysfunctional family. Her family problems included poor mental health, disability, poverty, and alcoholism, which resulted in Charlotte making many of the family decisions in her home. Charlotte's father felt frustration when his limited education prevented him from gaining promotions and limited his career options. He and his wife encouraged Charlotte to excel in school so she would be prepared to attend college. However, they themselves were ill-equipped to assist her with college decisions and trusted Charlotte to take care of things on her own. Charlotte recalled:

My father was very influential in my decision to go to college. My father wanted me to attend college. He never talked about me having a family. My father wanted me to provide for myself. I went back to college and finished with the encouragement of my professors. College provided stability in my life, but my family stress was always there.

George never received encouragement from his family to attend college, but his mother and aunt supported his decision to attend college. George's family had always been farmers, they believed a college education was unnecessary. George farmed and drove the county trash truck, but was uninspired by these jobs. George's mother believed her son's determination would allow him to succeed. George scoffed, "My mother and aunt encouraged me to go to college. My mother paid the \$500 and dropped me off on campus. The rest was up to me."

Although Elizabeth's mother did not complete high school and her father's education concluded with a high school diploma, both of her parents prioritized college attendance for their children. Despite earning a Bachelor's degree from a small private college, Elizabeth felt no motivation to return to school to study for advanced degrees. She recalled, "My family always said I would go to college. They moved so I could go to better schools. I had to go to college before I was married or had kids." Elizabeth knew from an early age, therefore, that she had to establish priorities in order to meet her college aspirations.

Darcy's family supported him until he graduated from high school, but then expected him to become self-reliant. When community college failed to hold his interest, his mother suggested he explore career options with the FBI. Soon after being hired by the FBI, Darcy was drafted by the selective service. "My parents raised me," Darcy said. "Now that I had graduated from high school, it was either work or go to school. If I went to college, I would pay for it myself." After serving two years in the Army, Darcy was eligible for the GI Bill. This incentive proved significant because Darcy knew he wanted to advance his career with the FBI and graduating from college would provide him with the credentials he needed to meet his career goals.

Jane's experience demonstrated that when a family desires a college education for their child, they will encourage the child to go to college. Jane's mother worked as a talented kindergarten assistant, but Jane realized her mother's teaching career was limited as she had not attended college. Jane pointed out, "Parents who know about college can help their children. My parents didn't know about going to college. My brother helped me because he had gone to college." Like Charlotte, Jane understood, by way of her parents' disappointments in their careers, that college offered life-changing opportunities to follow a fulfilling career path.

Although William's was born to an affluent family, his home was not child-centered family. In a child-centered home the needs of the child are placed ahead of the adults. His home life was disorganized and chaotic, and his parents failed to provide boundaries for his behavior or to support his academic success. Preparing William for college was not a family priority. "My grandfather made a successful business without college," William said. "My education was not important to my family, but I wanted to be an example for my children. My wife supported me the whole time."

Kitty's family encouraged her to engage in proactive academic and social behaviors such as setting goals. She immersed herself in academic and extracurricular activities. Kitty admitted, "My family believed in me. I wasn't going to let them down." Kitty wanted to graduate from college in order to set an example for her younger siblings, and to contribute to her community as a special education teacher.

Bingley's parents prioritized preparing him for college. They proactively helped develop his self-esteem and nurtured his athletic abilities that ultimately translated into a baseball scholarship. Bingley said, "My parents kept me motivated with baseball. They told me I had to graduate from high school so I could go to college. My sister helped a lot too with how to do things and get financial aid."

Without revealing the details, Georgiana made it clear that she had a difficult childhood. College and academic success were not priorities in her family and overcoming her past proved difficult. Nevertheless, Georgiana was keen to set a positive example for her own children by graduating from college. Georgiana said, "I wanted to be a positive example for my kids. My husband always helped me, and we sacrificed so I could finish college. My mother never believed I could do it, but she cried when I graduated."

Bennet's family, like Georgiana's and William's, did not emphasize the importance of going to college, but instead instilled in him a strong work ethic. Bennet is a confident professional who works in a factory where his responsibilities include solving organizational issues. Despite this professional experience, he struggled to master college systems. Attending college profoundly affected his opinion about education. When he attempted to engage his family in his college experiences and challenges, they lacked interest and empathy for his situation. Bennet admitted, "My parents never suggested I should go to college or ever recognized the value in college."

Friends. Of the 10 participants in this study, only one non-traditional FGCS admitted her friends influenced her decision to attend college. The participant acknowledged her friends were a bad influence but they were the ones she was listening to since her family was so uninvolved with her life. The six traditional FGCS participants believed their friends played no role in their precollege decisions. Their families made it clear that an education was a priority. Their families were the biggest influence in their lives and they certainly did not want to disappoint them. Albert, Chein, and Steinberg (2016) found that adolescent friends with similar interests gravitate to each other and profoundly influence peer behavior. Georgiana admitted, "I was hanging around with people who weren't making good choices." William's family, like Darcy's, did not encourage him to attend college. Unlike William, but similar to George who aspired to attend flight school, Darcy felt motivated to continue his education so he could qualify for FBI agent training. The participants in this research reported greater family than friend influence on their decisions to attend college. Bollich, Hill, Harms, and Jackson (2016) noted that personalities may change, based on social roles and military training, and that the friendship affect in-

creases the likelihood of adhering to social expectations. Although friendships may not have affected participants' decisions to attend college, McCabe (2016) discovered that college friends play a role in reducing loneliness and homesickness. Similarly, Bennet noted that he received significant support from friends who had gone through similar college experiences which helped him meet his academic goals.

Despite persistent family stress experienced by Charlotte throughout her time at college, she adjusted well to college life. She recalled, "I joined a campus organization devoted to serving God. This group deeply inspired me to continue developing my service to God. I never kept in touch with my friends from high school and college." Following college graduation Charlotte focused on her career, in an attempt to leave her painful past behind.

Elizabeth attended college as a traditional FGS and discovered, "None of my friends and family went to college, but they were excited for me. I never really did all the traditional college things. I wanted to go to college, but I didn't really want to live on campus." However, she did not find that remaining connected to her old life proved a distraction. Her family lived two blocks from campus, so living on campus was unnecessary. Although she was a traditional student, Elizabeth did not engage in campus-sponsored activities.

Jane's friends did not attend college. Jane complained, "My friends didn't go to college. That was hard. I had to miss out on my family too. They were out doing things, but I knew I had to stay positive." Jane realized that the positive future she hoped for depended on graduating from college.

Bingley's family were more influential than his friends in his college decision-making. Bingley lived on campus, became deeply immersed in college life, and the friends he made in college positively influenced his academic performance. He explained, "I am competitive, and I

always want to do better than my friends and get things done. I have made some strong friendships over the years, but there are only a few from in my class.” Living on campus, far from home, encouraged Bingley to develop new friends and pursue new interests.

Georgiana was a nontraditional student who learned that her past had set her up for life-long failure. Following the lead of her teenage friends deprived her of significant academic opportunities. She admitted, “I was hanging out with bad influences in high school. We all have tough times, but college opened doors for me. My friends from my childhood would not believe it's me.” Georgiana changed her dysfunctional behaviors and used her determination to accomplish her academic goals. With her husband’s support, Georgiana completed an alternative education program, community college, and graduated from college.

Bennet’s family placed more emphasis on establishing a career and developing a strong work ethic than on attending college, resulting in him and his friends seeking employment after high school graduation. Bennet recalled, “I don't remember my friends thinking about going to college or discussing college with anyone in high school. My friends who recently attended college have been my biggest supporters. They knew what I was going through.” Having worked for the same company for 23 years, Bennet felt limited by his lack of college education and his aspirations guided his decision to acquire a college degree.

Challenges, confusion, and discouragement. Colleges recognize FGS as a unique group of students who represent a challenge to all phases of matriculation. FGS and their families often do not know what to expect of the college experience. FGS can often feel confused and overwhelmed because their expectations of college life have arisen from watching movies rather than learning from knowledgeable mentors. Zimmerman (2014) suggested that negative personal experiences of parents during their child’s early education and concern over losing their

child can cloud their judgment about the importance of a college education. Therefore, students and families find it difficult to break the generational cycle of noncollege attendance.

Charlotte encountered many challenges before entering college, many of which seemed insurmountable. However, she was determined to graduate from college. She recalled, “My family life was a struggle. My father was my strongest supporter. I nearly quit after my father died.” Throughout this research, participants have cited family support as the strongest motivation to attend college. A member of Charlotte’s community failed to recognize the struggles she had to overcome to be eligible to attend college. “Someone sent an angry letter,” she said, “wondering how I could go to college when I was getting a check.”

During high school, George felt relegated to a lower social class and was considered an underachiever. “I was told by a high school teacher I would never amount to anything,” he scoffed. “But I was determined. I would succeed in college.” Once in college, George adapted to all classes of people, and his professors helped him succeed because of the considerable effort he showed.

Elizabeth struggled to adequately prepare for college. She had learning issues, and an early learning environment that wasn’t suitable to her specific needs. She admitted, “I hated the first kindergarten I attended. I had terrible experiences with the guidance counselors. They didn’t think I would succeed, so I took advice from teachers.”

William's reputation as an underachiever preceded him into high school. His advisor recommended nonchallenging high school courses. “Standards to get into college vary but the standards apply to everyone,” he said. “I got my GPA up in a community college, so I got to go to a 4-year college.” While attending college, William realized that high schools offer students rigorous courses to help prepare them for college. Taking on a demanding course load during

high school precludes remediation courses at community colleges. William complained, “It has been challenging going to college and working and frustrating that my 4-year degree took six years.”

Georgiana had a family of her own while attending college. She knew balancing a family with attending college would be difficult, but she kept her end-goals in mind in order to inspire her children and achieve her career goals. Georgiana said, “I completed my associate’s degree, but I did not know how to transfer my credits. This cost more money and caused me to go to college an extra year.” She recognized that the benefits of earning a college degree exceeded the challenges she faced in achieving that goal.

Bennet worked for 23 years before making the decision to attend college. As with William, Bennet found remediation classes frustrating. He believes the community college system is inefficient and less professional than the 4-year institution he attended. Bennet noted, “I didn’t take college classes like high school students do now, so took remediation classes in community college. I struggle with time management because I don’t get to relax after work.”

