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First-Generation College Students: Forensics Fulfilling a Family Support Function

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By

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Abstract

One in three students is a first-generation college student. First-generation college students are continuing to increase in enrollment each year. Previous research has explored the communication challenges and communication patterns of first-generation college students. However, research has not explored if an activity like forensics can fulfill a family support functions for first-generation college students. This project used a qualitative retrospective survey of open-ended questions was used to collect data. Themes emerged relating to the first-generation college student experience, the forensic team experience, and the forensic team as a family. The thesis concludes with conclusions and a presentation of future research.

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Chapter One

Personal Statement

My Mom, my primary caretaker growing up, never attended college but always encouraged me to attend. She was born and raised on a dairy farm in southern Minnesota. After high school, her parents encouraged her to find a job, get married, and have kids. She worked on an assembly line in a factory for many years and then became a homemaker after the birth of my older sister and I. She currently works for the local school district as a kitchen manager at one of the middle schools. She has done this work for twenty-one years and has held various positions within the organization. She started as an entry level worker and now works in middle management. My Mom has enjoyed her career because of the people but does not enjoy the physical labor she is required to do every day. She has always told me "find yourself a career where you can sit at a desk." Growing up she stressed to me that I need to get some sort of higher education whether it be a one year program or a program that took many years to complete.

My Dad never attended college and was not encouraged by his parents to attend after high school. He grew up with six siblings and knew that his occupation would be in the agricultural industry. After high school, he worked on the family farm and later became a truck driver for a national construction company. Over the years at his job, he experienced many on-the-job accidents and was forced to travel far from home at least three weeks of every month. His accidents ranged from minor to severe. He always told my sister and I we needed to go to school if we wanted to have jobs that were not harmful

to our bodies. He recently retired from his work as a truck driver after forty years because of his physical health, but continues to manage the family farm.

I always knew I would go to college, but I did not know what that meant for me. Growing up my family reminded me to do well in junior high school and high school because my grades would matter when I went to college. I did not believe them for the first two years, failing many of my classes in seventh and eighth grade. I was an unmotivated student and felt that much of the information I was learning did not apply to me or would not apply to me in the future. When I reached high school, I decided to take school more seriously and ended up receiving above average grades. Additionally, because I was told being involved in activities in high school would look good on college applications, I joined FFA and the Speech Team. I was confused by this because I had no idea how being in a club or organization would help me in college. My school counselor continued to encourage me to become involved in activities when family difficulties started to emerge. Out of the activities I joined in high school I stuck with the Speech Team the longest and was the Captain my senior year. At one point during my time on the Speech Team I wanted to quit because it was time consuming, but I felt too much of a connection with my peers to leave them. Little did I know it would be the activities that would help me integrate to the college environment and be successful as a student. Being a part of the Speech and Debate Team in college helped me become more aware of the academic environment, but more importantly the team became a family for me while I struggled with my student identity.

Frequently, I would question whether completing college was going to be worth it. I felt a loyalty to my family and being away from my family made it hard for me to

concentrate on completing my degree. The act of being in college made me feel different from my family, but the team members of the speech team made me feel more comfortable being in school. Additionally, the van rides to and from speech tournaments made me feel comfortable when talking to instructors. It was the many late nights traveling that I learned about the college environment from my Director of Forensics and also decided that I wanted to stay in academia in some type of capacity. Many times when I was experiencing difficulty in college I found myself going to speech team members or my Director of Forensics for advice on how to handle the situation.

Before I went to college, three other cousins had attempted higher education but soon after withdrew from their classes because they were overwhelmed with the college environment and the rigor of the courses. Each of my cousins also grew up on one of the family farms and held a connection with the farm. I felt the odds were against me so I did not take the application process seriously and applied to schools with undemanding admission standards. I decided to go to a small Midwestern public college, which was a three-hour drive from my hometown. The college offered me a few small academic and leadership scholarships. Before deciding on a college, I only visited three campuses. My parents came with me on some of the college visits, but I did not know what questions I should have been asking and neither did my parents. The decision to go to a college three hours away was mutual between my Mom and I. I agreed I needed to go to a school which was far enough away that I would not go home frequently but close enough that I could still get home to help with the farm.

Arriving on campus and moving into the dorms was a daunting task. I had very little knowledge of what it was like to live on campus. I was unsure of what I should

bring to live in a dorm because nobody else in my family had ever experienced dorm living. Fortunately, I was given a single dorm room in a junior and senior residence hall. It was helpful to have upper-class students around when I had questions. My parents finished moving me in, gave me a hug, and wished me the best of luck. As my Mom hugged me she said "I am sorry I can no longer help you because I did not go to college. You will have to figure college out on your own." and walked to the car. I remember going back to my dorm room that night and being excited and confused about my future.

The following day freshman orientation started and I was instantly overwhelmed. I was convinced I would not make it past the first month. I called home frequently in a panic and said I wanted to quit. I was confused by the terminology to which I was forced to adapt. I remember being told that it was mandatory for freshmen to attend convocation but not being told what convocation was. I only saw it as something I had to attend or perhaps another thing to check off the list before the first day of classes. I also had to buy textbooks which seemed insurmountable at the time. I was not sure how I would pay for the textbooks but fortunately I had financial aid to cover the costs. I had no idea what the words convocation, credit banding, office hours, and Pell grant had to do with me. In my state of confusion I asked my resident advisor what I should do. She suggested that I meet with the advisor who had been assigned to me. I set up an appointment to meet with my advisor early on in the semester. In the meeting with my advisor, I was able to clear up most of my confusion. It was not until my second semester my freshman year before I realized it was okay to talk to instructors and professors. I went to talk to my communication professor about a speech I was unprepared for and he suggested I should join the speech team. He had been a past participant in forensics and Director of

Forensics and thought I could benefit from the activity. He walked me down to the Director of Forensics office to meet with him. It was too late in the Spring semester to be able to attend any tournaments but I was still welcome to attend the weekly meetings. Even though I was unable to compete, I realized that forensics offered me a home and made me feel comfortable.

My first year on campus I faced many challenges related to being a first-generation college student, but I was able to overcome many of them and decided to continue my education. I quickly caught on and assimilated to the college environment after joining various organizations on campus. Forensics opened other opportunities for me on campus that I would not have considered without being involved on the team. For example, I would have never considered being involved in student government if I would have never met my teammate who was involved in student government. By being involved in student government I really learned how a college functions.

Even as a graduate student today I still face many of the challenges I faced my very first year of college living in the dorms. As a first-generation college student, forensics offered me a safe place to figure out the college environment and grow academically. Additionally, the team served as a family and offered me support that I could not get because I lived away from home. Without my involvement in Forensics I would have never considered going to graduate school. My personal experience as a first-generation college student and forensic participant have led to my interest in understanding if forensics can fulfill a family support function or alleviate communication challenges a first-generation college student experiences.

Problem Statement

One in three students entering college as freshman is a first-generation college student (Greenwald, 2011). Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, and Terenzini (2003) defined first-generation college students as those who have parents who have not completed a college education. Bui (2002) asserted one reason first-generation college students pursue higher education is ". . . so they can later help out their families which is a more important reason for first-generation college students than it is for students whose parents have at least some college experience" (p.9). Many first-generation students come from a working-class or blue collar background. This indicates many first-generation college students have had little to no knowledge of the college experience because their parents did not attend college. With little knowledge of the college experience, it is possible that first-generation college students may be more confused when entering the academic environment. Forming relationships with mentors and peers early on in the college entrance process is important for a first-generation college student in order to be successful. Second-generation college students and continuing-generation students generally have their parents to help them through the application process and selecting a college to attend. Mehta, Newbold, and O'Rourke (2011) explained that a continuing-generation student is ". . .those students currently in college who have at least one parent/guardian that completed college" (p. 20). For the purpose of this study second-generation college student will be used to refer to students who have at least one parent who complete a college education.

First-generation college students differ from second-generation college students in the characteristics they possess when entering and the different experiences they have

once at college (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Many students with first-generation status will begin college at a two-year institution (Bui, 2002) and attend public universities (Greenwald, 2011). In addition, Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) discovered first-generation college students are more likely to attend colleges which are less selective in the students they admit. Compared to second-generation college students, first-generation college students experience difficulties that are different related to the college experience on an academic and social level. Research suggests first-generation college students have a more difficult time acclimating to the college environment, attend class on a part-time basis and work at a full-time job, live off-campus, are more likely to postpone the college entrance process (Tym, McMillion, Barone, & Webster, 2004), be a transfer student, and be low-income (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011). When a first-generation college student goes to graduate school, many of the challenges become more difficult (Lunceford, 2011), but with the increase of first-generation college students attending college more and more first-generation college students are attending graduate school. Because of this information, it is important for educators to be aware of the challenges first-generation college students face. Not only do first-generation college students have a different experience, but they also experience communication challenges related to their identity, family, and institutional experience.

First, identity formation for first-generation college students can be challenging. College is a crucial time in the development of creating an adult identity (Duffy & Atwater, 2005; Orbe, 2008). First-generation college students have a more difficult time forming their identity because they are the first in their family to have a college identity. This new identity can separate them from their family whom do not have a college

education. When I would go home to visit my family I often felt a separation because I was having experiences at college that none of them have ever had before. Additionally, the way students enact their first-generation college identity varies greatly. Orbe (2004) discovered that the first-generation college student status was more significant when intersected with other parts of a person's identity. Research done by Lowery-Hart and Pacheco (2011) discovered first-generation college students struggle with whom to communicate about their new identity. The authors asserted, "Because the FGS seemed to judge themselves as lacking important understanding of college, they assumed other people would have the same harsh judgments" (p.65). This would mean first-generation college students struggle with communicating to their family and friends about their new identity as a college student. First-generation college students are more likely to talk about their status with other first-generation college students but lack a communal identity so often times they do not know where to find each other (Orbe, 2004). Additionally, research has revealed that first-generation college students who are able to talk to their peers about academic problems are more successful (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). Many first-generation students have a difficult time adopting a new identity when they go to college because they are afraid to lose their working class identity. The two different identities are tied to social class roles making them hard to balance. Trying to balance the two identities can cause first-generation college students tension because they are trying to reconcile the two identities.

Second, first-generation college students have a difficult time communicating to their family. First-generation college students communicate with their family differently compared to their peers. First-generation college students are often at odds with familial

expectations because they enter academia without knowing what to expect (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011). Orbe and Groscurth (2004) discovered that first-generation college students once at college would often times censor what they talk about or go for periods of time not communicating with their relatives because they felt it would threaten them. I like many other first-generation college students would censor myself when I went home. I would avoid topics about academics because I did not want to sound smarter than them or think that I was smarter than them. If I was asked about college I would only share experiences relating to my part-time job or the activities in which I was involved. I remember my parents being more concerned with where I would be competing that weekend for forensics than the classes I was taking. Much of the time we discussed topics related to current events or pop culture.

