

5-1-2010

First-again generation: a qualitative study of first-generation college student siblings whose grandparents attended college

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

THE FIRST-AGAIN GENERATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY
OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT SIBLINGS
WHOSE GRANDPARENTS ATTENDED COLLEGE

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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May, 2010

ABSTRACT

Rene R. Couture. *The first-again generation: A qualitative study of first-generation college student siblings whose grandparents attended college*. Published Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2010.

A critical ethnographic case study was conducted with a White family from a lower income and rural background. The three siblings in the family were first-generation college students with two siblings concurrently enrolled at the same institution of higher education. Four themes emerged from this inquiry. These first-generation students were identified as the *first-again generation* because although their college student status was first-generation because their parents did not attend college, their grandfather had earned a college degree. The parents in this study, therefore, were identified as the *skipped generation*. The youngest sibling was identified as *an astute college student* because his first-generation student experience was atypical in that he had received immeasurable benefits from his older sibling's college experience and from his high school guidance counselor. Another major theme revolved around this family's loyalty to each other, perhaps, in part, due to bereavement from four family deaths, including the siblings' father, this family had experienced in recent years. First-again students knew from an early age that they would attend college. Younger siblings had increasingly smoother transitions to college than their older siblings. Implications for practice in the areas of the first-again generation, skipped generation, first-generation students, and social class are discussed. Finally, areas for future research are considered.

Acknowledgements and Dedication

No one can take on a project like this without help. I thank my dissertation committee, and in particular, Flo Guido, for working tirelessly to help me progress through this journey. I thank Amber Paulson-Hofseth for introducing me to the Philips family. I thank the Philips family for sharing their story with me. I thank my wife, Valerie, for making sacrifices as she supported me through this process, which required countless hours away from our family. Because this is a dissertation about family, I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Lauren and Oliver, who I hope will continue to help and support each other through their life journey.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Study Background.....	2
Parents, Family, and the Millennial Generation.....	2
Definitions of Terms.....	3
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Significance of the Study.....	8
Research Questions.....	8
Emerging Research Focus.....	9
Possibilities of the Study.....	10
My Story.....	10
Overview of the Study.....	17
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	18
Forms of Identity.....	20
White Racial Identity.....	20
White Privilege.....	22
Masculinity and its Social Construction.....	24
Social Class.....	26
Economic and Cultural Capital.....	27
Siblings and Families.....	28
Sibling Relationships.....	29
Sibling and Young Adult Relationships with Parents.....	33
College Students and Their Grandparents.....	36
College Students.....	36
First-Generation College Students.....	36
Students from Lower Incomes.....	45
College Student Siblings.....	48
Male College Students.....	53
Identity/Masculinity of College Students.....	55
Multiple Identities.....	56
Summary.....	57
III. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	61
Epistemology.....	61
Constructivism.....	63
Critical Theory.....	65

Methodological Framework.....	66
Critical Ethnographic Case Study.....	66
Sampling.....	67
Participants.....	69
Context.....	72
Data Collection.....	72
Data Analysis.....	74
Trustworthiness Criteria.....	76
Authenticity Criteria.....	77
Ethnographic Criteria.....	79
Ethical Issues.....	79
Summary.....	80
IV. STUDY CONTEXT, PARTICIPANTS, AND THEMES.....	81
Study Context.....	82
Family Background.....	82
Rocky Mountain University: Study Site.....	84
The Town of Johnsville: Location of Rocky Mountain University.....	85
The Town of Wilson: Home to Participants.....	86
Wilson School District.....	89
Wilson’s Sense of Community.....	90
Participants.....	92
Charlie and Mary Oliver: Philips Siblings’ Maternal Grandparents... ..	92
Kate Matthews-High School Counselor: Town/School Storyteller.....	93
Laurie Philips-Mother-“Now we can laugh together”.....	94
Holly Philips-Oldest Sibling, Age 23.....	96
Lyle Philips-Father.....	98
Brian Philips-Middle Sibling, Age 21.....	99
Steven Philips-Youngest Sibling, Age 19.....	101
Prior to College.....	101
Bereavement.....	103
Alcohol Avoidance.....	104
Steven’s First Year in College.....	106
College Changes.....	108
Classes and Finances.....	109
Steven’s Residence Hall Room.....	112
Steven’s Advice to Other Students.....	113
The Siblings’ Dating Relationships.....	114
Themes.....	115
Theme 1: First-Generation, Skipped Generation, and First-Again Generation.....	115
College Expectations.....	115
Financial Hardship.....	118
Are They Still First-Generation?.....	120
Theme 2: The Astute College Student.....	120
Help from Brother.....	121

	Help from Guidance Counselor.....	123
	Encouragement from Mother.....	123
	Generational Issues.....	124
	Theme 3: Strength of Family.....	125
	Considerable Time Spent with Family.....	127
	Difficulty Connecting with Family.....	128
	Theme 4: Dimensions of Identity.....	131
	Holly’s Identity.....	133
	Steven’s Identity.....	135
	Summary.....	137
V.	SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS	141
	Inquiry Summary.....	143
	Implications for Practice.....	149
	First-Again Students, Siblings and Twins.....	149
	Grandparents.....	151
	Social Class and Practice.....	153
	Areas for Future Research.....	153
	First-Again Students.....	153
	Grandparents.....	155
	The Skipped Generation.....	156
	First-Generation Siblings and Twins.....	157
	Social Class Research.....	158
	Conclusion.....	158
VI.	EPILOGUE.....	160
VII.	REFERENCES.....	162
VIII.	APPENDIX A: Philips Family Genogram	179
	APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form	181
	APPENDIX C: Institutional Review Board Application	184

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much has changed in the composition of the undergraduate student population since Harvard first opened its doors in 1636. The notion of going to college was originally reserved for males who came from elite backgrounds to prepare them for medicine, politics, or the clergy (Rudolph, 1962), all of which were—and seemingly continue to be—dominated by males of privileged backgrounds. One development that contributed to a more diverse male college going population was the Morrill Act of 1862, which helped create land grant institutions, leading to more training for more disciplines, including agriculture. In 1944, the GI Bill also contributed to the enrollment of more egalitarian students, mostly older males, who may have not otherwise attended college (Rudolph, 1962).

Chapter I introduces the background of this study on first-generation students, including the multiple perspectives scholars have as to what it means to be “first-generation.” Next, the statement of the problem and purpose of the study are introduced. This is followed by the significance of the study and the research questions considered in the study. Finally, to help readers understand my perspective and how I became interested in the topic, I offer my personal background as a lower income, White, first-generation student with multiple siblings.

Study Background

Men dominated in college attendance throughout U.S. history until the late 1970s. However, in 1979, women began outnumbering men, and that proportion continues to increase (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). In 2004, women accounted for 57.2% of all students enrolled in institutions of higher education (NCES, 2006). By 2014, women will outnumber men 11,386,000 to 8,084,000 (*Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 2006). Students of color are also enrolling at greater rates than White students. Enrollment of students of color increased nearly 51% from 1993-2003, whereas White student enrollment increased 3.4% in the same period (NCES, 2006). But White students still far outnumber all other groups combined (*Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 2006). More first-generation students and students of color are also enrolling. Likewise, the number of lower income students who go to college continues to increase (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). Consequently, if current enrollment trends continue, women and men from lower and middle socioeconomic classes and first-generation college students have the potential to create the new educated public, thus institutions need to change to accommodate and understand their needs.

Parents, Family, and the Millennial Generation

Much research and many attitudes at student affairs conferences point to the increasing trend of parents who help their students make decisions, or in some cases, the “decisions” have already been made by the parents. However, scholars and practitioners are cautioned to ask, “which parents?” (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005), as working class parents are not as likely to be found among “helicopter parents” (i.e., overbearing, overprotective parents of college students). Research on the Millennial (those born in the

1980s and 1990s) student population (Howe & Strauss, 2000) states that students of the current generation are much more likely to seek out their parents' advice and help than students of prior generations. The students of helicopter parents may not view their parents as the obstacles that many higher education personnel do. In fact, many of these students welcome their parents' eager help. There is also new research that suggests these students ("Generation Me"—those born from the 1970s to the 1990s) are also much more narcissistic than students of previous generations and feel more entitled, have enjoyed instant gratification, possess all the latest technology, and engage in superficial relationships (Twenge, 2006). Perhaps Generation Me can summarily be described as placing their needs ahead of the feelings and concerns of others in most of their daily activities, whereas people of previous generations were raised to be more respectful of others (Twenge, 2006). However, just as Reay et al. (2005) remind us that not all parents are helicopter parents, not all students, particularly not all first-generation students, fit well with the positive and negative depictions asserted by the authors of both Millennial students (Howe & Strauss, 2000) and Generation Me (Twenge, 2006). The experiences of many first-generation students do not fit well in either the Millennial or Generation Me categories. In fact, depictions of Millennial or Generation Me often omit those from working class or lower income class backgrounds. Additionally, there are various understandings and levels of first-generation college students, which this inquiry describes.

Definitions of Terms

There are three new terms I introduce as a result of the findings of this study, and more detail is provided in Chapter IV, but they are briefly defined here. First, there is the

first-again generation. These are first-generation college students whose parents did not attend college, but at least one grandparent has earned a bachelor's degree. The next term, the *skipped generation* would be anyone whose parents earned a Bachelor's degree, but for any number of reasons, these individuals did not attend college, or, put another way, going to college skipped over this group. The final new term introduced in this study is the *astute college student*. This is any first-generation college student who has benefited from an older sibling's college experiences. The experiences of first-generation students in families with multiple siblings who attend college can be vastly different. In this study of three first-generation (and first-again) college student siblings, the youngest sibling's college experience was exponentially smoother than his older siblings, thanks, largely to having accurate college expectations handed down from older siblings—a gift many first-generation students lack.

What is a first-generation student? Some scholars argue a first-generation student is the first in the family to go to college (Poast, 2002; Rodriguez, 2001; Skulley, 2004). Others say the first-generation student is any college student whose parents do not hold Bachelor's degrees, but could have an Associate's degree (Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguiman, & Miller, 2007; Pike & Kuh, 2005). For this study, I use the following definition: A first-generation student is a student whose parents have no college experience (Ceja, 2006; Ishitani, 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2000). In addition, if multiple siblings from one family attend college, all siblings are still considered first-generation. In this study, I explore first-generation sibling relationships and how the college experiences of the multiple siblings may have been similar or different.

A better, more inclusive, definition of “first-generation” is necessary. There are varying definitions of the term, ranging from students whose parents have “no college background” to “some college experience,” among others, explained in greater detail in Chapter II. There is also a need to study how families of first-generation students are affected by this “breaking of tradition” (London, 1989; Rendon, 1996; Rodriguez, 2001). Breaking tradition refers to how first-generation students break the cycle within the family of not going to college. These students may be seen as the educational pioneers in their family, which can have both positive and negative consequences for both the student and the family, and this is also explored more fully in Chapter II.

First-generation students begin thinking about going to college much later than continuing generation students (McDonough, 1997), and they are more likely to come from working class and lower class families. Moreover, people who come from these backgrounds are likely to remain in these classes (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). Even individuals who come from working class backgrounds but have earned bachelor’s degrees still frequently feel as though they do not quite belong in the middle class (Lubrano, 2004). Access to college has been proclaimed for anyone with academic ability, but social class, among other things, can limit prospective students’ top choices of higher education institutions (Goodwin, 2006; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; McDonough, 1997).

Should first-generation students assimilate to institutions of higher education or should these institutions instead adjust to accommodate students (Rendon, 1992)? Those who employ the “sink or swim” philosophy might suggest that if students choose to attend a particular institution, they must conform to that institution’s expectations. On

the other hand, students who are unfamiliar with the college and university experience may have less access to an institution's mores, or worse, these students may not even be aware they lack what other students might consider common sense. For example, some students do not understand which utensils to use —when several utensils are present— when eating, or that “TR” on their class schedules means both Tuesday and Thursday. More pre-collegiate programs are needed to prepare parents and families of the benefits of higher education, especially on student income potential. More programs, similar to bridge programs (for recently graduated high school seniors) are necessary to help first-generation students persist in college (Rendon, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

Little is known about the variety of issues first-generation students face, including how they decide to enroll in college. Student affairs leaders must know how a student's family perceives the student's new role as college student, and how the family influences the college experience. Moreover, no research has investigated concurrently enrolled siblings in college and how they fit in socially and academically into the higher education environment. Colleges and universities need resources, both human and financial, to help guide first-generation students to be successful. Student affairs administrators must learn how to accommodate parents and families of first-generation student siblings. Listening more to concerns held by families of first-generation student siblings could inform new and effective practices and policies for student success.

White privilege is another pressing issue in the lives of White male, first-generation students, and the differences between them and continuing generation students. Too often in student affairs, in both practice and theory, we focus too narrowly

on one aspect of a student's development, usually in relation to the student's cognitive or racial identity, "often to the exclusion of acknowledging and using each theory in its full complexities" (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007, p. 17). Students, like all people, have multiple identities. A problem with the current limited research on multiple identities is that it "seems to privilege the researchers' points of view and interpretation at the expense of the participants' lived experiences" (Abes et al., 2007, p. 18). For example, a researcher may be interested in first-generation students and therefore spend more time focusing on first-generation issues, but the participants in the study may feel that another aspect of their identity is more salient. A thorough examination of first-generation college student siblings cannot be done without carefully examining other aspects of students' identities, such as issues of family, race, social class, and gender, which are also considered in this inquiry. More specifically, this study focuses on lower income, White first-generation male college student siblings, from working class backgrounds and seeks to better clarify and understand first-generation student issues and how we define first-generation students.

Purpose of the Study

Little is known specifically about the role of older siblings in helping younger siblings negotiate the process of enrolling in and persisting in higher education. The purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which lower income, White, first-generation college student siblings traverse the college experience, and how these students make meaning of their experiences and multiple identities. Moreover, this study seeks to fill the gap in the literature of siblings of first-generation college students by providing a more thorough understanding of first-generation status as well offering a new

perspective on the influential role grandparents can have in their grandchildren's educational attainment.

Significance of the Study

Why should student affairs administrators be concerned with studying first-generation, White, working class college students who happen to be siblings? Pascarella (2006) called college student researchers to study an array of diversity issues, including issues of class in higher education. bell hooks (2000) wrote that “nowadays, it is fashionable to talk about race or gender; the uncool subject is class” (p. vii). Addressing class issues is uncomfortable for many because it “threatens the ideal of the American dream” (Borrego, 2003, p. 4), but threatening subjects, such as class, need to be studied, addressed, and discussed to have any hope of progress and to recognize oppression. Institutional retention efforts have not recently been targeted at White male college students from lower income families. Today's students are different than those of the 1960s and 1970s when much of the early student affairs research began. Much of the early student affairs research was initiated by and conducted by White males using White male students as the sample. More recently, however, White males from lower income backgrounds have been noted to be one of the largest groups of students to be at risk for both attending and persisting through college (King, 2000). Although people of all classes might be fearful of talking about class, U.S. society does not give the poor a voice (hooks, 2000), and the voices of students from limited incomes are rarely heard.

Research Questions

Although research questions in an emergent design continually evolve as the study evolves, a list of questions can be useful in keeping the study focused. It is

important to allow participants to truly think freely about these questions so their voices and salient experiences are reflected accurately in the way we (they and I) interpret the data (Manning, 1999). I also recognize that some of the most salient and meaning making experiences may not result from my asking any particular question, but may become apparent as we reflect on their experiences more holistically (Merriam, 1998).

The following research questions were used to guide this investigation:

- Q1 How do first-generation, White, working class siblings traverse the college experience?
- Q2 What were the students' backgrounds in terms of pre-collegiate and upbringing experiences?
- Q3 How do family members hinder/support the college experience of first-generation students and how do students describe their familial relationships?
- Q4 How do students view and make meaning of their multiple identities?

Emerging Research Focus

Initially, the focus of this inquiry was to conduct research on two White, first-generation student brothers, from limited income backgrounds, concurrently enrolled at the same institution of higher education. As the study progressed and emerged, I narrowed the primary focus to the youngest sibling because the older brother chose not to participate. Consequently, the study took on a broader view of the entire family, including a grandfather's college background. The younger brother was enrolled as a first-year student, whereas the older brother had already completed his first two years of college and was a junior during this study. Viewed through a constructivist, critical cultural lens, the study is framed as a critical ethnographic case study.

Possibilities of the Study

I hoped to learn more about White working class first-generation college student siblings and the cultural context in which they live and how they may have developed a “second language” (Rendon, 1996), second language being a metaphor for learning how to live in two worlds. Sharing with me salient experiences of their college experiences, some student participants may include how relationships have changed with family and friends from back home, as well as relationships in the newer university setting. But before I could expect them to share their experiences with me, I needed to develop and nurture their trust. I interviewed three of the four family members, as one family member chose not to participate in the study. Also interviewed was a high school counselor. A family genogram is provided in Appendix A. At times, my background, knowledge, and understanding of higher education and institutional policies may help them in certain ways, and they may have seen that as an added benefit to their participation.

My Story

To help the reader understand my perspective, I share my experience as a White male first-generation college student from a working class family with two siblings who entered college before me (and three who entered college after me). What qualifies me to study the college experiences of first-generation, White, working class male siblings? These characteristics described me perfectly as a college student. Although I consider myself to be a first-generation college graduate who is White from a farming background, I do not expect the participants in this study to necessarily reflect or confirm my experiences. My experience was different in that I attended a very small Catholic, liberal arts college (1,700 undergraduates) close to home, about 70 miles away. It was very

convenient for me as my two older sisters had already attended the same college and one was still a student there during my entire first year. My campus reflected my background and values (i.e., Catholic college with a social justice mission) enough that I was comfortable and had a strong support network. I even had a work-study position in the same office where my two sisters had worked. I did not struggle with fitting in as I did not have to work hard at it because of my siblings.

I consider myself to be a first-generation college graduate, even though I have two sisters who went to college and graduated before me. My parents graduated from high school, got married at 19, started a dairy farm, and raised six children (three girls, three boys; I am the third child). I have two older sisters, a younger sister, and two younger brothers. We were all born in northern Vermont and raised on the family farm. We were never well off, but always had what we needed. As children, we were recipients of some federal benefits, such as reduced and free lunch during elementary and high school. My mother was always a great fan of weekend yard sales. We would also get some groceries at a store that specialized in discounted dented food cans. In college, I was awarded both work-study and the Pell Grant.

I come from a French Canadian Catholic family, where my first language is French. Based on the writings of Langelier and Langelier (2005), my family experiences seem to resonate well with the literature on French Canadians (or Franco Americans—these terms are used interchangeably by Langelier and Langelier). The church has had a strong influence on French Canadians. Even in my community of origin in northern Vermont, they still have some church services in French. Traditionally, issues that have been important to French Canadians are family loyalty, language, and conservative

values. My upbringing strongly instilled these values in me. Perhaps because of persecution by the English in Colonial times, a distrust of others still lingers for French Canadians. Many who speak French are still reminded by others that French Canadian French is not as sophisticated or eloquent as Parisian French. Still today, when people ask me if I can still speak French, I feel slightly embarrassed that my French is “inferior.” My response might be, “Yes, but, I couldn’t hold a conversation with a French professor.”

Franco Americans are not considered to be well educated or worldly, perhaps due to the strong ties to the church and family (Langelier & Langelier, 2005). In fact, a “sense of inferiority continues to haunt many, as they seem ill at ease with their roots” (Langelier & Langelier, 2005, p. 549). French Canadians without college degrees tend to live close to home, creating what are called “Little Canadas” (Langelier & Langelier, 2005, p. 550). Most of my aunts and uncles lived within 30 minutes of my family. We always saw everyone at holidays, even eating *tourtiere* (a meat pie) and celebrating *le Réveillon*, an all-night Christmas Eve party with my mother’s relatives following Christmas Eve Mass that lasted until three or four in the morning. We would get home just in time to milk our cows at five in the morning. These traditions are also mentioned by Langelier and Langelier, but I do not think my family still participates in *le Réveillon* with my aunts and uncles getting older and probably not able to party like they did in the past. We would call my grandmother *memere* and my grandfather *pepere*, which is typical for French Canadians (Langelier & Langelier, 2005). I am continuing that tradition with my children too, referring to their paternal grandparents as *memere* and *pepere*.

My *pepere* speaks English with a heavy French accent, but when I talk to him, we speak French. When I told him I was engaged to be married, the first thing he asked me was, “*Elle et une bonne catholique?*” translated as “Is she a good Catholic?” Of course, I knew there was only one right answer. I later wondered about my younger sister, whose husband is of Greek heritage. Her wedding was the first in our family that did not consist of a Catholic wedding mass. She was the fourth child, but had she been the first, I am not sure how accepting my family would have been of the Greek man my French Canadian sister married.

Of my many first cousins (approximately 30), the children in my family are the only ones with bachelor’s degrees. The older five siblings (including me) all attended St. Michael’s College, a small, Catholic, liberal arts college, 90 minutes from home. The sixth child, my youngest sibling, went to McGill University in Montreal. My parents’ help in the college process was mostly limited to financial aid forms and transportation. My parents, especially my mother, always encouraged me to take vocational courses during high school instead of following the college track, and then to take business classes in college. My second sister, who was a senior when I was a freshman, helped me the most through high school and during my first two years of college. She was certainly a great influence in my decision about where to attend college. In the 14-year period from 1988 to 2002, there was always at least one of my siblings enrolled at St. Michael’s College, and in a nine year period from 1990 to 1999, there were always two Couture siblings enrolled at the same college. There was even one female student that my younger brother and I, at different times, tried to date.

I remember exploring my options regarding going to college or doing something else. I even took the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) with a friend and considered joining the Navy with him for a while. The Air Force also caught my attention because I wanted to be a pilot. There was a technical college I also looked into for civil engineering. Looking back now, I had no idea of the level of math and science that would be required in those fields, and those subjects were certainly not my strengths. But even after I had settled on a four year degree, I was still looking into ROTC options. Later, during the Persian Gulf War, my eldest sister talked me out of any military options because she told me she did not want to see me going to war. I listened. Sibling influence can be quite powerful.

When my older sisters came home from college, I was always impressed with their books and their new, more inquisitive look at the world around them. A few visits to see them on campus solidified my plans to attend the same, nearby college. It was convenient in proximity and its small size was also appealing. I already felt comfortable with the campus as it was in a town I liked near home, it was Catholic, and my sister would also be there so I did not have to be scared about the uncertainties of going to college. At the time, my religion was something I thought I would continue to develop. Being a private institution, the college was also very expensive, but I was fortunate enough to be told by my sisters that I would get enough financial aid to make the tuition affordable. As an undergraduate, I never considered how I might be at a disadvantage because of my parents' education level and because of our income. Ironically, our income actually helped me secure a good financial aid package.

Other influences were a part of my decision to attend college. I knew that I did not want to continue farming. My father took over his father's farm, and it appears now that even with six children, none of us has plans to take over our parents' farm. I wanted a different lifestyle. In addition to learning of my sisters' college adventures, I also learned from their boyfriends, who were also at the same college. My high school counselor had what I thought to be a wonderful career, and so I explored that path further and became interested in psychology. My high school courses in English and social studies were also considered to be the more advanced level, and the expectation in those courses, especially at the junior and senior levels, was that we would go to college.

I had never even been forced to think about my White privileged background until my senior year in college, when my African American roommate expressed unease in traveling with me to a rural part of Vermont. This event helped me realize that my race and gender allow me to travel freely nearly anywhere in the U.S. without fear of discrimination or physical harm.

While I was in college, going home was often a little uneasy. My mother would always encourage me to go visit old high school friends, but I had no interest as I no longer felt I had much in common with friends from high school who never moved away or did not attend college. The summer that marked my 10 year high school reunion is a good example. Shortly after moving to Colorado, I flew back home to Vermont for a week or so as I would often do in the summers, and had just missed my high school reunion. My mother, who never misses her reunions, thought that I was saddened by this, or at least missing out, so she invited four people from my graduating class over for dinner. Three came, one of which was my cousin, whom I was glad to see, but I could

not recall ever really being friends with the other two during high school. This dinner was an awkward hour-and-a-half, as the conversation only revolved around these other individuals' jobs and families. No one seemed to understand why I was a glutton for education by spending so many years in college and then graduate school. With the exception of my cousin, who had attended a six-month technical college program in Wyoming, the others had no real concept of what moving away, or "breaking away" (London, 1989) was really like. My experience with discomfort with going home is not unique (London, 1989). London noted that many students in his study found it "difficult or impossible to discuss with family and friends who... could not identify with their new experiences" (p. 146). In a different study, I also found comfort in this student's reflection: "It's really hard for me at home. It's like living in both worlds. I come here [college] and I'm one person, and I go home and I'm the other person that they knew, but not really" (London, 1992, p. 8). For me, this not only occurred while in college, but it continues even now more than 10 years after I graduated from college.

Richard Rodriguez's (1982) autobiography *Hunger for Memory* resonates with many of my experiences. He wrote at length of growing up in a bilingual home where English and Spanish were spoken. In adulthood, his family ceased to be bilingual and spoke only English, as my family has also done, for the most part, abandoning our French language. Rodriguez also experienced discomfort in going home, not really wanting to talk about college and later, about his work with his writings. Rodriguez's perspective suggests that as a first-generation college student, once you graduate and are educated, your relationship with your family will likely never be the same.

Overview of the Study

Chapter I provided background on the nature of the study. Chapter II includes a review of the literature surrounding issues of first-generation students, sibling and parent relationships, young adulthood, and issues of identity, including White privilege and what it means to be male. Chapter III includes the study's methodology and paradigm. The study's findings and themes are presented in Chapter IV, and finally, Chapter V offers insight into implications, based on the study's findings, for both research and practice.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature on first-generation students is growing, as is the available literature on social class and college students. Less is known about college student sibling relationships. This chapter offers a review of the literature regarding identity, including White privilege and male privilege, social class, first-generation college students, male college students, and college student siblings. How each of these intersects to form multiple identities is then discussed.

Many of the classical studies in student development were conducted decades ago, and consequently may more accurately reflect the experiences of the parents of today's college students rather than their children. Indeed, as college students experienced more supervision (e.g., stricter social rules) in many aspects of college life a generation ago, the college experience of yesterday was a different experience than the college experience today (Lee, 2004). Although his research is somewhat dated, Boyer's (1987) assertion might still be appropriate: "College students today take for granted lifestyles that twenty years ago might have gotten their parents, when in college, admonished or expelled" (p. 198). On the other hand, Howe and Strauss (2000) note that today's high schools have implemented many more restrictions on student conduct, especially since the Columbine High School shootings. Therefore, because some new college students may have attended high schools with security guards and metal detectors, it is posited

that these students have a greater tolerance and even respect for authority than college students of the 1960s.

One point that Howe and Strauss (2000) stressed is that the Millennial generation has greater respect for authority than previous generations, but whether Millennial college students have a different experience than, say Generation X students, has not been determined. One trend does seem certain, though: parental involvement in the affairs of their college students is at its zenith. Levine's (2005) research with adolescents led him to conclude that today's parents are busy making certain that their children are "being entertained at all times and sheltered from adversity or hardship of any sort" (p. 6). This is a huge disservice to students, who do not learn any kind of conflict resolution or the skills necessary to advocate for themselves (Levine, 2005). The current generation of students is very optimistic (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Students who are sheltered and have their needs met might worry less, but this younger generation does not need to worry about worldly matters, such as politics, the economy, or even the possibility of war (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Of course, the current state of our economy and the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could change this view.

The literature reveals that a student's first year in college can be challenging, but if students hold unrealistic expectations, they will likely be taken aback (Paul & Brier, 2001). The transition to college often involves "a major upheaval within one's social network" (Paul & Brier, 2001, p. 84). There are multiple sources of help on campuses to help ease the transition from high school to college, but not all students take advantage of these opportunities. Those who do may be the students who need the least help. Similarly, many college administrators might agree that students who join clubs and

organizations and get involved on campus are doing what is expected. But more outreach to other students could be beneficial. Levitz and Noel (1989) cautioned, “If we wait for freshmen to come to us, many will fall through the cracks” (p. 74).

Institutions need to assure that new students feel attached (Levitz & Noel, 1989) and integrated (Krause, 2001) into their campuses. Levitz and Noel (1989) were practical in asserting that “all freshmen should have the sense that someone at the institution knows them personally and cares about their academic and personal well-being” (p. 72). A discussion of social identities can be useful in better serving and understanding our students and how they make meaning of their identities and those of their peers.

Forms of Identity

White Racial Identity

Research on White racial identity has historically focused on Whites’ views of themselves in comparison to African Americans, but not on what it means to be White (Carter & Helms, 1990). White people do not typically think of ourselves as White, but we tend to think more of our ethnicities: German, English, French, and so on (Helms, 1990). Being White in the U.S. means representing the “numerical majority as well as the socioeconomically and politically dominant group” (Helms, 1990, p. 54).

Furthermore, being White in the U.S. also means, “it is still possible to exist without ever having to acknowledge that reality” (Helms, 1990, p. 54).

