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The Experiences of First-Generation Women from South-Central Appalachia Who Have
Obtained their Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership And Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Teressa Dobbs

May 2016

Dr. Catherine Glascock, Chair

Dr. Hal Knight

Dr. Jasmine Renner

Dr. Janna Scarborough

Keywords: First generation, Women, Doctorate degree, Educational leadership, Appalachia

ABSTRACT

The Experiences of First-Generation Women from South-Central Appalachia Who Have

Obtained their Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership

by

Teressa Dobbs

This study was designed to investigate the experiences of first-generation women from South-Central Appalachia who completed a doctorate degree in educational leadership (EdD).

Research indicates that nearly one third of doctoral recipients reported being first-generation, and the majority of these students concentrated in certain academic areas such as education.

Furthermore, the literature suggests that there is a strong correlation between educational achievement levels and family background as well as cultural and geographic factors. While the amount of literature on minority groups has increased over the past 20 years, literature on the people and culture of Appalachia is limited. When first-generation status is paired with the challenges faced by females from Appalachia, such students could face particular issues that may impede their success.

A qualitative, grounded theory approach was used for data collection and analysis. Ten face-to-face intensive interviews with women who met the criteria for this study were conducted. The purpose of these interviews was to enter into these women's perspective, find out what was in and on their minds, and hear their stories.

From the raw data 15 themes emerged which were 1) Support, 2) Parental Support), 3) Precollege Support, 4) Support from Precollege Orientation Experiences, 5) Support from Mentors, 6) Support from Cohorts, 7) Socioeconomic Status, 8) Intrinsic Motivation, 9) Transformation, 10) Self-Efficacy, 11) Persistence, 12) On Being Appalachian, 13) Kinship, 14) Dialect, and 15) Bicultural Identity.

This research was significant because it was the first that looked specifically at the lived experiences of first-generation women from South-Central Appalachia who completed a doctorate of education EdD focusing on educational leadership and will contribute to the small body of research regarding first-generation, doctoral students.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this transcript to my granddaughters, Jolee Ann and Noel, and to any future grandchildren. If you chose to go to college and graduate, you will be the third generation in our family with a college degree. Do not ever think you cannot accomplish your goals and fulfill your dreams. Remember, it may take hard work and you may spend long hours doing one thing when you would much rather be doing something else, but it will be worth it in the end.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
DEDICATION.....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	11
Background.....	12
Statement of Problem.....	13
Research Questions.....	13
Significance of Study.....	14
Definition of Key Terms.....	15
Delimitations and Limitations.....	16
Statement of Researcher Prospective.....	17
Chapter Summary	19
Overview of the Study	19
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	21
Introduction.....	10
Defining First-Generation.....	22
First-Generation College Students.....	22
Demographics of First Generation Students	23
Income Level	24
Social-Class.....	25
Social and Cultural Capital	26

Graduation and Retention Rates	26
Degree Aspirations.....	27
Transition from High School to College.....	28
Persistence, Degree Aspirations, and Employment Outcomes.....	29
First-Generation Students in Appalachia	31
Demographics and Culture of Appalachia	32
Physical Location.....	33
Environs of Appalachia.....	33
The People of Appalachia.....	35
The Dialect of Appalachian People	36
The Culture of the Appalachian People	36
The Doctorate Degree	38
Retention, Persistence, and Attrition in Doctorate Degree Programs.....	39
Doctorate Degree in Education.....	40
Educational Leadership.....	41
Specific Educational Leadership Programs	43
Women in Higher Education	44
Female Doctoral Graduates.....	45
First-Generation Doctoral Students	46
Persistence and Attrition among First-Generation Doctoral Students	47
Family Support and Relationship.....	49
Grounded Theory	50
Difference with Other Theoretical Approaches	51

Chapter Summary	53
3. METHODOLOGY	54
Introduction.....	54
Research Questions.....	55
Sampling	54
Data Collection	55
Intensive Interviews	55
The Semistructured Interview.....	58
Field Notes	59
Ethical Considerations	58
Autonomy	58
Beneficence.....	59
Justice.....	60
Ethical Protocol.....	60
Data Analysis.....	60
Coding Data	61
Quality and Credibility	63
Chapter Summary	65
4. DATA ANALYSIS.....	66
Introduction.....	66
Participant Profiles.....	67
The Interviews	70
Question 1	70

Question 2	78
Question 3	86
Question 4	97
Question 5	105
Question 6	109
Question 7	113
Question 8	124
Question 9	131
Question 10	135
Question 11	139
Question 12	147
Summary	156
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	157
Summary	158
Statement of Problem.....	158
Summary of Results.....	159
Research Question 11	159
Support.....	160
Parental Support.....	160
Precollege Support	161
Support from Precollege Orientation Experiences	162
Support from Mentors.....	163
Support from Cohorts	163

Socioeconomic Status	164
Research Question 2	167
Intrinsic Motivation	167
Transformation.....	168
Self-Efficacy	168
Persistence.....	169
Research Question 3	170
Disconnects Between Cultures	170
On Being Appalachian.....	170
Kinship.....	171
Dialect.....	171
Bicultural Identity.....	172
On Being First-Generation.....	173
Implications for Practice.....	174
Recommendations for Future Research.....	176
Conclusion	177
REFERECNCES.....	178
APPENDICES	195
Appendix A Interview Questions	195
Appendix B Request for Interview Email.....	197
Appendix C Informed Consent	198
VITA.....	200

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the nation embraces a more technologically complex world (Di Pierro, 2007) doctoral programs are at the heart of the nation's system of innovation. These programs produce highly educated scholars and researchers who lead the way to innovations thereby creating new careers and economic strength for the nation (National Science Foundation, 2014). Between 40% and 50% of doctoral students either dropout or stop out of graduate school before graduation (Gardner & Holley, 2012; Guraraj, Heilig, & Somers, 2010). Given this, a concern has been conveyed over the retention rates of doctoral students (Seay, Lifton, Wuensch, Bradshaw & McDowelle, 2008) as well as a lack of diversity in doctoral programs (National Science Foundation 2014).

One understudied characteristic associated with doctoral student population is students who are the first in their family to graduate college or first-generation students (Holley & Gardner, 2012). Although the term "first-generation" has commonly been applied to first-generation undergraduate students, a significant number of doctoral students recognize themselves as first-generation. In fact, roughly one third of doctoral students identified as first-generation, and the majority of these students are female (Gardner & Holley, 2011). While graduate school is challenging for all students, it is especially challenging for first-generation students (Nettles & Millett, 2006). The likelihood of first-generation students obtaining a graduate degree is significantly less than those whose parents had a college education, and they are more likely to leave graduate study programs without a degree (Seay et al., 2008).

Background

Lohfink and Paulson (2005) found that although first-generation females enter higher education in greater numbers, gender-based inequalities continue to exist and females were less likely to persist than their male counterparts. Furthermore, first-generation students are more likely to concentrate in particular disciplines and professional fields such as education (Gardner, 2013). In fact, women comprised 68% of students and graduates in educational degree programs (Gonzales, Allum, & Sowell, 2013).

As undergraduates, first-generation students tend to be low-income, older, females, have a disability, come from a minority background, have dependent children, and are financially independent from their parents. First-generation students are less likely to ever plan to attend, enroll, or graduate from graduate school (Gardner, 2013). First-generation students were said to “live on the margins” (p. 4) meaning that they have difficulty breaking away from the past and are not fully accepted into the new culture. Often these students were found to have difficulty breaking away from their parents and exhibit a relationship of dependency. Examples of these struggles can be found in all socioeconomic classes but are typically found in low socioeconomic groups.

Many of the same challenges found in first-generation students may also be found in individuals who live in the Appalachian region of the United States, particularly because of the economic development and the low rate of individuals who attend college (Hand & Payne, 2008). Less than one fifth of adults are graduates of a 4-year college or university (Pollard & Jacobson, 2012), and few adults in Appalachia have parents who attended college (Ali & Saunders, 2006). Gammell (2006) found that Appalachian students function within a bicultural atmosphere much like that of Hispanic and other minority-status students.

This study is focused on the stories of women from the subregion of South-Central Central Appalachia who were the first in their family to complete college and persisted on to complete a doctoral degree concentrating in educational leadership.

Statement of Problem

While studies exist that have recognized the challenges faced by first-generation college students (Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007, 2008; Lohfink, 2005; Longwell & Longwell, 2007; Mehta, Newbold & O'Rorke, 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004; Seay, Lifton et al., 2008), little empirical research is available regarding first-generation students at the doctoral level (Gardner & Holley, 2011). There is also limited research focusing on the persistence of first-generation female doctoral students (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Lohfink & Paulson, 2005). In addition research is limited that focuses on women in specific programs and departments such as educational leadership (Cumings Mansfield, Welton, Lee, & Young, 2010). A review of the literature centering on the lived stories of first-generation Appalachian females who have persisted on to receive a terminal degree is absent. Because of the exceptional lack of research in this area, there is a significant need for further exploration to help fill in the gap regarding the persistence of first-generation Appalachian women who have obtained their doctorate degree in educational leadership. I have chosen this problem as the focus of my research.

Research Questions

To understand their educational, sociocultural, and professional experiences, I interviewed 10 first-generation women from the area of South-Central Appalachia who have completed a doctoral program in educational leadership. The questions that guided this qualitative study were taken from research conducted by Jackson and Mazzei (2012).