Career attainment. It has long been debated whether giftedness and genius are learned or innate. William argued, “Families groom their children to attend college.” Attending college changes people in many ways. Kitty pointed out, “Being the first in your family instills a sense of accomplishment and empowers forthcoming accomplishments upon entering a career.” FGS have a right to attend college, but they require support to help overcome challenges caused by inexperience. FGS come from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, races, academic backgrounds and degrees of family support.

FGS require career development and social networking opportunities in order to build social capital. Charlotte believed the college she attended could have offered more assistance to

help her find her aptitude, so she could have been more successful. Earning a college degree supports career development, but due to limited social capital, FGS often need support that extends beyond the classroom. Elizabeth suggested, “You can have a successful career without a college degree.” Attending college provides FGS with professional networking opportunities which often do not exist outside of the college community.

Bennet, having started his career immediately after completing high school, had over 23 years to build his professional network. Bennet admitted that, “A college degree provides legitimacy to your work history.” Nontraditional FGS face additional academic issues if they have been away from the classroom for some time. William pointed out, “College people who have been in the job market have an advantage over FGS who have never worked. They often represent a stronger asset to their organization, but they can be paid less.”

Charlotte commented, “I could never have predicted college would be the most important decision in my life. I had a lot of jobs after I graduated, but I had no real direction. I wish my college had done more with career development. I would have had more success.”

Despite being told by teachers that he was not college material, George was determined to become a pilot, “I joined the Army so I could become a pilot. I knew I would not meet my goals if I didn’t go to college.”

Similarly, Elizabeth wanted to graduate, and she was willing to work hard to meet her career goals. From her earliest memories, she knew she wanted to attend the college that was two blocks from her grandparents’ house. She was determined to graduate despite the difficulties she imagined she would face. “I always wanted to be a teacher my whole life, and I am one,” she said. “I had to have a degree to become a teacher. After I got my teaching certificate, I was never motivated to go back.”

For Darcy, career advancement depended on college completion, so he put his career on hold and went into the military. Following discharge from the military, Darcy used his General Issue (G.I.) Bill to fund his college education. Although Darcy continued working full-time, he took a full complement of night classes. As a result, his college experience was not traditional. Darcy commented,

“College wasn’t the same for me as it was for students who went during the day. I didn’t participate in anything, and I was exhausted, but I knew getting a college degree would lead agent training. So, I did it.”

Jane’s mother is a kindergarten assistant, who has always wanted to be a teacher. She wanted her daughter to avoid these same frustrations, and so worked diligently to help Jane set up her own classroom. Jane noted, “I knew I would have to complete college if I wanted to be a teacher.”

William's grandfather was a successful self-made business owner who had not graduated from college and William had an opportunity to work in his family’s business. College graduation was not a prerequisite for joining the family business. However, William became dissatisfied working in the family business. He found a great job he enjoyed, but had frustrations similar to those Charlotte’s father had experienced during his career. William knew he deserved promotion and that his extensive experience made him better equipped to work with clients. As he pointed out, “I have a successful career, but I want the advancements I deserve, but I can’t get them without my degree.”

Kitty's family provided extensive academic and extracurricular support. She was proud of her accomplishments and, moreover, she earned the credentials needed to become a special

education teacher. Kitty admitted, “Now you have to have at least a Bachelor’s degree to be successful and to have a good career. I became a teacher.”

Bingley's parents were successful despite not having college degrees. They possessed a great deal of social and family capital that they extended to their children. Bingley believed he could have had a good career without a college education, but in order to do so, he would have to start lower on the career ladder, work his way up, and would be passed over for promotions. He said, “College can help you do better in your career and leads to a successful career.”

Georgiana admitted to being overwhelmed with excitement at the prospect of graduating from college. As with the other female participants in this research, Georgiana attended college to earn a teaching degree. She wanted to make a difference in the lives children and to encourage them to go to college. Although Georgiana now enjoys teaching, she believes earning her degree has opened doors to opportunities beyond teaching. She said, “I have a degree, and I can do anything, I don’t have just to be a teacher but I do want to teach.”

The nontraditional students who participated in this research received limited support and encouragement from their families to attend college. Similar to the other students in this study, these nontraditional students wanted to earn degrees to improve their careers. Both Bennet and William made significant contributions to the respective organizations they worked for. Bennet decided to enroll in college to make himself more marketable and to broaden his career options. He explained, “I am reliable, and I have extensive experiences in human resources. Having a degree would help me secure a better position at a new organization.”

Preparation. Charlotte’s reason for wanting to attend college was to please her father. Therefore, she focused her early academic career on achieving this goal and graduated eleventh in her class. Charlotte’s parents wanted their child to have a career, so they encouraged her to

reach her college goals. She said, "I had always done well in school. My father told me how important an education is. Beyond encouraging me to do well, they could not help me." The encouragement Charlotte received from her family motivated her to set college attainment goals. George suggested, "FGS need more opportunities to try college if they want to go to college." George felt fortunate that his mother had believed in him and that he had found a college willing to enroll him. For George, graduating from college provided him the means to becoming a U.S. Army pilot. Elizabeth's family provided her with the early academic support she needed to attend college. As her grades were inadequate for enrollment in any of the larger South Carolina universities, she attended a small private college near her grandparents' home. This had the added advantage of sparing her the expense of commuting and living on campus. She recalled, "I dreamed of attending college. My parents moved me to better schools and encouraged me by building a classroom. My English teacher helped me a lot, but I never cared for my advisor." Darcy received no family guidance or support beyond high school. His mother spoke to an FBI agent, who recommended he apply for a position. Soon after starting his new career, he was drafted into the military for two years. Following discharge, he was eligible for the GI Bill to fund his education. Darcy knew that earning a college degree was the only path to career advancement and agent training. He recalled, "I never prepared for college. I got my GI Bill to help me pay for college. I didn't have financial problems after that."

Jane, like Charlotte, had always succeeded in school, and her family wanted her to attend college. Jane acknowledged, "My brother helped me a lot. My high school helped me. I went to a smaller 4-year college, and I went to the community college so I could save money."

William came from a privileged background. His grandfather had created a successful business despite not attending college. William was intelligent, but family problems distracted

him and led to underwhelming academic results. Since his parents were not involved in planning his route through high school, he registered for basic courses suggested by his guidance counselor. As a result, he was underprepared and lacking the required grades for college.

When working in the family business proved untenable, William found employment elsewhere and had a successful career. Extensive experience made him an indispensable member of the organization. However, because William lacked a college degree, he could not advance to management level. Family connections and privilege did not improve his chances for success. William suggested, “Some people don't want others to find out they are FGS, and have to admit their parents did not go to college. Continuing students have a lot of support from their parents. It's a hard thing to do by yourself, but you can do it by yourself even later in life. Families don't understand you have to work and prepare for classes because they never have. I had to take a lot of remediation classes before I could even be accepted into college.”

During high school, Kitty excelled in the classroom and on the field. Kitty did not find school difficult and knew in order to feel a sense of accomplishment she would have to attend college. Kitty aspired to earn her degree, prepare for a good career, and make her family proud of her. Growing-up, Kitty earned multiple leadership positions and felt prepared her for a career in education. Kitty admitted, “I am very proud of my education. It's an accomplishment. I am successful and I am the first person from my family to go to college.”

Bingley was what William described as student groomed for college. His family moved to an area with better schools, they supported his love of baseball, and they encouraged him to succeed at school so he could attend college. Bingley believed a good career would be possible for him because he had the right connections. Bingley also knew that college would improve his

marketability and advancement in his career. Bingley noted, “Having my parents encourage me to go to college and my athletic scholarship helped decide to go to college.”

No one encouraged Georgiana to attend college. In high school, when a teacher asked the students if they were considering attending college, Georgia was the only student who did not raise her hand. At the time, she did not understand the importance of college or of completing high school. After becoming a mother, Georgiana made college completion a priority. Although she now has a teaching career, the degree itself is what is most important to her. Georgiana discovered, “FGS have difficulties. I was never serious about school. Once I decided to go to college, I just did what I was told and worked hard.”

Motivations and perceptions about college. The decision to enter college is difficult for many FGS. Many come from families that do not know how to encourage or motivate their children, because parents are unfamiliar with college systems and feel unqualified to give their child advice. The traditional participants in the research highlighted the significant roles played by their parents in supporting their efforts to attend college. They wanted to live out their parents’ aspirations of going to college and having a better life. Despite their own limited experience, these parents impressed upon their children a sense of urgency about attending college and built the social capital and self-esteem necessary to empower their children to negotiate unfamiliar college systems. William and Georgiana are two nontraditional FCS who were motivated by the family they created.

Charlotte went to college because it was her father’s wish. Her family encouraged her to succeed in school in order to be eligible for scholarships and to be noticed by college recruiters. She had a great deal of self-confidence and understood she had an excellent standing in her high

school. Her father wanted her to have a good life and career. While she was growing up, Charlotte's family entrusted her with many responsibilities that helped her to mature early. Charlotte learned how to ask the right questions to get the benefits her family needed to survive. She explained, "College was an escape. I had so many burdens. My greatest accomplishment is living without being a train wreck. I never struggled with the transition from high school to college. I knew God could help me."

George was hard working and determined to go to college and his mother believed he could do anything he set his mind to. Although he struggled in high school and college, he ultimately succeeded and progressed to a distinguished career as an Army pilot. He was confident that he could succeed if he was given the opportunity. George recalled, "In high school, you're put into a certain class of people, and they set certain expectations for you. I went from the field to college. I felt proud of all my accomplishment despite not being thought of as being important in high school."

Elizabeth's mother did not graduate from high school, but her family believed in the value of a college education. Elizabeth struggled throughout her early academic career, but neither she nor her family doubted she would go to college and become a teacher. Elizabeth's determination and her family's support helped her overcome the difficulties she experienced. Elizabeth's family and several of her teachers helped her to apply to college, to schedule courses, and to apply for financial assistance. Although her family was not wealthy, they saved money for her education, and eventually paid off her loans. Elizabeth believed, "I would have made it regardless of my education. Attending college helped me avoid working long hours and I could spend time with my kids. I wanted to do my best."

For most students, the decision to attend college was pragmatic. Darcy wanted to become an FBI agent and had access to the GI Bill, but he had no idea how difficult graduating would be. He held down a full-time job and went to college for four hours each evening. College was not as he had expected. It was difficult, but he was determined to succeed. Because of this work commitment, he did not have a traditional college experience. He lacked opportunities and time to join clubs and participate in college-supported activities. College helped him to meet his career goals, but he missed out on the broader culture of college life. Darcy remembered, “I was exhausted after working and going to school all the time. I had determination, and that’s what it takes to succeed.”