Helms’ created a model of White racial identity development (1990, 1995), which is briefly described here. There are six stages, which Helms later renamed statuses, that individuals progress through on their way to White racial identity development. Helms believed status was a more appropriate term because the levels can have more overlap

than stages would imply. It is also possible to stay in a status without going through all six, just as it is possible to move backward. The six statuses are: (a) Contact, (b) Disintegration, (c) Reintegration, (d) Pseudo-Independent, (e) Immersion/Emersion, and (f) Autonomy. Statuses are used instead of stages because each status is not mutually exclusive and people often find themselves in more than one simultaneously (Helms, 1995). Furthermore, not all Whites will advance through each status, finding satisfaction in remaining in the Reintegration status, for example.

Contact. White individuals are not yet conscious that they live in a racist society and believe all people are evaluated based on White criteria. Blacks should be able to help themselves if they tried hard enough. Some describe Whites in the Contact status as “happy racists” (McEwen, 1996, p. 195). Whites in this status are satisfied with the status quo and have little contact with Blacks. Knowledge of Blacks may be primarily based on negative stereotypes (Helms, 1995).

Disintegration. Individuals entering this status have an experience that forces them to somehow realize that Whites have certain privileges that Blacks cannot access. Faced with moral dilemmas for perhaps the first time, White individuals begin to question themselves as to how they were raised and socialized to view people of color. They experience “conflicted White identification” (Helms, 1990, p. 58).

Reintegration. Here there is newly renewed adherence to the belief that Whites are the superior race, and Blacks are inferior. If Blacks are not successful, it is their own fault. Whites in this status idealize the White race and reject Blacks. Reintegration may appear similar to Contact, but in the Contact status, individuals have not yet been confronted with acknowledging certain privileges exist.

Pseudo-Independent. White individuals in this status no longer believe Blacks are innately inferior. Instead, they show more curiosity about Blacks and are willing to help Blacks become more successful, if it means helping Blacks become more like Whites. There is a tendency for these individuals to over-identify with Blacks, causing other Whites and Blacks alike to be suspicious of Whites in the Pseudo-Independent status.

Immersion/Emersion. Here, White people begin to seriously wonder what it means to be White and how Whites have benefitted from centuries of racism. In this status, Whites are not so interested in changing Blacks, realizing instead that Whites need to change.

Autonomy. This status is best described as White individuals who no longer feel threatened by other races. Individuals in this status no longer use stereotypes to understand how non-White people live or function and begin to see how other forms of oppression, in addition to racism, negatively affect the world. In addition, Whites may seek to help others understand their new realization as well, which includes, but is not limited to, the notion that racism truly harms everyone.

White Privilege

Helms (1990) understood that when most Whites in the U.S. thought of racial issues, they thought first of African Americans. Similarly, Whites and the “dominant U.S. discourse equates ‘White’ with ‘middle-class’ and ‘Black’ with ‘poor’” (Kliman, 1998, p. 53). To have privilege means some that some people must be lacking privilege (McIntosh, 1998). Although many White people who enjoy privileged lives do not intentionally mean to harm those without similar privileges, “those with privilege and

power live well at the expense of those without either” (Kliman, 1998, p. 54).

Discussions of privilege and power lead to an examination of oppression. Therefore, to have privilege means to oppress. Put more bluntly, if we are not oppressed, then we are the oppressors (Schacht, 2007). One way White people can ask themselves how they oppress others is to determine how they have benefitted from being “over-privileged” (Schacht, 2007, p. 73).

Peggy McIntosh (1998) brought attention to what it means to be White in her discussion, identifying, and naming White privilege. White skin is an asset, an unearned advantage. She wrote:

For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one’s life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own. (McIntosh, 1998, p. 150)

White people have the “privilege to ignore less powerful people” (McIntosh, 1998, p. 151). Even among White college students, many believe “racism doesn’t affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see ‘whiteness’ as a racial identity” (McIntosh, 1998, p. 151).

McIntosh listed 26 items of privilege that White people can store in their “invisible knapsacks” (1998, p. 147) often without their knowledge even though they benefit from these invisible items (Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001). For example, when Whites accept a new job offer, they do not need to worry that others will say they got the job because of their race. Furthermore, when White people are critical of the government, or critical of anything else for that matter, they can be sure others will not say they are “playing the race card.”

Masculinity and its Social Construction

Studying men can be seen as “inherently activist” (Capraro, 2004, p. 24) to some observers, probably just as women’s studies might seem that way to others. What it means to be “masculine” means different things to different people. Our understandings of the multiple layers of masculinity can be different due to religion, social class, and race, among other things (Kimmel & Messner, 2007). As a result, “Men are not born; they are made” (Kimmel & Messner, 2007, p. xxi). Throughout most of the U.S. educational system, students are taught about various male leaders, but these leaders are not explored as gendered beings (Kimmel & Messner, 2007). Until recently, there has been little research on men as gendered beings, and this lack of discussion has led to the “problematic and unprofessional...reliance on stereotypical gender scripts” for men (Davis & Laker, 2004, p. 49).

Gendered speech is any speech that “uses gender to make its case” (Kimmel & Messner, 2007, p. xv). Men often do not think of themselves as having a gender, just as White people often do not think of themselves as belonging to the White race, and middle class people do not daily think of their class standing (Kimmel & Messner, 2007). Most days, a White middle class male may go about his everyday life in U.S. society without being forced to confront these identifiers. Add to this list “middle-age” and “heterosexual” and this creates the dominant notion of “normal” masculinity by which men have traditionally been measured in this country (Kimmel & Messner, 2007). Kimmel and Messner suggest instead that we think of a “matrix of masculinities” (p. xxii) because there are so many different variations of masculinity, making it socially constructed, and adding to its complexity.

Most men do not keep in touch with old friends as much as women, especially with telephone usage (Walker, 2007). Men's use of the telephone is more for setting appointments or conducting work-related activities. Men do not call friends just to say "hi" or to see how their friends are doing. As a result of this, a man can experience "tremendous attrition in his friendship network over time" (Walker, 2007, p. 330). With cell phones that are more convenient and very important to college students, it begs the question of men's friendship networks and their persistence for an extended period of time.

White working class males feel threatened and worry about losing their jobs, control over "their" women, and their position in the patriarchy (hooks, 1994). Sometimes, working class males look for the scapegoats they believe stole their presumed privilege (Fine, Weis, Addeston, & Hall, 2007). They tend to view social welfare programs as beneficial if it helps White people, but discriminatory against them if people of color are helped. It is the same view with affirmative action programs, believing that affirmative action is intended to take jobs away from more qualified White males.

Peggy McIntosh (1998) observed, "I have met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance" (p. 151). Most men in the U.S. are socialized to believe that their needs should come ahead of women's needs (Gilbert & Scher, 1999; hooks, 1994). When these men do not receive the advantages they thought they rightfully deserved, many experience significant loss (Gilbert & Scher, 1999; hooks, 1994). When this happens, "he is usually 'hurt,' emotionally scarred because he does not have the privilege or power society has taught

him ‘real men’ should possess. Alienated, frustrated, pissed off, he may attack, abuse, and oppress an individual woman or women” (hooks, 1994, p. 630). This means most men try to have control over their lives, but not always in positive ways. As we saw briefly, men’s identities can be very much tied to their work, and one’s work, among other things, marks their social class.

Social Class

Discussions of social class are often limited, create a certain level of discomfort, and can be perceived as threatening (Barratt, 2007; Borreggio, 2003, 2004; hooks, 2000). Even in discussions of diversity, class issues are often omitted in favor of race issues (hooks, 2000), but class issues can factor into so many other branches of a person’s identity. According to Kliman (1998), class consists of “race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, physical and mental well-being, and geography” (pp. 50-51). One way of understanding positions of class in terms of work comes from determining “how autonomous, supervised, respected, or demeaned one’s work is” (Kliman, 1998, p. 52). Education alone cannot predict class. For example, just because a person holds a bachelor’s degree does not always mean a graduate is drawn to enter the world of white collar work. On the flipside, there are also plenty of highly skilled laborers who earn more and have nicer homes than people with advanced degrees (Lubrano, 2004). Class, however, involves more than educational degrees, occupation, and the size of one’s house.

In mainstream culture, class is typically framed in two “contradictory and decontextualized ways,” which are (a) individual attributes and (b) the “natural order of things” (Kliman, 1998, p. 54). Individual attributes are epitomized by the Protestant work

ethic—if we work hard, we can succeed, and therefore, those who are not successful are lazy. Believing in the natural order is popular among those who believe “we can’t all be rich” (Kliman, 1998, p. 54).

Economic and Cultural Capital

A person’s “class position governs access to resources: health care, political influence, housing, interest rates, and information” (Kliman, 1998, p. 52). Having access to these kinds of benefits is known as having economic capital (Bourdieu, 2004).

Economic capital serves as protection in the event of unforeseen economic hardships, such as a sudden loss of job (Kliman, 1998). Kliman further explained economic capital as both income and other assets:

One’s place in the economy is defined by occupation and earned income, but also *unearned* income, assets, and inheritances; credit lines; consumption of goods and services; employment security; debt load; and the number of paychecks one is from homelessness. These factors are shaped by race, ethnicity, gender, and physical and mental well-being, all of which govern economic access. (p. 51)

There is also cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2004), which involves having the knowledge to function well in the middle and upper classes. Examples of cultural capital can be seen in an individual’s ability to identify what some consider an important piece of art or work of classical music or in frequent visits to museums. Other examples could include amount of travel and a large social network. Individuals with high levels of cultural capital are well-connected to others with power and have access to many of life’s finer luxuries and enjoy more privileged lives than those with limited cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2004). If students do not have access or the knowledge to do something, such as how to drop a class, or that dropping a class is even an option, they will not know how or who can help them gain access. This is an example of a closed social network. Individuals with less

cultural capital may not participate in some of the same educational or cultural activities (i.e., visiting museums, traveling for the intrinsic value) because they do not see a practical value and may view these activities as a waste of money or even elitist. Moreover, people with less cultural capital may avoid certain events, such as formal dinners, not because of costs, but because of concern they will not understand particular social rules that others with more capital are oblivious to. The ways in which college students are affected by class and capital is explained in the later section on college students.

Siblings and Families

Many scholars have documented the influential roles families and even extended families can play in the lives of college students of color (Ceja, 2006; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Torres, 2004). Similarly, White, first-generation college students from rural backgrounds have been found to have strong connections with their families (Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Schultz, 2003). When families are discussed, it is often in the context of one student and his or her parents. In a recent search of the last decade or so in two of the more highly regarded student affairs journals, the *Journal of College Student Development* and the *NASPA Journal*, more than 60 articles contained references to parents, but only one mentioned the word “sibling.” Some students are more likely to turn to their siblings than their parents in times of need, so this paucity of research needs to be addressed. When dealing with “difficult family situations...siblings may become allies” (Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2001, p. 268). Nonetheless, quite little is known about sibling relationships in college. In fact, much of the literature on sibling relationships has focused on sibling rivalry (Hawthorne, 2003).

In many cases, as noted earlier, research on adolescence has been more concerned with an individual's parents and peers than on the individual's siblings (Updegraff, McHale, & Crouter, 2002). One reason for the lack of research on college student siblings could stem from studies like Pulakos' (1989), who reported that college students are more interested in becoming independent and on "developing relationships with friends outside the family" (p. 243). However, if the current trend of increasing family involvement in higher education continues, we cannot ignore the importance of college students' families, including siblings, especially those students with older siblings.

First-generation students with older siblings in college may have more social capital than students who are first in their family to attend (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006), but should not be considered as traditional students. First-generation students are often lumped together, whether an only child or one of many siblings to attend college. Most studies that focus on both family relationships and college students tend to focus on the student's parents, instead of other family members. For example, in a study that included "the role of family" for first-generation students (Feenstra, Banyard, Rines, & Hopkins, 2001), "family" meant a student and his or her parents. No consideration was made for older or younger siblings. Nonetheless, older siblings of first-generation students should not be ignored.

Sibling Relationships

Sibling relationships can contribute to both positive and negative development of siblings (Sanders, 2004), but much of the literature focuses largely on siblings in childhood. As one author aptly noted, "Concern or consideration about one's siblings seemed to stop after childhood, as if the relationship had ended" (Hawthorne, 2003, p. 1).

For those of us who work with siblings, or for those of us who have siblings in adulthood, it is important to remind ourselves and others that “sibling relationships are one of the longest lasting human relationships” (Tucker et al., 2001, p. 269). Many researchers have examined sibling relationships, especially in adolescence. Nearly every article reviewed for this section seemed to share this theme: siblings are an influential source of support and information for each other.

Popular culture (i.e., MTV and teen films) tends to place greater interest on adolescent peer relationships and peer pressure, often overlooking familial bonds, even though there is literature to support the importance of sibling relationships on development. Contradicting evidence on this topic reveals levels of intimacy with siblings and peers change depending on how an individual’s developmental needs are met (Updegraff et al., 2002). For instance, a middle child may relate more with either an older sibling or a younger sibling, depending on the middle child’s developmental or social stages. Similarly, in families with multiple siblings, a sibling’s closest sibling, in terms of friendship, does not necessarily equate to the person’s closest sibling in age (Pulakos, 1989).

Gender differences have also been studied in communication among siblings. One researcher found no effect on the level of communication between sibling genders (Newman, 1991). Sibling communication was greater when both parents had raised siblings. The youngest sibling is least likely to initiate phone conversations among siblings, but once they are engaged in conversation, younger siblings are more likely to discuss problems they are experiencing (Newman, 1991). Middle children communicate more with their younger siblings than with their older siblings. Furthermore, “third

borns” felt closer to the middle sibling than to the first-born. As family size increased, communication, in terms of telephone calls, seemed to decrease among siblings. In contrast, “the larger the sibling group, the more the students reported getting along with each other” (Newman, 1991, p. 640). Newman also noted the power structure in sibling relationships:

The first born tends to be autocratic, and unduly independent on maintaining the complementary relationships that are the basis for first born power. Later borns, especially last borns, lack complementary power, and hence rely more upon skills such as discussing, conferring, and cooperating that are inherent in reciprocal relationships. (pp. 641-642)

When it comes to siblings’ influencing other siblings, actions seem to speak louder than words. For example, one researcher found that the behavior of older siblings, more so than the older sibling’s attitude, has a significant influence on younger siblings, especially when the older sibling is a brother (Olenick, 1998). Older siblings “qualify as both contemporaries and family members” (Seginer, 1998, p. 287). Seginer examined the outcomes of sibling relationships by examining perceived support. A problem with Seginer’s study is that she disqualified participants of the study if they indicated that their closest sibling was younger. Most of the literature on siblings focuses on adolescents. Less has been written on adult siblings, and hardly any literature exists on college student siblings.

Even though sibling relationships can be quite influential, very few researchers have compared the “experiences of two siblings from the same family” (Tucker et al., 2001, p. 254). Siblings may have a deeper impact on their siblings than many people assume. When younger siblings seek information, it

commonly comes from their older siblings rather than from parents... In addition, parents may not be as knowledgeable as adolescents are about such nonfamilial

experiences. For these reasons, older brothers and sisters may be invaluable guides for their less experienced younger siblings. (Tucker et al., 2001, p. 255)

Older siblings are frequently seen as mentors to their younger siblings.

Same sex siblings tend to feel more support from each other than from opposite sex siblings. In general, sisters tend to give more support than brothers (Lee, Mancini, & Maxwell, 1990; Tucker et al., 2001). Sibling relationships vary greatly, and there are often complementary relationships (Tucker et al., 2001). The older sibling is not always dominant. Rather, if a younger sibling is more skilled in “social life issues” and establishing peer relationships, the younger sibling may be able to give support to the older sibling. The same can be said of academics. For example, a younger sibling who easily understands chemistry might be effective in helping the older struggling sibling. However, the smaller the family, the more likely the older sibling is to give advice on non-familial issues (Tucker et al., 2001).

Adolescence involves “the movement toward personal autonomy and renegotiation of relationships with parents, greater involvement and more intense relationships with peers, and the initiation and greater involvement with dating behavior” (Windle, 2000, p. 98). Curiously, this description of adolescence omits changing relationships among siblings over time. In earlier adolescence, peer relationships are of central importance in development. However, as siblings progress from middle to late adolescence (15 to 17 years of age) sibling relationships tend to increase in intimacy, whereas peer relationships may decrease in intimacy (Updegraff et al., 2002). Adolescents’ needs for support changes as they continually move toward independence from their parents, and “by young adulthood, younger siblings may become important sources of support” (Tucker et al., 2001, p. 269). A shift in power occurs with age:

“Sibling relationships become more egalitarian and less controlling during adolescence, as older siblings relinquish some of the power and control inherent in their role”

(Updegraff et al., 2002, p. 184).

Perhaps not surprisingly, firstborn siblings have been found to be “more controlling toward their younger siblings” (Updegraff et al., 2002, p. 192). Likewise, older siblings exert more influence over younger siblings than vice versa (Schultheiss, Palma, Predragovich, & Glasscock, 2002). Females are more likely to control their siblings, but are less controlling with their friends (Updegraff et al., 2002). However, this controlling behavior diminished over time.

There is also evidence to suggest that not all sibling relationships are positive, especially with the use of alcohol. Adolescents who have had early exposure to alcohol by seeing parents or siblings drink are more likely to start drinking early (Windle, 2000). However, adolescents are more likely to emulate siblings’ and peers’ behavior than their own parents’ behavior (Windle, 2000). Indeed, “deviant behaviors often take place in the company of a sibling” (Tucker et al., 2001, p. 268). Substance abuse in older siblings is a “potent predictor” of substance use in younger siblings: “It is also quite conceivable that older siblings may provide greater ease of access to alcohol and other substances” (Windle, 2000, p. 106).

Sibling and Young Adult Relationships with Parents

Adolescence can be defined as, “a developmental period when parents and youths negotiate issues of autonomy, when relationships with friends and romantic partners become more salient, and when identity issues are a focus of concern” (Tucker et al., 2001, p. 254). Also during this time of increasing independence from parents, older

siblings can be “at least as influential as parents in socializing younger sisters and brothers” (Tucker et al., p. 254).

Research studies involving families have largely ignored sibling influences, instead focusing mainly on parental influences on children (Windle, 2000). This is ironic because as one researcher found, parents may not be the major influence on their children when siblings are present (Sanders, 2004). Some scholars have addressed the question of how siblings who grow up with the same parents can be so different from each other (Conley, 2004; Sanders, 2004). There are multiple factors that can lead to very different outcomes in terms of success for children of the same family (Conley, 2004). It is much more difficult to predict the success of highly qualified college students from poorer families than students from higher social and economic classes because of the limited resources available to poorer families (Conley, 2004).

Although genetics are similar, family dynamics for each sibling can be unique (Sanders, 2004). For example, it is commonly understood that fathers engage in rougher play with their sons than their daughters. Over time, it is quite common for parents to treat younger siblings with fewer restrictions, after having gained more experience parenting (Sanders, 2004). Some children are also treated differently by their parents and by their other siblings. Moreover, “it would be impossible for two children in a family to experience an identical environment” (Sanders, 2004, p. 89). But the issue is not as much whether parents offer differential treatment, as it is the perceived meaning that children will make of the differential treatment (Sanders, 2004).

Arnett (2004) researched parent-child relationships within the context of what he calls “emerging adulthood,” being roughly the period of one’s earlier 20s. Many

emerging adults develop a deeper appreciation of their parents' efforts and accomplishments and emerging adults tend to enjoy a more equal relationship with their parents (Arnett, 2004). Arnett's description of emerging adults, who might be at the older end of Howe and Strauss' (2000) Millennial generation, is a more thoughtful and better researched depiction of the current generation of college students. Not all emerging adults have been handed everything from their parents. Many are working several jobs to pay their rent and tuition and/or student loans (Robbins & Wilner, 2001). First-generation students more closely resemble adults who are struggling with issues of finance, identity, intimacy, and fit, whereas Howe and Strauss' Millennial generation tend to come from more privileged backgrounds. The depiction of the Millennial generation students is sometimes seen as the hegemonic view of the current generation of students, while research on first-generation students points to less optimistic trends. On campuses and at student affairs conferences, the Millennial generation attributes are too widely accepted as the norm.

Just as relationships between children and parents often improve in adulthood, so do relationships among siblings (Newman, 1991). In adolescence, siblings help each other as "socialization agents" (Tucker et al., 2001), and this could likely continue into college as an older sibling could help the younger one negotiate the college process. Furthermore, parental education level can also impact sibling support: "It may be that younger siblings whose parents have lower education levels rely on older siblings for support with schoolwork" (Tucker et al., 2001, p. 256). This can be critical in helping student affairs administrators understand first-generation student issues for siblings in college. However, even if siblings assist each other throughout the college process,

parents of all first-generation students should not be ignored, but instead be included and welcomed by the institution.

College Students and Their Grandparents

Grandchildren can have close relationships with their grandparents. The roles of grandparents or siblings in the lives of first-generation college students are largely lacking in the literature. It is not known how many college students were raised by or have lived with their grandparents. As the expected lifespan increases, some individuals will be grandparents for up to half their lives (Kennedy, 1989), meaning grandparents have the potential to be involved in their grandchildren's lives more than in previous decades. Grandparents, particularly grandmothers, "appear to be more invested in their grandparent-grandchild relationships than their grandchildren" (Harwood & Lin, 2000, p. 42). If grandparents wish to continue nurturing their relationships with their college-going grandchildren, this relationship is worthy of further study.

College Students

College students are obviously a diverse group of students. This study looks more closely at a specific kind of student. The study specifically examines students who are first-generation, from lower income families, have siblings concurrently enrolled in college, and are White males. The next sections examine the literature on these topics.

First-Generation College Students

New college students often feel inadequate, intimidated, have difficulty managing their time, and are not prepared for the ambiguity surrounding academics (Krause, 2001). If college students in general feel this way, it must be even more difficult for first-generation students. First-generation students tend to worry more about financial aid,

feel less prepared for college, and know less about the social environment on campus when compared to more traditional students (Bui, 2002).

There are different understandings of the term *first-generation*. As more first-generation students attend institutions of higher education, the meaning we place on “first-generation” merits some thought. For example, my parents did not attend college, so I am considered a first-generation college student, as are my two older sisters and three younger siblings, where we have a 16-year range from my oldest sibling to my youngest sibling. Is it appropriate to define all Couture children as first-generation? If so, should there be different variations of how a first-generation student is defined? Although my youngest sibling qualifies as both a first-generation student and as a member of the Millennial Generation, his college experiences did not seem to match most of the depictions of either first-generation or Millennials. Many student affairs professionals have latched onto the notion of college student parents as helicopter parents. Indeed, many parents have been so involved in their children’s lives that some students have not developed skills to advocate for themselves (Levine, 2005). In fact, some parents go as far as completing and submitting college applications for their children (McDonough, 1997). Other parents are deeply offended if their child writes an application essay regarding an influential person in the student’s life about a teacher, and not a parent (McDonough, 1997). However, not all parents are helicopter parents and not all parents pay for their child’s tuition.

There are multiple understandings of the term first-generation. One common definition considers students to be first-generation if their parents have some college, but no bachelor’s degree (Lundberg et al., 2007; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Another broader

definition of first-generation students are those whose parents have a high school diploma or less (Ceja, 2006; Ishitani, 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Somers et al., 2000).

Finally, the most specific, and limiting definition of first-generation is students who are first in their family to attend college (Poast, 2002; S. Rodriguez, 2001; Skulley, 2004).

Using the definition “first in one’s family to go to college” is limiting in that it excludes younger siblings from being considered as first-generation. It is doubtful that higher education personnel would consider these younger siblings to be classified as “continuing-generation” students, but if younger siblings are not called first-generation students, then what might define their status? These younger siblings, who I consider to be first-generation students, are largely omitted from research, or even from discussions of first-generation students.

Two researchers (e.g., Poast, 2002; S. Rodriguez, 2001) explicitly stated that they omitted first-generation students from their studies if participants had older siblings who had gone to college. Rodriguez, however, refers to herself as a first-generation student, but her definition would even exclude herself because her older sister attended and graduated from college. Implications for narrower definitions might include fewer opportunities for scholarships and ignoring the needs of a large group of students by not classifying them as first-generation.

The essential difference in the various definitions of first-generation student is whether parents have some college experience or no college experience. The simple definition I endorse for this study is that students are first-generation if their parents did not attend college. It does not matter if the student is first in the family or second or third or more, if their parents did not go to college all their children are considered first-

generation students. Older siblings can pass down knowledge to their younger siblings, and consequently, studying the possible sibling effect on the concept of first-generation is warranted.

A rationale for removing parents from an understanding of first-generation is that even if parents went to college for one semester, parents are still knowledgeable on many aspects of “getting in” to college. They have done at least some research on selecting a college, have applied for admission, perhaps even for financial aid, they have registered for classes, have an understanding of how college is different from high school, and so on. Consequently, these parents can pass on the information gained from their college experience, however limited, to their children. There are different types of first-generation students, yet these definitions may not accurately fit many students with the first-generation moniker. For example, siblings who are first-generation students might ascribe different meaning to what they identify as “first-generation” based on the level of support they received from their older, more experienced siblings. Moreover, some first-generation students may not see themselves as first-generation. For example, my youngest brother is the sixth child in our family to go to college even though our parents did not attend. Being first-generation may not mean as much to him as my oldest sibling.

A dichotomy expressed in today’s literature about current students is that they are either well-off Millennial students with hovering, over-involved parents, or they are first-generation students, who seem to form the catch-all “other” group coming from White and non-White backgrounds, limited income, and working class backgrounds. The Millennials have gained much attention, probably because this generation has only recently begun going to college. Millennial stories are often positive, and in the way

Howe and Strauss (2000) depict them, Millennials seem to come from middle and upper class backgrounds. Another reason popular culture focuses more on Millennial students is that the media spends vast amounts of time glorifying people of privilege. Millennial students are more glamorous. Indeed, when Millennial students encounter a struggle, their parents are thought to be immediately ready to save their children. However, first-generation students and their parents present a wide array of possibilities, making it imprudent to claim that all first-generation students experience a common path through college.

Considerable research on first-generation students exists, although little is known about their actual college experiences (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Terenzini et al. (1996) identified three themes in the literature on first-generation students, including 1) pre-college characteristics, 2) the transition from high school or work to college, and 3) persistence of first-generation students.

Pre-college characteristics. Pre-college characteristics are (a) first-generation student background, (b) how they decide to attend college, and (c) where do they decide to enroll in college. First-generation students tend to worry more about financial aid, feel less prepared for college, and know less about the social environment on campus when compared to more traditional students (Bui, 2002). In comparison to traditional students, first-generation students are more likely to come from lower income families, in higher need of remedial coursework, are less involved with peers and teachers in high school, and more likely to be students of color. They received less encouragement from their parents to pursue higher education. More than half (55%) of all first-generation students take remedial courses while in college (Chen, 2005), and are also more likely to take

fewer credit hours per semester causing them to take longer to graduate (Chen, 2005). Finally, first-generation students are more likely to have dependent children (Terenzini et al., 1996). Terenzini et al. identified these students as at risk, meaning first-generation students face a number of obstacles throughout their college journey.

Terenzini and his associates omit the socialization of many students who have been encouraged academically their entire lives in the pre-college characteristics. Others who have studied first-generation “success” stories also cite forms of encouragement as a way students are molded into believing in themselves and are instilled with educational self-confidence (Lubrano, 2004). S. Rodriguez (2001, 2003) calls this “positive naming,” which occurs when students are encouraged in elementary school and beyond. Positive naming can come from teachers, parents, other family members, and anyone else the young student respects. Statements such as, “You’re such a good writer,” or “You are great at debating and would make a great lawyer one day” are examples of positive naming. In her study of first-generation students, all of S. Rodriguez’s (2001) participants were recipients of positive naming. High school teachers’ expectations of students can have a large impact on students’ futures. Positive naming is great for students who receive it, but are left to wonder who benefits and who may be excluded from positive naming. Different high schools create different expectations for different students (Reay et al., 2005), which can lead to different outcomes.

Positive naming, however, should not be confused with just any type of encouragement. Too much praise can be harmful for a child (Twenge, 2006). Some students, like many of those described as narcissistic of the Generation Me, have been victims of too much praise or unrealistic praise throughout much of their childhood

(Twenge, 2006). Many boys, for example, throughout elementary and high school, are encouraged primarily for their athletic ability leading them to have a false sense of security in their abilities, unrealistic expectations, and sudden loss of identity once they are no longer able to compete in sports (Messner, 1987).

Transition. Transition refers to how first-generation students adjust both socially and academically to their new higher education setting. Some students experience the loss of their previous support systems and struggle to find new ones. The struggle with living in two worlds (home of origin, and the new foreign campus) has been cited (London, 1992; R. Rodriguez, 1982; S. Rodriguez, 2001, 2003) and many will continue to struggle fitting in back home and in their new world (Lubrano, 2004; R. Rodriguez, 1982). Richard Rodriguez's (1982) experience taught him that once a first-generation student becomes educated, the family dynamics are never the same.

Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995) suggests there are three types of events that may lead to transition. The first is an expected event or anticipated transition, such as the expected transition of moving to campus for new college students. The second event is the unanticipated transition, which are events that are "not predicted" (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 29), such as a sudden illness or an unexpected loss of a job. The final transition is a non-event, an event that was expected, but did not come to fruition. An example of this for students could be if a student expected to earn all A's in the first semester, but in reality, no A's were earned, possibly leading to issues of self-doubt. The degree to which a student is able to cope with these transitions can lead to either growth or stagnation. Individuals who feel more

in control consequently have a greater internal locus of control and thus will cope more effectively through their transitions (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

In this study, the theme of transition is treated extensively. Students do not simply “transition” from high school to college and are done with it. For many first-generation students, the “transition” is more of a process or journey that takes four or more years. And for some, the idea of being first-generation students (not quite fitting into the mainstream) stays with them throughout their professional lives as well (Lubrano, 2004). First-generation students are sometimes seen as breaking family tradition, which can lead to family conflict (London, 1992; Rendon, 1996; S. Rodriguez, 2001; Somers et al., 2000). Put another way, not only are first-generation students breaking family tradition, but they are also entering “uncharted cultural territory” and will eventually seek white collar jobs (London, 1992, p. 10). Eventually, first-generation college graduates and continuing generation graduates assume similar types of careers (Stewart & Ostrove, 1993), but this can create the false image that one is “done” being from a different background (Lubrano, 2004). More on the transition theme is addressed later in the section on social class.

Persistence. First-generation college students are seen as being at risk (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Lundberg et al., 2007; Somers et al., 2000; Terenzini et al., 1996). In comparison to traditional students, first-generation students do not invest as much effort in their course learning, do not attend fine arts events as much, have less meaningful peer relationships, and are less involved in scientific experiments (Lundberg et al., 2007). Whether each of these statements actually negatively affects first-generation students is unknown. Not attending fine arts events or being less involved with science may be a

function of first-generation students' preference for more vocationally-focused college majors (Clayton, Hewitt, & Gaffney, 2004). As they continue to live in two worlds, first-generation students may have more meaningful relationships with family and friends back home. The fact that they are less engaged with coursework or faculty may stem from their being less willing to express themselves or lack of comfort with expressing themselves (Lundberg et al., 2007).

First-generation students who live at home are less likely to withdraw from college because they are able to maintain their traditions and culture more easily (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Similarly, others have found that beginning undergraduate studies at a community college while living at home is akin to experiencing an extension of high school in some ways (Lara, 1992). For example, one student stated that going to a community college did not change her home life much: "I come home every afternoon and participated in the same family activities I had while in high school, and I continued to conform to my family's expectations" (Lara, 1992, p. 65). Many first-generation students, who often continue to live in two worlds—their new college world and their family of origin (Rendon, 1996) have obligations and may not be as able to participate in on-campus activities. Others have identified the benefits of living on campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), so students who continuously go back home are missing out on certain college experiences. In their call for future research, Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) cited the need for "interviewing current first-generation students...to gain a clearer picture of the realities of campus life" (p. 420). Traditional students speak of "finding themselves" and their identity in college, whereas first-generation students are more

likely to “lose themselves” (Reay et al., 2005) in that they struggle to find themselves or fit in with the campus community.

Even though there are more women attending college than men, first-generation males are more likely to persist to their second year of college than first-generation female students (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). First-generation students who attend public institutions are also more likely to persist than students at private institutions, which some attribute to lack of fit for first-generation students at wealthier private institutions (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). The greatest predictor of first-generation student persistence, however, comes from students’ level of academic engagement, especially when it involves getting to know faculty (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Others have also identified academic engagement as critical to the success of students (Astin, 1993; Light, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Students from Lower Incomes

We are mistaken if we assume all first-generation students come from lower income backgrounds (Borrego, 2003). In fact, less than a third (29%) of first-generation students come from lower income families (Austin, 2006). However, social class has been a topic that has long been ignored and threatening (Borrego, 2003, 2004; hooks, 2000) to many, including researchers. Even when we speak of diversity issues, social class is often omitted (Barratt, 2007). Some individuals believe social class issues are covered when we talk about college students who are first-generation or students of color, but unless class is specifically addressed, it becomes overlooked and hence invisible (Borrego, 2003).

Lower income first-generation students have been identified as potentially “problematic” in their likelihood to persist from their first year to second year in college (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Somers et al., 2000). Working class White students are less likely to seek out their parents’ advice than middle class White students (Moss, 2003). There appear to be several reasons for this that seem plausible. First, many White working class students come from backgrounds that encourage individual achievement through hard work, so there is a sense of pride in independent task accomplishment. And second, many children of working class families will not ask for their parents’ advice if they do not believe their parents can be helpful, as in the case of the college selection process, for example. Moss (2003) also noted that many students from working class backgrounds identified themselves as middle class. It could be that individuals do not want to identify as lower class, or it could also be that many students from working class backgrounds have no idea of their parents’ income (McDonough, 1997).

Students who are poorer are also likely to come to college with less cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 2004). Within the higher education setting, capital can be understood as one’s knowledge and resources about college in general, from applying to finding resources. The reward of cultural capital “comes in using, manipulating, and investing it for socially valued and difficult-to-secure purposes and resources” (McDonough, 1997, p. 9). In other words, cultural capital means nothing until it is put to use to benefit oneself. Higher education espouses middle and upper class values (Borrego, 2004), thereby reinforcing class differences. Not everyone can afford to live on campus (McDonough, 1997), buy the required texts for class (Barratt, 2007), study abroad (Borrego, 2004), or participate in student organizations, the very things most

institutions encourage and expect of students. Another way higher education officials perpetuate middle and upper class values is by assuming that parents pay for their children's education. For lower income families, the student often is responsible to realize a way to finance the college education, whereas in higher income families, parents often assume this responsibility (McDonough, 1997). In fact, in one study, none of the participants from lower incomes expected their parents to pay (although some of these parents were willing to assist financially in some ways) (McDonough, 1997).

Many working class students will “continue to feel ambivalent, different, and marginalized on campus” (Borrego, 2004, p. 1). Some authors describe students from lower classes as having difficulty knowing the appropriate use of multiple utensils in the college cafeteria (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996), another example of lacking cultural capital. (I was in college before I was introduced to the soup spoon.) A much greater percentage of upper and middle class students have visited cities and nations outside the U.S., whereas some lower class students may have never left their state or even county (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996), thereby limiting their cultural capital. Clearly, students from more limited incomes do not have as much access to higher education as middle and upper classes. Or, to be more frank, “democratic access is a not a reality in this country” (Goodwin, 2006, p. 3).

Most individuals feel uncomfortable discussing issues of class because acknowledging different classes exist threatens our notion of the American Dream (Borrego, 2004). Interestingly, social class can be seen as more of a barrier than both race and gender in educational attainment (McDonough, 1997). Students typically research potential colleges and universities within two hours from their homes. For

working class students, the two hour ride is likely to be by car or bus, whereas for upper class students, the two hour travel time could be a plane ride (McDonough, 1997). Based on students' cultural capital, they may feel "entitled" to attend a particular type of institution (McDonough, 1997). In one study, "entitled" meant that students from upper classes felt entitled to attend Ivy League institutions, whereas students from working class backgrounds may feel limited to attend community colleges or other institutions closer to home (McDonough, 1997).

Students from lower income backgrounds will not always understand the different types of financial aid (i.e., loans, grants, scholarships). Likewise, they may not realize that they would likely not have to pay the so-called "sticker price" of a particular institution, and not bother to apply to a particular institution based on its tuition. Although lower income student enrollment is increasing, need-based financial aid is decreasing (Howard & Levine, 2004). This is unfortunate because as the financial aid package of lower income students increases, so do their chances of persistence (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).

College Student Siblings

Several studies of sibling relationships focus on childhood and adolescence (Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999; Newman, 1991; Tucker et al., 2001; Updegraff et al., 2002). Others note the research has been fixed on childhood and late adulthood (Lee et al., 1990). Current studies of sibling relationships are incomplete in that they often omit sibling pairs if the age difference is considered "too great" (10 years) (Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999), if there were "too many" siblings (more than 4) (Newman, 1991), or if the college participants were "too old" (older than 23) (Newman, 1991). Twins are also often

omitted from sibling studies (Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999; Newman, 1991). In one study of close sibling relationships, the authors omitted potential participants whose close siblings had “a handicapping condition” or disability (Tucker et al., 2001, p. 256). Most studies also focus exclusively on sibling dyads (Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999; Tucker et al., 2001; Updegraff et al., 2002), even if other siblings were part of the family in question. For example, Updegraff et al. researched only relationships of firstborn and second-born sibling pairs, thereby ignoring siblings who placed third or even later in birth order. Finally, siblings from non-traditional families (i.e., families without both biological parents) have also been grounds for exclusion of potential research participants (Updegraff et al., 2002). Many sibling scenarios are excluded in the literature of sibling relationships, leaving much to be learned about siblings and their families and their college experiences.

Within the context of first-generation student issues, when the literature refers to “family,” siblings are often excluded. “Family,” then, refers to college students and their parents. It is not clear why siblings of college students, for the most part, have been omitted in the college student literature when other research clearly suggests that sibling relationships can be highly influential (Ceja, 2006; Updegraff et al., 2002). A better understanding of sibling relationships among first-generation college students could potentially lead to improved services for these students, their siblings, *and* their families.

An older sibling’s decision to go to college can have tremendous influence on younger siblings. When families leave their college student at campus for the first time, younger siblings often imagine themselves going to college too (Ceja, 2006; Savage, 2003). By their participation in this process, younger siblings might begin to form their

own expectations of what their first day of college will be like. Moreover, later conversations between a college sibling and sibling at home can lead to the younger sibling's greater awareness about college. Realistic expectations of college are essential in determining one's persistence in college. Moreover, college staff can better involve younger siblings by having programs related to "how to deal with your college student sibling." This can be beneficial to younger siblings who are experiencing a changing family dynamic when the older sibling leaves the family.

Ceja's (2006) study of sibling relationships among Chicana college students dealt specifically with siblings helping each other through the college system. Ceja's research provides an exceptional framework for further study of siblings in college. Many of the students in Ceja's study realized their parents could not help them with the burden of narrowing the list of colleges to which their child might apply. Instead, parental support, if present, consisted of emotional and financial help. Even if a student's older sibling goes to college, many parents remain unaware of several aspects of college. One of Ceja's participants stated, "They're not familiar. They're a little bit familiar because of my brothers, but I still feel they need more information about it" (p. 96). More helpful for these students, however, is if an older sibling attends college, what Ceja identified as establishing "a college-going expectation" (p. 97). Levine and Nidiffer's (1996) study also depicted one student who cited an older sibling as a source of support to attend college. Ceja's (2006) participant, Rosario, reflected on her good fortune of having older siblings who had attended college: "So it [the road to college] was paved for me, and I thank God that I'm the youngest one because I would probably be lost if I wasn't" (p.

96). In cases such as Rosario's, first-generation students become the "primary sources of college information" (p. 98) for their younger siblings.

Ceja (2006) further identified older siblings as "protective agents...who are able to serve as information sources during the college choice process for both parents and younger siblings" (p. 97). It should be noted, however, that an older sibling can be critical of a younger sibling, especially if the older sibling did not attend college, but the younger sibling did enroll in college. In certain families, older siblings can be made to feel as though their younger siblings are better than the older ones (Padron, 1992) by the younger siblings' enrollment in higher education. One author found that college students have a preference to be closer with peers than with their siblings (Pulakos, 1989), whereas other researchers concluded that younger siblings prefer to learn from their older siblings and that strong ties between siblings can lead to "higher self-confidence and better adjustment" (Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999, p. 393) for the younger siblings. In a different study of college students, females reported closer sibling relationships than males (Pulakos, 1989).

First-generation students considering college do look up to their siblings, but those who are first in their family to attend college do not have that luxury. One first-generation student reflected, "I didn't have a big sister or brother or even a cousin to go to and say, 'What did you do in order to get in?'" (Cushman, 2005, p. 17). Even when older siblings have been to college, the amount of information sharing between siblings might be dependent on the quality of the sibling relationship.

One study examined sibling relationships of college students (Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999). When college students with siblings talk to each other, they are likely to talk

about their parents, and are least likely to discuss lifestyle changes and their sex lives. Interestingly, in this study of college students' levels of disclosure, there were no reports of siblings discussing their academics. Another important finding was that "older siblings fill a quasi-parental role for their younger siblings" (Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999, p. 398). Finally, "siblings are viewed as 'genderless' insofar as disclosure is concerned: that is a brother is not a *male*, he's just a brother; a sister is not *female*, she's just a sister" (Dolgin & Lindsay, 1999, p. 398).

Cicirelli's (1980) study of 100 college women revealed female students tend to view relationships with their mothers and other siblings more favorably than they view relationships with their fathers. He also found that younger siblings rated their older siblings as close in their relationships, as well as siblings who were close in age. However, "family size and sibling sex had less clear-cut effects" (p. 116). Cicirelli identified three categories of women's feelings toward their family members: emotional support, active help, and leadership functions. In discussing emotional support, women found their siblings just as helpful as they found their mothers. On the other hand, "college women have more positive feelings toward mother than sibling when they are seeking a family member in the role of active helper or advice giver" (p. 116). Mothers were also viewed more positively with leadership functions than other siblings or fathers. Birth order also plays a role in closeness: the first born child is often closer to the parents than younger siblings (Cicirelli, 1980).

One study found that African Americans are more likely to attend college if their older siblings attended college (Loury, 2004), and may apply to siblings of other ethnicities as well. More specifically, older siblings have a greater influence on college

attendance for their younger sisters than their younger brothers (Loury, 2004). It was not clear why this was the case, but a first-generation student's chance of going to college increases tremendously if an older sibling went to college first.

Male College Students

Males in the U.S. are not attending college at the same rates as females. In 2001, males made up 48.6% of the college student population (Clayton et al., 2004). Small liberal arts colleges are also seeing declines, as are certain majors, because males are becoming more interested in career focused majors (Clayton et al., 2004). Men still dominate in Engineering and Business majors and others that tend to lead to higher paying careers (King, 2000). The "plight" of men in college has been documented, perhaps exaggerated, by the popular media (Linder, 2008). The smaller proportion of males attending college to females is not the only issue male students face. College men are struggling in general, and in higher education, we have "a failure to accurately understand men's development" (Davis & Laker, 2004, p. 48). Men's issues have taken a back seat, or were never appropriately considered: "Rather, issues related to women and people of color are discussed overtly, while men's issues are overlooked or seen as implied in discussion of general student developmental models" (Davis & Laker, 2004, p. 48). Davis and Laker further insist that society can "perpetuate privilege" (p. 49) when men's issues are implied in these discussions. Davis and Laker's solution to understanding college men is to "understand the social construction of masculinity and the pressure for men to conform to these standards" (p. 50). Their statement is in congruence with bell hooks' (1994) assertion that if we continually perpetuate the hegemonic view of masculinity, men will continue to feel loss if they cannot achieve

their notion of masculinity. We must remember that college men are just entering manhood and are trying to figure their place in society as a man, and so “student affairs professionals should consider that in spite of the socially constructed mask of masculinity worn by many of our male students, underneath there might be a fearful boy” (Davis & Laker, 2004, p. 53).

Is higher education really facing a crisis with fewer males attending college than females? Numerous articles in the popular media have called attention to our society’s preference for girls in education and how we need to pay more attention to boys (Linder, 2008). But in taking a closer look at the male students, “it is apparent that the majority of male students are doing fine; it is among men of color and white men at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale that substantial problems exist” (Clayton et al., 2004, p. 11). King (2000), who spent some time studying this topic, would agree. Looking at the distribution of White, traditionally aged (under 24) students of all income levels, there is very little difference: 51% are women, 49% are men (King, 2000). For White students at the lower income level (family income was less than \$30,000), 46% are males, 54% are females. At middle income levels, men and women are equal in college attendance, and at upper income levels, men actually outnumber women (52% to 48%) for traditionally aged students (King, 2000). Popular media has chosen to ignore these statistics and bring attention to a war against men. Again, the issue of class is absent in mainstream discussions.

Perhaps most troublesome is that only one in four White low income men (25%) attends college immediately after high school (King, 2000). This rate was lowest among all income levels, among males and females, when looking at Whites, African

Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. King did not provide data on Native Americans. One possible reason that lower income men may not attend college at higher rates is that “blue collar” jobs are seen as a viable career (King, 2000). Furthermore, these jobs may be more familiar and are more quickly attained than a four-year degree. White males from lower income levels are certainly a group deserving of more attention.

Identity/Masculinity of College Students

Even though much research has used male college students as participants, past studies have not considered males as gendered beings (Davis & Laker, 2004). It seems as soon as boys enter college they become men, but becoming a man does not occur overnight. As Kimmel and Messner’s (2007) assert, men are made, not born. Newspaper articles even seem to struggle with identifying young men. For example, an 18 or 19 year old male charged with a crime can be described as either a man or a teen. For some, adulthood can be delayed for men who enter college rather than seeking employment (Ludeman, 2004). Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vectors address some of the identity formation issues a male college student experiences. For some male college students, their identity is tied almost entirely to their athletic ability (Messner, 1987). (I have noticed this too when I have asked new students to tell me something about them—they almost always recite the sports they played in high school.)

Real or perceived, many men are not as capable as women in letting others know when they experience difficulty, and it can be difficult for professionals to notice when males are struggling (Ludeman, 2004). Many young men are not prepared emotionally for college (Ludeman, 2004). Challenges can be expected when males are socialized to restrict emotions when they are told to build new meaningful relationships in college

(Ludeman, 2004). Many student affairs activities on campus are nurturing, and can thus present a threat of perceived femininity to some college males (Capraro, 2004). Men, like all humans, need intimacy, “but as long as intimacy is identified with the feminine they reject it” (Capraro, 2004, p. 28). The programs we offer to men are necessary, “but their own masculinity severely complicates their subscribing to them” (Capraro, 2004, p. 29). Men do, however, open up more when they are engaged in activity and when they feel confirmed and understood (Davis & Laker, 2004).

One way that males can comfortably bond is through the use of humor and joking (Lyman, 1987; Walker, 1994). In addition to “doing something” through activities, humor can be used as another way for males to open up. Unfortunately, though, Lyman’s work reveals that male humor, particularly among university fraternity members, often involves teasing each other about their sexual conquests, mothers, sexual abilities, and sexual orientation.

Multiple Identities

As researchers and higher education professionals, it is imperative to “not presume what is most central to individuals, but must instead listen for how a person sees herself” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 412). Similarly, we must suspend our assumptions about the salience of one particular dimension when working with students from “traditionally marginalized groups” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 413). For example, when working with first-generation students, we might assume that means something to them, but if they have adjusted well to campus, that may not be a salient dimension of their identity. Still, understanding that multiple identities exist, we need to acknowledge that “ethnicity, religion, race, gender, and class *do* influence every aspect of how people

view the world and what they consider to be ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ (Crohn, 1998, p. 295). Identities are in flux, and what is salient for a student one semester may not be as salient in the following semester, depending upon the context at the time (Davis & Laker, 2004; Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Jones and McEwen’s (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity is a useful tool in illustrating the many facets of our identities, including race, culture, class, religion, gender, and sexual orientation within one’s core. All of these personal attributes are present for everyone, but how important each attribute is to everyone is different, depending on the context of family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, and career decisions (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Finally, “no one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions” (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410). In this study, multiple dimensions of identity among the student participants is clearly examined.

Summary

Parental involvement of traditional age college students will probably only increase. Books intended for parents titled *Letting Go* (Coburn & Treeger, 2003), and *Mentoring Your Child During the College Years* (Savage, 2003), reflect a difficult time of transition, and perhaps loss, for some parents. Higher education leaders need to discover new ways to involve parents so they do feel valued. Parents and college students are not alone in experiencing a significant life transition when an older sibling goes to college (Savage, 2003). Younger siblings who remain at home can also be affected by this transition, but their voices have not previously been heard or even acknowledged.

The event of going to college is perhaps the biggest life event and change for the new college student up to that point. Student development theorists, such as Chickering and Reisser (1993), Josselson (1987), and Schlossberg et al. (1995), for example, can help us understand how students negotiate becoming a college student and continuing as one. Knowledge of these theories allows higher education authorities to see where changes should be made and where our assumptions should be suspended. Furthermore, many theories are not based on first-generation students, and there are no theories based on students with siblings who have previously attended college.

First-generation students and students with limited cultural capital are frequently at a disadvantage. Many faculty and staff expect students to take the initiative to seek help. However, students cannot ask questions when they do not know what to ask. When students are the first in their family to attend college, they are unaware of what college has to offer and are afraid to ask questions that they feel may make them appear stupid or lazy (Jalamo & Rendon, 2004).

The importance of sibling relationships in college has not been appropriately explored. College students do turn to their siblings for many things, particularly for career exploration and decision making (Schultheiss et al., 2002). But even among the few studies that have looked at college students and siblings, both siblings were not enrolled in college simultaneously. Institutions' retention efforts may be enhanced when an older sibling recruits a younger sibling to attend the same college, and later aiding the younger family member in negotiating the realities of adjusting to college life.

Today is clearly a time of shrinking budgets and greater accountability in higher education, and community members and legislators demand that taxpayer dollars are

being put to good use. Some colleges might not exist without the support of their local communities just as some towns would not exist without their colleges. Community members need to be assured that their local college is meeting the needs of its members, especially those members who may have become invisible or marginalized in more recent years.

Students from rural areas may not have been encouraged as much to attend college and, these students, especially first-generation rural students, “represent a fragile constituency” (Cavan, 1995, p. 14). Because students from rural areas are more likely to withdraw (Cope & Hannah, 1975), and because rural students are also more likely to be first-generation students, colleges need to be better informed about the communities from which they draw their students. Studying and reporting on sibling and family matters should send a strong indication to the community that the college is committed to helping students succeed.

Several issues were presented in this chapter that could be effective in raising awareness of first-generation college students with siblings. College students who attend the same college concurrently with their siblings present a unique opportunity for university officials to learn more about this family dynamic. As a research topic, siblings and college student development has not previously been investigated. Ceja’s (2006) study of Chicana siblings who were making a decision to attend college provides a beginning framework in understanding this process.

Family dynamics were also discussed in this chapter. The literature is replete with articles purporting to be about college students and their families only to find “family” consists of a college student and parents, or at best, one sibling. To gain a

deeper understanding of family dynamics, it is important to consider entire families, including siblings and grandparents, to further see what role education has played in these families. Is education encouraged, and if so, what kind of education? It could be that a liberal arts degree is frowned upon among families of first-generation students when vocational training provides a more seemingly direct path to employment. Many students from lower income families tend to enroll at two-year colleges if they do not know what major they will choose in college (McDonough, 1997), which can sometimes present a problem with transferable coursework and commitment to a degree. Discussions of education and employment of first-generation students cannot omit discussions of social class.

Social class, then, although a topic often omitted due to feelings of discomfort it tends to stimulate, cannot be left invisible in a study of this nature. What role does class play in determining where one goes to college? Even before college, what is the impact of class on one's encouragement from teachers, school counselors, or peers in going to college? Along with class, ethnicity is another category frequently discussed with the subject of first-generation students. Further, in a study of first-generation students, if issues of class and ethnicity are present, issues of marginalization and oppression must also be explored. Even though this study's participants are White, and inherently enjoy White privilege, they remain marginalized due to their lower income background and first-generation student status. White males from lower income classes are thought to be one of the greatest groups of at-risk college students related to college attendance and persistence (King, 2000). Accordingly, this inquiry is a critical ethnographic case study, which is explained more fully in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter discusses the paradigm, ontology, epistemology, and methodology to be used in this study. It is important that all aspects of the research are congruent. For example, in good research the epistemology is consistent with the chosen methodology (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Crotty (1998) suggests the research process encompasses the following: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. For this study, the epistemology is constructivist and critical cultural; the theoretical perspective is relativism; the methodology is critical ethnographic case study; and the methods used to collect data include participant observation and multiple interviews over an extended period of one academic year. Criteria by which the study can be judged are also discussed.

Epistemology

Epistemology is the “acquisition of knowledge” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 9) or the “theory of knowledge” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Creswell (1998) referred to epistemology as the “relationship of the researcher to that being researched” (p. 74). This relationship between the researcher and the researched is different given the paradigm (Crotty, 1998). Positivism holds that truth is objective and can be observed, verified, measured, and predicted (Crotty, 1998; Jones et al., 2006). Positivist researchers employ the scientific method (Crotty, 1998) and maintain distance from their subjects (Jones et al., 2006).

Positivist research is useful when we “want to know how everybody does it: frequencies, distributions, average or ‘typical’ behavior” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 30). Constructivist researchers involve participants in all aspects of the research including the interpretation and meaning-making of the results. Reality and meaning are co-constructed through the researcher-researched relationship (Manning, 1997, 1999).

Theoretical frameworks inform all aspects of research, including, but not limited to how we view the world, the research question, sampling, collecting data, analyzing data, and writing the final report. Researchers need to be upfront about their theoretical frameworks, but many are not. Those researchers who do not are considered “ungrounded” and these studies “risk running adrift, rambling, becoming lost, and having no direction” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 122). For this study, the theoretical framework is relativism, which acknowledges different interpretations and experiences of reality. The theoretical framework thus lends to validity for the researcher to examine and make consistent the axiological, ontological, and methodological perspectives of the inquiry. When all of these perspectives flow together in a coherent way, called congruency, a form of goodness in the research is achieved (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Jones et al., 2006).

Ontology relates to the nature of existence (Jones et al., 2006), what is real (Creswell, 1998), or “the study of being” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). Is reality viewed as a single, fixed, universal truth or is it socially constructed with different people having differing views of reality, or is reality viewed in other ways? In this inquiry, what is true and real is a social construction that resides within the participants’ meaning making

experiences and how the participants and researcher interpret those meaning making experiences.

Axiology relates to the values researchers hold (Creswell, 1998) and the impact those values have on shaping the research itself. This can range from the belief that a researcher's values have no impact (completely objective) on the research to the other end of the continuum, where researchers believe no research is value-free. Instead, these researchers even celebrate and make known their values (Creswell, 2005). For this study, I acknowledge that my values (axiology) have led me to the research topic and will also shape the way I interact with the participants. For example, my background as a lower income, White, first-generation male with multiple siblings precipitated my interest in researching others with similar characteristics. In my search to understand how participants view their world (relativist ontology), I worked with them to create new knowledge and to discover how they make meaning of their experiences. In the next chapter, as much as possible, I provide the participants' direct quotations to give voice to a group of students who have not previously been afforded the opportunity. These positions, therefore, are consistent with the constructivist paradigm.

Constructivism

Constructivist research strives to understand how others make sense of the world (Crotty, 1998). Constructivism also holds that "reality is multiple, complex, and not easily quantifiable" (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 436). A key tenet of constructivism is that knowledge is constructed (Schwandt, 2001). Constructivist research is also "iterative, interactive, hermeneutic, at times intuitive, and most certainly open" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 183). Constructivism does not claim to be objective or value-free, but

quite the opposite. In fact, as the researcher, I must be open about my values, for my values and worldview and background will be the lens through which I interpret the data (Jones et al., 2006). Furthermore, constructivism also permits in-depth study of a topic. Within the constructivist, or naturalistic paradigm, researchers “are increasingly concerned with the single experience, the individual crisis, the epiphany or moment of discovery” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 205). One metaphor of this research can be viewed as a journey we take: The more traditional positivist epistemologies are like taking the interstate highway (standard, sterile, popular), whereas constructivism allows us to follow more scenic paths (Muncey, 2005). In this study, the scenic path meandered as I discovered new, previously unknown territory. The journey, continually evolving, contributed to my deeper understanding of lower income, first-generation college student male siblings.

Understanding and appreciating that multiple social realities exist “that are the products of human intellects” (Guba & Lincoln, 2004, p. 27), the ontology used to interpret the data in this inquiry is relativism. There is no single truth “out there” to be known. Relativist ontology holds that “social realities are social constructions, selected, built, and embellished by social actors from among the situations, stimuli, and events of their experience” (Lincoln & Guba, 2003a, p. 227), meaning an individual’s worldview will shape that individual’s reality. Accepting that multiple truths exist, what is true and real for one person may not be true and real for another. These social constructions are how individuals make sense of and make meaning of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2003a). Because these constructions are also interpreted, the term interpretivism is often used for constructivism.

Interpretivism “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Interpretivism is also seen as a “means of transmitting meaning—experience, beliefs, values—from one person...to another” (Crotty, 1998, p. 91). However, interpretivism must be used with thoughtful consideration, as the best “the researcher’s account is always an approximation” (Manning, 1997, p. 104) and there is not one single or valid truth in interpretation (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, the interpretation “is inevitably impacted by our own experiences and worldview” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 106). Interpretation, though, requires much more than identifying themes in transcripts (Jones et al., 2006). Interpretation requires the researcher to make links between information that is both stated and unstated (Jones et al., 2006). Thus, the importance of the researcher co-constructing knowledge with the participants (Manning, 1997, 1999) cannot be understated. Furthermore, the research does not belong to me as the researcher, but to the participants, in part because “knowledge cannot be separate from the knower” (Lincoln & Guba, 2005, p. 202), with the participant as the knower. “Real” is a consensus between the participants and me, the researcher, and this can change over time or as the research is carried out (Lincoln & Guba, 2003b). Moreover, in constructivist research, the researcher-researched relationship is interactive, engaged, and dialogical. In fact, the researcher-researched relationship can even be described as a “relationship between equals, built on mutual respect, dignity, and trust” (Lincoln & Guba, 2003a, p. 228).

