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A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE OLDER SIBLINGS PLAY IN
THE COLLEGE-GOING EXPERIENCES OF YOUNGER FIRST-GENERATION
COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership (Higher Education)

by
Gretchen Waugaman
August 2022

Accepted by:
Dr. Michelle Boettcher, Committee Chair
Dr. Tony W. Cawthon
Dr. Kristin Frady
Dr. Jacquelynn Malloy

ABSTRACT

This study looked at the roles that older siblings who have been through the college process themselves play in the college-going experiences of younger first-generation college students. A qualitative study was conducted with 10 FGC students at a large public four-year university in the Southeast of the United States of America who had older siblings who were either currently attending college or had recently graduated from a four-year college or university themselves. For this study, I answered the following research question:

What role do older FGC student siblings play in the college-going experiences of younger siblings?

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The concept of family capital served as the conceptual framework for this study.

This study showed that the older siblings served one of three roles for their younger brothers and sisters: a supporter, an informant, and a role model. This research makes a significant contribution to the literature surrounding first-generation college students as not much literature exists looking at the second or third-in-family's perceptions of their siblings as they navigate college.

Additional research studies centering on younger siblings could explore the findings of this study further, and first-generation support programs could utilize the fact that these first-generation college students have a built-in resource to tap into when designing programming to further develop that connection. College and university policy

makers could also create financial aid and admissions policies to encourage more second-in-family students to attend college.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, dad, and sister. Thank you for your love and support as I navigated this journey to earning a Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank several people who have been integral in helping me through this Ph.D. program/journey.

First, to my dissertation committee members, thank you for your help, support, and encouragement. To Dr. Michelle Boettcher, my committee chair, you never failed to encourage me along the way. You helped me along each milestone in this program, pushing me, helping me be the best Ph.D. student I could be. I could tell after our first meeting together before I was even in the program that I would learn a lot from you, and that definitely turned out to be true. To my committee members, Dr. Tony Cawthon, Dr. Kristin Frady, and Dr. Jackie Malloy, you definitely were the “dream team” as I like to call you. Thank you for helping me along way.

I want to thank all of the co-workers who were along side of me as I worked full-time and did this Ph.D. program part-time. Along the way you made sure to remind me of my strengths, cheered me on, and wished me well as I left work to head off to “school.” I could not have gotten through this without you.

To my two supervisors during this 4.5 year journey, thank you for your support. To Dr. Mary Von Kaenel, I watched you go through your Ph.D. program, and appreciated all of our conversations as I entered and navigated the majority of this program. Thank you for your support. And to Dr. Mike Jackson, thank you for your encouragement as I learned a new job and finished up this dissertation. I have learned a great deal about what it means to be an excellent leader from the example both of you set.

When I attended our Ph.D. New Student Orientation a wise faculty member said we would not get through this program without turning to our fellow students, and that has definitely been true for me. Over the past 4.5 years, I am grateful to have met so many people across campus. To all of Dr. Boettcher's fellow advisees, it was wonderful to hear your experiences and celebrate your triumphs. To my fellow classmates, whether we worked together on group papers, projects, or presentations, studied statistics together, or met up for weekly work sessions on Zoom, I appreciated all of our time together. I was grateful to watch so many people become Dr. ahead of me, and can't wait to celebrate the milestones yet to come for those still in the pipeline!

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To my parents, thank you for your love and support along this journey. I honestly do not think I can thank you both enough for all of the encouragement and love you have given me. You helped celebrate every minor achievement and encouraged me along each step. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

And last but certainly not least, to my sister, Chelsea, simply saying "thank you" does not seem enough to show my gratitude for what you have done for me over these past 4.5 years. You were literally there for me from Day 1 of my first class--College Teaching--as the TA for the class. Along the way you never failed to share your wisdom and experiences going through this same Ph.D. program yourself and encouraged me through each phase of my journey. Thank you for helping me so much along the way. I'm honored to be able to stand along side you as another Dr. Waugaman!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background on First-Generation College Students' College Experience

Enrollment of first-generation college (FGC) students in institutions of higher education is growing (RTI International, 2019). A FGC student is defined in a variety of ways by different FGC scholars and the differences will be addressed more fully in Chapter 2. For the purposes of this study, a FGC student is defined as a student pursuing a four-year degree whose parents did not earn a four-year college degree themselves (Choy, 2001; Inkelas et al., 2007).

The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, in the 2015-2016 school year, found that 24% of undergraduate students were first-generation, and of them, 59% were the first of their siblings to attend college (RTI International, 2019). Those enrollment numbers have climbed as EAB (2020), a Washington D.C. research organization, reported that 33% of students enrolled in a college or university in the 2018-2019 school year were FGC students.

Description of the Problem

Those who are considered first-generation college (FGC) students experience the college environment differently than their peers who are continuing-generation students, meaning one of their parents earned a college degree (Azmitia et al., 2018; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011). Their families do not often have a context for what they are going through in the pursuit of higher education. The issues that arise for a student when transitioning into college include homesickness, lack of resources, and a fear of not being

successful leading to feelings of anxiety (Lubrano, 2004). “Entering the university means not only that [FGC students] must leave home for an unfamiliar academic setting, but that they must also enter an alien physical and social environment that they, their family, and their peers have never experienced,” (Thayer, 2000, pp. 4-5). FGC students experience a disconnect from their previous lifestyle (Lubrano, 2004). These students transition into college and go through milestones in college differently than their continuing-generation peers.

After being immersed in the college experience, a FGC student’s sense of identity can be different from friends and family at home. Friction with those individuals at home can result (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). For students who do not have a support network in their higher education setting, they may find it difficult to navigate further through college (Azmitia et al., 2013) or perceive their peers at their college or university judge them, contributing to a lack of connection to their campus (Lowery & Pacheco, 2011).

Existing scholarship has shown that there is a significant graduation gap between FGC students and continuing generation college students. Chen (2005) found that fewer than 25% of FGC students who entered college graduated with a bachelor’s degree. In comparison, 68% of students who had at least one parent who was college educated graduated from college. Soria and Stebleton (2012) did a similar study in which they tracked FGC students and found they did not graduate at the same rate as their peers who had a college educated parent.

My study on FGC students adds to the body of knowledge in place on FGC students but with a specific focus on what impact siblings have on FGC student

experiences in college. As will be mentioned more fully in Chapter 2, there is limited literature on siblings' impact on FGC students' involvement in their college-going experiences. This study explored what role siblings play in a FGC student's life, whether they helped make the transition into college easier and what, if any, support they give their siblings as they experience college.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to explore the role that older FGC siblings who have been to a four-year college or university themselves play in the lives of their younger siblings when they begin their college journeys. This study determined whether siblings were utilized as a resource or support when students experience challenges or new and unexpected obstacles. The data that was collected during this study involved students sharing their experiences relating to their time in college. For this study, I answered the following research question:

What role do older FGC student siblings play in the college-going experiences of younger siblings?

Significance of the Study

My study on FGC students looked at the roles their older siblings who have been to college play in the lives of their younger siblings as those younger siblings pursue college degrees themselves. This study built on the work of Roksa et al. (2020) who looked at the dynamic of family members in the lives of FGC students once they enroll in college. They investigated how "exposure to education can benefit not only individuals but also families" (p. 1). They ultimately focused on the support that the older siblings

provided to their parents, who were then able to help their younger children to a greater degree as those young children navigated college. Roksa et al. (2020) suggested that future research look at the interactions between different family members, (i.e., sibling to sibling interactions) to see how older siblings sharing their experiences in college may help younger siblings. Previous studies have also looked at the role that siblings play in FGC student households growing up (Covarrubias et al., 2019) and how siblings were sources of support that FGC students turned to when they could not receive support from other family members such as parents (Milevsky, 2005). Ceja (2006) and Elias McAllister (2012) found that siblings were a resource for FGC students during the college application and college decision making process.

I add to the academic discourse as I uncovered what role older siblings play in their younger siblings' lives. The results of my study have potential implications for university support programs for FGC students. As this research provided evidence that older siblings positively impact their younger siblings and give greater context for navigating higher education, an even greater effort can be placed on helping those first-in-family siblings successfully complete their college degree. Admissions departments may find the results intriguing as they look to diversify their freshman classes. More second-in-family students could be admitted knowing they have a built-in resource at their fingertips to help them persist to graduation. Identifying what role older siblings play has practical and academic implications. More implications of practice are addressed in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 2 a more comprehensive literature review detailing FGC students' demographics, assets, and challenges is shared. I will also discuss literature on FGC student's siblings and contextualize my study in the existing scholarship.

Overview of Methodology

This study was a basic qualitative study. Rather than adding to the academic discourse around a grounded theory (Merriam, 1998), this study strove to uncover the perspectives of FGC students as they navigate their own experiences in higher education at a four-year, research-based institution in the Southeast of the United States of America, here referred to as Southeastern University. Qualitative data collection methods were utilized including semi-structured interviews with undergraduate FGC students from different academic years: first-year, sophomore, and junior years. Data analysis involved identifying patterns in the data (Merriam, 1998).

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument through which the data is analyzed (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017), and as such, my experience and professional background may shape how I view the data collected from my FGC student participants. My professional career since earning my undergraduate degree has been in higher education. Before earning my master's degree, I worked at a racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse two-year institution just outside of Washington D. C. in the United States of America. After earning my master's degree, I spent over a decade working at a large, public primarily white four-year research institution in the southeast of the United States supporting first-year students academically.

I do not identify as a FGC student as both of my parents earned advanced degrees beyond their bachelor's degrees. Not identifying personally with my participants allowed me to maintain a more neutral perspective when considering their stories. I did not compare those stories to my personal experiences as an undergraduate college student. For the past decade I have worked specifically with first-year students who struggle to connect to the learning and social environments in college, so I needed to separate those students' experiences from my research participants and not allow those experiences to influence how I interpret the experiences of my research participants. Working through my doctoral journey, I have relied on the expertise and guidance of a sibling of mine who attended the same Ph.D. program. I realized that not everyone's experiences are identical, and I needed to permit my participants to share their experiences without facing judgement from me or for me to compare their stories to others' educational journeys, including my own.

Definition of Key Terms

First-Generation College Student

A FGC student is any student pursuing a four-year degree whose parents did not earn a four-year college degree themselves (Choy, 2001; Inkelas et al., 2007).

First-in Family

In the United States, first-in-family denotes a difference among the siblings who are considered first-generation in a household. The first sibling to attend a college or university would be considered the first-in-family, first-generation student, and

subsequent siblings attending a college or university would be classified under the first-generation umbrella term (O'Shea et al., 2017).

Sibling

Baumann et al. (2005) postulated that siblings are two or more people who share common ancestry. In other words, they have one or both parents in common and have biological connections to each other. Siblings growing up in the same household, whether as full, biologically related individuals sharing biological similarities with both parents, half-siblings sharing biological similarities with one parent, or as blended siblings growing up in the same household without biological similarities have the same familiar culture and common memories and experiences (Cress & Cress Peterson, 2009). For the purposes of my study, I state that siblings are individuals who grew up in the same household and have at least one parent sharing biological similarities with each other.

Social Capital

Social capital is “resources accrued through social networks” (Martin et al., 2004, p. 822).

Family Capital

Gofen (2009) defined family-based social capital as “the social links among family members, the social relationships of a family or the accumulation of human and cultural capital within the family” (p. 107).

The conceptual framework shaping this research study is the idea of family capital. Family capital is the capital within a family that helps those members in it to

thrive. Swartz (2008) posited that family capital encompasses financial support, social support, and informational support that family members tap into as resources that they can use to improve their lives.

Conclusion

This study added to the academic discourse surrounding FGC students, specifically focusing on the role that siblings play in the experiences of FGC students. As the following literature review will show, scholars have looked at FGC students from different perspectives including highlighting their assets in higher education (Cavazos et al., 2010; Covarrubias et al., 2019, Demetriou et al., 2017), the challenges they face navigating two cultures—home and the academy (Lubrano, 2004; Stephens et al., 2012; Thayer, 2000), and how their demographic characteristics shape their experiences in college (Hinz, 2006; Orbe, 2004; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Smith et al., 2006). While other scholars have looked at the role that siblings play as FGC students prepare to enroll in college (Ceja, 2006; Hurtado-Ortiz, 2007) and the family dynamics (Roksa et al., 2020) and communication patterns exist when older siblings attend college (Wang & Nuru, 2017), few scholars have focused on the role that siblings specifically play on FGC students. This dissertation research added new knowledge that scholars and practitioners can utilize when designing student support programs for FGC students and expand efforts to diversify their college campuses.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This following is a systematic literature review on relevant scholarly literature relating to first-generation college (FGC) students and the roles siblings play in their college-going experiences. This literature review provides context for why a study on sibling roles for FGC students should be conducted. The literature review began when I completed my research internship with Dr. Michelle Boettcher, chair of my dissertation committee, in Spring 2020 to review the comprehensive literature she identified surrounding family support for FGC students. I focused specifically on family support for FGC students as scholars have previously covered other areas on this topic such as academic preparedness and persistence issues. I wanted to see for myself what had already been published and where the gaps in the literature exist relating to the role of FGC students and sibling impact.

I utilized several steps in conducting a systematic literature review as outlined by Okoli (2015) including identifying the purpose of my review, searching for literature, extracting data, synthesizing studies, and writing the review. This chapter also outlines what has been written regarding FGC students and defines the gaps in literature regarding the sibling role for FGC students. I utilized Google Scholar to search for key terms such as “first-generation college student,” “challenges,” “demographics,” and “siblings.” I looked initially at studies conducted within the last 10 years, but also made note of studies from earlier than 2010 that were repeatedly cited within those articles. The following is the summary of those efforts.

This literature review begins with an overview of the specifications scholars use when defining FGC students and which definition I will be using in my study. Then, I explore the literature related to demographic characteristics of FGC students as well as providing an overview of the challenges FGC students face when attending colleges and universities and the assets they bring with them into that learning environment. Then, I outline literature surrounding siblings and studies published addressing FGC students' siblings. Finally, I address the perceived scholarly gaps in the literature and how my dissertation study expands that academic discourse.

First-Generation Student Definition

Scholars studying FGC students vary in their definitions of what it means to be a first-generation student. I provide here an overview of those definitions. The section concludes with my own choice of a definition to move forward in the scholarship and review of the literature.

FGC Students in Scholarship

Scholars have different definitions for FGC students because researchers account for different variables such as the educational level or the different types of post-secondary education pursued or completed by various family members (Toutkoushian et al., 2019). It was originally coined by Adachi in 1979, and his definition was a student who has at least one parent who does not have a four-year degree (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). More recently, scholars defined FGC students as those college students whose parents did not complete a four-year degree after earning their high school diplomas (D'Allegro & Kerns, 2011; D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ishitani, 2003; 2016; Vuong et al.,

2010; Wolniak et al., 2012). However, these same authors acknowledged that the parents of FGC students could have enrolled for a period at a two-year or four-year college or university. Others assigned first-generation student status to college students whose parents have two-year or associate degrees, but not four-year degrees (Ishitani, 2003; Toutkoushian et al., 2019). Other scholars have stated that if a student's parent attended a four-year institution for any length of time (even if they did not graduate), then that student does not hold FGC student status (London, 1989; London 1996; Forrest Cataldi et al., 2006).

FGC Students Defined in Legislation

The Higher Education Act of 1965 defined FGC students as those students who were the first in their family to attend college after neither parent graduated from a four-year institution, (Higher Education Act of 1965, 2008) and several scholars use that definition in their work (Ilett, 2019; Toutkoushian et al., 2019). The Department of Education (2018) defined FGC students as “undergraduate students whose parents had not participated in postsecondary education,” (p. 2).

FGC and First-in-Family Definitions

At times, internationally, FGC students have been considered “first-in-family” (Luzecy et al., 2011, p. 1) indicating that the students are the first ones in their immediate families including parents and siblings to attend any education past high school (Luzecy et al., 2011; O’Shea et al., 2017). In the United States, first-generation is the term most scholars and higher education practitioners use when talking about college students whose parents did not attend college (Luzecy et al., 2011), however

first-in-family denotes a difference among the siblings who are considered first-generation in a household. The first sibling to attend a college or university would be considered the first-in-family, first-generation student, and subsequent siblings attending a college or university would be classified under the first-generation umbrella term (O'Shea et al., 2017).

Author's FGC Definition Selection

For the purpose of this literature review and my subsequent study on FGC students, FGC students will be any student pursuing a four-year degree whose parents did not earn a four-year college degree themselves. This classification is what many FGC student scholars consider to be an effective definition (Choy, 2001; Inkelas et al., 2007). This concept mirrors the definition of FGC students at the research site, a four-year public university in the Southeast.

