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Influence of Grandparents on First-Generation College Students

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Abstract: This qualitative research study explores the relationship of grandparents as a source of knowledge, support and advice for first-generation college students' decision to pursue higher education. Grandparents can have a positive influence on first-generation college students through emotional support and guidance through the student's educational career. This study explores students' perceptions of how they interact with their grandparents for major decisions like pursuing higher education and achieving life goals. Although research has been conducted on first-generation college students there is minimal research on grandparents' involvement. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with five to seven participants, who were recruited through a support program at a Rocky Mountain region university. Participants were asked questions regarding their relationship with their grandparent(s). Interviews were transcribed and coded for themes. There were five themes throughout this research which were financial needs, distance, relationship gap, amount of contact and influence of parents. This research contributes to the limited knowledge about the ways in which grandparents can positively impact their grandchildren's lives and decision to pursue higher education.

Keywords: *first-generation college students, grandparents, higher education, life goals*

According to Kern (2000), "Education beyond high school is a necessity to succeed in the United States. Today's job market requires that at least 27% of the labor force have 16 years of education or more and an additional 26% of the job market requires 8-10 years of education plus additional training (pg.30)." First-generation students typically desire to pursue higher education because someone has influenced them to go such as a teacher, parent or grandparent. The U.S. Department of Education classifies a student to be first-generation if neither parent achieved a baccalaureate degree (U.S. ED; Choy, 2001)

INTRODUCTION

Although research has been conducted on the impact of parents on students' education and goals, little research has been conducted on grandparents' impact on their grandchildren's academic plans, the role of grandparents and how their knowledge, support, and advice influences first-generation students' college experiences. The purpose of this study is to explore first-generation students' experiences with their grandparent(s)' knowledge, support, and advice about going to college. Secondly, the study will explore students' perceptions of how they interact with grandparents for major decisions like pursuing

higher education and achieving academic and social goals. This research question will guide this study: How do grandparents help first-generation students decide and prepare for higher education? Most information on the influence of grandparents on first-generation college students must be generalized from the overall studies of support given to college students by a variety of different supportive people.

Characteristics of First-Generation College Student

First-generation college students have many unique characteristics in addition to being first in their families to attend college. First-generation college students may have come from low-income households or large families. First-generation college students may also be older, married, come from large families and have family and work responsibilities. First-generation students tend to work longer hours a week on or off campus than typical college students.

First-generation college students need guidance and support in furthering their education considering that there is no tradition for these students in attending college because their family members did not attend college. Students that come from a first-generation background have a

strong family support system for the students to continue or advance their education.

Author's Personal Stance

My grandmother is the reason I decided to research the influence of grandparents on first-generation college students. My grandparents were my biggest influences in pursuing higher education. My grandma used to tell me that she wished she went to college to be successful in the world today and that is why she encouraged me to go to school to receive a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately my grandfather died when I was very young and therefore did not have an impact on my decision to pursue higher education. However, my grandfather did always encourage my siblings and me to do well in school so that one day we could become someone special and important in the world. My grandfather's death brought my grandmother and I closer than I ever would have imagined. Prior to his passing, our relationship was a mutual relationship because I was more of a tom girl and she was not into the things I liked to do. My grandmother and I did not have that much in common which hindered our relationship. My relationship with my grandmother has changed due to interacting with her on a daily basis and her interest in my education. Without my grandma, I do not know where I would be both educationally and personally.