William was a working nontraditional student with a family, who felt frustrated about being overlooked for work promotions despite his extensive work experience. Advancement, however, required college credentials he did not possess. William commented, “I was frustrated. I have a lot of responsibilities at my work, and I was determined to get a promotion, but I was passed over. After earning my college degree, I feel well-prepared and successful.”

Attending college was always crucial for Kitty's family. She was aware of how proud her family would be if she graduated from college and she did not want to let them down. Although her family had not gone to college, Kitty was determined and asked question when she needed help. Kitty revealed, “Graduating from college made my family proud, and I feel successful. I was independent and free to make my own discoveries in college. I was a major force on my campus.” College provided Kitty with an opportunity to grow.

Georgiana was the most emotional of the research participants. The mother of a middle school student and a fifth-grade student, Georgiana graduated four years before the interview

took was conducted. Georgiana was in awe of all she had accomplished, despite the low expectation of others. Georgiana admitted that people from her past would not recognize her now. She attributed her success to her determination to be a positive role model for her children and to God's guidance. Balancing a family with attending college full-time was, at times, a struggle. She experienced guilt when she had to choose between completing assignments or spending time with her family. Her husband's faith in her never wavered, and he played his role in supporting her success. Georgiana noted, "The best thing about my degree is that I made my mom proud."

Early academic experiences and influences. Attending college was a life-changing event for Charlotte. She attributed her success in college to hard work throughout her academic career. Although her life was difficult, attending college helped her to break the cycle of poverty and to strengthen her faith in God's power to change lives. Charlotte recalled, "I'd always done well in middle and high school. School was easy for me. I was number 11 in my class. My history professor wanted me to attend Johns-Hopkins and earn my degree in Bible history."

School was difficult for George, but his persistence and determination paid off. Instead, of aiming for A grades, he aimed to pass. As long as he passed, he felt triumphant. He did not let other's low expectations determine his success. George recalled:

I was told many times I was not college material. I didn't have good grades. Many times, I said to myself what am I doing here. I was not qualified but I worked real hard and my grades were good. I made C's. I was weak in English and trigonometry, but I managed to pass. I wanted to show people you could do whatever you put your mind to. I had a lot of drive, and I went into the military, and I worked hard, and I got to fly planes.

Elizabeth's early years in school were difficult, but her family remained confident that she would succeed in college. Their encouragement, practical assistance, and faith in their daughter encouraged her to reach her academic goals. Elizabeth explained, "My first school was horrible. We moved so I could go to a better school. I stayed with my grandparents so I did not commute."

William suggested that, "Parents groom their children to go to college." Grooming a child involves creating a child-centered home, where routines are set and parents maintain high expectations for behavior and academic success. William said, "I was not groomed for college and there was a lot of dysfunction in my family. When I went back to school, it was a struggle to keep a routine because I had never had one."

Bingley succeeded academically so that he could play baseball. Bingley suggested that he attended college as it was the only way he could attain his career goals. Bingley recalled, "Teachers were always talking about when you go to school, but college wasn't like they said it would be. I don't remember my guidance counselor helping me with college."

Bennet did not consider going to college when he first graduated from high school. No one in his family had attended college, no one at school had talked to him about going to college, and a good job was available for him at the local factory. At the time, Bennet could not have anticipated regretting his decision to bypass college. He mused, "Going to college right out of high school might have been easier than waiting."

What can colleges do to help more first-generation Caucasian students? The college Charlotte attended actively made her feel important. She knew she had accomplished a lot. Up to this point in Charlotte's life, family issues overshadowed her accomplishments. Charlotte wanted to attend a college that made her feel important. Charlotte's parents could not assist in

making the college selection, admission, or which major to declare. Charlottes took care of those details and she selected a college she believed would take care of her.

The college Charlotte chose addressed her by name and offered a competitive financial aid package. Charlotte recalled, “Individualized recruitment could encourage more FGS to attend college. The head of the department contacted me and invited me to spend the night with an upperclassman. They catered to my ego.”

George was not recruited by any college. However, he was aware that he wanted to attend a military and agricultural college. He met required deadlines for such a college and paid the tuition. Despite not receiving encouragement to apply to colleges, he accomplished his academic goals. George suggested, “More colleges need to go into the schools if they want students to know what college is and encourage students to go to college.”

Elizabeth did not know what to expect in college. She was a traditional student, but she did not have a traditional college experience. As Elizabeth’s daughter now prepares to attend college, Elizabeth is concerned that her daughter has a mistaken idea about the college experience and the responsibilities she will face there. Elizabeth has the ability to help her daughter with college procedural processes but not with how to negotiate college pitfalls. Elizabeth pointed out, “I never had the college experience. I went from high school to college and finished as quickly as possible to save money. I had very little involvement in college life.”

Career advancement motivated Darcy to complete college. He did not say if colleges attempted to recruit him. His college career began at a community college from which he withdrew. Following discharge from the Army, he felt prepared to attend college. Darcy’s determination to become an FBI Agent led to his decision to attend college as a nontraditional student.

He suggested, “Colleges could make themselves more accessible to student and accommodate more students. You didn’t have people tell you how to make college easier.”

Jane’s family supported her throughout her academic career. She performed well in school, but in her interview, Jane did not specify any methods used to encourage her to pursue college. In general, she believed that schools should set up programs to explore college options from early education onwards. Jane suggested, “Colleges could have more clubs in high school to teach students about going to college. That would help students make decisions about attending and how to be successful.”

William did not know the importance of preparing for or attending college. Like all too many potential FGS, William lacked college aspirations because he did not have support from school or from home. William discovered, “Colleges are a business. Colleges need to get more involved in promoting their product, try harder to accommodate more students.”

Colleges need to develop a presence at all levels of education. Teachers often push students to perform well in class, but this represents a small proportion of what it takes to succeed in college. College representatives can inspire students and provide accurate information about college systems. Kitty suggested, “More colleges should go into high schools and make themselves present so students can understand what college is all about. Job shadowing makes students with disabilities aware of options.”

Education was not a priority in Georgiana’s family when she was growing up, but now she is a teacher, and has taken on a role as college mentor to her students. She believes sharing knowledge gained from college experience will encourage these students to attend college. Many of Georgiana’s students live in poverty and the cost of college seems like an insurmounta-

ble barrier. Georgiana suggested, “Colleges should go to elementary school and create a presence. Volunteers should talk to students and make college real to students so students can understand college is for everyone.”

Darcy, William, Georgiana, and Bennet felt discouraged while attending community college. Although they understood the benefits of remediation, they were frustrated at spending two extra years developing math and reading skills at a community college. Bennet pointed out, “Colleges need to disseminate more information to high school students and during early education so students can understand the benefits of taking challenging courses and attending college.”

Summary: Chapter 4

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of 10 FGCS as they prepared for and attended college, and to determine the role being Caucasian played in their college success. Guided by the research questions, the participants provided thick description associated with the phenomenon of being FGCS and what they had experienced as the first members in their families to attend and graduate from college. Chapter 5 provides,

- a summary and discussion of the results;
- discusses the results in light of previous literature;
- examines the limitations of the study;
- provides the implications of the results for practice; and
- makes recommendations for further research.

The participants’ responses led to additional questions and future research topics which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The researcher developed this phenomenology study to analyze the lived experiences which motivated 10 FGCS to attend and graduate from college, and how race influenced the participants' college success. Research by Terenzini et al. (1996) and Tinto (2007) showed that FGCS face the same preparation, transition, and college life issues that other college students, while simultaneously experiencing challenges that are unique to the FGS population. Schrader and Brown (2008) have established additional first-generation barriers such as family issues, financial concerns, social confusion, and cultural issues, all of which can persistently stymie success. Purpose Built Communities (2017) suggested that college acquisition represents an academic milestone in which students, parents, educators, and community members hope students will aspire, and college represents the final stage of developing children into well-rounded, self-actualized adult citizens.

Learning about FGCS experiences is essential to educators interested in advancing strategies to increase the number of FGCS entering college as traditional students, rather than delaying entry or abstaining from college. An improved understanding of FGCS experiences could provide educators with practical strategies to support and encourage more FGCS to attend college. Chapter 2 explored the issues experienced by FGS and found that information that pertains directly to FGCS is limited.

The lack of college mentors within a family often affects an FGCS decision to plan and prepare for college. FGCS are often unaware of the significance college plays in improving financial and social status. FGCS possessed less knowledge about college, were unaware of the

commitment required to be successful in college, and often receive limited family support (Terenzini et al., 1996). FGS parents lacked experiential knowledge of college and are frequently unable to advise their children about the process of preparing, transitioning, and remaining in college (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Tinto, 2007). Thus, FGS tend to live in the moment rather than for the future (Opidee, 2015). Carp and Hughes (2008) noted that experiential knowledge deficits increased FGS's risk for failure while when compared to their traditional peers. Therefore, FGCS face significant issues when exploring options such as engaging in challenging high school preparatory courses, attending college, and completing college. Overcoming these challenges improved FGCS opportunities to meet academic and career aspiration. Moreover, increasing the number of FGCS graduating from college provides a viable solution to bolstering the number of qualified employees within the job market and keeping the U.S. in a competitive position within the global economy (West, 2012). Regardless of race, socioeconomic background, or culture, the findings of multiple research projects have helped colleges to recognize that FGS experience obstacles that limit their aspirations to prepare and persist in college.

Providing adequate resources to FGCS supported successful college completion is often a challenge for educators. On the surface, FGCS look like majority students, but belong to the FGS classification. Engle et al. (2006) found that educators can promote strategies to help students prepare for and transition into college. One participant said he felt confused and embarrassed because of his lack of understanding of college processes. This resulted in this individual not taking the appropriate steps to complete the college admissions process. Therefore, educators are unaware of the need to provide FGCS with strategies and to develop protective factors that will help to improve FGCS college outcomes.

During interviews, the researcher bracketed bias and systematically analyzed the interview data. Analyzing participants' responses led to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of being a FGS and Caucasian, via an exploration of emerging themes while not changing the nature of the rich, thick responses given by participants. Participant feedback substantiated the researcher's assertion that educators need to learn more about providing support to individual groups within the wider FGS classification. Chapter 5 furnishes the reader with a summary of the results, discusses the significant findings of this research as it relates to the themes of extant literature related to FGCS preparation, motivation, challenges, and triumphs which accompanied the participant's decision to attend college. The study focused on answering the three following research questions.