Characteristics of FGC Students

First-generation scholars find defining first-generation students to be challenging (Toutkoushian et al., 2019). That said, scholars have found common characteristics shared by students across each population of FGC students regardless of the definition employed (Ward et al., 2012). Understanding these characteristics give scholars a better picture of FGC students.

College Enrollment Demographics

According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, in the 2015-2016 school year, 56% of undergraduate students were first-generation, and of them, 59% were the first of their siblings to attend college. Forty-

seven percent of the students at public four-year colleges and universities were first-generation, and 43% of the students enrolled at private nonprofit institutions were first-generation (RTI International, 2019). McCallen and Johnson (2019) reported a study by the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment that 41.5% of all undergraduates enrolled at four-year colleges and universities in the 2017-2018 school year were first-generation.

Racial and Ethnic Identity

Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) found that FGC students are more likely students of color than continuing-generation (CG) students whose parents earned a college degree. Ryan and Bauman (2016) found that a smaller percentage of people of color earn a bachelor's degree compared to the percentage of white people who have earned a bachelor's degree. They claimed that since the parents of students of color earn a bachelor's degree at a lower rate than parents of white students, FGC students are more likely to be students of color. Chen and Carroll (2005) found that students of color make up 36% of FGC students, but students of color make up only 16% of CG students. The US Department of Education (2017) found that 14% of all FGC students were black, but only 11% of CG students identified as black. When comparing racial and ethnic FGC student groups, Latinx individuals are the largest (Balemian & Feng, 2013).

Latinx FGC Students

Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) found that Latinx students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experience "cultural incongruence" (p. 147) when encountering a higher social class environment in college. Scholars have found that

when they begin their college journey, Latinx FGC students find that being a FGC student is important (Orbe, 2004). The Latinx identity is salient to students, even in that different environment. Additionally, scholars have found that Latinx FGC students experience microaggressions related to their racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, many of which were unaddressed by college administrators (Rodriguez et al., 2000; Yosso, 2009). Finally, researchers have reported that Latinx FGC students often do not feel a part of their campus environment which can lead to persistence issues (Engle, 2007).

Black FGC Students

Smith et al. (2006) found some black FGC students enter college after experiencing “racial battle fatigue” (p. 300) via racial microaggressions in high school. These aggressions can result in FGC students feeling as though their career and educational choices are not appreciated by teachers and guidance counselors (Cholewa et al., 2018) and FGC students being tracked into vocational programs rather than college-preparatory programs such as AP classes (Klopfenstein, 2004). Fries-Britt and Griffin (2007) found that Black students also may have faculty members question their intellectual ability after they begin their college classes. If Black FGC students internalize those negative stereotypes (Solorzano et al., 2000), it can lead to increased feelings of disconnection from campus (Hoffman et al., 2002). Choy (2001) found that Black FGC students who attend predominantly white colleges or universities experience a new college culture and can feel isolated without many other Black students with whom to interact. Scholars have also looked at Black students’ perceived senses of belonging

(Hoffman et al., 2002), and found that as students successfully integrate into the campus racial climate, they are more likely to persist to graduation (Locks et al., 2006).

Socioeconomic Status of FGC Students

The U.S. Department of Education (2019) defined someone to be a low-income individual if they come from a family whose taxable income does not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level. The 2019 poverty guidelines indicate that for a family of four living in the contiguous United States, their income cannot be more than \$38,625 (Department of Education, 2019). Students from low socio-economic backgrounds have access to federally funded grants to pay for college such as the Federal Pell Grant that was authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (College Board, 2018). From 2007-2017 the amount of Pell Grant money disbursed to colleges more than doubled, going from \$17.2 billion to \$40.1 billion (Department of Education, 2019). Looking at the overall population of students, 32% of them qualified for Federal Pell Grant money, an increase of 7% over the past decade (Department of Education, 2019). The average Pell Grant awarded was \$4,010, and only covered on average 60% of four-year public institutions' tuition and fees and barely covered one fifth, 17% exactly, of private non-profit four-year institution fees, leaving a substantial financial shortfall that family members were unable to meet themselves (Department of Education, 2019). The family incomes for 73% of Pell Grant recipients in 2016-2017 was less than \$40,000 (College Board, 2018). "Students from low-income families have fewer financial resources to pay both the direct costs of college attendance, and the many less-visible costs of college access and completion including costs of college admissions tests and college application

fees” (Perna, 2015, p. 4). Understanding the financial situation low-income students experience is important to understanding the needs that low-income FGC students have when coming to college.

Considering that many parents in low-income families do not have college degrees themselves, they do not always see the benefit and higher earning potential available to their children once they earn a college degree (Hodges-Payne, 2006).

Hinz (2016) looked at the class identity that first-generation, low socio-economic students hold when entering higher education. Her study was at an elite public university, and the students in her study did not identify or hold loyalty to any class group. Some students in her study wanted to keep the working-class culture in which they were raised after they graduated from college, but still work in middle-class professions. Moving to a higher class for those students “requires a ‘leaving off’ and a ‘taking on,’ the shedding of one social identity and the acquisition of another,” (London, 1992, p. 8), and they did not want to lose the social identity they had growing up. Most of the students in Hinz’s (2016) study did not want to remain in the socio-economic class in which they grew up but instead aspired to a higher standard of living and understanding of the world around them which she labeled “converts” (p. 295). She found that FGC students who are “class-transitioning students can happily maintain complex class identities that combine elements from both classes” (Hintz, 2016, p. 295).

Rice et al., (2016) studied the experiences of low-socioeconomic first-generation students at a public institution, and found all participants received messages from their home environments about making a better life for themselves. They viewed their college

education as an avenue to improve their lives. The culture at college was different for them. They were not familiar with the vocabulary that their upper-class classmates used and described their upper-class peers' home environments as a "different kind of world" (p. 425). Having fewer financial resources prevented them from participating in similar experiences such studying abroad or participating in clubs and organizations with membership fees. They also felt more comfortable around students from similar socio-economic backgrounds who more easily understood their backgrounds. Some held negative stereotypes about their upper-class classmates believing they took their advantages for granted and were not as motivated in college since they were not the ones paying for it (Rice et al., 2016).

It is important for the purposes of this study to understand the existing scholarly knowledge about the characteristics of FGC students since it sets a foundation for understanding the lived experiences of potential participants in this study.

Assets of FGC Students

Determination

Universities may reinforce deficit narratives when considering the FGC students on their campuses; however, some qualities and characteristics of first-generation students have been assets as they navigate the college environment (Covarrubias et al., 2019). Covarrubias et al. (2019) found that students learned toughness and determination through watching their parents persist through difficult times. They were able to demonstrate those qualities to help overcome their own challenges. Those students may

shield their families from their own struggles to not add to their personal concerns, but they learned early in life how to navigate challenging times (Covarrubias et al., 2019).

Responsibility

FGC students are seen as responsible (Covarrubias et al., 2019) and resilient (Cavazos et al., 2010). First-generation students likely had extended family members to care for prior to entering college (Valdes, 1996). Those students may not seek out campus resources, choosing instead to develop their own academic skills (Stephens et al., 2014), and campus stakeholders may not value their independence, determination to succeed on their own, and self-reliance their home life fostered. Instead, they viewed the students who do not seek out resources and support as having a deficit (Covarrubias et al., 2019). “Institutions can and should recognize multiple ways of enacting both interdependence and independence and acknowledge the different cultural strengths that students bring with them to the classrooms,” (Covarrubias et al., 2019, p. 405). By capitalizing on those self-sufficient attitudes, faculty and staff working at colleges can help FGC students achieve their goal of earning a college degree.

Resiliency

Cavazos et al. (2010) looked at the resiliency factors that Latinx FGC students possess including goal setting, developing interpersonal relationships, intrinsic motivation, maintaining an internal locus of control, and strong self-efficacy. Demetriou et al. (2017) found FGC students to be “active agents” (p. 52) who sought out opportunities to engage in their college environment through on-campus activities.

Colleges and universities can provide targeted resources to FGC students to increase their engagement on campus.

Family Support

Latinx FGC students value family relationships and hold family members in high regard (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Stephens et al., 2012). Familismo is a cultural value in Latinx communities where extended family members are sources of support for a person and family needs are considered before personal needs. Maintaining connections to family members can be seen as creating unneeded stressors for FGC students (Morales & Consoli, 2020). On the other hand, Tello and Lonn (2017) posited that education stakeholders need to view the relationships that Latinx students have with their family as a source of support that can help FGC students develop feelings of resilience and self-efficacy.

Engle (2007) found that as FGC students enter higher education, they need to receive messages of validation that they can achieve in college. Removing barriers, such as financial constraints and connecting FGC students to interventions such as TRIO programs to help them with their transition from high school to college, ultimately help FGC students engage actively in the college environment inside and outside of the classroom (Engle, 2007).

Proactive Characteristics

Garrison and Gardner (2012) found FGC students to be proactive, goal-directed, optimistic, and reflexive and implement those character traits when they enter higher education. These students fostered those characteristics before they even stepped onto

college campuses due to the “marginalized position” (p. 48) they were in prior to entering college, primarily caused by their low socio-economic status. Those students initiated the college-going process when in high school and described instances where they sought out resources from other family members and friends’ family members to help with challenges.

FGC students were found to set their own goals in life and saw college as a way to achieve a better life for themselves (Orbe, 2004). They were optimistic and hopeful that their persistence would pay off and allow them to have careers that members of their family without college degrees did not have. They also were self-aware, knowing what their academic and personal strengths entailed (Garrison & Gardner, 2012). Garrison and Gardner (2012) encouraged higher education stakeholders to consider themselves “gem-cutters” (p. 50), revealing the strengths that FGC students possess. The goal when working with FGC students is to help “reveal the inherent value” (p. 50) within their students and teach them to identify their personal assets and use them throughout their time in college to experience academic success.

At times the scholarly and popular press portrays FGC students in a negative light. If future scholars approach their research with only that perspective, they will look for and may only find negative outcomes in their research. It is important for this research study to understand and acknowledge the assets that FGC students bring to their college-going experiences. Their resiliency, proactive characteristics, and family support help those students as they navigate their college experience.

Challenges for FGC Students

Adjusting to a New Environment

First-generation students face challenges navigating college that CG students do not always encounter. They experience a new world when beginning their college careers (Lubrano, 2004). First-generation students find it hard to adjust to a new environment different from their high school (Longwell-Grice, 2016). The academic workload at their high school may not have challenged them to face the academic requirements of college (Cabrera et al., 2001). Students entering college encounter new experiences, people, and academic rigor for which their home environment and previous schooling may not have adequately prepared them. Choy (2001) reported a National Education Longitudinal Study that showed FGC students graduating from high school did not expect to earn a college degree, did not go to college as prevalently, were less prepared for the rigors of college, and received less support as they transitioned into college than their peers whose parents had earned a college degree.

Lubrano (2004) looked at the challenges first-generation students encounter while they straddled two worlds while connecting to and developing a sense of belonging with the campus culture. FGC from low-income backgrounds experienced culture shock immersed in an upper-middle college environment and struggled connecting to fellow students who held different values relating to money (Lubrano, 2004). Stebleton et al. (2014) found a connection between a strong sense of belonging in college and a student ultimately graduating from a college or university. Tover et al. (2009) defined a student's sense of belonging as a desire to be connected to campus through interactions with

others. As FGC students struggle to feel they belong and feel alienated from the college or university culture, they do not connect to the school and may ultimately withdraw from the institution (White & Lowenthal, 2011). Struggling to fit into an academic environment, especially if it is drastically different from their home environment may lead to feelings of discontent and questioning whether the college environment is where they belong.

Values Differ from Those at Home

While navigating college, FGC students sometimes encounter a new college environment that promotes independence and self-discovery which may differ from their home environment (Stephens et al., 2012). Some FGC students spend time with their immediate and extended families instead of engaging with the campus community (Covarrubias et al., 2019). College stakeholders can have negative perceptions about FGC student's choices to spend time away from the college environment (Covarrubias et al., 2019). FGC students may feel conflicted having a desire to remain close to their parents and family members who are not part of the college environment also having a desire to connect to a college environment that encourages more independence.

Hidden Curriculum in Education

As FGC students struggle to navigate the college environment, they lack an understanding of the standards and expectations of college (Davis, 2010), also known as the hidden curriculum of college (White & Lowenthal, 2011). Scholarship around the concept of the hidden curriculum has looked at the K-12 (Dreeben, 1968; Jackson, 1968; Vallance, 1978) and college curriculums (Margolis et al., 2001; Polmear et al., 2019;

Smith, 2004). A student's successful navigation of the K-12 curriculum allows one to have greater navigation of the hidden curriculum in college. Jackson (1968) found that the K-12 hidden curriculum centers on the expectations of daily tasks that teachers in the K-12 school system have for their students such as completing work in a timely manner, behaving respectfully, and working on assigned tasks. Students are expected to learn certain skills to be effective students but never receive direct instruction on those skills (Jackson, 1968).

Learning what is expected of a student is part of the hidden curriculum. "Leadership, entrepreneurship, manners, and class dispositions the qualities once called "finishing" and certain glib pseudointellectual styles are elements of the hidden curriculum," (Margolis et al., 2001, p. 3). The hidden curriculum is known as the "elements of socialization that take place in school but are not part of the formal curricular content," (Margolis et al., 2001, p. 6). As students go through school, they pick up on those norms and routines primarily through social interactions (Dreeben, 1968).

The hidden curriculum in a higher education environment, is viewed as "the unwritten and unspoken rules of how to successfully navigate through the nebulous academic culture of higher education, which is essential to academic success" (Smith, 2004, p.48). As students comprehend the hidden curriculum, they learn what they should and should not focus on while in college. For example, Soria and Stebleton (2012) found that FGC students did not interact with their faculty members as often, contributed less to class discussions, and neglected to connect what they were learning to other course material. The academic success a student finds in college depends on how effectively

they know how to work the higher education system, and many of those understandings are never explicitly addressed in college (Smith, 2004).

Academic literacy, the knowledge of academic discourse, is a large part of the hidden curriculum of higher education (Margolis et al., 2001). White and Lowenthal (2011) posited that students who are not exposed to academic literacy in high school find themselves at a disadvantage when entering college. Those students may become alienated and stop out of their higher education experience. This leads to issues with institutional retention and graduation rates (White & Lowenthal, 2011).

Students need to learn the language used in college, and if they do not or cannot, they remain as outsiders, never fully integrating into their scholastic community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Being fully immersed into the university environment involves “knowing how and when to employ specific literacy practices in the different domains of life,” (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 11). The language and communication about college is not a concept that students immediately understand. If students have been exposed to ways of understanding that are different or contrary to what is needed in higher education, they must relearn what they know (White & Lowenthal, 2011). “Schools tend to adopt a rigid view of what counts as acceptable literacy practices that is both foreign to many students and affectively silencing to them,” (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 17).

High school students who practice the successful skills and traits needed for the college environment as well as discuss with teachers and administrators the importance of maintaining those skills once they leave high school perform better and have an easier adjustment in college (White & Lowenthal, 2011). Having parents, friends, and teachers

focused on orienting their students to the academic rigor of college can be essential, however first-generation students and students from low-income backgrounds do not always have immediate access to those forms of capital (Kim & Schneider, 2005). These FGC students come to college without the preparation necessary for what is ahead of them.

Navigating the hidden curriculum brings pitfalls for students who are not exposed to the necessary academic discourse. “Because the ways of thinking and communicating of one culture may differ significantly from that of the academic discourse community, ideological and linguistic conflicts arise,” (White & Lowenthal, 2011, p. 20). Miscommunication about expectations and understandings can result and students can feel alienated from the college environment, leading to issues with their sense of belonging on campus.

Juggling Multiple Roles on Campus

While navigating the hidden curriculum in college, FGC students juggle multiple roles when they step onto their college campuses. Those roles can include being a part-time or full-time worker, a parent, a child, and a full-time or part-time student (Fischer, 2007). As they have different roles than that of a full-time CG college student, they may not participate in as many curricular and extra-curricular activities on campus as frequently (Fischer, 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004). That lack of engagement can lead to feelings of disconnection, isolation, and dissatisfaction with the college environment and may ultimately lead to the student dropping out of college (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

Access to Fewer Resources

FGC students have fewer resources to help them when anticipating attending, applying to, and ultimately enrolling in college (Blustein et al., 2002; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Raque-Bogdan & Lucas, 2016). Horn and Nunez (2000) found that parental involvement increases a student's chances of enrolling in college, and the parents of FGC students do not have first-hand knowledge of what that process is like to help their children navigate the college-going process. If students cannot ask their parents about how they prepared for college entrance exams, applied for financial aid, or visited colleges and universities, they turn to counselors and other individuals in their high school to gain that information. Underfunded high schools with large student-to-counselor or student-to-teacher ratios do not always have the resources to assist students (McDonough, 1997; Vargas, 2004), and students may not be given the necessary messages about the academic rigor and demands of college (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

To adequately understand FGC students' experience in college it is important to understand what has been written regarding a FGC students' difficulties encountering the college environment. This study may reveal how a sibling can support a younger FGC student as they encounter these same challenges and navigate the college experience.