Orbe and Groscurth (2004) discovered four different communication orientations first-generation college students have when communicating with their family. The four different communication orientations are nonassertive assimilation, assertive assimilation, nonassertive and assertive separation, and assertive accommodation. Orbe and Groscurth explained nonassertive assimilation is when the student would not talk about college with their families. Additionally, some first-generation college students used a nonassertive and assertive separation communication orientation. A nonassertive separation communication orientation is when the student simply avoids talking about college and an assertive separation communication orientation is when the student would actively acknowledge that they are different because they have gone to college. The last communication orientation Orbe and Groscurth presented is assertive accommodation. Assertive accommodation is when the first-generation college student would opt to spend

more time with other college students than with their family. Housel (2012) explained in a narrative about her experience as a first-generation college student that she would often not go home on breaks because it was easier than trying to negotiate her two different cultures of being a college student and having a working-class background. Furthermore, the students feel it is their role to positively represent academic behavior at home and in their community when having an assertive accommodation communication orientation (Orbe and Groscurth).

Third, first-generation college students struggle with instructional communication. First-generation college students struggle to communicate with instructors and lack a communal identity within the academic institution. Research has revealed that first-generation college students have a higher success rate if they have positive communication with instructors (Jehangir, 2010; McKay & Estrella, 2008). Interacting with faculty is important for student development whether it is in the classroom or outside of class (Sax & Kim, 2009). Sax and Kim explained "Students whose parents attended college were more likely than students whose parents have not attended college to assist faculty with research for course credit, communicate with faculty by e-mail or in person, and interact with faculty during lecture class sessions" (p. 443). McKay and Estrella discovered service learning courses are important for first-generation college students because they provide opportunity for the students to directly communicate with instructors. The authors learned that service learning courses provided first-generation college students with an outlet in which to integrate socially and academically. Depending on the quality of the interaction with the instructors, first-

generation college students were also able to have a more positive perception of their short and long term goals.

Service learning courses were important in my development as a student. It gave me something tangible to tell my family about. The experiences I had in my service learning courses seemed to prove to my family members that college did serve a purpose and that I was gaining skills that could be used later in my career. Research has also addressed that social interaction with faculty members help enhance the experience of the first-generation college student because the student is able to build a mentoring relationship (Jehangir, 2010). Mentoring relationship were integral to my success as a college student. Many of the mentoring relationships I formed in my undergraduate education and now my graduate education have been through forensics. Forensics has given me the opportunity to work closely with faculty members and feel comfortable talking to them.

Research has also explored the role of social class and first-generation college students. Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias (2012) explored how the social class achievement gap created a mismatch in cultures for the first-generation college student and the college environment. The researchers discovered that universities tend to focus on an independence mindset whereas first-generation college students have an interdependent mindset and are more likely to respond to other needs and depend on others. Additionally, Tseng (2004) learned that because first-generation college students have an interdependent mindset that their family obligations sometimes distract from academic achievements. Housel (2012) articulated in a narrative that the most frustrating thing about being a first-generation college student was meeting other students

who took their upbringing for granted which included trips and camps. Housel explained that these things were cultural capital of which many first-generation college students are unaware. Collier and Morgan (2008) argued cultural capital is related to how much a first-generation college student is able to master the student role and meet faculty expectations. Cultural capital is the mastery of dominant cultural codes which is often also practiced in educational systems (Collier & Morgan). This indicates that parents who obtained a college education would also be able to obtain cultural capital.

Researchers have explored many areas on the communication challenges of first-generation college students (Hart & Pacheco, 2011; Jehangir, 2010; Orbe & Groscurth, 2004). Different areas of research have examined the communication challenges associated with identity, family, and instructors (Hart and Pacheco, 2011; Jehangir, 2010; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011), but the function a forensic program fulfills for a first-generation college student remains unclear. Researchers have explored how forensics competitors communicate with their family (Hughes, Gring & Williams, 2006; Williams & Hughes, 2005), but has not explored if a forensic program can fulfill a family support function specifically for first-generation college students.

Value of Study

Hottinger and Rose (2006) explored how student support services like TRIO can help retain first-generation college students and be more academically successful. TRIO has eight different programs which assist students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The programs start in middle school and proceed all the way to post-baccalaureate (U.S Department of Education, 2013). Graham (2011) explained "TRIO programs academic, social, and administrative knowledge has shaped me to become an academic. Being an

FGS, I did not know how education would change my career goals, and also influence me personally" (p. 38). The student support programs are designed to help first-generation college students transition into the college environment and have academic success, but the studies do not address if involvement in forensics can alleviate communication challenges. In programs like TRIO students are able to form meaningful relationships with peers and academic professionals. This would mean forensic programs function much the same way because through involvement in forensics students are able to develop relationships with peers and coaches.

Research has addressed that first-generation college students are less likely to be involved in activities on campus (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Soria & Stebleton, 2012), but students who are more engaged with on campus activities have higher success rates academically and socially (McKay & Estrella, 2008). This would mean that forensics as a co-curricular activity could help first-generation college students become more engaged on campus and provide an outlet for greater interaction with faculty which in return creates a better experience and success.

The objective of this research is to shed light on the experiences of first-generation college students in forensics by allowing past first-generation college students to share their experiences through a qualitative retrospective survey. Therefore I pose the research question: Does a forensic program fulfill a family support function for a first-generation college student? This thesis will also explore whether involvement in a forensic program can alleviate the communication challenges a first-generation college student experiences in their higher education experience.

This project will build on previous research because it will explore the communication challenges first-generation college students experience and how a forensic program can fulfill a family support function for those students. Because increasing numbers of first-generation college students are enrolling in colleges it is important for co-curricular activities like forensics to be aware of how to accommodate this demographic.

This research study is important because it can help inform the forensic community and administrators about the role the activity plays for first-generation college students. Research has explored the benefits associated with participating in forensics. These benefits include citizenship skills (Bartanen, 1998; Billings, 2011; Morris, 2011), leadership skills (Bartanen, 1998; Billings, 2011), a greater sense of self-esteem (Billings, 2011), and communication competence in relationships (Bartanen, 1998; Billings. 2011; Jensen & Jensen, 2006; Kuyper, 2011). It is clear forensics offers students benefits by participating in the activity which could also carry over to first-generation college students.

In the following chapter I present a review of literature on the role of family and the college experience, college student identity, campus engagement and institutional identity, and forensics as engaged learning. Next, I describe the method of a qualitative retrospective survey in order to gather data. Following, I describe the data I collected from my participants. Finally, I explain conclusions, limitations, implications, and directions for future research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Many forensic educators and scholars can agree that forensic programs sometimes function as a family but whether a forensic program can fulfill a family support function for a first-generation college student has not been explored. Before analyzing data, I review the previous bodies of research that are critical to this study. First, I explore literature on the role of family in the college experience focusing on the general student experience and then the first-generation college student experience. Second, I look at literature on college student identity relating to the general student and first-generation college students. Finally, I explore forensics as engaged learning and the role family plays in forensics.

College Student Identity

The General Student

Identity formation for college students can often times be a challenging and turbulent process. The student is struggling to carve out his or her own life while simultaneously trying to still be connected with family. The general college student faces two different issues of identity once leaving home. The first issue has to deal with communication which can be informed by communication accommodation theory. The second issue of identity the general college student faces is being able to manage multiple identities which is better informed by communication theory of identity.

One issue of a college student's emerging identity is the frequency in which to communicate with others once leaving home. Many times the way a person

communicates evolves throughout a lifetime. Communication accommodation theory can offer an explanation for why college students may change the way they communicate with others after leaving home. Communication accommodation theory was originally used to explain why people shift or adjust the way they communicate with each other in order to match or turn away from patterns (Dainton & Zelley, 2005; Giles, 1973; Harwood, Jordan, & Lin, 2006). When an individual tries to match or accommodate another person's communication style it is called convergence. College students are usually very interested in finding their own identity when leaving home. One aspect of finding their own identity can be associated with the people with whom they choose to communicate. In order to fit in with their new peers and develop their identity a college student could accommodate or try to match the people they choose to be around. Verderber, Verderber, and Berryman-Fink (2007) defined convergence as ". . .making language similar to another's language" (p.100). People engage in convergence for many reasons. Some of the reasons include matching another person's dialect, social power, or where they think the other person is in terms of communication competence. Giles (2008) explained one instance where a person would accommodate based on communication competence:

> Common instances of this are where social stereotypes associated with another's apparent or presumed group memberships (e.g. elderliness) may lead to faulty expectations about the other's competence and characteristics. In this instance, one may overaccommodate an older person by becoming extremely deferential and polite, or by touching them, slowing down speech rate, and enunciating loudly. For those elders who

> do not resonate to the way they have been so characterized, such miscarried accommodations (irrespective of, say, any actual nurturing intent) can be perceived as patronizing and demeaning, whereas perhaps for more frail elders is can be construed as empathetic and being helpful. (p. 164)

Verderber, Verderber, and Berryman-Fink (2007) defined divergence as ". . .making language different from another's language" (p. 100). The reasons people choose to engage in divergence include distancing themselves from a group, having the inability to understand the other person's language, or they want to diverge in order to impress the other person (Giles, 2008). The way people converge or diverge in communication can vary widely. For example, people can do it through speaking pace, pitch, nonverbal communication, vocabulary, or the use of accents. Communication accommodation theory has been used to understand interpersonal processes, conflicts, and to examine intergroup structures (Harwood, Soliz, & Lin, 2006). For example, a college student may choose to engage in divergence with their family if they left for college their first year on a bad relationship.

Communication accommodation theory has been used in order to explain family communication practices. Bandura (1977) indicated that children communicate like their parents because they are imitating them and that it is a part of the socialization process. Unlike social learning theory, communication accommodation theory explains that children communicate like their parents because they are simply trying to fit in with the family. Harwood, Soliz, and Lin (2006) explained that reasons children may adopt parental styles include wanting affiliation with the family, seeking compliance, or a

shared identification with the family. The reasons children would not adopt the communication style of their parents include wanting to be different from the family, rebellion, or seeking independence. A first year college student is trying to establish a new identity and seek independence from the family, so communication accommodation theory offers one explanation on why a student would be rebellious toward parents.