1. What is the importance given to life events and/or individuals in the participants' decisions to pursue first undergraduate, then graduate study?
2. What have they learned as a result of forging new territory without familial/social role models?
3. How do they understand/articulate multiple identities? (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 10)

Significance of Study

Nearly one third of all doctoral recipients reported being first-generation, and the majority of these students are concentrated in certain academic areas such as education (Gardner, 2013). Less than one fifth of adults from Appalachia are graduates of a 4-year college or university (Boyd, 2007). Hand and Payne (2008) found that there is a direct link between the educational achievement levels and familial factors as well as cultural and geographic considerations. Tang and Russ (2007) found that while there has been an increasing amount of literature on minority groups in the past 2 decades, literature on the people of Appalachian culture is more limited, and the people of Appalachia have become an invisible minority because they do not appear outwardly different from mainstream Americans. When first-generation status is coupled with the challenges faced by females from Appalachia, such students may face particular issues that could impede their retention and success.

There appears to be an absence in the literature studying the perceptions of first-generation women from the South-Central region of Appalachia who have obtained a terminal degree in educational leadership. The findings from this study are significant because they address the knowledge gap about first-generation Appalachian women's experiences in doctoral educational leadership where women are the majority in both enrollments and degree recipients. In addition this research has theoretical, practical, and research implications for students, faculty,

and administrators who wish to pursue an understanding of how first-generation status and cultural background influence the doctoral studies of first-generation women. An awareness regarding subpopulations of students such as this may also lead to considerations regarding programming and services needed to make the completion of degree programs more attainable for all graduate students (Seay et al., 2008).

Definition of Key Terms

Appalachia: A 205,000-square mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from South-Central New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015).

Appalachians: People born in the geographic area along the spine of the Appalachian Mountains, which include the Great Smoky Mountains and the Cumberland Mountains (Tang & Russ, 2007).

Attrition: The student act of not re-enrolling in an institution of higher education in a consecutive semester (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Doctoral persistence: The continuance of a student's progress toward the completion of a doctoral degree (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

First-Generation: The definition adopted by the United State Department of Education federal TRIO program stating that students are considered first-generation if neither parent graduated from a 4-year college or university (United States Department of Education, 2015).

Resilience: The maintenance of competent functioning despite an interfering emotionality (Newman & Blackburn, 2002)

South-Central Appalachia: This study includes participants from East Tennessee, Southwest Virginia, and Western North Carolina, all of which can be generally defined as South-Central Appalachia.

Delimitations and Limitations

In order to understand how first-generation females from the South-Central area of Appalachia perceive and process their experiences, a qualitative approach was employed. In-depth interviews were used to collect the participants' stories and lived experiences. This approach allowed these women to tell their stories from their own point of view. Qualitative research permits a holistic and flexible approach to study phenomenon in a real-world setting. In addition it allows for an in-depth, rich exploration into the perceptions and understandings of individuals involved in certain circumstances, events, or happenstances (Snap & Spencer, 2003). Because it is necessary to relate the participants' stories to the real world in which they live, grounded theory allowed me to elaborate on existent theories and models that are relevant to first-generation student females pursuing the doctorate degree and theories regarding the uniqueness of Appalachian students.

In order to prevent from presenting a skewed representation, I was cognizant of my own biases and idiosyncrasies based upon my status as a first-generation female from the subregion of South-Central Appalachia who is currently in a doctoral program of study focused on educational leadership. This study was limited to first-generation women in the South-Central area of Appalachia who have completed their doctorate degree in leadership. The results cannot necessarily be generalized to other programs of doctoral study or doctoral graduates outside of the subregion of Appalachia. Because some of the participants in this study were coworkers, peers, and administrators where I work, the credibility of this sample might be judged more

critically. Additionally, the findings of this study will not be able to be generalized due to the relatively small sample of participants.

Statement of Researcher Prospective

I am a first-generation graduate and the first on either side of my extended family to pursue a college degree. As a teen, I was reared by a single mother who had a limited income. I had dreams of being married, having four children, and driving a station wagon with wooden panels. Throughout high school I worked as a server, thinking very little of my education, but mostly of my plans to be married. After graduating at age 17 I found myself too young for the work force with no career goals or objectives. After little contemplation, I enrolled for college at the nearest 4-year university. Due to my family income, I was eligible for grants that paid for me to attend college and purchase my textbooks. I remember sitting with an advisor as she explained to me that I would need to take a college entrance exam, but that could wait until after I began classes. I did not take an entrance exam until entering graduate school. I also remember the day I first moved into the college dorm. I was one of the last ones to arrive and had missed the orientation session. Although my mother helped me buy the necessities for living on my own, I moved myself into the fourth floor dorm room.

After completing the first semester of undergraduate school, I reasoned that I was one eighth of the way from a degree and felt that graduation was an obtainable goal. Even though my grades were mostly “C’s”, I saw each semester as a major accomplishment and I eventually began to develop the study skills necessary to be successful in college. I also discovered that my strength was in conversing with others and found social work to be a good match for a career choice.

During my second year of college, I met and married my now husband of 34 years. Despite the extra responsibilities of family, my grades continued to rise, and I was placed on the *Dean's List* almost every semester. I graduated with one child on my hip and another clinging to my leg. It seemed that the more I had on my proverbial plate, the more determined I was to succeed.

Immediately following graduation, I began my career journey as a social worker with the Department of Human Services in the Children's Service Division. After many years of witnessing children grow up in the foster care system and later seeing their children become part of the same system, I transferred to the State Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. There I had the opportunity to participate in a distance-learning program to obtain a master's degree. After working as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for nearly 8 years, I was given the opportunity to work out of my home as a state childcare program evaluator. Although this helped me to meet the demands of my family, I found that this was not my calling, and after 4 years, I made the decision to return to school.

Years later I find myself as a faculty member at a community college teaching students how to succeed in college and the importance of being a lifelong learner. Like myself, the majority of the students I teach are first-generation. I am passionate about giving them the tools and the resources that may help them to accomplish their educational goals but more to assure them that they have someone who cares about them and is willing to help them succeed. As I look back on my educational journey, I can see how I would have benefited from such additional support as a first-generation female.

Chapter Summary

Because of the importance that the doctorate degree has to the nation's economic structure, the doctoral degree has become a subject of attention over the last 2 decades for many researchers. Doctoral programs are also imperative because they train future scholars who in turn construct research and enter other professional careers (Holley & Gardner, 2012). First-generation students compose about 37% of doctoral students and the majority of these students are females seeking doctorate degrees in areas such as education. Despite the increased access for first-generation students, these students have more difficulty with adjustment periods, may question whether they belong and can succeed, and struggle more academically (Stephens, Townsend, Markus, & Phillips, 2012). When first-generation status is coupled with the encounters faced by female students from the Appalachian region, the effects are especially challenging. Gardner (2013) stated that it is important to examine the intersectionality of the different identities that first-generation doctoral students bring to their experiences.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 of this study provides a brief introduction to and an overview of the study, the research questions, statement of the problem, the significance of the study, delimitations and limitations, and a statement of the researcher's prospective.

Chapter 2 of this study provides an overview of the literature pertinent to the subject including first-generation students, first-generation students in Appalachia, the doctorate degree, the doctorate degree in educational leadership, and a brief introduction to females in education, female doctoral graduates, first-generation doctoral students, and a brief overview of grounded theory.

Chapter 3 of this study is a discussion of the qualitative methodology of the study and interviews with the participants.

Chapter 4 is a presentation and discussion of the results for the study

Chapter 5 provides recommendations for further research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant to a qualitative study of the perceptions and experiences of female, first-generation graduates of doctoral programs in South-Central Appalachia are three major areas of research. First is research related to first-generation students in higher education with specific attention given to Appalachia. Second, there is research related to doctorate programs. Finally there is research associated with females who have obtained their doctorate degrees. While researchers have made considerable contributions to our understanding of each of these subjects, there is a dearth of research to explain how these concepts intersect to understand first-generation women who have obtained their doctorate degrees.

In order to discuss first-generation students in Appalachia adequately it is critical to discuss the culture and how it often perpetuates first-generation status. To gain a more in-depth understanding of the body of research regarding those who have completed a doctorate degree, the experiences of undergraduate first-generation students is discussed. The literature contains considerable information regarding the experiences of first-generation undergraduate students (Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007, 2008; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Longwell & Longwell, 2007; Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004; Seay, Lifton, et al., 2008) as well as literature concerning the characteristics of doctoral degree graduates (Di Pierro, 2007; Nerad & Miller, 1996; Ostriker, Kuh, & Voytuk, 2011). However, a gap exists in the literature regarding first-generation females who pursued advanced degrees. More notably, the literature on the topic of females who were the first in their families to attend college from South-Central Appalachia who went on to obtain a terminal degree is absent.

Defining First-Generation

The term “*first-generation*” focuses on the highest level of parent’s educational attainment and is defined by the literature in a variety of ways (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Darling and Smith (2007) defined first-generation college student in its simplest form as an individual whose parents have no college experience. The Federal TRIO programs use the following definition of first generation student to determine eligibility for program services: “*an individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree or in the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree*” (United States Department of Education, 2014). The CollegeBoard defines *first-generation* as those who are first in their immediate family to attend college and those whose highest degree by either parent was a high school diploma, the equivalent, or less (CollegeBoard, 2013). The most common definition and the one that is used for the purposes of this study is an individual whose parents did not receive an undergraduate 4-year degree (Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004; Stebleton & Soria, 2012; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014).