My grandma has always encouraged me to shoot for the moon and never give up. She would also say that nothing is unattainable as long as you set your mind to it. I never believed her because I was told that I would not become anything by my high school counselors and peers. For example, my high school counselor told me that I could never go to college and I would be working at McDonalds for the rest of my life. Thanks to my grandma, I have chosen to attend a university to obtain not only a bachelor's degree but also I hope one day to receive a PhD in higher education. Having the support and guidance from my grandmother has shaped who I am today and I am forever thankful for her.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most research on first-generation college students and the support received from grandparents regarding decisions on education must be generalized from overall studies of any support first-generation college students receive regarding their decisions about education. The need for an understanding of what role grandparents play in a student's decision to pursue higher education is an area that needs more research. Given the changing demographics of today's society, it is critical that all students, especially first-generation and underrepresented students, be encouraged to seek education beyond high school (Kern, 2000). First-generation college students need support and guidance in aiding their decision to pursue higher education. There is an increasing need to have an understanding of the influences grandparents make on their grandchildren. Students take into consideration their grandparents' knowledge, advice, and support regarding the students' choice in postsecondary education.

First-generation college students often represent a large proportion of the community college population and they typically have distinct goals, motivations and constraints. First-generation college students also face a variety of nonacademic challenges. They often come from poorer families. They are also geographically bound and may be concerned with attending a college close to home. Additionally, first-generation college students may often work longer hours to pay their way through college (Inman & Mayes, 1999).

According to Block (2002), it is suggested that the current generation of children will have more living grandparents than any other generation in history. It is estimated that more than 50 percent of adults over the age of 65 have grandchildren over the age of 18. College students may not always want advice from their grandparents but they feel comfortable telling their grandparents problems and concerns to air their emotions without the need for advice. Grandparents also take on roles of teaching their grandchild the

basics of life such as food, clothing, shelter, transportation and role models who demonstrate how to deal with the world outside the home (Block, 2002).

Block (2002) informs that learning experiences are more common between grandparents and younger grandchildren because younger grandchildren have more to learn and they are more likely to accept their grandparents as authority figures than are older grandchildren. Grandmothers might provide the unconditional love and non-critical advice that college students need as they confront new challenges and developmental issues. Grandparents who remain involved with their grandchildren receive the benefits of reconfirming their self-worth and their grandchildren receive the benefits of continued family support throughout their college careers (Block, 2002).

Influences on College Students

For many college students, family members are an important link and can serve as advocates for higher education. Parents, peers, teachers/faculty and grandparents play an important role in the student's guidance and support system. Another influence is the parents' educational attainment and their occupations. If a student's parents obtained a college degree, the student's academic performance at the university was significantly increased as opposed to a student whose parents did not go to college. For college students, both first-generation and non first-generation, the parents continue to be actively involved in their children's lives and these children take their parents' expectations and behaviors into account when thinking about their own educational goals (Bank, Slavings, & Biddle, 1990).

Bank, Slavings and Biddle (1990) conducted a qualitative study on who influences students and found that it is possible that parental influences may be stronger among first-year students than among older undergraduates because of the difference between high school and college. Some parents frequently encourage their children to carry out behaviors such as completing high

school or college because the parent(s) were unable or unwilling to accomplish such tasks themselves. The phrase, "Do as I say not as I do" tends to be a highly useable phrase when parents are encouraging their children to continue their education beyond high school. Other students may sometimes conform to their parents' expectations as a means of seeking a reward or avoiding punishments. Overall, parents are an important influence in students' decisions to pursue higher education (Bank et al., 1990).

For many students, pursuing education beyond high school is new to themselves and their families. Information and guidance in the process of deciding to pursue higher education is needed for both the parent and the student. Considering that many students are first-generation college students, counselors and college/university representatives may need to provide special assistance during the decision making process. A strong family support system for continuing the student's education indicates that the student has encouragement to proceed with their education. Also the student's overwhelming interest in continuing their education further than a high school diploma demonstrates their aspiration to gain more knowledge and training (Kern, 2000).

An additional determining factor for first-generation college students in the decision making process is influenced by a student's ability and socioeconomic status. Students will tend to look at their ability to succeed at a university or community college. They also will take into consideration the amount of income their parents have and if college is affordable for them to attend. A first-generation college student will typically apply for a job while going to school to help pay for the expense of college (Inman & Mayes, 1999). "African American students consider college reputation, availability of a specific major, total cost of attending and availability of financial aid. They also seek information from current college student's college admissions representatives and faculty" (Kern, 2000, p.488).