1. What perception do first-generation Caucasian students have about being more privileged than other first-generation students?
2. Which support made the most significant impact on the participant's college decisions?
3. Which challenges developed the participant's awareness of the importance of attending college?

This chapter concludes with the limitations of the study, the implication of the results when applied to practice, recommendations for further research, and a concluding summary.

Summary of Results

Utilization of the qualitative phenomenology method provided the researcher with a platform that facilitated the collection of rich, thick accounts of FGCS early education, academic preparation, family dynamics, and college experiences. Five men and five women, ranging in

age from 21–88, met the criteria to participate in the research and were subsequently interviewed. Participants reported belonging to the FGCS classification because they are Caucasian and the first in their family to graduate from college. Prior to participating in this research, interviewees disclosed they were unaware of belonging to a unique population of college graduates. Therefore, participants labored under the impression that they should have understood college systems and processes despite lacking frames of reference to navigate college systems and processes. They were also unaware of the importance of selecting a college that was sensitive to diverse needs of FGS.

One participant admitted he was embarrassed that none of his family had attended college and confided that FGS peers shared similar feelings with him. Two participants said they realized it was easier for their friends to understand college conventions because the parents of those friends had attended college. Participants admitted that they understood, in advance, that attending college would be challenging, but they were determined to succeed. All participants felt proud of their accomplishments and wanted to share experiences about the personal determination that had helped them to succeed in college.

During the initial stages of research, the researcher expected participants to acknowledge the considerable role played by educators in their college preparation and academic success. However, all participants stated that educators played an insignificant role in their decision to attend college. This indicated that improvement to America's education system requires the concurrent, collaborative efforts of educators to connect families who have broken intergenerational noncollege attendance for mentoring purposes (Purpose Built Communities, 2017). Most families expected their child to graduate from college but were unable to translate those expectations into actionable plans for college success (Gofen, 2009). Helping more potential FGCS to enter

college as traditional rather than nontraditional students will increase these students' chances of graduating.

Unlike many potential FGCS, the participants selected for this study overcame doubts about attending college. Once in the college system, these participants soon acclimated to college life and overcame typical first-year college stress to successfully graduate (Falcon, 2015). Future research should focus on identifying FGCS from as early as early childhood programs. Providing the families of these children with early academic and college awareness support programs could encourage more families to support their children's college aspirations. This phenomenological study offered insight into the lived experiences of 10 successful FGCS. Although previous research has focused on FGS, relatively little research has focused on the impact of being a FGCS, or on the interactions that support academic aspirations.

This phenomenological study provided an opportunity to directly study the phenomenon of with being FGCS by asking participants to discuss their lived experiences. Replicating this study with additional groups of FGCS could improve knowledge about the FGCS experience and highlight strategies that can be developed to increase their interest in college completion. Additional research should be conducted to learn more about the distinction between traditional FGCS and nontraditional students FGCS. Throughout this research, participants' responses strongly suggested that family expectations and support played critical roles in how these students prepared for college, their recruitment to college, and their persistence in college. Developing longitudinal studies to examine the needs of FGCS could provide additional opportunities to address the needs of FGCS (Tinto, 2006). Longitudinal studies track data over time. This provides the researcher with opportunities to study phenomenon over time rather than in one moment of time.

The interviews provided the researcher with an insight into FGCS experience and offered suggestions for help to overcome FGCS challenges. As suggested in Chapter 4, participant responses provided significant data related to FGCS issues and suggested determination, rather than privilege, played a more significant role than race. Replicating this study in other communities will help to develop a stronger consensus regarding how to help FGCS prepare and persist in college. More importantly, responses underscored how family support affects academic decisions related to attending college as either a traditional or nontraditional learner. The six traditional FGCS confirmed that the college expectations of their families had a greater influence than race on their decisions to attend college. The remaining participants confirmed that family disinterest in their education limited their academic aspirations. Therefore, none of the four nontraditional FGCS participants had any interest in college or qualifications immediately after high school graduation.

In some cases, early educators were found to have prepared students for college, but they did not play a significant role in influencing FGCS to attend college. Even with encouragement from their families, the six traditional FGCS struggled to overcome college confusions. All of the participants talked about the role their families had played in their decision to attend college. All participants said their high school guidance counselors planned their route through high school. Two participants found that high school counselors provided limited constructive advice about college. One participant admitted his guidance counselor advised him to take fewer challenging classes in high school. Two participants refused to meet with their high school guidance counselors after being told they were not college material.

In the early education setting, educators are witnessing a decreased amount of parental involvement in children's education. These students often lag behind their peers in academic

readiness skills. The participants in this research indicated that college preparation and encouragement extend beyond the classroom. Early educators must implement practices to encourage parents to reengage in their children's education. A family's failure to prioritize education has a profound impact on a child's attitude toward learning and affects a child's decision to prepare for and persist in school. As Wang (2014) suggested, the message parents send to their child is critical to the child's academic success. Further research, based on successful FGCS parent methods to prepare children for college, could be used by educators to engage more parents in their children's education. The message a parent conveys to a child about education affects the value the child places on education. FGCS parents require greater guidance to understand how to proactively support their child's college aspirations. However, as Orbe (2007) suggests, families of FGS often do not know how to support their children resulting in those children experiencing isolation and helplessness.

Discussion of Results

The FGCS participants in this study denied that race played any role in making them more privileged than others FGS. Six of the 10 participants attended college as traditional students. These six participants admitted that significant family support during their formative years had helped them to develop positive, proactive educational behaviors. The participants who came from dysfunctional backgrounds and who experienced financial hardships acknowledged that the value their family placed on education created greater opportunities for educational than race.

Conversely, the nontraditional participants demonstrated that a lack of adequate family support led to poor choices that stymied college preparation and prevented subsequent college recruitment. As one participant suggested, "Successful students are groomed for college." In the

context of this research, this participant noted, “Grooming for college means parents discuss the importance of attending college, make learning and homework a part of daily routines, and revere teachers and the education system.” The six traditional students who had been “groomed for college” actively sought out opportunities to prepare for and attend college. These participants succeeded in school, were employed throughout high school and college, explored possible careers, met with counselors, applied to colleges, and entered college the fall after high school graduation.

None of the four nontraditional participants attended college immediately after high school. Two participants started families and two pursued careers. FGS often pattern their lives after role models who did not attend college. In the absence of family support, educators can promote college as a challenging yet worthy goal to attain and a pathway to a successful career and improved social standing (Opidee, 2015). These participants failed to plan for a future and were unaware of the benefits college could provide to their family and to their careers, because their families had never discussed college. Two participants, both of whom are currently teachers, agreed that educators could encourage more students to attend college by improving awareness of the benefits of attending college. FGCS often experience a sense of otherness in social situations and find college life exhausting as they straddle two worlds (Stuber, 2011). Family and social pressures made it difficult to acclimatize to college life. Havlik et al. (2017) noted greater demands cause FGCS to experience intensified stress due to the higher demands placed on their time and financial resources. The following events decreased opportunities to adjust to college life and decreased college enjoyment:

- guilt regarding family sacrifice to put the student through college;
- guilt when participating in enjoyable college activities;

- work demands limiting opportunities to participate in collegiate activities;
- limited networking opportunities; and
- limited financial support that limited college choices, and living on campus (Havlik et al., 2017).

Six participants experienced guilt related to attending college. Three participants were employed full-time, and two had to balance family and course demands. These participants reported feeling exhaustion. They did not participate in traditional college life and experiences. Two of the traditional students did not live on campus and they did not connect to campus life or participate in traditional campus activities. The four nontraditional participants believed that attending college immediately after high school would have been less stressful. As Stuber (2011) indicated, social networking and building social capital within the college setting provides students with opportunities to increase self-confidence and improve job prospects. Four traditional students participated in typical college experiences such as living on campus and participating in campus activities. While each of these participants found college a transformative experience, only three reported satisfaction with on campus networking opportunities. One participant enjoyed engaging in professional conversations. Corwin and Cintron (2011) suggested that not all college students participate in beneficial peer interactions. Six of the participants in this research failed to participate in any social networking because they lived or worked off campus to order to be able to afford tuition. One traditional student believed attending a small college limited her networking opportunities, but the small campus size allowed her to build social capital and become “a force” in the activities in which she participated on campus. One participant suggested colleges should provide more career counseling and internships to student.

Many individuals experience success without attending college. Shatkin (2015) referred to college as an education milestone that requires significant adjustment, but this provides students with opportunities to improve their economic status. Increasing FGCS graduation rates improves the likelihood of maintaining the well-educated workforce required to keep the U.S. globally competitive (West, 2012). Two participants agreed that career improvement and organizational competitiveness relies on the willingness of their employees to attend college and professional training opportunities in the fields of technology, marketing, and product development. These participants felt limited by their current positions. Despite years of service and experience, these participants lacked the college qualifications for advancement. One participant admitted he did not want to start in an entry-level position if he were to join a new organization. The participant complained that he never understood the importance of attending college. “Colleges need to disseminate more information to high school students so students can understand the benefits of taking challenging courses and attending college. No one in my family had ever attended college. I didn’t know I could be successful in college.”

The commitment to attend college requires a significant investment of time and money and confidence. Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2008) and Tinto (2007) argued that FGS can be successful in college. Six of the participants received encouragement from their families to attend college. Each of these six admitted that their family’s persistent belief was what built their self-confidence and compelled them to succeed. Moreover, the families of these participants were available to answer questions or suggest others who might help. These families toured campuses with their children to assist with the college selection process.

The four nontraditional participants had limited frames of reference to prepare for college, taking admissions tests, writing essays, filling out applications, or receiving encouragement. Once participants decided to attend college, the four nontraditional participants discovered that finding the right college and applying for admission was difficult. One participant felt discouraged by the complicated application process at one college but encouraged by the empathy another college expressed and its willingness to assist him with the admission process. This participant admitted to feeling embarrassed in terms of how little he knew about the college application process and access systems.