First-Generation College Students

In order to gain a more in depth understanding of the body of research regarding those who have completed a doctorate degree, it is essential to understand the experiences of undergraduate first-generation students for a number of reasons (Holly & Gardner, 2012; Portnoi & Kwong, 2011; Seay et al., 2008; Tate et al., 2014). Portnoi and Kwong (2011) stated that by examining undergraduate first-generation students one can gain an enhanced understanding of the characteristics of those who are pursuing advanced degrees. Holley and Gardner (2012) found that first-generation undergraduate students often encounter challenging

obstacles as part of their higher educational experience that often influence their ability to negotiate as they move through postgraduate study.

By examining the research regarding first-generation undergraduate students one can see how these students use their own personal interventions and power in pursuit of career goals (Tate et al., 2014). Vekkaila and her associates found that environments can be designed to increase student engagement by focusing on how first-generation students function best and by assessing their strengths and positive emotions (Vekkaila, Pyhältö, & Lonka, 2013). In addition previous research regarding first-generation undergraduate student research may also be used as a benchmark to determine if the achievement profile of undergraduate first-generation students is consistent with first-generation graduate students (Seay et al., 2008).

Demographics of First Generation Students

First-generation students account for approximately 50% of the undergraduate student population (Choy, 2001; Mertha, Sanjay, Newabaold, & O'Rorke, 2011), and the profile of these students is comprised of certain characteristics that place them at a distinct disadvantage in regard to their academic achievement in higher education (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). First-generation students are over-represented in the most disadvantaged groups. They are more likely to be female (Chen, 2005; See, Fong, Carter, Boehme, & Alpert, 2011), older, nonwhite (Choy, 2001; Huerta, Watt, & Reyes, 2013; Yarborough, 2012), have dependent children, and come from low-income families (Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012; Tenenzini, Springer, & Yaeger, 1996). First-generation students are more likely to enroll in community colleges after high school as opposed to a 4-year college (O'Connor, 2009; Huerta et al. 2013) and were found to be more likely to enroll in institutions that have declining or stagnant graduation rates (Engle, Yeado, Brusi & Cruz, 2012). These characteristics are interrelated and intersect with first-

generation status resulting in limited opportunities and access for first-generation students (Engle, 2007).

Income Level

For first-generation students, obtaining a baccalaureate degree represents “the single most important rung in the educational attainment ladder in terms of economic benefits” (Pike & Kuh, p. 276, 2005) and is an avenue for upward social mobility (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Stephens et al., 2014). The majority of first-generation students come from low-income families (Darling & Smith, 2007; Ishitani, 2006; Lohfink, Paulsen & Paulsen; 2005; Padgett et al., 2012).

Approximately 24% of the undergraduate population were found to be low-income and first-generation students. If a student is considered to be both low-income and first-generation the challenges of graduating college are compounded (Arnold, Fleming, DeAnda, Castleman, & Wartman, 2009; Engle & Tinto, 2008; 2009; Tate et al., 2014).

Students who are both low-income and first-generation are not “only disadvantaged by their parents’ lack of experience with information about college, but also by other social and economic characteristics that constrain their educational opportunity” (Lohfink, Paulson, & Paulsen, 2005, p. 418). Low-income students today enroll in college below the rate that high-income students did 40 years ago (Engle et al., 2012). Only 61.5% of low-income students took the college entrance exam compared to 73.3% of middle-income students and 91% of high-income students (O’Connor, 2009).

First-generation students who are also low-income are four times more likely to leave college by the end of their first year. In fact, students who fall into this category were said to have only a 7.5% chance of completing a bachelor’s degree after 6 years as opposed to 41.1% for their peers who were neither first-generation nor low-income (Tinto, 2012). One explanation is

that low-income students are often required to take out student loans and work full time to pay for such necessities as housing and books triggering significant stress (DeRosa, 2014; Engle & Tinto 2008; Walpole, 2003). Additionally, low-income students are compelled to choose between the need to work and social and academic opportunities at school (DeRosa, 2014).

Social-Class

Because of the relationship of parental education and social mobility or socioeconomic status, the gap in college success between first-generation students and their non-first-generation peers has been referred to as the social-class achievement gap (Harackiewicz et al., 2013). Over the past 50 years this social achievement gap in the United States has widened. Until the mid-half of the 20th century more than half of individuals completed more years of education than their parents. This percentage continued to increase until the last quarter of the century allowing children who had grown up poor to “join the middle class” (Duncan & Murnane, p. 5, 2011).

However, by 2007 the family income for those at the 20th percentile had only increased by 7% while the incomes for families at the 80th percentile had increased by 36%, even though America’s gross national product nearly doubled between 1977 and 2007. Those whose income fell above the 99th percentile had their income more than triple (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). In 2011, 5% of Americans earned 21.3% of the total income while the bottom 40% earned only 11.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). With the exception of Great Britain, the United States currently has one of the lowest rates of upward mobility in the developed world. This inequality in income between the wealthy and the poor is comparable with that in countries such as Tunisia, Sri Lanka, and Morocco (Cruz & Haycock, 2012).

Two factors contributing to this inequality of income are the advancements in technology and the outsourcing of jobs to other countries. Both of which have reduced the need for workers

with no education and have resulted in disparities for children growing up in low-income families. At a time when education has never been more rewarded, children from low-income families often are deprived of quality education at all educational levels (Duncan & Murnane, 2011).

Social and Cultural Capital

The conceptual framework of Bourdieuan capital points out that an individual's resources have a significant impact regarding his or her enrollment and persistence in doctoral education (Gardner & Holley, 2011). The research is clear regarding the disadvantage that first-generation students have compared to their non-first-generation peers in regards to cultural and social capital (Padgett et al., 2012). There are three primary forms of capital; economic, cultural, and social, and according to Bourdieu the distribution of these three forms of capital is a determining factor in the likelihood for success in a given situation (Bourdieu, 1986; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009). Measures of the amount of capital parents have to invest in their children are found in the characteristics of one's social origin such as parental education, family income, and socioeconomic status. Although the ability of a student's family to provide financial support and stability are important, the culture surrounding the student's lifestyle are just as valuable (Padgett et al., 2012).

Graduation and Retention Rates

Despite major advances toward access to educational opportunities within the past 3 decades, there are still major gaps in college enrollment and completion in the United States among those who are the first in their family to complete college (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Even with similar demographic backgrounds, and academic preparation, first-generation students are less likely to pursue a college degree within 8 years of graduating high school (Chen & Carroll,

2005; Olson, 2014). When they do enter college these students tend to take fewer classes, have lower grade point averages and require more remedial classes (Chen & Dennis, 2005; Stebleton & Soria, 2012). Students who are first-generation are less likely to graduate than their non-first-generation peers (Pascarella, Pierson, & Wolniak, 2004; Chen & Dennis, 2005; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). Only 24% of first-generation students attain a baccalaureate degree, compared to 68% of their non-first generation peers (Chen & Dennis, 2005; Olson, 2013). If a student is considered to be both low-income and first-generation, the challenges of graduating college are compounded (Arnold, Fleming, DeAnda et al., 2009; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Tate et al., 2014). These students are four times more likely to leave college by the end of their first year. In fact students who fall into this category were said to have only a 7.5% chance of completing a bachelor's degree after 6 years as opposed to 41.1% for their peers who were neither first-generation nor low-income (Tinto, 2012).

To further explain these low retention rates among first-generation students, Pascarella and his colleagues (2012) detail three general categories of studies that compare first-generation to other college students; (a) college choice and aspirations (Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007; Mehta et al., 2011; Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013), (b) academic achievement (Barry, Hudley, Kelly, & Cho, 2009; Engle, 2007; Mehta et al., 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004), and (c) persistence and graduation (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Ishitani, 2006; Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004)

Degree Aspirations

Studies that examine college choices and aspirations compare the demographic characteristics of first-generation to other college students such as secondary school preparation,

the process of college choice, and the student's expectations of college (Padgett et al., 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004;). First-generation students have lower degree aspirations than that of their non-first-generation peers (Sy, Fong, Carter, Boehme, & Alpert, 2011). As early as the eighth grade, first-generation high school graduates reported lowered educational expectations by their parents (Engle, 2007). Even though a growing number of first-generation students report having the expectation of attending college and taking college preparation classes in high school (Engle, 2007; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013), only about half of those students expected to earn a bachelor's degree compared to nearly 90% of non-first-generation students, and only 65% of those students actually enrolled in college as compared to 87% who were not first-generation (Choy, 2001). In addition, studies in this area suggest that first-generation students are limited in knowledge regarding areas of postsecondary education such as the application process and costs associated with college, as well as areas regarding educational degrees and academic plans (Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007; Mehta et al., 2011).