Kern explored the question “What influences students to pursue higher education” through a qualitative study. As stated by Kern, both underrepresented students and first-generation college students tend to fear similar issues about going to college. Underrepresented students and first-generation students have a tendency to choose institutions that are relatively close to home for the support of their families (Kern, 2000). A negative influence on college students is the desire to party and wanting to get away from home and family. The aspect of coming to college to party, according to Kern (2000), is not a reason for high school seniors to attend college. Kern (2000) states that leaving home and family is not frequently found to be a factor that influences students to pursue a college education. Students do tend to choose a college where peer attendance is an encouraging factor for the students to pursue higher education (Kern, 2000).

Rodriquez (2003) wrote an article exploring what helps some first-generation students succeed. Many first-generation college students enter college despite fear of being academically unqualified, not intelligent enough, unable to obtain enough money to pay for college, worry of being discovered as imposters pretending to be real college students, suspected of trying to become better than their friends and family members by going to college, and probably heading for academic failure (Rodriguez, 2003). Despite all of the obstacles faced by first-generation college students, they still take a leap of faith and venture to pursue higher education. With the positive influence of parents, grandparents, faculty, and peers, first-generation students gain a stronger perception of the idea of college than what they had previously experienced (Bank et al., 1990).

Relationship between Grandparent and Grandchild

The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is a critical area to study because the grandparent-grandchild relationship is growing due to the amount of living grandparents to grandchild ratio. Although the relationship

between grandparent and grandchild is important there have been few studies that focus on the extent to which grandparents and grandchildren have been in contact with one another or are concerned emotionally with one another’s lives. Also there is minimal knowledge about how grandparent-grandchild relationships may change over time (Clingempeel & Colyar, 1992).

Creasey and Kaliher conducted a qualitative study on the difference in age among grandparents and grandchildren. According to Creasey and Kaliher (1994), the grandparent is seen “as a member of the family system who has increasingly been mentioned in theoretical discussions regarding child and adolescent development” (p. 411). The role of grandparent is one that tends not to diminish as grandchildren move into adulthood. Grandparents tend to have a relationship with their grandchildren when the grandchildren are between the ages of 2 to 43 years old. The range of age that a grandparent tends to have a relationship with their grandchildren is important because, according to Kivett (1985), at the age of 43 the relationship is not as strong anymore. This shows that the adult may not need the support and guidance that the grandparent showed them when they were younger. As grandchildren become adults, the grandparent-grandchild relationship still stays strong (Kivett, 1985).

Kivett (1985) explored the relationships between grandfathers and grandchildren through a qualitative study. Many factors have been established to influence the amount of closeness between grandparents and grandchildren. These include, but are not limited to, the age of grandchild, amount of contact with grandparents, grandparents’ behavior toward them, parents’ relationship with grandparents, and the child’s perceptions of older people in general and grandparents in particular (Kivett, 1985). Although some research has found that grandparents on the rare occasion engaged in social activities with their grandchild, other grandparents show higher levels of interaction between the grandparent-grandchild relationships. These include gender of grandparent and

grandchild, social class, residential (whether the grandchild lives near/far from the grandparent), close relationship and grandchildren's sense of responsibility to the older generation (Kivett, 1985).

Clingempeel and Colyar (1992) studied the relationships with maternal grandparents by conducting a qualitative study. The family structure plays a major role in the grandparent-grandchild relationship. There is a difference between the roles that grandfather and grandmother's play and the needs of the grandchildren. Grandfathers have a less sensitive relationship with their grandchildren than grandmothers. For example, a grandfather tends to be more actively involved with a grandchild that plays a sport like football or who enjoys fishing. Grandmothers are more likely to have emotional, loving and sensitive relationships with their grandchildren. For example, a grandmother tends to be more loving and caring, as in taking care of a sick grandchild. Grandmothers also tend to have more contact with their grandchildren than do grandfathers (Clingempeel, 1992).