Family and Sibling Literature

Resource Usage

Downey (2001) found that the more siblings there were in a family, the fewer financial and personal resources available in the home. His study revealed that a dilution in resources caused by multiple siblings living in a household was linked to a reduction in

intellectual development for younger siblings. “As the number of children in the family increases, the proportion of parental resources accrued by any one child decreases” (Downey, 2001, p. 503). The addition of that sibling does add resources to the family including increased mentoring and guidance and assistance with academic work aligning with the older siblings’ strengths (Phillips, 1999).

Siblings in Immigrant Households

Morales and Consoli (2020) studied nine undocumented college students who had younger siblings who were United States citizens. The differences in legal status between those siblings brought “complexity” (p. 117) to their sibling relationship. The older undocumented siblings were aware of their limited employment opportunities and reduced access to health care. They also understood that they had fewer funding sources for higher education and were jealous and resentful of the opportunities afforded to their younger siblings. They believed that their younger siblings took those opportunities for granted.

On the other hand, undocumented older siblings felt compassion, gratitude, and love for their younger siblings, and tried to serve as role models for them, teaching them about the privileges their U.S. citizenship granted them (Morales & Consoli, 2020). They did not allow their differences to become a barrier, but instead used their differences to connect more deeply to their siblings. Coleman-Minahan and Scandlyn (2017) found that older siblings in immigrant families served as protectors of their younger siblings during difficult times including periods of poverty or when they were separated from family members.

Parental Influence on FGC Children

Parental influence on FGC children has been studied, including the influence they have on their children after they begin attending college. McCarron and Inkelas (2006) found in a quantitative study of FGC students that parental involvement in the lives of their children was a “viable predictor of postsecondary aspirations” (p. 544). College administrators’ involvement of parents in the college-going experiences of their children, done via parent education programs, family open houses, and family-oriented orientation sessions, can help minimize the college culture shock FGC students experience when stepping into new collegiate environments (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Those parents while not understanding college personally, can still impact their children through encouragement and connecting them to resources on campus that can connect students to the services they need.

Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) studied FGC students and the family relationships they foster while in college. They found that FGC students felt they were eclipsing their family members. Parents and siblings were unable to understand their advanced coursework, so students did not share that side of themselves with them (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). When home and college environments would come into conflict with each other, study participants sought out needed support from others in their college environment including academic advisors and faculty mentors. FGC students experience competing pressures from their home and school lives, and they want to be successful in the eyes of their parents (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Challenges come when they do

not have the support of their family members to pursue a college education to experience that success (London, 1992; London 1996).

BiCulturalism Between Home and Higher Education Environments

As FGC students navigate their college environment, they struggle balancing their college world with their home environment (London, 1992; London 1996). Nunez (2005) posited that “first-generation students must traverse a greater social and cultural distance than other students to become part of the college community and to negotiate a successful passage through college” (p. 88). College students feel resentful when they are not able connect their home environment with what they are learning about themselves and the world around them in their college classes and extra-curricular activities (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Students who can successfully straddle both worlds and not feel disconnected from one culture or the other become “bicultural” (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016, p. 41). FGC students find they can then negotiate the culture of higher education and the culture in which they grew up.

Family Achievement Guilt

Family achievement guilt, or feelings of guilt caused by the idea that they are eclipsing or surpassing their family members at home is a family dynamic that interdependent cultures navigate. They experience those feelings of guilt “because they earned the opportunity to attend college and, in doing so, surpassed the achievements of close others in their working-class home context” (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015, p. 1). The guilt stems from believing they are better than their family members and must leave them behind to pursue a college education. Interdependent cultures, such as Latinx

cultures, reported more feelings of family achievement guilt as “belonging to two different interdependent cultural contexts yields additive effects on experiences with guilt” (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015, p. 424).

Moreno (2016) found students felt guilty as they prioritized their own needs over those of their families. They also found that female participants were more likely than males to feel guilty. When students lived away from immediate family members, their feelings of guilt were stronger (Moreno, 2016). They struggled with not being physically present to help family members when they experienced challenges (Moreno, 2016). Feeling different from their family members when returning during breaks in the semester triggered feelings of guilt and made them question whether college was right for them (Moreno, 2016). Students struggled balancing the needs and requirements of being a student with also being a member of their home communities.

Family Communication

Scholars have investigated how family members communicate with one another. Wang and Nuru (2017) found that prior to enrolling in college, first-generation students spoke with their families about the costs of college and how their family members wanted them to be make a better life for themselves. When they entered college, the desire to earn a college degree became a shared goal between the student and their family members, and FGC students “negotiated new meanings and approaches to achieving this shared goal through family communication” (p. 166). To make meaning of sibling dynamics in the college going experience, it is important to understand how resource usage in a family, the communication patterns within a family, the guilt behind

achievement, and how parental support impact a FGC student as they navigate their college-going experiences.

FGC Student Sibling Literature

Role Siblings Play Growing Up

First-generation student literature related to siblings has focused on the role older siblings play in caring for their younger siblings while growing up (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Dunn, 2002). Older siblings were expected to care for their younger siblings while growing up (Covarrubias et al., 2019) and experienced stressors separating themselves from their immediate families while attending college. “The desire and commitment to engage in family roles might run counter to or mismatch the university expectations to dedicate one’s time to pursuing individual goals,” (Covarrubias et al., 2019, p. 395). Dunn (2002) found that siblings spend significant time with each other growing up and the intimacy created in that bond can create positive and negative feelings depending on the relationship.

FGC students seek out their siblings to compensate for a lack of other family support or peer support (Milevsky, 2005). Van Volkom et al. (2011) found that younger female siblings turned to their siblings for support when they experienced challenges, and those students who lived with their sibling tended to have closer relationships. Paladino Schultheiss et al. (2002) found that first-generation students turned to older siblings for career exploration assistance as they felt their parents could not provide the information they needed. Their older siblings also served as role models as they investigated potential career paths (Glasscock, 2002). Those siblings provided the needed information that

FGC students were searching for to overcome questions or concerns they had in their day-to-day lives.

Ceja (2006) found that FGC students turned to their siblings for help in choosing which colleges to apply to and ultimately enroll. Those older siblings thought of themselves as “protective agents” (p. 97). They realized they were more familiar with college and were committed to sharing their experiences going through college with their siblings (Ceja, 2006). They were able to act as role models for their younger siblings to help them with the probability of attending college themselves. Elias McAllister (2012) found that older siblings who had been through college before had the greatest influence on Mexican American FGC students as they were selecting which college to attend. Their younger siblings turned to them to find out information about the schools they considered attending (Elias McAllister, 2012).

Siblings as Cultural Brokers

Older siblings providing educational information to younger family members are known as cultural brokers (Delgado, 2020; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). These older siblings bridge the gap between the home environment and school environment by sharing information about preparing for college regarding entrance exams and the application process (Ceja, 2006; Hurtado-Ortiz, 2007). They connect the culture the siblings grew up with and the new culture they are facing and give context for that new culture. The first-in-family siblings impart educational information to parents, which ultimately assists younger children, as those parents are more knowledgeable and aware of what their younger children may experience when entering college (Roksa et al.,

2020). As parents know more about the college-going process and what to expect, they feel more comfortable discussing issues and challenges with younger children. As parents can serve as a resource for their children, they help them move more steadily toward their degree completion (Roksa et. al, 2020).

Siblings as Role Models

The status of an older sibling as a role model has been studied in the context of helping siblings apply to college (Ceja, 2006) and in career development (Palladino Schultheiss et al., 2002). The older sibling is aware of the position they play in the family as they “seek to do well in school in order to demystify the college process for their siblings” (Delgado, 2020, p. 3). Kim et al. (2020) found that older siblings help cushion younger siblings against the culture shock found in college, and Gass et al. (2007) found that older siblings serve as a buffer to combat stressful experiences in college. Given those older siblings play a different role in families than parents, are closer in age than parents, and have more contemporary experiences with one another, the role they play in the college-going process is likely to be more relevant to younger siblings, as well.

Investigating current sibling research and seeing how older siblings are viewed by younger FGC student is important for this study. Siblings play different roles in a family growing up including being a role model or an information broker. I hope to understand what kind of role, whether it be similar or different from these roles, that older siblings continue to play as the younger FGC student enters college through this study.

Framework—Family Capital Within Social Capital Discourse

Family-Based Social Capital

While my study does not employ a critical lens, it is important to acknowledge the foundational work of Yosso (2005; 2009) in creating language around social capital for Communities of Color. Yosso (2005) posited that Communities of Color develop wealth which is defined as “the total extent of an individual’s accumulated assets and resources” (p. 78) through different types of capital including aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. The familial capital she refers to is the connections People of Color have to their communities from extended family, not just their parents or immediate siblings. It is important to acknowledge the family capital that students of color have and maximize as they enter the college environment.

Gofen (2009) defined family-based social capital as “the social links among family members, the social relationships of a family or the accumulation of human and cultural capital within the family” (p. 107). He determined that family capital is capital derived from members of the family unit and drew connections between family capital and a broader system of capital: social capital. “The concept of family capital captures the various ways in which the family affects the future of its children, especially with respect to the investment process” (Gofen, 2009, p. 115). Family capital is the development made by the family to further improve the children growing up in the family unit (Gofen, 2009).

Swartz (2008) added to the concept of family capital by considering it as an “aggregate of family resources” (p. 15) including financial support, social support, and

informational support. Swartz (2008) posited that the more resources a family has at their disposal, the more capital available to the children to foster their development and growth. The degree of one's family wealth will replicate in the wealth of the child once they reach adulthood. The capital parents provide to the family helps their children progress from childhood to adulthood, ultimately becoming independent entities of the family unit (Swartz, 2008).

Development of Capital in Families

Swartz (2008) looked at siblings as competitors for limited family capital investments, but also as “suppliers and receivers of family capital, including financial resources, social networks, and cultural know-how” (p. 21). Belcher et al. (2011) looked at how families develop capital and share that capital with others and explored the idea of negative family capital. Negative family capital comes when “individuals are unable to separate, individuate, and develop autonomy from their family of origin” (Belcher et al., 2011, p. 69). They also looked at poverty and the development of family capital. Lower socio-economic statuses lead to less capital primarily in the form of financial resources.

Families produce family support, kinship, and family resources such as social, cultural, and psychological ones, producing positive family capital. “Families that produce positive capital embrace a social milieu that promotes a caring and loving presence, characterized by secure attachment and parental attunement; one where empathy or role taking is present” (Belcher, 2011, p. 73). Capital is based on trust among family members.

Familial capital is important to my study given the connection I explored between siblings and how that connection informs the college-going experience. For younger FGC siblings, having familial capital in the form of an older sibling may or may not be important. That is what I hope to understand because of this work.

Conclusion

Highlighted in this literature review, FGC student literature has focused on defining FGC students, student characteristics, assets of FGC students, challenges they face, and family dynamics. My study fills a gap in the existing FGC student literature. Limited literature exists addressing specifically the roles older siblings play in the college-going experiences of younger siblings.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The research question guiding this study was what role do older FGC siblings play in the college-going experiences of younger siblings? More specifically, the purpose of my study was to uncover what role older FGC siblings who have attended a four-year college or university play in their younger siblings' college journeys. An older sibling was someone who was raised in the same household as their younger sibling, who shared at least one parent in common, and who was restricted to be no more than 10 years older than their younger sibling. The 10-year age restriction allowed greater likelihood that the siblings would be living together in the same household for at least 8 years prior to the older sibling beginning their college education, a trait shared by all the study's participants. This study explored whether older siblings were utilized as a resource or support for FGC students as they experienced challenges or new and unexpected obstacles in college. The qualitative data I collected during this study involved students sharing their college experiences through individual semi-structured interviews.

Rationale for Research Tradition and Methodological Approach

I wanted to understand better through this study the role that FGC siblings played in the experiences of their younger siblings while in college, as perceived by the younger siblings. To answer that question, rich data regarding the participants' experiences was gleaned through qualitative research methods (Patton, 2002). Therefore, a basic qualitative research design helped me understand in a basic straightforward manner my participants' experiences in college and if and how their older sibling played a role in

those experiences (Sandelowski, 2000). Merriam (1998) described basic qualitative research as the most useful type of research as it can be used to “discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (p. 11).

While there were several approaches I could have used, I chose a basic qualitative study because it was most appropriate in answering my research question. As stated above, I sought to understand from the perspectives of younger FGC siblings about the role their older college-going siblings played in their academic lives in college. I chose this approach over other research designs like phenomenology because I was looking at a specific population at a single site. I wanted to explore more what Sandelowski (2000) described as the “what” (p. 339) behind the role older brothers and sisters played in younger siblings’ lives.

The goal of my study, as with any qualitative study, was to determine “understanding and meaning” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11) from my research participants. Given that they were the experts and holders of knowledge, my goal was to learn from them.

My basic qualitative study uncovered how the FGC students participating in my research study navigated their college years and whether or how they utilized the older siblings who had experienced – or were currently experiencing – college themselves. I explored further what role older siblings play in younger siblings’ college-going experiences and how their younger siblings tapped into any network of support.

As is called for in a general qualitative study, I stayed “closer to [my] data and to the surface of words and events” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 336) in several ways. First, using semi-structured interviews, I explored through the research participants’ words how they encountered the phenomenon of the college-going process with their siblings as support. In doing this, I sought to learn from my participants how they were influenced by their older siblings who may have been first-in-family, the first of the siblings to attend college, (Luzecyj, King, Scutter, & Brinkworth, 2011). Finally, I explored how this influence included the ways the older sibling were involved and whether those siblings were a resource for younger FGC siblings.

Research Setting

Institutional Site

This research was conducted at a large, public, four-year, research university in the Southeast United States, hereby referred to as “Southeastern University.” The school was also a land-grant institution (Grant et al., 2000). The undergraduate student population for the 2020-2021 school year was 20,868 students, and the graduate student population for the same year was 5,538. Of the 20,868 undergraduate students, 80.2% self-identified as white/Caucasian, 6.0% were Latinx, 5.8% were African American, 4.1% were more than one race, 2.7% were Asian American, .5% were international, .3% were unknown, .2% were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and .1% were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

Of the undergraduate students, 95.9% were enrolled as full-time students, earning 12 or more credits a semester. Slightly more than half, 50.6%, of students were male,

and 49.4% were female. This institution served primarily in-state students as 66.4% were in-state compared with 33.6% who were out-of-state. Only .5% of students came from outside the United States of America. The enrollment by academic class consisted of 34.2% in the senior class, 23.7% in the junior class, 24.4% in the sophomore class, and 17.3% in the freshman class, and .3% in an unclassified class.

Program-Specific Information

Participants in this study came from a sub-population of students who had participated in a first-year program at the university, called for the remainder of this dissertation by the pseudonym “Pathway Program.” This program helped fulfill the university’s foundational land-grant practice that Southeastern be an institution that provided educational opportunities to in-state students. The program began in the fall of 2006 to allow highly qualified students access to the four-year university who otherwise would not have been admitted into the freshman class. The program has grown over the years from 236 students in 2006 to 1,000 students in fall of 2020. Pathway students were offered an opportunity to participate in the program after they applied to the four-year university as first-year applicants. Students entering the Pathway Program exhibited strong academic skills during high school with nearly a third of them (29%) graduating in the top 25% of their high school class. The average SAT score for a 2020-2021 student was 1115 and the average ACT score was 22.

If potential students accepted their Pathway offer, they attended a local two-year institution, located five miles from the four-year university, for the fall and spring semesters of their freshman year. To successfully transfer to Southeastern University,

Pathway students must have completed academic requirements including earning a 2.5 GPA and earning at least 30 credit hours in which they received a final grade of at least a C in Southeastern-transferrable courses. Students had until the end of the summer term after their Pathway year to complete those requirements. Once Pathway students participating in this study completed those requirements, they were officially admitted to the four-year university and stayed enrolled at that school for the remainder of their time to complete their bachelor's degree. I chose to limit the students to those who successfully participated in the Pathway Program, because I wanted all of the participants in the study to have a similar first year and subsequent college experience.