Finally, a last issue concerned with a college student's emerging identity is to be able to manage intersecting identities. As a person becomes older they are forced to take on more roles and in return need to manage multiple identities. Communication theory of identity explains how our different identities are communicated. Communication theory of identity posits that identity is a communicative process and there are four frames or perspectives through which to understand identity (Hecht, 1993). Communication theory of identity has been used to study identity among different cultural groups such as Jewish Americans (Hecht & Faulkner, 2000). The four frames of identity are personal, enactment, relational, and communal. The first frame is personal which means individuals base their identity on their own feeling or self-concept (Verderber, Verderber, & Berryman-Fink, 2007). The second frame is enactment which means individuals act out their identity to others. This enactment of identity can be done consciously or unconsciously. This frame is more focused on the messages individuals send in order to portray their identity (Hecht & Faulkner). For example, children who go to college may try to enact a student identity when they go home to visit rather than a child identity. The third frame indicates that individuals can view identity through a relational perspective. Verderber, Verderber, and Berryman-Fink explained ". . .you negotiate your identity within a particular relationship. You may interact differently in a relationship where you

are a parent than in a relationship where you are a child" (p. 37). The relational frame also explains how when you enter a relationship your identity changes based on that relationship. For example, when students go to college their identity changes based on the relationships with their peers versus when they are with their family. The fourth frame of communication theory of identity is communal. A communal identity is based on the assumption that groups of people can hold an identity together. Verderber, Verderber, and Berryman-Fink explained "Groups of people have identities that bond them to one another. These communities develop certain behaviors, which they teach to new members and expect members to enact" (pp. 37-38). Additionally, the theory can be used to see how the traditional college student has different frames of reference for their identity. College students may see their personal identity different from their relational identity with their family which is also different from their communal identity as a college student. Each frame of reference can help unearth the emerging identity of a traditional college student and how it impacts family communication.

The First-Generation College Student

First-generation college students, much like the general college student, also have intersecting identities which can make the higher education process difficult. Orbe (2004) used communication theory of identity to explore how first-generation college students have intersecting identities. Orbe discovered first-generation college students are aware of their self-concept but their communal identity is not apparent until they return home. Additionally, Orbe discovered that first-generation college students as a whole lack a communal identity.

Many times first-generation college students will come from a lower social class than the traditional college student. This difference can cause first-generation college students to struggle with their working class identity upon entering college. Oldfield (2007) explained in his personal narrative about being a first-generation college student and then becoming a college faculty member that having a working class identity and then going to college caused a lot of confusion. Oldfield explained that upon entering college he noticed that he was disadvantaged compared to other students from middle and upper social classes. Closely related to this is the idea of a cultural mismatch on how American universities are constructed compared to a person with a working-class identity (Stephens et al., 2012). Stephens et al. explained:

> American universities, like all institutions, are not neutral contexts. Instead, reflecting the cultural norms that are foundational to American society, universities promote a particular set of independent norms for college students. These norms are based on a particular middle-class model for how to be a person and successful college student. (p. 18)

This is different compared to the working-class identity and the identity with which many first-generation college students associate, which is that interdependence and responding to others is valued.

Institutional identity is also different for first-generation college students compared to second-generation students. Pike and Kuh (2005) discovered first-generation college students perceive the college environment as not being supportive. In addition, first-generation college students report having a lower level of social

satisfaction compared to other students and earn lower grades (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011).

Similar to institutional identity campus engagement is also different for first-generation college students. Campus engagement is how students interact with their college campuses whether it be through talking with instructors or being involved in clubs and organizations. Research has explored first-generation college student engagement. Pike and Kuh (2005) discovered that first-generation college students were less engaged overall compared to other students. One reason why first-generation college students are less engaged than other students is because they are more likely to work more hours and take less credit hours (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011). Additionally, Mehta, Newbold, and O'Rourke (2011) discovered first-generation college students have greater financial demands which cause them to rely on other forms of income such as grants and student loans. First-generation college students are also more likely to live off campus making it harder for them to engage in student activities (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004).

Role of Family in College Experience

The General Student

The role of family in the college experience for the general college student can be best understood through two different communication theories. Each of the theories aids in explaining how a college student's emerging identity can impact the family and in return the role the family plays in the college experience.

First, college students developing their emerging identity struggle with privacy management. Young adults struggle with what to share with their parents because they

are frustrated. Duffy and Atwater (2005) explained ". . .they may feel impatient and resentful toward their parents for their attempts to control them, but on the other hand, they may also feel anxious about their ability to be successful on their own" (p. 65). Communication privacy management theory helps offer an explanation of how college students manage their private information with their families. Petronio (2002) claims that self-disclosure no matter what the situation has rules. Communication privacy management theory is based on the assumption that people are constantly trying to control what information they reveal or conceal to others (Petronio & Durham, 2008). Communication privacy management theory asserts that people learn what information is appropriate to reveal or conceal through the socialization process (Petronio, 2002). The theory in relation to family communication is designed to understand how families face privacy issues. Communication privacy management theory is organized around six principles (Petronio & Durham, 2008). The six principles are broken up into two different groups referred to as assumption and interaction maxims. The assumption maxims posit that people are in a constant state of managing what information to disclose, private information is treated as a possession, and privacy rules are used to decide what information is appropriate to share. The interaction maxims explain that when people share information they are giving some of it away, thus sharing the ownership of that information with the other person (Petronio & Durham, 2008). Petronio (2002) explains that in order for relationships to be developed properly coordination of how the private information is shared or discussed is essential.

The decisions to reveal or conceal information can be based on many different influences. Petronio and Caughlin (2006) explained:

> The decisions to reveal or conceal are predicated on rules that stem from many different spheres of influence. The calculus used to judge the scope of disclosure to others might take into account cultural issues, motivations, situational factors, gender criteria, or the cost of revealing. For example, we may develop rules based on the motivations for disclosure. If an adolescent does not want her mother to know about her dating experiences, she may implement rules that limit the amount of information she typically gives her mother about dating. (p. 38)

Additionally, many people struggle with what they should keep private and what should be shared with others. For example, many people will learn privacy boundaries in their family during childhood. The process of knowing privacy issues or what is appropriate to disclose is a process of trial and error between family members. Generally, as a child gets older and into young adulthood more privacy boundaries are formed and they are less permeable, but more equal in terms of negotiation (Petronio, 2002). Renegotiation between parents and children about power in emerging adulthood also has to do with renegotiations of privacy. When a child goes off to college the family is forced to renegotiate their privacy boundaries. Sometimes this means the child will avoid communication with the family which is not always a bad thing. For example, Caughlin and Afifi (2004) discovered that when parents and college students would practice avoidance in order to protect their relationship, avoidance of communication was not perceived as bad. Additionally, the researchers discovered that parents and children were dissatisfied if they thought the other was avoiding a topic because they were not well informed about the topic. Caughlin and Afifi concluded that when topics are avoided

because of the lack of information it only made avoidance more prominent and more upsetting to the individual. For example, when a student moves away to college much of their life becomes private and they may not be willing to share information with family members.

The renegotiation of privacy and topic avoidance among families can lead to privacy dilemmas. Petronio and Caughlin (2006) discovered families experience four main privacy dilemmas. First, there is the confidant dilemma which occurs when private information is shared with another family member but is not meant to be shared. This dilemma causes a family member to have to decide whether to keep the information private even though it may cause harm to the family member who reveled the information. The second dilemma is when a family member accidently finds out private information about another family member and if that information is found out by the rest of the family it could cause harm to that person. Third, a privacy dilemma can occur when a family member spies on another family member finding out private information but the process of revealing it could cause distrust. Fourth, there is an interdependence dilemma which occurs when a family member has to make a decision between revealing information to the rest of the family that could be helpful but losing trust with the family member that confided in them (Petronio & Caughlin, 2006). The issue of privacy management for an emerging college student identity is better informed by being aware of these four privacy dilemmas because it helps explain why the college student struggles with privacy management. There is a constant push and pull to share private information.

A second issue related to a college students emerging identity is the ability to adapt to a new environment. Because the student is struggling with a new identity it is

harder to adapt to the new college environment and maintain a relationship with their family which was potentially one of their main forms of social support. Duffy and Atwater (2005) explained that if a young adult is having problems with coping it can cause issues with home and family dynamics. Attachment theory informs the issue of being able to adapt to a new environment, but still be able to have a healthy relationship with family members after leaving for college. Attachment theory was first created to address why children develop strong bonds with a primary caregiver but experience distress when they are separated (Bowlby, 1988; Guerrero, 2008). Even though attachment theory was created to explain the infant-parent relationship, attachment bonds are also important throughout the whole lifespan and impact how people communicate. Attachment theory posits that the communication in attachment relationships can affect a child's psychological development because attachment figures are supposed to be safe and when they are not it causes distress. This is very similar to how a college student adjusts to their new environment. Through the attachment relationships children create working models in order to make sense of themselves and the interaction they have with others (Bowlby, 1973). Trees (2006) explained the two major elements of working models:

> These working models include two major elements: conception of self and conception of the attachment figure. These two dimensions are interdependent and reflect expectations concerning whether or not the self is the sort of person who is valued and competent and likely to receive help from others, and whether the attachment figure is someone who is

> emotionally available and who can be counted on to respond to calls for help and provide protection. (p. 167)

The working models children create carry into adulthood narratives which affect how they communicate with others and their family. Research has addressed that if children have strong attachment with their parents and their parents have strong attachment to each other they are more secure adults (Trees, 2006). This finding relates to the success students will have when entering college.

Research has explored the impact of college student-parent attachment and the success of the student (Campbell & Watkins, 1988; Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012; Lee, Hamman, & Lee, 2007). The ability for college students to adjust to their new school is imperative for their success. Children who have strong, positive attachments with their parents are more likely to succeed when they go to college. Lee, Hamman, and Lee (2007) discovered that family closeness was positively correlated with self-regulated learning skills. Additionally, the researchers discovered that students who rated their family high in terms of closeness were able to adjust to their schools easier. Based on this finding Lee, Hamman, and Lee suggested "Parents should utilize every possible opportunity to foster a close family environment, as it related to children's academic learning" (p. 785). The researchers also suggested "Owing to the strong relationship between family closeness and adjustment to school, the results also indicate that close family environment might also be a possible indicator of retention rate" (p. 785). If a student is able to manage their past identity and the relationships that go with it they are able to have a healthier future. The supportive messages students receive from their parents once at college are also important to their success. Kranstuber, Carr, and Hosek

(2012) discovered that memorable messages from parents are not directly associated with college success but can account for learner empowerment, motivation to stay in school, and satisfaction with college. These finding indicate that a positive attachment and communication with parents after leaving the house for college is important.

The First-Generation College Student

First-generation college students experience unique differences with their families compared to the general student. Researchers explain the role of family in the first-generation college student experience is two-fold. Researchers have discovered that a first-generation college student's family is proud they are attending college, but at the same time unsure of the experience.

Many times families of first-generation college students are proud of their child for going to college, yet Orbe (2008) discovered when first-generation college students go to college there is a tension between being similar and different from their families. For example, when a first-generation college student goes home they find the environment relaxing but their family may look up to them as a mentor. Orbe explained:

> . . .FGC students are often asked to assume the role of mentor, advisor, or expert in their families (and, in some cases larger communities). For some, this responsibility is simply an extension of established roles; for others, it is a new aspect of their familial positionality that may come at the expense of older family members." (p. 89)

Additionally, families of first-generation college students offer support to the student going to college. Orbe (2008) discovered that families will be supportive in many different ways which include, emotional, physical, and logistical. Families will make

sure to encourage their student, make sure they have the necessities to attend college, and make sure they can make it to and from campus.

