ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: A CASE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF
                             FAMILY ON FIRST- GENERATION COLLEGE
                             STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS
                             POST HIGH SCHOOL

                             Shawna L. Acker-Ball, Doctor of Philosophy, 2007

Directed By: Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt, Professor
                             Department of Education, Policy and Leadership

The purpose of this study is to examine how factors in the home environment (hereby referred to as habitus) (Bourdieu, 1977) impact the educational aspirations of first-generation college students who are participants in an academic achievement program designed to meet the needs of first-generation and underrepresented students (Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program). This study examined family characteristics such as educational and cultural practices, academic awareness, social class position and parental expectations to determine if they have an impact on student aspirations. The primary research question to guide this study is, "What is the influence of family on first-generation college students' educational aspirations post high school?"

This study sought to determine how families that were from traditionally underrepresented populations (low SES, ethnic minorities, single parent home, etc.) in post-secondary education were able to influence the aspirations of their children to attend

college. Put differently, the study sought to understand the amount of exposure that each student had to the collegiate experience, the arts, financial information, and other cultural and social events. This study focused on what happened in the homes of the participants that provided the requisite skills, attitudes and behaviors that would serve as a source of motivation to aspire to college.

A CASE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY ON FIRST-GENERATION
COLLEGE STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS POST HIGH SCHOOL

By

Shawna L. Acker-Ball

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Advisory Committee:
Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt, Chair
Dr. Ida Brandon
Dr. Alberto Cabrera
Dr. Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy
Dr. Robert Waters

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Access to higher education is shaped by a host of factors including a student's

academic achievement, family background and high school culture and competitiveness

(Perna, 2006). Students who are first-generation begin to think about going to college

much later than students whose parents attended college (McDonough, 1997). The delay

in the decision to attend college greatly impacts the preparation a student must make in

gaining access and in acquiring the requisite skills and resources to persist in college

(McDonough, 1997). First-generation college students are those whose parents' highest

level of education is a high school diploma or less (Horn and Nunez, 2000). These

students are defined as first-generation because they cannot benefit from experiences of

college-educated parents by way of information sharing, goal setting and they are

disadvantaged in understanding what skills, attitudes and abilities are necessary to

successfully navigate the college experience and consequently the capability to persist

(Horn & Nunez, 2000).

Often students who come from first-generation homes are also disadvantaged as a

result of the lack of support and encouragement they receive to seek educational and

professional goals that are not manifested in their homes (McDonough, 1997). The study

of family background and cultural factors has played an integral role in identifying

variables that affect student educational aspirations. Family education, social status,

socio-economic status (SES) and student ability are reliable indicators of students'

success in college and further lead to status attainment after college (Braxton, 2000).

Parental encouragement was positively related to academic involvement and is an aspect

that influences educational aspirations (Braxton, 2000; Astin, 1993). Although expectations about college play a role in students' commitment, factors associated with expectations are already embedded in students prior to matriculation and manifest themselves as predisposition characteristics (family and student background) (Berger, 2000; Lareau, 1987). The stronger the link between the goal of college completion and other valued goals (professional employment, social mobility and affiliation, etc.), the greater the likelihood of the intent to attend and complete college. Typically this commitment manifests itself in two ways: goal commitment (commitment to personal and educational goals) and institutional commitment (willingness to work toward the goals of the institution) (Tinto, 1993).

Family, friends and school networks aid in the decision to attend and remain in school and create what Patricia McDonough (1997) calls *individual biographies* (similar to predisposition factors). These individual biographies are not only important in choosing a school, but also in remaining enrolled until the degree is completed. First-generation students actively choose to stay in school or to leave (Lopez-Turley, 2006). It is not a matter of simply matriculating from one semester to another; they must examine their options (cost benefit, aspirations, etc.) and strategize how they plan to continue. Much of the research on student aspirations has focused on what students do wrong to lead to withdrawal; however, research has begun to examine this issue from the perspective of student success. What are students doing right that contributes to persistence and eventual degree attainment (Ishitani, 2006; Adelman, 1999; Padilla et. al, 1997)?

Factors that contribute to a student's educational aspirations and ability to persist are often prevalent in their home environments. The knowledge, skills and dispositions they learn prior to college admissions influences their behavior, attitudes and aspirations. Researchers (Berger, 2000; Lareau, 1987) characterized these predisposition traits as cultural capital. The following section will define cultural capital and further explain its significance as it pertains to first-generation students.

<div align="center">Cultural Capital</div>

Understanding the experiences of each participant's home environment is key to identifying the ideals that were instilled in them. These ideals, according to literature (Creswell, 1998; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Lareau, 1987), influence the attitudes and behaviors of the students, which ultimately led to college access. Lareau (1987) has revealed that students who are reared in home environments that advocate post-secondary education and have significant cultural capital, (various forms of knowledge, dispositions and skills) typically have been exposed to cognitive (academic preparedness) and non-cognitive (social/extracurricular participation) factors that have a positive effect on whether they persist in college and pursue professional careers. Students who come from homes where there is little or no exposure or encouragement to pursue post-secondary study (a form of cultural capital) are disadvantaged with regard to the requisite characteristics for gaining college access and the ability to persist in college (Braxton, 2000).

Experiences within the home are important in shaping students' attitudes about school and education, and these experiences are considered forms of cultural capital. There are other forms of capital, such as social capital, that also affect students' attitudes

and perceptions that in turn contribute to their aspirations to seek a college education and decisions to persist. Unlike cultural capital, social capital is typically built outside of the home and with persons outside of the family unit (Bourdieu, 1996).

According to Coleman (1988), social capital is unlike other forms of capital. Social capital is embedded in the structure of relations between actors and among actors. It is not embedded in the actors themselves or in the manner that the capital is provided, it instead is derived through changes in relations among persons that facilitate action (Coleman, 1988). Social capital helps facilitate upward mobility and enables persons to gain access to other forms of capital through information sharing (Bourdieu, 1986). It focuses on social networks and how these networks are sustained. Social capital is built by membership to social networks and is further developed by the relationships one makes through these networks. The amount of social capital one gains is directly related to the social value ascribed to a particular network and is determined by the amount of economic, cultural and social capital that members of the network have individually and collectively (Perna, 2006; Bourdieu, 1986).

Through social capital, human capital is created by changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that enable them to act in new ways (Coleman, 1988). Human capital is less tangible, because it is embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual. Social capital is also intangible. It exists in the relations among persons. The real key of attaining greater social capital is the function of accessing the resources that can be used to achieve the aspired goals and interests (Coleman, 1988).

Perna and Titus (2003) found that the level of social and other capital that are accessed through social networks at students' high schools influence enrollment at two-

year and four-year colleges, just as students' parental involvement does. The social capital that many parents seek for their children is demonstrated through the heterophilous principle (Lin, 2001), defined as persons who attempt to find relationships with persons of higher social status in order to gain additional resources. Parents entrench the significance of attaining greater social status than what is currently held by the family and parents promote this status attainment to their children (Perna & Titus, 2003).

Although social capital helps to understand the relationships that parents and students have built or are trying to build outside of the home, the theoretical framework of cultural capital will be used to understand the home experiences of first-generation students for the purpose of this study. Using cultural capital as the theoretical framework for this study is largely due to the literature that reveals variables such as value orientations, parenting practices, enrichment/extracurricular activities, academic preparedness and academic achievement as primary characteristics used to measure cultural capital or the lack thereof and this study seeks to better understand how these variables were manifested in the participants' homes.

The term social reproduction is used here to describe the act of seeking/gaining greater social status by an individual or family of a lower social economic standing (Berger, 2000). Cultural capital is a significant aspect in the social reproduction process. Researchers such as Berger, (2000) treat cultural capital as a cumulative process, noting that the earlier one gains access to its endowments, the easier it is to build upon these assets and continue acquiring more. Cultural capital is viewed as extending far beyond college and across generations by providing requisite access and information to assist in

career choice and advancement (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985). Chapter 3 will explore the elements of cultural capital in greater detail.

<u>First-generation Students</u>

Students who are first-generation have different characteristics than their continuing-generation peers. They enroll in less rigorous high school curricula and are less prepared for college (Horn & Nunez, 2000). As a result of being ill-prepared for college, first-generation students often have lower degree aspirations and they tend to be less focused on attaining a college education and identifying career choices (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). If they do enroll in college they persist and complete degrees at lower rates than their second and third-generation peers (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). These distinctive characteristics set them apart from their peers whose parents completed a college degree (Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez, 2001). Additionally, first-generation students are more likely to come from low socioeconomic status (SES) homes. Because they often must financially contribute to the expenses of the home, as well as contribute to their educational expenses, many first-generation students work while matriculating and rely more on aid to finance their education (Sewell, 1971; Warburton, Bugarin; Nunez, 2001 & Nunez & Caccaro-Alamin, 1998). Some additional characteristics of first-generation students that differ from their continuing-generation peers are that they are non-traditional (age), less likely to be white, non-Hispanic, and more likely to be female (Hsiao, 1992; Thayer, 2000).

When considering factors such as educational expectations and support from families and schools, first-generation students have more difficulty navigating college. Many do not know what questions to ask and how to obtain necessary information and

resources to pursue a college degree and are at greater risk of attrition than their continuing-generation peers (Hsiao, 1992). In addition, first-generation students lack time management techniques, underestimate the financial costs associated with college life, and have little understanding of the bureaucratic nature (policies and procedures) of post-secondary institutions (Hsiao, 1992; Thayer, 2000). Their degree attainment is positively related to parents' education and SES and this lack of exposure and knowledge further impacts their ability to aspire to go to college (Trotter, 2001; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora, 1996).

Another great challenge that first-generation students face is their departure from the working pattern already established in their homes. Because their participation in the workforce is expected in order to assist in the economic well being of the family unit, their failure to fully contribute impacts the amount of positive reinforcement they receive from their families to pursue a college education (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). As a consequence, they typically do not receive support, such as words of encouragement and general interest, from family and friends, especially those first-generation students who still live at home (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Hsiao, 1992). This support is not received from their parents and family members due in part to the attitudes they share about education. First-generation students' attitudes about education are less congruent with those of their parents (the students place greater significance with gaining more education) and these factors contribute to their vulnerability to depart (Billson & Terry, 1982).

Although first-generation college students' are less likely to apply to and attend college than their continuing-generation peers, their educational aspirations can be

nurtured and influenced a number of ways. As a result there are specific criteria that must be met in order for these students to realistically engage in the college-going experience. In order for students to begin to prepare themselves for college three critical tasks must be met to increase the likelihood of attending college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). The first task is for students to be educationally prepared to qualify for college admission. This task is a byproduct of a student's educational attainment and early development of educational aspirations along with the involvement and encouragement of parents. Students' aspirations to go to college are linked to educational strategies that were employed by their families. The second task is the completion of high school (graduation) and the third task is to apply to a four year college or university (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). A comparative analysis of low SES and high SES students revealed significant differences between the two groups, with the high SES students meeting the three critical tasks at greater numbers. Research (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001) did reveal however, that these gaps could be reduced or eliminated once other variables related to school and family background was considered. In addition, these tasks can also be attained when students receive critical support and assistance in addition to their own efforts (study habits, course selections, etc.).

The college choice process involves developing predisposition characteristics to attend college. Students first search for college information and then make choices about college attendance (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Parents can be involved in this process and greatly influence predisposition characteristics by encouraging college enrollment. Parental encouragement has two dimensions. The first is motivational, whereby parents' high educational aspirations are espoused to their children. Parents engage the second

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dimension by being proactive and discussing school matters, college plans and college costs with their children. Research (Perna, 2006; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001) has shown that students' college aspirations are a powerful predictor of college application and are proportionally related to consistent parental encouragement. Students whose parents expected them to earn college degrees were 26% more likely to apply to college. The likelihood of students enrolling at two or four year institutions increases with the frequency of parental involvement, such as volunteering at the school and parent initiated contact about academic matters, plans after high school and course selection (Perna, 2006). Although parental encouragement and involvement has been demonstrated to increase student educational aspirations, low SES students who are in more need of it are less likely to receive it (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001).

Because of the greater understanding of and increased desire to pursue post-secondary access for low-SES and minority students (first-generation are largely from low SES and minority homes), there will continue to be a dramatic increase in the number of first-generation college students. As a result of this increase, first-generation students will require support mechanisms and strategies to assist in their development and matriculation (Merullo, 2002). Research focusing on the matriculation characteristics of first-generation students reveal that they anticipate completing their degrees in a longer period of time, take fewer humanities and fine arts courses and are less inclined to perceive college faculty as being truly concerned about their welfare and academic success (Ting, 2003). Over the past 30 years, colleges within the United States have become more aware of the issues faced by first-generation students and have designed programs to specifically meet the needs of these students. Many post-secondary

institutions desire to enhance first-generation students' college success, and institute

student support programs that promote educational attainment that subsequently

influence students' decisions to persist (Merullo, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how factors in the home environment

(hereby referred to as habitus) (Bourdieu, 1977) impact the educational aspirations of

first-generation college students who are participants in an academic achievement

program designed to meet the needs of first-generation and underrepresented students

(Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program). This study examined

family characteristics such as educational and cultural practices, academic awareness,

social class position and parental expectations to determine if they have an impact on

student aspirations. The primary research question to guide this study is, "What is the

influence of family on first-generation college students' educational aspirations post high

school?" The sub questions that will further explore the conditions in the home

environment that impact educational aspirations are:

- Does family contribute to a child's attitude toward education?

- How does family affect students' attitudes toward education? and

- What educational or cultural practices do the family engage in that
  impede or enhance the student's academic awareness?

This study sought to determine how families that were from traditionally

underrepresented populations (low SES, ethnic minorities, single parent home, etc.) in

post-secondary education were able to influence the aspirations of their children to attend

college. Put differently, the study sought to understand the amount of exposure that each

student had to the collegiate experience, the arts, financial information, and other cultural

and social events. This study focused on what happened in the homes of the participants that provided the requisite skills, attitudes and behaviors that would serve as a source of motivation to aspire to college.

<div align="center">Research Methods and Design</div>

Method

Case study methodology was employed in this research. Case study relies on multiple forms of data in order to build an in-depth case; it allows the researcher to develop categories and themes based on the data (Maxwell, 1996). This research methodology incorporates the case study tenets of Gall, Borg and Gall (1996), which seek to single out specific instances or cases of phenomena. Case studies integrate components of Robert Stake's (1995) theory, who asserts that case study is defined by the interest in the individual as opposed to the methods of inquiry (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996).

Case study methodology provides an in-depth study of each case or phenomenon in its natural context; and studies the emic (participant's viewpoint) of each study participant (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). Case study can obtain the answer to the research question and provide in-depth analysis of the data recorded.

The research questions were answered by exploring the family experiences of the participants, in individual interviews, and by identifying the conditions in the home that impacted educational aspirations. Understanding the participant's home environment is key to identifying the knowledge, skills and dispositions that were demonstrated or taught within the home. These ideals influenced the attitudes and behaviors of the participants, which ultimately led to college enrollment. Learning about the family practices and family involvement in each participants home assisted in identifying the ideals that were

instilled in them. These ideals, according to literature (Creswell, 1998), influence the

attitudes and behaviors of the program participants and ultimately the desire to enroll in

college. Interview questions examined different components of each participant's life and

extracted pertinent information that lead to a greater understanding of their goals and

educational aspirations.

<u>Site</u>

The site selected for this research study was the University of Maryland, the

flagship institution for the State of Maryland. The university offers over 100

undergraduate majors under the auspices of 13 colleges and schools. The undergraduate

student headcount, as of the fall 2006 semester was 25,154 and it was comprised of

56.1% white, 14.1% Asian, 12.9% African American, 5.7% Hispanic, 0.4% Native

American, 2.3% foreign and 8.5% unknown students. The University of Maryland

administers a number of academic achievement programs to aid students in need of

academic and career guidance during their first years of college. One program in

particular, The Ronald E. McNair Program prepares first-generation and

underrepresented college students for doctoral studies. Students are paired with faculty

mentors who involve the participants in research and other scholarly activities. The goal

of the McNair Program is to increase Ph.D. degrees for students from underrepresented

groups. The students selected for the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement

Program met the criteria for the study to be a first generation college student. McNair

Program eligibility criteria required that participants be members of first-generation,

underrepresented populations (more information about the McNair program will be

addressed in Chapter 3). Students who gained admission to the program and who were

enrolled in their junior or senior year were candidates for this study. Approximately 25 participants were given a brief presentation about the purpose of this study and were asked to volunteer, in which nine did so. This study examined those students who were successful, unlike many studies that focus on students who fail to persist (Ishitani, 2006; Padilla et. al, 1997).

Significance of the Study

The experiences within the home of first-generation college students are important to better understand the role of the family when examining educational aspirations. Understanding first-generation students' family experiences provides necessary information to assist in developing appropriate intervention strategies, programs and policies for their continued success.

Conducting a study of family influence on educational aspirations helps to provide greater understanding of student predisposition to college and cultural capital in different home environments. Looking at families that were able to instill a sense of value about education and create motivation for students to achieve can help inform further research on first-generation college students.

Conclusion

Students who are first-generation tend to be overrepresented in minority populations; however, much research on student retention began prior to the time ethnic minorities became a critical mass on predominantly white campuses. Sample sizes were smaller and tended to focus on white males. Research in this area was monolithic, devoid of culturally identifiable factors, as well as gender and political affiliation (Braxton, 2000). Additionally, little research has been conducted on ethnic minorities' perspective

of the value of a college degree (return on investment). A greater emphasis of research

has been placed on increasing the motivation and aspirations of underrepresented groups

to pursue higher education, without including cultural considerations, which includes

their heritage and culture (Braxton, 2000). The lack of information on ethnic minorities

has prompted researchers in recent years to examine these groups in an attempt to

understand the barriers and conditions associated with their educational aspirations and

college departure decisions.

It is estimated that by the year 2030, ethnic minorities will comprise 40 percent of

the American population. This projected representation requires businesses to examine

their diversity and challenges government officials and law makers to change hiring

practices that are favorable to the educational growth of minorities and to create policies

that consider the needs of minority and underrepresented groups (Bowen & Bok, 1998).

The importance of having well-educated and involved citizens relates directly to the

ability of society to be productive and advance the needs of all its constituents.

College degrees contribute significantly to potential earnings. On average,

persons who obtained bachelor degrees earned $54,689 in 2004 as opposed to $29,448

for those who held high school diplomas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). In addition,

research has shown that taking some college courses does not significantly influence the

rate of earnings compared to those who have taken no college courses, which further

heightens the significance of degree completion (Zucker & Dawson, 2001). A factor that

influences the demand for college-educated workers is the demand for U.S. businesses to

compete globally and their need to create high performance work places. These

environments rely heavily on multi-skilled workers who demonstrate superior problem-

solving, critical thinking and social skills. Social communication, problem solving and basic academic skills are now also required of traditional service occupations, such as cooks, secretaries, nurses, aides, cashiers, etc. (Levesque, Lauen, Teitelbaum, Alt & Librera, 2000).

In today's society the completion of a college degree is a necessary credential to gain meaningful employment and to provide opportunities for advanced education. A wide variety of benefits accrue to society as a result of a well-educated populace and they include increased productivity, lower welfare and crime rates, a higher rate of technological development and greater participation in civic and community life (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989). College-educated individuals have higher rates on return (earnings), better fringe benefits, and fewer health problems and are also more satisfied with their lifestyles (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989). One third of new jobs between 1984 and 2000 required a bachelor's degree, according to Workforce 2000 estimates. Of the ten occupations with the highest projected growth, eight require bachelor's degrees in addition to on-the-job training. With the increase in educational attainment, there is also a positive correlation to labor force participation, and the research comparing these two variables has consistently documented positive labor market returns.

Higher education means increased workforce participation which in turn leads to a more productive society and economic development (Levesque, Lauen, Teitelbaum, Alt & Librera, 2000). These new trends in the U.S. labor market have created significant shifts in who attends college and the impact that college enrollment has on varying ethnic and underrepresented groups. The information that can be learned from first-generation

and underrepresented students can help inform policy and practice by developing and implementing strategies that provide the necessary support and resources to help them get to college and matriculate to degree completion.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to understand what factors in the home environment have an impact on first-generation college students' educational aspirations. The students in this study were participants in a program designed to increase first-generation and underrepresented student participation in post-secondary education.

This chapter begins by exploring first-generation student characteristics and the students' academic preparation. A number of variables will be examined, including family support, educational expectations and the cultural challenges first-generation students face on college campuses. Next, the chapter closes with a detailed review of cultural capital theory (Cheng, Brizendine & Oakes, 1979; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Walpole, 2003), the theoretical framework for this study. Cultural capital theory provides a richer comprehension and knowledge of why and how cultural factors significantly influence students' educational aspirations.

First-generation Students

First-generation students are defined as those whose parents' highest level of education is a high school diploma" (Nunez & Caccaro-Alamin, 1998, p.7). These students represent a typical departure from the norm established in their families because they are deviating from a culture that did not promote or could not afford an education past high school. Their college attendance is a deliberate attempt to improve their social, economic and educational status within society (Nunez & Caccaro-Alamin, 1998).

Research has found that first-generation students already begin the process of higher education with characteristics that are associated with attrition. They are more likely to come from low-SES homes, tend to be less academically prepared and have lower degree aspirations (Nunez & Caccaro-Alamin, 1998). They often begin their undergraduate matriculation at two-year colleges. Some of the reasons they start with two-year schools are that their academic preparation is lacking and they are not qualified for admission to some four-year institutions; the financial obligation at four-year schools is too great or they need flexible class schedules to accommodate their work schedule or other familial responsibilities (Bui, 2002). It appears however, that first-generation students are more successful at attaining a bachelor's degree when they begin at four-year institutions (Bui, 2002).

Researchers have found that certain theoretical predictors that have been associated with first-generation student backgrounds are consistent with research that identifies a lack of academic exposure in the home and less familiarity with academic discourse than continuing-generation students (Penrose, 2002). Research has also demonstrated that parents' academic experiences are of critical importance to students' educational aspirations, more so than ethnicity and cultural background (Penrose, 2002). These students are at greater risk of attrition than their continuing-generation peers due to less academic and social integration, and their degree attainment is positively related to parents' education and SES (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella and Nora, 1996).

As with many students who struggle with the adjustment to college, Bean and Metzner (1985) have used the concept of "integration and cultural transformation" to describe the obstacles facing first-generation students as these students attempt to

integrate within the higher education environment. Additionally, London (1989) describes the process which first-generation students undertake when moving from their home environment to school environment as "cultural mobility." The reason many students have problems completing this transition is that they have no true support system at home due to the conflict between the culture of their families and the culture of college (Nunez & Caccaro-Alamin, 1998). First-generation students are at a disadvantage to continuing-generation students with regard to their basic knowledge of college, personal commitment to college, and family support of college, and the academic, familial and financial characteristics of first-generation college students differ from those of their continuing-generation counterparts as well.

In addition to the normal transitional difficulties most college students face, first-generation students also experience social and cultural transitions. Because of the conflicting roles and demands between family membership and educational mobility, first-generation students face real hurdles when trying to reconcile these conflicts (London, 1989). The social mobility involved not only provides a sense of gain among first-generation students, but also a sense of loss of cultural attitudes and perceptions they manifested prior to attending college. This change contributes to the confusion, conflict and often anguish that many first-generation students manifest when entering the "college life" (London, 1989; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella and Nora, 1996). Many first-generation students give greater importance to gaining respect or status and bringing honor to their family and financially contributing to their families as reasons for going to college as well (Bui, 2002).