Of the 1,000 student Pathway Program cohort in fall 2020, 469 of the students, 46.9%, were female and 531, or 53.1% were male. The racial breakdown of the Pathway Program is that 82.4% were white, 7.1% were black, .7% were Latinx, 1.7% were Asian, .05% were American Indian, .02% were Hawaiian Asian, and 7.4% were multi-racial or another race. The Pathway Program served primarily in-state students as 83.1% are in-state, but out of state students in the 2020-2021 cohort come from about 20 other states. Most of the students, 88%, lived in on-campus housing provided by the four-year university during their Pathway year, and 12% commute from one of the three surrounding counties near the four-year university. About 23% (228) students in the 2020-2021 cohort were first-generation college students indicating that neither of their parents completed a four-year college degree.

Sample Selection and Recruitment

Sample Selection

The goal of a qualitative study is to gather and share “extensive detail” (Creswell, 2007, p. 126) from and about the subjects. To achieve that objective in this study, I recruited 10 participants. Guest et al. (2006), suggested that qualitative researchers will achieve data saturation within 12 interviews, and the participants I selected provided rich, detailed information in their interviews leading to data saturation within 10 interviews. I selected participants from the freshman, sophomore, and junior years to see if any themes emerged from a variety of academic years and whether any themes were specific to students at certain points in their college experiences.

Criterion sampling (Maxwell, 2007; Patton, 2002) was used in this study. Criterion sampling includes cases that meet a predetermined criterion, and for the purposes of this study that criterion was one’s status as a FGC student enrolled at the four-year institution as an undergraduate student and participation in in the Pathway Program. Staff members in Southeastern University’s institutional research office had access to the self-identified FGC student population enrolled at the school who were either Pathway completers or current Pathway students. This study was restricted to students in the Pathway Program to allow all participants to have had a similar first-year experience. As noted above, these students all attended a local technical college for their Pathway year, and as upper division students all had successfully transitioned to Southeastern by the start of their sophomore years and remained at that institution since that point. The students who chose to participate in the study self-identified as having an

older sibling who enrolled at a four-year college or university prior to their enrollment at Southeastern.

In qualitative research, researchers utilize criterion sampling to select information-rich cases “from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). For this research study, FGC students were the participants, but specifically those students who had a sibling attend a four-year college prior to the study participant’s enrollment in a four-year college. An older sibling was someone who was raised in the same household as their younger sibling, shared at least one parent in common, and was restricted to be no more than 10 years older than their younger sibling. The 10-year age restriction allowed for the siblings to be living together in the same household for at least 8 years prior to the older sibling beginning their college education. Allowing students to grow up together for approximately half of their lives before they went to college allowed them to have shared lived experiences with their sibling while growing up.

The participants selected for the study provided data to illuminate the research question guiding the study. To reach data saturation within the recommended interviews that Guest et al. (2006) suggested for qualitative research, 10 interviews from first-year, sophomore, and junior academic classes at Southeastern were utilized.

Participant Recruitment

To recruit participants, I tapped into the resources at the research study. First, I asked staff from the institutional research department at Southeastern to pull the names and contact information for all FGC students who are currently in the Pathway Program

or enrolled at the four-year university as Pathway Completers. Each of those students received an e-mail message (see Appendix A) directly from me explaining the nature of the study and the time commitment involved. Additionally, I highlighted the fact that I restricted my study to FGC students who had at least one older sibling who attended a four-year college and started college before they did.

As an incentive to encourage students to participate in my study, monetary gift cards were provided to the FGC students. These cards compensated the students for the time needed to participate in my study and allowed me to show my appreciation that they shared their expertise on their lived experiences. I gave each person a \$25 VISA gift card, which I self-funded. After the interview concluded and they reviewed their transcript as part of member checking, the participants received their recognition gift.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data “tell a story... [and]” “capture and communicate someone else’s experience of the world in his or her own words” (Patton, 2002, p. 47). To collect this type of data, I conducted virtual, Zoom-based semi-structured interviews with each participant, as it was not possible to conduct those interviews in-person due to COVID-19 pandemic social distancing restrictions.

Pre-Interview Demographic Survey

Prior to any data collection efforts, I asked students who responded to my inquiry to participate in this study to complete a 16-question demographic survey (see Appendix B), so that I could glean information about their race, ethnicity, gender, educational history, educational history of their parents, and the educational history of the sibling

who attended college before them. I used this data to ensure that my participants met the criteria specified above.

Virtual Interview

The interview questions were divided into two sections: (a) the participants' family background, and (b) family capital utilization (see Appendix C). To discover the social links among family members that related to Gofen (2009)'s findings on family capital, I asked about how they connected to their older sibling and how, if at all, they turned to their older sibling for help and guidance throughout their time in college. To address the three parts of family capital that Swartz (2008) posited, I broke the questions into categories: 1) financial questions including how they relied on their older sibling for financial support and information in college, 2) social support questions that addressed how they felt at different stages of college and whether their sibling created to their feelings of belongingness in college, and 3) informational support questions to see what information they felt they were lacking in college, how they learned that information, and what if any way their sibling contributed to their college-going knowledge acquisition when they were in college. To discover whether each participants' family provided positive family capital as compared to negative family capital, I asked about their family dynamic prior to college, what their sibling relationship was like prior to college, and the relationship dynamic that existed between the siblings prior to college and where they currently were in their college experiences.

Prior to each interview I sent each participant a consent statement (see Appendix D) via e-mail. At the start of each interview, I read the statement to the student

participating in the interview and received verbal consent to continue with my questioning. Each interview was 60 to 75 minutes and was conducted virtually via the webinar platform Zoom.

Zoom videoconferencing technology was used for several reasons. The first being that Southeastern University has an institutional subscription to Zoom and is a technology that the research participants were familiar with due to the Southeastern's faculty and staff members using it to conduct their business since the start of the March 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Zoom also provided a recording and transcript of the interview. Each transcript was reviewed and compared closely to the recording to ensure accuracy to what was shared in the interview.

To ensure that the data was adequately collected, as there could have been technology failures or internet connection issues, I used a voice recording app on my cell phone as a back-up for recording the audio portion of the interview. I asked each participant to agree that if the interview was disrupted, I could call the student on the phone, confirm their identity, and proceed with the remainder of the interview questions. Fortunately, I did not have any technical difficulties as I was conducting these interviews, so that protocol was not necessary nor were the audio recordings needed.

To protect the data and privacy of the participants, I stored the audio and video recordings on a password protected computer. This was a personal computer, and only I had access to the video recordings. Each participant was given a pseudonym in my dissertation, so the identity of each participant was kept confidential.

Participant Context

Ten students chose to be a part of my study and share their experiences. Demographic information about each participant can be seen in the following table (Table 1).

David was a 21-year-old Asian man, a junior at this study's university, who had two older brothers. One brother, Kevin, attended the same institution as he did and participated in the first-year entry program as he. His other brother, Chris, went to another local university in the same state. Both siblings graduated from their respective institutions before David started college, and Kevin lived near David when David was a first-year student.

Carrie was a 21-year-old White woman, junior who had one older sister, Stephanie, who also attended Southeastern University but never went through the Pathway Program. Her older sister was in her senior year at Southeastern when Carrie was in her Pathway year.

Justin was a 21-year-old White man, junior, whose brother, James, also went to Southeastern but did not attend the Pathway Program. His older brother was in his senior year at Southeastern when he was in his Pathway year.

Matt was a 20-year-old White sophomore man whose older brother, George, also attended Southeastern. George was at Southeastern when Matt started in his Pathway

year, and both continued to be enrolled at the institution at the time of this research study. George did not participate in the Pathway Program.

Kate was a 21-year-old Black sophomore woman whose older brother, Max, attended a university outside the state where Southeastern was located (their home state). Max graduated college prior to Kate starting her Pathway year.

Alejandro was a 20-year-old Latinx sophomore man whose older siblings, Miguel and Maria, attended a smaller institution in the state where Southeastern was located (their home state). Both siblings graduated college before he started into college. His sister, Maria, lived near Southeastern while Alejandro attended school during this study.

Carol Anne was a 21-year-old White sophomore woman whose older sister, Brittany, attended a smaller in-state institution. Carol Anne's older sibling graduated from college before she started her studies at Southeastern.

Steven was a 20-year-old Black sophomore man who had one older sister, Allison, who also attended Southeastern, but did not go through the Pathway Program. She was in her senior year when he was a freshman.

Rajiv was a 19-year-old Asian first-year man whose older sister, Priyanka, was one year ahead of him in school. She was still enrolled in college at the time of this study;

however she attended an institution outside of the state where Southeastern was found (their home state).

Mia was a 19-year-old White first-year woman and the only out-of-state student who participated in this study. She was from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. She had two older sisters who attended college before her: Jennifer, who attended Southeastern but did not go through the Pathway Program, and Sarah, who attended another institution in a neighboring state to Southeastern’s state, referred to as Neighboring University. Both siblings graduated before Mia enrolled in college, however Sarah lived close to Southeastern at the time of this study.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Year in school	Race	Older sibling(s) pseudonym(s)	Sibling attend southeastern	Sibling pathway participation
David	Male	21	Junior	Asian	Kevin	Y	Y
					Chris	N	N
Carrie	Female	21	Junior	White	Stephanie	Y	N
Justin	Male	21	Junior	White	James	Y	N
Matt	Male	20	Sophomore	White	George	Y	N
Kate	Female	21	Sophomore	Black	Max	N	N
Alejandro	Male	20	Sophomore	Latinx	Miguel	N	N
					Maria	N	
Steve	Male	20	Sophomore	Black	Allison	Y	N
Carol Anne	Female	21	Sophomore	White	Brittany	N	N
Rajiv	Male	19	First-year	Asian	Priyanka	N	N
Mia	Female	20	First-year	White	Jennifer	Y	N
					Sarah	N	

Data Analysis

In describing qualitative research Patton (2014) identified the researcher conducting the research as “a credible, authoritative, authentic, and trustworthy voice that engages the reader through rich description, thoughtful sequencing, appropriate use of quotes, and contextual clarity, so that the reader joins the inquirer in the search for meaning” (p. 73). In each step of the data analysis process, I attempted to serve as that trustworthy voice to discover what the participants had to say as I answered my research question.

Immediately after each interview, I blocked time to complete an analytic memo (Saldaña, 2013). In the memo I highlighted main ideas and important comments and quotes that each participant made as they answered the semi-structured interview questions.

I then listened to each interview again and edited the transcripts for clarity. As I edited each transcript, I immersed myself in the participants’ comments, reading over each transcript thoroughly. After reading each transcript I wrote another analytic memo highlighting any similarities between the research participants in their answers, how certain answers tied into the family capital conceptual framework for this study, and how each participant addressed the role their sibling played for them while in college.

All data provided by the participants in this study was kept secure. The audio and video recording files of each interview were kept on a password protected computer to which only I had access. All participants were given pseudonyms to prevent their identities from being revealed.

Coding and Theming the Data

As I conducted my coding, I employed multiple rounds of data coding to help make meaning of the data collected (Saldaña, 2013). My goal with the analysis was to take “a volume of qualitative material” and “identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453).

In the first round of coding, I used open coding (Saldaña, 2013). I utilized open coding to develop an initial set of codes. Codes are “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). Using open coding I was able to break “down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences,” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 100). Open coding allowed me to see what codes emerged from the data, and Saldaña (2013) posited this technique is best for novice qualitative researchers, and I am one such scholar. The second round of my coding involved pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013). Pattern coding allowed me to look for patterns in the codes. I then grouped these codes together under broader categories. I conducted two rounds of theming as I grouped the categories together, and ultimately determined overarching themes from the final categories that remained.

Once I discovered patterns in the initial inductive review of the data, I deductively tested “the authenticity and appropriateness of the inductive content analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 454) noting any data that strayed from the patterns identified in the second round of coding. I developed a code book to organize my data (Saldaña, 2013). I maintained a

list of codes generated from the rounds of coding and organized and reorganized the codes into categories and subcategories (Saldaña, 2013).

Trustworthiness

I utilized a variety of different techniques to ensure the trustworthiness (Patton, 2002) of the findings from my study. I utilized member checking to strengthen the accuracy of my data after sending transcripts to participants (Glesne, 2016). I followed up with the study's participants and asked any lingering questions I had about their answers. By sharing the transcripts with them I ensured I was reviewing and coding the data correctly. The participants also had an opportunity to add to their data through member checking.

Another method to ensure trustworthiness was a peer review process (Glesne, 2016). I utilized two peer reviewers for this process. The first peer debriefer was someone who coordinates a FGC student support program at the research site and is a content expert on FGC students. I shared preliminary themes with this person and sought insight into my preliminary ideas for my implications of practice and policy. And I sought the involvement of a recent Ph.D. graduate who conducted qualitative research to review my transcripts and code book. Even though this person was not knowledgeable about the content area, she reviewed the data for accuracy as an impartial observer. The peer reviewer looked at my codebook to ensure that coding categories were distinct from each other, and that the data included in each category matched the description of the code.

Timeline

To complete this study, the first step after a successful proposal defense was to gain IRB approval which happened at the end of April. To recruit the participants in my study, I received the names and contact information for all current and former FGC Pathway students from Southeastern's institutional research department. By early summer, all Pathway FGC students received an e-mail from me telling them about my study (see Appendix A). To indicate their interest in participating in the study, students completed a demographic survey (see Appendix B), which I used to learn information about them and their older siblings. I sent out reminder messages about my study in June and early July. In early July I piloted my semi-structured interview questions with a Southeastern student who participated in the Pathway Program who felt she met all the criterion for the interview as indicated above, however her father ultimately earned bachelor's and master's degrees. To explain how she qualified figuratively for this study but not literally, she told me that she did not live with her father after her parents divorced when she was five years old. She considered herself to be a FGC student since her mother was her primary influence on her growing up and her mother did not attend a four-year college. I knew based on how I was defining FGC student for my study that this student would not be eligible to participate in the study, so I piloted the interview questions with her.

In the early fall semester, I completed my data collection through individual interviews. Throughout the fall of 2021 I analyzed my transcripts and created my code

book. In late fall and Spring 2022 I wrote up my analysis, results, and implications of research and practice.

Conclusion

Through conducting a basic qualitative research study, I desired to learn more from the experiences of the participants in my study and the role that their older college-educated siblings played in their experiences in college. I wanted to learn more about the students' experiences and determine what themes emerged as I analyzed the data. As I analyzed and coded the data, I wanted to see what common themes emerged among my participants. I hoped to add to the academic discourse by uncovering what role older siblings played in their younger siblings' lives, and I expected to see what practical and academic implications the data provided. In the following chapters, I have shared my findings and discussed their implications for forthcoming research and best practices for supporting FGC students.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this study I utilized a basic qualitative approach to explore and understand the lived experiences of FGC students. Specifically, I looked at how FGC students engaged with older siblings who had attended college. My research question was What role do older FGC student siblings play in the college-going experiences of younger siblings? This chapter consists of the participants' responses to this overarching research question highlighting the roles siblings play for the participants in this study.

Study Themes

As part of the data analysis process, three themes emerged about participants' older siblings, the contexts of participant-sibling relationships, and the impact older siblings had on the participants' college experiences. Those themes were: emotional support and fostering independence (older sibling as support), imparting knowledge (older sibling as informant), and paving the path to college (older sibling as role model).

The first theme, emotional support and fostering independence, highlighted the older sibling as support. This theme related to the connections participants had fostered during their lives with their siblings and how the support they received from their older sibling(s) helped them grow while they were students in college. The support these students received from their sibling(s) also equipped them with the freedom to make their college experiences their own.

The second theme, imparting knowledge, focused on the older sibling as informant. The theme came through as the older siblings helped their younger siblings

learn how to gain access to and succeed in college. In this capacity older siblings shared advice and taught participants about college from their own experiences.

The final theme, paving the path for college, positioned the older sibling as a role model. Participants described how older siblings mentored them through key college-going milestones both before and after university enrollment. This mentoring inspired younger siblings to attend college and ultimately succeed once they were enrolled, in part through the benefit of learning from the experiences of their older siblings.

Theme 1: Emotional Support and Fostering Independence: Older Sibling as Support

Eight of the 10 participants in this study discussed turning to their older sibling(s) for emotional guidance and support while navigating college. Participants talked about the close relationships they had with their sibling(s) while growing up. These connections to their siblings varied depending on what their home lives entailed, but all eight indicated they connected to their siblings growing up and while in college.