The role the families play for first-generation college students can also be turbulent. Orbe (2004) discovered that when first-generation college students go home, the status of "college student" is not important which can make it seem the family is being unsupportive of their student. Furthermore, when a first-generation college student decides to go to college the family may actually be a limitation because they did not attend college. Because the parents did not attend college they may not know how to help with applying for college, paying for college, or advising how to be successful once at college (Hottinger and Rose, 2006).

Forensics

With an understanding of student identity and the role of family in the college experience, it is easy to understand how forensics also fits into the college experience. Forensics is able to provide a sense of an identity to a college student because of the team dynamic. Through van rides, team meetings, and coaching sessions students learn a lot about themselves and where they fit in on the team and in the university. Because forensics does not fit into the traditional classroom setting, it is a form of engaged learning. Additionally, because of the abundant amount of time students spend with each other in order to engage in the activity the team itself becomes a family. Much like a family unit, forensic teams also struggle with privacy dilemmas. First, I explain forensics as engaged learning and second I explain the body of literature surrounding forensics and family.

Engaged Learning

Many forensic programs have a director or coach to help them learn about forensics and what is expected of them at tournaments, but for the most part students learn about forensics through the process of doing forensics. This aspect of the activity makes students engage in their learning rather than receiving the information through a traditional lecture. Student involved in forensics are involved in engaged learning through three different ways. These include citizenship skills, leadership skills, and communication competence.

First, one of the ways students are involved in engaged learning is through the process of obtaining citizenship skills. Researchers have explored the citizenship skills gained from the activity (Bartanen, 1998; Billings, 2011; Morris, 2011). Involvement in forensics can expand a participant's world view. Forensics as an activity naturally helps the participants be more concerned with their community and the world around them because of the variety of topics they are exposed to on a regular basis. Bartanen explained "Listening to speakers, interpreters, and debaters from ten to thirty other colleges at a tournament is a broadening experience which requests ongoing consideration of how issues look from another's perspective and what the world feels like in others' shoes" (p. 8). By being exposed to topics they would not normally consider, it forces participants to evaluate their own topic and those of others. Whenever a person gets criticized or is forced to engage in self-reflection, it can also help that person gain more self-direction and engage in personal growth (Duffy and Atwater, 2005). Often criticism or self-reflection can be hurtful, but it can also cause people to broaden their view of themselves. When students compete at a tournament they are forced to engage in

self-criticism of their performances in order to figure out how to get better at their event. Additionally, forensics provides participants the opportunity to meet people from other demographics than their own. Not only are the topics varied from competitor to competitor but so are the people. Billings described "From politics to religion, sexual orientation to race/ethnicity, forensics seemed to be a significantly broadening experience for many people" (p. 117).

Second, forensics is engaged learning because of the leadership skills which are obtained through the involvement in the activity. Many co-curricular activities are isolated to just their own campus, but forensics allows for participants to not only be a leader on their own campus but in a whole community which involves multiple campuses and the nation. Many opportunities are present to forensic competitors. For example, many teams may have warm-up leaders, class representatives, or committee leaders which all offer opportunities for students to work on their leadership skills. Research has explored how participants benefit from competing in forensics in their future careers (Bartanen, 1998; Billings, 2011). When participants have to research and organize information in order to present it publicly to an audience they are indirectly building leadership skills. Bartanen explained how forensics builds citizens concerned with their community "Forensics develops able advocates. Forensics students have always had a tremendous advantage over other students in terms of their abilities to find, organize, and manage information" (p. 9). This indirect benefit of participating in forensics can also help students in their future careers. Billings surveyed former individual events competitors on the benefits they felt they gained from forensics. Participants of the survey indicated that forensics helped them excel in their careers. Billings explained:

> . . .the majority of the respondents felt that the activity significantly enhanced their careers for a range of reasons beyond the obvious benefit of being a sound public speaker. People drew direct correlations between forensic participation and future job expertise, time management, research skills, and a sense of self within a diverse global context. This resulted in presumed advancement and leadership opportunities that people felt would not have been either as prevalent or as accelerated had it not been for their involvement in forensics. (p. 121)

Third, through the involvement in a forensic program, students learn communication competence. Communication research has explored communication competence in many interpersonal situations (Arroyo & Segrin, 2011; Merril & Afifi, 2012; Teven, Richmond, McCroskey & McCroskey, 2010). Communication competence as defined by Spitzberg (2000) is when communication is appropriate and effective for the occasion. Research has explored communication competence within forensics (Bartanen, 1998; Billings, 2011; Jensen & Jensen, 2006; Kuyper, 2011). First, learning how to work well with others, but more importantly communicating effectively with others is a skill gained being a forensic participant. One aspect of communication competence is self-monitoring which is the ability to know when and how to communicate. Furthermore, self-monitoring is becoming more self-aware of the communication in which we engage. Floyd (2009) explained "People who are high self-monitors pay close attention to the way they look, sound, and act. . .people who are low self-monitors often seem oblivious to both their own behaviors and how other people are reacting to them" (p. 30). Jensen and Jensen explained:

> Forensic experiences help to build skills of self-monitoring. We listen to arguments that we may not accept as true. We listen to performances of literature that we may not find appealing. We travel and work with – and in some cases, share a room with – individuals we may find to be objectionable for any number of reasons. In these ways, forensic laboratories uniquely test our abilities to self-monitor, whether we are student or professional participants. (p. 21)

Jensen and Jensen extrapolate that even coaches and instructors are able to develop self-monitoring. People who are high self-monitors have high levels of social and emotional intelligence which can make it easier for them to recognize other people's emotions (Goleman, 1996). The benefits of being a self-monitor, or learning it as a skill, are beneficial once the student is done competing. Self-monitoring can be helpful in future relationships whether it is romantic or a business relationship. Additionally, self-monitoring is not the only skill associated with learning to work well with others, but also learning how to adapt communication styles. For example, in the individual event dramatic duo participants need to work with a partner. Often times this can cause students a lot of stress when practicing for competition, forcing the partners to adapt to each other's communication styles. Jensen and Jensen explained "Forensics students must learn to adapt their communication styles in order to work more effectively with partners as well as teammates in general" (p. 20). Another instance in which forensic participants are forced to adapt their communication styles is parliamentary debate. In this case competitors are given a limited time to prepare a case forcing them to become more competent communicators and adapt to each other (Jensen and Jensen).

Second, forensic competitors learn conflict management through involvement in a forensic program. Communication scholars have explored conflict in the interpersonal setting. Interpersonal conflict occurs when two parties are competing for scarce resources, have mismatched goals, and when interference occurs between the two parties for the desired goal (Wilmont and Hocker, 2001). In order for conflict to occur, all three elements need to be present. Floyd (2009) described ". . . a disagreement becomes a conflict only if the parties depend on each other in some way – that is, if the actions of each party affect the well-being of the other" (p. 375). In a forensic program often times there will be conflict among team members because in order to meet individual goals they need to compete against each other while still working together to meet team goals. Team members may compete against each other for many reasons which include competing for national tournament qualification legs, team officer positions, and district awards.

Additionally, conflict can occur between teams because they are in constant competition for team awards. Because this competition exists on the team so does conflict, causing students to learn how to navigate conflict. A forensic program can help students learn conflict management skills. When a student wins from a different team or if a student wins from the same team students are coached to gracefully accept their award no matter what the placing. Jensen and Jensen also (2006) explained "Forensics is unique from the typical collegiate experience in its potential for honing competent conflict management because of both the extended amount of time spent as a group, and the argumentative nature of the activity itself" (p. 26). The potential to teach conflict management skills to students is huge and not only in the collegiate setting. These skills

can also be carried on into the professional setting. Forensic students are taught to communicate about their differences which closely relates to constructive controversy which is one way to manage conflict. Johnson, Johnson, and Tjosvold (2006) explained "Constructive controversy exists when one person's ideas, information, conclusions, theories, and opinions are incompatible with those of another, and the two seek to reach an agreement" (pp. 70-71). In addition, to engaged learning, forensics has also been explored in relation to family.

Family

Communication scholars have explored family and forensics in two different capacities. First, forensics has been explored as a family. Second, the communication forensic competitors and coaches have with their families has been explored. Hobbs, Hobbs, Veuleman, and Redding (2003) explored the metaphor of forensics as being a dysfunctional family. The authors argued that forensics is a dysfunctional family because the forensic family makes mistakes much like the traditional family. The researchers explored verbal abuse through the use of verbal attacks, unrelenting criticism, gaslighting, blocking and diverting, trivializing, and threatening as a way for members of the forensic community to exert control over others in the community. Verbal attacks are characterized as name-calling. Verbal attacks often start out as playful but escalate into demeaning the competitor. The authors explained:

> For example, at one tournament, a student risked taking a nontraditional approach to an impromptu speech. The reaction he received from the audience led him to believe that it went over well and his teammates would reward him for his innovation; however, the ballot did not reflect

> such rewards. Thus, laughter and joking – including some name-calling – started to ensue from his peers.. . At first the joking and name-calling was somewhat jovial, but after several hours of the "joking" about the speech, the jokes" became abusive and hurtful to the student. (p. 21)

Verbal attacks among family members much like with teammates in forensics are common. Unrelenting criticism occurs often when one person is trying to give another advice but it comes off as being mean. For example, duo partners may try to give advice to each other on how to do their performance but it is perceived by the other partner as criticism. This can lead to the coach becoming involved in order to stop the behavior. Much like a coach, a parent may get involved with two children fighting and constantly nag them about the fighting until they stop. Gaslighting occurs when someone tries to convince the other of making crazy decisions or being insane. The authors explain that coaches and debaters may engage in gaslighting if they think the judge has made an incorrect decision about the round. Blocking and diverting often occurs by coaches. Coaches many times will decide when ballots can be discussed or when is the appropriate time to discuss topics. Blocking and diverting is also common in a family unit. For example, parents may decide when it is appropriate to discuss certain topics or change the subject if they deem the time incorrect. Trivializing occurs when another team member tries to downplay something that another team member has done. The authors explain a more experienced teammate may attempt to downplay the contributions of new team members. Similarly, siblings in a family may try to get attention from parents by demanding they have done a better job than their brother or sister at a task. Finally, threatening occurs within the speech family as a way to exert control. Hobbs et al.,

explained threatening happens toward judges and by coaches toward their competitors. Often times threatening will be used as a way to discipline. Parents may also threaten their children as a way of discipline.