Many first-generation students have been successful. These stories of first-generation students come as a result of their integration into the academic community (Penrose, 2002). Additionally, students with long-standing goals of attending college are more likely to go to college, if that intention is developed prior to the tenth grade. It appears that the high school environment has a significant influence on whether a student considers college; a decision often determined by whether or not the student develops and integrates specific college-focused academic standards and practices in high school (McDonough, 1997). Although these rationales contribute to their decisions to attend college, many first-generation students lack adequate academic preparation to sustain their matriculation, and the following section will delve into the factors that contribute to this void in first-generation students' education.

<u>Academic Preparation</u>

The academic preparation of first-generation students is central to their educational aspirations, access to higher education, persistence and success. The likelihood of college enrollment increases with higher academic achievement and students who are prepared academically have a greater chance of persisting through college (Cabrera, Deil-Amen, Radhika, Prabhu, Terenzini, Lee & Franklin, 2006). The background characteristics of first-generation students are less likely to promote and support higher education aspirations and success.

Like second- and third generation students, first-generation students represent a diversity of academic ability. The areas of difference are in academic preparedness, in retention rates and in their perceptions of their academic literacy skills (Penrose, 2002). Because first-generation students have not been raised in a "college-going" tradition and

have not been exposed to the "folklore of academic life" they have less understanding of the values, norms and customs associated with higher education. Often first-generation students feel socially isolated from peers who have been exposed to the culture of higher education (Penrose, 2002). Some have argued that continuing-generation students may be perceived by first-generation students as being more confident and more adaptable to college life and matriculation; however, data does not support this characterization of first-generation students (Penrose, 2002).

In a study of first-generation students, Trotter (2001) determined that 55 percent of students who enrolled in regular course loads in high school remained in college after three years; however, 81 percent of first-generation students who enrolled in more rigorous course loads remained after three years. In addition, first-generation students were less proactive in pursuing academically challenging curricula than continuing-generation students. First-generation students reported studying fewer hours, were less likely to be in honors programs, completed fewer credit hours during their first year and took fewer courses in the humanities and fine arts (Terenzini, et. al, 1996). A determinant of completing advanced mathematics in high school is taking algebra in the eighth grade. However, a much lower percentage of first-generation students took eighth grade algebra than continuing-generation students did (Horn & Nunez, 2000). This trend continued during high school, as lower percentages of first-generation students completed at least one advanced mathematics course, compared to the percentages of continuing-generation students. It did appear, however, that first-generation and continuing-generation students who took eighth grade math were both more likely to complete advanced-level mathematics courses in high school; taking advanced math more than doubled the

chances of enrolling in a four-year college (Horn and Nunez, 2000). Although strong

academic preparation is important, nearly one-quarter of first-generation students who

were highly qualified for college admission had not enrolled in college two years after

high school graduation (Horn and Nunez, 2000).

First-generation students had less rigorous curricula than their continuing-

generation peers (Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez, 2001). They were less likely to take

college entrance exams and when they did, they scored lower than continuing-generation

students (Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez, 2001). First-generation students were more

likely to score in the lowest quartile and less likely to score in the highest quartile than

continuing-generation students as well. In some cases, first-generation students'

performances differed minimally from students whose parents had some college, but

more so from students whose parents had completed college (Warburton, Bugarin and

Nunez, 2001). First-generation students were more likely than their continuing-

generation peers to enter public, comprehensive universities and to attend college part-

time (Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez, 2001). They were more likely to choose business

management majors over social and behavioral sciences and life sciences, a phenomenon

which may be linked to previous research demonstrating financial stability or wealth as

being very important to first-generation students (Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez, 2001).

First-generation students were more likely than continuing-generation students to take

remedial courses during their first year in college. The rigor of students' high school

curricula was associated with first-year grade point averages (GPA). As the rigor

increased, the students' first year GPA did as well. In cases in which the first-generation

students' curricula were rigorous, there was no difference between their first year GPA

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and the GPA of continuing-generation students. However, first-generation students who attended schools where the curriculum did not exceed or only somewhat exceeded the core New Basics (standardized educational measurement) maintained lower first year GPA than their continuing-generation peers. The rigor of the curriculum also correlated to remedial education. Students who took rigorous course work were less likely to enroll in remedial classes (Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez, 2001).

First-generation students' academic preparedness is a strong indicator of their educational aspirations and ability to persist in college (Ishitani, 2006; Warburton, Bugarin and Nunez, 2001). Although a combination of variables contributes to their educational aspirations, if they enter college without the requisite academic preparation to complete college-level work, they significantly increase their chances of failure. Acquisition of college qualifications (adequate academic preparation, familiarity with the college admissions process, etc.) can begin as early as eighth grade. When planning for college at an early age, students begin to understand the importance of college and its value in being able to pursue career aspirations (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001). Family support, which is examined in the following section, explores the role families play in increasing first-generation students' academic awareness and aspirations.

Familial Environment and Influences

Psychosocial factors are in line with the basic premise guiding this research study, which examines the influence of family on first-generation college students educational aspirations post high school. Psychosocial traits are developed within the home. The factors that have been identified as non-cognitive variables are influenced by the home environment, such as the interaction, guidance and support of parents and family (Ting,

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1998). Past studies have focused on cognitive variables to predict success in college; however, cognitive variables alone were not sufficient in giving researchers an understanding of the collegiate experience. Sedlacek (1996) determined that non-cognitive variables should also be considered to further support predictive validity. He considered the eight psychosocial factors to be 1) positive self concept, 2) realistic self appraisal system, 3) coping with racism, 4) a preference of long range goals, 5) availability of a strong support person, 6) successful leadership experience (extracurricular activities), (7) demonstrated community service, and 8) acquired knowledge in a field. These factors increase in their effectiveness as time goes on (Sedlacek, 1996).

Being equipped with the appropriate understanding of what occurs on a college campus within and outside the classroom can largely be influenced by family. Adequate family support prior to college admission can develop the requisite foundation that can prepare first-generation students for what's ahead, but because first-generation students are challenged academically, socially and financially, they often begin their college careers at community colleges or on campuses that do not meet their academic, social and cultural needs. Many of the challenges they face are further compounded due to family resistance and lack of cultural acclimation of a college campus, and often transition to this new environment creates separation from the student's culture of origin (Striplin, 1999).

Going to college is often considered a "rite of passage" for many students; however, it is often a great challenge for first-generation students because of the conflict a college education has with past cultural practices in first-generation homes. Parents,

siblings and other family members who have no experience with college or its rewards may be non-supportive or even obstructionist because they lack the understanding of the advantages a college education can provide (Hsiao, 1992). As traditional-aged students begin to take on symbols of college culture, first-generation students may feel an uncomfortable separation of the culture that they have experienced most of their lives. They may also experience displeasure from their families and may be criticized for devoting time to school as opposed to family obligations (Lopez-Turley, 2006; Hsiao, 1992). First-generation students receive significantly less emotional support from family and friends, a dynamic which may appear counter-intuitive, considering the sacrifices first-generation parents make to send their children to college (Penrose, 2002). It appears that parental support of a college education and understanding of the culture and practices of higher education are quite different and evoke different responses from first-generation students' parents, families and friends (Penrose, 2002). First-generation parents are often unprepared for the transition their children undergo while attending college. Because the values they adopt may differ from those in the home, there is often less congruence between the students' beliefs and those of their parents. There is a sharper contrast between the old and new environments (Penrose, 2002).

First-generation students may receive little guidance from their parents in regard to navigating the application process because their parents have no direct experience with the process. Differences in parents' educational levels influenced their involvement in how much or if they encouraged their children to take more rigorous courses in eighth grade and thereafter. First-generation students are also less likely to consult with their parents about choosing high school programs and more likely to work with teachers or

counselors (Horn & Nunez, 2000). They may rely on those people they believe to be knowledgeable agents, such as teachers or counselors. Even with this assistance, if received, it can come very late in their high school careers (Horn & Nunez, 2000). To become competitive in today's society and job market, many first-generation students realize the importance of obtaining a bachelors degree, but are less aware of the demands of college, and this lack of awareness inhibits their success. Also, because of parental lack of awareness of general education requirements, parents may offer advice about college that is counter productive. First-generation students can, however, be influenced or assisted by siblings or peers who attend or have attended colleges (Inman & Mayes, 1999). Research has revealed that programs and practices aimed at assisting first-generation students' transition to college can benefit them and influence their educational aspirations as well (Engle, J, Bermeo, A. & O'Brien, C., 2006).

Because first-generation students are less academically prepared than continuing-generation students, the first-generation students have a lower sense of self-worth (Inman & Mayes, 1999). This lower sense of self-worth is further impacted when students who are returning from the workforce enter higher education. Because of lower self esteem, they may also feel less socially accepted, which is further compounded by the lack of family support. They move from an area of high competence to an area of low competence and may experience value or culture conflict when they enter college (Inman & Mayes, 1999). These students believe that they must make an all-or-nothing decision about perpetuating family custom and practice or rejecting it to pursue academic credentials and furthering their education and chances for a more enriching lifestyle (Inman & Mayes, 1999).

Educational Expectations

Expectations of educational attainment significantly impact first-generation students' goals and aspirations. These expectations may relegate first-generation students to aspire to only complete a two-year degree and can hinder their educational goals (Horn & Nunez, 2000). Because of the lower levels of educational expectations, first-generation students often do not persist, and causes for first-generation students' lower educational expectations will be studied.

Critical factors that influence first-generation students learning outcomes are demographic and cognitive in nature (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996). These variables also influence a student's curricular choices, class room experiences and out-of-classroom experiences. As a result, first-generation students' background and academic preparation are not the only factors that influence these students' college experiences and choices. College aspirations and expectations as well as orientations toward learning play a major role in the development and college persistence of these students (Penrose, 2002). Certain choices made by first-generation students may enhance their chances of success. For instance, first-generation students are less involved in clubs and other social activities, and this lack of involvement had a negative correlation to GPA To the contrary, first-generation students also spent less time on campus and at cultural events, and this lack of involvement had a positive correlation to GPA (Ishitani, 2006; Penrose, 2002).

Research has demonstrated that first-generation students' ultimate goals are more likely to include receiving associate degrees over bachelor degrees and that they are far less likely to aspire to graduate degrees (Horn & Nunez, 2000; McDonough, 1997). The

more limited goals may be as a result of family and financial pressures and reflect practical constraints as opposed to a lack of self confidence (Penrose, 2002). Although first-generation students have relatively high aspirations to attend and complete college, they were less likely than continuing-generation students to indicate the highest degree they planned to attain was a bachelors degree and less likely to aspire to attain an advanced degree. Students' aspirations appear to be related to parents' educational levels. The more education parents have the higher students' aspirations (Penrose, 2002).

A study by Pratt and Scaggs (1999) found that first-generation students felt significantly different from continuing-generation students about being adequately prepared for college. Subsequently, first-generation and continuing-generation students have little difference in their initial expectations for success or academic performance. The primary difference is in their college experiences, comfort levels and quality of life. The primary distinction between first and continuing-generation students is the cost (alienation from their families and from their college peers, etc.) of their success, not whether they can succeed (Ishitani, 2006; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Penrose, 2002).

Cultural Challenges

Moving from one environment to another can be difficult to manage for most students, and first-generation students are especially challenged once they enter post-secondary education (Hsiao, 1997). The attitudes, behaviors and perceptions they encounter in college can differ from those from first-generation students' homes and communities. College is viewed as a rite of passage for first-generation students; however, it also demonstrates a significant separation of the student's past to his/her future, particularly for traditional aged students who live at home. Style of dress and

range of vocabulary changes, which creates tensions and requires the student to renegotiate relationships with family and friends (Hsiao, 1992).The cultural challenges that first-generation students face can inhibit their academic progress.

First-generation students often pursue higher education as a means to increase personal autonomy (London, 1992). A college education not only propels one's intellectual fulfillment, but also builds greater cultural capital among the family unit and thus increases one's acquisition of higher social standing. First-generation students typically enroll in community college as a means to advancement, because it builds on pre-established goals and is in line with the progression or maintenance of the family status (London, 1992). The very act of attending college indicates their aspirations to obtain a white-collar, middle-class profession. This moves the student to unfamiliar cultural territory (London, 1992). Upward mobility can create a sense of loss or can be perceived by family members as disloyalty and discontinuity. In contrast, upward mobility can also produce feelings of discovery, reconciliation and joy (London, 1992).

Howard London (1992) uses Old Separation Theory when describing the cultural challenges that first-generation students face as they negotiate their higher education experiences. He contends that "moving up requires a leaving off and taking on." By London's definition, first-generation students must leave behind certain cultural beliefs and practices (social identity) and then take on the new cultural beliefs and practices of the higher education institution they attend. He further contends that the loss of a familiar past is what evokes periods of confusion, conflict and isolation for some first-generation students (London, 2002). This analysis describes the experiences of some, not all, first-

generation students, and reflects a deficit approach to understanding their experiences (Benmayor, 2002).

In a study conducted by Benmayor (2002), she concluded that ethnic students have brought about new modes of thinking as researchers analyze first-generation students and their integration into higher education. As opposed to succeeding because of first-generation students' abilities to conform to dominant culture norms, some first-generation students or ethnic minorities have developed "critical resistant navigational skills" to help in their successful matriculation. These skills develop as a result of students' resistance to the oppression of their socio cultural experiences and non-acceptance of the dominant cultures' values and expectations. These students use their cultural resources to reject the paradigm (Benmayor, 2002).

To some degree all students experience a change in college. Many students' ideals, behaviors and values transition throughout their college matriculation as a result of college curriculum and exposure to other cultures and attitudes. They are encouraged to think abstractly by college faculty and as a result have changes in their psychological and ethical development. These changes are often in direct conflict with their home environment and culture (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004).

Related First-Generation Student Research Studies

Research on first-generation college students has become more prevalent over the last decade. Of the 1.3 million first-time freshmen who took the S.A.T. in 2002, over twenty eight percent (364,000) were first-generation students (Ishitani, 2003). The sheer numbers of first-generation students compels researchers to investigate their success and failure patterns/behaviors in order to better understand how to serve them. Although

typical research studies related to first-generation college students focus on their inability to persist, there remains a smaller category of research that examines how and why first-generation college students succeed as well as research that helps determine their needs and at-risk behaviors. This section will incorporate four research studies that examined the successful attitudes, skills and behaviors that influenced first-generation students' educational aspirations and behaviors that assisted them in achieving their post-secondary academic goals. The studies that are included were selected based on their correlation to the cultural capital framework as it is used in the current study.

An ethnographic research study was conducted at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) that examined the collegiate experiences of first-generation college students, specifically the children of migrant workers. There were 63 participants, 41 of Mexican decent, 6 African Americans, 1 Asian American and 15 Caucasians. Of the 63 participants, 30 were female and 11 were male. CSUMB was founded to serve historically underrepresented populations within higher education, specifically, low-income, working class students from ethnic, racial and immigrant backgrounds. The study conducted at CSUMB examined how first-generation students of Mexican-origin construct the pathways for younger siblings to take advantage and value higher education. The testimonies demonstrate an affirmation of the strong sense of family and contributions to the family economy. These commitments shape Mexican-origin students' goals and aspirations (Benmayor, 2002). Do Mexican-origin first-generation students consider themselves as "departers" from the culture, as some research indicates, or do they attempt to expose their families to new resources to integrate into their cultural communities? Mexican-origin first-generation students look to higher education as a

means to claiming cultural citizenship or to obtaining first-class student status. The cultural assets they bring to the table such as bilingualism and cross cultural knowledge are hoped to be valued, as opposed to being stigmatized as a result of some perceptions that they are academically deficient (Benmayor, 2002).

"The stories of first-generation Mexican-origin students at CSUMB articulate a cultural logic in which the value of education is measured not by individual class mobility or increased economic power, but by the collective advancement and well being of their subordinated communities" (Benmayor, 2002, p. 98). The oral histories from the first-generation students in this study constructed a collective memory of their educational pasts, where they brought to light institutional neglect as well as acknowledging those, specifically teachers and counselors, who encouraged and supported them (Benmayor, 2002).

As the study participants from CSUMB continued to matriculate, it was interesting to note that each classification of students had different concerns that affected how they negotiated the various institutional cultures, systems and practices. Freshmen were consumed with adjusting to their new environment and academic expectations, while sophomores placed greater emphasis on student financial and academic support. Juniors were looking past college to future careers, while also being more critical of the university (Benmayor, 2002).

These students also found a strategy to integrate their former cultural experiences and values with the new cultural experiences and values. The first-generation Mexican-origin students who participated in this study believed honoring family and culture was one of the strongest assets they could bring to the college environment (Benmayor,

2002). Most mainstream literature on this topic places the parents of these students as liabilities because of the lack of guidance they can provide. This deficit philosophy does not take into account the cultural assets they bring into the educational arena. Although parents may not possess the education, they do guide their children by culturally nurturing them and connecting them to family history and values. Students relate this form of guidance as a "source of pride and a strategy for empowerment." These students exemplify collective concepts by giving back to the community and bringing forth others to participate in the community of higher education (Benmayor, 2002).

In a separate qualitative study, Rodriguez (2003) examined the ability of first-generation college students to rise above their circumstances, obtain a baccalaureate degree or higher and go on to become activists and a vehicle for those who come from comparable backgrounds. The study used in-depth interviews for the participants who were first-generation college graduates and who had become social activists. They included 6 African Americans, 6 Caucasians, 3 Hispanics, 1 Asian American and 1 Native American. There were 8 women and 9 men and their ages ranged from 28 to 74 years. Rodriguez states, "I began to wonder why and how students from poor, undereducated backgrounds, often with little to no support, become the first in their families to go to college and after graduation, catalysts for similar transformation in others' lives" (p. 18). She sought to gain greater insight by conducting in-depth interviews with first-generation college graduates who had become activists. The researcher hoped that the factors that aided in their academic success could be isolated and then possibly replicated in others' lives. (Rodriguez, 2003).

The participants indicated that adequate financial aid, parental support, academic preparedness and college counseling were factors that promoted their success. However, there were several additional positive influences that promoted their success as well. A phenomenon the researcher labels as "special status" was determined to be prevalent in many poor, uneducated family homes. This practice involved special treatment of the participants by providing positive reinforcement and boosting self confidence. Often, special gifts and treatment by a family member or friend provided advantageous effects on a child's attitudes and perceptions of self worth. These affirmations could have offered the requisite encouragement and instilled in the child greater hope for themselves, both academically and professionally (Rodriguez, 2003).

"Positive naming" was a different practice that occurred when a concerned adult in the child's life assisted in the development of his/her potential by building upon observed talents within him/her. Positive naming is displayed by expressions of strong belief in a person's worth or reinforcement of a particular skill that a child demonstrates. Often these skills or talents are associated with a specific profession and perceived to be of value (Rodriguez, 2003). Another phenomenon identified by the researcher is termed "ascending cross-class identification." This occurs when a person from lower SES gains exposure and understanding of the life and culture of higher SES and seeks practical means of attaining the higher status lifestyle…cultural shift (Rodriguez, 2003).

This study corroborated other research findings related to first-generation educational aspirations and success, such as the fact that during the participants' K-12 education, positive teacher attitudes toward them fostered their belief in themselves, their sense of belonging and subsequently their academic success. The teachers' belief in

students' self worth was a significant influence on academic preparedness and academic goal setting. Conversely, negative or non-supportive attitudes toward students hindered students' progress toward academic achievement. Students, however, also used peer role modeling to influence their behavior. They observed what their middle class counterparts were doing (registering for college entrance exams, etc.) and mimicked the behavior. This practice also allowed them to take risks in approaching teachers and counselors and inquiring about the college going process although they may not have been deemed college material (Rodriguez, 2003). A final observation made by the researcher states, "While the study's participants most often experienced these influences by chance, I contend that we can do much by design to influence the metamorphosis of students from poor, undereducated backgrounds into college-educated, activist members of the middle class" (Rodriguez, 2003, p.22).

Although qualitative inquiries delve into the "why" of particular behaviors or phenomenon, quantitative research assists in understanding the significance of specific behaviors or phenomenon. Siu-Man Ting (2003) examined the academic success of first-generation college students using SAT scores and non-cognitive variables. The study was conducted at a southeastern, public research university and used a survey questionnaire for gathering data. There were a total of 215 participants, who were first-generation students. One hundred fifty nine were Caucasian, 35 African American, 18 Asian American, 2 Hispanic and 1 Native American. There were 110 men and 105 women and the mean age was 18 years.

Non-cognitive variables were determined to be better predictors/indicators for educational aspirations and moderate predictors of GPA for students of color. The non-

cognitive factors related to student retention and academic achievement were positive self concept, a realistic self appraisal system, preferences for long term goals, a strong supportive person, leadership experience, demonstrated community service and acquired knowledge in field. These factors address psychosocial and cultural backgrounds of students and relate to how well they can integrate into the college environment and culture (Ting, 2003).

The study was conducted at a public research university in an urban area of the southwestern United States. Eighty percent of the students lived on or near campus, 74 percent of the students were Caucasian, while 26 percent were students of color. The mean age of the student population was 18 years, while 51 percent were men and 49 percent were women. The students of color had lower mean SAT scores, Admission Indexes (AI) and first semester GPA than Caucasian students. They also had lower mean scores on demonstrated community service and acquired knowledge in a field, but had higher mean scores on understanding and coping with racism (Ting, 2003).

The non-cognitive variables, SAT math scores and AI were moderate indicators for first-generation students' academic success beyond the first year; however, the SAT math score alone was a poor predictor of persistence for first-generation students of color. It appeared that the non-cognitive variables affected first-generation students of color more significantly. Another indicator of success for first-generation students was demonstrated community service. Community service allows students to build networks and connections to the community. It contributes to their sense of belonging, which is important since first-generation students were found to be less likely to have social support networks assisting them and had lower social adjustment skills. Community

service helps these students build the skills they need to engage in social groups, adequately communicate and establish new relationships. Students who have these experiences and have developed their social skills are better equipped to succeed and achieve academically (Ting, 2003).

Ting (2003) determined that first-generation students fared well in their undergraduate matriculation if they had long-term goals and if they displayed more certainty toward their undergraduate major. Ting reported that SAT scores and AI were less effective in predicting academic success for first-generation students of color. In conjunction with the aforementioned factors, Ting (2003) determined that non-cognitive variables should be included in the equation when making predictions of student academic outcomes and assessing not only who can be successful in college, but how institutions of higher learning can assist in the success of first-generation college students, particularly those of color.

A separate quantitative research study investigated the longitudinal effect of being a first-generation college student on attrition. It examined independent variables and whether they had influence over a student's educational goals during varying points of his/her matriculation (Ishitani, 2003). The study was conducted at a four-year comprehensive public university in the Midwest. There were 1,747 participants, and 1,016 were first-generation students. Females comprised 955 of the participants, while males comprised 795. Ethnicity was categorized in two groups, Caucasians totaling 1,564 and minorities totaling 183. The research employed event history modeling for data analysis. This statistical technique allowed the researcher to focus on time periods when students were at greater risk of departing the institution. The study displayed the

longitudinal process of student enrollment in the following terms: continue, stop out, drop out, transfer and graduate; these terms were also incorporated within specific time periods. The researcher contended that first-generation students' access to college did not guarantee college completion; however, if academic administrators understand the risk periods, profiles for at-risk students can be developed and strategies can be put in place to support these students and boost their persistence rates and ultimate college degree completion (Ishitani, 2003).