Connections Through Experience and Time Together

Some of the experiences that connected siblings were because of a challenge or difficulty. Steve described his relationship with his sister as an “unbreakable bond.” He said, “Growing up me and my sister we went through everything together.” The relationship that he and his sister fostered while growing up enhanced the connections they made while in college leading them to support one another through any challenges that they faced. Steve encouraged his sister to stay in school when she felt like quitting during her first semester of college. He said:

I would call her to check up on her during that time. She was getting homesick and because we were so close, I just had to encourage her to stick through it no matter how hard, to just get to the end. I'd say you can't come back here; you have to do something better with your life.

Steve fostered a bond with his sister, showing her that he was there to support her. She did the same as he entered college. She attended Southeastern at the time he did and supported Steve as he experienced challenges. He said:

I had a rough period of trials during last year with friends dying, so she made sure that I stayed on the best track I could. She checked up on me, trying to bring me out of the depression that I had. She has really been I would say almost like a mother figure.

Steve counted on his sister when he was in college, turning to her for support and guidance as he experienced difficulties.

Justin and his brother James's parents went through a divorce before Justin entered elementary school. He indicated he only had his brother James growing up to help him through that process. He said:

It was always just me and my brother, and that obviously brought us closer together. We had each other and we had our parents at that point but, I don't know if my brother felt that way too, but I felt the trust [with my parents] wasn't there. Obviously, that's something that you understand whenever you get older and understand why [the divorce] had to happen. Then, you feel like you can't communicate with [your parents] as much because the relationship was broken

between your two parents. It was hard. Me and my brother were always there for each other, and especially him being there for me.

For Justin, James was the person he trusted the most and who was most available, so his parents' divorce began to solidify a different kind of bond between the brothers than they might have otherwise had.

Alternately, David said that his parents put elements in place in positive ways throughout his life growing up that fostered the bonds he had with his siblings. He described the relationship he had with his two older brothers when growing up saying:

We were always hanging out doing something. Even now we still go on a family vacation about once a year. How many people do you know take vacations to Disney with a 30-year-old, a 28-year-old, a 21-year-old and then two parents? That's the way I sum it up with us. Sure, we got on each other's nerves, but we are a very close unit and it's pretty cool. My parents have always been that way, keeping us close, having us talk to each other. [In high school] I could always just call my brothers, because they were either [in college] or in a graduate program.

David's relationship with his two brothers was formed by constant interactions, encouraged by his parents, creating a bond where they knew they supported each other. This relationship was maintained when he entered college through constant, frequent communication and give and take.

Alejandro shared a room with his older brother and sister growing up and spent time with them. He said "We would walk to school together. And then we also got to

live together. We used to live in a two-bedroom apartment, and we all got to bunk together in one room so we're kind of used to being in each other's way." The time at home and on the way to school provided them opportunities to connect in a variety of settings that transferred to their college experiences.

Alejandro, Mia, David, Carrie, Justin, Matt, and Steve either had an older sibling attend the same university at the time of their college enrollment or their sibling lived near the institution during at least their first year. They all capitalized on the opportunity to see their sibling whenever possible. They were able to turn to their sibling for support seeing them on a regular basis, and that proximity deepened their relationship.

Alejandro said, "Especially my first year it was nice to have my sister close by since I wasn't really able to make many friends or hang out with many people. It was nice to have her there so I could be with someone that I knew." He turned to his sister for support as he was adjusting to college life and finding connections on campus.

Steve's sister was finishing up her senior year of college when he started into his first year in the Pathway Program. He described that time during his first year of college as an "excitement phase actually being reconnected with my sister" after living apart for three years. He indicated that when she left for college that "a piece of me was leaving as well." He wanted to maximize his opportunity to reconnect with his sibling and then turned to her for guidance and support as he faced academic and personal challenges in that first year.

When Justin was in his first year of college, his brother was also completing his final year of college at Southeastern. He mentioned:

Our dynamic definitely changed for the better whenever I did come into college, and that was the only year that we did spend together actually at Southeastern. He was super involved senior year, so he was busy with stuff as well, but he always tried to say, “come over to my apartment,” or “let’s go get lunch.” So, it was a really good year and I think we tried to make the most of it because we did realize we only had that one year of college together.

Justin knew that James was there to support him in his first year and he took advantage of any opportunity he had to connect with him.

David and Mia would turn to their sibling(s) whenever they felt homesick during their freshman year. As a result, they both expressed how interacting with their sibling helped them keep a sense of home even when going to school far from home. David said, “for the first two, three months I missed home a lot. It helped having my brother there. I would have been a lot more stressed out if he wasn’t there.” He turned to his brother for emotional support to abate feelings of homesickness.

When Mia was in college, one of her siblings, Sarah, lived only two hours away while the other, Jennifer, lived across the country. Mia still felt connected to Jennifer during her first year as she had just graduated from Southeastern the previous academic year. Both of her siblings helped mitigate feelings of homesickness due to the connections she had with them. She mentioned how her proximity to Sarah allowed her to feel like a part of home was nearby. She said, “me and Sarah were two hours away from each other, so it was very easy for me to go and visit with Sarah whenever I was feeling homesick.” Mia felt confident that Sarah could support her, and her proximity

allowed her to feel that she had a piece of home with her that she could tap into whenever it was needed. On the other hand, her other sister, Jennifer, even though she was not in the area, she was able to connect her to people she knew who were still in the area. Mia felt that those people reminded her of her sister and made her feel like her sister was with her. She said:

It was super comforting knowing that [Jennifer] had people here [at Southeastern]. Even though she was not here, I had people who knew her and were friends with her. So, if I'm ever feeling homesick and I don't want to drive two hours to go see my other sister, I could meet with people that are still in the area that knew Jennifer and just talk to them and surround myself with people that also knew her.

Even from a distance, Jennifer supported Mia and helped her to feel more comfortable in her new collegiate environment.

Matt felt comfortable going to college knowing that his older brother would be right along-side of him attending Southeastern with him. He indicated that having him there was a major factor in choosing where he would go to college. He said, "in the back of my mind, I knew I would be going to the same school as my brother, so that was a definite plus. That was an influential part of going to Southeastern." Matt knew Justin would be there to support and guide him as he navigated his time in college.

Carrie said her sister eased her concerns about college during her first year and made her feel like she belonged there. As she progressed throughout her first year and

has persisted in college, she felt less and less anxious than she thought she would. She said:

Yeah, [my sister] definitely made my college experience a lot better. She helped me get more comfortable in my environment and helped ease a lot of my anxiety about college just having her there to help me through things.

The support Carrie received from her sister gave her a sense of freedom as she entered college and adjusted to a new academic and social environment.

The participants in this study felt comfortable turning to their older siblings for support. Those older siblings served as an encourager and supporter, helping their siblings feel less anxious about the college-going process. Younger siblings capitalized on their connections with their siblings, and the support that they received even further developed their relationships.

Connections Through Encouragement

Carol Anne was a first-year student in the spring of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic spread, causing her institution to pivot suddenly to all-online instruction for the last six weeks of the semester. She admitted that this form of learning was incredibly difficult, but her sister refused to entertain the notion that she quit school. Her mother encouraged her to take the next academic year off when she saw Carol Anne struggling, but her sister insisted that she continue with her education, motivating her to do so. She said, “[Brittany] would say, ‘We’ve got this. Just get through this year. It is going to be okay, everything’s going to go back to normal eventually or somewhat normal’.”

Carole Anne's sister supported and encouraged Carol Anne to achieve her dream of getting a college degree even when the learning environment was challenging.

David, Steve, and Carrie's older siblings made their younger siblings feel safe when they admitted they needed help or did not understand something about the college-going process. David said, "I don't have to - quite frankly - look stupid, ask a dumb question." The connections he fostered with his brothers allowed him to be vulnerable and get the assistance he needed. Carrie said, "I have turned to [Stephanie] a lot for emotional support. She's really good with [challenging] situations and how to handle it. Whatever the problem might have been, she wouldn't judge me but would help me figure it out." Carrie felt free to explore any challenges with the assistance of her sibling without fear of facing condemnation from her sister.

Steve said he has always had a problem discussing personal issues with other people, but he had no trouble doing that with his older sister Allison. He felt his relationship with her had improved over the previous two years when he had her to help him with his challenges. He said:

I typically have a problem opening up about feelings, but I would be more willing to talk to [Allison] about things, tell her what's going on with me. And it honestly paid off for the better as I was able to tell her more about how I had been feeling and our relationship became stronger. She now knows way more than she knew about me two years ago.

Steve's connection with Allison and the support he received allowed him to unpack his thoughts and feelings about college life.

For several participants, their older sibling created a safe, supportive environment where they felt free to explore what college was about. Their older sibling encouraged them to continue in college, achieving their dreams of being college students.

Support Leads to Independence

While participating in the Pathway Program during their first year of college, participants turned to their sibling(s) for help and encouragement. Participants expressed concerns about their transition from high school into college including navigating difficult professors, finding friends and a sense of belonging, adjusting to the rigors of college academics, and navigating a new environment.

As they navigated college further, all participants indicated that they attempted to experience college for themselves but were grateful to still have their sibling continuing to support them. Alejandro felt that his time in college helped him adjust. He said:

I think I feel different just because I do have those two years under my belt, so I don't panic as much when I see new things in classes. I feel like I have a lot more composure this year when it comes to everything and being able to be more independent while in school.

Alejandro was adjusting to college life, feeling more confident about his experiences in college and able to navigate more and more challenges on his own.

Carrie, a junior, felt that her time in college improved as the years went along and her sister was able to help her through each year and the challenges she faced. She said:

I definitely feel more settled in now than I did before. As much as I'm ready for it to be over, I think I'm enjoying it more than I ever was just because I feel like

years before I just wanted to get through it. But now I'm trying to enjoy it more while I still have it before I have to go off into the real world and do more school elsewhere.

With the support of her sibling, Carrie found she was more stable and more fully able to enjoy her experience in college.

Growing up these participants had at least one year in high school, where their older siblings were no longer living in their same family household. Participants reacted to that time away from their sibling differently. Mia and Steve specifically mentioned feeling disappointed that they could not be around their sisters anymore when they went away to college. Mia felt jealous as her sisters went off to college and wanted to be with them. She said:

When Jennifer [went] to Southeastern, I felt very lonely just because I had the house completely to myself and I was home alone for four years with just my parents....I envied [my siblings] for being away and living their own lives, but it was very interesting to be able to come to their college towns and visit, seeing that they have their own little life but as a kid you are just very jealous. You're excited to make your own journey too, but it's super upsetting I think when you're a kid and see your sisters who are built-in friends just leave, but I was happy for them, even though I was sad being home.

Terry added that he missed his sister as she went to college. He said, "So, once she left it was kind of like a piece of me was like leaving as well." Both Mia and Terry missed

their day-to-day connections with their siblings, but also aspired to the experiences they were having in their new lives in college.

David and Kate appreciated the time they had in high school after their older siblings moved out of the house. These participants saw the time as an opportunity to learn who they were and how they could function as adults.

David said that time away from his brothers in high school matured him. He said: “I’m more mature and independent than they were at 18. I think it helped that I was living basically on my own for five years without them being home. So, I felt the independence.” David felt free to learn how to function on his own without his brothers around him, contributing to feelings of independence before and as he prepared to go to college.

Kate appreciated having her own space while she was in high school and her older brother, Max was away at college. She said:

In high school I was just in my kid head thinking I am free and have the house to myself. I just had the house to myself. But it was in my senior year that I turned to him more. He was getting ready to leave college.

Kate felt independent in high school, exploring and growing during the years that her older brother was at college, but as she began to think about college herself, she turned to her brother.

Even after time passed in college and participants felt more confident in their ability to handle difficult situations in college, the participants continued to turn to their sibling(s) for advice, support, and guidance. They knew that their brothers or sisters were

there to help them, but at the same time their older siblings were intentionally allowing participants to come to their own conclusions. Matt reflected that his older brother was now allowing him to come up with solutions and feel comfortable making decisions on his own. He said:

The advice I got from George was more “this is my opinion based on my experiences, you can take this information and think about how it could apply to you.” It was never “You should always do this.” It was “I am always here to help, not tell you what to do.”

The support Matt felt from his brother inspired him to come to his own conclusions and make college his own.

Alejandro said that his brother and sister gave him less advice his sophomore year, as they felt he had a greater grasp on college. When reflecting on why his siblings treated him that way, he said “maybe it’s because I’ve already explained to them, I was already getting a hang of things so maybe they felt that they didn’t really need to share much more about their own experience.” Alejandro’s siblings offered support by allowing him more freedom to follow his own path. They knew he was getting comfortable handling things on his own and gave him the opportunity to do that.

David reflected on his past three years in college and shared that he reached out to his brothers significantly in his first year, but that tapered off. He said, “The questions have gotten less and less from freshman year. But they still arise every now and then. I can confess I haven’t had a question probably since middle of last year.” David knew

that his siblings were there to help him, but he relied on them less as he progressed through college.

Rajiv shared that he battled sibling rivalry significantly during his time in high school and during his first year of college. His sister was one year older, and he said that she excelled academically in high school in areas where he struggled. He felt he lived under Priyanka's shadow, and that was the impetus for him to attend a different college than the one she went to. He was bothered by the fact that his parents and his sister's friends would frequently compare him to Priyanka. He said:

I didn't always appreciate [being compared to Priyanka] growing up. I learned to let it go a little bit and just try to be my own person at that point. Just try to focus on me more. Not in a selfish way. More just focus on me. Rather than trying to make it seem like "Oh, I'm always Priyanka's brother" just be, like, "Oh, that's Rajiv."

When Priyanka role modeled getting into college, Rajiv actively sought ways to create his own experience separate from that of his sister after high school.

Rajiv saw college as a time to be away from his sibling. His time in the Pathway Program was new for him. Since Priyanka had not gone through the program or to the same institutions, he was no longer in a position where he was constantly compared to her. He intentionally did not take his sister's advice and attend her out-of-state university, since he wanted to be out of her shadow. He wanted independence. Rajiv was the only research participant who voiced those concerns. He said that his sister's

comments and advice were annoying in high school, but her insights became less annoying during his first year of school.

Throughout his first year in college (during the 2020-2021 academic year), his institution implemented modified hybrid instruction operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, he did not turn to his sister for help even though they were both experiencing college in the COVID-19 pandemic. He said “So, we’re both doing [college during COVID] together. But my mindset was I didn’t really turn to her for questions.” While he indicated that Priyanka was giving him guidance and support during his first year, he felt her efforts were annoying as he considered her to be “the person that’s itching around my neck...poking out of my neck, making sure I do everything I need to do.” He struggled taking the advice and support from his sister even in difficult times.

Rajiv did acknowledge that even when he did not turn to her for support during his first year of college, he knew he could. He said:

I didn’t really ask for her support. Not like in a bad way more just “Hey, I don't really have anything right now I need help with. So, I don’t need to ask for anything right now.” That was like a big thing, but I always knew she’d be there if I needed anything, or if she needed anything I’d be there for her.

Rajiv did not feel he needed his older sister Priyanka as his first year of college wrapped up, but he did not shut the door completely to her support. He knew he could turn to her in the future if he did need anything.

Participants in this study said their older sibling was someone who helped them see that they could make college their own. They could take the advice and encouragement their older sibling gave and have their own college experience. Even if participants did not ask their siblings for support or necessarily want to be compared to their sibling, they knew that their sibling was there to encourage them and help them have a successful college experience.

Theme 2: Imparting Knowledge: Older Sibling as Informant

All the research participants sought words of wisdom from their siblings about going to college. The informational help that siblings offered fell into three main categories: assistance entering college, assistance navigating college, and assistance regarding life after college.

Advice: Assistance Entering College

Alejandro, Justin, David, Matt, Carrie, and Rajiv turned to their sibling for help as they applied to college. Alejandro's sister, Maria, guided him through the college application process. He said:

[My sister] has been the one to really push for me to have a good education. She was always there through the application process. She would say, "Oh, you can do it. There's a way for you to be able to get in." She encouraged me all through high school, trying to get me to do my best and try hard. She was there for me. Alejandro's sister guided him along the application process, encouraging him but at the same time making sure he knew how to set himself up for success in the process.

Rajiv's sister, while initially wanting him to apply to her out-of-state school, eventually helped him apply to his in-state schools of choice. She kept him on track throughout his senior year as he navigated the application process, monitoring deadlines and to-do tasks. He said:

She would ask about college. She would slowly talk about college when I was a senior and she was in her freshman year. She would ask me, what colleges have you applied for? And I be listing off some of the colleges and she would say you had better do it sooner, everything very soon.

Rajiv's sister provided advice and guidance as he applied to college. He accepted this assistance despite some previous resistance to her input.