Critical Theory

This study is informed by critical theory, which aims to “critique and challenge, to transform and empower” (Merriam, 2002, p. 327). Questions raised by critical

research are often about power and oppression and the forces that maintain the status quo (Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 2002). Maintaining the status quo keeps oppressed groups marginalized. My goal, then, as a critical researcher, is “to be ‘critical,’ to uncover and challenge the assumptions and social structures that oppress” (Merriam, 2002, p. 328). Merriam also noted that many methods of maintaining the status quo are hidden in our society, as in policies or texts. For example, there may be university policies in place that are designed, intentionally or unintentionally, to exclude certain groups, such as students from lower incomes or first-generation students. Study abroad could possibly be one example of this (Borrego, 2004). In higher education, we tend to view study abroad experiences as an ultimate form of enlightenment for students, but for many students, this is not a financial possibility. In addition to the already expected forms of marginalization the students in this study face (i.e., lower income and first-generation status), this study also examines how they maintain their forms of privilege (i.e., White and male).

Methodological Framework

Critical Ethnographic Case Study

The methodology of a study “provides the direction for the methods” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 41). Ethnographic case study is used in this inquiry. Case studies may be conducted in both the quantitative and qualitative traditions, but they are more often found in qualitative studies (Hammersley, 1992; Punch, 1998). Case studies are useful when the researcher is more interested in uncovering the intricacies of a case than with the individual participants (Schwandt, 2001). Certainly, this does not mean that the participants are unimportant; rather it is important to identify individuals who can be helpful in creating the data. Other reasons to use case studies are to document extreme or

atypical cases (Creswell, 1998). A case study “is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system” (Creswell, 2005, p. 439). The bounded system in this inquiry is a lower income, White family with three first-generation college student siblings from a rural community.

An ethnographic case study is defined as “a case analysis of a person, event, activity, or process set within a cultural perspective” (Creswell, 2005, p. 438). A critical ethnography is “a study of the shared patterns of a marginalized group with the aim of advocacy” (Creswell, 2005, p. 438). Furthermore, critical ethnographers seek to bridge “the divide between the powerful and the powerless” (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 217) and serve as “consciousness-raisers” (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 220). Ethnographic studies focus on the cultural context, and culture can be seen as a social construction in that it is “best seen as the source rather than the result of human thought and behavior” (Crotty, 1998, p. 53). The college students in this study are lower income, first-generation students and perhaps feel marginalized on a campus which espouses dominant-culture middle class values (Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2001). Therefore, this inquiry is a critical ethnographic case study.

Sampling

Recruiting potential participant volunteers proved more difficult than expected. Consistent with case study research, purposeful sampling was used in this inquiry (Merriam, 1998) to identify potential “cases” who met the criteria, which was lower income, White, first-generation brothers from rural backgrounds and concurrently enrolled at the same higher education institution. I sought the help of my colleagues who meet new students at various orientation sessions. A total of 10 advisors (including myself) assisted. First, recruiting began during an early orientation session in April 2008

for students entering the Fall 2008 semester at Rocky Mountain University (RMU). Early orientation sessions are geared toward first-generation, lower income students. Students were asked if they had older siblings currently attending the same institution, and if so, they would be invited to learn more about the study. No names were forwarded to me after this first session. One of the TRIO office on campus, which works with eligible lower income, first-generation students in a number of ways provides free tutoring and study skills workshops for these students. To be eligible for participation, students must be first-generation and lower income, measured by their Pell Grant status. This office turned out to be an excellent resource to recruit potential participants, and the director agreed to help recruit, although this office was also unable to find potential participants. Another campus resource with potential participants was the Women's Center. This department has a group of male students who educate others on campus about breaking down barriers of patriarchy. However, through all the orientation sessions, only one student's name was forwarded to me: Steven. My colleague, who served as Steven's orientation advisor, realized he was a first-generation student from a rural background who had an older brother already enrolled as a junior at RMU. My colleague told Steven about the study and he seemed interested and then she gave me his contact information. I met with Steven in early September of his first year in college and he agreed to participate. "Snowball sampling" (Merriam, 2002, p. 166) was used to identify other participants—as determined by Steven—whom he considered to have been influential in his decision to attend college and continue his enrollment.

Participants

The case consists primarily of the siblings, who are first-generation, White, working class students, operating within the context of a family. Other important aspects of the case include other individuals and places, for example, a visit to the siblings' hometown, their K-12 school, and home. Although the use of pseudonyms was employed, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, and stated on the consent forms (see Appendix B). Some advocates of "emancipatory" projects, such as critical inquiry, believe forcing participants to use pseudonyms against their will is unethical (Jones et al., 2006), and they therefore advocate for participant choice in the use of pseudonyms. I asked participants if they wanted to pick a pseudonym themselves or if they wanted me to pick one on their behalf. Participants neither cared to choose a name nor did they ask to keep their real names, so I assigned pseudonyms to all participants and other possible identifiers, such as places. Not all individuals listed below were contacted during this study (three were deceased; one declined to be interviewed), but because they are key players in the family, they are presented below (see also the family's genogram in Appendix A).

Steven Philips. Steven is the youngest (age 19) of three siblings. He is pleasant, mature young man with an outgoing personality. In high school, he excelled in both football and basketball, and was placed on the all-state football team. During his senior year of high school, Steven lived at home alone as his mother usually stayed with his ailing grandmother in a different town. Academically, he presents a curious disposition, yet does not seem to go above and beyond classroom expectations. In his first year of college, Steven went back home several times as he maintained his strong connections to

his former community. When he did not return home, Steven spent most of his free time working out in the campus recreation center or hanging out with his brother, Brian.

Brian Philips. Brian, age 21, is the middle child of the three siblings and was concurrently enrolled with Steven at RMU. Brian, however, chose not to participate in this study. Therefore, information on Brian's college experience was provided by others and is thus considered second-hand knowledge. Brian was the first in his family to move away from home to attend college. According to other participants in this study, Brian and Steven are alike in many ways and spend considerable time together.

Holly Philips. Holly, age 23, is the oldest sibling in the Philips family. Her coming of age experience was rather rocky. The "smartest of the three children," according to her mother, Holly would have graduated first in her high school class had she not dropped out after her junior year. After attending her junior prom, her date was killed in an automobile accident. The following summer, she ran away with an older boy several hours from home, causing her parents to send the police to find her. Holly then earned her GED and tried community college courses as well as a for-profit career and technical college. Her mother, Laurie, called this period "a hard time."

Laurie Philips. Laurie is the mother of the three Philips siblings: Steven, Brian, and Holly. Neither she nor her husband holds a college degree, although her father, Charlie, earned a Bachelor's degree in Business. Laurie is, therefore, considered to be part of what I have labeled a skipped generation of college students. She tried a community college course in computer programming when she was 18, but promptly dropped it and has never returned to the college setting. She works for a customer

service call center and hates every minute of it. Her primary source of joy, though, comes through her frequent contact with her children, whom she sees most weekends.

Lyle Philips. Lyle was the Philips siblings' father. He died in 2005, which was when Steven was a sophomore in high school. Lyle struggled with alcoholism, which led to cirrhosis of the liver and eventual death. He had always wanted to go to college and certainly encouraged his children to attend college. Laurie said Lyle's family was too poor to afford college expenses. Holly believed her father could have survived longer had he proper health insurance, but this was another expense they could not afford. The family remembers him affectionately. "He was a good man," Laurie reminisced, "he just had a drinking problem."

Charles and Mary Oliver. Charles and Mary Oliver were Laurie's parents and the Philips siblings' maternal grandparents. Charles died of cancer at age 52. He graduated from college with a business degree and although his grandchildren never met him, his legacy that college was essential was passed down the lineage. Charles was successful enough in his business investments that Mary never had to work outside the home. In fact, Mary, who in her 80s also died of cancer during this study, left a substantial inheritance to Laurie.

Kate Matthews. Kate served as the high school guidance counselor for both Steven and Brian. As an alumna of RMU, she was able to impart accurate knowledge of the institution. Steven identified Kate as influential in his decision to attend RMU, which is what led me to interview her. Kate noted that she reached out more to the Philips brothers because she knew all the tragedies they had been through. Her help came in the

form of applying to RMU, scholarships, financial aid, and even which residence hall had the best amenities.

Context

Setting the context is imperative in both ethnographic and case study research (Creswell, 1998). Much more detail on the context is provided in Chapter IV, including information on the participants' hometown, RMU, and the town where RMU is located. As an introduction, the participants' hometown is Wilson, a town of about 130, in the Rocky Mountain Region. It is a conservative and remote town, where many of its residents are involved in agricultural enterprises. The nearest town of considerable size (i.e., hotels, restaurants, shopping) is about one hour away. The K-12 school serves 70 students.

Rocky Mountain University (RMU) has an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 24,700 students. The institution is predominately White with 87% of its students identifying as White and 80% of its students are in-state residents. The average entering student's ACT score is 24 and the average SAT score is 1112. The average high school GPA is 3.5. Just over a quarter (27%) of the students report being first in their families to attend college. As a land grant institution, RMU hosts the state's primary agricultural college and its mission is to serve the public. First-year students are required to live on campus and most other students live within a mile from campus. The six-year graduation rate is 63%.

Data Collection

Methods of data collection included interviews and emails with participants, including the siblings, their mother, and the siblings' high school guidance counselor.

Data were collected in the venues of the higher education institution, the students' high school and hometown, as well as at the students' home. The setting was primarily the institution of higher education where two younger siblings were enrolled. Interview topics focused around multiple topics; however, more emphasis was placed on how the two siblings came to the decision to attend college and the individuals who had influenced their lives regarding their decision to break family tradition by attending college: parents, teachers, and/or best friends (McDonough, 1997).

Data were organized by interview transcripts, observation notes, and other artifacts (i.e., letters, emails). Prolonged engagement was established by the length of time in the field, in this case, August 2008 to May 2009, the academic year. Data collection occurred throughout the year using multiple interviews, emails, two home visits, a high school visit, and one sibling's workplace. Contact with Steven included 11 interviews, telephone calls, and multiple email exchanges. Laurie (mother), Holly (sister), and Kate (high school counselor) were interviewed as well. Interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the data were collected. After Steven's interviews, I would email him the interview transcription and a summary of my notes, and then we would discuss these in the following interview to check for meaning and interpretation and to follow up on topics discussed in previous interviews. The content of the interviews informed future interviews to further clarify student experiences and to go deeper into possible interpretations and meanings. As the researcher, I continuously used reflexive techniques, such as keeping a journal, using self-disclosure when appropriate with participants, and identifying my experience, perspectives, and values. Furthermore, I regularly bounced ideas and hunches to my research advisor and peer reviewer.

Data Analysis

Frequent contact with Steven encouraged prompt interview transcription to allow him time to review transcriptions and my notes prior to subsequent interviews. Two of the four themes emerged quite early from Steven, and were clearly echoed by his mother, sister, and high school counselor, and these themes were constant throughout the study. These two early themes were 1) his loyalty to his family and rural community, and 2) his acknowledgement and appreciation of the college help he received from his brother and guidance counselor. The first-again generation theme did not emerge until about half-way through the study when he revealed his grandfather had earned a college degree. The final theme of multiple dimensions of identity emerged near the end of the study as a culmination of all the characteristics Holly and Steven identified as being important in their daily lives. As these themes emerged, interviews and follow-up interviews sought to gain greater detail on both the appropriateness and accuracy of the themes. Themes were also developed as I read and re-read interview transcripts and focused on specific details of participant quotations and also thought about interviews holistically to arrive at themes that were sound. A peer reviewer also read the data and arrived at similar themes. Steven's consent with the themes was also requisite. At one point Steven asked me to reorder some information in the identity theme, but otherwise, he appreciated the other themes as being an accurate depiction of his college experience.

There are various ways to analyze a case study (Creswell, 1998). One way is to provide detail on the case, including its background to set the context. Another is to look at all the data holistically and then provide "a day in the life of" (Creswell, 1998) type of description. Either way, as the researcher, I continually analyzed the data and created

“hunches, working hypotheses, educated guesses” (Merriam, 1998, p. 155) and interpretations, even outrageous ones (Creswell, 1998) to offer to participants. Data analysis is not just one stage of the research, but is an ongoing process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Merriam, 1998). In both ethnographic and case study research, the goal is to create an analysis that “consists of making a detailed description of the case and its setting” (Creswell, 1998, p. 153) with rich, thick description (Merriam, 1998). More specific to ethnography, there is no established way to analyze and write the data (Hammersley, 1990) and “there are certainly no procedures that will guarantee success” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 158). Critical in reporting the data, then, is the researcher’s art of writing (Hammersley, 1990; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Wolcott, 2001). Some useful guidelines in analyzing ethnographies include:

See whether any interesting patterns can be identified; Whether anything stands out as surprising or puzzling; How the data relate to what one might have expected on the basis of commonsense knowledge, official accounts, or previous theory; Whether there are any apparent inconsistencies or contradictions among the views of different groups or individuals, within people’s expressed beliefs or attitudes, or between these and what they do. (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 163)

Furthermore, the data should be viewed critically to “find some concepts that help us to make sense of what is going on” (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p. 162). As I read interview transcripts and other documents, I took notes as I came up with “thoughts, musings, speculations,” (Merriam, 1998, p. 165) and “tentative themes, hunches, ideas, and things to pursue” (Merriam, 1998, p. 161). Subsequent interviews were informed by these new, tentative ideas. In further analyzing the data, categories should: “Reflect the purpose of the research; Be exhaustive; Be mutually exclusive; Be sensitizing; Be conceptually congruent” (Merriam, 1998, pp. 183-184). Sensitizing means naming

categories should be as descriptive as possible so that an outsider would know what the category entails. There is always someone else to interview or another way to interpret the data (Merriam, 1998), but once the data collection is deemed complete and the categories have been agreed upon, writing the report follows, and then readers can evaluate the findings.

Trustworthiness Criteria

Trustworthiness reflects the degree to which I, as the researcher, can persuade readers that the findings—the data and the interpretations—make sense (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Put another way, trustworthiness establishes “confidence in the findings” (Jones et al., 2006). Trustworthiness is comprised of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Several techniques were used to increase the study’s credibility. First, persistent observation, which “provides depth” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304) was accomplished through frequent contact with participants. Prolonged engagement was achieved by conducting the study for an entire academic year. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have defined when prolonged engagement is achieved: “Long enough to be able to survive without challenge while existing in that culture” (p. 302). Similarly, Wolcott (2001) suggested prolonged engagement is achieved when participants no longer “maintain a pose” (p. 145), and this was achieved when participants began to talk freely with me about topics unrelated to the study.

Triangulation and crystallization can be achieved by using multiple sources of information to gather and interpret data by using member checks and peer checks, as examples. Richardson (2004) introduced crystallization, which is preferred to

triangulation because “there are far more than three sides from which we approach the world” (p. 483). A crystal has more dimensions than a triangle, thus allowing us to look at research from more perspectives, more angles. Further, crystallization “provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic” (Richardson, 2004, p. 483).

Transferability refers to how the findings can be applied in other settings. Providing thick descriptions helps readers make the decision of its applicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability can be achieved if the decisions made throughout the research process are consistent and make sense. The fourth trustworthiness criterion, confirmability aims to ensure that interpretations are based on the findings. Providing several participant quotes in the text allows readers to follow the researcher’s interpretations (Jones et al., 2006). Confirmability was further established through the use of a peer reviewer, who read the data to see whether the interpretations were based on the findings.

Authenticity Criteria

Guba and Lincoln (2005) have also identified Authenticity criteria for rigor in constructivist research. These include Fairness, Ontological and Educative Authenticity, and Catalytic and Tactical Authenticity. Fairness aims to ensure that “all stakeholder views, perspectives, claims, concerns, and voices should be apparent in the text” (Lincoln & Guba, 2003b, p. 278), thereby not marginalizing any stakeholders. Bias can exist when researchers omit certain participants’ views from the research findings. All participant stories should be “treated fairly and with balance” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 207). Jones (2003) advised that participants should be able to recognize themselves in

the text. Moreover, staying true to the participants' story is essential; otherwise the "story" becomes the researcher's rather than the participants' (Jones et al., 2006).

Ontological Authenticity is achieved by helping participants reflect on the benefits of their participation, by developing a "raised level of awareness" (Lincoln & Guba, 2003b p. 278).

Not all authenticity criteria were achieved in this study. The final three criteria require a heightened level of awareness that may not always be immediate, but instead appear to require some self-advocacy and self-reflection by the participants. Educative Authenticity is increased by helping the participants appreciate the viewpoints of others. With Catalytic Authenticity, participants seek change or action as a result of their raised level of awareness due to their participation in the inquiry. Finally, Tactical Authenticity refers to the degree to which participants are ready for change, or "creating the capacity in research participants for positive social change" (Lincoln & Guba, 2003b, pp. 278-279). The researcher has control, but not in the traditional sense. To Guba and Lincoln (2005) this control is used as "a means of fostering emancipation, democracy, and community empowerment" (p. 202), and these authenticity criteria can help toward these goals.

Reflexivity was employed throughout the research process to facilitate researcher critical reflection on the inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) as the researcher and an individual with a background similar to the participants. Reflexivity occurs during the process of discovery, from formulating and collecting data in the field to writing the text (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). It is a process where we "interrogate each of our selves" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210) in how we shape and reshape the research.

Ethnographic Criteria

Ethnographic criteria have ranged from some researchers who think all criteria should be rejected, some believe quantitative criteria should be used, and others will use qualitative criteria (Hammersley, 1992). Hammersley (1990, 1992), perhaps dissatisfied with ethnographic criteria ambiguity, set out some criteria for evaluating ethnographies through means of validity and relevance. Validity relates to the level of truth in the work, that is, the level of accuracy that the findings portray the phenomena under study. Relevance refers to the value and importance that the work contributes to the field. Validity can be achieved by staying true to the tenets of constructivism, by co-constructing knowledge with my participants. My hope is that this study will hold relevance under Hammersley's concept, but that will ultimately be left to the reader to decide.

Ethical Issues

As the researcher-researched relationship can become intense in any in-depth qualitative study, several ethical issues must be addressed. First, there is the issue of power. I must acknowledge and understand the power and authority I hold over my participants (Jones et al., 2006). As a university authority figure, as potentially perceived by students, I must not abuse my position and do no harm to this study's participants. Moreover, I should not use my position to circumvent other university departments. For example, as an academic advisor with access to student records, I could conceivably give students registration access codes or credit overloads each semester to save them from making appointments with their own advisors. After establishing rapport and a certain

level of comfort, these students could have potentially asked me to help them in various ways, including buying alcohol or borrowing money, but fortunately, no ethical dilemmas were raised. There was also the issue of confidentiality. Participants signed a letter of informed consent (see Appendix B) stating that confidentiality, although not guaranteed due to the level of participation required, was very important to maintain. They also understood that I had a duty to report if they were to indicate to me that they will harm themselves or others. Being able to speak freely with parents and other siblings and other participants regarding these students' experiences was necessary in this inquiry, and participants understood this as well.

Summary

This chapter detailed the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods of the study, as well as criteria used to evaluate the inquiry. Participants were also introduced. The primary objective of this critical ethnographic case study is to raise awareness of issues surrounding lower income, White first-generation male college student siblings. Frequent, regular contact with participants helped achieve both persistent observation and prolonged engagement, and thus made it possible for participants to speak freely and honestly about themselves, their family, and their experiences, even concerning topics that might typically cause discomfort or embarrassment. Giving voice to these participants could help institutions of higher education review recruiting and retention practices as institutions seek to better understand the roles of families with students in college. The next chapter, Chapter IV, reveals participant voices.

CHAPTER IV

STUDY CONTEXT, PARTICIPANTS, AND THEMES

This chapter is divided into three major categories. The first category is the study context, which includes background on the Philips family's hometown of Wilson and K-12 school, as well as Rocky Mountain University (RMU) and the town of Johnsville. The politics and demographics of both Wilson and Johnsville are discussed to give the reader a good sense of the study's setting. The second category describes the study participants in detail. The third major category includes the four themes which emerged from this critical ethnographic case study.

Four themes emerged from this constructivist study of lower income, rural, White first-generation college student siblings. The themes are described in-depth later in this chapter, and are briefly outlined here. First, is the first-generation, skipped generation, and first-again generation. The Philips children are considered first-generation students, but more than that, they are what I call the first-again generation because they are reestablishing a college-going pattern within their family. The second theme considers Steven to be an astute first-generation student due to the convenient automatic help he received from his older siblings regarding college. The third theme highlights the Philips family loyalty. The final theme is the siblings' multiple identities, and how they are linked and separate from each other.

This study is about the college experiences of three lower income, rural, White, first-generation college student siblings, who, despite having encountered multiple obstacles, persisted in college, and how they have come to make meaning of their experiences. These siblings are part of a family with a father who died from alcoholism. I interviewed the Philips family during Steven's (the youngest of three siblings), entire first year in college. Steven and his brother Brian (the middle sibling) were concurrently enrolled at RMU during this study, at which time Holly (the oldest sibling) was in the process of becoming a college student. This chapter describes the siblings' collegiate experience, the tumultuous journey it took to get there, and the obstacles they have overcome to follow their educational aspirations.

Study Context

Family Background

A Philips family genogram is provided in Appendix A and provides a quick snapshot of the Philips siblings' grandparents, aunts and uncles, and parents. Steven, age 19, is the youngest of three children in the Philips family, and is considered the primary participant, or main character, for this study. Holly, age 23, is the oldest sibling and Brian, age 21, is the middle child. The Philips children grew up in the tiny western town of Wilson, a town with a population of 150. Wilson is about an hour-and-a-half, or 70 miles, from Johnsville, where Rocky Mountain University is located. Trips back home were not difficult for these students. Steven went home far fewer times in his first year than Brian did in his first year. Laurie Philips and Kate Matthews (Steven's and Brian's high school counselor) called Steven and Brian "inseparable" and "best friends," so the brothers were thrilled to be reunited on their college campus. Brian, who is more

introverted, moved off campus after his first year in college to live with his sister Holly. Holly and Steven, however, are much more social and outgoing, and consequently, contributed to Steven's smooth transition to college. Holly did not go to college, but toward the end of this study she was enrolled in a community college. However, not everything was smooth for this family.

The Philips family endured multiple losses and tragedies in recent years. First, in 2003, Holly's prom date died in an automobile accident after he took Holly home. Then, in 2005, Lyle, their father, died from cirrhosis of the liver brought on by alcoholism when Steven was a freshman in high school. The following year, the children's maternal aunt died. More recently, in 2008, during Steven's first semester in college, their maternal grandmother died. The children, particularly Holly, were close to this grandmother. The family had another scare when Laurie was diagnosed with cancer, although her cancer went into remission during this study. These losses brought a once fragmented family back together in an extremely tightly knit unit. Members of this family turned to each other as they valued and sincerely appreciated each other. They seemed to prefer each other's company over that of outside friends. Brian and his mother, Laurie, are similar in that they experience shyness. The more outgoing Holly and Steven have a larger social network and seem to experience less or little anxiousness.

Each sibling's college experience was different, and each became increasingly more informed and less complicated, learning from older siblings' mistakes. For example, Holly dropped out of high school and now, at age 23, attends courses at a community college. Brian was the first in the family to move away from home to attend college at Rocky Mountain University (RMU), but his experience was not necessarily

enjoyable, especially in his first year living on campus. Steven, however, had clear expectations of college through frequent visits and conversations with Brian, and as a result, he experienced an enjoyable first year in college. Steven attributed his ease in transition to all the help he received, mainly from his brother and high school counselor, also an alumna of Rocky Mountain University. More description on the siblings and family will be detailed later in this chapter.

Rocky Mountain University: Study Site

Rocky Mountain University (RMU) is a land-grant institution, where the primary mission is to serve the state by educating students, conducting research, and by providing outreach to many communities within the state, primarily through extension programs and agricultural education. Approximately 20,000 undergraduate and 5,000 graduate students attend the institution. In recent years, several programs have been developed to research renewable energy possibilities. The institution prides itself in its science and technology programs, and as a result, higher level math courses are required in several majors. Rocky Mountain University is located approximately one hour from a major U.S. city, and is also convenient to many outdoor recreation opportunities. About 80% of RMU's students are in-state residents, but RMU officials say they have students from every state and 85 countries. It is a predominately White institution (87% of its students are White). First-generation students make up about a quarter of all undergraduate students. At RMU, a first-generation college student is identified when neither parent earned a Bachelor's degree. Students self-identify (e.g. they "check the box") on the admission application, which asks whether either parent earned a degree. Admission standards are competitive; the average incoming class's high school grade point average

is 3.50. All first-year students must live on campus and most other students live in houses or apartments within a mile of the campus perimeter. Most students do not go home on weekends and attendance and enthusiasm at home football games suggest school spirit is high. Over 300 clubs and organizations also keep students busy. The university's calendar reveals an active schedule of events.

The Town of Johnsville—Location of Rocky Mountain University

Johnsville, the location of RMU, with a population of approximately 140,000 people, is an active community, and many would say it is a good town in which to live, according to rankings in magazines and books (see, for example, Lubow, 1999). Johnsville ranked in the top 10 in *Money Magazine's* 2008 "Best places to live" rankings. Johnsville Community College is also in town, where some RMU students elect to take their more difficult introductory math and science courses in smaller settings, or perhaps because the community college has different or more attainable prerequisites for its transferrable math and science courses.

Johnsville, the largest town in the county, serves as the county seat, with three government buildings downtown. There are two high rise buildings, which consist of 10 stories, downtown, as newer building codes do not permit buildings to exceed three stories. The downtown area offers free parking, is pedestrian friendly, and offers a saturation of restaurants, bars, coffee shops, and art galleries amidst a large historic district. A civic center offers a multitude of cultural offerings, including theater, ballet, various art exhibits, travel films, and an array of musical performances, among others. Not only is Johnsville a "good college town," it was also deemed as a good place to retire due to its good weather, downtown, and cultural offerings (Lubow, 1999). The public

school district also boasts one bilingual elementary school, which offers instruction in both Spanish and English. A lottery system was implemented to gain admission into this school due to its high demand. Several top-rated ski resorts are within a two-hour drive.

Politically, Johnsville is more liberal than many other towns in the state. This can cause conflicts for students who come from some of the state's rural communities with more conservative political leanings. In the 2008 Presidential election, Barack Obama claimed 54% of Johnsville county's vote; whereas John McCain took 44% of the vote. The town of Wilson awarded 81% of its votes to John McCain in the same election and therefore seems to stand in stark contrast to Johnsville. Depending on where students are from geographically, some find RMU and Johnsville to be either too liberal or too conservative. The participants in this study considered Johnsville to be a large city, and did not seem to mind Johnsville's more liberal climate than their rural hometown of Wilson.

The Town of Wilson-Home to Participants

The town of Wilson has one paved road; the eight or so others are gravel. On my 70-mile drive to Wilson one cold January morning, I was a slightly nervous at times due to the wind slapping my little compact car around, particularly when tractor trailers—the only other vehicles around— passed me, pulling me one way or another. Dodging tumbleweeds in their bold attempt to cross the road was another reason to keep two hands on the wheel. If I broke down out here, I thought, nobody would know. There would be no cell phone service in this area, Laurie Philips warned me earlier that morning. The town was not even marked except for a homemade painted wooden sign. “There used to be a sign,” Kate Matthews, the school counselor, later told me, “The wind must have

gotten it.” As I approached Wilson, the K-12 school was the first thing I saw with about 20 cars in the parking lot, some with license plates from the next state because it was so close. Steven revealed that his high school graduating class had 17 students. Because I arrived earlier than my appointment time, I drove through the town. I think one man waved to me, but I avoided eye contact not to give an impression of staring. I was immediately certain I insulted him by not returning his gesture.

Wilson’s population of 150 is over 96% White. There is one non-denominational Christian church in town, Wilson Community Church. Each summer, Wilson hosts a huge rodeo. The museum in Wilson is open only one day a week. The Town Hall, where all government business occurs, is open a total of seven hours per week. I contacted the Town Clerk’s office to determine if the mayor was a Democrat or Republican, but I was told, “In this municipality when running for office, or being appointed to an office, individuals are not required to designate a political affiliation, so, therefore, I do not know the answer to that question.” In small towns like this, where everyone knows each other, it is probably better for town officials to remain as neutral as possible. Afterwards, I contacted the county election office to learn how Wilson voted in the 2008 presidential election. Precinct results for the Wilson area revealed John McCain won 81% of the vote, whereas Barack Obama took 17% of the vote. Clearly, this town rings conservative.

As I researched the town, one website called Wilson “a ghost town.” Wilson’s peak seemed to be from the late 1800s to the Depression era. During that time, Wilson had “two hotels, a bank, a mercantile store, and a lumber yard,” according to their website. Now there are neither hotels nor banks; just a general store serving as the

anchor of Main Street. Forming an unofficial eastern town boundary are old, retired railroad tracks, which used to haul cattle to points north and south.

I was still early, so I decided to check out the café/convenience store. The school website, perhaps in an effort to recruit prospective teachers, made it seem as though there were two restaurants in town, but this deli/café/convenience store/hardware store seemed to have everything. I was glad, however, I did not have plans to eat lunch here. I might have been the only customer, joined by the store clerk/chef. “Is there even a gas pump in this town?” I later asked the counselor. “Oh, yes, you have to drive around the back of the store,” Kate said with a smirk. It was no wonder a few people had warned me to fill up my car’s gas tank before I set out on my journey that morning. Once inside the store, I realized I had to make a purchase because I felt like an obvious outsider and researcher. I spotted the soda fountain drink machine in the corner, but noticed only large, red, dine-in plastic cups, so I asked the clerk if she had to-go cups. “All I have is those coffee cups,” she said as she pointed to small white Styrofoam containers. This must be a place where people hang out and catch up with each other. Instead, I opted for a 60-cent can of Pepsi, tax included.