Each of the four nontraditional participants had academic deficiencies that prevented college admission. Once these participants had completed the required remedial courses at community colleges, they were able to transfer to a 4-year college. As suggested by Tinto (2007), participants' subsequent success in college demonstrates that FGS must have opportunities to succeed in college. The participants agreed that, in the absence of supportive families, they would have benefited from improved college mentoring. The participants admitted that it was unlikely they would have attended college after high school.

Early parental involvement in a child's education provides the base for future college decisions and builds social capital. Although Smith and Johnson (2003) found that the influence of early educators affects both a student's preparation and decision to enter college, the participants in this study admitted that their families exerted more influence over their college decision. Families require more information about early learning and college preparation opportunities. Regular parent-teacher meetings during a child's early education increases family and social capital. Support empowers families to take active roles in high school and college planning (Redford et al., 2009). Better-informed parents possess the confidence to assist their children in

making decisions about college (Smith & Johnson, 2003). With this in mind, educators from prekindergarten through college should advocate more strongly for collaborative academic planning to improve parental understanding of academic language and processes.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

FGCS study participants discussed the influences on their choices in conjunction with being Caucasian and FGS. The researcher bracketed bias in order to avoid predicting responses during the interview process. Using inductive reasoning, the following themes were extracted from the data:

- the urgency to succeed before and during college;
- the importance of grooming;
- learning about college preparation programs;
- the limitations of family support;
- enumerating the role of friends;
- the importance of having someone to turn to;
- a sense of accomplishment in achieving a degree qualification;
- meeting family or personal aspirations;
- the challenges facing the FGCS; and
- the career options and aspirations as significant motivations for college completion.

The remaining sections of this study will integrate the previously mentioned literature with the primary research data of this study to answer the study's three main questions. The concluding sections will address the implications of the study's findings for practice and suggest directions for future research. Data collected from participants demonstrated that a family's level of support, family capital and social capital, career aspirations, and the participant's stage in life

influenced the participants' college experiences and issues more than the phenomenon of being Caucasian.

What perception do first-generation Caucasian students have about being more privileged than other first-generation students? The consensus of the participants in this research was that race does not grant FGCS privilege. Attending college delivers life-changing opportunities regardless of the student's background (Terenzini et al., 1996). Impoverished Caucasians, like other minorities, can become marginalized due to financial shortfalls (Stuber, 2011). Similar to most other students, FGCS face many challenges to attending college. Hartigan, 1999, cited in Stuber (2011) argued that being a poor Caucasian often carries a stigma and leads to marginalization of members of this group by other social classes. FGCS find their "whiteness" becomes a liability when accessing programs intended to support students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Variations in family support. The research participants' class breakdown included: one from wealth, three living in poverty, and six from middle class families. Participants' backgrounds and family's attitudes toward education and family capital varied significantly. For example, Tate et al. discovered:

Studying family influence for students is particularly important, given that the source of their difference from traditional students is closely connected to their experience of their family. In other words, being a college student is another way of describing the familial context from which a student comes in pursuit of higher education. Further, past research shows conflicting results about what impact family influence has on their career and educational development. (Tate et al., 2015, p. 431)

Six participants, whose families created child-centered home environments and who promoted education as an essential endeavor, entered college as traditional students. As suggested by Gorard et al. (2012), in families where education and knowledge are valued the children likewise value education have college aspiration because it is valuable for their self- esteem, social mobility, and future endeavors. Although four of the six traditional FGCS families struggled financially, they worked together to meet financial obligations. Conversely, the four participants who received no academic support or encouragement from their families entered college as nontraditional college students. Family dysfunction or lack of family support limited these participants' higher education aspirations.

All participants denied experiencing privilege during their college education careers, and attributed their academic success to hard work and family support of their college aspirations. Although Hughes (2010) suggested, Caucasians experiences benefits and unearned privileges based on their because they lack representation which creates and uneven opportunities. Two participants pointed out that recruitment standards may vary by college, but each college's standards apply to all students. One male participant who could afford to attend college, found he was ineligible to attend any 4-year college. He was offered poor academic guidance. His attitude and poor behavior suggested he had no interest in attending college.**Significant influences and persistence.** Financially disadvantaged students often fail to become engaged in campus activities unless they can find opportunities to become valued member of college life (Gofen, 2009).

These may include:

- the desire to set an example for others; the ability to achieve despite obstacles;
- making career advancement;
- degree attainment;

- managing expectations of navigating college systems;
- assisting with college support systems; and
- meeting family, academic, financial, and social challenges.

Each participant admitted that financing college represented a family hardship. Therefore, all participants had paid jobs while attending college, ranging from full-time, to on campus, holiday or part-time jobs. One participant worked multiple jobs, while another admitted exhaustion because he worked full-time and attended night-school after work. Three participants were recipients of academic or athletic scholarships, and each participant benefited from lottery tuition assistance.

Scholarships and lottery assistance did not cover campus living expenses, activity fees, or study books and materials. In addition, all participants originated loans to meet outstanding fee obligations. All four nontraditional participants expressed frustration at completing community college remedial courses and spending time and money on additional courses that could not be transferred to their 4-year college degree courses.

Which support made the most significant impact on the participant's college decisions? The challenges participants experienced were not limited to issues relating directly to college. Based on the eight participants' interview responses, significant family or educational challenges diminished college aspirations. The participants acknowledged that issues they experienced before entering college persisted throughout their college careers. All participants noted that the unfamiliar issues they encountered in college led to substantial frustrations that reduced opportunities to spend time with family and friends or engaging in leisure activities. Nine participants found that these challenges interfered with their college experience, reducing enjoyment and learning, threatening college completion, and delaying college attendance.

Variations in family support. Many families living in poverty are unaware of the importance of prioritizing education in the early years or of the influence they exert over a child's decision to attend college.

Given that supportive family interactions can help FGS successfully transition from high school to college and positively influence student achievement, the insights gleaned from these findings may assist in providing understanding about the unique experiences of FGS. Specifically, these findings may help to provide parents of FGS with knowledge of these experiences so that they may craft specific advice, instructions, and messages that can aid their child in navigating unique educational struggles. (Wang & Nuru, 2016, p. 166)

Although the families of six participants actively encouraged their children to attend college, four participants admitted that education had not been a priority at home and college attendance was not encouraged. In the traditional families, the child's academic performance was discussed throughout the formal education years and the child was encouraged to aspire to attend college. One female participant said, "I didn't want to disappoint the people who believed in me over the years. It was also a pride thing. I was the first person from my family to graduate." Another participant noted, "My family never talked about college. I now understand the role I must play in my students' lives in the place of their families. I know, I must encourage my students to attend college."

Significant influences and persistence. Family, finances, self-esteem, academic preparedness all influenced the participants' decision to persist in college. One participant commented, "I wanted to participate in this study. I wanted to raise awareness of being a FGCS and highlight

their struggles. I raise student awareness of the importance of attending college.” Sufficient college funding challenged all 10 participants. Six participants reported that they were supported financially by their families throughout their academic careers. Ng et al. (2015) noted that attending college places financial burdens on families. The treat of financial burdens often discourages many FGCS from attending college and places constraints on the college experiences when the student cannot afford to participate in campus activities, study abroad, or join campus sponsored organizations. Nine participants to applied for student loans and grants utilizing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) applications. Participant received loans, grants, and scholarships. Six participants worked at least part-time throughout their academic careers. Three worked full time while in college and one student was a homemaker. One participant said her parents paid for college, but she had to pay for things she wanted. Like the other participants, she subsidized her college education with loans. One participant originated loans to pay for college and reimbursed his employer upon the successful completion of his course. Three of the nontraditional participants worked full-time, and one had full-time parenting responsibilities. Four of the participants who attended college as nontraditional students believed that attending college immediately after high school would have been less stressful.

Four of the six traditional participants lived on campus and actively participated in college activities, while two lived at home to save money. Kuh et al. (2006) noted that many FGS may live at home to save money. Living on campus provides significant benefits to students. Students living on campus have better access to campus services such as remediation, more opportunities to network, less commute time, and more time to focus on participating in the college experience. The six traditional participants utilized the FAFSA to access available grants, loans, work-study, and worked to fund college. Four participants received academic scholarships or

academic-athletic scholarships packages from the college they attended, and participants originated loans to accommodate expenses exceeding college debt. The Higher Education Act was authorized in 1965, which meant, the oldest traditional participant could not benefit from FAFSA. This participant's mother paid the \$500 tuition fee so the student could live on campus. Paying the required fees permitted college attendance, but he was still forced to work when not attending classes in order to fund college attendance.

Two of the traditional students lived at home during college to save money. One participant attended a private college because her high school academic record and test for academic skills (SAT) did not meet minimum requirements to attend a public college. Although the other traditional student qualified to attend a four-year college, she saved money by living off campus and attending a community college before transferring to a 4-year college. Neither student participated in college-sponsored events or felt any social connection to the college they attended. Another participant received consistent support from his family throughout his academic career, but he did not enjoy the college experience. This participant had to overcome many setbacks throughout college. As Tinto (1975, 2006) concluded students who are well-integrated into the social and academic setting and maintain close ties to family will persist in college despite significant difficulties students may experience. During the participant's freshman year, the college placed this participant on academic probation. The participant lost his baseball scholarship and he could not play college baseball until his grades improved. Losing his scholarship and having to attend college an additional semester was both expensive and frustrating. The participant considered joining the U.S. Army, but he persisted with college, as joining the Army would not have supported his career goals.

FGCS often experience otherness while attending college as they lack frames of reference for their college experiences (Stuber, 2011). Hartigan (1999) has found that Caucasian students from low socioeconomic backgrounds failed to receive the white privilege experienced by affluent Caucasians. An affluent male participant in this research recalled, “I was smart, but I was encouraged to take easy classes because I was too playful. My parents didn’t care what I did. I took the easy classes and made low grades. I couldn’t get into any college.”

As suggested by Tinto (2007), increasingly colleges recognize the role they play in encouraging students to persevere. Colleges are committed to actively implementing strategies to engage students in academic and college life regardless of the student’s background, but educators are often uninformed about how to break the intergenerational cycle that limits FGS’ college participation (Gofen, 2009). This research demonstrated that family support throughout the child’s educational career increases the likelihood that the child will attend college as a traditional student.

Which challenges developed the participant’s awareness of the importance of attending college? The four nontraditional participants spent a considerable amount of time deciding whether to attend college. As with the six traditional FGCS participants, the four nontraditional participants attended college later in life having decided that college offered a path to career advancement. The two nontraditional students with families wanted to be role models for their children, while the six traditional participants knew from early on that they would attend college because their families had supported their education from an early age and had encouraged them to participate in college as a means to life improvement.