Transition from High School to College

The second category of research regarding first-generation college students is focused on the transition from high school to college (Pascarella et al., 2004). First-generation students are less likely to gain admission into college and are less likely to be prepared or qualified for admission to a 4-year institution. However, even when they are academically prepared, nearly 25% fail to enroll in any type of postsecondary education (Engle, 2007). The first-generation students not only found the typical anxiety associated with such a transition but substantial social and academic transitions exist as well (Barry et al., 2009; Mehta et al., 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004;). Similarly, first-generation students are less likely to engage with faculty and peers (Mehta et al., 2011). During the initial phases of college transition first-generation students

report that they often delay getting involved in extracurricular activities and campus life until convinced that their academic lives are in order (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students reported being intimidated by faculty and perceived that faculty were there to act as gatekeepers to keep out those who were not serious about college (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007). This phenomenon appears to exacerbate the likelihood of failure as first-generation students reported to derive more benefit from interactions with others on their college campus than did their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Persistence, Degree Aspirations, and Employment Outcomes

A third category of research of first-generation college students concentrates on persistence, degree completion, and employment outcomes of first-generation individuals (Pascarella et al., 2004). The evidence is clear that first-generation students do not fare as well as their peers (Pascarella et al., 2004; Ishitani, 2006). And when first-generation students do persist to climb the socioeconomic ladder they often suffer from feelings of frustration and isolation in response to criticism from family members who have not fared as well (Piorkowski, 1983; Covarrubias, Romero, & Trievlli, 2014). With few exceptions, the socioeconomic and educational status of parents was positively associated with student persistence to degree completion (Ishitani, 2006; Mehta et al., 2011). After 4 to 5 years first-generation students appear less likely to be enrolled in a graduate program (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004;). In general students who expect to complete more than a bachelor's degree are found to be 7.3% more likely to graduate than those who only aim to complete a bachelor's degree or less (Lohfink, Paulsen, & Paulsen, 2005).

According to Tinto (1989) there are three misconceptions regarding student retention. The first fallacy is the belief that the primary objective of student retention efforts is to collect

tuition. Tinto stated that this assumption fails to focus on the ways to insure that all students learn as much as possible while attending college (Tinto, 1989). Despite efforts made by colleges, universities, states, and private foundations investing considerable resources in programs designed to increase retention rates of students' overall, completion rates have only slightly increased (Tinto, 2012). This marginal increase in retention is related to what Tinto stated is the second area of misconception – the perception that retention efforts are the primary responsibility of student affairs (Tinto, 1989). Tinto pointed out that retention efforts have remained at the margins of the classroom and have failed to improve the classroom experience (Tinto, 2012). Although student affairs are often primarily responsible for student retention efforts, more importantly faculty engagement with students is critical and correlates with retention outcomes (Tinto, 1989, 2012).

The third misconception is the idea that retention efforts are focused on those who really do not belong in college when, in fact, Tinto states that only one third of student attrition is due to academic failure. This misconception is found to create an environment where student retention efforts rest on the backs of remediation programs (Tinto, 1989). In his model of student attrition Tinto (1975) attests that a student's decision to withdraw from college is significantly affected by the degree of intellectual and social integration into the life of the institution. This lack of integration presumably leads to low commitment to the institution and increases the probability of withdrawal (Engle, 2008; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Tinto, 1989).

Not only are first-generation students found to face impediments to their academic success on campus, they are also likely to encounter obstacles associated with cultural adaptation (Padgett et al., 2012). Engle (2007) stated that first-generation students experience incongruities between the norms, expectations, and values of their families and communities and with the

culture of the college campus. In this study students reported that by being the first in their family to attend college they were breaking the traditions of their families. Thereby, relationships between first-generation students and their family members and friends who did not attend college are often strained, creating intense feelings of isolation and guilt for first-generation student (Engle, 2007).

First-Generation Students in Appalachia

For the people of Appalachia education was a matter of choice based on need rather than a desire to expand one's worldview (Boyd, 2007). Education in Appalachia has trailed behind when compared to education in the rest of the United States. In all but a few of the counties located within Appalachia the percentage of adults with bachelor's degrees is 27.5 % lower than that of the national average of adults who have 4-year degrees. Of the region's 420 counties, less than one fifth of adults are graduates of a 4-year college or university (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2012).

In a study regarding the educational aspirations of rural high school students in West Virginia, Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) reported that students conveyed an absence of knowledge of financial aid resources, minimal assistance from school administration, low expectations regarding the outcomes of a college degree, and an inability to negotiate the rigors of college. Students perceived that their community would have a negative opinion if they chose to attend college and that they would be looked down upon from those outside the community because of negative Appalachian stereotypes. This quote from a rural high school student epitomizes the challenges many students from rural Appalachia face in terms of their career and educational development. "I need a job, a good job. A job that will help me and my family.

Maybe then people won't look at me and think 'dumb hillbilly.' I hope this (survey) "will help kids find jobs" (Ali & McWhirter, 2006).

Ali and Saunders (2006) found that few adults in rural Appalachia have parents who attended college; therefore, students lack role models and have less access to information. Persistent parental attitudes towards the notion of dignity in skilled labor and the value of physical labor (DeYoung, 1995) historically have clashed with education. As more people from the region became educated and "abandoned their previous ways of life" (p.89), education became known as a modern-day force that deprived Appalachians of their heritage (Ali & McWhirter, 2006). Ali and Saunders (2006) further stated that students who planned to go straight to work after graduating high school tended to have low confidence levels regarding work and school, lower expectations regarding the outcome of a college degree, lower socioeconomic status, and failure to anticipate postsecondary paths.

Because there is a direct link between the educational achievement levels of students and cultural and geographic considerations (Hand & Payne, 2008) as well as economic and familial factors (Ali & McWhirter, 2006), it is important to examine the literature regarding these areas in regard to Appalachia. Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) found that for many rural Appalachian students education provided an understanding of the culture outside their area and provides ideas about what needs to take place in order for change to occur.

Demographics and Culture of Appalachia

The term Appalachia means different things to different people for both insiders and outsiders (Elam, 2002). For some it is a concept of shoeless, uneducated mountain people with many children living in rundown living conditions. As with most stereotypes there is an element of truth to this concept but little understanding of the people or their circumstances.

Physical Location

The legal boundaries of the Appalachian region were set in 1965 by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), a federal-state government partnership designed to improve conditions in the Appalachian region. The region includes a 205,000-square mile area that ranges along the Appalachian Mountains stretching from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and portions of 12 other states (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015). The region is very diverse in population patterns. Two thirds of the counties have populations less than 50,000 people and 125 counties have fewer than 20,000 residents. Contrastingly Allegheny County (where Pittsburgh is located) has 1.2 million residents (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013). In 2009 the region went from being divided into three subregions to five subregions. These subregions are adjoining regions of homogeneous characteristics within Appalachia and include; Northern, North Central, Central, South-Central, and Southern (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015). The focus of this study was on South-Central Appalachia that contains portions of Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

Environs of Appalachia

Appalachia is primarily a rural area challenged with high rates of poverty, low rates of white-collar employment, and low rates of college attendance (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004; Hand & Payne, 2008). The Appalachian Regional Commission (2015) established a classification system that places each county in a category based on income, poverty, and unemployment. Distressed counties are defined as those that have a per-capita income no greater than 67%, unemployment rates of at least 150%, and poverty levels are at least 200% of the national average. The majority of the 121 Distressed counties are located in Central Appalachia. Most (129) of the counties in Appalachia are considered to be “*Transitional*” counties and,

although they fail to meet all the indicators to be considered “*Distressed*”, they do not meet the national average. Of the 21 counties that are considered to be “*Competitive*”, (only slightly below the national average), most were found in Southern Appalachia. Only nine Appalachian counties fell in the highest category meaning they had achieved total economic equality with the nation as a whole and all but one of these counties are located in Southern Appalachia and are located near metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Georgia and Winston Salem, North Carolina (Pollard, 2003).

Attempts to bring industry and employment to the region have been prevented due to the history of oppression by outside interests (Bennett, 2008). Jensen and Glasmeier (2001) found that by the 1990s large companies from more prosperous parts of the country outsourced manufacturing jobs to the Appalachian region because of cheap labor, making the area the top producer of textiles, apparel, and furniture within the United States.

The extraction of natural resources such as coal is no longer a feasible source of revenue due to the changes in the economy and the lack of resources that could be easily extorted (Black, McKinnish, & Sanders, 2005). By the dawn of the millennium the majority of adults were employed in a rapidly growing service sector (Pollard, 2003).

According to Elam (2002) the geography of Appalachia “has always been problematic and greatly responsible for determining a particular way of life” (p. 11) for the residents of Appalachia; therefore, in order to understand the culture of the Appalachian people it is important to take into account the rugged geographic terrain of the area (Elam, 2002). The steep mountainous topography and deep winding valleys as well as the dense forests create a natural sense of isolation and a barrier from the outside (Rotkis & McDaniel, 1993). Tang and Russ (2007) stated that isolation among Appalachians was reinforced by poor road systems and

minimal industrial development. In addition, many Appalachians did not have telephones until the 1950s. These factors made it necessary to depend on family, church, and community for support, self-edification, and often survival.

The People of Appalachia

The Appalachia people were described by deMarrais (1998) as a distinct cultural group who share “a rich cultural heritage that includes a strong sense of kinship, a love of the land, a rich oral tradition and a commitment to personal freedom and self-reliance” (p. 90). However, deMarrais (1998) noted this commitment to personal freedom and self-reliance can result in both personal and cultural isolation. Boyd (2007) stated that illiteracy can be traced to the “disconnected nature of Appalachian culture” and that the “clannish structure of kinship” dated back to the Scottish roots that helped form the culture of Appalachia (p. 112). Elam (2002) described this culture of kinship:

“The people developed pride and rugged individualism through strong bonds of kinship and love of the land. Because each “holler” often had its own family group, mistrust of outsiders was continued and reinforced. Little value was placed on “book learning,” thus a fundamentalist and fatalistic religious faith developed that served as a comfort to the people but also encouraged the acceptance of poverty and hardship as one’s lot in life. The family network of each hollow was practically self-sufficient, giving little reason to “go to town” which could be a day’s ride on horseback. Bartering with neighboring hollows provided needed and available goods and services. Life was hard in the mountains, but the mountaineers were happy and satisfied with their life” (p. 11).