In this tiny western town plagued by tumbleweeds, I also observed two people raking the peculiar obstacle as if they were large leaves. Another person was using his car as if it were a snowplow to push a pile of tumbleweeds out of his driveway. I am still not sure of the “snow plow’s” effectiveness, but I was as mesmerized as an eight-year-old boy watching heavy machinery at a construction site.

Wilson School District

The Wilson school district consists of one or two buildings. My interview with Kate was exceptionally informative. She gave me valuable information related to this rural town and the Philips family. I interviewed her with Steven's permission. In fact, the reason I interviewed Kate was that Steven indicated she was instrumental in his decision to attend RMU. For a part-time school counselor who did not live in Wilson, she knew many details of the Philips family as a whole, not just the students she was assigned. Here she shared the following information on the town and school:

I'm not from Wilson. It's definitely a very isolated, rural, small town. The only really, I'd say, type of store is a small café/grocery store and then a little further up the road is a pizza/bar joint where a lot of kids will go. When I first started, I was like 'where are the stop signs? Where are the stop lights?' We don't have them [and] I'm like 'What?' For adolescents it can be hard because there's nothing for them to do, so then they turn to, some of them turn to, partying all the time or driving to Plainfield [an hour away] all the time because... We're actually closer to [a small city in the next state], but that's still 45 minutes away.

Kate also shared some background information on the school, in which she serves as the only counselor:

We do have a small town library, but mainly the school is the biggest building out here. It used to be just a lot of farming and ranching kiddos and families out here but the town actually recruited more families and now we have a lot of move-in families out here; it's not just the ranching anymore. School max we've had, I think, 120 kids and this year we're at the lowest of 78 [in] K-12. I am the one counselor and we only have one teacher per grade in elementary school and in high school there's one math teacher, one science teacher, one English/History teacher, so there's only one teacher per subject. Very limited course selection for our high school students. We don't have any AP or IB. For five years now, we have offered, through two community colleges, for advanced kids, the opportunity to take college credit classes here either online or through the interactive video system. But everyone makes the team, so when sporting events are coming on, this is pretty much where everyone is at.

Others spoke of Wilson and the school, but not as elaborately as Kate. She was an outsider and to her the town was her place of employment. For the Philips family, Wilson was home, and accepted as such.

Wilson's Sense of Community

As evidenced by Kate's comments, Wilson is a town where everyone knows everyone's business. The Philips family members agreed it was small without much to do, but they also seem to be happy to be from Wilson. Laurie Philips held a more positive view of this small, isolated town:

It was a good place to raise the kids. You know, I wouldn't change that for nothing. You know, they found fun on their own. It was a good place. I wasn't thrilled with it, but the kids, they could walk to everything, you know, games and sports, a good place for the kids. And the whole town rallies around the kids and school, the whole town goes to all the games.

Kate said some families were recruited to live in Wilson, so I asked Laurie if her family had been recruited to live in there. "No," she said, looking puzzled that recruiting actually occurred, "We moved there because Lyle's parents lived there." They moved to Wilson as Steven was preparing to enter kindergarten, so he was the only sibling to receive all his K-12 education at the one-building school in Wilson. Laurie was thinking of selling their house in Wilson, since she moved to her mother's house an hour south in Plainfield about two years ago, but she knew her kids were sentimental about where they grew up: "I don't think I could sell it because nobody wants to live out there [laughs] and it's kind of a crappy little house. I think the kids would like it if I ended up living out there."

Steven visited home a few times during his first semester, primarily to watch and officiate high school football games. He had a good friend, Jason, still in high school.

Steven went to Wilson at the end of the year to attend Jason's graduation. Steven and Brian also checked on the vacant house (where they grew up) periodically; they even tried to fix frozen water pipes. I asked him how he learned the plumbing trade and he said, "I guess I just picked it up. There was one though, that was just gushing with water. We needed to call a plumber to fix that." These brothers visited Wilson more frequently than their mother or sister visited Wilson. The brothers may have felt a traditional duty, as males after the loss of their father, to look after the house. The brothers' ties to their community in Wilson were not severed. Rather, they seemed to continue to claim their membership to the town and school instead of actively building their community at RMU.

Holly was incredibly open in our interview, which surprised me because my interviews with Steven and Laurie required me to consistently provide structure. Laurie warned me that Holly would "talk my ear off." She shared things that not too many people outside of Wilson might know. Holly quit high school and ran off with an older boy, but after learning of her father's terminal illness, both she and her boyfriend went back to Wilson: "We bought a house actually, when my dad got sick out in Wilson. We moved back to take care of my dad and uh, he actually ended up getting with my best friend and they're together still." She lost her father (death), two boyfriends (one through death, the other through cheating), and best friend (cheated with boyfriend), yet, she still maintained a positive outlook on life. In a town as small as Wilson where everyone knows your business, it was probably time for Holly to get out once again. One piece of small town gossip Holly shared was how her counselor ran off with one of the teachers:

Kate was there, but she wasn't a counselor at the time. I had had a couple of different counselors. One was pretty cool, but then she ran off with one of the teachers and got married, who knows what happened.

When Holly was done speaking, I exclaimed, "All this drama in Wilson!" and she laughed and nodded in agreement saying, "I know! Wilson was a good place though. All the teachers knew you, so you could go to any of them and talk to any of them." Kate also mentioned the longevity of the teachers: "More than half our faculty have been here over 20-plus years, especially in elementary. They've lived here all their lives." Holly spoke more of the town after I asked about her siblings' work ethic:

I think a lot of it had to do with being in Wilson, honestly. Because there's not a lot of drugs, not a lot of bad things to influence you, maybe? There was a couple kids, but for the most part, everyone's pretty well mannered out there. You don't have anything to do except to go play basketball or to do your homework. There's nothing to do. So I think that might be a big part of it.

Participants

Charlie and Mary Oliver—Philips Siblings' Maternal Grandparents

I did not meet with these grandparents, but their influence on their grandchildren is striking enough to include in this inquiry. Charlie died at age 52 of cancer and never met the Philips siblings. Mary died in November 2008 during this study, just before Thanksgiving. Charlie was a college graduate, whereas Mary did not attend college. Laurie could recall her father's insistence that she and her siblings would have to go to college. Only Laurie's youngest sibling, however, attended college, but the idea that college was of utmost importance was instilled in Laurie's mind, and she always expected her children would attend.

Mary was a warm, caring grandmother. In fact, Holly, after running away from home and being returned by the police, would sometimes escape to grandmother's house.

Holly said she and her grandmother were alike, and grandmother could understand her. Steven did not talk about his grandmother as much as Holly. Steven only missed two classes to attend his grandmother's funeral.

Kate Matthews— High School Counselor-Town/School Storyteller

I interviewed Kate once in the spring semester of the study. She was either in her late 20s or early 30s. Kate commutes about an hour to work. She serves the entire K-12 school, and yet, works part-time. She was the counselor for Brian and Steven, but not Holly. Steven identified her as instrumental in the assistance she provided with applying to colleges, financial aid, housing, and scholarship searches. Thus, I decided to visit the small town to interview Kate. When I called the school to schedule an appointment with her, I asked the receptionist to connect me with Kate Matthews in the counseling department. When the receptionist abruptly told me Kate was out that day, I knew that next time I could just ask for Kate without the other details (i.e., last name, counseling department) because I quickly sensed the school had only a handful of staff. Kate *was* the counseling department and did not have a separate receptionist. I asked if she had an email account and then learned she did not have a school district issued email account. (Later I asked Kate about email should I have follow-up questions, so she offered her Hotmail account.) I called back two days later, spoke with Kate, and explained the study. She was interested and therefore agreed to an interview.

When I remarked that she seemed to go above and beyond what most counselors might do, she said, "Well, I knew that those boys had had a rough time and that they needed a little extra help." She was the first one who told me how Steven's father, Lyle, died. Steven told me early in our interviews that his dad died while he was in high

school, but as I could sense Steven's discomfort with the topic, I did not ask more questions at the time. Kate also informed me of Laurie's possible cancer. She knew Steven's grandmother was important in this family and expressed sadness when I informed her she had died two months earlier. Kate offered insightful perspectives on the small town and the charm/lack of privacy that exists. As I told her of my visit to the store, she smiled and nodded in agreement when I told her I felt out of place. She also said the adolescents in this town have nothing to do beyond what the K-12 school offered besides hanging out at a pizza place a few miles up the road. Many are involved in sports, but "If they're not coordinated enough for sports, we also had cheering," Holly later told me.

Laurie Philips—Mother—"Now we can laugh together"

I interviewed Laurie twice in the spring semester. With exasperation, she said, "I hate every second of my job." She will probably continue working in the call center position for a few more years before she retires. However, there is nothing more important to Laurie than her children. Her greatest joy comes from simply spending time with them and laughing together. She seems to have accepted the multiple losses of her husband, sister, and mother in the past few years. She is grateful for the moments she shared with them. She truly lives in the moment—not dwelling on the past, not wondering what the future may bring—which is probably healthy when one has experienced so many losses. Laurie is proud of her children for going to college. She does not express regret for having dropped out of college when she was young. Laurie does not, however, enjoy feeling stuck in a job she hates. Laurie's seemingly only real concern for the future is that Brian will probably end up alone because he does not date.

According to her, Steven and Brian are so inseparable that they do not branch out to meet others, and this causes her a certain level of distress.

Laurie still owns the house in Wilson in which her children grew up but now lives in the town of Plainfield with her brother Richard, in their recently deceased mother's house. Laurie works full-time, but Richard was unemployed during this study. They were still trying to settle their mother's estate. Living at her mother's house significantly reduced her commute to work to 40 minutes rather than the 90 minutes it took from Wilson. Laurie works in Johnsville, which is the same town where her three children live. At 18, she tried college in Virginia where she was raised, but abruptly dropped out during her first semester because she realized it was not for her. She took a course in computer programming but never pursued any other form of higher education. Upon dropping out, she supported herself by working at a fast food restaurant and eventually moved into a data entry position. When she was in her early 20s, her parents moved west and she later joined them. She met her husband in the west, when they worked together for a telephone company. Steven said his father was a "computer guy" for the telephone company.

Laurie's house in Plainfield is part of a condominium complex not far from a golf course. It has a two-car garage, but the cars were still parked outside, presumably as the garage was being used for storage. The condominium grounds and building structures seemed to be in excellent condition. The house was ranch style and seemed large with its finished basement, from what I could see through the open floor plan. Laurie did not offer a tour, and I did not want to impose by asking for one. My first visit was in early January, between the fall and spring semesters, when classes were not in session. I hoped

to meet Brian for the first time, but Laurie told me that both he and Steven had just left, knowing I was on my way.

We sat together on the living room sofa, with my tape recorder on the coffee table. This large, wide living room would lend itself well to Philips family gatherings, I imagined. Laurie (and her cat and dog) were welcoming, but on my first visit, I felt as though I was interrupting some house cleaning or similar household chores because she was comfortably dressed in sweat pants and a sweat shirt, the television volume was high, and there were things happening in the kitchen. Nonetheless, she was polite and pleasant and made time for me on both occasions. Laurie works four 10-hour days, Mondays through Thursday, so I visited on her days off, which were Fridays. Rapport established, Laurie offered even more insights and spoke more freely in the second interview and even asked about me and the study a couple of times. She spoke about all three children, but this is where I learned the most about Holly. Steven had referred to her as “a bit of a mess,” citing her starts and stops with college and her relationship problems. Kate, the high school counselor did not really know Holly, except for how she ran off with a boy. Laurie explained “Holly was the smartest one of the three kids,” but even so, she dropped out of high school, ran away from home with a boy, and Laurie had to call the police multiple times to get her back. Laurie also told me that after Holly’s junior prom, her date was killed in a car accident on his way home. I knew I had to interview Holly. Her educational experiences from high school to college were certainly unique.

Holly Philips—Oldest Sibling, Age 23

I met with Holly twice in the spring semester. The first interview was in my office and the second time informally at the restaurant where she works as a server.

Perhaps like her mother, Holly initially appeared uncomfortable with strangers and securing an interview with Holly seemed like an ordeal. I feared that after calling her unsuccessfully two times, she might avoid me, as was my experience with Brian. I even suggested to Steven the two could come in together for a joint interview. I needed to use Steven as a gatekeeper to reach out because he knew I was safe. Since she did not initially return my calls, I also assumed she screened calls like her mother. I was also confused, however, because Laurie said Holly was very outgoing and would talk my ear off. When we did finally talk, I was extremely grateful. She disclosed considerable information on the family and helped confirm things I had learned from the others.

Before meeting Holly, Laurie informed me:

Holly was the perfect student. She's probably the smartest one of the three kids. Made straight A's, wanted to be a surgeon all her life, got accepted into this medical, it was like a medical camp, only 20 people [from this state] got accepted in. She met a guy that summer [and] quit school. The teachers and everybody were shocked up there because she was the perfect kid and she's really, really outgoing. She was real, real popular, you know, always got picked for everything, and she was dating a guy, and he got killed in a car crash. They went to the prom and he got killed after he dropped her off and then the day he was being buried she got accepted into this medical camp, and so she went up there a couple of months later and she was a different person after that and then a few months later she met this guy and dropped out of school and moved in with him and never went back, you know. She's tried to go back [to school], she went to some school up in Johnsville, some type of medical thing, I forget the name of it. But she dropped out. She says she's going to go back again. She got her GED but that was a *hard time*, because I expected so much from her.

Holly acknowledged dropping out of high school was an unfortunate choice. Slightly embarrassed at having dropped out, she said her high school class rank was second and she knew from the time she was four years old that she was going to be an emergency room doctor. When she was in high school she applied for and was accepted into a highly competitive medical camp at the state's medical school. She still looks back on

this experience as fascinating. “It was like college in some ways,” she reminisced, “because we lived in a dorm and attended classes and labs during the day.” Some of their work also involved cadavers, which did not bother her. Everyone in Wilson was shocked when Holly dropped out of high school. She ran off with an older guy to a mountain town nearly five hours away from Wilson. Perhaps seeking understanding or empathy, Holly wanted me to know she had been swept off her feet: “You know what it’s like when you’re in high school, and you’re young, and you think you’re in love.” She ended up being with this man for nearly five years. Since Holly was not legally an adult, Laurie called the police to report her as a runaway. The police went to get her but she left again, or sometimes she stayed with her grandmother, with whom she was rather close. “My grandma’s a lot like me,” she told me. Grandma understood her. Holly’s boyfriend supported her financially during that time, so she did not work. She completed her GED through a community college in about two weeks and even took a couple of college courses. Her father’s deteriorating health and eventual death as he struggled with cirrhosis of the liver finally brought her back home. Holly’s boyfriend “got with” her best friend, consequently ending the relationship. She calls that entire experience with him “stupid,” but one from which she has certainly learned.

Lyle Philips–Father

Holly shared some additional information about her father. He struggled to keep jobs because of his alcoholism. Sometimes he was out of work and would not tell the kids, or “sometimes he wouldn’t even tell mom,” Holly shared. Steven told me “He was in and out of hospitals a lot those last six months.” Also, he was so weak that when he fell, his body resembled that of an “old man,” according to Steven. Nonetheless, until the

end, their father continued to show up at their athletic events to cheer on his kids. Lyle showed more athletic support for his kids than Laurie did. She did however, watch from her car at times. Perhaps Lyle's greatest regret is that he did not go to college, according to Laurie. His family was "dirt poor and could not afford college," Laurie said. Steven told me, "Dad was always giving lessons. He would say, 'You've got your whole life ahead of you,' or 'You can do anything you want to.'" Holly compared her father's poor health with that of her grandmother's: "Dad didn't have insurance or enough money to take care of his health, whereas grandma did." Holly believed that better quality, more expensive healthcare, could have improved her father's life, but they could not afford it. His death though, seemed to bring a once fragmented family back together. Laurie spoke of her husband:

He was 45 when he died. And you know they [my children] had to help take care of him. It was tough, especially for Steven. He was amazing though...uh... because when they die from alcohol their brain gets real crazy and Steven in the middle of night would have to help him because he was out of it, he'd get him and help move him back to the bedroom and because he would always try to get out at night and Steven would say "oh dad, you can't leave, you can't leave." You know, so they've been through a lot. But they knew their dad loved them. He just had a drinking problem. Their dad would go to the games even when he was so ill you know, and he'd freeze, right before he died, but he went to all their games, you know, stuff like that.

Brian Philips-Middle Sibling, Age 21

Although I tried a variety of methods, I was not able to meet with Brian. I let other family members know I looked forward to meeting him, hoping they would persuade him to contact me, but at the same time, I did not want to alienate or cause discomfort for anyone. I called Brian three times and emailed him as many times. Kate, the school counselor, told me she was not surprised that I did not hear from Brian. It took four years before Brian initiated a conversation with her, and that was after he had

graduated when he went back for his high school homecoming. Speaking of Brian's shyness, Laurie indicated:

I do worry about him that he's going to have a long, sad life, just because he gets *so* shy. I mean he does his classes, but I don't think he probably talks to anybody...I do worry about him. Steven, I don't. Steven's a little more outgoing, but Brian I do worry about because I suffered with it too for years, so I know where he's coming from.

Laurie told me she sometimes experiences anxiety, which explains why she did not go to orientation and why she would watch athletic events from the comfort of her car. In fact, it was Holly who accompanied Brian at his first year college orientation. There was no way Brian could have gone alone, according to Holly. She informed me Brian "was so nervous, so, of course, I went with him [to orientation] because stuff like that doesn't bother me at all. I actually enjoyed it." I asked Holly if she helped Brian in other ways during his first year in college:

The first year I helped him a lot with homework, um, and financially, I guess. He pays rent, but he pays under what is half, or whatever. He has student loans, though, so he pays what he needs to pay, I guess. But I'll bring him home dinner all the time, stuff like that.

There are times when Brian can get so focused or concerned, that he will not speak to anyone to be alone with his thoughts. Laurie said, "When I told him I had cancer, he didn't talk to me for three days." Similarly, Holly, who shared an apartment with Brian, said, "I can always tell when he has a test the next day because he won't say anything all night."

Brian had a rough experience living on campus his first year of college, according to Holly. She said his roommate frequently partied. As a result, Brian went home nearly every weekend. He did not party, which is a primary basis for meeting people, according to Holly. Holly recounted Brian's first year in college:

He didn't really do anything, like he probably should have done. He had bad roommates, you know the partiers, and he, definitely, he won't even touch alcohol, which is good, but it makes you not meet that many people, either. When you're 21, that's how you meet all your friends, honestly. And he didn't do that, so he stayed in his room a lot.

Brian does not drink at all, to the point "where it's not natural," according to Laurie. She said Brian refused wine with their Christmas dinner. Holly thought it could help him: "I wish that, I wish Brian would be able to have a drink once in a while, so that he could meet people, but I think he's so uncomfortable." Brian typically spent his weekends away from campus during his first year. He did stay on campus for the weekends when Steven visited him there. Holly further elaborated on the weekends during Brian's first year:

Steven would come out, or Brian would actually go over to my mom's a lot, like every weekend in Wilson or to Plainfield, depending on where my mom was at the time. He'd spend a lot of time out there. Instead of staying in the dorms over the weekend, he'd just go home or come to my house.

Laurie said Brian wants to be a police officer after he graduates from college. Most of all, however, what I learned from Kate, Laurie, and Holly, is that Brian and Steven love each other and are inseparable. "When you see one, you see the other," Laurie said with a smile.

Steven Philips—Youngest Sibling, Age 19

I interviewed Steven a total of 11 times: six times in the fall semester and five times in the spring semester. Steven is an exceptionally mature, responsible young man. But he has a temper, according to his Holly.

Prior to college. Steven can be competitive when playing sports, which is his main hobby. He played every sport available in high school and was selected to the all-state team for football. Steven's favorite sport, though, is basketball. One way he earned

money in his first year of college was by refereeing junior varsity and varsity high school football games. Steven and his siblings were always the prom kings and queen in high school, too. He returned home as a spectator at a few football games at his old high school in Wilson. "They all come back for the games," Kate, the school counselor told me. At one of the football games, they were short on referees, so Steven was thrown into it. He also met up with Kate and his high school English/History teacher (same teacher for both subjects) at the football games. School athletics were the main source of entertainment and also served as the driving force for community connection in this small town, according to Kate.

Steven actually lived alone during his senior year of high school, the year after his father died. His mother spent more time with his ailing grandmother and that location was much closer to her work. Gas prices were at their peak during that time, another reason Laurie stayed with her mother, leaving Steven to care for himself. Kate maintained Steven always had his homework done, never came to school late, and never got into trouble. Steven told me later, though, that he was just good at not getting caught. Nonetheless, I am sure he was one of the more responsible students in his class. His mother echoed this by saying she was enormously blessed to have good kids, except for that spell with Holly. The children always finished their homework done without problems and without pleadings from their parents. They all excelled at both academics and athletics. Holly told me there was nothing else to do in their small town other than homework and sports, so there were not a lot of opportunities for trouble.

According to Holly, Steven is a different person when he is with his brother compared to when Steven and Holly are together. Laurie had this sense too, which is

why she secretly hoped Steven would attend a different college. The women in the family feel Steven is subdued and stifled in his older brother's shadow. Steven and Holly are both much more social and outgoing, and when they are together, they have fun, Holly informed me. But when all three siblings are together, Steven behaves as if he were Brian's twin. Indeed, Steven spent considerable time with his brother in his first year in college.

Bereavement. Steven never told me how his father died. He told me in our first interview his father died when he was a junior in high school and I did not ask why at the time, trying to establish rapport. It was his high school counselor and mother who told me the death was due to alcoholism. Laurie was more forthcoming in talking about her husband's death. Holly was also forthcoming about her father's death. With Steven, it was something I avoided until our last interview in May. In my second interview with Laurie, she asked me if Steven ever talked about his father's death, and I said no. I assumed he did not want to talk about it, but, in our final interview, when I asked him to tell me about his father, he did not hesitate. My hesitancy to discuss it with Steven is common in higher education (Balk, 1997), in that faculty and student affairs practitioners are not well-trained, if at all, in bereavement topics. In fact, the literature suggests even college and university counseling center staff are inadequately trained to work with bereaved students (Balk, 2008). Some have called bereavement among college students a "silent epidemic" (Neimeyer, Laurie, Mehta, Hardison, & Currier, 2008, p. 28) because most of those unaffected by loss are uncomfortable with the topic (Balk, 1997). Nonetheless, most college counselors believe the loss of a loved one by death can be a "defining issue" in a college student's life (Balk, 2008, p. 6). The research on bereaved

students also reveals that at any given point, approximately 25% of college students have lost someone close to them in the past 12 months (Balk, 1997, 2008). Steven and his siblings certainly fell within this category during my research with them, as their grandmother passed away in November of that year. Even though the Philips children experienced multiple losses, their experience with death is not entirely unique, in that 20% of college students have experienced multiple losses (Balk, 2008). I was taken aback when Steven told me he only missed one day of class to attend his grandmother's funeral. She died during his first semester in college, the first semester of this study. Kate said something similar about both Steven and Brian when their dad died. They only took a couple of days off from school. I expressed surprise but Kate thought it was appropriate, in their case, to resume their daily activities. Although I am not convinced they, particularly the Philips males, have properly grieved for their losses, I can appreciate that everyone grieves differently. I am lucky to have limited experience with death. I still have three grandparents. My grandmother died when I was two. She is the only person in my large family who has died. The only other funeral I have attended was for my wife's grandmother, about six years ago.

Alcohol avoidance. On several occasions in our interviews, Laurie and Holly brought up the issue of alcohol aversion for the two brothers. Brian and Steven do not drink alcohol at all. Brian seems to have the strongest aversion. Steven, who is under 21, did not discuss it, nor did I bring it up, but I heard from both Laurie and Holly that neither brother is interested. During spring break in the year of this study, the Philips family went to Las Vegas. While there one evening, Brian and Laurie went out to dinner and they happened upon a restaurant advertising two-for-one margaritas. Brian decided

to try it. He took one sip and passed it back to his mother. Steven is probably this way too with an aversion to alcohol. Holly will have a margarita sometimes after her shift at the restaurant where she works. Laurie also drinks on occasion. The Philips males do not touch alcohol, whereas the females drink on occasion. Are the brothers worried they will become addicted? Maybe they saw too much as they watched their father's body shut down. Lyle's brain functioning was abnormal in his final days. His body resembled a man twice his age when he walked and subsequently fell, according to Steven. He tried to leave in the middle of the night, not fully conscious, not due to being drunk, but due to brain malfunction, Holly informed me. How does a teenager make meaning of that? Are Brian and Steven so inseparable that they have adopted each other's stance on abstaining from alcohol?

During one of our interviews I asked Laurie how she thought her sons may have changed since going off to college:

I really don't see a lot of differences...because I was thinking, you know, college life, I always figured truthfully, you know, and that's college life, I figured they'd probably go and start drinking, which I didn't want them to, but college kids do that and I really thought that that would happen, but they, and I know, I know they don't drink, I mean, and I'm not a naive mother. That really, really almost to the point where they're against it, to the point where it's not normal. You know, which is wonderful, which is wonderful, but I want them to have some of the "funness" of college, you know, but they're not doing that, you know, but they don't want to do that [consume alcohol]. I don't know if Steven ever told you but their dad was an alcoholic, and he died from cirrhosis and I think that's why they're so against drinking and all that.

In our first interview in January 2009, Laurie told me of story of Christmas, which was two weeks prior to our interview, when she offered her boys some wine with dinner and they refused. She worried their fear and aversion of alcohol might be abnormal, but she understood why they rejected alcohol.

Steven's first year in college. Steven was not a typical first-generation college student in his first year in college. He credited his counselor and brother as helping him tremendously during the college selection and application process. He learned a great deal from his brother about the university through campus visits and conversations about college. Laurie shared that because they are inseparable, it was an easy decision for him to attend RMU even though he had been recruited to play football at two or three other colleges. She also confessed it was secretly her wish that he did not attend the same institution as his brother. She wanted them to become more independent from each other. Steven told me he did not want to play football in college for fear he could not balance both academics and athletics:

I didn't really want to play anymore because I didn't think I could pass my classes if I played football. When you're out of class, you're in the weight room or the gym or whatever. Plus, I had already applied to RMU and was accepted. I didn't want football to take over my life.

Steven felt committed to his decision to attend RMU. However, I share his mother's perspective that perhaps the main reason he chose RMU was due to the comfort he had already experienced from his brother's knowledge and presence on the same campus. Kate also attended RMU, and was consequently able to impart a great deal of knowledge about what RMU offered. She even told him about the newest residence hall, and that he would have to apply early to get into that one, thus, he did. Kate nodded with pride when shared that Steven was living in the new residence hall.

Steven reflected on what he looked forward to in college:

I never had much interaction with different cultures growing up because I grew up in such a small town. One of the main reasons I chose a large, four-year school is so I could meet new people and interact with and be around different cultures...By being a student at this school, I feel like can do many things. I

know that I will be challenged every day, but it will help me to become a better person.

Steven had clear expectations about the university and college life in general. His brother talked to him about choosing classes and Steven had already toured the campus multiple times. It seemed the only surprising thing to him was the amount of studying he had to do in college. Because this was a study of first-generation students, there were multiple instances when I expected he would share some of the blunders first-generation students seem to encounter (just as I did when I was a first-generation student), but there were none. "I adapt really well," Steven said nonchalantly. For example, some first-generation students are embarrassed if they are not aware of certain etiquette practices for dining or they may not be as well-traveled as other students, but these issues did not surface with Steven. One example of Steven's blending in with others on campus was that he owned all the latest gadgets. He had a laptop computer, an Ipod, a cell phone, and an LCD TV. He even hooked up his TV to his laptop so he could watch his downloads, such as videos of television programs (he mentioned MTV) on his fancy TV. I commented that when I was in college in the mid-1990s, no one had a cell phone, except sometimes I saw people with those large car phones attached to bags. Also, when I was in college, no one had laptops, and only about half of my friends may have had desktop computers. I asked him if he knew anyone who had a desktop and he thought for a moment and said no, "I haven't seen anyone with a desktop. Eventually, though, I'd like to get a desktop, but for now, it's much more convenient to go anywhere on campus with my laptop." Like other students, Steven purchased a backpack to accommodate his laptop and other supplies he needed each day. He liked using his laptop in the student center and told me some tricks about how to connect wirelessly, which I still do not

understand. Steven had a MySpace account, but not a Facebook account. We talked a little about the privacy issues relating to social media and I assured him that I did not have MySpace account, so I would not snoop on him. He laughed, but agreed that some students were not bashful enough about their private lives on these sites.

I wondered if Steven was surprised by anything during his first year in college. He claimed he felt fairly well prepared to do college work, but quickly realized, “Professors are not lenient!” He offered one example of this: “I submitted a paper to the TA, but I guess I was supposed to put it on WebCT, but I didn’t want to do that, so I lost points.” This was his ethnic studies class. He had another interesting observation regarding school spirit in college: “I’m surprised at how much school spirit there is at football games, even when we’re losing.”