Second, forensics competitors' communication with their families has been explored (Hughes, Gring & Williams, 2006; Williams & Hughes, 2005). Hughes, Gring, and Williams (2006) discovered forensic activities affect the communication between students and their families. The researchers discovered that students involved in forensics reported their listening and speaking skills to be better when communicating with their parents. Additionally, Williams and Hughes (2005) discovered students perceived communication with their parents is more fulfilling when their parents are familiar with their involvement in forensics. William and Hughes also discovered ". . . socio-oriented families may foster more intercollegiate forensics competitors than concept-oriented families" (p.24). Concept-oriented families employ rules to establish relationships and socio-oriented families are more flexible in their communication patterns.

Additionally, coaches experience emotional labor carrying the load of leading a forensics team which can carry into their family life. Gilstrap and Gilstrap (2003) discovered that the emotional labor a coach tries to portray to a forensics team can overlap and influence into their family life. For example, the authors explained a situation where the coach tried really hard to motivate a student to do well in competition but despite his best efforts the student did not become more motivated resulting in frustration for the coach. This frustration then got translated into the coach's family life.

Student identity and family communication often are important in a student's satisfaction and college success. Activities such as forensics can benefit first-generation college students by helping provide them an identity and family support qualities. The following chapters explain my research design, results, and discussion of results.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In order to understand if a forensic program fulfills a family support function for first-generation college students I designed a study which used structured retrospective surveys. I am connected to this topic because I was a first-generation college student who competed with a forensic program for three years. The retrospective survey allows for participants to have time to privately reflect and process on their experience in their forensic program. This method allows me to gather data unobtrusively about the experiences of first-generation college students involved in forensic programs. In this chapter I will explain my procedures, justify why I chose my method, give an explanation of my coding procedures, and the demographic information I collected from my participants.

Procedures

Recruitment

I sent a call for participation to the Individual Events listserv (IE-L). I also posted the call for participation on my Facebook wall. Additionally, I asked those receiving the e-mail or post on my Facebook wall to forward the information on if they knew anyone who fit the criteria. All participants who went to the link for the survey were shown the informed consent form and had to give their consent in order to have access to the survey questions.

Nature of Survey

I used a structured retrospective survey was used to collect data. A structured retrospective survey is a sequence of questions which asks participants to reflect on part of their past. The survey consisted of nineteen open-ended questions. The survey consisted of questions which addressed: why participants joined forensics; interactions participants' had with teammates and coaches; the first-generation college student experience; family communication; communication challenges they had while in college; demographic information; and what forensics did for the participants as first-generation college students. I distributed the survey online via Qualtrics, a website for creating online surveys. The criteria for participants were that they were eighteen years of age, a first-generation college student, have obtained their bachelor's degree, and a former forensic competitor.

Justification

Retrospective Format

While asking participants to reflect on their past can be a disadvantage because their perceptions can be clouded, I believe the only way to collect the whole experience of being in a forensic program is buy reflecting on it retrospectively. I chose to do the survey in a retrospective format because I needed to gather data from former forensic competitors. Many first-generation college students do not realize they are first-generation college students while attending college. Additionally, my goal was to gather information about the family communication present in a first-generation college student's life. This would mean in order to gather data I needed the participant to reflect back on their college forensics experience. Because I wanted to gather data about

experiences, it was better to ask participants to reflect back on their time as a competitor because they would still have had more experiences versus the current competitor.

The retrospective survey also poses its own disadvantages because participants can filter their experiences when answering a question about the past or run the risk of not being able to remember their experience. Because I am a first-generation college student and I am closely related to the research topic, I come with my own set of assumptions. For example, my forensic program did fulfill a family support function for me, but that may not be the case for every first-generation college student. It is also important to acknowledge the subjective perception of my participants. My study is heavily weighted on self-report data because of the use of open-ended questions. Gravetter and Foranzo (2006) explained "Ultimately, the quality of a survey study depends on the accuracy and truthfulness of the participants" (p. 343). Because of this bias that is present, it is important for me to make sure the participants understand what I am asking on the survey. Gravetter and Foranzo further explained "It is certainly possible that at least come participants will distort or conceal information, or simply have no knowledge about the topic when they answer certain questions" (p. 343). In my call for participation and my informed consent form I diminished this risk because I explained what my study was about and the type of information I was seeking.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions are able to introduce a topic and allow for each participant to choose how they want to answer the question. The main advantage to using open-ended questions is being able to gather each individual experience. Open-ended questions also have disadvantages. First, because open-ended questions allow for participants to

answer any way they want to it could cause totally different perspectives to emerge making it difficult to summarize or compare. A second disadvantage to open-ended questions is that participants may be brief or unwilling to express all their thoughts (Gravetter and Forzano, 2006).

For my study I gathered descriptive data from the participants detailing their experiences about their forensic team and family. A closed-ended question approach for my study would be less beneficial than open-ended questions for two reasons. First, closed-ended questions would not allow participants to share their experiences and would generalize experiences rather than allow for the participant to share their whole story. Second, closed ended questions are restricted and my bias would be more present in my study because I would be creating the choices to be selected for the participants based on my own assumptions. Closed-ended questions do not allow for me to gather data to explore my research question.

Coding Procedures

Since I used open-ended questions, I used grounded theory coding techniques to make sense of my data. Grounded theory coding, also known as the constant comparative method, is used when a researcher wants to find themes within the data and ensure that the researchers' bias is diminished. Charmaz (2006) explained that grounded theory has two main phases which includes an initial stage where each line or word is named and then in the second phase the coding becomes more selective. Charmaz explained "Later, you use focused coding to pinpoint and develop the most salient categories in large batches of data" (p. 46). Coding was done in two phases. The first type of coding was the initial stage in which coding is done line by line and categorized

into initial themes and categories. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained "During open coding the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data" (p. 62). Axial, or focused, coding is the next step in the coding process. Axial coding is the process of linking categories or condensing categories from open coding. Furthermore, axial coding not only links categories, but also can clarify and extend emerging ideas (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz explained "you use focused coding to pinpoint and develop the most salient categories in large batches of data" (p. 46). Once theoretical saturation is present coding of the data is complete. Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe theoretical saturation is when new categories are no longer emerging or categories are stable.

Ensuring the accuracy of my coded data and emergent themes took two steps. First, as the researcher I familiarized myself with my topic. I did this by creating my literature review and studying other outside research about first-generation college students and forensic programs. Charmaz (2006) explained:

> Several strategies foster revealing such preconceptions. Achieving intimate familiarity with the *studied phenomenon* is a prerequisite. Such familiarity not only included in-depth knowledge of people who contend with the phenomenon, but also a level of understanding that pierces their experience. This level moves you beyond taking the same things for granted that your respondents assume. Initial coding can move you in this direction by inducing you to wrestle with your participants interpretive frames of reference, which may not be your own. (p. 68)

Additionally, Glaser (1978) suggested that any preconceived idea should earn its way into the analysis, thus I also acknowledge my bias as a researcher. Every researcher has their own preconceived ideas and knowledge about the topic they study. By acknowledging that I am a first-generation college student and a former forensic participant I am making it known of the biases I hold.

After describing how I used a retrospective structured survey to collect my data and providing my justification for using the method, in the next chapter I will report the results of my study. The results section will present the themes from coding the surveys and analyze if a forensic program can fulfill and family support function for a first-generation college student.

Demographic Information

Twenty one total participants completed the survey. Participants varied in the amount of time they had spent within the activity. The median participants indicated competing in collegiate forensics was four years. The range of involvement in collegiate forensics as a competitor was two to four years.

Many of the participants also indicated involvement in forensics prior to college and after college as a coach. Nine of the twenty-one participants indicated that they were involved in forensics in high school and two participants indicated participation in middle school. Additionally, seven participants indicated they are still involved in forensics through coaching. Coaching experience indicated from participants ranged from two to twenty-six years. Two of the participants reported being active in the activity through serving as a judge at various tournaments and helping competitors find literature and

review drafts. In totality, participants reported being active in forensics between 1975 and 2013.

Chapter Four

Analysis

This chapter describes the findings of the present study. I synthesize the information and stories my participants gave me and develop themes about their experiences as a first-generation college student in forensics. The data my participants provided proved to be rich and descriptive of their experiences. In this chapter I discuss major themes that emerged from coding the survey responses which shed light on three key areas: first-generation college student experience, the experience of being involved in forensics, and finally how forensics can serve family support functions.

The First-Generation College Student Experience

In the survey responses many participants discussed their experiences being a first-generation college student. Many participants described their struggles along with their triumphs in higher education. The experiences ranged from academics to communication. Themes that emerged were: challenges being a first-generation college student, a lack of understanding of the college experience at home, communication apprehension, trying to balance a social life and academics, and financial stability.

First, one of the themes that emerged from the surveys was that being a first-generation college student was challenging. Many participants expressed that being a first-generation college student was challenging. This theme is consistent with past research that has explored the challenges first-generation college students experience (Hart and Pacheco, 2011; Jehangir, 2010; Lowery-Hart & Pacheco, 2011; Orbe & Groscurth, 2004). One participant explained:

> It's definitely challenging being a first-generation college student because when you start off college as one, it brings you to an unfamiliar territory that make you feel separated from everyone else. It feels like no one understands the challenges you face and they don't see you as a first-generation student. You are held up to the same standards as ones who are not first-generation. Being first-generation added another layer of struggle when I didn't have the background, the knowledge, the skills, or the resources to set myself up to succeed.

Additionally, two participants indicated that it was challenging being a first-generation college student because it was lonely. One participant, when asked what it was like being a first-generation college student noted, "Lonely, as far as I know my friends were not first-generation, my best friend's Dad was a professor at the college we attended." Another participant expressed "I would say it was frustrating as I didn't have anyone to talk with about the experience and no one to answer my questions." Similarly, another participant described the phenomenon as "You feel a bit isolated, like everyone has a map and you're just trying to catch up."

Second, many participants indicated in their survey responses that being a first-generation college student meant there was a lack of understanding at home about their college experience. Participants indicated that their family was unsupportive of them going to college. This theme is consistent with previous research. My literature review explains in relation to identity that parents may be confused with the emerging college student identity of their child (Hottinger & Rose, 2006). One of the participants

described how he or she had parents that did not understand the amount of time that needed to be devoted to college:

> …it was hard to go home and have no one who understood my goals or what I was going through. I even felt at times I was discouraged from my goals because I felt my parents could not empathize or fully appreciate what a college student pursing two degrees while practicing, traveling, and competing over forty hours every weekend is like.

Similarly another participant described that their family did not understand why a college education was necessary when they could be working in a factory instead of attending college. The participant described "I also had to fend off my mother's family because they felt that I was going to school for no reason when I could just work in a factory."

Not every participant felt that their parents were unsupportive of them attending college. In fact some participants indicated that their parents fully supported them getting a college education, but did not have information for them when they had questions about college. One participant described "My family supported me, but I didn't feel like (at least initially) I had anyone who could help explain how things worked in college." Another participant described their experience as "I luckily had parents who wanted me to get an education because it was an opportunity they didn't take. And although they didn't always have the background or understanding of happenings the tried their best…" The mix of responses from participants proved that a lack of understanding from parents is common but the enthusiasm for their child to be the first in the family to go to college is positive.