"After controlling for factors such as race, gender, high school GPA and family income, the risk of attrition in the first year among first-generation students was 71 percent higher than that of students with two college-educated parents" (Ishitani, 2003, p.433). Although this percentage is startling, it was determined that characteristics of first-generation students after initial college entry demonstrated lower levels of academic and social integration than their continuing-generation counterparts. There, however, are inconsistencies related to first-generation freshmen grades and whether they differ dramatically from those of their continuing-generation peers. Over time, it was revealed that first-generation students were found to be less likely to persist. The data indicated that after year one, 57 percent of students were more likely to depart, while after year two, 66 percent of first-generation students were more likely to depart (Ishitani, 2003). This finding illustrates the need for institutions of higher learning to provide consistent student support services throughout their matriculation, as opposed to front- loading programs and services at the freshman year.

Institutional Characteristics and Student Participation

Student aspirations can be impacted by factors outside of the student's control or understanding. Often, institutions of higher learning practices and culture can shape students' perceptions about college and can either encourage or deter their active participation (Thayer, 2000). As previously noted, first-generation students are not as participative in the social and extracurricular activities many colleges and universities offer because of work or family obligations. However, there may also be a lack of these activities or programs that fit these students' interests or needs. Higher education institutions' practices can make a difference in first-generation students' educational goals (Pascarella et al., 2004). Further examination will be made of the role institutions can play and strategies they can employ to assist in retaining first-generation students.

During the 1960's and 1970's there was much unrest experienced by academic institutions due to the growing impersonalism of what was termed the multiuniversity and a strong lack of communication, including non-classroom contact between faculty and students (Pascarella, 1980). The concept of colleges has since changed, and they are perceived as socializing organizations because student behaviors, attitudes and educational outcomes are affected by structural factors such as the size of the institution, living arrangements, administrative policies, curriculum, etc. and also through interactions with socialization agents such as peers, faculty and administrators. The interpersonal environment of an institution presents students with a climate of opinions, values, attitudes, behaviors and performances which are practiced by the socialization agents (net climate) (Pascarella, 1980).

Students' satisfaction with their environment, including quality of instruction, contacts with faculty and fellow students, curriculum, college administration and facilities is directly related to the number of undergraduate years completed. Students' satisfaction and students' perception of their college environment has more bearing on persistence decisions than input or predisposition characteristics (Astin, 1993). Decisions to withdraw are more a function of what occurs after entry, than of what precedes it. Although students weigh their individual consequences, such as occupational, monetary and other societal rewards, institutions and students are better served if there is more focus on not only the education of students, but also their social growth. Once this occurs, enhanced student retention will follow (Tinto, 1993).

To aid in the socialization of students from different cultures, institutions can facilitate, through their curricula, the classroom as a learning community. By connecting the world of the student to the world of college, students can discover both inanimate and animate objects in the new college culture that stimulates their feelings of connectedness and belonging (Braxton, 2000). Special events that promote particular ethnic or cultural events can be hosted by institutions and, more importantly, persons who represent different cultures should be used as translators, mediators and role models to further assist students in deciphering unfamiliar college customs, mediating conflict or misunderstandings that arise, and modeling behavior that is accepted by both the minority and majority cultures (Braxton, 2000). Students attempt to reduce the differences between themselves and those components of their interpersonal environment of which they are a part. Faculty play a key role in shaping students' net climate and if they increase informal non-classroom contact, the greater the influence of faculty's attitudes

and intellectual values (Pascarella, 1980). Some students choose to exclude faculty from their non-classroom lives and elect to associate primarily with peers outside of the classroom. Pascarella (1980) notes that Chickering found that students who have increased interactions with faculty have a greater sense of purpose and are more certain of career or vocational choice and are therefore more likely to persist.

Socialization requires, in part, students to practice both mainstream culture and ethnic cultures at the same time. Practicing both cultures is termed *biculturalism*, and students actually demonstrate biculturalism at an early age. It continues throughout life and is generally of equal importance (de Anda, 1984). de Anda (1984) notes that there are six factors that affect biculturalism and these factors converge two worlds and allow individuals to function effectively and less stressfully. They are 1) degree of overlap of commonality between two cultures; 2) availability of cultural translators, mediators and models; 3) amount and type of correct feedback provided by each culture; 4) conceptual style and problem solving approach; 5) degree of bilingualism; and 6) degree of dissimilarity of physical appearance, skin color and facial features. The bicultural experience is possible because of overlap of two cultures and dual socialization is due to the amount of overlap. Students can function more effectively and less stressfully because the two worlds converged (Braxton, 2000).

Two important questions that should be addressed when seeking to improve the condition of at-risk students and to increase their participation are the following: What are the barriers they face in their decisions to participate; and what are the solutions they recommend to increase their participation and educational aspirations (Freeman, 1997)? African American students who participate in higher education fare better professionally,

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socially and economically than those students who do not participate; they receive a higher rate on their return. Although the 1990's demonstrated a slight increase in ethnic student participation, there remained a sizeable gap between white student and ethnic student participation. The increasing investment students must make to attend college has been identified as a primary cause of stagnation, which has been brought about by rising tuition costs and declining financial aid. Research focusing on areas that have not traditionally been addressed such as ethnic student perspectives of the value of a college degree as well as ethnic heritage and cultural influences on educational aspirations can provide additional insight to attrition causes (Freeman, 1997). Although individuals and groups are often asked their opinions about their plight, they are seldom asked to participate in the development of programs or models that will improve their levels. Additionally, as more non-traditional academic venues arise (virtual universities, night/weekend programs), delayed entrants have become an integral part of college. These students as well have different needs and values from those of traditional students and may feel marginalized to the social and academic climate of the college. Their academic skills may need augmenting, and appropriate course formats and student services must be available to assist in their academic success (Tinto, 1993).

<p align="center">Cultural Capital</p>

Historiography and Overview of Cultural Capital

This section of the literature review will examine the research shaping cultural capital, the theoretical framework used for this study, and its influence on first-generation college students and their educational aspirations. Cultural capital is a useful framework for studying first-generation students because it looks into students' familial background

to understand how they are impacted by their environmental culture, which ultimately leads to their establishing educational goals. In reviewing cultural capital theory, this section will examine the historical development of cultural capital and social reproduction theory, cultural capital characteristics and habitus, educational equity and excellence, family background and SES, parent, school and community involvement, and cultural shifts.

To begin, cultural capital theory is derived from social reproduction and social mobility theory. Social reproduction is focused on the future and the social advantages one generation can pass on to its heirs (Ball, 2003; Prandy, 1998). There are risks associated with social mobility, and families must make determinations that could potentially enhance the social opportunities and resources of their successors or the prospect of generational decline. The responsibility to choose wisely rests heavily on families who seek to improve their social standing, who in turn must apply their resources to increase mobility opportunities for those they will leave behind (Ball, 2003; Prandy, 1998). Social reproduction and cultural capital are linked in critical ways. Cultural capital cannot stand alone and is obtained and increased as a direct result of the pursuit of social reproduction (social capital) and upward mobility.

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has been a leader in the development of cultural capital theory. In Bourdieu's view, those in power do not merely pass on their material wealth or economic capital to their offspring; instead, they also try to assure that their children acquire cultural capital and social capital (Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Zweigenhaft, 1993). According to Bourdieu, cultural capital consists of various forms of knowledge, dispositions and skills. Social capital refers to the benefits of knowing people

who can be of help to one, also referred to as making "connections" or "networking" (Zweigenhaft, 1993). Bourdieu and Passeron's work also contributed to social reproduction theory by stating that family background and position provide social and cultural resources that in turn need to be invested to yield social advantages (Lamont and Lareau, 1988).

Providing an equal chance for a student to receive a quality education is a value espoused by American culture. Attempting to provide this equal chance for ethnic minority and lower SES students is a high priority. According to Cheng, et al. (1979), "an equal chance is essentially a culture-bound concept, defined relative to the dominant belief system and political and economic structures" (p. 267). Fundamental characteristics of American life must be considered when determining what comprises an equal chance for minority students. Cheng, et al. (1979) believes that the dominance of the Anglo-American culture unequally distributes economic rewards (i.e. professional mobility, wage earnings, higher education access, etc.) and that this is directly linked in the educational arena. Cheng's et al. belief is proven quite evident in most research surrounding the academic achievement and post-secondary pursuit of students who come from lower SES and higher SES families. As noted in Chapter 1, the differences between these two groups are astounding and are primarily related to SES, which impacts greatly the cultural capital that each child inherits. Specifically, first-generation students do not receive guidance in regard to enrolling in rigorous high school courses, considering college earlier in their lives, participating in extracurricular activities and obtaining information about college and its costs (Prandy, 1998).

Cultural Capital Characteristics and Habitus

Walpole (2003) explains that each social class possesses capital, economic, social and cultural. Parents pass on cultural and social capital in the form of attitudes, preferences and behaviors that are used for social profits or desirable social outcomes. Cultural capital is knowledge, skills and dispositions that are specific to different social classes and used as a means to gain social mobility or social acceptance to a degree. The perceptions in which social class members share consist of goals and strategies necessary for aspiring to the desirable social level or attaining a certain social status. This concept is identified as *habitus*. Habitus is defined as attitudes, perceptions and knowledge sets that influence a person's actions subconsciously. Habitus determines how an individual operates and the parameters they have identified internally (Perna and Titus, 2003). "Habitus is characterized as a 'conductorless orchestration' that serves to give systematicity, coherence and consistency to an individual's practices" (Throop and Murphy, 2002, p. 186).

Cognitive and motivating structures within a particular social environment are the modes through which habitus and, subsequently, cultural capital are formed and maintained. According to Bourdieu (1977), habitus is something that is not intentionally transmitted. It is learned attitudes and behaviors that are passed on to others in that particular social environment without conscious intention. Therefore, the attitudes of students who are first-generation begin in part in the home. Education is not necessarily highly regarded, and this message is passed on over generations. Research indicates that the habitus of low-SES students predisposes them to lower academic or professional aspirations than those of their high-SES peers, and this attitude perpetuates itself by

engaging low-SES students in less effective educational strategies that in turn prove to further relegate them to lower social profits and continued lower social position (Walpole, 2003). Critics of Bourdieu do not conform to the notion that habitus is unintentional or subconscious entirely. Husserl (1973), an early researcher of social reproduction theory, who also conceptualized "habitus," noted that habitus was "previously acquired, latent anticipations and cognitions (knowledge)" and that it could be voluntarily established (Throop and Murphy, 2002, p. 193). Both assertions, although differing in the manner of how habitus is established, lend understanding to cultural capital and its influence on first-generation college students.

<u>Educational Equity and Excellence</u>

William Sewell (1971) notes that higher education in American society gains only part of its significance from the personal satisfactions and self-realization that comes from general learning and mastery of high level skills. He states that higher education provides increased chances for power and prestige for those who are fortunate enough to obtain it and that the allocation of social position is increasingly dependent on higher education as well. There are restrictions for entrance into certain occupations, and educational attainments beyond secondary school are presumed to produce habits of thought, attitudes and special skills that are requisite for these occupations. When requirements are artificially high, many otherwise qualified persons from disadvantaged backgrounds are excluded from desirable occupations. With the level of technology increasing within the U.S., it appears that the trend will be toward more, not less, dependence on post-secondary institutions to select, train and certify people for a widening variety of occupations. Those who do not receive this training will be severely

disadvantaged in the competition for jobs and many other areas of social life as well (Sewell, 1971).

Sewell (1971) also notes that when controls are set for academic ability, higher SES students have substantially greater post-secondary educational attainment than lower SES students. Students in the highest SES category, when compared to students in the lower fourth of the ability distribution, have a two and one-half times advantage over those in the lowest SES category in their chances to move on to some form of post-secondary education. Students in the highest ability category are one and one-half times more likely to pursue post-secondary education than those in the lowest SES category. Cheng et al. (1979) points out that the basic inequality and authoritarian character of the economic structure coexists with America's democratic ideology that emphasizes equal opportunity for all citizens. Even though this contradiction is a fundamental societal characteristic, the unequal distribution of economic power has not been viewed as inconsistent with the concept of equality.

The failure of compensatory education programs to improve achievement in their target populations had, by the early 1970's, caused legislators and educators to seek alternative measures of equalizing the competition for educational attainment. Differences among students were not viewed equally and were no longer considered as the absence of necessary developmental experiences as a result of impoverished backgrounds (Cheng et al., 1979). Reminiscent of cultural relativity theories, this perspective challenged the idea that providing equal chances for children meant eliminating cultural and ethnic differences. This new emphasis, however, did not replace the generally held assumption of Anglo conformity. The monoculture curriculum content,

testing and grouping practices, as well as expectations of educators for minority children, came to be realized as barriers to educational equality. Equal educational opportunity has emerged as the central ideology of American schooling, especially since schooling is considered the primary mechanism by which economic attainment is reached. Public education has been a major focus for social reformers interested in providing an equal chance for minorities to participate in the competition (Cheng et al., 1979).

The development of national standards is a strategy that many U.S. educators and policy makers support as a means to achieve educational excellence and equity (Aronowitz, 1996). Students would be required to take a national examination that is knowledge based. Colleges and universities would use the scores from these exams as a criterion for admission. Essentially, national standards could become the major indicator that drives educational reform. According to Aronowitz, national standards would not change the ways in which differential cultural capital is distributed. He argues that, because of the lack of resources already within large minority and working communities, national standards examinations might impose a negative effect on these students. State legislators might be less inclined to invest more money in these communities, thus further enlarging the educational attainment gap. The standards would allow further justification for the perpetuation of unequal class systems. Moreover, because the current direction of educational funding is down, not only would there be disparate effects on educational attainment, but also on educational access (Arononwitz, 1996).

Paul DiMaggio and John Mohr (1985) have offered hypotheses related to cultural capital and educational attainment and college attendance. They contend that "cultural capital has a positive net effect on educational attainment and college attendance for men

and women" (p. 1239). The expectation of cultural capital is for it to affect students' educational attainments and their likelihood of attending college. Cultural capital can increase opportunities for special help from teachers and other gatekeepers, it can nurture the development of generalized reputations as "cultured persons," and it can navigate exposure to social environments where education is valued and exposure to additional educational milieus is prominent. The researchers defer to Bourdieu, who treats cultural capital as cumulative, noting that the greater earlier endowment, the easier the further acquisition (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985). This is the analysis that most researchers of cultural capital derive. Cultural capital is viewed as extending far beyond college and across generations.

Berger (2000) developed several propositions to test social reproduction perspectives and demonstrate how cultural capital can be manifested by not only the student, but also the institution as well. "Proposition 1 notes that institutions with higher levels of cultural capital have the highest retention rates, while Proposition 2 claims that students with higher levels of cultural capital are more likely to persist across all types of institutions than are students with less access to cultural capital. Proposition 3 states that students with higher levels of cultural capital are most likely to persist at institutions with correspondingly high levels or organizational cultural capital, and Proposition 4 indicates that students with access to lower levels of cultural capital are most likely to persist at institutions with correspondingly low levels of organizational cultural capital" (Braxton, 2000, pp.113-116). It would seem that the statement Proposition 4 makes is flawed, because typically students with low levels of cultural capital do not persist. Berger makes this assertion by examining the difference between organizational cultural capital and

student cultural capital; the lower the difference between the two, the greater the chance of educational success (Braxton, 2000). A significant factor that also impacts student success is institutional culture. High status cultural capital is valued by educators and is rewarded within the structure of the school system. This results in the further increase of low-SES student risks and propensity to leave high school or decisions to not participate in post-secondary education (Walpole, 1997).

<u>Family Background and Socioeconomic Status</u>

Family structure and how family lives are organized has implications on the establishment of outside social networks. This structure is established by parents and passed on to the children (Smrekar, 1992). Annette Laureau (1987) has examined social class differences and the importance of cultural capital in lower and middle-SES working class families. Her research deviates from educational outcomes to the processes through which educational patterns are created and reproduced. Some social theorists subscribe to the culture of poverty thesis, which states that lower SES culture has distinct values and forms of social organization. Lareau (1987) argues that although these theories vary, most early researchers contend that lower SES and working class families do not share values as they relate to educational attainment. Education is considered to be more highly regarded in high-SES. Lareau also cites Bourdieu in regard to how the cultural experience in the home (habitus) influences children's adjustment to school and academic achievement. Habitus therefore transforms cultural resources into what he labels *cultural capital*. This perspective links home environment to school structure and examines how the absence of certain cultural capital attitudes and dispositions can impede both the parents' and children's' negotiation of the process of schooling (Lareau, 1987).

The differences between low-SES and high-SES students begin early in a child's life, are cumulative and are shaped by differences ranging from parental involvement to college costs. Student aspirations are influenced by both parental involvement and college costs; both of these variables vary with social status (Cabrera, Burkum & LaNasa, 2005; Walpole, 2003). Low-SES students who gain access to higher education, typically attend two year or vocational institutions. Those who enroll in four-year institutions are less likely to persist to graduation and do not pursue post baccalaureate educations. Low-SES students also manifest different behaviors than their high-SES counterparts, and these unique behaviors transition into different outcomes once they attain their degrees (Walpole, 2003). There is conflicting research that examines the income levels and SES of high and low-SES students after graduation, as well as the propensity to attend graduate school. Essentially, both high and low-SES students inherit behaviors specific to that social class, and these behaviors and patterns of activities can also be similar in nature and are opportunities for capital accumulation (Walpole, 2003). Walpole (2003) describes these patterns as falling within a Bourdieuian framework.

Low-SES students can learn to make different choices as a result of attending a post-secondary institutions (PSI). Because of the varied experiences and exposure to other habiti and people from different habiti on a college campus, low-SES students are not necessarily without opportunity or resources to change their social position. College, however, can be used as a means to reinvest capital already acquired and to accumulate more. This accumulation can be used to negotiate and acquire future social profits (Walpole, 2003). Research has shown that educational aspirations and degree attainment are influenced by family background, social and cultural capital. It has also demonstrated

that the effects of these influences extend beyond college. Although low-SES students who attended PSI's have proven their ability to convert their college experiences to greater cultural and social profits than low-SES students who did not attend a PSI, their social and economic profits are still lower than those of their high-SES counterparts (Walpole, 2003). Research that examines SES and persistence typically controls for social class differences as opposed to focusing on how the differences influence decisions and outcomes. A college education is a means for social mobility; however, because of the lack of political mobilization of low-SES groups, insufficient attention is provided to this group from policymakers (Walpole, 2003).

As previously mentioned, a consistent finding in the area of social stratification research is that the children of higher SES origins are more likely to aspire to high educational and occupational goals than are the children of lower SES origins. Sewell and Shah (1968) also note that despite their lower SES backgrounds, some lower SES children do aspire to and achieve high-level educational and occupational goals. It is apparent that, in fact, some lower SES families acculturate their children to the value of education and encourage high levels of aspiration and achievement. Sewell and Shah seek to determine what variables in the family environment (habitus) instill these values in children (cultural capital). It is suggested that if one or both parents are dissatisfied with their own social position they can assert their expectations or hopes of a better social standing onto their children. Parents may strive to motivate their children to higher levels of aspiration and achievement as a result of their inability to pursue or achieve it themselves (Sewell and Shah, 1968).

In contrast to Sewell and Shah (1968), Walpole (1997) states that social status often defines parental expectations and definitions of success which mediate student aspirations. She believes that low-SES parents do not typically envision post-secondary education for their children, as opposed to high-SES parents who consider a bachelor's or advanced degree to be the norm. In recent debates over SES and its impact on academic achievement and aspirations, Walpole's assertion is more widely accepted. Measures of success vary among SES, and a full-time job after graduating from high school, with no true goal or expectation that their children will attend college is a characteristic of low-SES families. College attendance, to low-SES parents, more often refers to community college or technical school. Attending college is the standard recourse for students from high-SES backgrounds (Walpole, 1997).

Walpole confirms that often low-SES students do in fact attend college after graduating from high school, but that they are less likely to persist to degree completion or aspire to a graduate or professional degree. She also notes that lower SES students often enroll in lower tier institutions, as opposed to those that have proven retention and degree attainment track records, in part due to their pre-college academic characteristics (GPA, SAT scores, etc.). It has been long understood that low-SES students have a cadre of obstacles on their way to and through college, which results in negative consequences for their educational aspirations and goal attainment (Walpole, 1997). Because the habitus of a low-SES student predisposes that student to less effective educational strategies, the student is likely to make choices that will result in the continuation of his/her lower social position. It is possible, however, that parents can have a dynamic effect on habitus and a student can adopt new knowledge, skills and dispositions as a

result of new exposures, historical changes in the environment and associating with others from different milieus, which are all possible in the college environment (Walpole, 1997).

Parent, School and Community Involvement

Students' academic success depends a great deal upon family involvement. The role of the family in the education of children has been of interest to researchers, policy makers and practitioners. In the early 20th century, researchers assumed that family involvement in children's learning created more of a hindrance than a help (Tierney, 2002). Native American parents, at that time, only spoke in their tribal dialect and only taught tribal customs to their children. This was considered an impediment to the children's learning, and government agencies removed the children from their homes and sent them to boarding schools that were often thousands of miles away. Children may not have returned home or saw their families for years. This practice did not prove to be fruitful, as the educational levels of these children still did not meet those of other children in the mainstream (Tierney, 2002).

Another philosophy to gauge children's abilities and aspirations was to examine the parents' educational levels. If a child's parent did not attend college, which was the case for most low-SES families, it was considered to be a strong determinant of their academic success and propensity to pursue post-secondary education. "Class became the determining factor" (Tierney, 2002, p. 589). To resolve this issue, it was believed that the focus should be on improving the schools, once again removing parental influence from the equation. This approach failed as well. The perception of the role of the family has changed from being harmful to a child's welfare, to being irrelevant, to now being

integral to the educational development of children. Additionally, the traditional definition of the nuclear family (mother, father and 2-3 children) had never been appropriate for different groups and has proven problematic in the 21st century. The definition of family must be more inclusive of various groups and cultures. To more accurately reflect society, researchers must examine who is in the family environment and how children are being raised (Tierney, 2002).

McNeal (1999) reveals that there are inconsistencies among research examining parenting practices, academic achievement and educational attainment. The relationship between parental involvement and student educational outcomes is inconclusive; however, parental involvement has been linked to both positive and negative levels of academic achievement. A potential explanation for the inconsistent findings is the variation in levels of parent involvement by race, ethnicity and social class, as well as the variation in how parent involvement affects achievement. American school reform movements have placed focus back on parental involvement. National programs include parent involvement as focal points for student success; teachers encourage parents to become more involved with their children's education; and formal programs are being offered to address ways to encourage greater parental involvement (McNeal, 1999).

Research has documented the importance of parental involvement to the academic success of their children (Cabrera, et al., 2006). Most literature focuses on middle-SES families or families where the parents are well educated. Although these factors play a significant role to exposing children to high academic and societal standards, familial involvement in the homes of low-SES children can also be a positive influence, particularly if they are linked to schools. Typically, schools do not teach students the

competencies necessary to gain cultural capital (Tierney, 2002). To gain cultural capital, a family or person must be willing to make investments of time, effort and money, particularly to succeed in higher education. Seemingly, those who lack cultural capital are less aware of the investments necessary to increase their capital or of the measures necessary to acquire it (Tierney, 2002).

Parental involvement and knowledge of practices that allow high-SES students access to college, such as SAT courses, college prep courses and on-campus visits are practices that demonstrate higher forms of cultural capital. In addition, high-SES families build stronger linkages by maintaining systematic, ongoing relationships with school personnel. This interaction is more than attending Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A.) meetings and participating in parent/teacher conferences (Tierney, 2002; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001). One reason low-SES families may have difficulty cultivating relationships with school personnel is that they may not have the means or job flexibility to do so. If they are unable to secure transportation or their work schedules do not allow the time for them to frequent their children's school, they very well must eliminate cultural capital for economic capital. One factor is for certain: Familial involvement with the schools should incorporate and identify cultural factors that promote educational aspirations and academic success. Programs that are unidirectional and monocultural do not yield great success (Tierney, 2002).