This idea of kinship or “familism” was said to be the fabric of Appalachia and was described as having “larger family size, patriarchal (male dominant and less child-centered) structure, and

greater emphasis on the importance of extended family relationships” (Lewis & Billings, 1997, p. 3).

The Dialect of Appalachian People

Language and dialect play a critical role in the education of many students from Appalachia (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2015). By listening to someone speak assumptions are often made about that speaker that may include gender, age, race, socioeconomic status, level of education, intelligence, nationality, regional origin (Dunstan, 2013). Many educated individuals believe that there is a single form of “correct” English and this form of correct English is normally based on the values of white, middle-and upper-class speakers (Lippi-Green, 2012).

Even when educators promote diversity in the classroom, diversity of language is often not observed nor seen as a type of diversity to celebrate or to learn about, but rather an issue that requires standardization and homogenization (Dunstan, 2013).

Appalachian English is one of the most commonly recognizable dialects in the world and features components of phonology (pronunciation), morphosyntax (grammar), and lexicon (vocabulary) (Hazen & Hamilton, 2009). There are numerous dialects of Appalachian English varying not only between the regions of origin but also social class, and privilege is often granted to those with certain dialects. Because of this, many students from Appalachia believe that that they must either adapt their speech or risk being seen as uneducated. Many Appalachians have learned to code-switch between their “home English” and their “school English”, thus creating tension between the values of family and the outside world (Dunstan & Jaeger, 2015).

The Culture of the Appalachian People

Halan (1977) also found that these Scotch-Irish roots continue to be found in Appalachia and the “distinct culture” has been passed down orally from generation to generation in the form

of folk music, songs, ballads, hymns, riddles, beliefs, tales, and superstitions similar to Scotland and Ireland. Behringer and Krishnan (2011) stated that Appalachians share several self-identified traits that include an oral culture based upon storytelling. Fisher (1984) indicated that storytelling helps to make sense of everyday life and serves as a means to rhetorically perform these stories. Likewise, Schechner (2013) found that the presentation of stories allows people to communicate and build their cultures.

According to Thompson (2006) music is an extremely important representation of the Appalachian region. There is an old Irish saying, “the Celtic people were happy in war and sad in song” (p. 205) and according to Ford (1971) it was this “Celtic heritage” along with a “strong English ballad influence” (p. 205) that the Scots-Irish brought with them to the Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee and Kentucky. The fiddle was the most popular instrument of that time as it had replaced the more expensive pipes in Britain. Due to the extreme isolation of the area many songs remained intact and were only slightly modified. As the region opened new instruments were brought in such as the banjo, dobro, and electric guitar. As this Appalachian folk music evolved and became commercialized it became known as country music. Ballads and banjo tunes mark the distinctiveness of the region and reinforce prevalent ideas regarding gender and music (Thompson, 2006).

Another trait of Appalachians is their strong church and religious affiliations (Behringer & Krishnan, 2011). Over one half of the region’s population is affiliated with a formal church denomination (Behringer & Krishnan, 2011). The Christian church is usually considered part of the extended family and these strong spiritual and religious beliefs permeate the everyday lives of many Appalachians (Tang & Russ, 2007). Even though the majority of the culture adopts the relationship between person and nature and an external locus of control based upon science

(Bennett, 2008), many Appalachians adopt this type of fatalistic view based upon the religious doctrines of the region. This belief system can serve as a self-protective mechanism for individuals who do not expect positive outcomes resulting from personal effort (Bennett, 2008). Although the church has traditionally been known as the meeting place for Appalachians, its teachings of a strong work ethic have in many instances equipped Appalachians to survive (Schwarzweiler, Brown, & Mangalam, 1971).

Despite the many economic disparities and challenges faced by the people of Appalachia Kimweli (2002) found that Appalachians report higher subjective well-being or happiness than any other individualistic or collectivistic culture that has been researched. As opposed to middle-class suburban values of upward mobility, the values of rural Appalachia allow for more time spent with family and friends, more frequent leisure activities, less crime, and increased support from the community. Even with the awareness of economic limitations, many Appalachians choose to remain in the region because of support from family and friends and high satisfaction with life. Those who do leave the region tend to appreciate financial achievement more.

The Doctorate Degree

Even though it is widely acknowledged that the bachelor's degree is the key to upward mobility, the entry point for many high-level careers is the doctorate degree (Choy 2001: Engle & Tinto, 2008). The United States has long been considered to have the world's best doctoral education programs and these doctoral programs are "at the heart of the U. S. system of innovation" (Ostriker et al., p. 17, 2011). Doctoral education produces scholars, significant research, and opportunities for innovation.

Graduate students from around the world choose American graduate programs particularly in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Nevertheless, other countries are becoming competitive in the market.

Retention, Persistence, and Attrition in Doctoral Programs

Many students who begin doctoral programs of study fail to reach their goal of obtaining a terminal degree and once a student has enrolled in a doctoral degree program, the chances of completing it are marginal. In 2007 the national average of attrition among doctoral students was found to be 57% (Holley & Gardner, 2012). This was only slightly higher than the average attrition rate of 50% that has existed since the 1970s. Well over half (58 %) of attrition in doctoral programs occurs within the first 2 years of study (Di Pierro, 2007; Holley & Gardner, 2012). Attrition occurred in 41.2% after the first 2 years, 31.8% after 3 years and 17.3% after 5 or more years (Di Pierro, 2007).

Understanding the factors that contribute to persistence through a doctorate degree program has been the focus for much research, and while there is no one reason doctoral students leave before graduation the literature contains several complex explanations (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Gardner & Holley, 2012; Nerad & Miller, 1996; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Tinto (1993) found that there are three distinct phases through which doctoral students progress that include coursework, candidacy, and dissertation and discovered that the retention and persistence challenges are different for each of those phases. As students enter each of these phases, they experience both the transition and a high degree of ambiguity that then “feeds into the need for self-direction” (Gardner, p. 76, 2010).

Golde (2005) stated that students left their programs of study early when they experienced a mismatch or incompatibility between their chosen field of study, program, and/or

institution and their own interests. Nerad and Millar (1996) cited that students exited their doctoral programs for a number of reasons including a detachment from the research, accumulation of finances, debt, poor relationships between them and their advisors, a lack of professional goals, and the climate of the department. During the later phase of the doctoral program, Gardner (2008) found that students left because of the isolation experienced when writing the dissertation stating that they no longer experienced the same sense of support. Vekkaila et al., (2013) stated that students who were more engaged were likely to experience satisfaction with their thesis work and remained resolute when faced with challenges. Decline of state support for higher education is forcing institutions to raise the cost of tuition, negatively impacting the United States' lead role in innovation (Ostriker et al., 2011). Not only do American graduate programs impact research and innovation, these programs impact communities' and individuals' personal wealth and opportunities (Gururaj et al., 2010). Because of this the doctoral degree has gained an increased amount of attention over the past 20 years from higher education administrators and policy makers (Holley & Gardner, 2012).

Doctorate Degree in Education

Doctoral degrees in education differ from other professional doctorates such as the medical doctorate or juris doctorate. While these degrees prepare for highly skilled and specialized fields, only public K-12 education formally applies the doctoral degree to a leadership or management role (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007). Education doctoral students are expected to have a broad understanding of the historical and contemporary bodies of knowledge relevant to the classroom as well as policies that impact education (Nettles & Millett, 2006).

According to the National Research Council, around 142 graduate schools of education award both the doctorate of education degree (EdD) and the doctor of philosophy degree (PhD).

Of the 18 types of research doctorates recognized in 2010 over 95% of doctorate recipients received the PhD, and an additional 3.1% received the EdD (Fiegener, 2011). Traditionally the PhD has focused on research and scholarship while emphasizing greater breadth and depth in theory and research methodology. In contrast the EdD has been more focused on the practitioner (Perry & Imig, 2008). EdD students focus their dissertation research more on specific practices or policies that affect state or regional schools (Nelson & Coorough, 1994).

As opposed to students in arts and sciences or engineering, most education students have had careers before pursuing the doctorate. Consequently, in many circumstances doctoral work comes at a mid-career stage for education students rather than at the beginning (Gonzales et al., 2013). The majority of these students have worked as teachers or administrators or in other diverse fields, as only one third of educational doctoral students have a bachelor's degree in education (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006). The median age for doctoral graduates in educational programs is over 43 and women comprised 68% of these students and received 68% of the awarded degrees (Gonzales et al., 2013). Moreover, education is the second highest gender-distributed field (behind engineering) with more than two thirds of education practitioners, doctoral students, and faculty being women (NSF, 2014). Most education doctoral students receive some type of tuition assistance from the K-12 schools or the higher education institutions where they work. The majority of these students work full-time as they pursue the doctoral degree (NSF, 2014, Shulman et al., 2006).