Researchers have found that women seemed to be more prepared and ready to take on the role of grandparent whereas grandfathers did not. Grandfathers also have been characterized as imposing authoritarians who tend to scare and challenge their grandchildren (Kivett, 1985). The grandfather-grandchild relationship is more likely to be perceived by grandfathers as obligatory rather than a supportive or guidance approach.

The associations that occur between grandchildren and grandfathers are more of frequent visits which tend to occur once a week or month. Holidays and special family occasions were significant times of contact between grandfathers and grandchildren (Kivett, 1985). Grandfathers may become more involved with and closer to grandchildren in single-parent families than in intact and stepfamilies because they feel a need to be a male role model for the child(ren) (Clingempeel and Colyar, 1992). Block explored college students' perceptions of social support from both their grandmother and step

grandmother. According to a study conducted by Block (2002):

grandmothers provide collegiate grandchildren guidance by providing various forms of information and feedback. The mean scale score for guidance suggest that grandmothers provide their grandchildren with some form of guidance at least several times a year. Grandmothers may be a good resource for collegiate grandchildren when they need guidance (p.426).

Older grandchildren are more inclined to spend more time sharing thoughts, feeling and ideas with their grandparents but have a tendency not to engage in physical activities. College grandchildren tend to have older grandparents that cannot do as much physical activity as the grandchild (Block, 2002).

College grandchildren can count on their grandmothers to provide guidance and both social and emotional support for the grandchild. Grandmothers and grandchildren may contact each other in person, by telephone or mail, or by email for guidance and support.

College students perceive that their grandmothers provide emotional support by showing concern for their grandchildren's well-being, by letting them know they will always be there to support them, by telling them they are ok just the way they are and by letting them know that they feel close to them (Block, 2002, p. 426.).

Grandmothers are seen to have the ability to provide an abundance of emotional support and guidance to their grandchildren while they attend college whether the grandparent lives close or far away from the student.

According to Creasey and Kaliher (1994), "Data demonstrated that although grandparents decrease as support influences, interpersonal relationships still remain qualitatively strong. Rarely did grandchildren rate their relationships with grandparents as being non-optimal regardless of the age of the child" (p. 421). It is indicated that college granddaughters are more inclined to

want a better relationship with their grandparents than grandsons. For some college students the transition from high school to college may be a time where the grandchild seeks a stronger connection with their grandparents. It is apparent that even among older children, grandparents continue to play an encouraging role in the grandchild's life (Creasey & Kaliher, 1994).

Block (2002) suggests that, "Even though the majority of college students spend a significant part of the year geographically distant from their parents and grandparents, the results of this study suggest that most continue to be the beneficiaries of emotional support and social interaction from their grandmothers" (p. 426). Other research suggests that, "Late adolescents reported close relations with grandparents in terms of attachment and affection but also reported low rates of intimacy" (Creasey & Kaliher, 1994, p. 413). College students expect their grandparents to show them love and interest but the students expect little in return. The affection received by the grandparent to the grandchild remains a key ingredient in the grandparent-grandchild relationship even as the child grows older (Block, 2002).

Grandparents' Impact on Young Adults

There is ample reason to believe that relationships with grandparents have the potential to make a long-term impression on young adults' lives, particularly those of their grandchildren. Grandchildren of all ages may consider their grandparents' role in the family as valuable however not all grandparent-grandchild relationships are meaningful. For example, some advice given by a grandparent is taken into consideration while other advice is not. Another factor that may determine the degree of impact that a grandparent may have on their grandchild is how close the relationship between the grandparent(s) and grandchild is (Brussoni & Boon, 1998).