Justin made his FGC student identity apparent when he said that his mom told him she did not know as much about going to college. Instead, she indicated that Justin's older brother, James, should be the one to clarify the college exploration process. James attended Justin's college visit days to Southeastern and another in-state university. It would be his older brother who would show him around both campuses and teach him about the college environment. Justin said:

I was a senior in high school. I did not understand how to pick a college. Having conversations about where to live, what to bring, he was just my go to. He was my Ask-It Basket type guy that I would feel like I could ask him anything and he lived it directly.

Justin's entry into college was facilitated by his sibling not a parent. James was the one with the information to help Justin choose where to go to college.

Mia's sisters told her to go to a rigorous college and, as a result, they wanted her to challenge herself academically. This pushed her to do more than she originally thought she could. Mia said, "[My sisters] put a little bit of pressure on me to do more. So, they definitely wanted me to want more from an education, rather than just doing college to do college." Mia's sisters were those informants for her on how to select the best college for her, helping her see what kind of academic challenge she was capable of successfully taking on.

Several participants focused on how their older siblings helped them navigate their entry into college. This included campus visits, completing paperwork, meeting deadlines, and choosing schools that would challenge them. This support and encouragement helped get students into college, and the support of siblings continued once participants started college.

Advice: Assistance Navigating College

Understanding Finances.

Older siblings shared information about how to navigate paying for college. David, Justin, Steve, and Matt's siblings clarified how loans could help pay for college. Matt said:

When it comes to money, [my brother] just said, "Make sure to get as many scholarships as you can. If you get loans, make sure you know how those loans are going to affect you in the end, like the condition of those loans. There are so many other options, and he said there are so many ways to do it, but the best way is just to go to the Financial Aid office. They're going to be able to help you

more because that's their job to do it. He knew his knowledge was limited to his experience, [and said] "Someone who [works in Financial Aid will] know a bunch of people's situations and analyze what's best for them. That's going to be a lot better than anything that I can help you with. If I don't know, go to someone who does know."

Matt's brother not only shared what he knew but directed Matt to campus resources particularly about loans and how to pay for college. Matt's brother encouraged him to seek out the professionals on campus to further his understanding of finances in college.

David, Rajiv, and Carol Anne's siblings walked their younger siblings through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (commonly called FAFSA). Carol Anne said that FAFSA was one of the most confusing things about college. She said:

FAFSA was really hard for me to do and navigate. To make it less confusing I just had to sit down and get through it. I called my sister and asked her to help me get through it. It definitely took me a few tries.

Carol Anne took a difficult financial process and asked her sister who had already been through it how to complete the form. Her sister was able to make it seem less intimidating, walking her through each step.

David's brothers told him where to go to get his FAFSA information. He said: My brothers said learn how to do FAFSA quickly. I remember my older brother, [Steve,] just knew all of my dad's information, everything you needed for FAFSA, and he would have pictures of it on his phone to use again and again. Freshman year, I didn't do that, and it took way longer than it should have. After

I learned to keep that information on my phone, I did it that way every year after that. That was the best specific piece of advice he gave me.

David's brother taught him what information was necessary for FAFSA and demystified the process of completing the FAFSA, ultimately making it easier for David to do it.

Similarly, Steve, Alejandro, and Justin learned directly from their siblings' experiences about how to pay for college. Steve's sister walked him through how she paid for college using loans and an in-state scholarship and made sure he knew how to apply for the same loans when he got to college and achieve whatever academic standing was necessary to earn the same in-state scholarship for his first year. He said:

I really did not know anything about paying for college, but I became more aware of the situation once I actually sat down and talked to my sister and my dad about it. They just told me basically everything, that I should have grants like the Pell Grant and unsubsidized and subsidized loans.

Alejandro wanted to avoid the financial mistakes his older siblings made with credit card debt in college. He said the main advice he got was "mainly just stay away from credit cards. Because I think they got into a tough financial situation because of that when they were in college. They gave me words of wisdom about that." He learned from his siblings' lived experiences and words of caution about navigating credit card debt when addressing paying for the college.

When Justin became confused about finances he immediately turned to his brother. He said, "I literally just went to him and said tell me what to do. I have no clue

what any of this is.” He tapped into his brother’s knowledgebase to help understand college finances.

Justin and Rajiv’s siblings encouraged their younger brothers to think about how to budget their money in college and to factor in the “incidentals,” as Justin put it. The older siblings taught their younger siblings what to buy during college. These included going out to eat, buying clothes, or spending money on items that are not academic in nature. Rajiv’s sister helped him figure out what was important, and he needed to invest in, or not invest in, while in college. He said, “She told me what to buy and what not to buy. She said don’t buy a meal plan if you are not going to go [to the dining halls], so I didn’t buy a meal plan.” Rajiv’s sister helped him avoid paying for things he would not need or use in college.

Throughout their experiences, several participants talked about getting guidance from or avoiding the pitfalls older siblings had experienced when it came to finances and paying for college. These older siblings informed their younger siblings about how the finances of college worked. Along with helping them regarding finances, they also informed them about how to successfully navigate the academic requirements of college.

Understanding Academic Excellence.

Prior to attending college, Steve and David’s siblings warned their younger siblings about the rigor of college level academics. Steve said:

So, we had those conversations where she would honestly tell me that college is easy to get into but staying in is the hardest part. She also told me to make sure that I stay on top of my work, don’t ever get behind because if you do, that’s when

you get in trouble. She would give me advice on college before I even got to college, so I wouldn't be surprised about everything when I was in college.

Steve's sister knew how easy it was to fall behind and struggle. She wanted him to start learning how to be a successful student prior to attending college and keep that same mentality after getting to college.

David had a similar experience. His brother told him, "Get your work done, don't just be lazy because high school is not even close to college." College was not going to be what he experienced in high school, and his brother wanted him to be aware of what the academic expectations would be.

Rajiv's older sister wanted him to focus on schoolwork both in his senior year of high school and during his first-year of college. He said, "She mainly just told me to focus on classes, make sure I do good on my grades and exams." Priyanka's advice was to focus on academic success as she wanted him to be a successful student.

Participants learned from their older siblings about how to be a successful student in the classroom. They emphasized how rigorous college would be and that they needed to put effort into their schoolwork. That focus on achieving excellence in college prepared the younger siblings for the academic work load they would face during their time in college.

Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on all the research participants' experiences in college. Four of the participants' older siblings attended college during the pandemic as well. Mia's middle sister attended college during the 2019-2020 school

year when Mia was still a senior in high school. Steve and Matt's older siblings were enrolled in college during the 2019-2020 school year when operations at Steve and Matt's institutions moved online at the start of the pandemic. Further, Matt and Rajiv's siblings attended college during the 2020-2021 school year when the pandemic continued to modify operations. These changes included the enforcement of social distancing, more online learning, and reduced in-person resources on campus.

Matt said that he talked to his brother about what they were going through with online learning during the 2020-2021 school year. He said:

We would talk about being online all the time. Last year, one of my friends decided his second semester to take a gap semester because he basically just failed or dropped a bunch of classes. So, [taking a gap semester] was an option for us. We would sit there and talk about what we would want to do.”

For Matt, his brother was able to help him figure out online learning while he experienced it too, helping him see that he could stay enrolled in college and work through the challenges of online education.

Steve's sister wanted to make sure he was adjusting well to the modified operations in college and focused on his mental health. He said, “My sister made sure that I was okay. COVID had hit and I already had some depression from some of my friends dying, so she ended up being a good mental savior.” Steve's sister wanted to make sure he was navigating the non-academic challenges of COVID successfully.

The remaining six participants whose older siblings never experienced college during the COVID-19 pandemic did not turn to their sibling for help navigating online

learning and remote college experiences. Instead, the older siblings for those participants adjusted their advice and was concerned more about their younger siblings' wellbeing.

Justin turned to his brother for help with his mental health. He said about the start of the pandemic:

For the most part, no one knew what was going on, no one had a clue and [James] didn't know what was going on. We talked about "Oh there's this virus going around, look at how we're shutting down." That initial shift was just so rough from directly online when no one had done that before really. And I feel like our conversations were more so checking in. "Hey, how are you doing, even though obviously things are crazy right now."

Justin's brother tried to check in on him, to make sure he was doing well.

There was a reversal of information sharing between the participants and their older siblings when addressing the changes to education with which the pandemic presented them. No longer were participants going to their sibling(s) for advice, but their older sibling(s) were curious to know how they were handling their new online/pandemic-influenced college experience, something they themselves had never encountered in the past. For Alejandro, his two siblings had been out of college prior to the pandemic, so they asked him what his experiences were like. He said:

They were really interested to see how I was adapting to everything just because most of the classes were online. They were asking me "hey how are you doing in your classes? How are they compared to how we did ours?" They were able to

fully have their classes in-person, compared to me having everything broken up, and then having to go online for a while.

Alejandro's older siblings could not give him advice on how to handle online learning, but instead asked him how the process worked.

It was a role reversal experience, and the older siblings approached this new information sharing in a variety of different ways. David said his older brothers asked him questions in an "apologetic" way, realizing that David's experiences in his junior year were going to be different than his brother's experiences in their junior years without having the COVID-19 pandemic to work through. They wished David could have had a junior year resembling more like what they experienced in college. David said:

What's funny is that now it's a circumstantial thing but with COVID they're asking me questions every day. They ask, "What's your experience been like compared to ours?" I was like "Not fun. I'll tell you that, not fun." Zoom classes were not fun, not enjoyable. But my middle brother was like "Yeah if I had Zoom classes, I would have failed. I would have failed all of my classes" because if he had had all Zoom classes, he would have struggled, he would have struggled big time. They would ask me big questions about that specifically.

David's brothers wanted to hear from him about his experience and related it to their experiences going through college prior to the pandemic.

Carrie knew that her older sister was not going to be able to help her process the online learning components during the COVID-19 pandemic, so instead she sought out

her roommates and friends in college, especially those in her major for assistance. She said about her discussions with Stephanie during the pandemic:

I don't really know if I ever really talked with her all that in-depth about school. I just honestly asked my roommates over her just because they were closer for one, and they would have a more biology-related answer. They would know the answer before my sister would.

For Carrie, those roommates and friends rather than her sister became the content experts on how to navigate COVID-19. Those in college with her experienced the pandemic alongside her and had knowledge, ideas, and insights her sister did not.

As each participant was navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes it brought to their educational experiences, if they had an older sibling who also went through the pandemic as a student, those siblings became an informant on the pandemic. Those siblings helped them handle adjustments to new ways of learning and interacting with others. If their sibling(s) did not experience the pandemic as college students, their role became one in which they checked on their younger siblings' wellbeing or turned to their younger sibling as the holders of college pandemic information.

Advice: Assistance Regarding Life After College

Three of the participants, David, Carrie, and Matt, said that their older siblings encouraged them to think about life after college. David and Carrie were juniors and Matt was a sophomore. David's brothers encouraged him to think about joining the military or attending graduate school. He said:

Now, they ask me more questions about what I want to do. Do I want to do graduate school or officer school or go get a job or MBA or do an HR program? And so now, this is where my middle brother comes into play, because he went and got his MHR degree and his law degree.

David's brothers encouraged him to think about life after he finished college. His middle brother drew from his experiences pursuing advanced degrees to give David options to consider as he approached graduation.

Carrie reached out to her sister as she was debating getting a job after college or going to graduate school. Carrie said, "I definitely talked to her about graduation and how that was and about the transition afterwards to finding a job." Similarly for Matt, his brother was someone to whom he turned as he figured out who he wanted to be after college. He said:

And when it came to trying to decide basically who I wanted to be, what I wanted to do with myself, I would talk to him about that. Sometimes we would just sit there and talk about what we wanted in our lives in the future.

David, Carrie, and Matt's older siblings each provided points to consider not only during college, but as the participants began to think about life after Southeastern.

As an informant, participants' older sibling(s) helped clarify how to get into college, how to navigate college once they were there, and think about life after college. They referred them to resources on campus to help them with their academic and personal success. If they had a context of the COVID-19 pandemic as a student, they

helped them navigate the challenges of online learning. If they didn't have a context, they made sure to check on their well-being.

Theme 3: Paving the Path to College: Older Sibling as Role Model

Students talked about how their siblings role modeled what it meant to be a college student in addition to simply engaging in conversations with them. As participants explained their college-going experiences, they shared how they tapped into the lived experiences of older siblings when they were navigating college. Each research participant discussed how they modeled some part of their college experience after the example set forth by their older siblings.

Avoid Challenges in College Through Sibling's Experience

Participants learned to avoid pitfalls in college by seeing and hearing how their older sibling(s) struggled. Rajiv saw his sister struggle as she lived on campus with roommates. He said, "I am really glad I didn't have the dorm experience, because my sister really had the dorm experience, and she would tell me the problems of her dorm experience." He never wanted to live on campus after seeing what his sister went through.

Kate needed to bounce back from a difficult academic semester in her freshman year and sought out her brother for advice on what to do next. She said:

Yes, I was very, very scared, especially after the first semester of my Pathway year and I was telling him that my GPA was very low, and I wanted some tips on how to be better. He told me about his experience during his college years and it was worse than mine.

Kate's brother shared his academic challenges and gave her tips for how to avoid going through the same experience.

Students learned not only through advice or building on the successes of their older siblings but also by watching and discussing mistakes and challenges their older brothers and sisters faced. This connected to role modeling as each of their older siblings were successful in college in terms of graduation despite these setbacks along the way.

Making College a Reality for Siblings

Justin, Steve, Carol Anne, and Kate all said that they were able to see that college was something they could achieve after seeing their older sibling go through it first. Justin noted that his parents did not push him to go to college, but seeing James go through it gave him the idea that he should do the same. He said:

For the most part my parents said, "College is on your own. They didn't go to college and didn't have their parents pay for it. It was something that James and I decided to do. If James hadn't gone to college, I wouldn't have gone to college. That was just the reality of it, which is sad but that's how it was, and I am thankful that he even did go.

James and Justin's parents did not make attending college a priority for them growing up. Instead, Justin looked to James as a guide for how to attend a four-year university, and that inspired him to do the same. Justin attributed his attendance at college to the fact that James showed him that attending college was possible.

Steve's sister attended Southeastern as well, and he indicated that she was the reason he wanted to go to Southeastern. He wanted to follow in her footsteps. Steve said:

Being able to see her go off to college - that also motivated me because I could see it was possible for that to happen, because none of my family members really went to college. If they did, they went to a two-year college, so to see her go to a four-year college actually motivated me to be able to say, "Yes - I can go to a four-year college."

His sister was the person in Steve's life who opened the door to him possibly earning a four-year degree and made it a reality for him. She made him want to earn that degree as well. He saw her attend college and wanted to do the same. He was inspired to achieve the goal of attending college, too, after seeing his sister navigate higher education.

Like Steve, Carol Anne wanted to come to Southeastern after her older sister, Brittany, attended the school. She said, "Her being [at Southeastern] helped motivate me to want to be here, too. And so that's a big part of I guess too why I wanted to come to Southeastern." Carol Anne wanted to model her college experiences after Brittany's. Her older sister set the stage for her to want to attend college and Southeastern, specifically. She was able to watch her sister go through college, and that inspired her to want to do the same. She wanted to experience the same collegiate milestones that her sister achieved.

Kate's older brother was a role model for Kate when he went through college. She said that he finished his college degree so she would have someone to model after when she was working on her degree. She said:

He told me that he wanted to be a role model for me because he said I can't be the older brother that didn't graduate college. Then my younger sister won't be able to go to college, because I didn't finish college.

Kate's brother did not simply role model college-going by attending. He intentionally talked with her about what he was doing and how it was not only for him, but for her as well. Making this role modeling explicit inspired and engaged Kate in powerful ways related to her own college-going experience.

Several participants discussed the importance of seeing their older sibling(s) go to college as it helped them see that they too could go to college. Rather than simply saying, "You can do it," these students' brothers and sisters were saying, "I did it, so you can, too." In some cases that was explicitly stated and a part of sibling conversations. In many cases it was the actions of the older siblings that served as the inspiration without specific conversation.

Older Sibling Modeling Excellence

Mia and Terry mentioned that their older sisters set a high bar for them to in terms of achievement in college and motivated their younger siblings to want to be successful as well. Mia said:

[My sisters] definitely set a very high example for me because Sarah went to Neighboring University and it is a very good school and Jennifer came to

Southeastern. They did a lot of work, and they were able to do the ROTC programs as well and excel in those areas. They definitely set a very high standard for me.... I definitely look to them and set them as an example of what I want to do while at school and that is how I have always looked at them.”

Mia’s sisters showed her what academic success in college could look like, setting an expectation that she also wanted to achieve.