The assumptions parents and families have about how children learn play a significant role in raising a child's educational level. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) have determined through their research that parents who promote conformity, obedience and good behavior have children with lower academic achievement, while

parents who promote personal responsibility and self respect have children with higher

school performance. Their research implies that families of low-SES tend to fall in the

first category, emphasizing role compliance, while high-SES families tend to focus on

building children's self esteem and self worth. Family roles are also based on different

societal networks, such as SES, religious beliefs, cultural practices, etc. Families who live

in communities that have structural supports will be more involved with the education

and academic preparation of their children. Even so, communities and school systems

should not assume that familial involvement is automatic. Invitations to participate,

whether formal or informal, are an important part of the equation (Tierney, 2002).

U.S. policy makers have mandated numerous practices to be used within school

systems in an attempt to further family-school relationships and harmonize the home and

school environments. Parental involvement is considered crucial to the well being and

academic preparation of students. Universal policies and practices are thought to improve

across social and cultural lines the educational condition for students. Bourdieu's social

reproduction theory, however, contends that these practices can often stifle or diffuse

their intended influence, particularly that of parent-teacher conferences (Weininger and

Lareau, 2003). Weininger and Lareau (2003) examined a U.S. educational strategy that

has been in place within school systems for a number of years. The study was conducted

to determine the cohesiveness of this activity across social class lines. Parent-teacher

conferences are conducted as a means to involve both families and schools, particularly

teachers, with the educational assessment and growth of students. This study compared

middle-SES parents to working and low-SES parents as it related to their interaction and

involvement with parent-teacher conferences.

It was determined that Bourdieu's theoretical account of educational systems was supported. He contends that these systems further perpetuate inequality between different social and economic classes. Low-SES parents were more inclined to rely on the educators' perceptions and knowledge of their children's classroom experiences, while middle-SES parents generally had more detailed knowledge about their children's abilities and classroom experiences (Weininger and Lareau, 2003). Additionally, middle-SES parents demonstrated more knowledge regarding educational interventions and strategies than low-SES parents and were more assertive in their interactions with teachers than low-SES parents. Middle-SES parents often entered the classroom without knocking, questioned the teachers regarding their academic practices and also complained about academic problems as well. It was therefore concluded that vast differences between middle and low-SES parents were revealed in the quality of interaction and information exchanged at parent-teacher conferences. It was further determined that these differences were as a result of the amount of cultural capital manifested by the parents. The cultural capital also exhibited itself in the parents' symbolic capital they attributed to teachers. The symbolic capital characterized itself by the amount of authority parents ascribed to teachers and whether they themselves had the authority to challenge it (Weininger and Lareau, 2003).

Parental involvement is considered to be an integral factor in the development of children's intellectual development, academic performance and aspirations (Pong, 1997). Researchers have found that parental child-rearing practices outweigh differences in economic resources. This is considered detrimental for student achievement, and can lead to many of the undesirable behaviors associated with school failure and student attrition

(Pong, 1997). A student's perception about college or education in general has a significant influence on their learning and intellectual development (Pike and Kuh, 2005). The experiences and child-rearing practices students undergo within their home environment shapes their perceptions and subsequent ability to pursue education (Franklin, 1988). Students who come from homes where education is valued receive positive images from the parent(s). Parents who obtain further education can espouse their views and also serve as role models. These parents are typically more comfortable and capable of assisting their children with school assignments and have a greater proclivity to invest in their children's education (i.e. tutoring services, supplemental learning programs, cultural and extracurricular activities, etc.) (Franklin, 1988). Conversely, the lack of family structure was found to account for developmental difficulties in students. Children whose mothers spent less time with them had lower cognitive scores on the Preschool Inventory, which was used to measure cognitive performance. Children from low-SES homes whose parents did not have a college education or did not complete high school had lower self esteem and limited cognitive, affective and intellectual development (Franklin, 1988). A lower level of cultural and social capital in the family is considered to be responsible for poor school achievement of children, particularly those from single-parent homes (Pong, 1997).

Pong further asserts that community-based parental involvement is also closely related to student education. Parental influences extend past a single child to the community at large. The type of students attending a school has the most crucial influence on the school's effectiveness. Pong (1997) reports that empirical research using the characteristics of the student population has impact on student achievement,

over and above the effect of individual-level characteristics. From an economic standpoint, schools that are comprised largely of single-parent households are likely to be low-SES status schools. The surrounding neighborhoods are low-SES communities where resources are lacking . Administrators, teachers and counselors from these schools tend to view students with low expectations, resulting in students with low achievement (Pong, 1997).

Coleman (1991) conveys that social capital in these communities needs to be rebuilt. By enhancing the habitus and further influencing cultural capital, individual families can further influence the community and build greater social capital. Facilitating change with the individual homes is essential. "Social capital among parents, once created, does not always reinforce school goals; however, a strong constituency of parents is a force within the community that will often act in accordance with the school, but also as an agent for the children of the community and as a gauge on the actions of the school's" (Coleman, 1991. p.3). A critical relationship that plays a role in the achievement and aspirations of students is that between parents and schools. Parental involvement affects the interactions between the school and the family by nurturing it. Parent participation encourages teachers to in turn encourage parents; it has a reciprocal effect (Eccles and Harold, 1993).

In recent years, greater family involvement has become a key factor in school reform efforts. A school-based management program was designed by James P Comer, a noted Yale psychiatrist, in an attempt to propagate high motivation and high achievement climates. The success of the program is dependent upon the school-parent relationships

and one of its primary tenets rests with the equal, interactive and positive partnerships between parents and school (Eccles and Harold, 1993).

Research has indicated that communities also have a direct impact upon family involvement. The presence of undesirable elements in the community has a negative influence upon parental involvement. The lack of involvement is associated with different parent beliefs, practices and resource availability in the child's environment. According to Eccles and Harold (1993) families living in high-risk, low-resource neighborhoods develop coping mechanisms to assist with successful integration within the neighborhoods, as opposed to building upon talents and skills to assist in successful academic attainment. Families living in neighborhoods with lower negative or less dangerous influences focus more on helping their children develop specific talents and skills that are more useful in academic settings. These researchers also note that there are families from all SES levels that are highly engaged in their children's education and schooling and families from high-SES communities who are disengaged as well (Eccles and Harold, 1993).

Parental involvement typically decreased as students entered secondary schools. Parents may feel that their children are more self reliant and more capable of navigating school without the same level of guidance and assistance that they received when the students were younger. Parents may also believe that they are less competent at assisting with school work because of the increased rigor at the secondary level. School work usually becomes more advanced and technical and some parents, particularly those from low-SES homes, may not manifest the requisite academic training to provide help. Parents may also believe that the teaching methods used by teachers are different from

those that were used when they were in school. As a consequence, parents may have concerns that they may mislead or confuse their children if they try to help (Eccles and Harold, 1993). Alternatively, school personnel can act as obstacles or inhibiters to parental involvement because of their own beliefs and attitudes. The beliefs shown by school personnel have been found to actively discourage parent involvement in the classroom and the school. Intervention strategies were developed by Eccles and Harold (1993) to nurture synergistic relationships between parents, communities and schools, which in turn will impact the achievement and aspirations of their children.

Cultural Shifts

Since the Civil Rights Movement, there has been a significant rise in the African American middle class in the U.S. Despite the growth in income levels, post-secondary enrollment, and degree completion, African American's lag behind whites. It is believed by some that African Americans' assimilation into the American mainstream has brought on a loss of cultural identity (Ginwright, 2002). Much attention is now being placed on the relationship between the African American working poor and African American middle class. One concern focuses on the increase in cultural capital among middle class African Americans and whether it has improved or sustained the condition of the African American working poor. It is argued that the exodus of the African American middle class from African American urban communities has further endangered those communities because of the removal of economic, social and cultural resources, in addition to valuable role models (Ginwright, 2002).

Although the middle class migration from urban communities may impact some pre-existing relationships, it does not necessarily sever them. Upwardly mobile African

American's maintain their involvement in religious, civic and other community organizations even after they leave (Ginwright, 2002). The African American middle class has become increasingly difficult to define. It is fragmented and consists of varied incomes, professions and educational levels. Although middle class African Americans share similar occupational identities, the distinction between middle class and working class is tied to intellectual labor rather than manual labor. The true difference between the two classes is linked to personal fulfillment with work. The middle class mindset tends to focus on career accomplishments and the knowledge, abilities and credentials involved with their work. Working class members view work as less personally fulfilling and do not attribute what they do as a symbol of their identity. For example, a plumber may earn more than a teacher; however, the plumber is designated as working class due to the values and beliefs associated with job and status (Ginwright, 2002).

Perceptions of the world and the way in which it works is shaped by social class. This ideology extracts similar assertions as those from Bourdieu's definition of habitus (Ginwright, 2002). Additionally, middle class issues focus more on quality of life rather than on day- to-day survival. This transition of thinking creates new cultural values as well as new forms of collective action. A longitudinal study conducted by Tripp (1987) examined the cultural shifts of student activists who were low-SES while in college. These same students now represent middle-SES, and Tripp found that there were differences in their ideological view points and strategies for improving the Black condition. Although they became less collectivist, their civic interests and responsibilities did not diminish (Ginwright, 2002). After the Civil Rights Movement, middle class African Americans thought it important to reclaim cultural values, customs and identities

that may have been lost as a result of integration. It is widely believed by African Americans that integration, although it assisted in increasing the social and economic status of African Americans, also caused a disconnect between the race as well. African American communities began to dissolve, and African Americans who were doctors, lawyers or other professionals moved their practices and businesses to integrated areas, which further removed these influences, resources and cultural values from African American communities (Ginwright, 2002). There appears to be a transition or shift of values and beliefs in the homes of low-SES and first-generation families. The result was a greater appreciation for learning and a realization that to become upwardly mobile, higher education is a necessity. In order for a family to change its condition, the behaviors, attitudes and beliefs must change as well. These changes further manifest themselves in a change or increase, if you will, in knowledge, skills and dispositions that in turn increase cultural capital within the home and social capital among peers.

In the U.S. acquiring access to college requires that prospective students manifest characteristics that demonstrate academic preparedness, aspirations to obtain a post-secondary degree and resources necessary to support persistence, to name a few. The literature has revealed that students who are reared in home environments that advocate post-secondary education and have significant cultural capital typically have been exposed to cognitive (academic preparedness) and non-cognitive (social/extracurricular participation) factors that have a positive effect on whether they pursue college education and professional careers. Students who come from homes where there is little or no exposure or encouragement to pursue post-secondary study (cultural capital) are disadvantaged because they have fewer requisite characteristics for gaining college

access. The key to acquiring these characteristics lies with generational ties and exposure to post-secondary education and professional careers. As a result of this exposure, students' awareness of what steps are necessary to acquire college access and to navigate the college process provides a significant advantage over students who have not had this exposure.

Research demonstrates that cultural capital has a positive correlation to socio-economic status (Ishitani, 2006; Perna, 2006; Horn & Nunez, 2000; McDonough, 1997). This correlation also is tied to student educational achievement and aspirations. Of major importance to the success of all children who aspire to attend college, and even those who may not aspire, is appropriate support. Parents have been reported to have the greatest impact upon children's achievement and performance; however, there must be a collaborative effort between parents, schools, communities and local and federal government to assist our children in achieving their goals. Cultural capital can be impacted by the aforementioned entities and can help provide the necessary strategies to level the playing field for all who desire to compete.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

<u>Overview</u>

This chapter outlines and describes the research methods and design of the study. Included in this chapter are the processes followed to obtain study participants who met first-generation status, how the participants were recruited and selected, the method of data collection, the procedures for data analysis and the strategies used to interpret the data. Using qualitative methods, this study sought to understand how family practices and behaviors influence post-secondary educational aspirations. The academic, social, financial and cultural experiences of the participants were examined, as well as family characteristics such as SES and parents' occupation and parental expectations, to determine if they had an impact on the educational aspirations of students. The case study method of inquiry was selected to address the research question: What is the influence of family on first-generation college students' educational aspirations post high school?

<u>Case Study Methodology</u>

Case study relies on multiple forms of data in order to build an in-depth case. It allows the researcher to develop categories and themes surrounding the statements of the research participants, provides a description of the experiences, and extracts information that addresses the primary research question (Maxwell, 1996). This study primarily incorporated the case study tenets of Gall, Borg and Gall (1996), Robert Stake (1995), and Sharan Merriam (1998). These researchers state that the main characteristic of qualitative research is the study of specific instances or cases of phenomena. Case study is defined by the interest in the individual as opposed to the methods of inquiry and that

qualitative research builds concepts, hypothesis and theories rather than tests them (Merriam, 1998; Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Stake, 1995). Case study is typically not an experiment and is not statistical in nature; however, it does test theory and its focus is on process, context and discovery, as opposed to outcomes, specific variables or confirmation. In addition, case studies are detailed analyses of a single unit or bounded system (Merriam, 1998). Stake (1995) states that case study looks for the "detail of interaction with its contexts," yet can make grand generalizations because throughout the case there are generalizations that are refined and modified (e.g. a large percentage of first-generation students are from lower-SES homes, etc.).

The primary research question in the study examined the experiences of first-generation students who traditionally would not pursue post-secondary education. Issue-related questions can assist in "scratching the surface" of more poignant questions and they will also be included (Maxwell, 1996). The sub questions that further explored the conditions in the home environment includes 1) Does family contribute to a child's attitude toward education?, 2) How does family affect students' attitudes toward education?, and 3) What educational or cultural practices did the family engage in that impeded or enhanced the student's academic awareness? These participants are examples of students who have "beat the odds" and not only gained access to a post-secondary institution, but also persisted past the first two years. In addition, the design of the program is geared to prepare students for post-baccalaureate study and provide opportunities for them to further their academic pursuits on a graduate level.

Additionally, understanding "why" is a primary rationale for conducting qualitative research. Case study can obtain the answer to the research question and

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provide in-depth analysis of the information acquired. The characteristics of case study

focus on specific instances or cases, provide an in-depth study of each case, study the

phenomenon in its natural context and study the emic (participant's viewpoint) of case

study participants (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). According to Gall, Borg and Gall (1996),

case study is suitable to this research study because it addresses specific instances

(processes, events, persons or things of interest to the researcher). With case study, each

member of the sample can represent a separate case or unit of analysis, and the researcher

can select a focus for investigation and the aspect that data collection and analysis will

concentrate.

Although case study is chosen as the research method and design for this study,

there are four other qualitative traditions of inquiry that could be used: biography,

phenomenology, grounded theory and ethnography. These methods share similar

characteristics, such as the fact that they take place in the "natural world", use multiple

methods that are both interactive and humanistic, allow information to emerge rather than

be preconfigured, and are fundamentally interpretive; however, they all differ in form,

terms and focus (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Biography studies an individual, rather

than a group, and has roots in the anthropological perspectives, while phenomenology

examines the lived experiences of individuals as they relate to a concept or phenomenon

and has roots in the philosophical perspectives. The third tradition, grounded theory,

seeks to generate or discover a theory that explains a particular phenomenon or situation;

grounded theory is rooted within the sociological perspectives. Lastly, ethnography, is the

description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system, examines the

learned behaviors and patterns of that group, and manifests its roots in cultural

anthropology (Creswell, 1998). Like these aforementioned traditions, case study also engages in interrelated activities that focus on gathering good information to answer pertinent research questions (Creswell, 1998).

Site

The study site was the University of Maryland, College Park, a public research university in the State of Maryland that is considered the flagship institution for the state. The Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program is a federally sponsored, national program, and its mission is to increase the number of undergraduates enrolling in graduate school to pursue doctoral degrees. To be eligible for this program, students must meet the criteria for entrance, which is full-time matriculation, junior or senior classification, first-generation, underrepresented, low-SES, minimum grade point average of 2.85, at least 30 semester hours of academic credit and interest in pursuing a Ph.D. Although The McNair Program is administered under the University of Maryland, it permits students from two other universities within its consortium to apply and become members of the program. The admission criteria for the program are limited to students who are considered underrepresented, first generation or low-income. Any one of these criteria meets the eligibility standards for acceptance into the McNair. Program applicants are screened and selected by program administrators and faculty. The criteria used by the McNair program to select participants are consistent with the definitions employed in the current study.

Theoretical Framework

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1973), cultural capital consists of various forms of knowledge, dispositions and skills. Bourdieu's original definition of cultural capital is used by many researchers (Cheng et al., 1979; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985) who seek to explain why some groups have a greater or lower propensity to attend college and the likelihood of a student's potential success in college. In Bourdieu's (1973) view, those in power do not merely pass on their material wealth or economic capital to their offspring; instead, they also try to assure that their children acquire cultural capital and social capital in order to obtain greater opportunities, increase social networks and acquire additional resources (Zweigenhaft, 1993). According to Peterson (1979), culture was defined for social science in 1871 by Edward B. Tylor as a "complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p.). In contemporary society, culture consists of four elements that include norms, values, beliefs and expressive symbols. Although the culture concept has been explored, it has not been greatly elaborated since Tylor's initial explanation. These norms shape the values and attitudes of students within different socioeconomic stratifications and impact their intentions and decisions to not only pursue post-secondary education (Peterson, 1979).

Providing an equal opportunity for a student to receive a quality education is a "mantra" that American society has echoed across the years. Ethnic minority and lower SES students have traditionally not been afforded this equal opportunity, for a variety of reasons, such as lack of adequate training, financial hardship and lack of adequate school and familial support, to name a few. According to Cheng et al. (1979), "an equal chance

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is essentially a culture-bound concept, defined relative to the dominant belief system and political and economic structures" (p. 267). Fundamental characteristics of American life must be considered when determining what comprises an equal chance for minority students. These characteristics impact the definitions of equality and educational reform efforts that are geared toward providing all students an equal opportunity to learn and thrive. Cheng et al. (1979) believes that the unequal distribution of economic rewards and dominance of Anglo-American cultural patterns are equally linked in the educational arena and are further proven quite evident in most research surrounding the academic achievement and post-secondary pursuit of students who come from lower SES and higher SES families (the "haves" and "have nots"). The differences between these two groups are overwhelming and are primarily related to SES, which influences greatly the cultural capital that each child inherits.

Paul DiMaggio and John Mohr (1985) contend that cultural capital has a positive net effect on educational attainment and college attendance for men and women. The expectation of cultural capital is for it to affect students' educational attainments and their likelihood of attending college. These researchers also state that cultural capital can increase opportunities for special help from teachers and other gatekeepers; it can permit the development of generalized reputations as "cultured persons" and can facilitate access to social milieus where education is valued and information about educational opportunities is available. Freeman (1997) conveys a different theory that poses similar elements as cultural capital. She contends that environmental forces, whether individuals, institutions or circumstances, influence the direction of students' choices. She terms this "channeling" and also notes that the more capital an individual has, the more likely

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he/she is to be influenced by forces within the home. Channeling cuts across social, cultural, economic and financial capital (Freeman, 1997). Researchers, such as Berger, (2000) defer to Pierre Bourdieu, who treats cultural capital as a cumulative process, noting that the greater earlier endowment, the easier the further acquisition.

Cultural capital is viewed as extending far beyond college and across generations by providing requisite access and information to assist in career choice and advancement (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985). Research has also shown that educators value high-status cultural capital by rewarding students from higher SES backgrounds who possess this capital, which in turn, leaves students with low-status capital at risk for lower success rates in school. School guidance counselors are also considered to value high-status cultural capital as well when assisting students with future school and career decisions (Walpole, 1997). Scholars have additionally suggested that acquiring high-status capital may be a prerequisite for joining the upper-class and that upwardly mobile students who exhibit such acquisition may be rewarded in the educational system. The habitus (cultural experiences in the home that shape attitude and behavior, both consciously and subconsciously) of a student from a low-SES background tends to guide that student to have lower aspirations and predisposes that student to less effective educational strategies. Thus, the student is likely to make choices that will result in the maintenance of their lower social position. It is possible; however, that habitus can have a dynamic component and a student can adopt different values as a result of new exposures, historical changes in the environment and associating with others from different milieus, which are all possible in the college environment (Walpole, 1997).

It is important to note that although the premise of cultural capital can assist in further exploring factors associated with educational aspirations, its focus has usually assessed these factors across all groups, not specifically the culture of groups individually (Freeman, 1997). William Sewell (1971) notes that higher education in American society gains only part of its significance from the personal satisfaction and self-realization that comes from general learning and mastery of high level skills. He states that higher education provides increased chances for power and prestige for those who are fortunate enough to obtain it and the allocation of social position is increasingly dependent on higher education as well. Of significant importance to the study of social stratification are the impact of gender, socio-economic origin, race and ethnic background. These variables are significant because the characteristics of social origin and the extent to which opportunities for higher education are achieved are directly related to cultural capital and negatively impact those who lack the appropriate societal standing (Sewell, 1971). The importance of cultural capital in the educational process provides another rationale for using first-generation college students for the purpose of this study. By including participants from this group, insight about their perceptions of the educational, professional and economic benefits of a college education can be learned and a determination can be made about how cultural capital within their home environments played a role in their educational aspirations.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

Two primary methods of data collection were used in this study: individual interview and field notes. Each of these methods can be used in developing descriptions, themes and assumptions from the data; however, for the purpose of this study, the in-

depth interview method was primarily employed. Rarely are multiple data collection

strategies used equally. One or two methods predominate while the others play a

supporting role (Merriam, 1998). The strength in using an interview allows the collection

of large amounts of data quickly. In addition, by using in-depth interview, the research

can instill follow-up responses or questions that can gain further clarification (Marshall &

Rossman, 1999).

In order to guide the process, criteria were established and parameters were

determined. The sampling could have been terminated at the point of saturation and when

no new information was being reported and information redundancy occurred. The

tentative number of 5-10 participants were recommended; however, if information

redundancy was not reached, it would have been necessary to include additional

participants (Merriam, 1998).

McNair program administrators invited the researcher to meet with the McNair

scholars during two of their program sessions. A presentation about the research study

was made to the McNair scholars by the researcher and students were asked to participate

in the study and provide contact information to the researcher. The presentation included

the following information: the name of the researcher, purpose for the study (dissertation

research) and why their participation was needed. The presentation also provided an

overview of the study's purpose in an attempt to draw interest from the prospective study

participants and to motivate them to agree to volunteer for the study. Explicit agreements,

by way of consent forms, were shared with the students who volunteered to participate in

the study. The consent forms disclosed information about how the research was

conducted and included information regarding the anonymity of the participants and

access to the research study once it was completed. These consent forms were disseminated to the program participants who agreed to volunteer at the time of their interviews. Details regarding confidentiality and anonymity were specifically documented in these forms.

The selection of participants was based on the assumption that the best information can be gathered from this sample. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to discover, understand and gain insight, and its focus lies in information-rich cases, which can provide depth of information (Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling is not designed to achieve population validity, but instead its intent is to achieve an in-depth understanding, not a sample that will accurately represent the defined population (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1998). There are different types of purposeful sampling techniques, and the manner utilized for this study is unique purposeful sampling. With unique purposeful sampling, the sample is based on the uniqueness of its attributes or the occurrences of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 1998).

Participants were asked to schedule interviews. The interviews were conducted at the McNair Program office, in library conference rooms and in conference rooms at the researcher's place of employment. The program participants selected the interview locations they believed provided comfort and privacy. Due to the length of the interview, detail-rich information was gathered that sufficiently addressed the interview questions.