Third, many participants indicated they experienced communication apprehension and lacked confidence during their college education. This is consistent with past research about adjusting to the college environment. Student with cultural capital are more likely to share their experiences where as a first-generation college student may not having any experiences to share because they are lacking the cultural capital (Housel, 2012). Three participants expressed having communication apprehension when having to participate in class and or when needing to talk to a professor. Most notably one participant described "Communication challenges that I have experienced in college include not being confident enough to participate in class discussions, not knowing how to communicate with my professors, and having to give frequent presentations." Other participants expressed that they were apprehensive about communicating because of language differences. A participant expressed "I spoke with improper grammar just like my family did, I never noticed until a friend pointed it out to me, I was so humiliated." Similarly another participant described their language being problematic "I was pugnacious in classes and often, I would say the wrong thing at the wrong time. People told me I had boundary and foot in mouth issues, where I would just say the wrong thing." This theme is particularly interesting because the participants chose to be in an activity which requires them to perform in front of other people, yet they report having communication apprehension in class discussions. This could stem from the fact that they feel like they cannot contribute because the college environment is difficult to navigate.

Finally, a theme that emerged related to participants having a first-generation status was having financial stability. Many of the participants described that money and

being financially stable through college was often a concern. Research has discovered first-generation college students are more likely to attend school part-time and work full-time in order to be more financially stable (Tym, McMillion, Barone, & Webster, 2004). Trying to balance a job and academics can be challenging. One participant gave a detailed account of how money affected them:

> Money was a never ending concern. My bank account was always in a dangerously low balance until I started living off of student loans. I always felt the burden of the debt I accumulated each year of attendance at my college. Having that much debt at 20 years old is terrifying! There were teammates who came from more affluent families who had parents with PHD's and even forensics competitive experience who never had to worry about paying student loans.

Comparable, another participant expressed money being an issue "I never had a college fund and had to pay for each semester with student loans. In contrast, whereas a few of my peers with parents with degrees had most of their tuition either paid for or mostly paid for." Participants not only discussed how paying for college was a challenge, but how they knew they came from a different social class than their peers. A participant reported "I did feel a class divide more intensely than a first year divide. I went to a very elite school, and it was clear I had the least amount of money of any of my peers."

Closely related to the issue of having financial stability is having enough time to have a job in order to make money. Eight participants cited time as a challenge they faced while in college. Many of the participants described trying to balance attending class, being involved in activities and working a job were difficult to balance. One participant

described their situation “There was always something that needed attention – school work, practice, family, work, friends, and peace and quiet.” Similarly another participant expressed “Balancing school, work, and the team (I had to work 40+ hours a week, which led me to quit the team two years in).”

The themes that emerged around the first-generation college student experience proved to illustrate the difficulties first-generation college students face. Frustrations along with loneliness were all expressed by my participants in relation to trying to navigate higher education, gain understanding at home, communication apprehension, and gaining financial stability. In addition, to my participants having a unique college experience they also reported having a unique forensic team experience. In the next section I discuss the forensic team experience of first-generation college students.

The Forensic Team Experience

The survey addressed questions about the participants experience being on a forensic team. The participants shared the difficulties of being a part of team and how the experience affected them as first-generation college students. The information the participants shared was descriptive of their accounts of being a part of the activity. Themes that emerged from the forensic team experience were: justifications for participation, the activity provided educational support, and the positive and negative aspects of teammates and coaches.

First, one theme that emerged from the survey was justifications for participation in the activity. Participants had many unique reasons related to participating in forensics as first-generation college students. Many of the justifications participants cited could be related to their status as a first-generation college student because research has discovered

first-generation college students are more likely to come from a working-class background (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011) and have less cultural capital (Collier & Morgan, 2008) than the general college student. Participants cited money/scholarships, the opportunity to perform, and the chance to meet people and develop relationships as reasons to be involved in forensics. Six participants cited money as the reason for participating in forensics, seven cited the opportunity to perform, and seven cited the chance to meet people and develop relationships. Many of the participants cited multiple reasons for participating in forensics. One participant described "I love to perform in front of an audience. I always enjoyed presenting to an audience (even at a young age). Also, I earned a forensics scholarship which really helped." Another participant cited a similar reason for joining "I enjoyed the mental challenge, and the scholarship is what enabled me to attend a top tier university."

Upon joining the team many participants reported that they experienced nervousness and uncertainty. As previously mentioned one theme that was apparent was communication apprehension among participants when wanting to contribute to class discussions. It is interesting to note that even in their safe space of the forensic team, participants were still nervous about joining. Many of the participants indicated that they received a scholarship to be on their college or university's speech team indicating that they had previous performance experience, so it was not a new experience to be a part of a speech team. One of the participants described what they felt upon joining the team:

> One of the happiest moments of my life was receiving the letter which informed me I had earned the forensics scholarship. I knew in that moment I could justify what seemed impossible. The ability to attend the

> expensive private college I had dreamed about for years. When I first met my teammates, I know I gave the worst impressions. I was nervous and came across as mildly unintelligent.

Similarly another participant explained "When joining the team, my initial reactions was fear and I was also really nervous about starting because I have never done it before."

Despite the nervousness and awkward impressions participants still decided to stay involved in the activity. Many participants described that they stayed with the activity because they had formed relationships with other team members and wanted to have competitive success. Most notably a participant explained:

> I also felt like I had finally found my "people." My Forensics peers were the first community where I was among individuals who shared similar values and goals as I did. I wanted a good education, to be part of an activity I respect, meet new friends, and be recognized as a strong forensics competitor. I also made it my goal to be a four year competitor. This is an achievement I am very proud of.

The majority of participants cited staying in the activity for the relationships they formed and for the competition. Out of the twenty-one participants, nine cited one of their goals in forensics was to win. Others cited learning, having fun, and not letting their team down as goals for forensics. One participant explained "I always wanted to be competitively successful on a national scale. I wanted to improve my public speaking skills and I really wanted approval and respect from peers, professors and coaches I admired."

Second, closely related to staying with the activity for the relationships and competitive success participants also indicated the activity provided educational support. For a first-generation college student having educational support from peers and mentors is important for educational success. Forensics was able to provide this for some participants. When participants were asked how forensics impacted their college experience many of them explained that the activity provided them educational support. One participant explained "My GPA went up once I joined forensics. There was a clear and direct correlation." Another participant explained "Forensics made me a better student overall. I had a lot more respect being involved with the team." In addition to educational support, participants also cited that forensics impacted their college experience by being their college experience and providing educational support simultaneously. Participants indicated that forensics was such a large part of their college experience that it was almost like that was all they did when they were at school. Most notably one participant described their experience:

> I do not know what my college experience would have been like since I placed a heavy emphasis on forensics. It's cliché however it felt like I ate, slept and breathed forensics. Every book was a potential prose piece. Every interesting news story or example from class, I'd record as a potential impromptu example. Most importantly it was the support system I truly needed. I know I may not have graduated if I hadn't competed.

The specific educational support participants cited was wide ranging in scope. Different educational aspects that were cited included public speaking skills, reading skills, academic awards, and the support to go on to graduate school.

Finally, participants described negative and positive experiences they had with teammates and coaches. Negative experiences are bound to happen in forensics because of the potential to have multiple personalities and competition with other teams and with teammates. Because of the close proximity and daily interaction forensics participants are certain to have competitive disagreements in regards to their goals. Additionally, team members are likely to form multiple friendships on the team which can sometimes be hard to manage. Negative experiences described by participants fell into two themes which included the pressure to do well and differences in personality. Participants described that they felt pressure to do well both from coaches and teammates. One participant explained an account of how the pressure to do well affected her as a first-generation college student:

> At first I had a lot of clashes because I didn't have money to buy the requirements to be in speech: makeup, jewelry, suit, etc. My head coach bought a lot of that out of her own pocket for me, and I didn't know it felt bad about it when I found out. The way I found out was very embarrassing. I took my (only) suit off, and threw it on the floor and didn't hang it up. I didn't iron it the next morning and my head coach noticed it. I told her I didn't think the wrinkles were a big deal and she said "Yes it is a big deal. I bought it." in front of the team at breakfast. I was horrified. . . I grew up poor and went to college on pell grants and need scholarships, and I didn't know how to take criticism very well during coaching. I was stubborn and just wanted things to be my way. I

never felt like I lived up to the expectations other people had of me on the team.

Differences in personality were another negative theme cited by participants. One participant cited specifically that the more coaches and team members on a team the more likely there will be personalities that do not always agree. The participant explained "the multiple personalities and disagreements would cause conflict between the coaches and between the students."

While many participants cited negative interactions with differences in personality and the pressure to do well from coaches and teammates they also cited many positive interactions. Positive experiences by participants fell into two categories which included developing friendships and having coaches who increased their awareness and pushed them to do their best. Forensics is a very time consuming activity which means many team members and coaches are forced to spend a great amount of time together. Participants described that friendships would form because "When you travel 22 weekends a year with the same people you experience so many highs and lows with them." Similarly, a participant described the support they felt from teammates "We would celebrate each other's victories, mourn each other's failings, and it was just an amazing support system." Additionally, many participants felt a positive interaction with coaches who increased their awareness and pushed them to do their best. One participant described how their coach taught them about a lot of stuff besides speech "He taught me a lot about stuff besides speech – what to order at restaurants, how to travel, that there was a big world accessible to me, just a small town kid." This quotation encompasses the theme of what many participants cited as coaches being able to increase their awareness

about the world around them. Many participants also cited that a positive interaction with a coach was when they pushed them to be better performers. One participant explained "They pushed me. I think they realized that I had more potential than I put forth those first two years. . . In my later years, they really helped me to own what I was doing, making me a better performer. . ."

Themes that emerged around the forensic team experience for first-generation college students illustrated justifications for being on the team, continued involvement after joining the team, and the positive and negative aspects of being a part of a team. Despite having uncomfortable moments on the team and having some negative experiences, participants described that the team became their family while they were attending college. In the next section I review how participants felt their forensic team served as a family.

Forensic Team as a Family

In the survey responses many participants discussed how their forensic team was like a family. They discussed how often they communicated with their own family as well as how their forensic team fulfilled family support functions while they were at college. Themes that emerged were: coaches were like parents, teammates were like siblings, and the team was like the participants' university family.

First, many participants cited in their survey responses that their coaches were like parents. The large amount of time coaches devote to the activity can translate into stronger relationships with their students. Often during college students may see their coaches more than their own family members. When preparing for national tournaments many hours a week may be devoted to coaching and then a four to seven day trip follows

attending the national tournament. One participant noted "The DoF was my parent when I accepted scholarships at dinners when my own family was unable to attend. . ." In many ways forensics educators are parents to their students not only by attending events family members might traditionally go to, but also the way they communicate with their students. Many participants discussed their coaches being like parents and described them as "they were like moms, I could come to them with problems, we could joke around." Similarly another participant expressed "I started to refer to the DoF and ADoF as my academic parents. I could rely on them whenever I had issues with school, personal, or speech." The more developed relationships participants were able to form with the coaches made it seem like they were not only academic figures but parents.