METHOD

Participants

Two student participants from a university student support service were recruited. Both

participants were recruited from a Rocky Mountain region university. One participant was a junior and the other participant was a senior. Participants were 20 and 21 years of age. One male and one female participant were interviewed for approximately 20 minutes each. In order to maximize confidentiality, the participants had the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. The male participant chose Zeke and the female chose Kacee. The participants will be referred to by their respective pseudonym while sharing their individual experiences regarding the influences of their grandparents. Participants were not selected upon race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, or the presence of a medical condition or disability. The participants were recruited through email.

Procedure

This research required the authorization of the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to commencement of data collection. I set up a conference with the director of the support center on campus to discuss the purpose of my study and how she could help me identify participants. Once the director agreed to aid in the search for participants, I submitted my IRB for approval. Upon receiving IRB approval, I used a convenience sample by using participants I already knew. I emailed the two students (See Appendix C) to request permission to interview them for the study. Once the students responded to the email, I spoke with each student to explain the purpose of the study being conducted.

After I spoke with the participants, I sent out the consent forms (See Appendix A) to each student. Upon receiving signed consent forms, I spoke to each participant to make an appointment for interviews. I collected data through semi-structured interviews (See Appendix B). Students who participated in the study responded to an interview based on their perception of their grandparents' influence of the involvement in academic and social life.

Students were interviewed using a series of open-ended questions regarding their relationship with their grandparent(s) (See Appendix B). The

students were free to disclose any information they wished to talk about regarding the study. The estimated time for each interview was 20-30 minutes. The interviews were recorded (with the permission of the interviewee) for transcription. Student interviews and data collection were conducted at two different student lounges on campus. The interviews were conducted in English and transcribed. This ensured that data was collected accurately. The participant had the chance to add additional information they want or ask the interviewer questions they had.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed for accurately recording the interviewee's direct quotes. I read the transcribed interviews and coded for themes. My mentor also read the transcribed interviews for themes. My mentor and I coded each transcript. We checked for agreements between our notes and examined frequency of codes across the transcripts.

FINDINGS

Zeke is a 20 year old male majoring in economics and international affairs. Zeke is a junior in college and expressed his grandparents' involvement in his decision to pursue higher education. He plans on joining the Peace Corp after graduation. He wants to be financially secure when he graduates from college, just like his mother's father was. Both sets of grandparents have been a major part of Zeke's life and influential in his decision to pursue higher education.

Kacee is a 21 year old female senior. Throughout the interview process, she expressed the need for her two sets of grandparents. She indicated that her grandparents were a major impact on her decision to pursue higher education. Kacee had the opportunity to live with one set of her grandparents while growing up. She is very outspoken and plans to return home when she graduates. Kacee indicated that both sets of her grandparents were a major reason she chose to attend a university outside her home state. She is excited to graduate in the spring.

Each participant stressed the need for their grandparents during their decision making process for choosing to pursue higher education whether it was to leave the state they grew up in or stay. Many themes occurred throughout the transcriptions. Five common themes were identified including: financial needs, distance between the students and their grandparents, age, amount of contact and the influences of each participant's parents.

Financial Needs

Both Zeke and Kacee showed a significant amount of passion on the subject of financial help from their grandparents. Both participants said that they never wanted to take money from their grandparents but they were always offered the assistance if needed. It seems that the financial need was a significant aspect of both participants' lives growing up and continues to be an aspect that they cherish now being in college.

Zeke's need to seek out financial help from his grandparents was a recurring theme. Zeke shows the importance of financial need in this quote:

Grandpa...might of gave me an impact because without his education he wouldn't have been able to leave the money for my grandma to help raise us...so that was a huge influence and I guess the money aspect and obtaining education to be comfortable in life in the future.

This quote shows how Zeke values the need for education to be well off in the future. Although throughout the interview he continued to say that he would not ask his grandparents for money, he knew that if he were in a bind he would have the help from his grandmother.