Variations in family support. One nontraditional male participant said he believed parents his parents groomed him for college from an early age. This grooming included:

- teaching respect for others;
- teaching responsibility for ones' actions;
- encouraging self-motivation;
- encouraging curiosity about learning;
- supporting learning opportunities;
- displaying positive attitudes toward learning and education;
- encouraging excellence at school; and
- frequently discussing the benefits of college.

Based on the responses of six of the traditional FGCS participants, the researcher found each of these had been groomed by their parents to attend college. The traditional students indicated that their families undertook the responsibility of grooming their children for college. The families achieved this by encouraged the children to do well in school, encouraged regular church attendance and participation, frequently discussed the importance of attending college, and helped their children to decide on which college to apply. Gofen (2009) suggests that the outcome of belonging to a child-centered family is that the child valued education. FGS often lack the knowledge and social capital necessary to prepare for college (Karp & Hughes, 2008; Schrader & Brown, 2008). These six participants admitted they entered college as traditional students with limited knowledge of college or academic life but endowed with family and social capital that supported their educational aspirations. Gofen (2009) has found that students from child-centered families report positive attitudes toward education. The attitudes and desires of parents for their children to succeed increase social capital and self-efficacy in those children.

Some middle and high schools encourage talented underrepresented students to attend federally funded programs that are designed to support college aspirations by preparing these

students for college. The Federal Government funds several college preparation programs housed under the umbrella term TRIO–Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services. The three original college access programs expanded to eight to provide a wider net of support for minorities, individuals from a low socioeconomic background, and FGS. The U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) described the TRIO program as:

Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) are Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs. (para. 1)

The participants in this study were unaware of TRIO programs and could not remember anyone suggesting they should participate in any such program.

Significant influences and persistence. Educators can encourage students to attend college by advocating for students who lack social capital and providing support to encourage FGCS to persist in college. Many FGS lack the substantial preparation required to perform well and to socially and academically acclimatize to college (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2011). Furthermore, self-determination, resilience, and persistence play a vital role in assuring that FGS remain in their chosen college to the completion of their studies. One participant suggested colleges should disseminate additional information to high school students and participate in early education to help students to understand the benefits of attending college and undertaking challenging courses. Stuber (2011) suggested that college mentors who understand the unique needs of FGCS play a critical role in FGCS success. One participant admitted experiencing helplessness and giving up in frustration rather than pursuing answers to questions he did not know how to

ask. This participant explained that, while attending college, his success coach supported his success and helped him feel empowered to ask questions and actively participate in college decisions.

Some students experienced isolation, but they turned those feelings into motivation and purpose and, ultimately, adjusted to the college situation. Networking with students allowed FGS to understand the experiences of others with similar issues (Stuber, 2012). One female participant said an educator, asked, “Where else can students get the encouragement they need to go to college when it’s not expected at home?” Another participant, also an educator, suggested, “Colleges should have a presence in public schools and be a good role model [sic] so that students believe attending college is the norm for students, not the exception.” Providing potential FGS access to experienced FGS could provide a model to circumvent college issues.

Knowing that others share similar family, financial, cultural, and academic issues may encourage the college aspirations of more students and encourage those already in college to persistence. One participant suggested that some students are embarrassed that their families have never attended college. Tinto (2006) argued that involvement in college activities matters, as it encourages students to persist in college. Graduating from college drives away the stigma some feel about not coming from a family with a history of college attendance.

Careers advancement. Individuals who have not attended college will increasingly be unable to take advantage of innovative career opportunities. Havlik et al. (2017) noted that the new careers are due to technology advancements. Many careers did not exist as recently as five years ago but are non-the-less skills which can be learned in college and are required for employment. Three participants determined that the lack of a college degree limited in their careers. Despite their extensive work experience, the participants did not qualify for career advancement

due to limited educational attainment. The participants' aspirations for career advancement motivated them to attend college. One participant had worked for the same company since graduating from high school—for 23 years. He wanted to explore career opportunities within other companies but he was uninterested in accepting entry-level position with a reduced salary, and limited responsibilities.

Seven of the participants were educators. In South Carolina, the State Department of Education requires public educators to participate in college education training programs. Graduating from a teacher preparation programs qualifies participants to teach in South Carolina public schools and continued certification and career advancement require educators to participate in graduate and professional development courses.

Lack of family support. Researchers have found that students who lack family support can benefit from federal support programs. Contreras (2011) critiqued the effectiveness of pre-college Federal TRIO programs and suggested they provide critical support from middle and secondary school for underrepresented students to attain higher education qualifications. Quantitative research conducted by Sanchez et al. (2016) points to the importance of enrolling at-risk students in rigorous federally supported college preparation programs. Sanchez et al. (2016) and Moschetti and Hudley (2015) have found that living and being employed on campus improves student integration into campus life and also improves social capital as students have more time to participate in campus activities. Working on campus strengthens student connections to their campus and provides opportunities to connect with their peers (Havlik et al., 2017). Federal Work-Study programs provide students with opportunities to find employment on campus. This gives students more opportunities to earn money, build social capital, and connect to campus.

Family, academic, financial, and social challenges. FGCS often feel like outsiders on campus this often leads to isolation. The FGCS in Havlik et al.'s (2017) study admitted they felt like outsiders because of their socioeconomic disadvantage that meant they could not afford to participate in campus-sponsored events and learning opportunities with their peers. The feeling of otherness frequently led to an inability to adjust to college life (Havlik et al., 2017). These FGCS believed other students lacked empathy for their situation. Similarly, Oldfield (2012) found that disadvantaged students feel isolated due to their financial and social struggles. The two traditional participants in this research who did live on campus lacked the social capital and financial capital to become immersed in college activities, and the four nontraditional participants reported that work and family obligations limited their opportunities to become immersed in college life and to avail of the services available to other students. Difficulties often arise for FGS when students are unable to access campus services and activities (Corwin & Citron, 2011). Regardless of the quality and benefit of services that college make available to students, the services are useless unless the intended recipients can access the benefits the services provide.

FGCS often struggle to remain in college due to various family, social, or financial issues. Many FGCS give up rather than persisting and finding solutions to their issues. Stuber (2011) used an intersectional study to explore the factors affecting disadvantaged, first-generation, Caucasian, working-class students. The findings from Stuber's study establish the importance of promoting factors that support resilience, human persistence, and academic persistence in the face of perceived adversity. Stuber's research was critical in focusing on and understanding the effects of race and class as both assets and liabilities to the persistence of first and second-generation college students. Kuh et al. (2006) suggested that retaining students necessi-

tates student comprehension of the benefits of remaining in college. Zimmerman (2014) emphasized that extending resiliency can help shield FGCS from the many stressors that can produce adverse outcomes. Finding ways to build resilience as a component of student preparation could increase positive college outcomes.

Limitations

The research presented in this phenomenological study examined the experiences of 10 FGCS and reviewed previous studies related to FGS. Astin's theory of involvement, Tinto and Pascarella's theory of attrition, and Terenzini's work related to the positive effect college has in FGS lives have helped many educators recognize FGS as a special population of students who represent a challenge to college administration related to recruiting and retaining FGS because prospective FGS often believe they have insurmountable barriers to college attainment. College recruitment and retention specialists who adopt effective recruitment and retention strategies based on sound research strategies can help FGS overcome financial, social, and academic issues and improved college outcomes. Gofen (2009) found that campuses which institute student acclimation programs, offering incentives, and articulate the benefits of college, are more likely to encourage FGCS enrollment and college completion. Although the research revealed relevant information about FGCS, a research method could have been designed to collect more functional data about FGCS experiences. Within this study, significant differences among participants included:

- the age span was between the early 20s and the mid-80s (four in their 20s; one in his 30s; two in their 40s; one in her 50s; one in his 70s; and one in his 80s);
- level of parental support (six received significant support and encouragement; four received no support or encouragement);

- family capital (six received positive messages about their characters and abilities; four did not receive positive messages about their characters and abilities);
- academic ability and preparation (continual parental and educator messages about the importance of education); and
- six traditional and four nontraditional FGCS.

This research was designed to investigate whether participants believed race allowed them to enjoy FGCS privilege. The participants unanimously indicated that determination, rather than race-based privilege, made college possible. Although the results are not generalizable, they indicate that among the FGCS population there are important phenomena and experience yet to be studied. The findings of this research may help educators to better understand FGCS decisions to attend college.

Although research was limited to FGCS, the responses of the participants indicated that experiences within this group vary significantly. Building on this research design, future research could recruit FGCS with specific characteristics related to, for example, socioeconomic background, age brackets, traditional or nontraditional status, academic history, or parental support. In this study, the researcher learned,

- family support influences decisions to attend college upon completion of high school;
- lack of family support delays college attendance;
- determination rather than race support college attendance;
- limited ability can be overcome with parental support; and
- wealth does not assure an FGCS will attend college.

Implication of the Results for Theory, Policy, and Practice

The research developed through this study fully supports the researcher's conceptual framework which heavily relied on Kellner's critical education theory. As suggested by Kellner (2010) education must be fluid and relevant to the needs of the evolving population of students and their academic growth to be effective. Applying the methods used in this research in other contexts is likely to substantiate that families profoundly impact FGCS decisions to attend college and support the FGCS subsequent success in college. The research indicated the need for more research designed to investigate family dynamics, the outcomes of which can be used to develop strategies to support improved academic preparation within the family and the education system. Future research, based on this design, can be used to develop strategies that educators can use professionally and share with families to improve the support families provide to their children.

Over the years the existing research has been utilized by educators to increase the number of FGCS graduating from college. The findings from the researcher's indicated a need to increase family involvement in education. Therefore, the researcher from the present study advocates more should be done to get families involved in their child's education. The participants suggested they benefitted from a nurturing family, building family and social capital, and learning about funding and other aspects of college from knowledgeable educators. Many parents do want their child to attend college. Understanding college can help reduce the stress families experience when encouraging their children to attend college. Prioritizing the teaching of family proactive academic support strategies will improve how families support the academic behaviors of their children, increase the number of students recruited into college, and the influence subsequent college outcomes. Social media could be instrumental in connecting families willing to

share tips about supporting academic success, developing competitive high school transcripts, dealing with college bureaucracy or tackling financial aid problems.