Information gathered from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) survey questionnaires was used to inform the design of the interview protocol. NCES has performed numerous quantitative studies on first-generation college students and also uses variables associated with cultural capital theory in the construct of the interview

questions. Questions such as, *Can you describe the conversations you had with your parents about school?* or *What extracurricular activities did you participate in while growing up?* were included in the interview.

The primary method of data collection was 60–90 minute, in-depth interviews. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) state that interviews can provide sufficient information rich data for case study analysis. These interviews were audio taped and transcribed. As a result of the variables associated with cultural capital, the interview questions were devised in a manner that examined these variables to determine the extent to which cultural capital within the home influenced the educational aspirations of the program participants. Interview questions encompassed different components of each participant's lived experience and were able to extract pertinent information that lead to a greater understanding of the phenomenon (cultural capital).

Two types of questions were developed. Open-ended questions were asked in order to focus on the home environments and basic ideals and attitudes prevalent in their homes, and specific questions were more direct and focused on obtaining more explicit information about school and academic achievement. Field notes were taken that reference participant behavior and attitude. This method of data collection can assist in the narrative perspective to be included in the analysis (Maxwell, 1996).

A pilot study was conducted to test the interview protocol. Two persons who were college age and first-generation students were asked to participate. Their prematriculation experiences and backgrounds allowed them to provide feedback that assisted in determining the most accurate and appropriate questions for the study. The pilot participants made recommendations on how to frame the questions in order to get at the

information being sought as well as offered suggestions for possible follow-up questions.

Their input helped streamline the interview protocol and made it more useful.

<u>Data Analysis</u>

The data were analyzed using several methods described by Creswell (1996) and

Maxwell (1996), who suggest procedures for managing the data.

<u>Data managing</u> - Once all interviews were conducted, the audio-taped information

were transcribed verbatim. Each interview was considered a separate unit of analysis

(case and participant responses were assigned codes that correlate with each other). Each

participant's information was assigned different computer files within the same data

folder. Each participant was assigned separate data folders.

<u>Reading/memoing</u> – Transcriptions of interviews were read, and notes and

interpretations about the information were made. Field notes were cross-referenced to the

transcribed interviews to provide more of a narrative synopsis of the information.

Horizonalization techniques were initiated to develop lists of non-repetitive, non-

overlapping statements. For instance, if non-cultural capital variables, such as non-

familial influences, were introduced by the study participants, they were recorded and

used for data analysis. This process provided greater clarity and tied in to the themes that

were later developed (Creswell, 1998).

The following three processes were interrelated and comprised the third step in

data analysis.

<u>Describing</u> – The study field notes and personal reflections linked related

information from each participant interview (Creswell, 1998). Variables associated with

cultural capital, such as students' participation in cultural/extracurricular activities,

attendance in non-school-sponsored academic enrichment programs, parental involvement in course selection, etc. was identified and categorized according to their similarities. Distinctions were made concerning each participant's information. Descriptions of the researcher's perceptions of the information, based upon the data obtained, was not included.

Classifying – By using the horizonalization lists, related information and statements were compared and linked (Creswell, 1998). The categories that were developed through the describing procedure was further analyzed through classifying. The cultural capital variables that were identified by the researcher and the statements of the study participants were linked together in accordance to their similarities (categories/themes). For example, if three participants discussed the amount of time they were permitted to watch television, this data was placed in the same category. Other data that could link to this category were the number of books they were required to read or the amount of time they were required to read. Although there were two distinct categories, they both were connected to each other, because the more time reading impacted the amount of time watching television; thus they fell under the same theme.

Interpreting – Once the classification strategy was implemented, more concrete definitions or interpretations were developed from the themes identified. Under each theme/category, a detailed description of its meaning and how each participant experienced the phenomenon (exposure to post-secondary education) was made (Creswell, 1998). Explicit statements about what happened and how it happened were noted. This data was captured precisely since the interviews were taped and because field notes were available. In essence, interpretation involved making sense of the data

(Creswell, 1998). All of the information was examined, and the researcher drew upon the similar experiences of each participant, identified a central experience, and used it to describe the essence of the phenomenon (i.e. family and its influence on their post-secondary educational aspirations).

Representing and visualizing – Characteriaztion of the home and family experiences of the study participants were written based upon the researchers interpretation of the phenomenon. The researcher continued to draw upon the themes that were established and further detailed the information that was reported by each participant. Member checks were performed by another researcher by comparing the transcribed interviews to the themes that were developed. By employing this technique, the internal validity of the data was further supported (Merriam, 1998). The participants already provided input to the accuracy of the transcribed interview responses and theme development, and analysis was specific to the researcher's perspective (etic) (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996).

<center>Limitations of the Study</center>

The limitations of this study are primarily related to other variables that impact educational aspirations. Specifically, the influence of community, teachers, counselors, friends and college retention efforts will not be explored in an attempt to narrowly focus on family influence. These aforementioned variables have been noted to influence educational aspirations; however, the data collection protocol employed for this study extrapolated information that was specific to the research question, purpose and goals of this study. The sample size of the McNair Program may also be considered a limitation due to its low enrollment of 25 students. Case study research does not require large

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sample sizes; however, larger populations can assist in acquiring a suitable pool of participants to choose from.

An additional limitation of this study is the accuracy of participant interview responses. As with any self report data collection method, the research must rely on the ability of the research participants to be forthright and accurate in their descriptions (deMarrais, 1998). Participants may respond in a manner that they believe will demonstrate a more positive reflection of their experiences or in a manner they believe is expected by the researcher. Although participant briefings will convey the necessity of being as truthful and precise as possible, there remains a possibility that not all participants will comply. Unfortunately, this is an impediment associated with conducting qualitative research (deMarrais, 1998).

CHAPTER 4

OVERVIEW

Case study methodology and in-depth interviews were used in this research study

in an attempt to understand family dynamics, family attitudes and family behaviors that

influenced the educational aspirations of first-generation college students. The primary

research question that guided this study was, "What is the influence of family on first-

generation college students' educational aspirations post high school?" The sub questions

that further explored the conditions in the home environment that impacted educational

aspirations were:

- Does family contribute to a child's attitude toward education?

- How does family affect students' attitudes toward education? and

- What educational or cultural practices do the family engage in that
  impede or enhance the student's academic awareness?

The chapter will begin with participant profiles that provide a richer context of the

participants' backgrounds and their home experiences and how those experiences shaped

their attitudes and behaviors. The experiences that the participants conveyed link directly

with their intentions to pursue and receive a college degree. Although family attitudes

and behaviors toward education appeared deliberate (purposeful communication about

the need for college), there were instances where inadvertent attitudes and behaviors

played positive roles in shaping participants' attitudes (a desire to excel academically and

professionally after experiencing the struggles of their parents).

Participants described their experiences in the home and themes were developed

from the information gathered. These themes depict the family dynamics, family attitudes

and family behaviors that contributed to the participants' knowledge, skills and

dispositions and eventual decisions to attend college. Parental expectations and family patterns is a theme that permeated throughout the interviews and played a role in most of the participants' accounts. This theme will be explored first; it will lay the foundation and set the tone for describing family dynamics, family attitudes and family behaviors, particularly as they relate to education. The second theme that largely impacted the participants' views of their home lives and whether higher education was possible was the role of finances and social class challenges. Participants were from low SES homes and the lack family finances were quite evident throughout their upbringing. Since most of the participants worked while enrolled in college, their economic need also shaped many thoughts and attitudes about higher education and degree attainment. The final theme focuses on the participants' personal aspirations, motivations, goals and challenges and examines how their attitudes about education evolved from wanting to accommodate their parents to aspiring to better themselves.

<div align="center">Background Characteristics of Study Participants</div>

The participants in this research study are members of the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program. The McNair Program is administered under a Research I university within the State of Maryland; however, it permits students from two other universities within its consortium to apply and become members of the program. The admission criteria for the program are limited to students who are considered underrepresented, first generation or low-income. Any one of these criteria meets the eligibility standards for acceptance into the McNair Program.

Nine program participants were interviewed for this research study and of the nine participants, seven were women. The age range of the participants was from 19 to 24

years and three of the nine participants lived on campus, the other six lived at home. Eight of the nine participants were Maryland residents and three of the participants were born outside of the United States (China, El Salvador and Trinidad). Four sets of parents were born outside of the United States (China, El Salvador, Haiti and Trinidad). Of the four families who were originally from outside the U.S., one family moved to this country prior to the participants' birth, two other families moved to the U.S. when the study participants were in elementary school and the last family moved here when the participant was in high school. There were language barriers for two sets of parents, which prevented them from becoming fully immersed in and acclimated to the American culture and its educational system. The participants indicated that their parents were more involved with their education when they lived in their home countries because their parents were more familiar with the educational practices in those countries.

The home life of the study participants varied, with six of the participants coming from homes with single parents as a result of divorce, death and out of wedlock births. The majority (7) of the participants were employed while in school, working 20 hours or less between work study and jobs off campus. One of the participants worked more than 30 hours per week. All participants were enrolled in college full-time.

The interviews were approximately 60-90 minutes in duration and were comprised of multiple questions that ranged from extracurricular activities to family practices, family activities and expectations. The interview questions focused on three primary areas of interest which were, parents/guardians, siblings and participant aspirations. Descriptions of participants' home lives and family interactions were

explored. What follows are brief participant profiles that depict their upbringing and family life, specifically as it relates to their perceptions about education.

<u>Profiles of Study Participants</u>

- John is a 22 year old Hispanic male who is originally from El Salvador. He is a rising senior whose major is International Business and Economics, with a self-reported grade point average (GPA) of 3.7. His parents divorced after they moved to the United States and he has four older siblings who all worked part-time while matriculating in school and have all earned college degrees. John's mother was very involved in her children's schooling while they lived in El Salvador and stressed the importance of obtaining a college education although she only had an elementary school education herself. His mother involved herself with him and his siblings' schooling when they were younger, but she became less involved when they arrived in the United States. John believes that his mother was less familiar and uncomfortable with the educational system and culture within the United States and therefore did not feel as empowered about guiding her children. John's older brothers (2) remained in El Salvador, while his mother, two other older siblings and he moved to the United States. Once his older siblings who attended U.S. schools became more familiar with the educational system, they in a manner of speaking took over the role his mother previously played and guided each other along the process.

- Sarah is a 20 year old African American female who is a rising junior majoring in Sociology. Her self reported GPA is 2.7. She was raised by her mother but not her biological father. Her mother was married at least twice during Sarah's childhood.

Sarah had a tumultuous upbringing, indicating that there was a significant amount of abuse and dysfunction in her home. Her family moved frequently and she was unable to establish long-term friendships as a result. Sarah was also responsible for the care of her younger sibling while her mother was working during the week and on weekends. Once she entered high school Sarah shared with her mother the desire to remain in one location and as a result she and her family lived in that location during her high school years. Sarah's mother worked a great deal and the family rarely participated in family-related activities. Although Sarah had aspirations of attending college, she received mixed messages from her mother. There were times when her mother would encourage her to excel and other times when she was discouraging.

- Naomi is a 22 year old Haitian American female whose parents lived in Haiti prior to relocating to the United States. Majoring in Public and Community Health, she reported a GPA of 2.1 and is a senior. Her parents were strict disciplinarians while she and her two older siblings were growing up. Her family spent a great deal of time attending church services and programs and participating in a variety of church activities and auxiliary groups. The only social activities that Naomi was allowed to participate in were related to the church. A primary concern of her parents was for Naomi and her siblings to go to college. Her parents were also clear that they did not want the girls to get pregnant before college. When selecting a college, Naomi's first priority was for it to be a distance from her home. Her sister was required to attend college near home and commute; however, she got married while in school and eventually moved out of the house.

She did complete her degree. Naomi originally attended a college on the eastern shore of Maryland, but later transferred to her current school which is near her home because she changed majors. She commutes to school as opposed to living on campus.

- Martha is a 19 year old African American female who is a junior majoring in Chemistry. Her self-reported GPA is 2.9. She is an only child raised by her mother, who is a single parent. Her father is a devout Jehovah Witness who did not support a college education, but instead wanted Martha to devote most her time to their religious organization and community. Martha's mother and maternal family members encouraged her to attend college and continue to support her matriculation. Since she has been in college, her father's attitude about obtaining a college degree has changed. He is proud of her accomplishments and boasts about how well she is doing; he even rewards her with monetary gifts. Martha attends one of the consortium schools associated with the McNair program. She contends that racism is more prevalent at her home campus (because it is in a rural location that is predominantly Caucasian) and that many of her classmates have misconceptions about African Americans in general and their intellectual astuteness. She has overheard her classmate's remark that the only reason she is able to attend that school is because of Affirmative Action.

- Elizabeth is a 20 year old Caucasian female who is a double major in Biology and Philosophy. She is a rising junior with a self-reported GPA of 2.7. Elizabeth lived with both parents. Her parents worked a great deal and neither of them encouraged her to go to college. The expectation they communicated to her was

to graduate from high school and get a job. None of her older siblings attended college. Most of Elizabeth's childhood was spent watching her father play sports or participating in sports herself. When she expressed her desire to attend college her parents did not discourage her, but indicated that they would not pay for it. She would have to find the resources to go to college herself. As a result, Elizabeth was able to obtain scholarships and grants to offset her college expenses. Her parents did pay for her books for one semester. Elizabeth has sought funding for college on her own. Her desire to become a college graduate impacted her younger sister who is currently seeking a college degree as well.

- Esther is a 22 year old Trinidadian female who is a graduating senior majoring in Public and Community Health. Her self-reported GPA is 3.1. Her parents divorced after they relocated to the United States from Trinidad and she spent the remainder of her childhood being raised by her mother. She received a full athletic scholarship to participate in track and field from a university in Tennessee, but transferred to Maryland after two years. She believed that she was not emotionally prepared to attend school and that she did not have a support system (family and friends) to assist her when she first got to college. From a young age, Esther exhibited strong athletic abilities and her family felt that college was. College and track and field went hand in hand and she was confident that this goal would be realized, as long as she continued to run. Esther's older sister also attended college on a track and filed scholarship.

- Hannah is a 21 year old multi-racial female who was adopted and raised in an African-American home. She majors in Psychology and minors in Studio Art and

her self-reported GPA is 3.2. She is a senior. Her adoptive father died when she was two years old and her adoptive mother died when she was 13 years old. Prior to her mother's death, college was an expectation and was constantly addressed by her mother. Hannah's mother had not completed high school and stressed the importance of education in succeeding in life. Hannah's mother took great strides in fostering friendships and social networks with those she believed could assist with getting Hannah into college. Once her mother died, Hannah completed her secondary education at a boarding school in the Midwest and as a result was able to excel academically. Hannah has proven extremely resourceful and used an array of financial resources to pay her college expenses. She works over 30 hours per week and is able to manage her studies as well.

- Joseph is a 24 year old Asian male who is a rising junior majoring in Mechanical Engineering and Fire Protection Engineering. His self-reported GPA is 3.36. His family relocated to the United States from China when he was in high school and his parents do not speak English. He studied English for four years prior to moving to the United States and thus was able to acculturate himself to the American educational system. Joseph's parents enrolled him in an assortment of enrichment classes and extracurricular activities in order to expose him to various forms of art and culture. Joseph received a great deal of support and assistance from his high school counselors, who provided him guidance and supplemental academic assistance. This help allowed him to perform well academically and provided him the requisite knowledge about college admissions and college

majors. Joseph acknowledged that without their assistance he would not have been able to make informed choices and do well in school.

- Ruth is a 22 year old African American female who is a senior majoring in Public and Community Health with a self-reported GPA of 3.0. She was raised by her extended family (grandparents and aunts) due to her mother's mental health concerns. She has four older siblings, none of whom attended college. Ruth has been able to remain in school despite her circumstances. Although her family in general supported a college education, her aunts were the force that helped develop her desire to earn a college degree. One of her aunts earned a degree and provided helpful information to Ruth and took her on college visits. Although she came from a home with limited financial resources, her aunts as well as a former teacher assisted Ruth in acquiring the financial assistance necessary to pay for school. Ruth commented that her family was very protective of her because she was the youngest child, and were persistent in conveying the importance of a college education.

<div align="center">Parental Expectations and Family Patterns</div>

The most significant finding that permeated throughout the interviews was parental expectations and the pressure to succeed. It appeared that regardless of family background and SES, the expectation for participants to receive a college education was expressed within the majority of homes. Coupled with the expectation for a college education were family patterns, attitudes and behaviors that reinforced the parents' aspirations for the participants to seek higher education. This section will first examine the manner in which parents evoked this expectation in their children and the means by

which they sought to prepare them for college. It will further examine familial attitudes and sibling influences over participants' decisions to enter college as well as cultural, religious and extracurricular involvement that may have imparted necessary knowledge and skills for the students to matriculate successfully.

Most participants indicated that their parents espoused the need for college during their childhood and that it was an expectation that they would go to college. Naomi stated, "It was drilled in our heads, because they weren't able to do it and they know how important it is." The general sense from the participants was that their parents wanted more for them and realized that education was an important factor in being successful, particularly in the United States.

When asked about conversations regarding school or education in general, most participants replied that although their parents emphasized the importance of a college education, they rarely had specific conversations about their plans after high school or about future career choices. Students whose parents were foreign born shared that most of their parents were involved in schooling and education when they lived in their home countries. John reported, "Because she [mother] was in El Salvador and she lived there all her life so she knew the system and she knew the language and she knew what was going on." He also stated, "…For us it was different because we came here (U.S.) and she didn't know the system well enough. They [parents] were very involved in my first few years in school, like elementary school, but after that, you know, I was born in El Salvador, so I was there for ten years. So, they were really involved back then and through elementary school, but once I got to middle school and high school they weren't as involved." Those participants who were born in the U.S. echoed similar recollections,

noting that their parents' involvement was more prevalent when they were younger, while enrolled in elementary school. Parents appeared to rely more upon school counselors, teachers and administrators to provide the requisite guidance for course selection and information about college in general once participants were older.

Most participants reported that they had few conversation with their parents, although Hannah did state that while growing up she had frequent conversations with her mother about college. They even discussed scholarship opportunities and college funding.

> "Well for the most part, my mom was very strict on school. I had a 4.0 all through middle school, all the way up to middle school. So we were always talking about school. She actually was working on getting her GED while I was in middle school, so we talked about stuff like that all the time, how important it was to go to college, how important it was to finish high school. We didn't necessarily talk about what career path I was gonna take, which she would always tell me to kind of do what I want to do because it's something I'd be doing for the rest of my life, which was actually helpful when I had a lot of people telling me I should do other things. I kind of remembered that I was supposed to kind of pick what I wanted. And so the most talks we had really were just about making sure I got into school. She was trying to find people who were gonna help me to pay for school because she knew that I wouldn't be able to do it, or she wouldn't be able to do it."

Similarly, Joseph also expressed that his mother spoke often about college and possible college majors. She expressed the importance of college and supported his academic progress. Esther stated that conversations about college hinged upon whether she received an athletic scholarship. College would not have been promoted as much if there was no possibility of obtaining an athletic scholarship. She did assert that she would have likely aspired to go to college without athletics, but doesn't believe that she would have. "I would have definitely aspired to go to college, but I just don't know if I would be in college."

Although most parents imparted the importance of college to the participants, not all parents took an active role in encouraging the participants to seek a college education. Elizabeth indicated that her parents did not discuss college with her or her siblings while growing up and that she did not begin to think about college until she was in the 10th grade. Her parents never expected her to receive a college education and would have been satisfied with her earning a high school diploma and finding employment. Elizabeth's experience was the anomaly among this group. The parents of the majority of participants were quite vocal in expressing the importance of a college education and ensuring that the participants' academic preparation was an integral part of their family experience.

Understanding that good grades were a precursor to college, all participants reported that they received help with their schoolwork from their parents when they were young. Many parents checked homework, monitored the participants' progress and encouraged good grades in school. "…I don't know about how involved I really wanted them to be, but I mean, they tried to make sure I always did my homework." Martha noted that while growing up, her mother encouraged hard work and her father rewarded good grades by giving her money. The participants acknowledged that throughout their upbringing, their parents and extended family supported their matriculation by attending school activities, reinforcing the need for a college education and participating in parent/teacher conferences. Ruth noted that when her mother could not attend or assist her with school due to emotional health issues, her grandparents and aunts played an important role in her education. In addition, a number of participants noted that when academic support was needed, their parents hired tutors to provide supplemental

assistance. Naomi revealed, "…I mean they tried to make sure I did my homework and got the help that was necessary, like if I needed tutoring or whatever.", while Hannah shared, "She [mother] would try and help me. She would be there. She'd sit at the table and be like, "Do you need anything?" But I knew she didn't really know all the answers, especially with math because that was my more difficult subject. But she just didn't know much about math at all. I mean, being that you [she] hadn't graduated high school and there weren't calculators and all that. My biggest problem was fractions and so she ended up getting me a tutor for that, well, it was some girl from down the street, but she was my tutor."

There was a shared sentiment amongst the participants that once they reached high school, there was little that their parents could do to assist them academically. If finances were not available to secure tutoring services, they sought aid through simpler means, such as classmates, teachers and resource centers that were available through the school. Once participants became engaged in the college admissions process, some revealed that their parents or extended family helped with the process by reviewing and editing admissions essays and visiting college campuses.

Parents attempted to provide the necessary encouragement and advice to the participants although they had no post secondary school experiences. Some participants' revealed practices from their parents that promoted college matriculation although their parents could not share or provide information about college first-hand. Hannah reported that although her mother was pursuing her general education degree (GED) while she was growing up, she still sought relationships and built social networks with those who could assist Hannah with information about or assistance for admissions to college. In

many cases, parents and family discussed possible academic majors with students and encouraged possible careers that they perceived would yield higher earning potential. Parents did not support academic majors for careers that they believed would be difficult to locate employment/job placement, enhance upward mobility and generate higher salaries.

It appeared that parents endorsed majors and careers that they believed would provide a better living for the participants; once again wanting more for their children, so that they would not endure the struggles that come with not having a college education. These attitudes about social class and economic stability were passed from the parents to the participants and their siblings and will be further examined in the next section.

Familial Attitudes and Sibling Influence

Reinforcement of ideals and attitudes can play a major role in shaping the behaviors of others. Although the majority of the participants reported that their parents openly expressed the desire for them to obtain a college education, another sub-theme that became evident from the findings was family attitudes and the influence siblings had on matriculation and persistence. The following section examines the family attitudes and sibling involvement that made impressions upon the behaviors and attitudes of the participants. The attitudes and perceptions manifested by the participants could ultimately influence their educational aspirations and persistence decisions.

The majority of the participants reported that since they entered college their parents have been verbally supportive and the support they receive helps them stay in school. All participants reported that their families want them to complete their degrees, even those participants whose parents were initially less expressive about college. The

participants report that parents have pride in their accomplishments. Elizabeth shared that initially her father did not encourage college, but once she enrolled, he supported her. "He's more excited now about me and education like the McNair Program. He told everybody, who I don't know, he told them, yeah, my daughter; she's smart. She's the smart one in the family." She also mentioned that although her parents neither supported nor discouraged college, once she was enrolled they supported her decision as long as she paid for it. Her mother encouraged her to obtain scholarships so that she could remain in school and complete her degree. She noted that, "My mom said "You have to apply for scholarships." That's all she ever talked about, apply for scholarships. My dad really stayed out of it, but my mom always hounded me. "I know, I have to, you just told me that yesterday, apply for scholarships."