Educational Leadership

Since the time of Aristotle and Plato the concept of leadership has been a subject of thought and debate (McCaffery, 2010). Henry Kissinger, an American statesman, stated that a leader's mission is to bring the people from a place where they are to a place where they have

never been (as cited in Peleg, 2012). Northouse (2007) defined leadership as the ability to influence a group of people collectively to achieve a shared goal. Barker stated that most every definition of leadership focuses on the attributes and traits of the leader that are recognized as successful in influencing followers to do what the leader wants them to do (Barker, 1997). There are claims of over 650 definitions of leadership, this fact indicating the lack of congruency surrounding the topic (Peleg, 2012). Although there is little agreement regarding what defines leadership, effective leadership is evident when it is exhibited (Bennis, 1989).

Two central principles that guide effective school leadership are 1) the fundamental missions of the school are teaching and learning and 2) the improvement of teaching and learning is never ending (Leithwood & Duke, 1998). The objectives that underlie educational leadership are to inspire those who are led to problem solve and to realize their potential as well as to build and encourage them to rise above the norm and transcend to high levels of performance and educational commitment (Peleg, 2012). Leadership within schools was said to improve teaching and learning indirectly by influencing staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions and was second only to classroom teaching in regards to influence on student learning (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Likewise Whelan (2013) found that students' success rarely surpassed the leadership and management in the school.

Northouse (2007) stated, "Leadership and management are different concepts that overlap. They are different in that management traditionally focuses on the activities of planning organizing, staffing, and controlling, whereas leadership emphasizes the general influence process" (p.13). Barker (1997) stated that the function of management is to create stability while the function of leadership is to create change. Managers often look at the short-term

consequences of a decision, while leaders embrace a long-term view, asking questions and challenging the accepted norm.

Effective educational leaders also have a contextual intelligence of the organization grounded in an understanding of the formal and informal political structure as well as the values, norms, assumptions, and beliefs that have evolved over time (Gayle et al., 2011). Other characteristics of effective educational leaders are their willingness to learn from others, flexibility in thinking within a system of core values, persistence in their pursuit of staff development, and a sense of resiliency and optimism (Leithwood et al., 2008).

In order to gain the necessary skills and traits for effective leaders, potential leaders must have access to professional development opportunities. The majority of community college presidents reported that they had received their degrees in the field of educational leadership (Shults, 2001). The majority of those held a doctorate of education degree and the typical degree was the EdD (Rouech, Baker, & Rose 2014).

Specific Educational Leadership Programs

There are four universities that offer the doctorate of educational leadership (EdD) located within the South-Central subregion of Appalachia (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015). These are Appalachian State University (Appalachian State University Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, 2015), The University of Tennessee Chattanooga (The University of Tennessee Learning and Leadership, 2015), Lincoln Memorial University (Lincoln Memorial University Doctor of Education, 2015), and East Tennessee State University (East Tennessee State University Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis, 2015). Each of these universities offer EdD programs that are housed within their institution's schools of education. Each program requires 2 to 3 years of coursework and a qualifying or comprehensive

examination before beginning the dissertation. Each program also has a cohort structure meaning that members take core classes as a group (Appalachian State University Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, 2015). The majority of these programs also require a residency and/or internship experience within the scope of the profession. Although the programs offer a variety of delivery methods that include online delivery, hybrid (both online and face-to-face meetings), and face-to-face meetings, all are designed to meet the needs of working adult students (Appalachian State University Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, 2015; The University of Tennessee Learning and Leadership, 2015; Lincoln Memorial University Doctor of Education, 2015; East Tennessee State University Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis, 2015).

Women in Higher Education

Allan (2011) stated that in order to understand the gains and continued challenges made by women in regards to education, it is important to have the historical context to use as a backdrop. Graham (1978) found that the historical role of women in higher education in the United states “rests upon understanding a series of related changes in both education and the status of women” (p. 759). Since the 1840s and 1850s sociopolitical events have influenced society’s acceptance of women in higher education (Allan, 2011). After the Civil War, college enrollments were down and colleges were in desperate financial need. In addition the Morrill Act of 1862 expanded public higher education generating a desperate need for teachers. Because of these two factors colleges began to accept women in order to meet their financial needs, and women’s colleges began to offer programs that were parallel with those at respected men’s colleges to meet the growing demand for teachers.

Following the World Wars there was another influx of women entering colleges; however, there continued to be controversy over the role of women in society and how to integrate their studies with their roles as homemakers (Rury, 1991; Soloman, 1985). The civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s and 1970s brought about important changes in regards to the status of women in higher education. Still, not until the passage of Title IX of the Civil Rights Act did the number of women who held administrative positions in higher education begin to expand (Allan, 2011).

Female Doctoral Graduates

Significant progress has been made in regard to women's access and representation in higher education. In fact, women are now the majority in every level of education (Gonzales et al., 2013; Masterman, 2012) other than the PhD and MD programs (Allan, 2011). The percentage of enrollment and earned doctoral degrees by women in 1976-1977 was 25% and increased to 51.2% in 2011-2012 (Masterman, 2012). Although the past 30 years have brought about change and progression towards gender equality in higher education, this progress was described as "glacial" and "excruciatingly" slow (Cummings et al., p.727, 2010; Marschke, Laursen, Nielsen, & Rankin, 2007, p.1). Although there have been improvements in women's access to education, Allan (2011) stated that these gains "paint only a partial picture" (p. vii) and fail to recognize the continuing challenges faced by diverse groups of women and disparities among women doctoral students, especially those who are in the science, engineering and math fields (Masterman, 2014).

Overall women are slightly less likely to complete a doctoral degree after beginning. While 58% of men were found to complete their doctoral degree within 10 years, only 55% of women complete within that time frame. Mansfield and her colleagues (2010) found that female

graduate students experience an especially vulnerable position and gaps exist in the form of networking, mentoring, and other support as well as the level of respect and opportunities such as publishing. Masterman (2014) corroborated this in her study and stated “gender differences exist in doctoral degree completion rates across all disciplines with women lagging behind men” (p. 42). Because women experience more personal, institutional, and sociocultural barriers than men, women are less likely to complete their degree.

Marschke et al. (2007) found a discrepancy between the percentage of women earning doctoral degrees and the percentage of women employed as professors. When demographic factors such as faculty age, gender composition, retirement patterns, gender composition among doctoral degree earners, and the availability of faculty positions change slowly, they result in a “pattern of demographic inertia” (Marschke et al., 2007 p. 4). Hired females who had earned their doctoral degree and work in education were said to make less money, be promoted more slowly, and receive heavier teaching loads than their male counterparts (Cummings Mansfield et al, 2010). Even as recently as 2011 men were more likely to be hired as full time, tenure-track faculty, earn 20% more salary than their female counterparts, and hold 75% of college and university president positions (Kendall, 2014).

First-Generation Doctoral Students

Although the term “first-generation” has commonly been applied to undergraduates, over one third of doctorate recipients reported that neither parent had completed a college degree. (Choy, 2001; Gardner & Holley, 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004). First-generation students are less likely to pursue a graduate degree than their non-first-generation peers (Gardner & Holley, 2011).

Mullen, Goyette, and Soars (2003) found that 76% of first-generation students did not pursue a graduate degree and that individuals who were first-generation were less likely to enter doctoral

programs than students with parents who were highly educated. In a longitudinal study conducted over a 10-year time span, Nevill and Chen (2007) found that 53% of first-generation students obtained graduate degrees, while 67% of their non-first-generation peers obtained graduate degrees and that first-generation students were more likely to depart from graduate school before obtaining a degree. First-generation and low-income students have only a 36% chance of completing a doctorate degree once they have begun (Engle & Tinto, 2009).

First-generation doctoral students have many of the same characteristics as first-generation undergraduate students. They are likely to be nonwhite female and are more likely to have attended community college and have additional financial debt. Students possessing these characteristics are more likely to drop out of graduate school. In fact, over half of African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans were found to be first-generation while only 32% of Caucasian and 26% of Asians identified as first-generation (Gardner & Holley, 2011).

Persistence and Attrition among First-Generation Doctoral Students

Between 40% and 50% of all doctoral students either dropout or stop out of graduate school before graduation (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011; Gardner & Holly, 2012; Gururaj, Heilig, & Somers, 2010); however, little information is known about their persistence. One explanation for this is that there is no national base to track graduate students, and the majority of colleges and universities fail to track graduate students' persistence and graduation rates (Gururaj et al., 2010).

Tinto (1993) found that doctoral student attrition is attributed to the interaction between the student and the educational organization. Building on Tinto's theory, Lovitts (2001) elaborated that academic integration is most important for doctoral students, while social integration is more important for undergraduate students. Cohen and Greenberg (2011) found

that the key elements to persistence for graduate students were being treated with respect and the faculty's enthusiasm for teaching and methods of instruction. They also found that the level of parental education impacted the importance graduate students placed on these issues (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011). The lower the level of parental education, the more importance students placed on instructional methods and student support.

One explanation for the low percentage rate of first-generation doctoral graduates is attributed to financial circumstances. Even though not all first-generation doctoral students are from working-class or poor families, Gardner and Holley (2012) found family background to have played an important role in the way first-generation students view finances. Students reported that their educational aspirations were attributed to having observed their parents in labor-intensive employment. These students also reported a sense of anxiety related to the cost of the degree program. In addition, for each \$10,000 increase in family income, a 2.0% increase in the probability of persistence was found (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Furthermore, first-generation doctoral students are more likely to have accumulated debt from their undergraduate studies (Engle & Tinto, 2009).