FGCS represent a diverse population of students who will benefit from the development of additional programs and support to assist in meeting their academic goals. Future research to investigate a broader FGCS spectrum will increase the robustness of this study. Based on information collected as part of this research, early preparation and encouraging awareness of college may help more FGCS aspire to attend college. Tinto (2007) noticed that many colleges already provide programs to recruit and retain FGS. Peer mentoring programs have met with great success, as they appeal to students who doubt they will find friends with similar FGS experiences, and they help with peer tutoring and advise.

Research should be conducted to collect experiential evidence that supports FGS college success. Developing, applying, and tracking research could suggest effective early intervention strategies to support the identification of FGCS, college recruitment, and retention (Gorard et al. 2012; Rouse & Kemple, 2009; Zhang et al, 2009). Results from phenomenological studies are valuable to educators, as participants who have lived experience of the phenomenon can provide autobiographical insight. The experiences of the FGCS in this study demonstrated that, regardless of race, FGS struggle with the transition to college and require support to help make a successful transition. Although preparation programs can effectively support college aspiration, many educators are unaware that federally funded programs exist or are unaware of how to provide students with access to these programs (Sanchez et al. 2016). Middle and high school educators must encourage participation and increase awareness of the programs available to un-

derrepresented students with college aspirations. Although, such programs can be based on eligibility, they can assist participants in build social capital and provide support interventions to students.

Based on prior research and data collected for this current study, merely recruiting students into college is not enough. Once in college, students require extensive and systematic support which extends beyond the first year. Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2007) revealed that first-generation, working-class students believe that effective retention programs should be ongoing and provided beyond the transition phase to help students to become fully immersed in college life. One participant spoke of the benefits of being assigned a success coach to answer questions and help keep him on track. As with Havlik et al. (2017), Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice (2007) found that positive college interactions and faculty relationships are critical to retaining students. Supplying additional professional development to faculty related to mentoring and fostering positive interactions among students and faculty, and developing college knowledge would not only build self-esteem but empower students as mentors. Gofen (2009) suggests that developing protective factors such as supportive friendships, participating in campus life courses, and in campus activities help to build student success and confidence. One participant noted that his success coach had dramatically affected his awareness of what his success meant to the college, making him feel well-informed, self-confident, and powerful. This participant, in turn, looked for ways to help others.

This research also found that college is worthwhile endeavor academically, socially, financially, and can be used as a springboard into self-actualization. Similar to Jones and Workman (2016), the research presented here found that college profoundly affects family dynamics, increases social mobility, improves career opportunities, and supports social networking. Rouse

and Kemple (2009) found that once one member of a family attends college, subsequent family members are more likely to attend, thus increasing U.S. competitiveness on the global job market. College may not be for everyone, but each person who aspires to attend college should have the opportunity to pursue academic endeavors.

Recommendations for Further Research

This phenomenological study provided the researcher with an opportunity to directly study the phenomenon of being an FGCS by asking questions about the lived experiences of these former students. Expanding this study to include additional FGS groups will help to improve knowledge about FGCS issues and help to develop the strategies required to increase potential FGCS interest in college. Additional research is required to learn more about both traditional and nontraditional FGCS. Throughout this study, participants strongly suggested that family expectations and support were critical to how these students prepared, how they were recruited, and their persistence in college. Developing longitudinal studies to examine the needs of FGCS could provide additional opportunities to address the needs of these students by focusing on how to work with families to increase their engagement in supporting their child's academic aspirations. The study also suggested changes in academic policies which could improve outcomes for FGCS.

Participants' responses to the interview script provided the researcher with useful insight into FGCS experience and suggestions for overcoming FGCS challenges. As suggested in Chapter 4, participant responses provided significant data related to FGCS issues and suggested determination, rather than privilege, played a more significant role than race. Replicating this re-

search in other communities or with additional FCS subgroups could help develop stronger consensus regarding best practices to help FGCS prepare and persist in college. More importantly, participant responses underscored how family support affects academic decisions.

The number of FGCS entering and completing college grows continually. Although this study provided some insight into the issues FGCS experience, more research could be developed to supply educators with strategies to address the needs of students struggling envision the benefits of a college education and support college aspirations. Furthermore, developing longitudinal studies which focus on:

- identifying and tracking the effectiveness of student preparation programs;
- providing educators with professional development which addresses preparing FGCS for college;
- supporting FGCS college aspirations;
- developing early family support programs to support college aspirations;
- evaluating the effectiveness of linking families to FGCS or FGS mentor families who can share the methods they used to prepare their children for college and support their children throughout college;
- the importance of educators and families proactively supporting college aspirations;
- developing early preschool interventions and strategies educators can provide to families who wish to support their child's college aspirations; and
- improving college recruitment and outcomes among FGCS.

The suggestions for longitudinal studies should be applied to all of the groups which comprise FGS. The researcher believes that learning about FGS successes and sharing the successes with potential FGS families could an increase the number of FGS meeting their college aspirations.

Sharing these findings will educate families by providing the families with relevant strategies to support their child's college aspirations. Stuber (2011) suggested that higher education researchers must explore the ongoing problem of leaving school and that administrators ought to continue to seek policy options to mitigate this problem. Currently, the heavy emphasis on attrition masks the extent to which such students continue to be underrepresented on college campuses. Stuber (2011) wrote, "By shifting the focus to those who remain on campus, more can be done to help them succeed socially and academically" (p. 117). Families who have broken the intergenerational cycle of noncollege attendance can mentor others (Gofen, 2009). Gofen (2009) found that, even though most families expect their children to graduate, many are unable to translate expectations into actionable plans for college success. Helping more potential FGCS enter as traditional rather than nontraditional students increases the chances of more FGCS graduating.

Similar to many potential FGCS, the participants selected for this research were, as reported by Falcon (2015), capable of acclimating to college life and overcoming typical first-year college stress. Future research should focus on how to identify potential FGCS during early years education and developing education classes to support parental education efforts to encourage and support their children to attend college. This phenomenological study offered insight into the lived experiences of 10 successful FGCS. Despite the large body of FGS research, very little of this research focuses on the impact of being a FGCS.

All the participants discussed the role their families played in their college decision-making process, and all attested that high school guidance counselors formulated their high school graduation plan. The six traditional FGCS confirmed that the college expectations of their families had a greater influence than race in their college decision. The other four participants confirmed that their family disinterest in education limited their academic interest and that race

played no role in subsequent college success. Even with family encouragement, the six traditional FGCS struggled to overcome confusion in college. Only two participants reported that the high school counselors provided constructive college advice. One male participant said his guidance counselor advised him to take fewer challenging classes, while two participants (one male and one female) refused to meet with their high school guidance counselors after being told they were “not college material.”

Improved course-to-career articulation policies could likewise reduce the time to degree completion and empower more professionals to acquire degrees. One male participant in this research complained, “My 4-year degree took six years. Taking so many extra courses was frustrating.” Colleges must improve credit articulation and reduce college expenses. Such strategies will help students remain focused on completing course requirements in order to reduce the time and expense of attending college. Nontraditional FGCS work experiences could be used, in part, as internships and micro-credentials. More than 2,900 colleges now allow students to participate in the College Level Exam Program (CLEP). Passing the five general CLEP exams costs approximately \$400 and replace one year of college (Five ways to get college credit, 2019). Portfolios and micro-credentials provide additional alternative methods that colleges can offer to reduce the time and cost of college completion and can improve credit articulation.

Developing resilience starts within the family, but not every family understands the importance of resilience when sending a child to college. The debilitating otherness of being FGCS can be mediated by sharing experiences with other FGS. Therefore, as one participant suggested, teaching parents about college grooming behaviors will help families to learn how to instill proactive academic attitudes and encourage more students to take advantage of available ac-

academic programs, networking opportunities, and leadership opportunities. Future research focused on comparing the perceptions of groups which comprise FGS including minorities, students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, and traditional and nontraditional students will improve strategies used to enhance FGS graduation rates. FGS regardless of race, socioeconomic background students can experience significant issues during college (Adair, 2005; Havlik et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; van Manen, 2016). Educators can share resources and strategies with families to motivate and prepare students to attend college.

Two participants in this research suggested that precollege educators and counselors impacted their decision to attend college. This indicated that more educators require training to provide FGCS with strategies to support their students' college aspirations. Preparation plays a significant role in whether FGCS enter college as traditional students or delay college recruitment until later in life. Sharing what FGCS say supported their college decisions and what helped them to overcome college issues could encourage more FGCS to attend college.

The researcher found that participants valued college support that assisted in streamlining the financial aid, credit articulation, and the matriculation process. The participants also appreciated personnel who respectfully answered questions, who seemed to know what they were doing, tried hard to get answers to their questions, or provided sound academic planning. Inkelas et al., (2006) and Moschetti and Hudley (2015) have made similar findings, which suggests that students want colleges to provide enhanced social support services, transition resources, and increased financial assistance to improve FGCS experiences. The researcher found that not all families consider education essential. Therefore, neither did their children value education. Based on participant responses, family support notably affected academic behaviors and aspirations. The families instilled values and encouraged their child to succeed in college using grit.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the role race plays in FGCS's success and to explore whether FGCS struggles were similar to other FGS. The results from this study identified determination and family support, rather than race, as positive influences on college outcomes. The findings suggested that students, regardless of status, must possess grit and determination to succeed in college. The findings further indicated that students navigating the education pipeline require positive messages and expectations from their families and educators to be successful in college.

This phenomenological study provided credence to the researcher's suggestion that more research should be devoted to understanding FGS groups. Despite the limited size of this study about FGCS the researcher found considerable differences among the participant experiences. Learning more about FGCS influences and behaviors will help steer college outcomes in a positive direction. Educators at all educational levels need to become advocates for college attendance. College is a social and financial endeavor that frequently evades students whose families have not attended college. The data from this research suggested that FGCS struggle to complete college; however, elements such as family support, expectations, sacrifice, educators, personal attributes related to determination, and grit contribute to FGCS college success, not race.

Throughout this study the researcher noticed the vast differences among the traditional and non-traditional FGCS. The six traditional FGCS suggested they were groomed to attend college. Three of the nontraditional FGCS were motivated by career advancement and one nontraditional FGCS admitted her family motivated her to complete college. Arguably, the phenomenon of being a traditional or nontraditional FGCS as well as grit impacted participants' responses far more than being Caucasian. The continued research about FGCS experiences will contribute

to an improved understanding of how to prepare FGCS to attend college and increase the number of FGCS graduates. The collaborative efforts of researchers and educators can be used to develop and implement strategies which will improve FGCS' family engagement and student preparation, recruitment, and retention.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Participants Wanted for Study

Are you the first member of your family to attend college?