Participants acknowledged that their parents and families were proud of their involvement with the McNair Program although they knew little about it. Sarah acknowledged,

> "…but for instance, like at the McNair Induction Dinner on Friday, where your family comes and see you inducted into the program. My mom, I took her to see the program, but she didn't understand it and everything involved until she was there. I had to explain it to her and that kind of thing and it was funny because the next day she gave me twenty dollars. She's like, this is for the program. You're doing so good and keep doing well. It's kind of her odd way of saying, good job."

The participants did convey that their membership in the McNair Program has reinforced their aspirations to not only complete their baccalaureate program, but to also pursue a graduate degree, specifically a doctorate

Some participants noted that their parents have always been supportive of college and have demonstrated their support in different ways. Esther stated that her mother

typically would not openly display her enthusiasm, but wrote her a letter expressing her

pride and encouragement toward her pursuing her college degree.

> "I personally feel as if it's hard for them to maybe be emotional…I'm
> closer with my mom, so we would maybe have more of an in-depth
> conversation. But she is much more passive and she wouldn't maybe
> actually come out and say, you could do it, or anything like that. I know
> she's there and she's supportive. But I know this one time she actually
> wrote me a letter, and it was kind of surprising. Not surprising, but it was
> like, Oh, okay, like it wasn't anything normal."

Joseph revealed that because he is in college, his parents do not pressure him to

help contribute to the family and because of this he is able to persist, there is less pressure

and he can focus on school. He also acknowledged that his parents have more respect for

him and value his opinions more because he is obtaining a college education. "They

respect my opinion more because I kind of know more to them. I'm a college student that

might have pretty valuable opinions." He went on to explain, "Because my parents

always think knowledge is very powerful and useful; therefore, if I'm at this point I say I

have more knowledge now than they do, so they will value my opinion." Conversely,

Elizabeth did state that if she did not attend college (which was not encouraged by

parents) that she would have to find a job, and that she would not be responsible for

contributing to the family's household expenses. "My dad said he would have any of his

children, no matter how old they were – they could live with us no matter how old or for

how long, it doesn't matter. He would never ask his children to pay his bills."

Attitudes about race appeared to be prevalent in the homes of the participants

since the majority are ethnic minorities and from low SES homes; however, with close to

half of the participants coming from families whose parents were foreign born, none

implied that their parents expressed racist ideals or behaviors. Naomi, whose parents

were born outside of the United States, did however reveal that her parents had negative perceptions about race and did not believe that people of color could excel and achieve high levels of success (professionally). She commented…"they would bring up that for the most part they don't expect people of our skin color to go that far, and they're always thinking negative so make sure you do what it is you have to do and follow the rules, and just get to where you need to go, then I should be fine." Each family had its own manner for dealing with the participants as they grew up and espousing their beliefs. Whether parents conveyed their attitudes about race, work or education, one common factor within all of the participants' homes was the enforcement of rules.

Rules within the home contributed to the participants' attitudes about hard work, work ethic and discipline. Most families enforced rules, some spoken and some implied, but in every case, participants were required to adhere to guidelines that were established within their homes. The home life of the participants in this study varied during their upbringing, yet many were made aware of the importance of doing well in school as well as contributing to the upkeep of the home. Besides the rule that purports basic respect and regard for elders, most participants were also required to assist with chores and home responsibilities (cooking, childcare, etc.). Sarah revealed, "We really didn't have these rules. It was kind of like my Mom was, I don't want to say rarely there, that sounds so bad, but she kind of was rarely there and she worked so much and everything. So, it was me kind of enforcing the rules with my sister…. So, the house did tend to be messy occasionally because I wouldn't want to clean it."

Most participants reported that although there were no restrictions on the amount of television that could be watched or recreation time, they were expected to study and

complete all homework before any other activities. Esther reported that she would receive whippings if her grades were not adequate. Naomi did state that her parents were strict disciplinarians and that they were extremely protective of her and her siblings' social time. Social and recreational time was monitored by parents and participants reported that they were required to be in the home at a certain time while they were younger (playing in the neighborhood) and they had curfews if they went out in the evening when they were older. No participant indicated that they were able to live in their parents home without any guidelines or practices that were put in place by their parents.

Other factors that contributed to participants' attitudes and behaviors were the relationships between each family member and social problems (abuse, alcoholism, etc.). In most instances, participants reported that one or both parents worked a great deal and as a result, the family did not participate in family activities together or did not have what would be considered "family time". Elizabeth stated, "I didn't do too much, my parents worked a lot." Sarah was the older sibling and was responsible for the care of her younger sibling when her mother was at work. Two other participants indicated that there was turmoil in their homes while growing up (abusive parent/step-parent), which caused instability and one participant expressed that she and her mother moved frequently when she was growing up, in part due to the issues that were going on within the home. These home experiences left an impression with the participants as well as their siblings. Many of the older siblings provided support and guidance for the participants and assisted them with decisions about colleges, majors and how to be successful in the classroom.

Older siblings who attended college also had a positive influence over the participants and impacted their ability to remain in college. Each participant indicated

that their siblings served as role models and motivated them to do well and helped reinforce college attendance. John noted that all four of his older siblings attended college and the oldest, a medical doctor, left a positive impression. "I remember when I was in El Salvador and I was really younger, my brother was going to college already, my oldest brother, but I remember him studying all the time." He continued, "…and more than anything I guess what helped get me through college was the expectations. You know, everybody always passed already in college and has done a degree already, so you were kind of expected to do the same thing." In a few cases, the older siblings also participated in Academic Achievement Programs (AAP's) similar to the McNair Program and provided guidance regarding the programs as well.

It was reported that siblings assisted with school work when they were growing up, but also provided direction concerning college, such as study habits, course selection and support programs, etc. It was noted that an older sibling motivated a participant to stay in school. Naomi conveyed, "I mean she's [sister] really supportive in my school. She really tries to help me anyway she can, like if I have an anatomy exam and she knows of a certain topic that she took similar classes, she would go online and try to find things for me and e-mail them to me." Esther reported, "I have an older sister, so if I needed help I would ask her." Esther acknowledged, "I'd say I've stayed in college because I saw my sister, she completed college and that was like a motivation. Like, okay, I could do it also. You know, a lot of my friends went, they completed college too. So for me, I think I have a lot of pressure on myself, and it's indirectly because I want to do better. I want to do better for my kids. I want to help other people."

The majority of the cases where siblings were involved demonstrated that the older siblings sought to help the participant; however, Sarah who is the older sibling expressed that her younger sibling should contribute financially towards a college education as she had to. Her mother had begun to save for the younger sibling's college education and Sarah believes that the younger sibling would not appreciate it if she did not have to work for it. "I think it would be different. Like I told her [sister], I was like, you cannot allow her [mother] to pay for you. Like, let her offer, but I had to work for it. I appreciate it more and she's the youngest and she's kind of spoiled; the baby. I think if she actually kind of worked for her tuition too I think she'll need it more. I mean she'll have appreciated it more like I did." It was noted in John's case that although all siblings had to work during high school and college and were responsible for acquiring their own funds for college (scholarships, grants and loans), they did not feel obligated to help him financially with college. They also believed that since they were able to make a way for themselves, he should as well. John noted that his siblings' attitude was, "Do what you got to do. We did."

As reported in the findings, familial attitudes and sibling influence impacted how participants' viewed education and their desire to pursue a college degree. They each came from different backgrounds, one not quite the same as the other, but they all came to understand the importance of obtaining a college degree and how having a degree could make a difference in their circumstances and social and professional standing. Factors that also influenced their perceptions about education are cultural, religious and extracurricular involvement that will be discussed in the following section.

Cultural, Religious and Extracurricular Involvement

One of the most surprising findings of the study was the lack of extracurricular activities that the participants engaged in during their upbringing. Prior to initiating the study the expectation was that most of the participants would have engaged in a variety of lessons and activities. The data found that only one participant (Joseph) was very active in a wide range of lessons, hobbies, cultural schooling and pastimes throughout his childhood. He was enrolled in art lessons, dance lessons, martial arts lessons, gymnastics lessons, music lessons, foreign language lessons, etiquette courses and religious instruction. While other participants shared some of the aforementioned activities, none participated in them as extensively.

The majority of the participants described activities that were centered around their church/religious worship, particularly youth choral groups and social engagements that were hosted by their religious organization, such as bowling. Naomi's comments are representative of what participants shared, she stated, "So for the most part every weekend, even throughout the week we would be in church or doing some kind of activity that had to do with church."

Music lessons were pursued by both Naomi and Elizabeth, with Elizabeth teaching herself on a keyboard that was within the home. Naomi learned to play at least three different instruments through her school's music program and played in the middle school band; however, she was not able to pursue this talent because her parents would not permit her to take lessons during the summer break when school was in recess. "I don't know why they didn't want it. I actually was pretty good. I was kind of upset about that. I actually liked playing those instruments more so the baritone than the trombone."

Based on the findings, it was unclear why the participants' families did not involve them in supplemental activities. Perhaps it was related to economics or better yet, lack of awareness regarding the positive influence of cultural lessons and extracurricular activities. Although the majority of the participants were not involved in instructional activities (music, dance, art lessons, etc.) they noted their participation in other programs when they were older and made their own decisions to participate in activities such as organized sports (softball, volleyball, basketball, etc.) cheerleading, Girl Scouts, student government, honor society, school newspaper, and community service.

Family recreational or cultural outings were not common practice amongst the participants. Most have not traveled outside of their home states with their families and have not experienced family vacations. Family activities were limited to visits to local parks, domestic trips in conjunction with religious and cultural enrichment programs, and out-of-state travel to visit extended family. Sarah revealed that her family recently vacationed at a time-share/resort and traveled to Disney World for her younger sibling's birthday. In a separate case, the extent of Elizabeth's family recreation was attending sporting events in which her father was involved. John revealed that his work schedule prevented him from participating in extracurricular programs. He stated, "I wasn't really involved in anything. In high school I was working already, so I didn't have time to go to any after school activities or anything like that." Most participants also reported that their families were regularly involved with religious worship and religious enrichment activities/programs associated with their religion.

It is possible that participants received encouragement and nurturing through these venues since they spent a good period of time with persons in these organizations

throughout their childhood. The religious organizations likely had an impact on the participants, and could have helped shaped their personal aspirations and goals. Since religious worship is considered to be uplifting, it likely had a positive influence on participants' perceptions, although this information was not divulged during the interviews.

<div align="center">Finances and Social Class Challenges</div>

Socio-economics plays a significant role in the ability to go to college (Cabrera, Burkum & LaNasa, 2005; Walpole, 2003; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001). The participants involved in this study came from lower socio-economic homes and understood the need for acquiring additional financial resources in order to make a college education a reality. Students also have a multitude of financial resources (scholarships, grants, loans, etc.) to use in order to assist them; however, the need for financial assistance and the increase in those seeking assistance makes it more difficult to obtain enough financial assistance to support college matriculation. It appears that the more financial resources available the more financial need for those who cannot afford college. Resources are not necessarily more available or attainable. The students in this study found varying means to offset the expense of college and have been able to persist despite the lack of financial resources in the family. The following section details the measures the participants have taken to achieve their goal of obtaining a college degree. It also examines the social class perceptions these participants have as it relates to education and social class privilege.

Only Esther was attending college on a full athletic scholarship. All others paid for school with grants, scholarships, loans, financial aid, wages from employment and some parental support although most participants have no parental financial contributions

toward education. John revealed that he chose his school based on its cost, "I knew that

that's where I wanted to go, mostly because it would be cheaper." Participants admitted

that their selection for college was based primarily on affordability; the least expensive

was the best choice. Many participants work part-time to pay for college and many

indicated that although their parents don't pay for schooling directly, they do offset some

of the living expenses for those who reside at home. Joseph explained, "They [parents]

don't pressure, which is good because I don't have to apply support to my family because

right now they still give me economic support because they know I'm good in school and

I have never to work." He continued, "…and because the people my age, a lot of them in

this country or in China, support their families financially."

Due to the financial constraints and the amount of aid received, John lives at

home. He believes that he would be better socially integrated if he lived on campus, but

can not afford to do so. There were two instances where participants (Hannah and Ruth)

acknowledged the assistance of friends or role models who have helped contribute to

their college expenses. Hannah noted,

> "I actually met this lady when I was doing a real estate internship, and I
> sold a house to her. She was from Maryland. It's the same lady that I did
> the paintings for recently, and I had done her interior decorating when she
> moved into her house… So my sophomore year, I actually wasn't going to
> come back junior year because I couldn't afford to. Because I was like
> $8,000 I hadn't paid yet that I couldn't come up with. I had come up with
> about $4,000 on my own, but I couldn't do anymore so she paid the other
> $4,000 for me.

Hannah, after losing lost both parents, divulged that there were no financial provisions

for her to go to college; however, before her mother died, her mother arranged for a

family member to raise her, but she instead chose to live elsewhere and was accepted into

a program that paid for boarding school. "I was more of an independent, and I wanted to

do everything on my own. I didn't want to have to be a burden to anyone. So I was like, oh, I can do it by myself. Because I had been doing it, I mean, I had been taking care of my mom, so it was like, why do I need someone to take care of me?" Without alternative financial means, many of the participants would not be able to afford college.

Parents expressed ideals in the home that helped to shape participants' perspectives of their social class. As previously noted, many parents encouraged fields of study that were perceived to earn high wages. Few participants were encouraged to pursue degrees in academic disciplines that prepared for careers that were non-technical or non-highly specialized. In addition to selecting a field of study, parents were also concerned about other factors that they perceived would prohibit access. Sarah noted that her mother took great care to give her a name that did not sound ethnic, because it was perceived that a name that had ethnic connotations could hinder future aspirations and personal progress. "I think that my mother, she had ideas that I probably wouldn't go as far, maybe because I was black, you know what I mean? So, it would probably be harder for me in college. She told me when I was little that she gave me my name so that people wouldn't know what color I was. With "Sarah" (participant's name) you can't really tell. It's more of a white name than a black name and (participant's last name) is a Spanish name, but you're not really sure. So, she gave me a name purposely to try to throw people off I guess, if you want to put it that way."

Although her mother chose a name that she believed would assist Sarah in moving forward in life, she expressed a desire for Sarah to be exposed to her culture and African American roots. Sarah disclosed, "One time this girl lived next door to us, she was a black girl and she {mother} forced me to go to church with them; trying to like

force me to be friends with her. She wanted me to be, I guess, have more of my culture or whatever. I'd rather read or just, you know, sit or choose a type of other friends and she forced me to go to this girl's church because she wanted me to interact with more black people." Esther believed that her perceptions about race and social class differed from those of her American friends because she was not born and raised in the U.S. and was less aware or less sensitive of the nuances in behavior and why she may have been treated in a certain manner. In most cases however, parents encouraged participation in religious worship and activities that provided exposure to their culture as well as ancestry.

Overwhelmingly, the participants had staunch ideas about social economic status and social class culture as a result of their upbringing and also as a result of their experiences as they matriculated through college. Many believed that there were social class differences amongst their classmates and that money made life and school easier because you didn't have to work as hard if you had it. John declared, "Probably, it's my perception. I don't really think I would have a lot of stuff in common with folks, the average people that go to *(name of university)*." "…because if you come from a let's say a rich family or a well to do or middle class family, then you pretty much have your future already set for you. You've been to a good school, but not necessarily with high grades or anything like that because your parents know people and get you a good job and I don't really have that."

Participants also stated that the appreciation for education and the work applied toward education is much stronger if you have to pay for it yourself. Sarah commented, "…but I guess students who don't pay their school versus those who do pay it or people who do pay their way through school, I think they work harder and appreciate their

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knowledge and they take their classes more seriously…because you're working hard, you're not going to work hard and waste your money. You could be buying clothes or whatever with the money or something you're not going to value."

When the participants were asked about whether race has played a role in their college experiences only Martha spoke of negative incidents that were considered to be racially motivated. She is a student at one of the consortium member institutions that is located in a rural area of the state, with a low ethnic minority population. All other participants did not express any concerns regarding race, although there were some sentiments that addressed the lack of diversity on the campus of the Research University and perceived lack of retention efforts for ethnic minorities. Hannah noted,

> "My ethnicity is East Indian Polynesian Bohemian. I was raised African American, so I kind of identified more with an African American side. However, my friends are of many different backgrounds. In the house that I lived in Minnesota, I had people who were of all different races. So, I kind of identified with all of them. In college, it's played the most of a role in my life because just being on this campus it's hard, number one, being a minority. There were a lot of things especially that I had to get used to. When I got here, in orientation they said, "Look to your left. Look to your right. One of these people won't be here when you graduate." Well I'm the only one from my row who's still here, and I happened to be sitting in a row of students who were all of color. So it kind of, to me, has shown that the retention rates on this campus are ridiculous. So I've just been kind of trying to see what I can do in order to kind of pan that out a little bit. So, I've been really active with the BSU (Black Student Union)."

Many of the students did reveal that they were involved in various clubs and activities on campus. Most involvement surrounded ethnic and cultural programs, while others participated in community service activities and social events and organizations. Hannah further reported,

"There's one African American professor in the psychology department. I don't think there're any Asians or any Hispanics, or any other. I've only had two there's one

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African American professor in the art department as well. I forgot about him. So it's been hard, but he kind of came on as my advisor. I've been talking with him, and he's helped me get the art league started, which was another group that I started on campus just to kind of get the art community involved with the rest of the campus, because we were kind of segregated off in our own little building, off in the middle of the campus. No one kind of really knows that we're there. So it's been hard, but at the same time it's just been an opportunity for me to kind of make different connections. I've brought several different diverse groups on campus to kind of have talks."

The perceptions that many of the participants shared helped shaped their attitudes and ultimately their aspirations as to what degrees and professions they pursued. All but one participant indicated that they wanted to pursue a doctorate, but all wanted professional careers, something that none of their parents had. Based on their matriculation experiences, they believed that having more money allowed greater privileges and opportunities and they all aspired to be at this level. The following section examines the participants' aspirations, motivations, goals and challenges and how they influence their ability to remain focused and achieve their goals.

<u>Personal Aspirations, Motivations, Goals and Challenges</u>

College was not an option for most of the participants, they were expected to attend and financial provisions were not available for a college education. Participants had to make a way for success and it required support from not only their parents, family and teachers; they too had to support their own dreams. With the exception of those who received guidance from older siblings, most were finding their own way. Naomi

indicated, "It was drilled in our heads because they [parents] weren't able to do it and they know how important it is to do it."

Participants demonstrated varying degrees of autonomy and self-reliance and despite the fact that not one of them received strategic guidance throughout their upbringing and while they have been college students, they appear to persist in spite of it all. Most participants believed that they were prepared academically and emotionally for college; however, the motivation they had in order to make it this far plays a very important role.

Many participants expressed multiple reasons for the motivation of wanting to have a college education. Elizabeth indicated that she wanted to impress her father because during her upbringing he paid more attention to her half-brothers and to sports. She believed that her participation in not only sports, but also education would "get his attention." Other participants revealed that the struggles of their families motivated them to go to college and make a better way for themselves. Esther commented, "I would say it was more indirect persistence just because I saw what my family was going through in terms of my mom didn't really have a good job. My dad doesn't really have a good job, so continues to inspire me to achieve. Like I would want to do better and do better for my kids. Not to say that they didn't do good, like they did good for me to think this way. So, I would say it was more like indirect." Sarah added, "My grandma was telling me when she was growing up my great-grandmother had three jobs. She was a janitor, she was the lunch lady and whatever she could do to support her family and that really encouraged me, like if I'm here and I'm young and I can get my degree and make it easier on myself

and my family to get a degree, you know what I mean? I should do it, you know what I mean?

Ruth wanted to complete her undergraduate degree to make her mother proud. While growing up she witnessed the struggles and obstacles that her mother underwent due to her mental health challenges. Although her mother was incapable of providing guidance and nurturing, she knew that earning a degree would give her mother a sense of accomplishment. Naomi initially wanted a degree to appease her parents, but now wants it for herself. "Well, it's not really an option to graduate because it's like, we're paying for this; you graduate. Really, it's more me than them. It's something, because, how can I say this? You can only do things for them but for so long."

Contributing to the "upliftment" of her race was a motivating factor to obtain a degree and pursue a doctorate for Martha, while Sarah described a tumultuous home life and how that experience impacted her desire to turn her life around.

> "I think I had a lot of things that were seen negative, but I think I kind of turned them into positive, like instead of my mother working as a negative thing, I missed her and I had to deal with my sister, but it kind of motivated me because I didn't want to be like that. I want to be the opposite of that and not have to be working as hard as she worked just for the paycheck. We literally lived check to check. She had a lot of money, but she was in debt a lot. So, it was really hard and I think I had it really hard. I mean, I think because there was some violence that was prevalent in my family. It happened with my grandmother and grandpa and then my mom and this father. So, that was constantly going on. There wasn't a night, I don't think, it was rare that it was just calm and I was scared because it's like, calm."

Elizabeth's father never encouraged her to pursue a college education and obtaining a baccalaureate degree would earn her father's respect. She shared,

> "Another reason for me wanting to get good grades is not because I was told to, but because my dad. When I was younger, I think I told you my

brothers lived with me for a long time and then when they moved out, I guess that kinda left a hole somewhere. And well, he works a lot too, I mean when we were younger he had to work like as many hours as possible because the bills were really high. She continued, "My dad was always working so I never saw him that much when I was younger and like on Sundays he would kinda see my brothers a little bit more. He would pay more attention to them, well in my eyes he did, so I always tried to do better than my brothers to maybe get his attention."

With each case, the participants acknowledged that their parents were proud of their accomplishments and believed that their parents had done a good job raising them and their siblings. Along with the parents, a few participants acknowledged the support and encouragement of teachers and others who inspired them.

Participants disclosed that there were a number of persons with whom they believed inspired them to seek a college education. Ruth stated that a middle school teacher who was a role model and also strongly encouraged her college attendance made a promise to pay for the cost of textbooks if she went to college. To this day, the teacher pays for her textbooks every semester. "He's always pushed us to go to college and he actually did, he made a promise to me in middle school that he would pay for my books during college if I, you know, went or whatever. So he still pays for my books." In Elizabeth's case, a high school counselor required her to complete two college admissions applications and seek financial opportunities to assist in paying for a college degree. Many participants acknowledged teachers throughout their schooling who supported them and consistently encouraged them to go to college.

Participants also noted that their friends' educational decisions influenced and motivated them. In one case, Elizabeth recognized childhood playmates for being the catalysts to her eventual desire to receive a college education. These childhood friends were enrolled in a rigorous elementary school magnet program. The elementary school

was a feeder program for the magnet middle school and magnet high schools that taught college preparatory curricula. Matriculation in these programs was dependent upon test scores and grades and students who were accepted into these programs were those who typically pursued college. Elizabeth admired the childhood playmates and when she learned of the school they attended, she informed her mother who looked into the program and eventually had her tested into the program. Elizabeth elaborated, "They actually went to this particular middle school and their grandmother lives right across the street from my grandmother and we used to play everyday when I went to visit, but they were like two years older than me. I kinda like looked up to them…Like I wanted to do what they wanted to do and my mom looked into it. My mom looked into a lot of schools." Elizabeth is clear in that the quality of education she received as well as the aspirations of her classmates inspired her toward wanting more from school than a high school diploma. The exposure to the two childhood playmates impacted Elizabeth's aspirations and with the support and assistance of her mother, she has been able to pursue her goals.