Steve’s sister also motivated him to succeed in college. He said:

I know she basically held me to a higher standard than she wanted herself to be at. She made sure that I’m on top, that I graduate earlier than she graduated. So, basically, she just wants me to have a better college experience than she had for herself. That’s the best way I can honestly explain that one. She wants me to have a better college experience than she had.

For Steve, his sister wanted him to be successful and earn a college degree. She knew the bar that she set in attending college and wanted him to not only achieve that, but also exceed it.

The older siblings wanted their younger siblings to be successful in college. They valued education and the college experience, so they put time and effort into being successful college students. They modeled academic excellence. Their younger siblings saw their older siblings as a role model and were inspired to achieve that same level of success as they attended college.

Siblings Pave the Path at the Same Institution

Five of the research participants’ siblings also went to Southeastern. They all

referenced how their siblings helped teach them about campus traditions and shared how the university operated. Their concerns about adjusting to college and navigating the academic and social aspects of their first year were abated by turning to their sibling to learn how they navigated those challenges. Carrie said:

[My sister] helped me with things like Canvas [the university's online course content management system] because she was already familiar with it, and I was not. And then getting around campus she helped me learn how to prepare more because she had already been through it, and so I got to learn some of her experiences and how she handled them and based my own experiences off of that. Carrie's sister helped her with the learning curve she might have struggled with related to campus technology and transportation. As a result, Carrie was able to tap into her sister's experiences and utilize resources effectively.

David was the only one of the participants whose brother, Kevin, also went through the Pathway Program. He mentioned repeatedly how he would turn to Kevin more than his other brother, Chris, who went to another school. David felt more comfortable going into his first year knowing that he could tap into Kevin's experiences to help him navigate the challenges he faced in college. He said:

It helped that he went through the Pathway Program as he was able to tell me, basically, what I should and shouldn't do and helped to advise me on where and what I should do and who would be the most helpful.

Kevin modeled how to go through a similar first year in the Pathway Program, highlighting what resources were available and gave him an example to model after.

Attending the same university as their older sibling gave the research participants a built-in resource to navigate their new academic world. They understood better the technological and programmatic services on campus and the campus culture was not as much of a mystery. These participants had someone to model after directly, tapping into their lived experiences, and those examples helped them make meaning of their college experience.

Conclusion

The older siblings of the research participants helped guide their younger siblings into and through their college experiences. The three themes that emerged from the students were: 1) emotional support and fostering independence: older sibling as support, 2) imparting knowledge: older sibling as informant, and 3) paving the path to college: older sibling as role model. Each of these themes illustrated the different roles the siblings held for their younger siblings: supporters, informants, and role models. Additional discussion on those findings and how they relate to and expand upon existing first-generation literature follows in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Through my study, I sought to answer the following research question: What role do older siblings play in the college-going experiences of younger first-generation college (FGC) students? This chapter connected the results of my research to existing literature and theory on FGC students. I also included a discussion of the limitations of the study. I concluded this section with ideas on how these findings can impact the work of higher education practitioners as they engage with FGC students, how this research sets the stage for further research, and what policy implications it could have for colleges and universities.

To unpack the results of my study and make meaning of the answers to the research question above, I explored three themes from this study's participants that emerged from my data analysis. Each theme highlighted a different role that siblings played in the participants' experience in college. The older brothers and sisters of this study's participants fell into one of three categories: supporter, informant, and role model. In the following chapter I describe each of these roles, and I contextualize them within the existing literature on FGC students.

Theme 1: Emotional Support and Fostering Independence: Older Sibling as Support

One role the older siblings of the participants in this study play in the life of a younger sibling is that of a supporter. Participants were grateful that their siblings encouraged them to earn their college degrees and demonstrated for them how to

navigate the college process which aligns with the work of Ceja (2004). Other ways my study is supported by existing scholarship includes older siblings setting high expectations and affirming younger siblings' ability (Cavazos, 2010) and earning a college degree became a shared goal between students and family (Wang & Nuru, 2017). This study further expanded on that concept and provided evidence as to why older siblings offered support to their younger siblings during their time in college. Those siblings wanted their younger siblings to achieve what they, themselves, had achieved – or were close to achieving, for those participants whose older siblings were still in college.

Gass et al. (2007) found that older siblings served as a buffer to combat stressful experiences. This study related to the findings in my study as the research participants in my study encountered challenges during their time in college. Those students had trouble transitioning into a new college environment during their Pathway year or struggled adjusting to online and virtual college experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and they turned to their sibling for support and guidance. Those younger siblings verbalized that they felt less stressed knowing their older sibling was there helping them and that knowledge allowed them to work through those challenges.

Covarrubias et al. (2019) discussed how family support from extended family members for Latinx students was a value and something to be appreciated for FGC students. This idea came through in my study with the Latinx participant, as he received encouragement from his two siblings. He turned to his siblings for guidance, knowing

that he could achieve his dream of earning a college degree having his siblings along as support.

Proximity to their siblings influenced the participants' experiences in college. Those participants who also had a brother or sister attend Southeastern University (the site of this research study) at the same time as they did were able to interact with that sibling regularly. Relatedly, these participants held a strong sense that they belonged at the university. This finding offered a new perspective on the work of Moreno (2016) who found that older first-generation college students who attended college away from their younger, not-yet-college-aged siblings felt increased senses of guilt for not being able to help them when they experienced challenges. This dissertation research illustrated what happens to the younger siblings when separated or near older siblings. Being near to one another helped both parties to stay connected to each other and foster a deeper relationship. From that connection they were able to be successful students in college.

As participants worked through their Pathway year and transitioned to Southeastern, they took on more ownership of their college experience and became more proactive in achieving their goals and overcoming challenges (Garrison & Gardner, 2012). They also became more resilient (Cavazos, 2010; Covarrubias, et al., 2019) working their way through challenges such as poor academic performance and having difficulty adjusting to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. My study makes an important contribution to this idea that FGC students are resilient in that older siblings helped to foster participants' resiliency related to college achievement. In my study, the older siblings encouraged their younger siblings to think through potential solutions and

have their own experience in college. Participants knew they could be successful based on seeing their older brothers and sisters overcome challenges and difficulties and heard directly that their siblings were getting the hang of college. The younger siblings knew they had their older sibling encouraging them to overcome their challenges and felt confident to seek out opportunities to maximize their college experience (Demetriou, et al., 2017).

My study showed that FGC students turn to their sibling for support and encouragement. Their older siblings set high expectations for them and encouraged them to achieve their goal of earning a college degree. My study adds to what scholars have found about family support for FGC students in that these siblings expected that their younger sibling would eventually earn a degree and wanted them to achieve that experience.

Theme 2: Imparting Knowledge: Older Sibling as Informant

Participants' older siblings served as informants, clarifying the college-going process for their younger brothers and sisters. Those participants had peers who started at the university knowing aspects that were a mystery to them. Scholars refer to that college content as the hidden curriculum within higher education (Jackson, 1968; Smith, 2004; White & Lowenthal, 2011). The older siblings served as cultural brokers (Delgado, 2020) to my study's participants. As such, the older siblings clarified and explained the nuances of academia. Higher education has a set of standards and expectations that are not often clear or intuitive especially for students (Smith, 2004).

Older siblings helped articulate those standards and expectations to the FGC students who participated in my study.

The participants in this study discussed how to engage with faculty and utilize resources on campus with their older siblings. Some participants, especially during their Pathway year, felt unsure about how to best connect with their faculty, and some participants did not engage with faculty at all. This finding aligns with Soria and Stebleton's (2012) work as they found that FGC students do not interact with their faculty members as often as continuing generation college students. Once the participants in this study knew how to best engage with their faculty members, they were able to get the academic support needed to be successful students who they defined as being able to successfully complete the Pathway Program's academic requirements and make progress toward their academic goals at Southeastern.

The participants' older siblings revealed and explained the hidden curriculum, making the traditions, expectations, and understandings of academe clearer to their younger brothers and sisters. As a result, the younger siblings did not take their on-campus resources for granted. Older siblings helped their younger siblings navigate how to best interact with faculty (Soria & Stebleton, 2010). They knew how to meet the standards those faculty members expected regarding their students' academic success, and they were equipped with the tools to best maximize their opportunities.

These older siblings also informed their younger siblings about multiple aspects of college, from the college application process (Ceja, 2006), the procedures and timelines for how to find funding for and eventually pay for college, the tools needed to

navigate the academic rigors of college, and the ways one can develop a sense of belonging at college. They also provided guidance on how their younger siblings can plan for life after college (Van Volkom, et al., 2011).

The findings in my study align with much of the existing literature. However, my study goes further and digs more deeply into the specific and unique relationships between siblings. This work builds on existing literature and reveals a new potential partner in providing support and ensuring success for FGC college students.

Theme Three: Paving the Path to College: Older Sibling as Role Model

The third role that older siblings play in their younger siblings' lives is that of role model. Throughout the interviews, participants revealed how they viewed their older brothers and sisters as people who were paving the path for them to be successful at college. They knew that through watching their older siblings enter and succeed in college that they could do the same (Delgado, 2020). They saw what doors a college education could open for FGC students and felt inspired to ensure that they kept those doors open for themselves. Their older siblings helped their younger brothers or sisters to believe in themselves and see that they had the ability to achieve the goal of a college degree.

While nine of the participants in this study expressed deep appreciation for their older brother or sister, one research participant provided somewhat of a counter-case to that narrative. Rajiv mentioned how he worked through feelings of sibling rivalry both before and during college. He felt that he had lived under his older sister's shadow growing up, and, as a result, intentionally distanced himself from his sister during his first

year of college. When describing his sister, he called her his twin, though in reality she was a year older than he, which illustrated how closely his parents, friends, and teachers connected the two of them together. This experience runs counter to what Milevsky (2005) and Von Volkom et al. (2011) found in they discovered that FGC students proactively seek out siblings to support them and turn to when they experience challenges and need assistance.

To be fair to his narrative, Rajiv's sister still played a positive role in shaping his college experiences, helping guide him through the application process (Ceja, 2004) and pointing him toward academic resources to utilize. This sibling also was a coach for him, reminding him of when he experienced academic and personal difficulty prior to college, with the intension of showing him how he could use the lessons learned from those past experiences to better himself in college (Phillips, 1999). His sister was also a source of capital for him in that she made things easier for him when he needed to discuss with his parents about his college needs, encouraging him to seek information at college for himself, developing resiliency (Cavazos et al., 2010) and independence. Those actions instilled within him a sense of pride that he could handle college on his own. Even with feelings of sibling competition and a tendency to establish independence from his sibling, he also knew that she was a source of ever-available support if he needed anything in college.

Rajiv's experience was a unique finding to what scholars know about FGC students. Thus far, no literature exists about the intersection of sibling rivalry and FGC students, social relationships, and family capital. Instead, scholars have identified the

feelings of guilt that first-in-families have connecting to family members after they attend college (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Those family members could include their younger siblings and their parents who continue to remain at home, but that work did not address the younger siblings' desire to distance themselves from their older siblings' ways of being, once they found themselves in the same situation attending college.

This theme that the older sibling was a role model to their younger sibling shows the impact that older siblings have on their younger brothers and sisters as they earn their college degrees. Previous literature has looked at the role that parents play in the college-going experiences of FGC students (Roksa, 2020) and at achievement guilt regarding the idea of eclipsing family members who did not achieve a college degree (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). My study instead found that these older siblings made college achievable in the eyes of their younger siblings. These younger siblings had someone who they wanted to emulate, and that sense of pride in their older siblings made them want to attend college, succeed despite encountering challenges, and earn a college degree. The younger siblings held a road map for how to earn a college degree simply by watching their sibling go through college, and they tapped into that model when they encountered difficulty.

Delimitations

The study is delimited in a several, different ways. This study takes place at one research university in the southeast. This restriction was an intentional decision to ensure that all participants experienced the same undergraduate institution and campus culture. While their older siblings may have attended other schools, the goal of this project was to

learn about the experiences of the younger students. Bounding this study at one institution prevented variation that other campus cultures may permit. Secondly, it was restricted to students who participated in a Pathway Program. That restriction ensured that all students had a similar experience in their first year of college

Limitations

As with all research, this study has limitations. First, no graduating seniors chose to participate in this research study. No connections could be drawn as to what graduating seniors experienced during their last year of college and the impact their older sibling had on the milestones that take place during the transition out of college.

Additionally, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of that, face-to-face interactions were limited, so the interviews and subsequent follow-up conversations with research participants took place virtually. While in-person interviews help researchers establish greater rapport and participants share more information about their background, doing so was not feasible. Fortunately, the students were familiar with virtual discussions as they had interacted with Zoom during the previous academic year in all aspects of their academic engagement at Southeastern, so robust conversations still took place.

Findings in Relation to Family Capital Conceptual Framework

This research project was structured around the tenets of family capital (Belcher, 2011; Gofen, 2009; Swartz, 2008; Yosso, 2005). Family capital is comprised of and can be found in one's financial support, social support, and informational support that is derived from family members (Swartz, 2008). The older siblings' roles of supporter,

informant, and role model identified through this study further correspond with those three elements.

Family Capital—Financial Support from Older Siblings

Addressing the financial support element of family capital, the older siblings of the research participants were able to unpack the challenges that come with navigating how to pay for college. Swartz (2008) posited that the more resources a family has at their disposal, the more capital available to the children to foster their development and growth. Furthermore, the degree of one's family wealth will replicate in the wealth the child experiences in adulthood. Children from upper-middle class families will have resources to perpetuate their upper-middle class lifestyle (Swartz, 2008).

In my study, rarely did a participant note that their older sibling provided them direct financial/monetary capital during their time in college. Instead, those siblings taught their younger siblings how to effectively manage their money, how to engage with on-campus resources such as the Financial Aid office, or how to qualify and seek out federal and state scholarships and grants.

Instead, the financial capital that these siblings provided came from informational awareness. Feeling stressed over finances was a common thread among the participants in my study, however their older siblings made the financial situations that their younger brothers or sisters faced less confusing. Their brothers and sisters taught the research participants how to go about paying for college and helped guide their siblings through an unfamiliar process. These FGC students had an informational resource to connect with and rely upon to help them find the material resources to pay for and continue to stay

enrolled in college. That informational assistance from their siblings helped several participants improve themselves through persisting in their efforts to earn a college degree showcasing what Gofen (2009) noted children receive from the family capital from the family unit.

Family Capital-Social Support from Older Siblings

Regarding the social support aspect of family capital (Swartz, 2008), this study's participants identified struggles they faced transitioning into college, including adjusting to a new academic and social environment (Lubrano, 2004). Their siblings supported them as they navigated those challenges. Those siblings produced positive family capital, were empathetic to their concerns (Belcher, 2011) and shared their experiences and connected their younger siblings to people who were on campus who could help them navigate difficulties faced in college. The younger students dealt with difficult roommates who they found different from the familiar family members they knew growing up. Their older siblings put those social situations into perspective for them, helping them see how they could best adjust to those new challenges in college.

In addition to residential life challenges, these students were concerned about the process of making friends and finding connections and establishing a sense of belonging with others (Stebbleton et al., 2014) in a new, foreign academic environment. When they entered college and the Pathway Program, they were concerned that they might not fit in and be a part of the campus, which is a common trend when first generation college students matriculate into college (Lubrano, 2004). Their older siblings allowed them to

see that college was right for them, and that they could follow in their footsteps in achieving a college degree.

The first-year students and sophomores in the study also had their college experience partially or completely affected by the COVID-19 global pandemic, which began in March of 2020. Campus resources and engagement opportunities were offered remotely and many of their classes were immediately pivoted online at the end of the Spring 2020 semester. Social distancing was enforced on campus and hybrid/online instruction continued throughout the following 2020-2021 academic year. Their older siblings, many of whom had since graduated from college at that time, could not personally relate to their younger siblings' experiences pivoting to online education or needing to socially distance themselves from others in college. Even without firsthand knowledge of what their younger siblings experienced, those older siblings still found ways to support their brother or sister throughout the process, mostly through empathetically listening to their concerns (Belcher, 2011). Their focus was on ensuring that their younger sibling maintained their mental well-being (Stebbleton, et al., 2014) and that they always remembered that they had the ability within themselves to get through those challenging experiences.

Family Capital—Informational Support from Older Siblings

The informational support found in families (Swarz, 2008) came through as participants turned to their older siblings to help them make meaning out of their college experiences. Thoughts of fear and concerns about adjusting to on-campus life were also assuaged whenever they sought help from their older sibling. These students knew they

had a resource close at hand. Connecting with and learning how college operated from their brother or sister allowed the younger sibling to further engage with their college environment.