College changes. As his first semester was winding down, just before Thanksgiving, I told Steven that sometimes when students go back home, relationships can be different with friends and family. He had already experienced this. He exclaimed, “Yeah! When I went back to a football game someone said I changed!” I asked him what was meant by that but he could not point to how he might have changed. He was excited for Thanksgiving and being away from classes and seeing old friends. Irritated with classes, he expressed “I need a break!” and “I knew U.S. History would be tough.” After going back home at Thanksgiving he disclosed seeing changes in some of his friends, and they noticed some changes in him as well:

I only got to see some of my friends over the break and it was only for a day. However, I did see how some of them changed. Some of the stuff was very small and some of the things were very obvious. Some of the ways they changed were in ways that I couldn’t really tell. I could not pick out what changed about them but I could tell that they had changed. None of the changes I saw in them were bad things but more like personality changes and other things. For the most part,

I don't believe I have changed a whole lot. Some of my friends said that I have a little but I'm sure I have in some ways. I do feel like a somewhat different person in some aspects but I don't think I have changed too much since coming to college.

Classes and finances. Regarding studying, Steven casually said, "I study when I feel like it." He studies about two hours a night, usually from 8PM-10PM or 10PM-midnight in his residence hall room or down the hall where there was a study area. He did not study in the library, although, "I've thought about it, but it's such a long walk from where I live," he defended. The "long walk" is about seven minutes. His favorite parts of campus were the recreation center and student center. He often used the computer lab in the student center, which offered free printing. I told him of another computer lab he could also use. At RMU, students' free printing is restricted to certain computer labs, depending on their majors. Steven's major was "Undecided" in his first year.

Upon reflection toward the end of his first year, Steven believed he had matured during this first year in college. At one of the high school football games he attended, someone said he had changed. His friend's unsolicited observation both puzzled and disturbed him. He did not feel as though he had changed. I asked him if he knew what that individual meant, but he was not sure. Steven thought he knew exactly what he wanted to do in terms of majors and possible careers in the early part of his first semester. He wanted to be a sports writer and hoped to major in Journalism. Once he realized those jobs were highly competitive and not exactly in high demand he began to question this path. Not being a big fan of math, he realized his options of majors were limited. He considered a double major with both Journalism and Political Science, his brother's major. Knowing the requirements of the Political Science major, I informed him that one

of the Political Science courses he was scheduled to take in the spring semester did not count in the major. He remained in that course and regretted it, but the regret was due to not liking the instructor, who incorporated “a lot of theory” into the course. Other majors he considered were Social Work, Liberal Arts, and Criminal Justice, but Criminal Justice was quickly discounted because it had a higher math requirement. Also, he felt Social Work and Criminal Justice might limit him to certain career paths. He could benefit from career counseling, I thought, but he did not seek out help easily. I believe that he does not like approaching unfamiliar campus staff and faculty members. Steven would rather find the information online. He prides himself on being independent, a trait that carried him successfully through high school. He does not like being told what to do. An academic example of this was for one of his assignments, which had an online component. Steven was supposed to post an assignment online, but he emailed it as an attachment to the teaching assistant instead. He was informed this was not acceptable, but thought, “fine,” and did not seem to care too much what the teaching assistant thought and did not care that he lost points. He also does not like feeling limited on his choices of majors and careers, which is why he wished he had College Algebra—a requirement for several majors—on his transcript. He did not place into College Algebra on RMU’s mathematics placement exam, and retaking the math exam did not appeal to him.

Steven considered taking College Algebra at a community college over the summer following his first year, but that did not sound like an exceptionally enjoyable summer. Instead, he lived in the same apartment with Holly and Brian and looked unsuccessfully for a summer job. He did not work at all during the school year, except

for the football officiating position he had in the fall. These games paid about \$65-\$75 each. He was awarded a hefty financial aid package, which covered all his education expenses through grants, but he still had to take out a small loan for housing. He was awarded work-study, but never applied for any work-study position, forfeiting that potential source of income. This lack of work-study knowledge could perhaps be considered a first-generation student blunder. But if his financial needs were satisfied, why would he want to work? His mother occasionally bought him a video game, but she did not give him cash on a regular basis. Steven hardly spent money. On occasion, he ate off campus or put gas in his car, but otherwise, he had no real reason to spend money. He hoped to have a job next year, his sophomore year, when he moved off campus, needed to pay rent, and did not have a meal plan at his disposal. More than likely, he will live with Holly and Brian in his sophomore year. Although Holly told me she subsidized Brian's rent by paying more than half, Steven was not yet sure how much Holly would charge him. Holly "can make up to \$300 per night at her waitressing job," he said in disbelief. Another idea the family contemplated was that Laurie was considered buying a house for her kids and they would just pay her the rent to cover the mortgage, but this plan was squashed as a result of the 2008 recession. Holly, who enjoyed the independence and responsibility of her own apartment, was not thrilled about the prospect of living in a house. Instead, she seemed satisfied with the thought of having her two brothers, her boyfriend, and her four dogs all live together in her small apartment. At least Steven likes this boyfriend, he told me.

Toward the end of the year, I asked Steven to reflect on what he found to be some of his most memorable experiences of his first year in college. One of the most

noteworthy experiences was when he and his brother saw Barack Obama on campus during his campaign for President. As Steven and Brian stood in line for their seats, someone pulled them aside because Steven was wearing his RMU sweatshirt. They wanted students with university apparel to be seated behind Obama, so he and his brother sat on the stage. Another memorable experience was when the Philips family went to Las Vegas over spring break. They were able to go because Steven made a half-court shot during half-time at one of the RMU basketball games. Interestingly, his two most memorable experiences had nothing to do with being in college, as these events were open to the public. He did not need to be a student to see Obama or make a half-court shot. Also interesting is that many students would prefer to spend spring break among friends on a beach, but Steven truly enjoyed being with his family.

Steven's residence hall room. In his residence hall in his first year, he shared a bathroom with two other guys, which was cleaned weekly by housing staff. Being the athletic type, Steven worked out several times a week and watched what he ate. He appreciated the efforts of the dining staff: "It's easy to eat healthy on campus." Sometimes he brought his brother along with one of his guest meal passes to the dining hall. I asked Steven to provide a written description of his residence hall room to me just as an anthropologist might, and this is how he described it:

Well, to start off Adam and I are located at the very end of the hall in the B-3 wing of Alumni Hall. On the door, there are two nametags that show our names obviously. Also on the door, there is a dry-erase marker board for people to write on. The marker board will occasionally have something written on it and when it does it stays on there for months at a time. When you walk into the room, you will first see the sink. Adam has a pet fish that is on top of the sink. The sink usually has a bunch of junk like toothpaste and deodorant on it and is usually somewhat clean. The wall on the opposite side of the sink has two posters, one of Chuck Norris quotes and the other of a band. The hall that leads from the sink into the main room is pretty messy usually and also always has both of our dirty

laundry hamper things in it. Also, that is where my dresser is. The main room is pretty much split down the middle with the layout the same on each side. Adam has a desk that is always piled with stuff and never used. My desk on the opposite side has my printer, TV, and computer on it. Adam's bed is up high with a small couch underneath it. My bed is on the middle level and has our fridge and microwave underneath it. There are a lot of posters and pictures. Most of them are music bands or stuff like that. I have my high school football jerseys on the wall above my bed. Overall, the room stays pretty messy with the trash piling up and clutter everywhere.

I knew football was important to Steven, and the display of his jerseys attests to this and also to his fond memories of high school athletics. In high school, Steven made the all-state team. On a high school football team where everyone makes the team, he must have been quite the standout in Wilson. His popularity in Wilson, although never discussed with me, may have contributed to his strong sense of community back home.

Steven's advice to other students. As Steven wrapped up his first year, I was curious to see what kind of lessons he may have learned, or things he wished he had known about that could have made his first year better. I invited him to write a welcoming letter to a new freshman for next year, and what follows is what he wrote:

Dear incoming freshman,

I have several things I would like to tell you before coming to Rocky Mountain University. First of all, let's talk about the dorms. If you have a choice for what dorm you should live in I would recommend moving into one of the Roaring River suites. In my opinion, they are the best inside and out. If you like having your own bathroom, don't move into any of the dorms with a community bathroom. Alumni Hall is a pretty new dorm, but it has very small rooms when comparing it to any of the other dorms on campus. As far as I'm concerned, all the food tastes pretty much the same at any of the dining centers. The Roaring River commons is a pretty good place to go. But other than that, it's pretty much all the same.

Let me talk about the campus. If you like to work out and be physically active, the campus has a great rec center and also intramural program. The student center is a good place to go eat and also has the bookstore. There are lots of places around campus where you can go to study, you just have to look.

Most freshmen are pretty familiar with the main lecture building. That is where at least one or two of your classes will be, if not all of them. Make sure you schedule your classes around a time where you can actually get to class on

time if your classes are back to back. I would suggest using profratings.com if you want to know how your professor teaches the class. That will give you a good idea if the students like the professor or not. Also, be prepared to stay up very late every night. College dorms are very loud and most of the students will stay up until two or three in the morning. Maybe try not to schedule an 8am class because staying up till three then getting up at eight is pretty hard. Also, don't slack off. The professor doesn't care what grades you get so put some effort in if you want to succeed. Enjoy your freshman year. It is a very fun and memorable experience, so don't take it for granted.

Sincerely,
Steven

Steven's dry sense of humor can be detected in his writing. His favorite thing about campus was the recreation center. When I asked him what he was looking forward to in the summer after his first year, he thought for a moment and said, "I'm looking forward to playing pick-up basketball games at the park."

The Siblings' Dating Relationships

Brian has not dated since high school and was entering his senior year of college as this study concluded. Steven had an off-and-on relationship throughout high school with one young woman he had known since kindergarten, but did not date during his first year of college. Dating relationships was a topic Steven did not seem comfortable in discussing with me. Holly, on the other hand, seemed almost proud to inform me that she had never been without a boyfriend. The brothers spent so much time together they may not have had enough time to seek other relationships. Laurie worried that Brian may end up alone. Laurie believed Steven would probably be fine in the dating realm because he is more social. Kate told me Steven's high school girlfriend was someone he could turn to after his father died. The girl he dated in high school went to a different college, but Steven kept in contact with her during his first year.

Now that some background has been provided, the next section addresses the themes that emerged from this study. First is the theme related to generations, including the notion of the first-again generation. The second theme identifies Steven as an astute college student. The third theme highlights family loyalty and the strength of the Philips family. The final theme relates to Steven's and Holly's multiple dimensions of identity.

Themes

Theme 1: First-Generation, Skipped Generation, and First-Again Generation

The Philips siblings are considered first-generation college students, but their grandfather earned a degree. Consequently, the term "first-generation" does not fully capture this seemingly unique case. These students are first-generation, with a history of going to college. In the literature, I have not been able to find any definitions or understandings of the term first-generation that consider grandparents' levels of education. Their grandfather went to college (first-generation), their parents did not (skipped generation), and all three Philips children were college students during this study. Thus, the Philips children are first-again generation college students because they are picking up the pieces, so to speak, and reestablishing a college-going tradition within their family.

College expectations. Steven's grandfather earned a Bachelor's degree and was outwardly financially successful. However, neither Steven nor his siblings ever met him, as he died before Holly was born. In some families of first-again students, grandparents may have the opportunity to directly shape and influence their grandchildren's decisions to attend college, but that was not the case with the Philips family. In this way, the Philips children would seem to fit the traditional notions of first-generation students, with

one exception: their mother, Laurie, always knew her children would go to college, and she encouraged them throughout their youth. Even though going to college in this family was not the norm, it was the expectation.

Laurie's father went to college but she did not, save for a couple of weeks, making her a skipped generation of going to college. She tried going to a community college, but she affirmed it was not for her: "I was kind of like Brian, real shy and I just wasn't comfortable with it." Steven informed me, "My grandfather had a degree in business from the University of Nebraska. He was smart; he invested a lot of money." His grandfather, now deceased, went to college for a Business degree.

Laurie had three siblings and even though her father regularly stressed when they were growing up that they would have to go to college, only one sibling, Laurie's sister, actually graduated with a degree, which was in elementary education. However, Laurie's sister never used her degree because her husband's income was sufficient. Laurie stated,

But my dad, from the time we were little babies, he would say, 'You're going to college, and you can go anywhere you want to go.' He really thought that was very, very important, and none of us did it, except for my little sister, but she never worked in her field. She didn't teach. He believed in it big, big, big time.

When I asked Laurie if the fact that only one of her siblings went to college bothered her father, she believed, "No, once we left the house we were free to choose for ourselves."

Laurie attempted college courses but quickly dropped out a couple of weeks into the semester. She reflected,

I think with my kids, they were so smart. Really, I just couldn't imagine them not going [to college], but everything was easy for them. But me, I had a harder time. And I think if you're smart, go. I was lucky all three of them were actually brilliant kids. And their dad wanted to go to college, so, so bad, but they couldn't afford it. He was a real smart man, but his parents couldn't afford it. I think he might have stressed for them [our kids] to go.

Even though Steven and his siblings may not have directly received college advice from their grandfather, something still seems to have been handed down. His mother told me,

I never had a doubt that my kids wouldn't go to college. The thought never even crossed my mind that they wouldn't go. I always just assumed it. I never, never did it enter my head they wouldn't go. Never and I think maybe I always stressed it so, yeah, it never entered my head that they wouldn't go. I never even thought about it. I never assumed that they wouldn't go to college, isn't that funny?

Several times Laurie reflected that her children were gifted at education:

Growing up, never one time did I have to say, 'Did you do your homework?' never. It was just, you know, it was never an issue. I was really lucky, because I'd hear other mothers say that, never, not one time. And they always did their homework, you know, I was really lucky with the two boys.

It did not go unnoticed that Laurie said she was lucky with "the boys." Things were obviously not so lucky with Holly, but I did not mention this to Laurie immediately during our interview. I wondered about the relationship between Holly and her mother. Clearly, Laurie was proud of her sons, but her daughter, whom Laurie deemed the smartest of the three, dropped out of high school. Laurie told me, "That was a *hard time*, because I expected so much from her." Steven admitted his mother "can get on" his sister because she has started and stopped college and other ventures multiple times. Now she wants to be an EMT or nurse, according to Steven. Holly currently works as a server at a popular restaurant chain and Steven labeled her as "kind of a mess." This bucks the literature related to first-born children in that they tend to be more responsible and mature and display leadership qualities more than their younger siblings (Newman, 1991; Schultheiss et al., 2002; Updegraff et al., 2002). The mother-daughter relationship seemed, to me, at least during the study, to be quite strong, but they did have that rough patch in the years leading up to Lyle's death.

Financial hardship. Laurie told me, “My father died at 52 and left my mom enough money to live the rest of her life. She never had to work or anything.” The children never knew him as he died before they were born. He was successful enough that his wife never had to work, and when she died during this study, in November 2008, Steven claimed, “My grandmother had a lot of money.” From what I gathered, the grandparents did not share their money with others because Steven’s family was always poor. His mother worked in low paying positions and his father did not have steady employment due to his inability to keep a job because of his alcoholism, according to Holly. However, Holly did have suspicion that her grandmother helped her family financially at times, but they still remained poor. Financially, the Philips family used the term *poor* in describing themselves. Laurie talked about being poor:

They’re good kids. I’ve been really blessed. I’ve really been lucky, because we haven’t had the easiest life. Because we were poverty, dirt poor, but I always made sure they had the stylish stuff, somehow or another I’d get it, you know. So yeah, for what they had to go through, well their dad was an alcoholic and died young. And it was hard, but I made sure that they would fit in and be popular and they were. We moved out there [to Wilson] and my kids always got picked for homecomings, always got everything, so I was really proud of them.

Laurie expected the family’s financial situation would be different for Steven’s second year in college, as a result of receiving her mother’s inheritance. Realizing that this would affect her children’s financial aid packages, and realizing that all three children would be enrolled in college classes, she told me, “I got a pretty large inheritance, so this year they won’t get as much aid, so I’ll help them.” Appearing quite unlike a first-generation student, Steven knew the benefits of applying for financial aid early. He reflected:

I began the financial aid process at the beginning of my senior year. I didn’t submit my application until mid January because we needed to wait for tax forms

to be returned. The process of filing a financial aid application is complicated. My counselor, my mom, and my siblings helped out a lot with the process. But when I was finished, I felt more confident in the process.

Steven did not have a job other than refereeing football games during his first year, but in doing so, he made \$65-75 per game. Steven was awarded federal work-study, but he did not work during his first year, so that was foregone money, but he did not know that. I informed him how work study operates. When he asked if it would go toward tuition, I explained work-study money goes directly to him in the form of a check. His mother did not help him with tuition in his first year. Steven had a car, which he kept on campus. He said he did not save an exceptional amount of money prior to going to college, and was therefore financing his education through grants and one small loan. Slightly annoyed with the concept of loans, he said, "Housing pushed me over so I had to take out a loan." He did not use the free bus in town, but he sometimes would bike around town. In fact, he never even picked up his free bus pass. Brian also did not use the free bus system, but his apartment offered a free shuttle to campus.

Steven also spoke of his family's finances:

Growing up, my family wasn't very rich. My family struggled at times and other times we did fine. My parents did a good job of providing for my whole family. They always bought us things that most other people didn't have or the newest and coolest stuff. Even though we didn't have much money they really strived to provide for us in any way possible. My father was always working and worked really hard to provide for us. He was always doing his best to provide for my family. My mother did a really good job of managing money. To this day, my mother still uses coupons and looks for discounts on groceries. I believe that she is one of the thriftiest people on the earth hands down. She can get thirty dollars worth of groceries for less than ten dollars. I believe that she had a huge impact on how my family survived growing up.

Steven had a different take on his father's work compared to Holly. Holly asserted that sometimes her father would be out of work and they would often not even know it.

Steven continued to speak of his family's financial background:

Growing up in such a small town there was not a variety of people. Economically, for the most part, everyone had almost the same situation. There were really no rich or really poor in that community. It was basically a little middle-class community. So my financial situation was a little different in terms of total income. We did not have as much money as most of my community. Most of my friends in high school lived on farms and were doing a little better than my family. Farmers aren't the richest people in the world but they do pretty good compared to what the stereotypical thought is.

Are they still first-generation? When I told Laurie about the first-generation study she had doubts about her children's first-generation status: "I was wondering about that, if my kids are still considered first-generation?" I confirmed that yes, her children were considered first-generation college students, using the U.S. Department of Education's definition that neither parent had earned a Bachelor's degree (Chen, 2005). I have never seen any definitions of first-generation college students referring to grandparents' earning college degrees. There are some definitions that use "first in one's family to go to college," but this excludes all younger siblings and it causes problems of what constitutes family. For example, in the case of Steven, who never knew his grandfather, it would seem unfair to not consider Steven or his siblings as first-generation college students. I use the term unfair to refer to the exclusion of any first-generation scholarships or eligibility in federal TRIO programs on campus.

Theme 2: The Astute College Student

The second theme, like the first, is a variation of the first-generation student. Each child in the Philips family increasingly received more help regarding going to college than the previous child. This leads me to call Steven, the youngest, an astute

first-generation college student. Steven is a first-generation student, but his experience was quite unlike his brother or sister's. First-generation students are often thought to have limited knowledge regarding many aspects of the college experience, from deciding to attend to general day-to-day college customs (Bui, 2002; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). Steven, on the other hand, had good, accurate expectations of college.

Help from brother. Steven's older siblings did not have a trusted, inside contact like Steven had with in Brian. Steven, therefore, was able to be more astute and discerning as a student. He truly credits his brother and counselor for assistance in learning about college and seeing it as a viable option. With humbling gratitude, Steven acknowledged, "I had a lot of help" in the college process. Steven looked forward to getting out of his small town. Although rarely a topic found in the literature, some authors (Ceja, 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006) have noted the influence college students can have on their younger siblings. Steven was a beneficiary of his older brother's influence: "My brother definitely helped me out a lot. If it wasn't for him, I question whether I would have come to this university." Steven further continued,

I had many thoughts going through my head during high school about what I was going to do when I graduated. I didn't know if I was going to join the military, to go college, or just get a job right out of high school. I believe the turning point for me during my high school career was when my brother decided to go to RMU for his education...At that time I knew that if he could do it, I could too...I believe that my brother has had a significant impact on my decisions for the future.

While in high school, Brian took some courses for college credit through a dual enrollment agreement with a community college. Steven was not sure what initially got his brother interested in college or why Brian enrolled at RMU. But Steven certainly appreciated Brian's help with the admissions application and financial aid application and

his advice about college classes. Once Steven started at RMU, he and Brian did everything together, including going to football games. Steven and Brian were involved in all the same sports in high school and continue to play for leisure now. Some of these campus events the brothers participated in would make Holly, who was a non-student during the first part of this study, a bit jealous of the free activities students can do.

Brian helped with many aspects of Steven's collegiate experience. Essentially, Steven seemed to have awfully clear expectations of his first year. He knew his way around campus from visiting Brian at RMU. He knew how to sign up for classes and even which classes to pick or avoid. Brian served as a socialization agent for Steven, which is not uncommon for older siblings (Tucker et al., 2001). In time, Steven was able to reciprocate for his brother with a useful college student tool: "I taught my brother about prof-ratings," a student-run professor evaluation site. Steven seemed to have followed in his brother's footsteps by not getting involved on campus, save for their heavy and frequent use of the recreation center. Steven did not talk about friendsickness (longing for friends back home rather than making new friends in college) like others in the literature (Paul & Brier, 2001) report as typical for first-year students. He mentioned two friends in college: his roommate and someone from his class who had been on the all-state football team with him. He did, however, speak of friends from home more frequently than new friends. This could be because he made several trips back home, and perhaps more important, his best friend, who happened to be his brother, was just a few blocks away in an off campus apartment.

I asked Steven to reflect on how he thought his college experience may have been similar or different to that of his brother's. He stated:

My college life is a bit different from my older brother's but not very much different. I would say the most different thing about my college experience is the fact that I already know a lot about college life. My brother never got to see the college life first hand until he was actually there. I knew a lot about everything even before I was there. I think my college life is also very similar to my brother's as well. I feel like I have had the same experience as he did because we both grew up in a small town and the experience itself was very similar. We both were dropped off into a huge community that we were not used to and that was an exciting experience.

Help from guidance counselor. Steven shared he had an exceedingly good high school counselor, who also went to RMU for her undergraduate degree. Kate was an alumna of RMU and seemed to take a special interest in Steven's going to college, from the admissions application to financial aid and scholarships. He brought in his tax return information so she could help with financial aid. Steven shared how Kate helped him:

During high school, my high school counselor helped me out a lot in deciding what to do with my life. She had graduated from Rocky Mountain University and she knows a great deal about the college life. My counselor helped me from financial aid to admittance to housing. Without her influence, I question whether or not I would have gone to college at all.

He further detailed Kate's assistance:

When I began my senior year of high school, my counselor started to help my class with the financial aid process. She did a great job of telling us what information we needed and what forms were necessary for financial aid. She also told us about different grants, scholarships, and loans that each of us were eligible for and how to apply for them. So overall, I think that my counselor made applying for financial aid very easy.

Encouragement from mother. Brian and Kate were not the only individuals who influenced Steven to go to college, even though these were the two individuals he easily identified as such. His mother also played a large role, one that I doubt Steven realized during this study. Laurie certainly encouraged Steven to go to college. She works in Johnsville for a customer service call center and feels stuck in her position without a college degree. "I hate every minute of my job," she admitted without hesitation.

Steven's mother did not have a preference for him to attend RMU, just that he attend a college. He had thought about going into the military, but Laurie really did not support that idea. "Mom's proud of us for going to college," Steven said with assurance. In thinking of his father, he knew, "Dad would have been real proud of us for going to college." Laurie was honest about what she wanted for her sons:

Truthfully, I wanted Steven to go to another school, I really did, because Steven's different when he's not around Brian. He gets more outgoing. It's like he has to be like Brian, you know, and I really wanted him to go to a different school, just to have the college life.

Holly told me the same thing: "Steven is different when Brian's around," meaning Steven is more outgoing without his older brother around. Laurie, in our second interview, talked about this more:

I wanted them to kind of break apart, but they love each other [laughs]. 'Cause I would love it if Steven would have, you know, because they don't really do the college life. They, I wanted them to, have fun and stuff, and I remember one day I said to Brian, I said, 'Brian, why don't you guys go to some parties and stuff?' and Brian said to me, he said, 'College is not for fun, it's for learning,' [laughs] and I didn't think that was good, but I thought, oh well. Well, they go to all the sporting events, but they don't do anything else. I've finally accepted, ok, that, you know they don't have a lot of friends, but they're best friends and I thought, well, what's wrong with that? You know, and they could have other friends, but they just are best, best friends. I mean when you see one, you see the other.

Generational issues. Steven does not display some of the qualities that Howe and Strauss (2000) attribute to the Millennial Generation. For example, he is not interested in volunteering or participating in the campus community, but has strong ties to his community back home. However, his family is the most important thing to him. Steven is quite close to his mother, and he talks to her almost every day. This increased frequency of communication is more common for his generation, according to the literature on Millennial students (Howe & Strauss, 2000). He usually communicates with

his mother via phone, not email. His mother does not tell him what to do; rather she supports him and knows he needs to find his own path. Steven was not new to sharing room in the campus residence halls, as some Millennials are (Howe & Strauss, 2000). He shared a room with his brother until 10th grade, at which time, his sister ran away, freeing a bedroom in their house.

Theme 3: Strength of Family

The third theme relates to the strength of the Philips family. There was a turbulent time after Holly dropped out of high school and ran away with an older boy, a “tough time,” according to Laurie. Holly admitted during this time she hardly spoke with her parents. Also growing up, her brothers often picked on her because she was the only girl. Lyle’s alcoholism was also something that did not make the family proud, as even Laurie mentioned that she perceived her children to have found it “embarrassing.” He had trouble holding down jobs, and Laurie did not always work, leading the family to see some difficult financial times. The children knew they were not rich growing up, but they never knew how poor they actually were until they had reached early adulthood. Laurie always made certain her kids had the latest fashions. The days leading to Lyle’s death truly brought this family back together. Since then, the children have moved into young adulthood and have become much closer to each other and their mother. The other losses that occurred during that time (i.e., their aunt and grandmother), in conjunction with Laurie’s cancer scare, gave them a newer perspective on life and each other. As mentioned earlier, deaths in the family are often considered turning points (Balk, 2008) in the lives of the bereaved, and that was certainly the case in the Philips family.

The Philips family spends considerable time together. In my first interview with Laurie, she told me about her children: “I see the boys all the time. I have a daughter too, but I don’t get to see her very often. She works; she’s a waitress, she works totally opposite hours.” All three children lived in the same town (Johnsville), and although Laurie lives in Plainfield, she commuted to Johnsville four days a week for work. With fondness, Steven said, “I talk to my mom almost every day.” My first interview with Laurie was interrupted by Holly’s phone call to her mother. This is an extremely tight-knit family, I thought, because they communicate so frequently and see each other “all the time.” There is not much in the literature on White students who have extremely strong ties to their family, but one author found White students from rural backgrounds are often exceptionally committed to their families (Schultz, 2003). Some has been written about the Millennial generation being more connected to their parents (Howe & Strauss, 2000), so strong child-parent relations could be more common among the younger generation of college students. Another, perhaps more plausible reason for the strong bond in the Philips family could stem from the four deaths they endured in their family, I surmised, because this family was not always so close. Steven gave me the dates of losses:

April 2003— Holly’s prom date died in a car accident on his way home after dropping her off.

April 2005—Lyle, Steven’s father, died after battling cirrhosis of the liver due to alcoholism.

April 2006—Laurie’s sister died. Although the children did not seem as close to her, they felt badly for their mother.

November 2008—Steven’s maternal grandmother died. The grandchildren, particularly Holly, were particularly close to this grandmother.

After their spring break trip to Las Vegas Laurie reflected, “We’ve just had so many tragedies in the last few years, I thought it was time to just go enjoy ourselves, and we

did, we really did.” She was hoping to do another family trip next summer, possibly Disneyland.

Considerable time spent with family. I asked Steven to talk about how things may have changed with his family since he started college, and his response was probably one of most unique things that a college student might say about the family:

Since I started attending college, I don’t think my life has changed a whole lot in terms of family. However, I do get to see my family a lot more than I did in high school. But besides that I have not really had a significant change in terms of my family life since moving in to college.

In fact, while Steven was in high school, his mother spent most of her time with his ailing grandmother, and he frequently stayed home alone during his junior and senior years, especially when gas prices were high. This may have contributed to his maturity. He shared one example: “I can’t believe some guys on my floor don’t know how to do their laundry.”

Steven also mentioned there was little change in his family after he returned from Thanksgiving in his first year. With the exception of the death of his grandmother, he thought his family, as a unit, had experienced no change:

My first Thanksgiving coming back from college was not much different from the previous ones. We did basically all the same things that we usually do over Thanksgiving. I went up to my mom’s house in Plainfield and we had our dinner over there. I did get to spend a lot of time with my family and had a good time over break.

When he said “mom’s house” he was referring to his recently deceased grandmother’s house in Plainfield, not where he grew up in Wilson.