Most participants reported that many of their friends went on to college. Seeing their friends pursue this goal provided them wit role models. Sarah indicated that she attended high school with classmates who were from affluent families. She spent time with these families and admired the parents and what they were able to acquire, in part due to a college education. This exposure enhanced her desire to go to college even more. "Well, all my friends, their parents always had, like they came from really wealthy backgrounds. So, it's kind of hard growing up and seeing them with a lot of money and

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things I didn't have. It motivated me to be like, well, if they can have it then why can't I?"

Martha disclosed that although most of her friends were first generation as well, they all attended college. There was a general sentiment that role models are important and can make a difference in your life. This is illustrated by Esther who noted, "I think a lot of people maybe drop out, or aren't, I guess there are extra pressures because maybe they don't have role models and things that they see to be involved with anything. They don't have anyone to look up to. Also, some people, because they don't have anyone to look up to, they'll like turn the opposite way. Like if you grow up in a bad neighborhood, some people use that to their advantage to want to excel, and be like, I don't want to be in this neighborhood anymore. But some people view it as, okay, this is all I can be. My parents are in it. I'm in it. So, this is all I can be."

To have motivations and aspirations to make your life better is important; however, strategies also must align with these goals. The participants used various methods to persist to the current levels of enrollment. There was planning and strategizing involved and participants shared some of the approaches they and their parents used to propel them forward.

Elizabeth's mother sought out a magnet school program that would enable her to receive an education that was rigorous and challenging. Although a college education was not promoted by her parents, the education she received would provide her the requisite educational skills and knowledge necessary to gain college admission. Elizabeth revealed, "My mom, I mean, she kinda looked at a couple of different schools, two different ones [high schools]. I know she didn't want to send well, my brother actually

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went to when he lived with us, he went to the public school and he used to get into fights all the time, and it just wasn't the environment my mom wanted me in. So she was like, "Okay, I want to check out other schools in the city. Where can I send them besides that school?" So that was when I began the middle school, and it was my idea. I mentioned it, and she looked at it, and I applied, and I had like little meetings with them."

The participants engaged in different strategies and behaviors to further their knowledge, skills and dispositions that has led to the pursuit of a college degree. In one case, Sarah did not feel challenged by her high school curriculum and elected to enroll in advanced placement (AP) courses. Joseph participated in AP courses and supplemental academic programs that were offered through the high school in order to enhance his skills, while Ruth was a member of a pre-college admissions program that facilitated skills enhancement and exposure to college curricula. Joseph stated that, "as a student, especially an immigrant, I may not have enough information to go and do college and on a graduate level. I get the information about college and Ph.D. programs. I get it and was like, I was prepared for it and it's enough. I know what to do. I know what's going to happen." Working with the high school counselor to determine possible college majors and courses was an approach that one participant employed to assist in her progress toward college admission and a another participant used an online common application to apply to multiple colleges at one time (one fee) and increase her chances of gaining college admission, without added costs.

In one of the most valiant cases reported, Hannah, who lost both parents at a young age, applied for membership to a program that could provide her the opportunity to attend a prestigious boarding school that was out-of-state. Throughout her childhood,

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her mother strongly expressed the need for a college education and consistently

reinforced this petition by having frequent conversations with her. Even after her

mother's death, Hannah realized that the local educational system would not afford her

the same level of academic exposure as a boarding school and actively engaged in

applying to various programs that would permit her admission to the boarding school.

She did admit that if her mother were living it would have been unlikely that she would

have approved of her attending the boarding school and thus would have been relegated

to attending the local high school. Hannah did not believe that she would have gained the

requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions to gain admission to the college in which she

currently attends had she matriculated in the local school program. She stated,

> "…because they don't prepare you for college, the school that I would
> have attended. I just didn't want to go to that school. It may have prepared
> me for sports a little more than it would have for college, but it doesn't
> really because it's mostly African American/Hispanic school, their goal is
> not college. Whereas when I got to this school, everybody was talking
> about from ninth grade what colleges they were trying to go to, SAT stuff,
> ACT, this class, that class, AP courses. I felt that I had to compete more at
> this school, whereas at the other school it was just natural. Like I had a
> 4.0, but I could sleep through class and get a 4.0." Hannah further
> elaborated, "Whereas they didn't offer those at the school in Beloit. They
> didn't offer any classes that were anything remotely college material.
> Whereas I was able to, at this school, take AP classes, take the AP exams.
> I was able to take SAT classes, and things like that, that were going to
> prepare me. I'm not saying that had I stayed in Beloit I wouldn't have
> gone to college. I definitely would have gone to college. There was no
> doubt about that. But I wouldn't have gone to the colleges that I wanted to
> go to."

Many participants expressed the lack of involvement their parents exhibited when

they were applying to college. In most cases, parents were not involved in the school

choices or selection, but participants informed them of their choices. The most prevalent

participation that parents displayed was choice of college majors and careers. In one

instance Naomi's parents were very disappointed when she changed her intended undergraduate major to a program that they thought would not be as financially lucrative. Naomi stated, "…I sat them down and I was like, I'm not going to be doing nursing anymore. I'm going do be doing public health and that's the same major that my sister did and they feel like that's not really a major because it was really hard for my sister to find a job afterwards." She further stated, "They [parents] really don't want me to struggle. Because that's how they had to do it. So they want me to be able to do something that's going to give me money. But at the same time I want to do something that would give me money too, but I want to enjoy it. I don't want to do something that is unfulfilling."

Acquiring a college education required participants to seek out various means and resources to assist in their success. Joseph studied English in his home country prior to immigrating to the U.S. He has only lived in the U.S. for four years and as a result of his high school counselor and teachers, he has been able to compete successfully. He is a senior and expects to graduate within the year. All but one of the participants has plans to pursue a terminal degree, although there are concerns about the time and energy that must be devoted towards it. Naomi noted, "I want to make sure that's exactly what I want because a Master's, I mean Doctorate, so I've heard some stories that it takes a lot of time and patience and I just want to make sure it's something I really want."

Initially Sarah wanted a baccalaureate degree when she first enrolled in college because her desire was to immediately earn a living and help support her family. Once Sarah discovered the Academic Achievement Programs and specifically the McNair Program, she decided a doctorate would be more beneficial. Many of the participants

have already begun to investigate graduate programs and assess whether the programs offer what they are seeking. Through McNair, a program that encourages advanced degrees, they are learning what characteristics to look for in a graduate program and which suit their needs. Hannah has indicated that she is interested in attending a graduate program abroad. It will allow her the opportunity to travel and experience a different culture, something she has not yet been exposed to. In each case, all families are excited about the progress the participants have made and are eager for them to complete their degrees. Ruth reported, "I would say the pressure I have is just that they want me to finish so bad. That's just a lot of pressure being the first one."

Not all of the experiences have been pleasant or productive for the participants, but they have been able to overcome obstacles or attempted to prepare for them. Although Sarah, Martha and Elizabeth's parents were supportive of them once they began matriculating through college, they did not necessarily receive consistent encouragement from their parents as they were growing up. Both Sarah and Martha received mixed signals about attending college from their parents; there were times when a college education was promoted and times when it was suggested that finding employment after high school was sufficient. Elizabeth was rarely encouraged to even apply to college throughout her upbringing. They have different views about college and have undergone varying experiences. Three of the participants have transferred from different colleges that were not local; the longest attendance at the first school was two years. Each transferred for different reasons; however, they all chose to come back to schools near their homes to attend a local university. Esther revealed that she thought that she could handle going away to school; however she found that she was not emotionally

prepared to do so. John does not believe that he has been able to socially integrate with his classmates due to his work schedule. He has had to work since high school and considers this to be a downfall in his ability to develop social networks and friendships outside of the classroom.

In order to obtain the goals they've set for themselves, participants also realized the importance of establishing social networks in college and building rapport with those who can help them. Elizabeth is a member of a sorority, an organization whose primary purpose is for enhancing social affiliations. She further expressed that she had developed good relationships with advisors, faculty and staff and that by building this social network she was able to enroll in courses that were closed and received treatment that students who didn't have these relationships would not otherwise receive.

Although the findings from this research implicate parents as a primary influence for participants to seek a college education, it also demonstrates that much of the success of these participants comes from their own aspirations, motivations and goals. The parents provided the foundation, but the desire to succeed comes from the participants. Success is more than someone telling or encouraging you do something, and you do it, it comes from the desire to pursue a goal and diligence to achieve it. These participants exemplify just that and with the continued support of their parents and family will also attain the credential of doctor, for which they are being prepared. In Chapter five I will discuss in detail the implications of these findings, the limitations of the work and the impact these findings will have for educational practice.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The nine participants in this research study were first-generation college students who were enrolled in an academic achievement program (Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program) at the University of Maryland, a Research I university in the State of Maryland. The McNair Program is designed to increase first-generation and underrepresented student participation in post-secondary study by exposing students to graduate research and providing opportunities for graduate school access. The purpose of this study was to examine experiences that took place in the participants' homes in order to understand their attitudes and perceptions about education, and the educational and cultural practices that impacted their academic awareness and educational aspirations.

This research study used case study methodology and employed purposeful sampling and in-depth interviews to collect data from the participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and then coded using QSR NVIVO software. Codes were developed based on the research and interview questions and once each interview was coded, reports were generated and general themes, based on the data that was obtained through coding, were compiled.

Family influence is the primary focus of this study and is what guides the research question. The primary research question of this study is: What is the influence of family on first-generation college students' educational aspirations post high school? Three additional sub questions asked the following:

    1.   Does family contribute to a child's attitude toward education?

2.   How does family affect students' attitudes toward education?

3.   What educational or cultural practices did the family engage in that impeded or enhanced the student's academic awareness?

The themes that were developed from the data collection explain participant attitudes and behaviors concerning education and academic aspirations as well as their ability and desire to persist. The data reveals information about family interactions, perceptions and expectations that impacted the participants' attitudes and influenced their behavior.

This chapter starts with a brief review of the findings. The themes derived from the findings relate to parental and family expectations and involvement, SES, finances and social class challenges and personal aspirations and motivations. Next, I turn to a larger discussion of these findings and how they are reflected in the literature. The conclusion of this chapter will convey the implications that this study can have on practice, policy and future research.

<div align="center">Summary of Findings</div>

Based on the research questions that guide this study, the following is a summary of the findings that were determined to be the primary themes that were articulated by the study participants.

1.   Does family influence contribute to a child's attitude toward education?

Information gathered from the participants implied that family influence significantly contributed to their attitudes about education and college specifically. Throughout their upbringing and particularly when they were young, participants confirmed that the prodding and constant emphasis on studying, performing well in school and going to

college, that they received from their parents firmly shaped their attitude about education and earning a college degree.

The findings also revealed that due to the struggles that the participants saw their parents undergo; they internalized the need to be successful and do better in life than their parents. This was reinforced by their parents as well. The participants and their parents determined that they could economically, socially and professionally elevate themselves by obtaining a college degree. All of the participants were interested in pursuing a college degree.

2. *How does family affect students' attitudes towards education?*

Most families did not engage the participants in activities and programs, such as study skills workshops or supplemental SAT prep courses; however, parents did assist the participants with homework when they were younger and older siblings provided help as well. Many participants expressed that their parents could not provide academic support to them because they were not familiar with the school material and did not have the requisite skills to assist them. Older siblings did however provide academic assistance to the participants. The actions and assistance of the family impacted the participants' ideas and attitudes about education. Parents' insistence about working and studying hard and earning good grades provided the needed support and encouragement that further reinforced the participants' aspirations to go to college.

The findings further revealed that families remained involved with the participants (e.g. attending parent/teacher conferences, checking grades, inquiring about school) throughout elementary and secondary school. Parents demonstrated real concern for their children's future well-being, particularly their abilities to be successful and to

earn a "good living". Parents, in particular, espoused the need for higher education and although they became less involved (with school work in particular) as the participants grew, they continued to express the importance of a college education.

3.   What educational or cultural practices did the family engage in that impeded or enhanced the student's academic awareness?

Based on the findings, the most common cultural activities that the families engaged in were religious worship and programs that were associated with traditional religious practice. Participants' involvement with youth groups, choirs, recreation and community service often was associated with their religious community, while their participation in other extracurricular activities, such as sports and music lessons, took place through their schools. Families did not engage in activities that were specifically related to improving academics or enhancing knowledge of their culture; however, families often relied on school personnel to supply most educational information that was needed to gain college admission. Rarely did parents augment their children's exposure to academic or cultural information; school was the primary source of information. Only one family attempted to incorporate diverse types of cultural and academic enrichment activities.

It is difficult to determine if this lack of educational and cultural practice impeded students' academic awareness, since most families stressed the importance of a college education. The constant reinforcement appeared to provide the participants with the vital level of motivation to pursue a college degree. Without this reinforcement from the families participants may not have pursued higher education. In addition, the exposure to religious activities may have cultivated the participants' awareness to education as well,

given that a number of religious organizations host informational meetings about college. The following section will examine how parents and family expectations and involvement shaped the participants attitudes, perceptions and abilities to pursue a college degree.

<p style="text-align:center;">Parental and Family Expectations and Involvement</p>

Most research reveals that parental support positively influences students' aspirations to go to college (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Trivette & Anderson, 1995). In this study the majority of the participants acknowledged the impact their parents had on their desire and ability to go to college. This study demonstrated that parents and family provided encouragement, support and guidance (by siblings) and assisted in the matriculation success of the participants (Perna, 2006; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001).

Expectations for a college education were constantly advocated by parents and family of the participants. Overwhelmingly, families provided support to the participants and appeared to assist them as best they could. Simply reinforcing the need to attend college was all that many families could do to support their children. Parents came to know and appreciate the value of a college education and consistently promoted the need to have one. Perna and Titus (2003) found that although social capital helps build one's social standing amongst various groups, parents promote the status attainment of their children. They embed the significance of attaining a greater social status than their current level (Perna & Titus, 2003). Parents took upon themselves the task of increasing their children's social status by imparting the understanding that a college education was key to their future success. For example, Hannah's mother attempted to build her social network by volunteering at her school in order to forge relationships with the teachers

and administrators. Her mother believed that they could provide additional information assistance and support as it related to Hannah's educational needs. Hannah's mother made conscious efforts to forge relationships outside of her social status in order to pave the way for her daughter. Lin (2001) has defined this behavior as the Heterophilous principle. This is when a person seeks relationships with persons of higher social status to gain additional resources. The parent who displayed this behavior realized that stepping outside of her social network was necessary in order to gain information and assistance that she needed in order to position her daughter for social mobility. If she had maintained relationships that were already a part of her social position, that would have described the Homophilous principle. This is demonstrated when persons establish relationships with those who have similar SES backgrounds and perspectives (Lin, 2001). Although most parents did not step outside of their current circumstances or social position, they were clearly interested in advancing their children.

Until the early 1960's, sociologists believed that school performance and intelligence were connected with socioeconomic status and family structure (Finn, 1998). Although these factors were associated with student achievement, societal influences increased and parental roles became reactive, in many cases, highly passive. This reactive posture emanated from the perception that schools knew more about children's development and education than parents. Parents gradually became more reliant on the school's judgement and the school's attempts to understand their children's abilities, personalities and intellectual potentials (Mannan & Blackwell, 1992). This was evidenced by many of the participants' parents, particularly when they entered middle and high school. Many parents did not discuss course selection or assist with homework once the

students were older. The parents entrusted their children's education to the school counselors, teachers and administrators and where they had once taken active roles in their children's education, they had relegated themselves to being spectators and allowing the "school" to assist their children in making choices about course selection, etc. Research by Mannan and Blackwell (1992) has also reported that even educated parents are not always sure of the level of involvement necessary and the skills that are required for their involvement, thus, many get lost and withdraw from the scene leaving all the details to the school. One point to stress is that parents never stopped promoting college and reinforcing good grades and study habits to their children although parents were not as actively involved in these decisions.

The majority of the participants knew from early ages that a college education was expected by their parents. Striplen (1999) found that family support can develop a foundation for first-generation students to be successful in college, which appears to have happened with the students in this study. He further argues that because first-generation students are challenged academically, socially and financially and also face family resistance, their integration into the college environment is stifled. In this study the majority of the participants did not reveal challenges with academic or social integration. They all however were recipients of financial aid, but none expressed this as being an obstacle to their success.

Parents employed various methods to support their children. They used various strategies (inviting classmates to study at their home as a means to academic support, using the babysitter to assist with school work, etc.) to ensure that participants received the assistance they needed. In so doing, parents cultivated an environment in their homes

of the importance of academic work. Understanding that ingenuity was necessary in acquiring the knowledge, skills and dispositions to gain college admission, parents' primary approach in providing support for their children was to express the need for college during the participants' childhood and as they grew. By providing supplemental support, the parents were contributing to the participants' academic preparedness that could assist them in gaining college admissions. This is contrary to most research that states that first-generation students are less prepared academically and think about going to college much later than their continuing-generation peers (Nunez & Caccaro-Alamin, 1998). The findings from this study demonstrated that the majority of the participants thought about going to college at an early age and fared well in their academic studies.

Although parents were highly supportive of their children's' education, there was no strategic planning and no dialogue about course selection or participation in supplemental academic programs. The participants acknowledged that their parents' constant insistence that they maintain good grades in order for them to go to college had a significant impact on how they performed academically; however, there was no dialogue about approaches on how to get to college. Many parents did not have exposure to information that promoted college, but knew that good grades were an important factor in being able to go to college and pushed their children to perform well in school. Penrose (2002) acknowledges that there is a lack of exposure and familiarity with the academic experience in most first-generation students' homes. In contrast, parents who are college educated are viewed as a source of information and students are more likely to seek information from parents who earned college degrees (Ishitani, 2005; Horn & Nunez, 2000). As a result, first-generation students are less likely to consult with their parents

regarding course selection and the college admissions process (Ishitani, 2005; Horn & Nunez, 2000). Eccles and Harrold (1993) also note that parents who are better educated are more involved in school and home (homework, learning activities, dialogue, etc.) than parents who are less educated. This research was supported in part by the participants who acknowledged that although their parents encouraged them and expressed the importance of a college education, they were not necessarily involved with course selection, particularly when they were in high school. Even so, studies (Trivette & Anderson, 1995) have demonstrated that there has been higher school achievement when parents participate in school activities, monitor children's homework and support the work values of the school. This was certainly evident in the homes of the participants. Developmental psychology has also examined the relationship between home environment and cognitive development. It has been asserted that through home environment, parents communicate a hidden curriculum for success which children must learn or learn to fail (Trivette & Anderson, 1995). Certain parental actions such as encouragement for reading and books as gifts, decreased television watching and rewards from parents for improvement on daily assignments have been reported to have a positive effect on achievement (Trivette & Anderson, 1995). Research (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001) has also demonstrated that when support is provided by parents, teachers, administrators, peers and the community, students are more likely to become aware of college. A student's eventual ability to pursue and obtain a college degree is multifaceted and can begin early in life when there is parental involvement (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001).

Penrose (2002) notes that there is a greater risk of departure for students who come from home environments where parents have not earned college degrees and there

is no exposure to academic programs that promote education. The findings from this study do not support Penrose's (2002) assessment, because although all of the participants' parents were not college educated, they are successful. It is important to note, that although the participants' parents were not college educated, some of the participants had older siblings who were matriculating or had matriculated successfully through college. The siblings served as role models for the participants and motivated and guided them through the college-going process (course selection, study habit strategies, support programs, etc.). The siblings' college experiences assisted the participants in facing some of the obstacles and transition challenges that many first-generation students deal with upon entering college. Bean and Metzner (1985) and London (1989) have addressed student integration issues and report that first-generation students often do not have true support systems and are at a disadvantage in regard to their basic knowledge about college matriculation and understating about what it takes, in regard to commitment and effort, to be successful in college. By having siblings that have undergone the transition, the participants were better able to navigate the process and make more informed decisions. All participants were successful whether they had older siblings who matriculated through college; however, those who did have college educated siblings benefited from this resource.

London (1989) also noted that the transition from the participants' home lives to college provided a sense of loss as well as a sense of gain. Researchers conveyed that first-generation students often manifest confusion and conflict as a result of the cultural attitudes that are associated with college by their families and the need to remain included and associated with the culture from which they came (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger,

Pascarella & Nora, 1996; London, 1989). The findings from this study do not support the conclusions that were made by the aforementioned researchers. None of the participants expressed confusion or conflict about leaving home for college because of negative attitudes of their family. Their experiences were in contrast to those of students who experience this and they expressed that they received support and encouragement from their families. Many of the participants echoed Bui's (2002) research which demonstrated that first-generation students often take pride in bringing honor and respect to their families and being the first to earn a college degree.

Parents were able to positively affect their children's attitudes and desire to achieve, as evidenced by the research of Trivette and Anderson (1995). The ability for this to occur in homes where students are traditionally unsuccessful is a testament to the parents' aspirations, diligence and ability to step outside of the norm and make a shift in culture to something that impacts the "big picture' and ultimate academic and social advancement of future generations. As a result, most participants never questioned if they were going to college, it was a matter of how they would pay for it, which will be addressed in the following section.

<u>SES, Finances and Social Class Challenges</u>

Socioeconomic status and social class challenges were factors that influenced the participants' matriculation decisions. Participants discussed the obstacles they faced throughout their childhood as a result of SES and lack of social prestige. Family income is the greatest predictor of college enrollment even when ability is considered (Thayer, 2000). The participants aspired to go to college and knew that it was an expectation of their parents; however, there was still a matter of how it would be paid for. Most

participants selected their schools based on cost and worked to offset college expenses. All participants received financial assistance to pay for college and in all cases, their families made no financial provisions to pay for college; the responsibility for college finances was left to the participants. Between scholarships, grants, loans and work study, the participants are able to pursue their education. Besides Esther, who was the only participant who earned a full scholarship, the participants used multiple forms of aid in order to pay for school. Aid has been shown to both negatively and positively affect persistence. Ishitani (2005) found that grants had a more positive effect on persistence during the first and second years, while persistence was negatively affected by loans. Campus based work study was found to promote graduation, while loans prolonged the time to graduation. Students who received grants were 37% less likely to depart, while work study recipients were 41% less likely to depart. Based on the findings of this study, aid has positively affected the persistence decisions of the participants. Without it, many would not be able to continue and they understand its significance in their ability to obtain their goals.

Students from higher-income homes are more knowledgeable about the costs of college and financial aid and more likely to select schools that have higher tuition costs. In addition, enrollment decisions were influenced by students' academic and social integration and higher SES had a positive effect on both of these (Ishitani, 2005). The participants often obtained the information they needed about college and aid through their schools and also through their older, college educated siblings. Little information was obtained by way of their parents. Parents who are college-educated are viewed as a source of information and students are more likely to seek information from parents who

earned college degrees (Ishitani, 2005). In this instance, the participants did not have their parents as resources and knew that they needed to seek information elsewhere. Because of this lack of information in the home, first-generation students are less likely to pursue a college degree and are at a greater risk for departing than their continuing-generation counterparts (Trotter, 2001; McDonough, 1997).

Although interpretations vary, research (Laureau, 1987) has suggested that children from lower-income families are disadvantaged due to the lack of value that is placed on education from their parents and families. This is in contrast to the value that is placed on education by middle and upper-income families. Some would argue that the levels of parental involvement from lower-income families results from institutional discrimination, claiming that middle and upper-income families are made to feel more welcome than lower-income families (Laureau, 1987). Based on the participant interviews, it is unclear whether the lack of parent participation throughout high school is as a result of SES factors or feelings of educational inferiority. As previously noted, often parents do not believe that they can significantly contribute to their children's education because they do not have the educational background to assist them. Often SES does contribute to parents lack of involvement, not only due to perceived discrimination and unequal treatment, but also due to a difference in the values they share. Educational values are considered to be more highly regarded in high-SES homes (Lareau, 1987). The relationship between socioeconomic level and parental involvement appears to have a significant impact upon a student's educational aspirations, achievement and ultimate enrollment in a post-secondary institution (Lareau, 1987). The results from this study do not support the conclusions that low SES families don't support post-secondary

education. These families did articulate value for pursuing higher education; and although the parents did not fully understand college life and educational strategies, they did value a college education and understood its importance.