Participants touched upon the influence of the hidden curriculum of academia (White & Lowenthal, 2011), which their continuing generation peers seemed to naturally navigate without any kind of guidebook. They referenced being unfamiliar with how Southeastern University operated. Participants talked about how their friends whose parents did attend college seemed already knowledgeable regarding how college worked and took for granted that not everyone else was familiar with those operations (White & Lowenthal, 2011). Those FGC students sought out their sibling to help make meaning of activities on campus and the expectations that faculty and staff had of them as college students (Margolis et al., 2001; White & Lowenthal, 2011).

For the participants who had an older sibling who attended the same university that they did, those older siblings were more knowledgeable about resources and tended to help connect their younger sibling more often to the support necessary to transition into and through college and have a successful college experience. The siblings were able to reveal to their younger siblings how that specific institution operated (White & Lowenthal, 2011), which specific office they needed to go to get support, and how they can succeed academically.

Families produce positive family capital when they contain a caring and loving presence and empathy (Belcher, 2011). This study showed how positive family dynamics fostered prior to college thereby led to positive family capital that siblings could utilize

once they entered the college environment. The roles of informant, supporter, and role model that the older siblings held for their younger brothers and sisters incorporated the informational and social support aspects of family capital.

Implications

This study adds to the limited literature regarding sibling roles in college-going experiences for FGC students. Scholars and practitioners can utilize the support, informational awareness, and role modelling those older siblings provide for younger siblings when designing future studies and creating practices to support FGC students.

Implications for Future Research

As this was an exploratory study of the role older siblings play in the college-going experiences of younger first-generation college students, the field is ripe for future research to explore and expand upon this dissertation's findings. Several of the participants felt free to navigate college on their own and felt their independent nature resulted from how they were raised. Additional research could explore what characteristics and elements of human capital exist within those independent second-in-family FGC students.

Six of the participants in this study also had at least one older sibling who attended the same institution, but only one had a sibling complete the same Pathway Program as he did. Additional studies could focus solely on dyads who experienced the same first-year pathway program to see if that common background contributed to greater likelihoods of resource and information sharing among the siblings.

Another study could be structured to be more focused in nature on a single moment in a students' college career. For example, a focused case study could examine the unique adjustments and challenges first-generation, first-year students experience during their first semester or first full academic year, requiring year-long observation and data collection. In a more narrowly focused study, participants could reflect in-the-moment on their sibling's impact on their life events and the questions and assistance they provided.

Due to participant availability at the time of this dissertation, no one who recently graduated from college (graduating seniors) was able to participate. Future studies focusing on graduating seniors or recent college graduates could also unpack how second in family younger siblings utilized older sibling support while navigating the transition from college to professional environments or further graduate study.

This study did not focus on the role siblings play through the lens of identity—gender, race, or ethnicity, however additional research could look at how those lenses may impact a siblings' role. A study could look at dyads of siblings who share the same gender identity to see if any common themes emerge.

This study did not focus on any issues in the participants' families prior to and after enrolling in college that may have impacted their relationship with their older sibling. Future studies could focus on those issues and how whether or not they have an impact on a student's transition into and through college.

Finally, a study could be conducted involving both older siblings and younger siblings in the data collection process to see if the older siblings see themselves in the

same light that their younger siblings do. Further research could investigate what role specifically the younger siblings played in the college-going activities of their older siblings while those older siblings were enrolled in college. Since participants in this study talked about ways they supported their siblings, more data is needed to understand the reciprocity of these relationships. Further research could explore those, or other roles perceived by the siblings.

Implications of Practice

The participants in this study had an existing network of support to tap into through their older college-educated sibling. Their older brothers and sisters who were the first-in-family students in their family did not have that existing support. The younger siblings transitioned into college with that sibling by their side guiding them, and this study revealed the positive influence of that sibling relationship. Faculty and staff who work in college or university sponsored programs that support FGC students could identify which FGC students have older siblings who have attended college prior, and those administrators could encourage a new struggling student to seek out their siblings' experiences and guidance.

The finding that participants further deepened their relationship with their sibling when they were close in proximity provides promising evidence that colleges and universities would benefit from encouraging those siblings to attend college together. Knowing that FGC students may more readily tap into the capital found in their family when that family member is an alum or existing student at their institution, admissions offices have greater evidence to offer a Sibling Legacy Scholarship to FGC students who

also have a sibling attending their institution. That scholarship would help mitigate some of the costs of college, and at the same time encourage and incentivize siblings to attend the same university. Hopefully, those younger students benefiting from this scholarship could more easily tap into the knowledge and support that their siblings provide.

The findings in this study also illustrate the importance of engaging and socializing the first-in-family college-going older siblings to fully understand the role they will play in their family members' futures. These siblings are a supporter, an imparter of information, and a role model for their younger siblings, and FGC student programs can help these students realize the potential impact they will have on their younger siblings' lives. Programs could be developed to teach these first-in-families how to be effective mentors, thus further enhancing their ability to make a difference in their younger siblings' lives.

Implications for Policy

The findings of this study have implications on policy development at the program and university level. Long-term, multi-year funding to develop a scholarship to encourage siblings to attend the same institution could prove beneficial to both older and younger siblings. Financial aid offices could develop policies for how to disperse those resources to FGC students to maximize college access. This could help retain both older and younger siblings. Policy makers at colleges and universities could use the fact that siblings foster support and encouragement to develop initiatives to help build a community on campus.

A program consisting of cohorts of older siblings and younger siblings could be in place to foster sibling relationships. My study found that younger siblings were more willing to face their challenges and overcome them knowing they had their sibling to support them. Having the institutionalized programming support to engage siblings with one another could further develop a younger student's willingness to complete their degree.

Retention and persistence data drives many decisions on college and university campuses. Administrators at colleges and universities need to consider the implications of how fostering sibling support for one another can lead to greater feelings of support and a better understanding of the college environment, ultimately leading students to want to complete their degrees at their institution.

Conclusion

This qualitative exploration research study looked at the roles that older siblings play in the college-going experiences of younger first-generation college students while they were enrolled in college.

Three themes were identified--emotional support and fostering independence (older sibling as support), imparting knowledge (older sibling as informant), and paving the path to college (older sibling as role model). Older siblings acted as college guides, encouraging their younger siblings to be successful in college and learn how to overcome challenges including a global pandemic that impacted their college operations. Those brothers and sisters set the stage for their younger siblings to want to attend and graduate

from college themselves. Ultimately, those siblings were essential in helping their younger siblings navigate through college.

The knowledge from this study can help first-generation student support program coordinators develop mentoring relationships to further foster that relationship between siblings. As proximity to one another increased the likelihood that younger siblings would turn to older siblings for support, creating a legacy scholarship for FGC students could allow more siblings who are close in age to attend college together and further increase college access to FGC students.

This study makes an important contribution to the scholarship on FGC students and shows the benefits that tapping into the skills, experiences, and insights of older siblings who have been through college can have for college students. The students in this study knew they were not navigating college alone, but rather could access their siblings as experts—people who embodied what the student participants wanted to be, a college graduate.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

E-mail invitation:

Hello Students,

My name is Gretchen Waugaman, and I currently work with the Bridge to Clemson Program at Clemson University. I am also a Ph.D. candidate in the Educational Leadership (Higher Education) program at Clemson.

My dissertation research centers on first-generation college students and the role that older siblings play in their lives. I am looking to interview students to understand how their older siblings have influenced their college-going experiences. If you have an older brother or sister who was raised in the same household as you were, is no more than 10 years older than you are, and who is currently attending or has already graduated from a four-year college or university, I would like to talk to you!

All I would need from you is about an hour of your time to ask you some questions, and those interviews will be conducted over Zoom. I also ask that you review your transcripts from the interview for accuracy. It should take no more than 2 hours of your time to participate in the activities involved in this study.

As a thank you for participating in my study, all participants will receive a \$25 VISA gift card. If you are interested in being a part of this study, please complete the following Qualtrics survey https://clemson.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0lDarRIK9T3kurk. I will be in touch with more information after I receive your survey submission.

If you have any questions about my study, please e-mail me at any time or contact the Primary Investigator of the study, Dr. Michelle Boettcher, at mboettc@clemson.edu.

For more information regarding participating in this study, please see the Informed Consent document attached.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Appendix B

Participant Demographic Survey

- 1) Student Name _____
- 2) Age _____
- 3) School Year When You Participated in the Pathway Program _____
- 4) Year in school for the 2020-2021 Academic Year (choose from: first-year, sophomore, junior, senior, 5th year and beyond).
- 5) Anticipated or Actual Graduation Date from Clemson _____
- 6) Gender _____
- 7) What racial category best describes you? _____
- 8) E-mail Address (for follow-up contact regarding interview) _____
- 9) Phone Number (for follow-up contact regarding interview) _____
- 10) Highest educational attainment earned by father (choose from: some high school, completed high school, certificate program, two-year degree, attended four-year school but never finished, completed four-year degree).
- 11) Highest educational attainment earned by mother (choose from: some high school, completed high school, certificate program, two-year degree, attended four-year school but never finished, completed four-year degree).
- 12) Please complete the following information about your older sibling who has attended a four-year university.
 Name of Older sibling _____
 Age of sibling _____
 Relationship to this older sibling (choose from Full Biological Sibling—have both parents in common, Half Biological Sibling—have one parent in common, Step sibling—you are not biological related to this sibling, other)
 College or University attended _____
 Did this sibling attend college before you started to attend college: Yes/No
 Has your sibling graduated from the four-year college/university: Yes/No/No longer attending four-year college
 Anticipated graduation date: _____

13) Do you have any additional siblings who have attended a four-year university?

Please include their information below as well.

Name of second older sibling _____

Age of sibling _____

Relationship to this older sibling (choose from Full Biological Sibling—have both parents in common, Half Biological Sibling—have one parent in common, Step sibling—you are not biological related to this sibling, other)

College or University attended _____

Did this sibling attend college before you started to attend college: Yes/No

Has your sibling graduated from the four-year college/university: Yes/No/No longer attending four-year college

Anticipated graduation date: _____

Name of third older sibling _____

Age of sibling _____

Relationship to this older sibling (choose from Full Biological Sibling—have both parents in common, Half Biological Sibling—have one parent in common, Step sibling—you are not biological related to this sibling, other)

College or University attended _____

Did this sibling attend college before you started to attend college: Yes/No

Has your sibling graduated from the four-year college/university: Yes/No/No longer attending four-year college

Anticipated graduation date: _____

Name of fourth older sibling _____

Age of sibling _____

Relationship to this older sibling (choose from Full Biological Sibling—have both parents in common, Half Biological Sibling—have one parent in common, Step sibling—you are not biological related to this sibling, other)

College or University attended _____

Did this sibling attend college before you started to attend college: Yes/No

Has your sibling graduated from the four-year college/university: Yes/No/No longer attending four-year college

Anticipated graduation date: _____

14) Are you interested in participating in a follow-up interview about first-generation college students and their older siblings (and earn a \$25 gift card)?

15) What are the best days of the week for the hour-long interview? (choose from Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday)

16) What is the best time to complete the interview? (choose from Morning 8-12, Afternoon 12-5, Evening 5-10)

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- 1) Tell me a little bit about yourself, (where you are from, year in school, why you chose Southeastern, and why you wanted to do the Pathway program)?
- 2) Tell me about each member of your family including all of your siblings (even those who didn't go to college). Did your older sibling participate in Pathway if they also went to Southeastern?
- 3) What was your relationship like with each of your siblings when you were still in high school?
- 4) What do you think contributed to that relationship dynamic back then?
- 5) Did that dynamic between you and each college-going sibling change when you started college?
 - a. Follow-Up if Not Answered: If there was a change, why do you think that happened?
- 6) Describe the dynamic between you and your sibling now that you are X number of years into college?
 - a. If there was a change, what do you think contributed to that change?
 - b. If things are still the same, what do you think contributes to things staying the same?
- 7) What conversations did you have with your older sibling (s) about the college experience before you attended college?
 - a. Follow-up if needed, tell me more about what those conversations looked like. How often did you talk to your sibling (s)? What topics did you talk about? What was the result of those conversations?

- 8) What conversations did you have with your older sibling (s) about your college experience during your freshman year of college?
- If sophomore, what were your conversations like Pre-March 2020?
 - If sophomore, what were your conversations like Post-March 2020 when Southeastern and Tech College moved to modified operations?
 - Follow-up, tell me more about what those conversations looked like. How often do you talk to your sibling? What topics did you talk about? What was the result of those conversations?
 - If first-year students, did the modified operations that Tech College has had in place this past academic year affect your conversations this past year?
- 9) If Sophomore or Junior: What conversations did you have with your older sibling (s) about your college experience during your sophomore year of college?
- If junior, what were your conversations like Pre-March 2020?
 - If junior, what were your conversations like Post-March 2020 when Southeastern and Tech College moved to modified operations?
 - Follow-up, tell me more about what those conversations looked like. How often do you talk to your sibling? What topics did you talk about? What was the result of those conversations?
 - Did the modified operations that Southeastern has had in place this past academic year affect your conversations this past year?
- 10) If Junior: What conversations did you have with your older sibling (s) about your college experience during your junior year of college?
- Follow-up, tell me more about what those conversations looked like. How often do you talk to your sibling? What topics did you talk about? What was the result of those conversations?
 - Did the modified operations that Southeastern has had in place this past academic year affect your conversations this past year?

- 11) How did you navigate the process of paying for college?
- Did you consult with anyone in the financial aid office?
 - Did you understand everything about paying for college?
 - What was the most confusing thing about paying for college—how did you make it less confusing?
- 12) Did your older sibling/siblings provide any information about navigating how to pay for college? If not, why not?
- In what ways did you turn to your older sibling to help with paying for college/money while in college and this can apply to money to buy something or giving information on applying for scholarships? (i.e. if needs further clarification---info on scholarships, loans, how financial aid office worked, helped find job on campus).
- 13) When you first started college, what was going through your mind?
- What were your concerns?
 - In what ways did you turn to your older sibling during that time to help with some of those concerns?
- 14) How do you feel now (X number of years into college)?
- If there is a change, what accounts for why there may be a difference in those feelings? OR I see you said XXXX in previous answer, it sounds like there is a shift in how you feel, why do you think that is?
 - If there isn't a change, why do you still feel the same? OR I see you said XXXX in previous answer, it sounds like there isn't a shift in how you feel, why do you think that is?
- 15) Did your older sibling (s) contribute to your feelings of belongingness in college?
- (IF YES), in what ways?
 - (IF NO) Why didn't they if the answer is no?

- 16) At any point since you started college, have you found that there were things about college that you didn't know that that your friends and other students already seemed to know?
- If yes, describe an example of when this happened to you.
 - Follow-up: How did you learn that information?
- 17) The next question is X parts (depending on number of years in school).
- What information about college did your older sibling provide you in your Pathway year?
 - If Sophomores/Juniors; What information about college did your older sibling provide you during your 2nd year in college?
 - If Juniors: What information about college did your older sibling provide you during your 3rd year in college?
 - If Applicable: Since you were at Southeastern/Tech during Spring of 2020, was there any information your older siblings provided to you once Southeastern/Tech went to modified operations for the rest of the school year?
- 18) How did you and your sibling share information during your time in college?
- Did you seek that information out from your sibling or did your sibling provide it before you asked?
- 19) How did that information from your sibling make you feel?
- 20) In what ways do you turn to your sibling while you have been enrolled in college?
- 21) What are those conversations like?
- 22) How do you maintain your connection with your older siblings?
- 23) Can you tell me some stories about your transition to Southeastern and how you found friends and community here?
- If no have specific stories, are there any moments or events that led up to the foundation of how you built a sense of community at Southeastern?
- 24) Describe in your own words how and in what ways you have turned to your older sibling for support and guidance.

- 25) What role do you feel your sibling has held for you during your time in college?
- 26) Do you have anything more to add about your older sibling and his/her impact on your college experience?

Appendix D

Consent Form

Dr. Michelle Boettcher is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. Dr. Boettcher is an Associate Professor at Clemson University conducting the study with Gretchen Waugaman.

The purpose of this research is to learn more about the role older siblings play in the college-going experiences of first-generation college students at Southeastern.

Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

Your part in the study will be to participate in a 60-70 minute Zoom interview that will be recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

It will take you about an hour to participate in this study and 30 minutes to review your transcript afterward.

We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

You may not benefit directly from taking part in this study; however your participation will add to the scholarship surrounding first-generation college students.

For participating in this study, you will be awarded a \$25 VISA gift card.

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations.

All data will be kept in a secure, password-protected computer.

Identifiable information collected during the study will be removed and the de-identified information will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071. The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Gretchen Waugaman at Clemson University at gretchw@clemson.edu

By participating in the study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. You do not give up any legal rights by taking part in this research study.

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