Kacee expressed a significant amount of times that the importance of having her grandparents around to help her mother financially was a major aspect of their relationship. Kacee also stated many times that both sets of grandparents were the reason she was able to pursue a higher education. Kacee expressed the importance of financial need by saying:

...I want to say my mom's parents helped the most you know they definitely sometimes helped my mom with tuition cause I went to a private Catholic high school so that was like tons of thousands of money to go to each year. I feel without their contribution monetarily and even support and emotional I wouldn't have been able to go to college. It just wouldn't have been an option because we wouldn't have had the money to put me through school....

Kacee was able to attend a university out of state due to the financial help of her grandparents. She also had the encouragement to pursue higher education no matter where she wanted to go because her grandparents were able to help her pay for tuition and fees. The financial help from her grandparents allowed Kacee to pursue her dreams and be the first to graduate from college in her family.

Relationship Gap

The difference in age between the grandparents and grandchildren sometimes tends to be an issue in creating relationships or maintaining relationships over the years. Zeke explains how the loss of relationship with his father's parents could be attributed to the difference in age and the amount of time lost with his grandparents. He explains: "...but I think that is the biggest thing I've recognized is the ability to reobtain a relationship with grandparents because...I guess that age difference that comes with that." Zeke also explains to me in the interview that there was a gap of approximately six or seven years in his relationship with his dad's parents. He stated that this gap occurred when he was between 11 and 17 or 18 years of age.

Kacee also experienced the loss of a parent due to divorce but her grandparents stayed in contact with her even though her father was out of the picture. Kacee expressed the gap in relationship in this quote:

...I'm old enough to make that decision to go and want to hang out and they are at

that age too where they don't want to force us to go hang out with them...the grandkids part and on my part that I feel like I should go see them and I want to go see them.

Kacee also explained to me in the interview that there was a gap in her relationship with her dad due to the divorce of her parents. She expresses that she was 11 maybe 12 when her father lost communication with her. When she was 18, they regained communication. However, the relationship with her father's parents remained the same.

Distance

The amount of distance between the grandchild and the grandparent was another theme because the contact between each other was determined by how close the grandchild lived to the grandparent. The distance of the grandchild to the grandparent did not affect the relationship of the grandchild to the grandparents. Both participants expressed the significance of the distance between each set of grandparents.

Zeke did not live close to his grandmother on his mother's side; in fact they lived in different states throughout his childhood, while his father's parents lived in Colorado his entire life. Zeke shared:

...my grandma came very often from South Carolina when we were living in Colorado so I saw my grandparents in Colorado more often but I was about as equally close...but I've always been attached to my grandma on my mom's side throughout my whole growing up process and...I stopped seeing the grandparents on my dad's side in sixth grade. I did not see them again till the very beginning of senior year of high school.

Zeke expressed the relationship he had with both sets of grandparents. He shows that he had a stronger relationship with his grandmother that lives in South Carolina rather than his grandparents in Colorado. This is unique because

of how strong Zeke portrays his relationship even though the distance is significantly large.

Kacee explains her closeness with her grandparents in this quote: "...my mom's side we moved in with my grandparents when my parents got divorced so they have always been in my life... my dad's side we lived less than a mile away from them so we always went over there...they were really involved in our lives." Kacee had the support and advice from her grandparents physically because of the distance being within a mile of each set of grandparents where as Zeke experienced the same support and advice from afar.

Amount of contact

The amount of contact is an important theme because it shows how often the participant contacted their grandparents on a regular basis. This quote shows how much contact Zeke has with his grandmother: "I'd say I'm actually really close with my grandma...I used to call her monthly like every few weeks but now it's been once a month...I'd say I'm a lot closer with her." Although this may not seem like a significant amount of contact, it still shows that Zeke has a relationship with his grandmother and still communicates with her. Zeke stated:

I can recognize how much of a relationship my grandparents wanted with me. After my dad and I started talking again, I realized that it has been the most difficult to reobtain a relationship with grandparents as compared to continuing it. So it's a lot more difficult when you haven't grown up with your set of grandparents...I feel like that's why my Grandma on my mom's side...because she has grown up with me as compared to my grandparents that probably still feel like they are a stranger to me.