Second, participants reported that teammates were like siblings. The teammates were like siblings in the way they communicated and the way they treated each other. Participants described being able to joke around and receive encouragement from their teammates much like siblings would communicate to each other. One participant explained the communication they had with their teammate as "Gee we fought like brothers and sisters. I don't know if that is good or bad. I am probably looking back with rose colored glasses but there was nothing big and bad." Much like a traditional family unit teammates argued with each other, but then could forgive and take care of each other when it was needed. Another participant explained how their teammates treated each other:

> We took care of each other. I was closer to them than to my own brothers and sisters (my family had a noticeable age gap that generated some interpersonal distance). I am still in contact with my teammates. They

> still love me and accept me for who/what I am. Most of them even appreciate my idiosyncrasies.

Other participants expressed that they did not necessarily see their teammates as siblings but instead close friends. One participant described how teammates begged he or she to return to the team after studying abroad which made he or she "realize that those are the kind of friends I want. They were loyal and caring and they gave a crap about you. It made me want to be better." Regardless of whether participants referred to their teammates as brothers and sisters or close friends it was apparent that the people on the team impacted their life in positive ways.

Finally, another theme first-generation college students discussed was how the forensic team became their university family. With coaches being like parents and teammates being like siblings it made for a family unit that could be trusted. While many participants described the positive aspects of a forensic family some difficulties do exist. Much like families go through interpersonal difficulties so do forensic teams. Many participants described their team as a family but one participant's description stands out the most:

> The people I developed strong relationships with were more like brothers and sisters, my coach a father. When I couldn't access my own family they were there and they were there to help me through any situation. I needed someone to support an organization, there they were to eat the candy and praise it. I needed someone to vent to about the crazy speech professor, they were there when I needed to vent. When I needed to cry they brought the Kleenex and when I made a huge accomplishment they

were my loudest cheerleaders-often with the warm up chants we did weekly. In many ways they were more family than my own family was.

Other participants also described their forensic team as a family because of their intimate communication and the amount of time they spent together.

Participants shared what it was like to have a forensic team be like a university family. Participants proved that a forensic team can fulfill family support functions for first-generation college students. These functions benefit first-generation college students by offering them support and encouragement through their college experience.

Overall, participants gave detailed information about their experiences being a first-generation college student, what it was like to be on a forensic team, and how the forensic team was like a family. From each of these sections multiple themes emerged in order to make sense of the stories and experiences they shared. In the next chapter I discuss the implications of a first-generation college students in forensics as well directions for future research.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Using qualitative retrospective surveys worked well to answer my research question about whether a forensic program can serve a family support function for first-generation college student. The results of this study indicate that first-generation college students view forensics as a valuable experience. The research question was answered with an affirmative yes that a forensic program can serve a family function for first-generation college students. In this chapter I draw conclusions from the analysis of my data, discuss limitations of the study, and propose future areas of research.

First-Generation College Students in Higher Education

Many of my participants shared their experiences of being a first-generation college student not just in forensics but in the general college setting. This study did not uncover any new information about first-generation college students in the higher education setting but did expand on the qualitative experiences first-generation college students report.

In this study participants indicated that being a first-generation college student came with many challenges which included a lack of understanding at home about the college experience, communication apprehension in the college environment, difficulty balancing social life and academics, and financial issues. Each of these findings is apparent in previous research.

Being the first in one's family to go to college can be cause for a stressful transition without the proper support. It is important for higher education institutions to

consider how their campus addresses students from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Oldfield (2007) suggested four ways in which colleges and universities can reform in order to meet the first-generation college students' needs while still promoting learning for all students. The first reform is to develop a support system for working-class and first-generation college students. Oldfield explained:

> Most colleges and universities have specialty student organizations or research centers to address the needs of particular groups (for example, women, students of color, GLBTQ students). Institutions should establish comparable facilities to meet the unique needs of poor and working-class individuals. These centers should help students acquire important cultural capital by showing them how to obtain financial assistance, how to locate and use campus resources, how to minimize costs, and how to secure reasonable housing. (pp. 8-9)

The second reform Oldfield suggested is to address classism by encouraging faculty to incorporate social class issues into the courses. By doing this not only are students able to consider other perspectives, but faculty members are also able to learn from incorporating the information into their classes. The third reform and fourth reform are paired together which are to diversify the social-class origins of faculty and students respectively. Faculty members and students from poor and working-class backgrounds should be encouraged to apply. By diversifying the backgrounds of faculty and students it can make for a more welcoming environment thus improving learning.

Not only should higher education reform in order to accommodate first generation college students, but more research should be done on the status of first-generation

college students. Higher education can be benefited in many ways by researching first-generation college students. The research can benefit instructors and the traditional student. Because first-generation college students are varied in terms of background, the more research that is done, the better it is for higher education because it can help create a welcoming environment for all students regardless of their background.

Understanding of the Forensic Team Experience

My participants shared information about their positive and negative interactions with teammates and coaches. Many of the participants indicated that while they had negative interactions for the most part their experience being on the team was positive. In addition to sharing information about their interactions with teammates and coaches, participants also discussed why they stayed involved in forensics and how the activity benefited them. This study was able to provide new information about the experiences of first-generation college students involved in a forensics.

The negative interactions participants shared were the pressure to do well and dealing with multiple personalities on the team. Traditionally, forensic competitors wear suits and women often times will wear high heels and jewelry. If competitors want to be taken seriously they need to wear nice suits that are expensive and women should also be wearing high heels and jewelry. The costs of these items can add up quickly. Many first-generation college students come from a low-income background (Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011). For a first-generation college student who comes from a poor or working class background being able to afford the attire to compete can be difficult. This can cause negative interaction in the team environment because of the pressure to do well. More research is needed in this specific realm of forensics. In order to help first-

generation college students, forensic programs should help students locate affordable attire. One way to do this would to have students buy suits together to save money or develop a program in which students pass their attire on to students as they graduate and leave the program. For example, the coach who bought a suit for the student was only trying to do something nice, but made the student feel bad because she could not afford to buy her own attire. It is situations like these that could be avoided by adopting programs which help low-income students to be able to get the basic items for forensics.

Participants also discussed positive interactions with teammates and coaches. Positive interactions included being pushed by their coach to do their best and developing friendships with teammates. Research has shown that first-generation college students who have more interaction with faculty members have an easier time transitioning into the college environment (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007). Forensics offers students the opportunity to interact with coaches and directors on a regular basis. White (2005) explained that there are many coaching opportunities available in order to mentor students. One thing forensic program administrators can do is make sure all students feel like they have some level of a relationship with a coach that they can share their academic, social, and personal experiences with related to school. Additionally, in order to increase intra-squad mentorship new students who join the team could be paired with a third or fourth year competitor as a way to build a mentoring relationship and friendship. Through this relationship the third or fourth year competitor would be able to share information about forensics and academics. The mentoring student could be an easy resource for a first-generation college student to seek out. This could improve team unity between the upper-class and first-year students. As a new competitor, and someone who

competed on a small team, I did not have the opportunity to seek out a third or fourth year competitor to help me. This type of program would not just benefit first-generation college students on the team, but all new competitors.

Finally, participants also discussed why they stayed involved in forensics and how forensics was beneficial to them. Participants cited money/scholarships, the opportunity to perform, and the chance to meet people and develop relationships as reasons to stay involved in forensics. Because first-generation college students often come from disadvantaged backgrounds, receiving a scholarship which would give them access to a higher education is very impactful. Without the support of scholarships and need based loans many first-generation college students would not be able to attend school. Forensics as an activity benefits first-generation college students immensely in this way. It is important for forensic programs to seek out talented individuals and make sure they are aware of financial aid opportunities whether it is through their college or university's forensic program or financial aid office. Additionally, participants in the study cited being able to develop relationships as a reason for staying involved in forensics. As previously mentioned, forensics involvement can benefit first-generation college students through mentorship and the chance to network with other students.

The University Family

My participants shared information which indicated the forensic team was their university family while they were at school. Participants indicated that their coaches were like parents and their teammates like siblings. This study provided a great amount of information about a forensic program fulfilling a family support function for first-generation college students.

Previous research has confirmed that first-generation college students have a difficult time communicating to their parents (Orbe & Groscurth, 2004). Many times the student will not communicate because they feel like they are different than the rest of their family or that their family is not able to understand their college experience. In this study, participants reported similar results. Many participants indicated they would communicate with their family but often times school was not up for discussion. This concept has interesting implications related to the observations that participants also indicated that their forensic team was like a forensic family and they could talk to them about anything. Participants reported that the team was an academic and social support. This could mean that instead of getting the academic, social, and emotional support from their family, participants were able to get the support they needed through their team. As a first-generation college student I engaged in this type of activity. Often during my first two years of competition I only communicated with my family a couple times a month. While my needs were being met through the team, the relationship with my family was suffering. Looking back on this experience I can connect how the team enabled me to avoid having to communicate with my family in order to get my questions answered. It was easier for me to use the team in the short-term to meet my needs but may have been more harmful in the long term. This connection has strong implications for any minority or at-risk students who have difficulty communicating with their families.

Limitations

With an understanding of the conclusions of this project, I will now describe the limitations present. Four limitations are associated with this project. First, the number of participants who completed the survey is a limitation to this study. Although the goal of

my study was not to generalize to the greater population, the sample does lack diversity. Because I used the Individual Events List Serv (IE-L) and my Facebook wall as a way to recruit participants it is unlikely I would be able to reach all alumni of forensic programs who are first-generation college students through those means. There may be many participants who met my criteria but simply did not know about the study because they are not on the IE-L or they are not linked to my Facebook network. By only having these two methods as a way to reach participants it is possible I was not able to get the greatest breadth of responses. Additionally, participants chose to do the survey on their own which means they are probably are still active in the forensic community or have some type of vested interest. The survey itself did not ask participants to report their age, sex, or ethnicity in order to have full confidentiality. The only demographic type of question asked was how long the participant participated in forensics and what years they participated. This leads to a limitation of the study because it may not fully capture the scope of first-generation college students in forensics.

Second, because of my personal connection with the topic of this study it is impossible for me to guarantee that my biases are not present or have misrepresented the data provided by the participants in the coding process. The subjective nature of this study requires that I acknowledge how I am connected to the topic. As a first-generation college student many of the experiences described by the participants were similar to my own. Because the survey was open-ended, the qualitative nature of the method makes it subjective. The subjective nature of the interpretation of the reporting of the data should be taken into account.