In the majority of the participants' homes, socioeconomic status contributed greatly to the type of education they received (public or private schools) as well as the types of extracurricular activities they were involved with (organized sports, music/foreign language lessons, etc.). Often families from low-income neighborhoods have multiple distractions (poverty, crime, lack of educational resources) that impede their ability to nurture, teach and motivate their children academically (Yogi, 2006). Low expectations by parents, administrators and teachers is also one of the biggest obstacles facing low-income students because if they are not taught that they are able to be successful and rise above the circumstances they are in, they manifest an attitude of having low expectations which manifests into being low achievers (Yogi, 2006). It is apparent that the majority of the participants' parents provided incentive to their children to be successful and to achieve more than what they (parents) had. This allowed the participants to develop high expectations and positive perceptions of themselves and their abilities. Every participant believed that they could be successful. It was an expectation that started with their parents.

Sewell and Shah (1968) note that some lower-SES children aspire to and achieve high-level educational and occupational goals despite the limitations imposed on them by their socioeconomic class origins. Some lower SES families allocate their limited resources, in a disproportionate measure, to higher education and to also acculturate their children to the value of education and high levels of aspiration and achievement. Sewell

and Shah (1968) seek to quantify the variables in the family environment that instill in children parental expectations and value orientations (cultural capital). It is suggested that if one or both parents are dissatisfied with their own position in the stratification system, they are more likely to project their aspirations onto their children and strive to motivate their children to higher levels of aspiration and achievement (Sewell and Shah, 1968). This was apparent in the cases examined by this study. Participants noted this fact consistently. Their parents were dissatisfied with their economic and social standing and wanted their children to fare better in life. Parents knew that education was one of the most significant factors that would allow their children greater opportunities and advancement in life. They were, in a sense, fanatical about keeping this information before their children.

In contrast to Sewell and Shah (1968), Walpole (1997) states that parental expectations and definitions of success vary with social status and mediate student aspirations. She believes that low SES parents are more likely to view a high school diploma as the norm for their children than are high SES parents who are likely to see a bachelor's or advanced degree as the norm. Low SES parents are more apt to define success as acquiring a full-time job after graduating from high school, (which was the expectation of Elizabeth's parents) with no expectation that their children will attend college. College attendance, to low SES parents, more often refers to community college or technical school. For high SES parents, the definition of success for their children is closely tied to attending a four-year college and attending a prestigious school (Walpole, 1997).

In addition, research (Inman & Mayes, 1999) has suggested that first-generation students have different perceptions and attitudes about going to college and leaving their families. Some research indicates that first-generation students have a lower sense of self-worth and conflict between pursuing a college degree and perpetuating family custom by financially contributing to the family household (Inman & Mayes, 1999). Other research reveals that some families may criticize students for devoting time to school and less time to family obligations. Because of this first-generation students may have conflicting roles between home and school. They manifest a sense of loss which creates conflict and confusion (Hsiao, 1992; London, 1989). In contrast, Bui (2002) contends that by attending college, first-generation students bring status and honor to their families. The participants' responses in this study were similar to the research conducted by Bui. Many of the students indicated that family pride, pleasing their parents and earning their parents respect and admiration was a motivating factor for going to college and being successful.

The habitus of a student from a low SES background tends to guide that student to have lower aspirations and predisposes that student to less effective educational strategies. Thus, the student is likely to make choices that do not advance them, but instead relegates them to their lower social position. It is possible; however, that habitus can have a dynamic effect and a student can adopt new attitudes as a result of new exposures, historical changes in the environment and associating with others from different milieus…which are all possible in the college environment (Walpole, 1997). This is the case for participants in this study. Because their parents constantly reinforced a college education, they adopted views that were different from the views about education their parents and grandparents received during their upbringing. This change in

perception was initiated by their parents, who came to understand that higher social

position often went hand in hand with education. Research (Cherian, 1992) has

demonstrated that children can adopt the educational aspirations that their parents have

for them. Children's behavior has been influenced by the support they receive from their

parents and that degree of influence can determine whether a child will try. Without the

support, children will make little effort (Cherian, 1992).

Participants believe that their classmates from middle and upper-income homes

are privileged and do not work as hard in school because the majority do not have to pay

for college and that greater economic and social status affords you more opportunities

and privileges in life. The participants' perceptions are that their more financially affluent

classmates take for granted their education and the opportunity it affords them. Research

(Walpole, 1997) has shown that educators value high-status cultural capital and ascribe

greater value to those students from higher SES backgrounds. This further perpetuates the

risk that students from low-status and low SES backgrounds face and sets them up for

lower levels of success in school. Acquiring high-status capital serves as a precursor for

gaining access to the upper class and those students who possess high-status capital may

be rewarded by education administrators and educators (Walpole, 1997). Furthermore,

greater access to human and cultural capital is offered to students whose parents are

college educated. This access is often acquired through family relationships (Pascarella,

Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004). Cheng's et al. (1979) distinction claims that equal

education opportunity should ensure fair educational competition and that achievement is

a more equitable way for dispersing status as opposed to inherited privilege. In other

words, a person's achievement should be the gauge to determine status and prestige, as

opposed to socio economic status. This contention is not in line with research that examines social status and privilege.

Thayer (2000) states, that adjustment to college for first-generation students who come from middle income backgrounds is less difficult and that SES appears to play a role in a student's social integration to college life. He further states that obstacles compound for first-generation students who are non-white and come from low-income homes. Based on this study's findings, the participants did not have difficulty adjusting to college life, in part due to the McNair Program which is designed to assist in their integration and persistence. Although the participants came from low SES homes, the combination of their parent's expectations, their aspirations and the support and guidance of the McNair Program provided the necessary foundation for them to integrate within the college environment.

Every participant believed that they could compete academically; they were motivated to persist. The following section will examine their aspirations and motivations that have led to their ability to persist and be successful.

Personal Aspirations and Motivations

Parental involvement and the confidence a student gains by parental influence and planning reduces the odds of dropping out and improves the likelihood of matriculation (Ishitani, 2005). As evidenced by the participants, their parents' involvement provided them the requisite drive and desire to go to college. Their desire to obtain a college degree extends past the degree to post baccalaureate education. Each of them participated in the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program, designed to prepare

students from first-generation and underrepresented backgrounds for graduate and professional study.

Students who plan for college usually did so between 8th and 10th grades and the likelihood of attending college was positively impacted when longer planning periods to go to college were undertaken (Cabrera et al., 2006; Ishitani, 2005). The likelihood of a student going to college increased by 29% when parents discussed college planning during the 12th grade (Ishitani, 2005). The likelihood increased by 43% when career planning was discussed by parents and students when students were in the 10th through 12th grades (Ishitani, 2005). In addition, Cabrera and LaNasa (2001) reported that parents were pivotal for low SES students to become college qualified. Children from low SES backgrounds were 18% more likely to be college qualified when parents become involved with school. They were also 9% more likely to complete high school due to parents being involved. Conversations that involved strategies to gain college admission were not evident in the participants' homes; however, parents did discuss its importance and possible career choices with their children throughout their upbringing. Although the conversations were not extensive, based on the findings from this study, it is apparent that the dialogue that was held made an impact with the participants. It motivated them to want to go to college. Only one participant (Elizabeth) noted that she did not think about going to college until the 10th grade and she was from a home where college was not given much consideration. As a result of their parents' insistence, the participants were motivated to pursue a college degree and had been convinced, by their parents, that it was a necessary credential that would aid in their social mobility. All of the participants

acknowledged that motivation was integral to their success, not just to aspire to go to college, but to also persist.

Although research (Cole, 2006; Bui & Khanh, 2002; Walpole, 1997) reports that students from low-SES backgrounds have lower educational aspirations, persistence rates and educational attainment than their continuing-generation peers, many of the participants realized that if they challenged themselves in school, they were positioning themselves for gaining college admissions and increasing their ability to manage a college curriculum. They tested themselves by enrolling in advance placement and honors courses in high school and participating in supplemental academic programs and even attending boarding school (Hannah). These challenges also helped to motivate them to raise their standards and seek goals that may have been articulated by their parents. Aspirations are developed as a result of the socialization processes that take place at different social levels. Aspirations of those from high SES backgrounds can be different of those from low SES backgrounds (McClelland, 1990). These processes, through the transmission of cultural capital, can familiarize persons towards different strategies for accomplishing goals, with the cultural capital providing the means in which they can accomplish the goals they have set (McClelland, 1990). Aspirations also represent an "internalization of objective probabilities for success," which is essentially an individual's calculation of the probability that they will achieve a goal that they have set for themselves. Some of the participants admitted that seeing their schoolmates' aspire to go to college further spurred them on. Although the seed had already been planted by their parents, their desire to pursue higher education was further reinforced by their classmates.

The participants initially set out to pursue a baccalaureate degree; however, once they were enrolled in school they learned of the McNair Program. The McNair Program would assist and guide them towards a post baccalaureate degree as well. Although this second goal (graduate/ professional school) may not have been established prior to entering college, they saw an opportunity to expand their education past the undergraduate level and to propel them past where they initially aspired to go. Once the participants enrolled in college they gained different social perspectives that allowed them to readjust their own perceptions and set higher goals for themselves. Interestingly enough, none of the participants expressed that they wished to pursue terminal degrees while they were growing up, nor did they indicate that their parents endorsed post baccalaureate education as well. These goals and aspirations also carried over to their career choices. Although participants aspired to have productive lives and be successful, most of them selected careers that truly interested them, as opposed to solely considering careers that generated large incomes. They expressed the importance of enjoying their work and having a certain quality of life. They witnessed their parents working jobs with little to show for their labor; moreover, their parents did not enjoy their line of work or profession and had few job opportunities available to them. Based on the findings of this study, the participants' aspirations increased after entering college and gaining additional cultural and social capital. They began to understand that they could determine, by their choices, their own educational and career paths.

McClelland (1990) states that persons from disadvantaged backgrounds need evidence or modeling in order to establish high aspirations. They need to be exposed to those who are successful in order to see the relationship between effort and reward and to

be able to see it for themselves (modeling). This appears to be true based on the behaviors and actions of the participants once enrolled in college. In some cases, older siblings who went on to graduate or professional school may have first provided the modeling; however, exposure to the McNair Program further inspired the students. This behavior is in contrast to research that has found that low SES students who attend college are less likely to persist to graduation or pursue a graduate degree (Walpole, 1997). Like their high SES peers, when first-generation students have access to support and role modeling they too are likely to aspire to obtain an advanced degree. The participants all displayed a sense of achievement and accomplishment for not only being enrolled in college, but for also aspiring for more than what was originally planned. They understood that most students from similar backgrounds and circumstances often did not fare as well when it came to college matriculation and persistence. They had made it past their second year of college and according to research (Ishitani, 2005; Braxton, 2000; Hsiao, K. P., 1992) conducted on first-generation students, they were beating the odds, since most do not make it past the first year of study (at the time of this study's publication, at least two participants had graduated).

<div align="center">Implications for Practice and Future Research</div>

Parents have been reported to have the greatest impact upon children's achievement and ability; however, there must be a collaborative effort among parents, schools and communities to assist children in achieving their goals. Schools cannot fulfill the huge responsibility of educating and supporting children alone and will ultimately fail without the needed participation of families and communities. Forty to fifty percent of

what a child learns occurs in school and the remaining comes from family and community (Brown, 1996).

A question that should be posed based on the results of this study is how do we engage parents in collaborative efforts to participate in their children's education, particularly parents who lack prior exposure to educational environments and academic? State and local governments, as well as school systems, could produce guides and supplementary training for parents to assist their children with homework and expose parents to the realization that their children can go to college (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Multiple intervention strategies can be used to engage students and families when making college-choice decisions (Cabrera et al., 2006). Some of the approaches included after school programs, tutoring, Big Brother/Big Sister programs, parental involvement efforts and financial aid advising (Cabrera et al., 2006). Programs designed to assist parents can be executed through community organizations without having to drastically increase school duties and responsibilities. If community organizations worked with schools that assisted parents, change would be a bi-product of this collaboration.

Programs within schools would be of benefit to parents and children alike. Greater counseling resources must be incorporated by the schools to ease the duties that are performed by guidance counselors. Additional career and education counselors are needed to assist students when determining what educational and career paths they will follow. With increased counseling, students who have little parental support and involvement can be given the exposure and guidance they need. Students can then make informed choices about their own goals and how they plan to achieve them. Programs can begin to be implemented at the elementary level through school assemblies, class

speakers (career day) and class projects that focus on education and career opportunities. Class field trips can also expose children to various career and education options. Although predisposition factors relating to educational aspirations have been reported to begin with adolescents in the seventh or eighth grade, earlier intervention can initiate social capital that students ordinarily would not have been exposed to Cabrera et al., 2006; Cabrera, La Nasa, 2001).

Intervention strategies that seek to increase college participation need to include various components, such as school and home based resources in order to create an interconnectedness among them. Low SES families should be provided information about the economic and social benefits of a college degree. Information on financial planning can motivate parents to save for college and learn about different financial aid packages that they may qualify for (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). The following programs are examples of comprehensive approaches that can assist underrepresented families in understanding the many facets that can lead to college enrollment.

The Lumina Foundation established a website entitled "KnowHow2Go" that assists first-generation and underrepresented families in obtaining information about college. Information is tailored for students beginning at the middle school level and for each classification in high school (freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors), parents and educators. The site provides information about financial aid, steps to college as well as concerns about college. It shares information about how parents can talk to teens and how they can stay connected. It refers students to resources that are available to them through their home states and coordinates mentor services that students can take advantage of. It also allows students and parents to sign up for electronic newsletters that

offer more information about college preparation and enrollment

(http://www.KnowHow2Go.org).

The Gates Foundation focuses its efforts on low income and minority students by investing in schools. It provides grant money to organizations that build networks for school improvement and foster curriculum and instruction that cater to the at-risk populations. Organizations that are awarded grant money design programs and strategies that seek to increase graduation and college readiness rates and improve college entrance applications and college completion. These programs are also designed to forge networks to aid in building advocacy and school improvements through partnerships with states that lead to statewide school reform (http://www.gatesfoundation.org).

The federal government designed the "Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs" (GEAR UP) to increase low income students' ability to enter and succeed in post secondary education. GEAR UP's discretionary grant program awards six year grants that provide services for cohorts beginning in the seventh grade and continuing through the twelfth grade year. Funds are also used to provide college scholarships. State grants focus primarily on early intervention programs and strategies as well as scholarship awards, while partnership grants focus primarily on early intervention strategies. GEAR UP's purpose is to raise the educational expectations of low-income students who are not typically exposed to information about college. A web site has also been designed for students, parents, teachers and administrators. The information under the parent link details information about student aid, parental support for homework, tutoring services, getting help for students, preparing for college and provides information about the television show designed to impart this information as well.

Parents are able to obtain the broadcast schedule for when the show is aired in their state as well as web cast information (http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup).

Retention strategies for college students should be designed with the special circumstances of first generation and low-income students in mind. Strategies designed to primarily meet the needs of the general student population do not consider the characteristics of first-generation and low-income students (Thayer, 2000). Programs such as the Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program are designed with the special circumstances of first-generation and underrepresented students in mind. The McNair Program is equipped to provide the requisite support and guidance for students as they matriculate through their junior and senior years, but to also provide information and resources to assist students in gaining graduate and professional school admission. The program helps retain students who have historically departed from college after their first year. The McNair Program is available to students once they have successfully completed at least two years of study; however, other programs are needed for those first-generation and underrepresented students who are just entering college and at risk.

By identifying attributes associated with at-risk groups, university officials can better understand the current and potential needs of their students. Exposure to the different aspects of college life can provide helpful information that can make a difference in whether a student can socially integrate with other members of the college community. As reported earlier, first-generation students often do not participate in extracurricular activities and have difficulty integrating, due to their work obligations, which results in their departure (Nunez & Caccaro-Alamin, 1998). Being able to provide

"buy-in" for these students, even those who may not have the time to fully participate in the social aspect of college can make a difference in their connectedness to the university and their desire to be a part of it. This connectedness is integral to a student's ability and aspiration to remain at that university and obtain a college degree. Assisting student persistence will also require university administrators to place less emphasis on withdrawal decisions and focus more on factors that predispose students to leave or variables that support students' intentions to return. This approach lends the strongest predictive validity of predisposition to leave (Cabrera et al., 1993).

Further research is necessary to fully understand the matriculation decisions of first-generation students based on parental and family influence and how it impacts their career and social mobility as well as their earning potential. According to a study conducted by Cheng et al. (1997), compared to their high-SES peers, first-generation students do not follow the same patterns of college and post-college cultural capital accumulation, which results in lower educational aspirations, lower educational attainment and lower career earnings. This stifles their social mobility, even though they may have acquired sufficient cultural and social capital to raise their social stratification from that of their parents. Persistence, degree attainment and early career labor market outcomes of first-generation students should also be examined. Compared to continuing-generation students, first-generation students are more likely to depart a four-year institution at the end of the first year and less likely to persist to degree after five years. The early career earnings of first-generation and continuing-generation students are comparable; however, five years after degree completion, first-generation students are

less likely to pursue a post baccalaureate degree than their continuing-generation counterparts (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004).

Additional research is also needed to compare first-generation students' characteristics to continuing-generation students' characteristics, such as demographics, academic preparation, college expectations, etc. Results typically demonstrate that first-generation students are at a disadvantage in regard to knowledge about post secondary education, academic preparation, family support, etc.; however, implementing some of the aforementioned strategies can result in a shift in exposure and knowledge that first-generation students can gain, particularly at an earlier age (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004). Another category focuses on the transition of first-generation students from high school to college, and examines concerns such as anxieties and expectations about college life and academic and social integration that differ from their continuing-generation peers. Because of their cultural, economic and social backgrounds, often their transition is not as smooth and involves a greater learning curve than that of their continuing-generation peers (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004).

Conclusion

Overwhelmingly, the findings from this study reveal that parental involvement and parental encouragement provided the essential support necessary to encourage first-generation students' educational aspirations. Parents were champions for obtaining a college education embedded in the participants the desire to fulfill their parents' expectations. Not only did the participants wish to appease their parents, but they too aspired to increase their social position and status. Those participants who had older siblings who attended college had additional guidance to assist them with course

selection and studying, as well as strategies to help them navigate their way through school, such as participating in academic achievement programs. The McNair Program also played an important role in contributing to the participants' aspirations to obtain a college degree and exposed them to post baccalaureate education.

As a result of their college attendance, the participants have not only increased their knowledge, but have been exposed to and taken on new skills and dispositions. This increase of cultural capital is also applied to their families, particularly those families that did not have older children/siblings attend college. The participants were able to build greater social networks outside of their current social status (Heterophilous principle) and acquire greater academic and social status as a result. In so doing they impart greater status upon their families by exposing them to different attitudes, ideas and behaviors. As many students stated, their parents boast about them being college students and have a great sense of pride for them. The desires that most parents had for their children was for them to obtain a college education which would ultimately allow them greater opportunities for increased economic and social status; for the participants to be successful and acquire more than they could. Whether the parents realized it or not, their children's increased cultural capital would in turn influence the family, just as their encouragement and support influenced their children's educational aspirations. There was a reciprocal affect.

The entire society benefits when all of its children are afforded the same opportunities to achieve and excel academically and professionally, regardless of socioeconomic status. Society, as a whole, is responsible for ensuring that its future leaders have the requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions to do so.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Individual Interview

Project Title	Influence of Family on First-Generation College Students' Educational Aspirations Post High School
Statement of Age of Subject	You state that you are 18 years of age or older. You wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by Shawna L. Acker, Ph.D. Candidate, Higher Education Administration, University of Maryland, College of Education
Purpose	The goal of this study is to examine how factors in the home environment impact the persistence of first-generation college students who are participants in an academic achievement program designed to meet the needs of first-generation students (Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program).
Procedures	You will participate in an individual interview. You will be asked questions about your family upbringing, parental involvement and academic and social experiences growing up. A typical question would be, "How far did you expect to go with your education?" You understand that your interview will be audio-taped.
Confidentiality	No information about you, or provided by you during the interview will be shared with others without your written permission, except if required by law. You understand that the data you provide will be reported using a pseudonym and will be used for presentation and writing purposes. Access to audio tapes and transcriptions will be limited to the members of the dissertation committee. Audio tapes will be destroyed once the research is completed and the transcripts will be retained with the principle investigator in a secure file cabinet in her home.
Risks	You understand that this study poses no risks to you physically and the nature of the topics will focus on your perspectives and opinions about your experiences as a student. There are no known risks associated with participation in this research project.
Benefits, Freedom to Withdraw, & Ability to Ask Questions	You understand that you are not required to participate in this study and can stop taking part in the process at any time without giving a reason and without penalty. This research is not intended to benefit you directly but to learn more about the

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	factors that contribute to the success of first-generation college students. If you wish, you may receive an Executive Summary of the final research report. You understand that you will receive a copy of the consent form for your records.
Contact Information	Shawna Acker Principle Investigator (301) 773-4799 sacker@umuc.edu Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt Dissertation Chair (301) 405-0186 sfries@umd.edu
Contact Information of the Institutional Review Board	If you have questions about rights as a participant in this study or wish to report a research related injury, you may contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742. IRB email irb@deans.umd.edu; telephone (301) 405-0678.
Mailing Address to receive executive summary of the final research report	

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Dissertation Interview Info Sheet

Name:

Code:

Classification:

Number of credits completed after spring 06 term:

Live on or off campus:

If off campus, how far is the commute?:

Major:

G.P.A.:

Did parent/guardian attend any college?:

How long was attendance?:

Are you a full-time or part-time student?:

Do you work, if so, how many hours per week?:

Research Study Interview Questions
Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program
First Generation Students' Educational Aspirations

Primary Research Question:

What is the influence of family on first-generation college students' educational aspirations post high school?

Sub questions:

A. Do cultural and other forms of capital contribute to a student's attitude/perception about education?
B. How do cultural and other forms of capital affect attitudes/perceptions about education?
C. What educational or cultural practices did the family engage in that impeded or enhanced the student's academic awareness?

Interview Questions:

Parents/Guardians

1. Describe the types of conversations you had with your parents about the courses you would take in school.
2. How frequent were these conversations?
3. Describe the types of activities your family participated in.
4. Describe the types of rules your parents had for your family. How did they convey these rules?
5. What involvement did your parents have with you and school work or homework?
6. Describe the conversations you had with your parents about your plans after high school.
7. How is your schooling being paid for?

Siblings (To be asked if student indicates siblings)

8. What did you learned from your siblings' college experience(s)?

Participant

9. Describe the types of activities you engaged in after school, on weekends and during the summer break.
10. How far do you expect to go with your education?

11. Do you believe that race has played a role in your college experiences and if so, what are your perceptions of these experiences?
12. Did you have a role model outside of your home that influenced your decision to attend college?
13. Describe your family's reaction to you going to college?
14. Since you have entered college, what influence has your family had on your ability to persist?
15. Has your family been supportive and encouraging?
16. How many of your friends from high school went to college? Did that have an impact on your decision to attend?
17. Do you believe you were adequately prepared for college (academically, socially, and emotionally)?

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