First-generation doctoral students are often influenced by disciplinary and institutional characteristics. These students tend to have attended a community college at some point in their educational career and less likely to attend institutions that are known to produce more individuals with graduate school aspirations. Another factor regarding disciplinary influences and motivation to pursue a doctorate degree is often embedded in professional norms. For example Gardner and Holley (2012) found that students who were in a profession (such as psychology) where the norm was to have a doctorate degree were more highly inclined to continue their education.

Family Support and Relationship

The choice of discipline selected by a first-generation student often triggers emotional responses by their families and determines the extent of support given. Families of those first-generation students were said to express a desire for them to obtain a practical degree or a degree that highly connected with a job (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Separation between the students' experiences and those of their family and friends are often amplified as the student persisted in their program of study (Holley & Gardner, 2012, p.81). As Melissa Boone, a PhD student at Columbia University put it, "*I don't know where to find my place.*" She reported feeling pressure to "dumb down" and when asked by her family about her work, she would only give the most basic answers and reported that her family often spoke of her lack of "common sense."

"People from working-class backgrounds understand going to work. They understand salaries. They don't understand the nature of graduate-school life: researching, writing papers. When you're face to face, there's a disconnect between them and you" (Patton, 2012).

A first-year doctoral student in the African-studies program at Northwestern University who was the first in his family to attend college, as well as the only man in his neighborhood to go to college tells of a similar experience. His sense of disconnect was intensified by the importance his family and friends placed on having children and value placed on physical labor (Patton, 2012). While the student's identity in relation to his or her family and community was found to be influential, first-generation students verbalized the need of support from both their biological families and the segregate families they had formed from the world of academia who acted as mentors and guides through the doctoral process.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a methodology purposed to provide structure to issues of significance in the lives of individuals (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Drawing from studies conducted in the early 1960s at a time when quantitative methods had gained dominance in the United States, sociologists Glaser and Strauss advocated strategies in developing theories from research grounded in data instead of construing testable hypotheses from existing theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory emphasizes systematic yet flexible research and has been both directly and indirectly influenced by contemporary intellectual trends and movements such as ethnomethodology, feminism, political economy, and postmodernism (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.276). Although first posed by sociologists, grounded theory has never been restricted to this group and fits favorably to the everyday realities of a practical area that has been strategically induced from diverse data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.276). It has been described as the most influential paradigm for qualitative research in the social sciences (Patton, 2002).

Grounded theory is aimed to produce original theory that is “grounded” by collecting data from participants regarding the complexities of their lived experiences. It seeks to construct theory about issues of importance in the lives of people through a process of inductive data collection (Fassinger, 2005). Theory evolves as the researcher gathers and analyzes data that have emerged from stories told about an area of interest shared by both the researcher and the interviewee (Glaser, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is not the voice of the participant but is an abstraction generated from their events and their connotations that are taken as data and conceptualized by the researcher (Glaser, 2002 p.5). As the researcher gathers and

analyzes data there is a systematic and rigorous interplay that results in the development of actual theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.273).

Difference with Other Theoretical Approaches

Grounded theory is distinguished from other theory due to its emphasis on inductive strategies as differentiated from theory developed by logical deduction from a priori assumptions (Patton, 2002, p.125). For this reason one of the most problematic issues regarding grounded theory is to what extent the literature should be used during a grounded theory study (Duune, 2010). Since the time Glaser and Strauss (1967) first introduced grounded theory, there have been concerns on how to use the existing literature (Bryant & Charmaz 2007, p.19). Glaser (1978) stated that truth emerges from the data representative of a reality. Strauss (1967) clearly stated that the literature in the area under study should be ignored (Straus, 1967) and by doing so encourages the researcher to allow the emergence of categories without being inhibited by existent theoretical frameworks and hypotheses (Duune, 2011). Other researchers (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1999) also suggested that the literature review be delayed until the analysis of data was complete, arguing that an extensive literature review before an analysis of data could impact the direction of the research rather than allowing the research to be grounded in the data.

However in subsequent years Strauss's position changed significantly as he teamed with Corbin and began to advocate for an early review of the existing literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998). Dunne (2011) found that there are benefits of undertaking an early literature review when using grounded theory:

- Offers a convincing rationale for study;
- Ensures the same study has not already been completed;

- Places the study into context and acquaints the researcher as to how the phenomenon has been studied to date;
- Helps the researcher develop sensitizing concepts;
- Establishes theoretical sensitivity and allows the researcher to become aware of possible unhelpful preconceptions;
- Promotes clarity in thinking about concepts and possible theory development;
- Allows the researcher to be open to criticism (Duune, 2011, p.115).

Adding to these arguments Charmaz (2006) pointed out that the literature review allows the researcher to include the current project in with other scholarly conversations contributing to the existing body of knowledge about that topic (Charmaz, 2006, p.168). Additionally, grounded theory allows the researcher to build and elaborate on existing theory (Vaughn, 1992). By rigorously matching existing theory against data, theory may be generated (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273).

A qualitative design and a grounded theory approach lent itself well as I conducted in-depth interviews that allowed first-generation individuals who have obtained a doctorate degree to share their stories without any assumptions on my part. Seidman (1998) stated that interviewing allows one to understand others' experiences and the meaning that is taken away from those experiences (Seidman, 1998). Strauss and Corbin stated that grounded theory is interpretive work but these interpretations must include the voice of the people and their perspectives (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.274). Because it is necessary to relate participants' stories to the world in which they live, grounded theory also allowed me to elaborate on existent theories and models that are relevant to first-generation students and to completion of the doctorate degree. An extensive review of the literature before collecting the data also allowed

for a richer and more reflective analysis of data and reconstruction of theory (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

Chapter Summary

The findings in this review of the literature clearly indicate a relationship between the educational level of a parent and the way his or her children navigate through the educational pipeline to completion of a terminal degree. For the majority of first-generation women from South-Central Appalachia, educational aspirations did not include a college degree, much less a doctorate degree. However while these first-generation women may face significant impediments to degree completion, there appears to be an underlying theme of resilience and *gumption*. Nevertheless, educational institutions should be cognizant of the fact that just because a student completes a baccalaureate degree, it is not an indicator that he or she is prepared for the rigors of graduate school. In conclusion, although there is a wealth of literature available in regards to first-generation students in undergraduate school, it is clear that there is certainly a deficit in the amount of research directed toward Appalachian first-generation women doctoral graduates. Because of this, a qualitative study rooted in grounded theory will add to the existing literature.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation was to describe the perceptions of first-generation women from South-Central Appalachia who obtained a doctorate degree; therefore, a qualitative methodology was chosen so as to encourage the individuals to share their stories about being first-generation and how being first-generation impacted their journey through undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs of study. This study will add to the minute body of empirical research that has been conducted in this area and serve as a means to understand first-generation students who have persisted all the way to the goal of a terminal degree. The questions that guided this qualitative study were taken from research conducted by Jackson and Mazzei (2012).

Research Questions

1. What is the importance given to life events and/or individuals in the participants' decisions to pursue first undergraduate, then graduate study?
2. What have they learned as a result of forging new territory without familial/social role models?
3. How do they understand/articulate multiple identities? (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 10)

Sampling

In order to provide information-rich data that yields insights and in-depth understanding, a purposeful sampling method was used in selecting participants for this study. I selected 10 participants from South-Central Appalachia who obtained doctorate degrees in educational leadership and who self-identified as being first-generation, meaning that neither parent had received a 4-year degree. According to Patton (2002) purposeful sampling allows the researcher

to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry and illuminates the questions under study.

Data Collection

Prior to collecting data for this research project, permission to conduct research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of East Tennessee State University. A criterion-based purposeful sampling strategy was employed. Patton (2002) stated that purposeful sampling promotes information-rich studies from which one can understand a vast amount of knowledge about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (p. 230). Creswell and Clark (2003) found the importance of acquiring participants who are willing to openly and honestly share information or their lived experiences. Potential participants who I thought might meet of the criteria of being a first-generation female from South-Central Appalachia who graduated from a doctoral program focusing in educational leadership were identified through my network of educational professionals.

I first initiated conversation with these women by phone. During this conversation I screened the potential participants to assess if her background met the qualifications for the study and gave a brief description of the study. Afterwards a formal letter was sent via email to the qualifying women who expressed interest in the study. The email letter included a cover letter explaining the research (Appendix B), a copy of the interview guide (Appendix A), and a consent form (Appendix C). For those women who returned the form, a face-to-face interview was scheduled.

Intensive Interviews

According to Patton (2002) we interview people who we cannot observe. We cannot observe thoughts, perceptions, and intentions, nor can we observe what has happened to

individuals in the past. In order to find out how individuals derive meaning and organize the world around them we have to ask questions. Intensive interviews were defined by Charmaz (1991) as a directed conversation that elicits inner views of respondents' lives as they portray their worlds, experiences, and observations (p. 385). Barriball and While (1994) listed advantages to using the personal interview as a method for data collection:

1. It has the potential to overcome the poor response rates of a questionnaire survey;
2. It is well suited to the exploration of attitudes, values, beliefs, and motives;
3. It provides the opportunity to evaluate the validity of respondent's answers by observing non-verbal indicators, which is particularly useful when discussing sensitive issues;
4. It can facilitate comparability by ensuring that all questions are answered by each respondent;
5. It ensures that the respondent is unable to receive assistance from others while formulating a response (p. 329).