Third, because participants are aware that their full quotations can be cited in the study social desirability may have played a role. Some of the participants even though they cannot be identified may have filled out the survey in a way that made them look more desirable to the forensic population.

Fourth, many times researchers will use interviews to gather retrospective information. While interviews are a good choice for many types of research it is not the best choice for my research. Using face-to-face interviews for my study was not a viable option for three reasons. First, because interviews are so in depth they often create a large amount of data that needs to be analyzed. Second, interviews can be hard to navigate (Keyton, 2011). It is easy for unstructured interview to get off track or the researcher can cut off the conversation to quickly not allowing for the interviewee to fully explain themselves. This can become uncomfortable for the researcher because they need to redirect the conversation back to the interview. A third disadvantage to using unstructured face-to-face interviews is having participants decide they want to be a part of the study, but then are hesitant to talk. Additionally, being able to do face-to-face interviews with a great number of participants would be difficult because of the regional constraints and the ability to find former first-generation college students that were a part of a forensic program. I would be forced to only gather information from local tournament participants. Because the forensic community is spread out across the nation, a survey is ideal for collecting data.

This study was not flawless, but was able to uncover some significant results about first-generation college students in forensics. The findings of this study along with

the implications create some interesting directions for future research on forensics and the experiences of first-generation college students.

Future Research

Based on the implications and limitations of this study, I propose two different areas of future research to be explored. First, research should focus on exploring the impact of extracurricular activities in terms of fulfilling a family support function for first-generation college students. Previous research has focused on how activities can help first-generation college students succeed academically and feel more connected on campus (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; McKay & Estrella, 2008), but does not address how or if the activities can help fulfill a family support function. This type of research would benefit first-generation college students as well as the general student population. Many first-year students may feel homesick or disconnected from their family once going to college so regardless of their status figuring out how organizations can fulfill a family support function would make it more welcoming for all students.

Second, because of the number of responses from my participants that addressed financial stability and having the appropriate resources to compete in forensics, future research should focus on exploring the role of social class in forensics. Studies should focus on how competitive success in forensics and disadvantaged backgrounds are related. Additionally, future research should focus on how forensic attire impacts competitive success in forensics. Since forensic attire is often costly it could be difficult for students with disadvantaged backgrounds to obtain the appropriate attire which can include suits, jewelry, make-up, handbags, and briefcases. It is interesting to note that while forensics competitors who are first-generation college students who may find their

home in the forensic community may not be able to support their involvement in forensics because of their socio-economic background. Because competitors with nice suits are rewarded with competitive success it perpetuates the class divide. Many students who may not be able to afford nice suits may feel discouraged and quit the activity because they are getting low ranks because of their attire. This is really unsettling because forensics is an academic activity in which students not only engage in competition but also learning. By having this class divide it discourages competitors with a low socio-economic background from reaping the benefit of education from the activity. As a competitor I was only able to afford one suit until my last year of competition. From time to time I would receive comments on ballots that suggested I should mix up my wardrobe. Forensics coaches, educators, and judges should be more aware of socio-economic backgrounds of competitors. This research would benefit the forensics community by giving more information about the experiences of competitors from different socio-economic backgrounds.

As a first-generation college student, I believe it is important to help other first-generation college students navigate the foreign space of higher education. It is important for forensic coaches, administrators, and funding committees to realize that forensic programs can be greatly beneficial to first-generation college students.

When I was first introduced to studying first-generation college students, I was not aware that I too was a first-generation college student. In the beginning I was actually a little shocked to learn that first-generation college students were considered at-risk. Through my undergraduate experience I never thought I was different from other students. Through this project and through teaching I have learned that I was different

and that I am still different from other students. I would not have been as academically successful and satisfied with my education without my involvement in forensics.

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Appendix A

IRB Proposal Approval

February 15, 2013

Dear Leah White:

Re: IRB Proposal entitled "[418962-3] Family and First-Generation College Students"
Review Level: Level *[II]*

Your IRB Proposal has been approved as of February 15, 2013. On behalf of the Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB, I wish you success with your study. Remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study. Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcome, you are required to report them to the IRB as soon as possible.

The approval of your study is for one calendar year less a day from the approval date. When you complete your data collection or should you discontinue your study, you must notify the IRB. Please include your log number with any correspondence with the IRB.

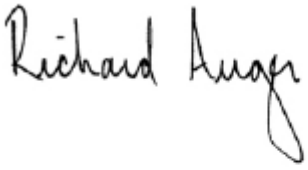
This approval is considered final when the full IRB approves the monthly decisions and active log. The IRB reserves the right to review each study as part of its continuing review process. Continuing reviews are usually scheduled. However, under some conditions the IRB may choose not to announce a continuing review. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at irb@mnsu.edu or 507-389-5102.

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for maintaining consents in a secure location at MSU for 3 years. If the PI leaves MSU before the end of the 3-year timeline, he/she is responsible for following "Consent Form Maintenance" procedures posted online.

Cordially,

Mary Hadley, Ph.D.
IRB Coordinator

Sarah Sifers, Ph.D.
IRB Co-Chair



Richard Auger, Ph.D.
IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB's records.

Appendix B

Call For Participants

Hi,

My name is Elizabeth Stoltz. I am a Master of Fine Arts student in the Communication Studies program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. You participation is requested for research as a part of my Master's thesis. I am interested in studying first-generation college students who were involved in forensics. The purpose of my study is to explore the purpose of a forensic program for first-generation college students who are over 18 and have completed their undergraduate degree. A first-generation college student is somebody whose parents have not completed a college education. I am seeking participants to complete an open-ended nineteen question survey that will take them approximately 45-60 minutes.

Your participation in the study is totally voluntary and you have the right stop the study or to refuse to answer any question(s) at anytime on the survey without penalty. Discontinuing the study will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato. All information collected will be kept anonymous and confidential.

Additionally, if you are not interested in participating or do not meet the criteria, but know someone who is, I would appreciate it if you would forward this call on. If you are interested please click the link below to proceed.

If you have any questions about the research you may contact Elizabeth Stoltz by calling 507-456-9459 or emailing elizabeth.stoltz@mnsu.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Leah White by calling 507-389-5534 or emailing leah.white@mnsu.edu at any time https://qtrial.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9LcCamThIvfsUPr (this link will activated upon IRB approval)

Thank you,

Elizabeth Stoltz
Graduate Teaching Assistant
Department of Communication Studies
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Appendix C

Consent Form

You are invited to take part in research about first-generation college students in forensics. You are a potential participant because you are a first-generation college student that has already completed a bachelor's degree, is over 18 and competed in forensics. The principal investigator, Dr. Leah White, and the sub-principal investigator, Elizabeth Stoltz, are conducting the research. We ask that you read this before agreeing to be in the research. If you have any questions about the research you may contact Elizabeth Stoltz by calling 507-456-9459 or emailing elizabeth.stoltz@mnsu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Leah White by calling 507-389-5534 or emailing leah.white@mnsu.edu at any time.

The purpose of this research is to gather information about first-generation college students in forensics. You will be asked about your first-generation college student status, about why you joined forensics, interactions you had with teammates and coaches, family communication, communication challenges you had while in college, and what forensics did for you as a first-generation college student. The survey will be nineteen open-ended questions and take approximately thirty to sixty minutes to complete.

Participation is voluntary. You have the option not to respond to any of the questions. You may stop taking the survey at any time by closing your web browser. Participation or nonparticipation will not impact your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato. If you have questions about the treatment of human participants and Minnesota State University, Mankato, contact the IRB Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 507-389-2321 or barry.ries@mnsu.edu.

Responses will be anonymous. However, whenever one works with online technology there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Information and Technology Services Help Desk (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

The risks of participating are minimal and no more than are experienced in daily life. There is no direct benefits to the participants for participating in this study. This project can help inform the forensic community and administrators about the specific roles the activity plays for first-generation college students.

Submitting the completed survey will indicate your informed consent to participate and indicate your assurance that you are at least 18 years of age. Additionally, submitting a completed survey will indicate your consent for the researcher to use your direct quotations and data about being a first-generation college student.

Please print a copy of this page for your future reference.

Appendix D

Survey

Item #1

You are invited to take part in research about first-generation college students in forensics. You are a potential participant because you are a first-generation college student that has already completed a bachelor's degree, is over 18 and competed in forensics. The principal investigator, Dr. Leah White, and the sub-principal investigator, Elizabeth Stoltz, are conducting the research. We ask that you read this before agreeing to be in the research. If you have any questions about the research you may contact Elizabeth Stoltz by calling 507-456-9459 or emailing elizabeth.stoltz@mnsu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Leah White by calling 507-389-5534 or emailing leah.white@mnsu.edu at any time.

The purpose of this research is to gather information about first-generation college students in forensics. You will be asked about your first-generation college student status, about why you joined forensics, interactions you had with teammates and coaches, family communication, communication challenges you had while in college, and what forensics did for you as a first-generation college student. The survey will be nineteen open-ended questions and take approximately thirty to sixty minutes to complete.

Participation is voluntary. You have the option not to respond to any of the questions. You may stop taking the survey at any time by closing your web browser. Participation or nonparticipation will not impact your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato. If you have questions about the treatment of human participants and Minnesota State University, Mankato, contact the IRB Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 507-389-2321 or barry.ries@mnsu.edu.

Responses will be anonymous. However, whenever one works with online technology there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Information and Technology Services Help Desk (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

The risks of participating are minimal and no more than are experienced in daily life. There is no direct benefits to the participants for participating in this study. This project can help inform the forensic community and administrators about the specific roles the activity plays for first-generation college students.

Submitting the completed survey will indicate your informed consent to participate and indicate your assurance that you are at least 18 years of age. Additionally, submitting a

completed survey will indicate your consent for the researcher to use your direct quotations and data about being a first-generation college student.
Please print a copy of this page for your future reference.

A)I accept

B)I do not accept

Please answer each of the following questions to the best of your ability.

Item #2

How long did you participate in forensics? What years did you participate in forensics?

Item #3

What were your reasons for participating in forensics in college?

Item #4

What kept you involved in forensics?

Item #5

Describe your initial feelings/reactions when joining the team.

Item #6

How did forensics impact your college experience?

Item #7

Describe positive interactions you had with coaches.

Item #8

Describe negative interactions you had with coaches.

Item #9

Describe positive interactions you had with teammates.

Item #10

Describe negative interactions you had with teammates.

Item #11

What were some of the challenges you faced while in college?

Item #12

What types of communication challenges did you experience while in college?

Item #13

How often did you communicate with your family? What kinds of topics did you discuss?

Item #14

What was it like being a first-generation college student?

Item #15

What were your goals in forensics?

Item #16

What did forensics do for you as a first-generation college student?

Item #17

Describe how/if the forensic program fulfilled a family support function for you.

Item #18

Do you think being a first-generation college student made your educational experience easier or more challenging?

Item #19

Looking back how do you characterize your college experience?

Item #20

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?