Share the experiences to help educators learn more about first generation students.

Participants for this study must be:

- a college graduate or near college completion
- your parents did not attend college



Text Lee @ [redacted]

Appendix B: Participant Qualification Checklist

Subject to change based on recruitment.	FGCS	From	College Grad Date	Sex	Major	Time (Date) 2nd interview	Phone Number Email
1. Charlotte							
2. Elizabeth							
3. Jane							
4. Georgiana							
5. Kitty							
6. George							
7. Darcy							
8. William							
9. Bingley							
10. Bennet							

Appendix C: Preinterview, Interview, and Postinterview Checklist

Physical Tools.

- ____ Locate a free area for holding scheduled interviews.
- ____ Locate device for recording interviews and learn to use correctly.
- ____ Locate physical backups in the field.
- ____ Purchase refreshments
- ____ Purchase incentives

Organizing data

- ____ Designate secure storage for data when not in use.
- ____ Create a system for organizing data in physical or virtual files and folders.
- ____ Designated binder for each participant.

Data backup

- ____ Back up data through secured connections?
- ____ Where will you back up secured data to Google docs?
- ____ All data saved in Google docs. Completed work transferred to word document.

Sensitive data

- ____ Complete protocol for anonymizing sensitive files in the field?
- ____ Complete IRB approval.
- ____ Secure all signed consent agreements and data for each participant.
- ____ Plan to secure field notes when not in use.
- ____ All interviews recorded using a voice recorder.
- ____ All transcribed data confidentiality maintained by researcher by assigned pseudonym and number.

Appendix D: Interview Script

Welcome to phase two of this study. As you will recall you have agreed to participate in this investigation because you are a FGCS and you are interested in sharing your experiences related to preparing for and attending college. Participating in this interview has limited potential for harm but could improve practices used to support positive experiences and successful outcomes for FGCS. I will record all.

1. Describe what being a FGCS means to you?
2. Describe experiences that were pivotal in compelling you to seek a college education?
3. How did your early education experiences affect your decision to attend college?
4. How have family, educational, or cultural experiences, impacted your decision to continue with your college education?
5. What does college mean to you?
6. What has been the hardest part of your college journey?
7. How have your college experiences changed you thus far?
8. Explain in detail how your college experiences disappointed, met, or exceeded your expectations?
9. Describe the feelings you had as you navigated the college admission's process.
10. Who helped you along the way and how did their help make you feel or were you pushed into attending college?
11. How has college affected how you feel about day-to-day life?
12. Describe some difficulties you have experienced due to your decision to enter college.
13. Describe some triumphs you have experienced.

14. Describe what keeps you going when times are tough?
15. Describe your reaction when you discovered you had been accepted into college?
16. Describe how you felt as you told people you were going to college and describe their reactions?
17. What social skills and characteristics do you possess that you believe have influenced your academic decisions thus far?
18. What have you done that demonstrates you would make a good candidate for college?
19. What do you suggest schools should do to increase college success and increase FGCS recruitment?
20. Which college preparation experiences were the most frustrating?
21. Describe what could prevent you from attending college?
22. What can colleges do to ensure people like you go to college or pick one college over another?

Thank you for responding to my flyer and agreeing to participate in this study. Your responses to my interview questions have been interesting and enlightening and have the potential to influence how educators support FGCS outcomes. Do you have anything else to add or can you tell me what prompted you to participate in this study?

Appendix E: Study Synopsis

First Generation Caucasian Students Wanted for a Research Study

- This research is conducted under the direction of Concordia University-Portland, doctoral candidate, Cora Lee Cross.
- This research is being conducted to learn more about the experiences of first-generation Caucasian students as they prepared for, were accepted into, and persisted in college.
- Individuals interested in participating in this study must be Caucasian students whose parents did not attend college.
- In three phases, the participants will schedule individual face-to-face opportunity to share their experiences involving the struggles and triumphs they faced as they navigated college life and discuss what college graduation meant to them. Interviews will be held in designated areas or using Google Hangouts and finally, the participants will evaluate transcripts for accuracy.
- Participants will be entered into a drawing for a \$50 gift card for participating in all three phases of the interview process.

Appendix F: Informed Consent Agreement

Concordia University-Portland
Institutional Review Board
Approved: 8/7/18; will Expire: 8/7/19

Research Study Title: Examining Experiences Which Support First-Generation Caucasian Students' Decision to Attend College

Principal Investigator: Cora Lee Cross

Research Institution: Concordia University-Portland

Faculty Advisor: Dr. David Kluth

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this survey is to learn about FGCS. We expect approximately 10 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on 8/7/18 and end enrollment on 8/7/19. To be in the study, you must be a FGCS. This means that neither of your parents attended college. Individuals interested in participating in this study will respond to this flyer by completing a brief prescreening interview to determine qualifications to participate, participate in the main data collection interview, and complete the final member checking phase to assure the reliability of this study. Completing these tasks should take less than three hours of your time.

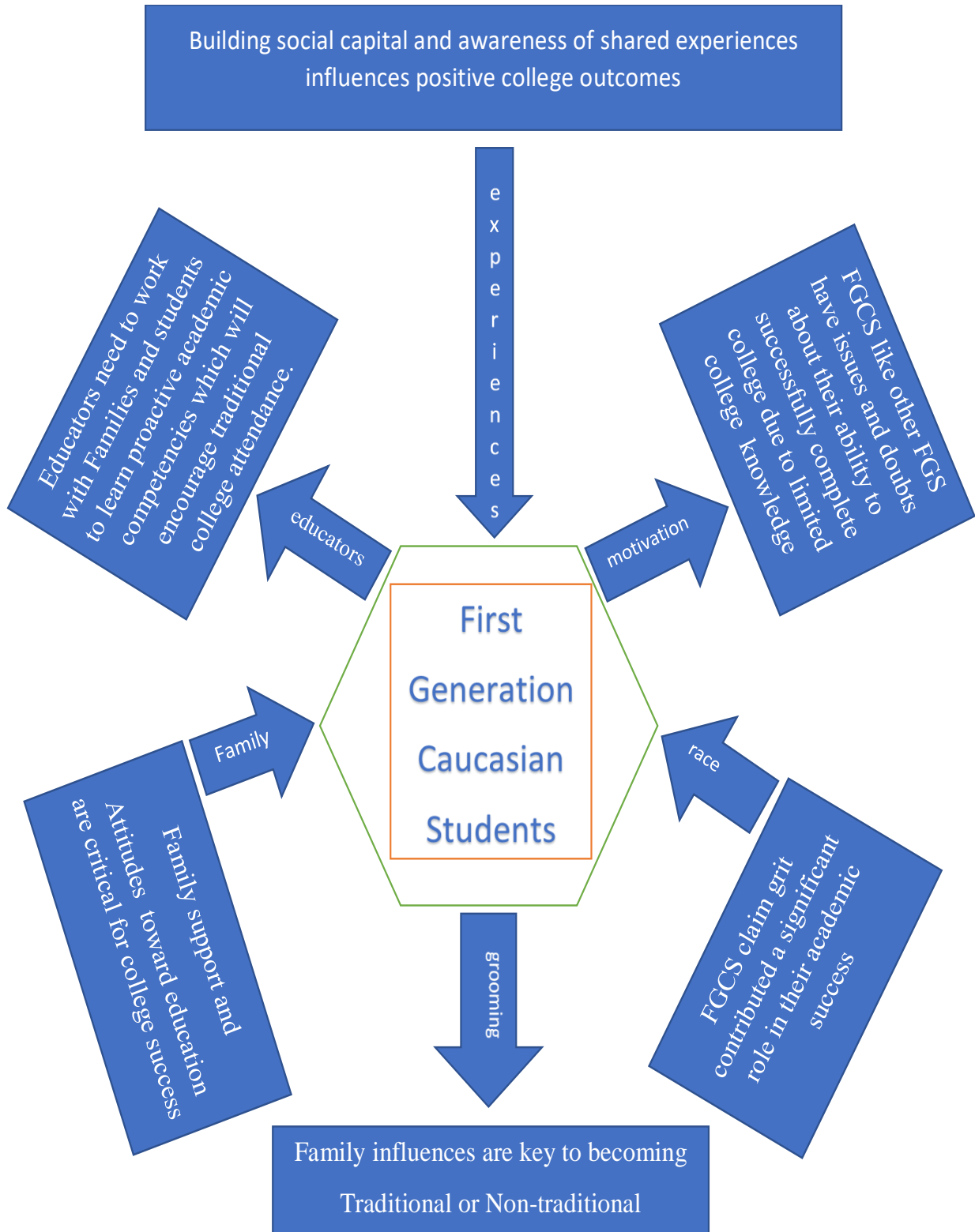
Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Interviews will be audio record and recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer using password protection software. All recordings will be transcribed by the principal investigator as soon as possible and recordings will be deleted as soon as the transcription is checked for accuracy and deemed accurate. This destruction of research data is allowed specifically for audio recordings, but all other research documents must be maintained for 3 years after the completion of the research project. Any personal information provided will be coded so it cannot be linked to individual participants. Any names or identifying information given by participants will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the principle investigator's home. When the data are reviewed by any of the research investigators, no data will contain any names or identifying information relating to the research participants. Only a secret code will be used to analyze the data. Participants will not be identified in any publications or reports. Information will be kept private at all times and all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after completion of the study.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help educators to improve strategies used to prepare, recruit, and retain FGCS in college. You too could benefit from this, by having someone to share your experiences with. This study will benefit FGS overall by adding to a body of knowledge and filling a gap in the literature.

Appendix G: FGCS Connections



Appendix H: Excerpt of Interview Coding Form

Interviewer will listen for the following buzz words and note: preparation for college, family impressions, college life, college academics, understanding college, college experience, and college.

Describe what being a FGCS means to you?

Response	Initial Coding	Focused Coding

Appendix I: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy.

This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

Statement of original work (continued)

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test,
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting,
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project,
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources have been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources have been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

C. Lee Cross

Digital Signature

Cora Lee Cross

Name (Typed)

April 13, 2019

Date