Steven saw his family more once he went off to college because he was living alone during his last year in high school. The children of the Philips family have seen a lot. Steven, in particular, was forced to mature at a more advanced rate than many

college students his age. He had to manage a household on top of his normal high school student responsibilities. Steven's first year in college was the first year in several where he was able to spend considerable time with his siblings and mother, which appeared to me to carry considerable meaning to this family. The family dynamic would have been undoubtedly different had Steven gone to college further away. The strength of this family is seemingly unshakable and perhaps impenetrable.

Difficulty connecting with family. I had some difficulties in connecting with the family. Missed appointments, missed rescheduled appointments, unreturned phone calls, and unreturned emails all caused me great puzzlement and wonder because I rarely encounter this in my day-to-day life. Steven was my gatekeeper to the rest of his family. He told them about the study and the women were willing to participate, but his brother never returned any of my phone calls or emails, and I was therefore not able to meet with Brian. Having good rapport with Steven, I could always count on him to respond to me and to arrive on time or early for our interviews, but toward the end of the study, even he missed some of our scheduled times. Without Steven's help, I am sure I would not have secured interviews with his mother and sister. At one point, he offered to bring Holly along for his interview with me, but he never made a similar offer to bring his brother along.

When I first started this project and had secured Steven as a participant, I enlisted his help in contacting Brian. He gave me Brian's cell phone number and email address. When these attempts at reaching Brian did not prove fruitful, I asked Steven to have Brian contact me. When I told Steven I had left Brian a couple of messages, he stated Brian probably did not have his voicemail set up, as his phone was new. He did not seem

enthusiastic about persuading his brother to talk to me, almost as though he did not want to give orders to his brother. I do not think anyone in this family answers the phone when an unrecognizable phone number appears on the caller ID. After our first interview, Steven would answer his phone whenever I called him. He kept all interview times with me perfectly during the academic year until April, in the second semester of this study, toward the end of his first year in college. In the first semester, his football officiating schedule was erratic, so he would call me if he needed to reschedule. Maybe he was more comfortable with me and knew how flexible I was with rescheduling. When I contacted him to reschedule, he apologized, "Sorry, I never write anything down."

It took several weeks to schedule my first interview with Holly and we rescheduled the second interview a total of three times. The formal second interview with Holly never happened, but I did track her down at her restaurant and she was genuinely noticeably pleasant with me, even though I do not think she was seeking a tip, but I could be wrong. After telling Steven I went to lunch at Holly's restaurant he said, "I hope she did a good job." My hope was that I left a large enough tip. I left her a 30% tip, but yet, she still failed to make our rescheduled interview four days later.

I thought in April, in the spring semester of the study, I would try to email Brian one last time. Like all others I sent him, this one also went unanswered. When Holly emailed me the next day, I jokingly told her to give him a hard time about it, and she did. She told me Brian said he never received the email. I told Holly I would forward it to her to pass onto Brian, to ensure that he got it, but I never heard again about this mysteriously vanishing email.

For some reason, this family is difficult to reach, and there could be a variety of possibilities as to why this is so. An alternative explanation could be that individuals from rural backgrounds tend to be more self-reliant (Schultz, 2003). Further, another alternative explanation related to social class and self-reliance suggests those from lower incomes backgrounds do not “need” others to help them. Borrego (2004) suggested many students from lower incomes feel ambivalent on campus, and this ambivalence could quite possibly extend to the family of origin. Once I was able to meet with Steven, Holly, and Laurie, I let them know my background (e.g., my farming background, first-generation status). After our first in-person contact, I could establish rapport, but the amount of time required in making first contact was a learning experience for me. Also extremely helpful was that Steven was recruited for this study by his academic advisor, someone he trusted.

I later speculated that, among the four family members, the more social an individual was, the easier it was for me to schedule an interview with them. In my mind, two were more extroverted (Steven and Holly) and the other two were more introverted (Laurie and Brian). Laurie told me outright that she had anxiety but she was willing to meet, probably because she saw some value in her contribution to aid in the “study about the boys,” as she once referred to it. Brian most likely was uncomfortable talking about himself and his feelings to a stranger. Individuals tend to avoid those situations that make them uncomfortable, but most are able to work through these situations, depending on how much anxiety the situation produces (Tillfors & Furmark, 2007). In their study of social anxiety among college students, Tillfors and Furmark found that just over 16% of students identified experiencing social phobia. Of that group, a quarter of them identified

making a phone call to a stranger as an anxiety-laden event, something they would probably avoid, if at all possible. Also, among the students with social phobia, a small percentage (8.6%) rated “maintaining a conversation with someone unfamiliar” (p. 84) as a potentially phobic situation.

Theme 4: Dimensions of Identity

The fourth theme relates to the Philips children’s multifaceted identities in terms of gender, race, and socioeconomic status. The siblings are linked by their background, in terms of lower socioeconomic status, their rural, mostly White hometown, and their experiences with witnessing their father’s alcoholism, his body shutting down, and eventual death. The Philips siblings are advantaged by their White racial identity, but this did not surface, most likely because they were never confronted with it. White people in this country are “still possible to exist without ever having to acknowledge that reality” (Helms, 1990, p. 54), and I believe this has been the experience of the Philips siblings. However, early in his first semester, Steven stated he was excited to get out of his small town to meet different kinds of people.

In terms of gender identity, Steven and Brian are also privileged with their masculine identities. Being a male was not something to which Steven had given much thought, but most first-year students are not yet able to articulate their gender identities (C. Linder, personal communication, March 2, 2010). Holly was confronted with what it means to be female. She went from running away and being entirely dependent on a male to being fully self-sufficient through her work. She lived with Brian during this study and was able to support him by charging him less than half the rent. The plan for

Steven's sophomore year in college, the year following this study, was that all three siblings would live together in Holly's apartment.

The family's rural background also seemed to have considerable impact on their identity, particularly for Steven. He returned home for a few high school football games and visited with former teachers and old friends. He even returned for the high school graduation the year after his class graduated to support one of his younger friends. Steven's ties to his home community were much stronger than to his university community. His strong connection with his community of origin is common for students from rural backgrounds (Schultz, 2003).

Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity illustrates the many facets of our identities, including race, culture, class, religion, gender, and sexual orientation within one's core. All of these personal attributes are present for each of us, but how important each attribute is to each person is different, depending on the context of family background, socio-cultural conditions, current experiences, and career decisions. Finally, "no one dimension may be understood singularly; it can be understood only in relation to other dimensions" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 410). For example, many facets of identity in mainstream culture are traditionally conceptualized as singular (i.e., race or sexual orientation or gender or religion, and so on). For Jones and McEwen, focusing on one piece of identity is incomplete. This notion is an important one to keep in mind as I examine the multiple dimensions of identity among the Philips siblings.

Holly's identity. Based on my interviews with Holly, we labeled her multiple dimensions of identity, which were identifiers she found salient and thought about daily.

What is important to Holly has certainly changed as she moved from adolescence to young adulthood. The death of her father significantly changed the way she views her family from a self-selected outcast to a more positive, contributing, engaged family member. Facets of her identity that she frequently thinks about are her roles as a female: woman, daughter, sister, granddaughter, girlfriend. After seeing firsthand what her life might have been like in her previous relationship, she deeply appreciated her independence and was proud to be self-sufficient through her work. She made enough money through her work that she could afford her apartment's rent and take classes part-time at Johnsville Community College. At age 23, she continued to explore what she wanted to do as a possible college major and career, but she expected it would be related to science and helping others in need. Her rural background did not seem to play as large a role as it did with Steven, but that could be because her high school experience was not as enjoyable and was cut short once she dropped out. She certainly had her regrets, including missing senior prom, senior class trip, and athletic events. In terms of her sexual orientation, she had no problem admitting that she always had boyfriends. In fact, she mentioned "always having boyfriends" in a way that sounded as though she had accomplished a great feat. This was in stark contrast to her brothers who rarely, if ever, had girlfriends. Her brothers, though, had each other's companionship. Holly established a good relationship with her mother after her father died, in Holly's early adulthood. Holly is a sociable and outgoing young woman. She enjoys having fun and wishes her brothers would be a bit more social so they could make more friends. She seemed to have worked through the losses of her father and grandmother and appreciated her time with them. Holly never spoke of her prom date's death, but it was not long after

his accident (probably three or four months) when she dropped out of school and ran away with an older boy. She did reflect on her past experiences and how she had changed:

I'm a lot different than I was in high school. In high school I wanted everyone to be my friend and I think as I've gotten older, I'm tired [after working 12 hour shifts]. I can't go to house parties, I can't party like I probably could have then. So I have my group of friends, but I don't hang out much. I'd rather be at home.

Using Josselson's (1987) theory of identity formation in women, Holly appears to be an Identity Achievement woman. One of the major themes of Identity Achievement women is their independence (Josselson, 1987). Josselson's description of Identity Achievement captures Holly's disposition: "She appeared to be a woman with a goal, a goal of her own choosing, a goal she was pursuing without looking right or left or letting other things distract her" (p. 86). There was a time when, as Holly stated, "I wanted everyone to be my friend," and her record with boyfriends attests to that. Now, however, Holly seeks pride in her personal accomplishments, rather than looking outward. Her current boyfriend respects her independence. Holly went through an intense period of separation or crisis (Josselson, 1987) in distancing herself from her family, and the ability to tolerate family guilt during adolescence is an attribute of Identity Achievement women. She does not suffer from the intense guilt often found among Moratorium (Josselson, 1987) women, who are in identity crisis and are incapable of forging their own realities. What matters most to Holly is not making others proud, but making herself proud through her accomplishments. Even though she does not know what exactly her major will be in college, she knows she wants to work in health-related area in a developing nation, even if temporarily. Holly's "commitments are based on an internalized set of values," (Josselson, 1987, p. 86) rather than commitments and life

choices being adopted by parental expectations. Similar to other Identity Achievement women, Holly is open to experience (Josselson, 1987), particularly in the form of what she wants to gain from her college education by learning for its intrinsic value.

Steven's identity. I worked with Steven to identify the salient dimensions of his identity. Thinking that he would not know enough about this task, I decided to first draft a list. I felt comfortable doing this after meeting with him throughout his first year in college. He was mostly in agreement with my list, but he definitely wanted to reflect this statement: "My family is very important to me." Facets he considers several times a week include: family, his rural background, his roles as son, grandson, brother, college student, and living a healthy lifestyle (i.e., athletics, watches what he eats). Also noticeably present is the fact that he has experienced multiple losses, but he never dwelled on these. I do not think that was necessarily a poor reflection of my relationship with him because he was this way with his high school counselor as well. Kate reported he went back to school almost immediately after his father died. Likewise, he only missed one day of classes when his grandmother died during his first year in college.

For Steven, there were pieces of his identity that were not challenges for him, or they were not in the way, so to speak, largely because of his privileged status and ability to blend in with the crowd. He likes to be noticed when he is involved in sports, but he does not like the spotlight outside of the playing field. Involvement in sports and fondness for community is typical for students from rural backgrounds (Shultz, 2003). Some identifiers did not play a large role in his identity, at least not in terms of thinking about these items on a regular occurrence. Things that Steven rarely thought about were the facts that he was White, male, heterosexual, and able-bodied. Students who have not

been forced to confront their heterosexuality often have not needed to consider that fact (Mueller & Cole, 2009). Steven mentioned a girlfriend once, but this topic seemed hardest for him to discuss. He had mentioned his love of athletics and working out. Therefore, being able-bodied, even if he did not mention it as important, is plainly important to him, more so than he might understand.

We spoke of finances a few times, but he was managing fine during his first year, so his financial comfort was not a large piece of his identity in his first year. I asked Steven if he was religious and he said “yes,” he considered himself religious, but as children, they were never forced to go to church and he still does not attend services, and this did not play a large role in his identity.

It is not a simple task to determine Steven’s White identity development using Helms’ (1990; 1995) model, as discussed in Chapter III, because he did not discuss this much. Once though, early in his first semester, he mentioned looking forward to meeting different kinds of people because his town was not exactly diverse, but this issue was not raised again. His interest in learning of those different than him was confirmed when he announced his favorite class in his first semester was Ethnic Studies. He also seemed supportive of President Obama, at least when Obama visited the RMU campus. Therefore, Steven might be working through the Pseudo-Independent status. If he were in Immersion/Emersion status, he might have felt strongly enough to mention his thoughts on racial matters, so I do not expect he was beyond the Pseudo-Independent status, which acknowledges racial inequities and does not assume people of color are inferior. He did not seem to over-identify with non-Whites, but I do not think any other status would be appropriate.

Using Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors, Steven struggled somewhat with *developing purpose*, in that his major was Undecided and seemed to have tremendous doubts as to what he would do in terms of majors and careers. In developing purpose, students make commitments to their personal values and possible vocation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Steven wanted a major where he could see a direct career path, and at the same time, he doubted his academic abilities in math and sciences and was not looking to challenge himself in these areas. In his first year at RMU his goal was to get through many of the general education requirements. Even more though, his primary focus in his first year of college was largely social and having a good time by being active, working out, and attending athletic events. As we followed up with each other in Steven's sophomore year of college (after the study was completed), he was more interested in finding a major that matched his values rather than focusing his search for a major primarily on career goals. Chickering and Reisser's vector of *developing mature interpersonal relationships* is another area Steven is working through as he did not seem to have exceptionally close relationships beyond his immediate family. He briefly once made reference to a girlfriend, but they had known each other since kindergarten, according his guidance counselor, and they are just friends now.

Summary

The direction of this study evolved from the original research proposal, which was to focus on two brothers in college. As the study evolved, it became a broader inquiry of the entire family, and the meaning they made of the college experience as first-generation college students from a lower income background. In this family, there were three siblings: an oldest sister and her two younger brothers. I was not able to meet with

the middle child, but met with the youngest brother, the sister, their mother, and the brothers' high school counselor. Their father died in 2005 from alcoholism, when the youngest sibling was a sophomore in high school. As I analyzed the data throughout the study, I realized that although these siblings were first-generation college students, their college experiences were unlike each others'. Furthermore, I realized that the act of going to college had skipped a generation (their parents did not attend college, but their grandfather did), leading me to call these students the first-again generation. I learned early that this family is immensely connected to each other, perhaps because they have experienced multiple losses in recent years (i.e., deaths of father, a boyfriend, grandmother, and aunt). The final theme analyzed in this study is the multiple dimensions of identity of both the oldest and youngest siblings.

The original research question of this study was to better understand the ways in which first-generation, White male, working class siblings traverse the college experience, and how these students make meaning of their experiences and multiple identities. It was not my original intent to interview Holly, but I found her experience to be too noteworthy to omit, as it helps paint a fuller picture of her brothers' experiences and the family's background. The Philips family opened themselves up to me, with the exception of Brian. This came as no surprise to Kate Matthews, his high school counselor, who told me it was four years before Brian initiated a conversation with her. The Philips siblings' story is one of loss, but it is also one of resiliency and hope. Their story is one of tragic deaths, teenage love and runaways, family secrets, silence, low income, high school popularity, half-court basketball shots, family healing, eventual familial solidarity, and three first-generation college student siblings all in college at the

same time. The Philips siblings' lives have not been an easy experience for these students, the first-again generation, but their resiliency and support for each other have propelled them to prosper during college.

The first theme regarding the emergence of the first-again generation was certainly something that surprised me. In fact, if we had not talked about grandparents, the topic might never have surfaced. As I have talked to colleagues about this phenomenon, a few have paused and said, "Oh, yeah, I know someone like that!" First-again students exist, but we are not sure yet to what degree and what significance a grandparent's role may be. As we have seen in this study, the grandfather's college knowledge was not directly handed down to his grandchildren since they never had contact, but what was established was a college-going expectation.

Steven gained tremendous college knowledge from his brother. They are both considered first-generation, and now, first-again students, but Steven's experience was much smoother. He had clear expectations of college, thanks largely to his brother. Steven, therefore, is considered to be an astute first-generation student who took advantage of his sibling's experience, the second theme.

The third theme related to the importance of the family. They were not always close and there was a time when Holly hardly spoke with her family. They all pointed to the multiple losses, particularly their father's death, as being a turning point for the family. Now, they spend as much time as possible together and plan spring breaks and other holidays together. I had some difficulty in making contact with this family. I had a trusted individual, my colleague, make the first contact with Steven as she told him of the study. It is difficult to speculate whether I would have had the same success with Steven

had my colleague not warmed him to the idea of participating in this research. Once I met with the participants, they were more than willing to help me in any way they could. I just needed to pass the hurdle of making the appointment, but with Brian, that hurdle was never cleared.

The fourth theme was the siblings' multiple dimensions of identity. Although they are linked by their common experiences as children, they began to individuate more during adolescence. Holly ran away, Brian went to college, and Steven lived at home alone. Steven especially, had to mature at a faster rate than his peers. For all the losses they have endured, their resilience kept them afloat.

Throughout the study, I heard repeatedly from Kate (the school counselor), Laurie, and Holly that Brian and Steven were inseparable. "When you see one, you see the other," Laurie said with warm, motherly approval. Linked by their shared familial experiences, rural background, ethnicity, losses, economic situation, and love of family, the three siblings were expecting to live together in Holly's apartment after Steven's first year in college, as soon the university permitted him to live off campus. Clearly, these siblings are a cohesive unit. A positive outlook on life and the ability to look to each other for support have carried these siblings far.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This is a story about three first-generation college student siblings who have found their way to college after overcoming a number of obstacles. This inquiry reveals that because of the high level of support they have received along the way—from each other, their mother, their late father, and their high school guidance counselor—each sibling has progressively encountered fewer and fewer obstacles along the educational journey. Moreover, the dissertation puts forward the notion of the first-again generation student as a result of the college experience having skipped over these siblings' parents, who are considered the skipped generation. Consequently, going to college for the Philips children was always an expectation, and until my interviews with Laurie, the siblings' mother, she had never contemplated that her children might not go to college. It is no wonder, then, that Holly's dropping out of high school caused such a rift in the family, something her mother called, "such a *hard* time." The illness and eventual death of the siblings' father became the catalyst that brought this once fragmented family back together into a tremendously cohesive unit. Additional bereavement from subsequent losses fostered further unity.

There are multiple types of first-generation college students. Higher education officials need to resist the temptation to assume first-generation students are a homogenous group, just as transfer students are understood to represent a diverse group

of students, from different income levels, different ethnicities, different geographical backgrounds, different college experiences, and so on. First-generation students can be utterly lost on campus, or they may blend in with continuing generation students, as was Steven's case. He did not readily think of himself as a first-generation student. While still in high school he made several campus visits to see his older brother, had a good idea of the residence halls, which classes to take (and avoid), and how to navigate the collegiate system. In short, he had good cultural capital as college student at Rocky Mountain University. On the other hand, Holly, who dropped out of high school and later attended a career and technical institution mistakenly assuming those courses would transfer to a more traditional institution, had little college knowledge. Holly, therefore, can be considered to have had little cultural capital in the college context.

Being a first-generation student was not a large part of Steven's identity, at least in the way he described himself. However, Steven's acknowledgement of his first-generation status was a source of pride when he reflected on his status. His father would have been proud of him for going to college, he said with a certain level of contentment. Steven also knew his mother was proud of him. But when scholars or institutions begin to label or perceive first-generation students as "at-risk" or "less than," holding first-generation status becomes an embarrassment, a deficit, and something to be remediated. Students are more willing to discuss topics that make them feel good about themselves rather than topics that make them feel inferior. I encountered this when I asked Steven if he had encountered any first-generation blunders, to which he denied any. As I refocused my thoughts, I realized a better way to ask this was to direct the conversation more toward his college expectations. Although I was unable to meet with Brian, it appeared

from others that Brian went to college with far fewer prior visits to campus and on-campus contacts than his younger brother. Clearly, Steven was a beneficiary of his older brother's help, and he readily acknowledged this fact in our first interview. Steven had a built-in support system on campus, whereas Brian was on his own. Steven's first year college experience was exponentially smoother than his brother's.

This final chapter provides a summary of the research findings as well as implications for both research and practice based on the findings that emerged from this study. At its simplest, the study calls for broader consideration of the traditional notions of family and first-generation students. More specifically, I discuss implications for practice within higher education related to issues concerning siblings, first-again students, and grandparents. Finally, I discuss areas to consider for future research in the subjects of social class, college student siblings, first-again students, and grandparents.

Inquiry Summary

First-generation students are often lumped together, but as I found in this study, they are rather diverse, even if they are siblings of the same family of origin. It is a disservice to students to assume "first-generation" means the same thing to everyone. For some students, like Steven, "first-generation" status hardly came up. On the other hand, his older brother and sister have had much different, trying college experiences. Brian will soon graduate, but at age 23, Holly's mix of credits from two community colleges is still not enough to classify her as a sophomore in college.

There were four themes that emerged from this study. The first two themes more accurately describe two variations of first-generation college students. The first-again generation is a new concept that recognizes some first-generation students have

grandparents who have gone to college, but their parents did not, making these parents a skipped generation of college attendance. Therefore, the younger generation, the first-again generation, is re-establishing a college going tradition within the family.

Depending on their grandparents' influence some first-again students could more closely resemble continuing generation college students, particularly if these college educated grandparent raised their grandchildren. On the other hand, some first-again students may not have ever met their college educated grandparents, so the grandparents' direct influence may be questionable or non-existent. In this study, the Philips siblings never met their college-educated grandfather, but their grandfather had encouraged his four children to go to college, and in turn, the Philips siblings' mother, Laurie, always encouraged her children to go to college. In fact, it never entered her mind that her children would not go to college.

The second theme also provides a more accurate depiction of another group of first-generation students. The astute college student is also a new concept that recognizes the contributions of older siblings of first-generation students. Some might argue that there can only be one family member who can be classified as a first-generation student, which would be the student who was first in the family to go to college. However, even Fuji Adachi, who is credited for coining the term "first-generation" (Billson & Terry, 1982), identified first-generation students as those students who had neither parent with a Bachelor's degree. Others, such as Billson and Terry (1982) advanced the notion that first-generation students were students with parents who had no college degree. They further clarified that a first-generation student was the first in the family to go to college, but simultaneously observed, "A student is considered first-generation even if a *sibling*

(emphasis added) has attended college” (p. 58). Billson and Terry’s research was the first and only work to include siblings in how they defined first-generation students. The current study adds to body of literature a more thorough understanding of the effect siblings can have on each other as they traverse the college experience. In this study, Steven, the youngest sibling, was identified as the astute college student because, even though he was a first-generation college student, his expectations of college were rather accurate, thanks to his background knowledge of college. There were several factors that contributed to his heightened awareness of college. First, he made several visits to the campus while still in high school as he visited his older brother in college. Steven later enrolled at the same institution where his brother was still enrolled, so Brian continually assisted his younger brother in multiple aspects, such as course registration, which professors and classes to elude or attempt, how to get tickets to sporting events, and the campus layout. Steven also knew the value of applying early for the best housing option and financial aid packages. Steven’s experience as a first-generation college student is not the one higher education officials tend to conjure up when they hear the term “first-generation.” Instead, first-generation status is often associated with students’ having certain deficiencies.

To be sure, there were instances where Steven’s first-generation status was more apparent. His connection to the campus community was weak. He spoke more fondly of his trips back home to his community. Steven’s most memorable experiences from his first year in college had little to do with being a college student. These memorable experiences included his spring break trip with his family, seeing Barack Obama on campus, working out in the recreation center, and attending sporting events. These

experiences probably would not have happened had he not been a student, but at the same time, anyone in the community could have seen Obama and gone to football and basketball games. Steven's search for majors was guided by the type of job he could do, rather than learning for its intrinsic value. He was not well-traveled, having been on an airplane one time prior to his 18th birthday for his high school senior trip to California. Traveling by car, he had not ventured beyond neighboring states. Had he not gone to college after high school, his other options would have been enlisting in the military or doing "some labor job."

The third theme detailed the Philips' family's loyalty to each other. They attributed their closeness to Lyle's premature death. The other losses they encountered coupled with Laurie's bout with cancer strengthened the family even more. They have turned to each other as sources of support and comfort and seem to have little need for outsiders, as evidenced by my difficulty in making contact with the family and the limited number of non-familial friends who were mentioned during this study. The three siblings were going to live in Holly's apartment during Steven's sophomore year (Brian's senior year) in college. Brian and Steven are best friends, causing Laurie to wonder how they would do apart. She called them "inseparable," but had secretly hoped Steven would have chosen a different college so he could become more independent of his brother. Holidays and many weekends are spent together as a family, enjoying each other's company. Spending spring break together as a family, as they did in Steven's first year in college when they went to Las Vegas, might become an annual event.

The final, fourth theme focused on Holly's and Steven's multiple identities. Brian's identity was excluded because I did not meet with him, although after hearing

from Laurie, Holly, and Kate, Brian's dimensions of identity are quite possibly similar to Steven's. Holly's identity was tied closely to her newfound independence that she realized through supporting herself financially through her work and by being in a period of transition as she worked her way toward earning a college degree. Using Josselson's (1987) work on women and identity, Holly was identified as being in an Identity Achievement woman because her sense of pride comes from what she accomplishes, as opposed to experiencing fulfillment by pleasing others.

Steven's identity revolved around his family and his strong ties to his community back home. Being White, male, and heterosexual—sources of privilege—were not items he identified as being important to him, probably because he had not yet been confronted with his privileged position in these areas. Steven was well aware of his family's financial background and experience and appreciated the sacrifices his parents endured to enable his siblings and him to be comfortable. This experience humbled Steven and he did not think anything was entitled to him. Using Chickering and Reisser's (1993) work, Steven was identified as working through the Developing Purpose vector, as he constantly struggled with his choice of majors and possible careers.

I wish I could have met with Brian, but based on what I heard from the women in the study, I understand why he chose not to meet with me. The women—Kate, Laurie, and Holly—talked about Brian's anxiety, but Steven never did. From what Holly and Laurie told me, it seemed as though Steven truly looked up to his older brother. When Steven talked about Brian, he usually recounted stories of what they did together or how he looked up to his brother in awe, though he never used the word "awe." The greatest examples of this were when Steven said "I probably wouldn't be in college if it wasn't

for my brother,” and “I knew that if my brother could go to college, then so could I.” As I write this, I realize Steven only had positive things to say about his mother and father as well. He told me, “Dad was always giving us lessons,” as he fondly remembered his father. He never talked negatively about his father’s alcoholism.

Neither Steven nor Holly talked negatively about their mother, but it was clear Holly’s relationship with her mother was strained for a few years when she ran away. During that time, Holly identified more with her maternal grandmother. Steven never mentioned any strained relationship with any family member. He seems to have the ability to focus on the positive aspects and strengths of others. However, on a more practical note, Steven probably had a keener sense as to what I was going to do with these findings, in that I would write it, so he may have held back on any negativity.

There were details I heard from Laurie and Holly that, I am sure, would surprise each other. I am reminded of the warnings issued by others (Ellis 2004; R. Rodriguez, 1982) when conducting research or writing stories about families: Family secrets will be unleashed. Family secrets, were, indeed revealed to me in this study, and I will leave it up the reader to perceive those, as the aim of this research is to look at family dynamics in relation to pursuing higher education. Moreover, this study is one that honors a family who has experienced multiple losses, and yet has remained positive and resilient in the face of loss and struggle and will eventually see three first-again students earn Bachelor’s degrees, thanks in part, to the enormous support for education the children received throughout their lives. The Philips children were beneficiaries of positive naming (Rodriguez, 2001), which is a gift of early and continual encouragement youth receive

from family and teachers to go to college or to enter certain occupations that clearly require college educations.

Implications for Practice

First-Again Students, Siblings, and Twins

White first-generation students from rural backgrounds may not have had much exposure to people who are different from them until they reach college. While diversity programming at institutions benefits everyone, some scholars suggest that student affairs professionals should consider that many activities designed to promote student learning and development may be perceived as threatening (i.e., threatening to values instilled by family, geography, community, or religion, among others) to first-generation students, so programming should be approached in supportive ways for these students (Lundberg et al., 2007). Fortunately, Steven was ready and willing to learn about differences, but not all first-generation, first-year students are so willing to embrace otherness.

Some implications of this study reach beyond higher education by including secondary education. Steven's high school guidance counselor, Kate, was instrumental in helping him apply early to college, housing on campus, and financial aid. Not every student is fortunate enough to receive this outstanding level of support and positive encouragement.

In the classroom, faculty might rarely know the details of their students' backgrounds in terms of educational background, family background, social class, and first-generation status, as examples. Even so, a first-generation student from a rural area, such as Steven, would probably be quite different from a first-generation student from an urban area. One way faculty can enhance their knowledge of their students' background

could be to offer an assignment, tied to the subject matter, which incorporates the students' backgrounds. Another assignment, which I have done in a first-year seminar, and again with Steven, was to have the students write a letter to an imaginary incoming student, providing insight and advice on how to be a successful student in college. It is amazing how honest students will be when they know their audience is another student, and this also provides an alternative framework to see how our students have changed or adjusted their college expectations or study habits.