This shows that Zeke's grandparents on his father's side are trying to establish a relationship through contacting Zeke on a regular basis even though Zeke does not have a strong relationship with his father. He also explained how it is easier

to maintain a relationship with grandparents than having to start all over.

Kacee had a significant amount of contact with both sets of grandparents because she lived within a mile of her father's parents and she lived with her mother's parents. Kacee describes her relationship with her mother's parents through this quote: "...They have always been in my life, they've helped us through school you know they are kind of a second parent and my grandpa especially he was like a father figure to me..." Kacee shows a strong indication of her relationship with her grandparents throughout her childhood but she also has indicated that her amount of contact is still a significant aspect throughout her college experience.

Influence of parents

Although this research is geared toward grandparents, it is relevant to know that parents are still playing a major role in influencing their children to pursue higher education. Zeke stated,

I think my dad in a way because before he went to jail he was going to school...we grew up on campus at [a college campus] so I was submerged in that college lifestyle at a very early age. I remember my dad always studying...he was doing electrical engineering...I guess that was probably the biggest influence because I knew I wanted to go to college since I was little that was always a dream.

Zeke shows that although his grandparents were a major part of his decision in pursuing higher education, his dad was a part of that decision as well. He grew up on a college campus and saw the dedication his father put into his studying. He also saw the difficulties of going to college and maintaining a family and your studies.

Kacee had the influences of both her mother and her grandparents from both sides while growing up and as she pursued her college career. In her case she was fortunate to have the support of everyone in her decisions. Kacee expressed her influences from her parents in the following quote:

I would say on my mom's side it was an even playing field. My mom was my biggest motivation. On my dad's side I would say my grandparents were a little more supportive since my dad lives out of state and I just recently started talking to my dad when I graduated high school... We really haven't really been in the same picture...we are still building our relationship... I felt like my grandparents his parents umm were more supportive...

Kacee has faced certain obstacles that could have changed her decision, educational but her biggest motivation has been by her side since she was born and has her grandparents to back her up in everything that she does. Kacee, like Zeke, is trying to rebuild her relationship with her father but her grandparents still remain as a support network for her throughout her journey through college.

DISCUSSION

The original intent behind this research was to explore how can grandparents influence first generation students to decide and prepare for higher education? After conducting the research, however, the focus changed to the relationship between grandparents and their grandchild. Most of the findings demonstrate the strong relationship between my participants and their grandparents. The results showed the impact grandparents make on their grandchildren through their childhood and into higher education both socially and educationally. Even though the findings demonstrated more of the relationship between one another they also showed how finances are a significant aspect of the need for grandparents after high school and into college.

Limitations

There were limitations in this research that could have improved the outcome of this study. The number of participants was one of the major factors of influences this research. The findings were limited to the transcriptions of the two participants. The need for more participants would have allowed me to produce more trustworthy

findings. I also used a convenience sampling technique for my research which allowed me to use participants I already knew. If I were to do this research again I would use a listserv from a Rocky Mountain university student support service to gather my participants. This will ensure that all participants will fit my research question perfectly.

Future Research

For future research, I would suggest researchers further study at the grandparent(s)' perspective on how they have impacted their grandchildren in their decisions to pursue higher education. Also I would do a quantitative research study on comparing between first-generation college students and non first-generation college students to see the impact grandparents have on each category of students would be useful.

CONCLUSION

There were five overall themes present in the data. These five themes showed the importance of the influence of grandparents and parents on first-generation college students. The data illustrates the importance of grandparents influence on first-generation students as they pursue higher education. The research indicates there is a need for grandparents through support and advice pertaining to issues that arise in the students' lives whether the issues are financial needs or social problems. Also grandparents tend to act as a mediator for issues that students are not comfortable talking to their parents about. The data also showed that parents did play a role in influencing their children to pursue higher education but were supported by their parents in helping take care of their children.

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