At new student orientation, I no longer simply accept that a student may be first-generation, which is provided to me by the institution along with standardized test scores. I take it a step further by asking my students if they have had older siblings who have gone to college before them, and if it was at the same institution. I often feel more assured when a first-generation student tells me an older sibling has already gone through the college process, assuming their sibling relationship is healthy and intact, which, of course, is not always the case. Taken a step further, when possible, I will ask these students how they might have been aided by their older siblings. But even among continuing generation students, I also feel that students with older siblings in college are better off than continuing generation students without older, college-educated siblings. Each year I also encounter students who are twins who come to college together, and this is another group to consider for practice. What are the college experiences of twins? One set of identical twins assigned to me began their first year in college as undeclared in the major, then changed to Computer Science and then changed again to Business. They tried to take similar classes and even came to my office together for appointments. I had trouble differentiating these twins because of this. The only difference I could detect was

that one had a slightly higher GPA. Similar to Steven and Brian in this study, the twins I worked with continued to use each other for support, seemingly to the point of limiting their social network to outsiders. Twins may or may not have gained the insights from an older sibling who previously went college, but their experience, their stories, is worthy of consideration.

Twins might be an easier group of students to study than other forms of sibling relationships. As stated above, institutions tend to feature twins or triplets more so than they may feature siblings. One reason for this is that our culture has a peculiar fascination with twins and triplets, particularly when the siblings are identical twins or triplets. It might be possible to have a focus group of twins and triplets at an institution to investigate how they have made meaning of their college experience. A similar focus group of siblings on campus may not realize the same attention or be as trendy as a “twins study,” but doing so could yield further results to inform practice for both student affairs personnel and faculty.

Grandparents

The limited literature on grandparents of college students points to financial support. Other sources of support have not been identified or studied. Also, the first-again phenomena has not been previously identified. We know very little about grandparents. In student affairs, it is common to say “Parents and Family,” but what is meant by the word *family*? Some may picture younger siblings or non-parental caregivers. When I was in grammar school, most permission forms were to be signed by either “parent or guardian.” Obviously, “parents and family” is a much more inclusive and positive term, but what if colleges would sponsor a “grandparent’ day”? I recently

learned my grandmother, at age 82, had created a Facebook account when she asked to be my “friend.”

Grandparents will only continue to get better connected to technology and may want to be more involved in their grandchildren’s lives. Also, once current college students’ parents grow older and become grandparents, they will probably not sit idly in retirement. Could today’s so-called helicopter parents become “helicopter grandparents” in the future? Do helicopter grandparents already exist? In my work with students, I have encountered mothers-in-law, aunts, parents, siblings, spouses, boyfriends, and girlfriends working on behalf of students, but never grandparents. A reasonable expectation is that in future years more grandparents will have experienced college, and will be willing to pass on their college knowledge to their grandchildren. Student affairs leaders, faculty, and others might benefit from training on grandparent-grandchildren issues.

It would be useful to find out how many of our first-generation students are first-again students. The Rocky Mountain University admissions application asks students if either parent earned a Bachelor’s degree. We could go a step further and ask if a grandparent had earned a degree. Even if this question may not be deemed appropriate for an admissions application, perhaps a survey of all new students could garner that information, which should be shared with student personnel (i.e., academic advisors and career counselors) and faculty. Students are reporting stronger ties to their families, and with the high usage of mobile phones, texting, and social media sites, such as Facebook, students are keeping in high contact with their families. Students’ families are probably not going to subside in the near future, and showing genuine interest in their families could improve their relations with us, leading to greater satisfaction for all involved.

Social Class and Practice

Do faculty or student affairs practitioners treat students from lower incomes differently? How do institutions support students who cannot afford textbooks? There is even a growing number of students who report being homeless (J. Donovan, personal communication, February 8, 2010). Critical theorists are advocates who work for the empowerment of the oppressed (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) and lower income students are certainly disadvantaged in multiple ways. Fortunately, for the Philips siblings in this study, their parents, and mother in particular, sacrificed enough so their children were insulated from the knowledge that they did not have much money. Higher education officials, even if they are unable to provide enough financial support for these students, should be informed and trained in issues of class and made aware of the students who cannot afford the expenses that are inherent in attending college, such as housing, meal plans, trips back home, computers, current fashions, and so on. Furthermore, assumptions that parents always pay for tuition and that all students have laptops and cell phones reinforces the status quo and can alienate those students who do not enjoy these “necessities.”

Areas for Future Research

First-Again Students

Researchers should refrain from categorizing all first-generation students as a group with a shared identity, accepting that first-generation students are opposite continuing generation students. First-generation status is one of many identities students might have, but simply because researchers are interested in first-generation student issues, it does not mean first-generation students will always identify as such. There are

multiple layers of “first-generation,” as shown in this study with both first-again students and astute first generation students. Other pieces of one’s identity need to be considered simultaneously, such as gender, class, ethnicity, geographic background, familial loyalty, sexual orientation, religion, and anything else a student finds important. Inquiries could be made to campus individuals who work in offices or departments whose primary objectives are to serve first-generation students to discover how these individuals make sense of the vast differences these students may present. Constructivist studies allow for more in depth study of these issues and they permit participants voices to be heard. Quantitative studies typically identify a few of these items, such as gender and ethnicity, but giving students more options to accurately describe themselves would yield more reliable and robust data.

If equipped with a sizable budget, first-generation students could be provided with video cameras to document and self-report their experiences and what they find interesting as they progress through their first year in college. MTV did this with four new students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in a series called *College Life*. Because it was produced and edited by MTV with a presumed target demographic of high school and college students, these students predictably spoke of parties and dating relationships, but they also documented their academic struggles and parental pressure to succeed.

An issue raised in this dissertation but given only little attention was that different personality characteristics lead to different research findings. My attention and consequently the results of this study were focused primarily on those who agreed to participate. More social or extraverted types of students are more likely to participate in

this kind of research, and quite obviously, anyone willing to speak into a video camera will be more outgoing. This leads to less research on the more introverted and shy types. Perhaps quantitative research is a better mechanism for those who are not as outgoing.

Several questions could be addressed in future research with first-generation and first-again students. Do college personnel treat first-generation students differently than continuing generation students? Is it assumed that first-generation students know little of the campus expectations and give them more assistance, or do we instead employ the “sink or swim” philosophy? Do advisors guide first-generation students toward less rigorous majors? Do faculty members talk to first-generation students about graduate school as much as they do with continuing generation students? Do we, in higher education, show interest in our students by asking them about their siblings and family? Some of these questions, particularly the ones regarding differential treatment of students, would lend themselves well to more critical research.

Grandparents

Little is known about college students and the grandchild-grandparent relationship. We need to find out from grandparents, we need to hear their voices. Unfortunately, the grandparents involved in this study were deceased. In fact, the Philips children never met their grandfather, but they were always expected to go to college. This may not have been the case had their grandfather not gone to college. Grandparents who were first-generation college students, and whose children are skipped generation students, and whose grandchildren are members of the first-again generation, would certainly have an interesting story to tell.

Grandchildren can have close relationships with their grandparents. Holly said she and her grandmother had matching personalities. Her close relationship with her grandmother is consistent with other research (Harwood & Lin, 2000), which found significant bonds between grandmothers and grandchildren. For a few years, Holly chose to spend more time with her grandmother than with the rest of her family. As nuclear families continue to be expanded, grandparents play a more prominent role in their grandchildren's lives. Similarly, as the expected lifespan increases, grandparents have the potential to be involved in their grandchildren's lives for longer periods than in previous decades.

The roles of grandparents or siblings in the lives of first-generation college students are hardly present in the literature. First-generation students could participate in focus groups to uncover the roles their families, including grandparents and siblings, may have played in their educational journeys. More could be done to ask first-generation students about grandparents' support and educational level. Unless surveyed, talking with students is one of the only ways to identify first-generation students. Some may ask if we should care whether a student's grandparents went to college. Having this information may or may not always matter, but it does provide a fuller understanding of the student's background. Could it be that first-generation college students whose grandparents went to college have better, more accurate expectations of college, or higher educational aspirations than first-generation students whose grandparents did not go to college?

The Skipped Generation

By definition, every first-generation student must have a parent who is part of the skipped generation of going to college. I met with Laurie during this inquiry and

was fortunate enough to hear her story. Going to college was simply not for her, but she instilled the value of a college education in her children and always assumed they would attend college. It would be fantastic if more parents could tell their story to help student affairs practitioners and faculty guide their children through the college years.

Recently I encountered a first-generation doctoral student who told me her father was a skipped generation member in that he chose not to go to college as an act of rebellion against her grandfather. In turn, this young woman felt her father held some resentment of her educational attainment, and he never attended any of her commencement ceremonies. Learning more about the skipped generation could have the potential to unlock important information about who goes to college and who does not.

First-Generation Siblings and Twins

One hypothesis for a possible quantitative study could be first-generation college students with siblings in college have more realistic expectations of college than continuing generations students without siblings in college. A survey of students from multiple institutions could be used to measure expectations. Without any effort, I have come across feature stories of multiple siblings attending two of my affiliated institutions. Slightly more effort could lead to interesting studies of twins or triplets who attended different institutions.

The sibling relationship is one of the most powerful and longest lasting chance encounters we may see in our lives (Tucker et al., 2001). In doing this study, I have become more attuned to siblings who are concurrently enrolled in the same college, and my belief is that siblings in college are more numerous than might be expected. Unfortunately, this is not something that has been given attention, so it is impossible at

this point to know the percentage of sibling pairs (or more configurations) at a given institution or the across the U.S. Assuming their relationship is good, students who go to college with an older sibling at the same institution have a built-in mentor, a trusted individual with a shared history who can socialize them to campus and college expectations. One way to begin this research would be to review the literature on twins or triplets in college. Two of my affiliated institutions have featured students who were triplets in campus news or alumni magazines (Hass, 2009; Tarnacki, 2006). Although these articles were not published to large audiences— making these students’ experiences and other instances of siblings in college difficult to discover— beginning with offices such as Admissions, Alumni Affairs, or Public Relations could be a start to obtain articles written of twins or triplets of an institution.

Social Class Research

Although scholars have also made important contributions on the topic of White individuals from lower income backgrounds (Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Howell, 1973; King, 2000; Lubrano, 2004, Moss, 2003; Poast, 2002; Schultz, 2003), discussions of class remain the “uncool subject” (hooks, 2000, p. vii) and thus cause discomfort for many involved (Barratt, 2007; Borrego, 2003). Discussing class issues acknowledges class differences exist.

Conclusion

As the current state of the economy affects more and more college students and their families, some college students could quickly find their class standing to be in question if a layoff affects their family or if their family home is taken into possession by their mortgage lender. These students could turn more to their grandparents and other

family members as sources of support. Perhaps now, in light of the current economic climate, is a more acceptable time to discuss class and consider broader family issues. Conversations of class may continue to make others feel uncomfortable, but these important conversations can be productive rather than threatening.

EPILOGUE

Steven continues to send me email messages once in a while to ask questions about classes during regular semesters or summer session. Recently, he asked me to serve as a job reference. As of Spring 2010, he was planning on double majoring with Journalism and Political Science or Liberal Arts. Steven's sophomore year means it is currently Brian's senior year. I have not heard of his plans yet for after graduation, but I assume his plans remain with law enforcement. Currently, all three siblings live together in Holly's apartment. I have not heard from her since last summer, but Steven told me she was still taking classes at the community college.

I recently looked at the Wilson school district's website and it appears their staff now have access to district-issued email accounts (Kate had to use her Hotmail account when I made contact with her). But more surprising was that Kate's position was posted for hire. I asked Steven if he had heard anything about that, but he had not. He did not seem too concerned that someone who had helped him so much was leaving or gone. This could be a good sign he is independent enough to be on his own through the college endeavor. Steven, in his sophomore year in college, also seems to be less concerned with his Wilson community and more interested in his RMU community. One question that remains will be how he and Brian handle being apart after Brian graduates, particularly if Brian's interest in law enforcement requires him to leave the state.

As I prepared to present the topic of the first-again generation at a national conference, I sought the help of colleagues who work closely with first-generation

students. Three students' names were forwarded to me, and I will never forget what one of these first-again students told me. This one student in particular was a first-again student because her parents did not attend college but her grandparents were college professors. She said, "I always knew I was different than the other *real* first-generation students in my classes." At the conference, one audience member in particular approached me and thanked me for studying this topic. As a first-again generation student, she never quite knew how to respond when asked if she was a first-generation college student. In the past her response to the first-generation question was, "Yes, kind of," and then she would go on to explain that her parents did not attend college but her grandfather was a doctor. The first-again term gave her new language to more accurately reflect this missing piece of her identity that she had previously struggled with in trying to make sense of her place among these generational issues.

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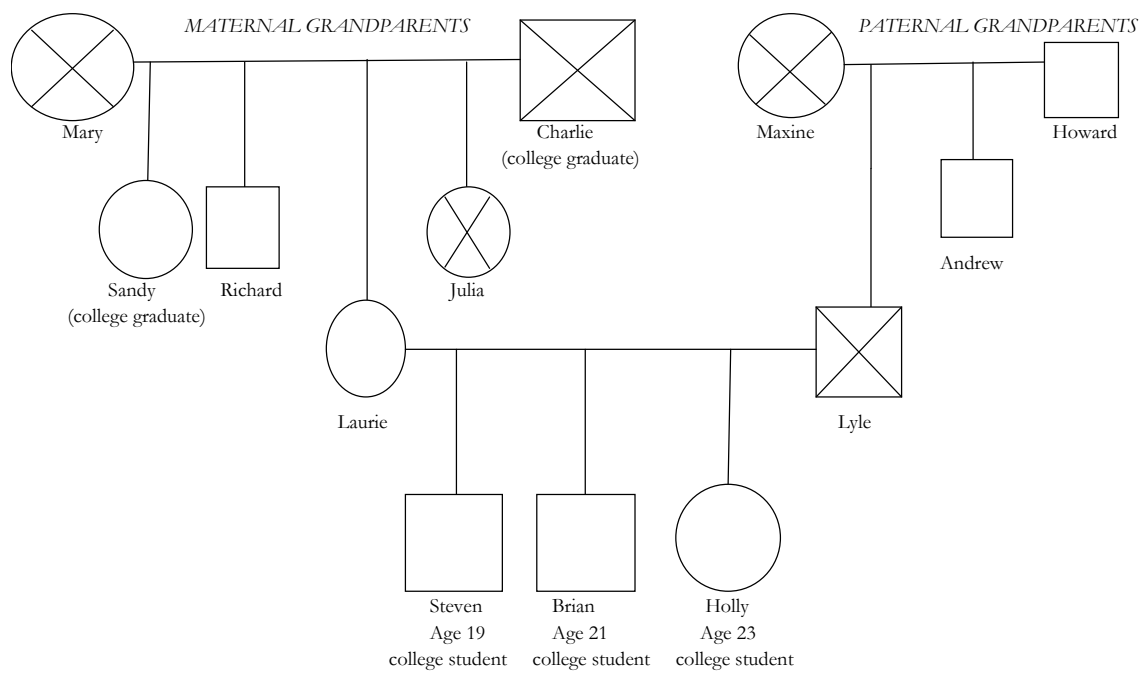
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APPENDIX A
PHILIPS FAMILY GENOGRAM

“X” denotes deceased family member



SIBLINGS IN THIS STUDY

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent for Participation in Research
University of Northern Colorado

TITLE OF THE STUDY: First-generation college students, siblings, race, gender, and class.
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rene Couture, 4th Floor McKee Bldg, University of Northern Colorado, 970-

RESEARCH ADVISOR: Dr. Florence Guido, 4th Floor McKee Bldg, University of Northern Colorado, 970-

GENERAL PURPOSE AND NATURE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to learn more about first-generation college student siblings. You are invited to participate in this research because you are a first-generation college student at Rocky Mountain University (a pseudonym). I am interested in learning more about your experiences, thoughts, feelings, and ideas regarding the student's participation in higher education and how it has impacted you.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The study will take place primarily at Rocky Mountain University. Secondary locations may include the students' home and home town. The study will last from August 2008 to May 2009. Interviews and observations will be conducted throughout that time period. Interviews will be arranged to last one hour, but they may not always last that long and may be stopped at any point. Follow-up interviews may be suggested.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? As a participant in this research study, you will be invited to participate in interviews with me. The interviews will be tape recorded to accurately capture your thoughts, feelings and experiences related to being a first-generation college student. Examples of the types of interview questions may include:

- When did you decide to attend college?
- What is it like have a sibling here with you?
- What do you wish you had known prior to coming to college?
- Who has been influential in your decision to attend college?
- If you hadn't come to college, what do you think you'd be doing now?

You will also be invited to keep a journal, which I will provide, to record your thoughts, experiences, and reflections.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? I will keep your information private. You will be given the opportunity to select a pseudonym, or made-up name, by which your information will be identified. Only I will have access to your real name. I may publish the results of this study, but I will keep your name and other identifying information private. You should know, however, that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed and that there are some circumstances in which I would be required to reveal your information, such as if you were to pose a danger to yourself or to others.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? Sometimes it can be uncomfortable to talk about yourself or others in interviews or through journaling. You will be able to stop the interviewing at any time if you become uncomfortable.

WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no direct benefits to participating in this research, but it is possible your involvement will benefit others who are first-generation students with siblings in college.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
Unfortunately, I am unable to pay you for your participation in this study.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? The only expected cost is the time required for interviews and writing in journals.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? After completing the interviews, I will send you a copy of the typewritten transcript of your interview to review for accuracy. You may make suggestions for changes or additions to the transcripts at that time.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1907.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research staff

Obtain your parent or guardian's permission ONLY if you are under 18 years of age.

APPENDIX C
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION

University of Northern Colorado State University

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Application for Expedited Review

Section I – Statement of Problem / Research Question

The purpose of this research is to explore how two White first-generation college student siblings make meaning of their collegiate experience. Issues of first-generation status, socioeconomic class, gender, sibling relationships in college, and race will be explored. Although this will be a qualitative and emerging study, I have a few hunches guiding the research, and thus, leading to my interest in the topic. First, I expect that the younger sibling will have a more realistic expectation of the entire college process, beginning with the admission and financial aid application process and throughout his first year. Should they both be considered first-generation students? (I was the third in my family of six children to go to college, and under current definitions, my siblings and I were all considered first-generation, although I certainly benefited from my older siblings' college knowledge.) Most definitions of first-generation students only look at parents' education status, such as not having earned a Bachelor's degree. Rarely, if at all, have siblings been considered in first-generation dialogue and literature. For this study, I define students, whether they are siblings or only children, as first-generation students, if their parents have no college experience at all.

Section II – Method

1. Participants:

- a) *Are the participants adults (18 years and over)? The primary participants (the two male college siblings) will be 18 or over. However, other individuals suggested by the participants may also be interviewed. These individuals could include other family members, teachers, and friends, and some of these individuals could potentially be under the age of 18.*

Are the participants vulnerable (e.g., prisoners, illegal immigrants, pregnant, cognitively impaired, financially destitute)? I do not anticipate the participants of this study to be pregnant, cognitively impaired, undocumented immigrants, or financially destitute. It is possible that some of the other individuals that the participants suggest I interview could fall into these categories, but if so, I will ask them to suggest others instead.

- b) Describe the source from which you plan to obtain your sample of participants. It is not enough to say, for example, that participants will be UNC students or Greeley second graders. Be more specific. *Participants will be current university students and siblings. I will work with the TRIO office to identify a number of students who fit the criteria of being White male first-generation college students (one freshman and one upper class student), from lower income backgrounds, with their home of origin from northern Colorado or southern Wyoming. They will be sent a letter describing the research and instructed to contact Rene Couture if they are interested in participating in the research or if they have questions regarding the research.*
- c) How are participants to be contacted initially? *Interested students will be called on the telephone to discuss the general nature of the study. If students remain interested, we (both male participants and I) will meet in person to discuss the full nature of participation. If they agree to participate, I will ask them to inform their parents as well to see if they have any questions to make certain parents understand my role.*
- d) How will they be made aware of their right to volunteer or not, procedures to insure confidentiality, and the general nature of activities for which they are being asked to volunteer? Typically, the LI will explain that these questions are answered through the process of documenting informed consent. *I will explain the full nature of the research project, including their right to volunteer or to withdraw from the research study. I will ask participants to create a pseudonym and I will explain that their research records will be kept confidential and locked in a file cabinet in my office. The general nature of the activities, which will span two semesters, will include participating in multiple individual interviews with the student participants and at least one interview with other, secondary participants, as well writing journal entries, and my personal observations of their university setting, home, and other important settings to aid in my understanding of the cultural and social context of the students. This information will also be included on the Informed Consent Form that will be provided in advance of their participation.*
- e) Describe how confidentiality or the anonymity of the source of your data will be protected (e.g., data will be recorded by geographical area or group rather than by individuals, numeric identifiers will be used for interview or field data, records will be stored in locked file cabinets etc.). If participants are to be anonymous (i.e. no one, including the researchers, knows their identity), explain how this will be accomplished. Explain whether or not the data can be traced back to the original source from identifiers used in the records. Remember that it is impossible to *guarantee* confidentiality. Information submitted electronically or in a group setting cannot be considered secure, and there is a legal obligation to report suspected mistreatment of children and serious threats against self or others. It is

also possible that a court might order the release of data or a list of participants. Again, focus on the steps you will take to maximize confidentiality. *Participants will select pseudonyms by which they will be identified in the interviews, transcripts, and final research report. They will be told that confidentiality will be of utmost importance, but that it cannot be guaranteed. Due to the intimate nature of this study, I do not expect that pseudonyms alone will protect confidentiality. Therefore, other identifying details (potentially academic majors, the university, home town, clubs or organizations they participate in) will also be given pseudonyms. Transcriptions and other documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet for three years and then destroyed.*

- f) Informed consent: Attach a copy of the informed consent document to be signed by the participants, or explicitly request waiver of informed consent. If participants are minors, provide the informed consent document to be signed by parents and address the documentation of assent by the minors. If written assent is to be obtained from minors, provide a copy of this document. *Copies of the Informed Consent Forms for the student participants, the family participants and other potential participants as well as the Informed Consent Forms for parents/guardians to sign for their minor children and the Written and Verbal Assent Forms for minors are all attached.*

Describe any special arrangements to protect the safety of special populations, if applicable (e.g., hospital patients, developmentally disabled, young children, prisoners, etc.) *I expect there could be individuals under the age of 18 involved in this study. It is also possible the student participants' other family members could be pregnant, have developmental or mental disabilities, or be incarcerated. If any potential participants are in prison, I would most likely exclude them from the study. If any potential participants are pregnant, those interviews will be very flexible in terms of scheduling and breaks will be encouraged. The comfort of the pregnant women would be the primary concern. If potential participants have disabilities, I will include them in the study if it is reasonable and if informed consent can be attained and if it is permitted by a care provider, if appropriate. Additionally, interviews with minors, pregnant women, and individuals with disabilities will be open to observed by parents or other concerned parties.*

- g) Describe any plans for debriefing your participants. As a compensation for participation, it is considered appropriate to provide participants with additional information concerning the nature and purpose of the study. It is also desirable to provide them with some information, presented in a form they are likely to understand, about the basic concepts and theories related to the study. Provide a copy of any debriefing information provided to the participants. *Because this is a study about first-generation college students, and because it will be very detailed about their collegiate experiences, the participants are considered as co-constructors of this knowledge. They will check to see that I have documented their stories, experiences, and understandings appropriately. At the conclusion of*

the study, I will be able to provide them with additional resources and theory related to the study.

2. Procedure:

- a) Describe your sampling or participant assignment procedures. *First-generation, lower income, male, White first-generation college students who are brothers concurrently enrolled at a regional university will be identified by the TRIO office or by other colleagues. For convenience, potential participants will have homes of origin in northern Colorado or southern Wyoming. Staff at the TRIO office regularly work with first-generation college students. Potential participants who fit the criteria will be sent letters detailing the nature of the study. The letters will include the name and contact information of the Lead Investigator for students to contact if they are interested in participating in the research study. If a brother pair is interested, I will visit with them to further discuss their participation and to determine if they do, in fact, meet the criteria for participation in this study. I will also inquire about the likelihood of their family being willing to participate. I suspect that it will be necessary for me to visit with the students' family members to inform them of my role and the nature of the research and what their sons may gain from their participation. I will also need to establish trust and rapport with the family members.*
- b) Provide a step by step protocol of everything participants will be asked to do in your study. Stipulate the nature of all data to be collected. For example, rather than saying that "participants will be observed" and "artifacts will be collected," specify what they will be observed for, and specify the nature of the artifacts. Make sure that this same information is provided in the consent form. *The student participants will be asked to be interviewed, keep journals, and be observed throughout two semesters. I will also accompany them on a trip home on one or two occasions so that I may interview other family members and other possible individuals. Other individuals could include neighbors, friends, teachers, or others the students identify as having helped them make their decision to attend college) and observe them in their home environment. I will also ask parents or others to keep a log of all email communication that the students write for further analysis. Students will be informed that emails may also be used in the study. In addition to interviews regarding the students' collegiate transitions and experiences, I will also observe them in their natural setting: residence hall or apartment, class, extracurricular activities, and home of origin. I will record field notes from these observations for further analysis.*
- c) Describe and provide clear rationale for the use of any deceptive practices. *No deceptive practices will be used in this study.*
- d) Include copies or complete descriptions of questionnaires, interview protocols, or other measurement procedures. Investigators using their own instruments should include a full copy of the measure. Copies of widely used standardized tests are not necessary. If an interview is to be conducted and the questions are not

standardized, indicate the range of topics and examples of possible questions. *Interviews will not follow a set list of questions but will be open-ended and each interview will inform the general range of questions for future interviews. However, as explained in Section I, I do anticipate differences between the brothers, especially in how they make meaning of first-generation college student status. The range of topics will primarily be focused on how the students have become first in their families to attend college and what that looks like for students coming from lower income backgrounds. Examples of possible questions could include: How did you arrive at the decision to go to college? Who in your life influenced your decision to attend? How does your family perceive you know that you're in college? How do you think your experience as a first-generation student might be different? How do you think your college experience is different or similar to your brother's? Students will be asked to reflect throughout the academic year on their experiences. Interviews are expected to occur approximately every two weeks.*

3. Proposed data analysis:

- a) Describe the form of the data to be analyzed (e.g., numbers from a Likert-type scale, journal entries, reaction time, heart rate, dichotomous 'yes' or 'no' responses, tape recorded conversations, photographs etc.). *The data to be analyzed will be in the form of observational field notes, transcripts from interviews, journal entries, and other documents (i.e., emails) provided by participants.*
- b) Explain the statistical design and how the corresponding analysis will address the research questions and hypotheses proposed. *This is qualitative research using Constructivist and Critical Theory theoretical frameworks. The methodology will be consistent with Ethnography and Case Study research. Therefore, the data analysis will consist of Interpretation, Co-Construction, and Emergent Theme Identification. I will also ask a colleague in the doctoral program to serve as a peer reviewer to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. There is no hypothesis assigned to this qualitative study. Instead, the focus of this research is to explore how two students make meaning of their college experiences related to issues of class and first-generation status.*

Section III – Risks/Benefits and Costs/Compensation to Participants

Risks to student participants could include the possibility of emotional or psychological distress while discussing their meaning making, especially if the students are enrolled in college against their family's wishes. Other potential emotional or psychological distress could surface if they are having negative collegiate experiences, or when reflecting on their lower income status. If this occurs, I will refer the students to the appropriate campus resources, including the counseling center. Likewise, if other family members are struggling with the "loss" of their students' being in college, I will refer them to the parent and family office on campus. In addition, pseudonyms will be used to

lessen the likelihood that the students and the families can be identified. Using these precautions should greatly reduce the chance of risk.

Benefits to the student participants will hopefully come from creating new knowledge to help others like them. We know little about first-generation college student siblings, and my hope is that they will feel honored to be able to help in this regard. Another benefit would be to have a frequent access to a professional staff member from their campus who will certainly be able to answer questions and refer to appropriate offices whenever possible, thus lessening their chances of becoming disenfranchised with the university. I expect the students' parents will also see this as a great benefit. Finally, one of the greatest benefits to the student participants will be an increased awareness and reflection into why they have chosen to attend college and how they can make it a truly meaningful experience.

Section IV – Grant Information

There are no grants associated with this study.

Section V - Documentation

- *Copies of the Informed Consent documents are attached.*
- *A copy of the range of topics and likely questions is attached.*
- *Recruitment of participants will not be through flyers.*

Potential Interview Questions and Topics to Be Addressed

The interviews will be flexible and open-ended; however, the following questions will be explored:

Regarding First-Generation Identity and Experience

- Tell me a story about being a first generation student at this university.
- What feelings and thoughts entered into your decision to attend college?
- What does it mean to you to be a college student?
- How do your family members hinder/support your college experience?
- How did your family perceive your decision to attend college?
- How has your family changed since you have been in college?
- What hopes/concerns does your family have for you?

Regarding the Sibling Experience

- What it is like having your brother here on campus with you?
- Tell me about your relationship with your family members.

Regarding Lower Income Identity and Experience

- Tell me about the process of applying for financial aid.
- Imagine that you hadn't come to college. What kinds of things might you be doing instead?
- Tell me a story about the last time you were home and ran into an old friend from high school.
- What do you think a college degree will mean to you?
- As you were growing up, describe how your family managed without being rich.
- How is your financial situation similar or different from your peers'?

Regarding Male Experience

- If you are involved on campus, tell me how you came to be involved with that organization.
- Describe your circle of friends.
- What is it like being a male on this campus?