In this study I conducted face-to-face intensive interviews with 10 women who met the criteria for the study. The purpose of these interviews was to enter into the participant's perspective, find out what was in and on her mind, and hear her stories (Patton, 2002).

The Semistructured Interview

The method of semistructured interviews as a means of data collection was chosen. This structure was well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of the participants regarding what may be sensitive and complex issues. This allowed me to probe for more information and clarify the answers (Barriball & While, 1994). These interviews took place in locations that the participants of the study selected. One interview was done via the Internet, using a computer application that allowed us to see and hear each other in real time.

A list of open-ended questions or a guide was used (Appendix A) to ensure that the same fundamental lines of inquiry were followed with each participant. Open-ended questions encouraged the participant to explore and question her own thoughts thus illuminating the subject matter. By using an interview guide the interview was more structured than the informal conversational interview, although there will still be some flexibility in its compositions (Turner, 2010). Charmaz (1991) stated that questions should be framed so that participants may pour their ideas, experiences, and feelings into them (p. 391). Questions beginning with “What,” “How,” or “Tell me about,” encourage conversation as opposed to using questions beginning with “Do you,” or such questions that prompt a “yes” or “no” response (Charmaz, 1991). The interview guide provided a framework within which I was able to sequence questions and make decisions regarding what information needed to be pursued in more detail (Patton, 2002).

Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The time of day and location of the interview was determined by the participant. Each interview was recorded with the permission of the participant. Afterwards, an IRB-certified transcriptionist transcribed the recorded interview. In addition brief notes were taken during the interview to capture the participant’s body language or any other part of the interview that was not captured in the recording.

Myers and Newman (2007) stated that the qualitative interview is “the most common and one of the best qualitative gathering tools in qualitative research” (p. 3). Corbin and Morse (2003) stated that the “very act of talking with another person that shares a common interest, is genuinely interested in your viewpoint, and who is not critical can be a richly rewarding experience” (p. 339). Rubin and Rubin (2005) metaphorically referred to the qualitative interview as night goggles, letting us see “what is not ordinarily on view and examine that which is looked at but seldom seen” (p. 8).

Field Notes

A major role of the observer is the taking of field notes. Field notes contain the description of what the researcher sees as important during the course of gathering data. These “record information that often cannot be recalled at a later date but which is instrumental in helping the researcher understand the context, the setting, and what went on” (Patton, 2002, p. 303). Field notes also contain the researcher’s own personal reactions to the experience. Mullhall (2003) described field notes as being messy, loose texts that are often only legible to the researcher. However, recording events as they happen or shortly afterwards ensures that details and important data are not lost to memory.

Ethical Considerations

Even though ethical problems in qualitative research are subtle, ethical considerations are present in types of research. Unethical types of research have the capacity to harm individuals, institutions, and the profession of research as a whole (Gorman, 2007). Although ethical dilemmas are often difficult to predict, the researcher should be aware of the sensitive issues and potential conflicts of interest. The issues in qualitative research can be alleviated through an awareness and use of ethical principles including autonomy, beneficence, and justice (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

Autonomy

The principle of autonomy is related to the notion of respect for others (Gorman, 2007). Research of any type should be guided by principals that incorporate a respect for individual rights that include the right to be informed about the study, the right to freely decide whether to participate in the study, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty (p. 95). In

qualitative research autonomy is honored by consent (Orb et al., 2001,) as it is at the core of the notion of respect for others.

While the risk factors of participating in a qualitative study, such as the one I conducted, are minimal, a degree of risk is inevitable. Pre-existing relationships can complicate consent to some degree but even more so when the researcher is in a position of power over the participant (Gorman, 2007). Although no individuals participating in this study were my subordinates, there were pre-existing relationships between certain participants in this study and me.

Beneficence

Beneficence is defined as meaning to do good and preventing harm. One moral obligation of researchers in this area is to conceal the identity of participants. Concealing the identity of participants in a study is often difficult in small communities where participants could be easily recognized (Orb et al., 2001) Although I employed the use of pseudonyms, it may be difficult to conceal the identity of certain participants in this study. In this case, I informed the participants how the results of the study will be published and asked for their approval. Participants were made aware that other researchers might review the process and the data (Orb et al., 2001).

It is difficult to predict the impact a qualitative will have on another individual. Reflection on years of lifetime experiences and history can be transformative or not. The researcher must keep in mind that the purpose of the interview is to gather data, not change people. Remaining focused on the interview was critical to effectively gathering high-quality data. Because my background is in social work and counseling, I remained cognizant of this reality as I interviewed other women who may have experiences that dredge painful memories.

Justice

The principal of justice suggests equality and fairness. The application of the principle in qualitative research was established by recognizing the vulnerability of participants and their contributions to the study. One mode of applying the principle of justice is by attending to the influences of disadvantaged groups (Orb et al., 2001). The voices of such groups in the study such as females, Appalachians, and first-generation students were heard and recorded in this study.

Ethical Protocol

Throughout the process of this study ethical considerations were of utmost importance. I completed the IRB (Institutional Research Board) certification and a copy of the research proposal was submitted for IRB approval. In addition, the transcriptionist was also IRB-certified. All participants in this study were provided informed consent and were reminded that their participation in the study was completely voluntary. All participants were informed that if at any time they elect to opt out of the study, their recorded interviews would be destroyed, as would any copies of the interview transcripts. Participants were informed that their anonymity would be protected during the course of this research process. Pseudonyms were used, but because of their position and status in a small community, their identity could be recognized.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis converts data into outcomes. According to Patton (2002) data analysis is unique for each researcher and although there is guidance that can assist the researcher for transforming data into findings, there is no exact formula available. In qualitative analysis the researcher is the instrument of qualitative inquiry and the quality of the results relies

heavily on the qualities of that person. Through interpretation and reporting the researcher is able to transform raw data into findings.

A major challenge of qualitative analysis is making sense of enormous amounts of data. Because there is no formula or agreed upon method of determining what data are significant, it is often difficult to sift the trivial from the significant in order to construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed. Even though guidelines for analyzing qualitative data can be found, it is still up to the researcher to apply these guidelines, requiring judgment and creativity. This human factor is said to be both the strength and weakness for qualitative analysis, creating what Patton (2002) calls a scientific two-edge sword.

As opposed to quantitative analysis, the lines between data collection and analysis are fluid. Throughout the course of fieldwork ideas about data analysis occurred. Patterns and themes emerged during data collection and recording and tracking these insights was the beginning of qualitative analysis. While premature conclusions were avoided, these insights were not repressed, for this would have chanced their permanent loss. According to Patton (2002) this overlapping of data collection improves both data collection and analysis.

Coding Data

The major challenge of content analysis is making sense from the complexity of raw field notes and verbatim transcripts. Therefore, it was imperative that I developed a manageable classification or coding scheme. Coding “represents the operation by which data are broken down, conceptualized and put back together in new ways” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57). Through coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the primary patterns of the data the chaos and confusion is curtailed (Patton, 2002). Thomas (2006) discussed a grounded theory approach to analyzing qualitative data. This approach primarily uses detailed readings of raw data to

derive core themes through axial coding and theoretical sampling. This approach to analysis allowed the research findings to emerge from core themes within the raw data (Thomas, 2006).

Patton (2002) stated that the first step of data analysis is to develop a classification or coding system. In order to establish a theory about the underlying structure of experiences that are evident within the raw data, I began the open coding process of data analysis. First, I read through all of the interviews and field notes extracting major categories of information from transcripts and noting open codes of the initial analysis. Charmaz (2006) stated that memos are similar to conversations the researcher has with him or herself between the steps of data collection and the first draft of a study. These comments were coded and classified by using a word or short phrase to describe a category. Next, I read through the data again and again to begin the formal coding in a systematic method. With this done, I highlighted concepts of text that illustrate meanings, associations, and perspectives associated with the category (Patton, 2002; Thomas, 2006). Creswell (2003) refers to this pattern of interviewing and coding as “zigzagging.”

During the axial coding process I began to determine what things fit together. I then worked back and forth between the data and the classification system to validate the significance and allowed for integration of the axial codes and generate a more refined theory based upon the resulting theoretical scheme (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In order to enhance the credibility of the research findings I elicited stakeholder and member checks. Thomas (2006) stated that allowing participants and others who may have a specific interest in the research to comment on or assess the findings might be important in the credibility of the research. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) found that the most ideal way to ensure

reliability is to use more than one researcher. As such, I invited another researcher to assist in the verification process.

Quality and Credibility

While the quality of qualitative analysis depends on the astute pattern recognition of the researcher, there are rigorous techniques that can be used to increase the credibility of the research (Patton, 2002). Creswell and Millar suggested that there are diverse lenses or viewpoints that the researcher uses to establish validity in a study. One lens is that of the researcher. The researcher must “determine the length of time in the field, whether the data are saturated to establish good themes, and how the data evolves into a persuasive narrative “(p. 125). A second lens would be that of the participant. In order to insure that the realities of the participant have been represented accurately in the final account, it is important to assure their interpretations have been accurately represented. A third lens may be to check the credibility of an account by individuals who are external to the study. Criswell and Miller (2000) list nine procedures for implementing validity procedures in qualitative research:

- Triangulation: A systematic process by researchers of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas.
- Disconfirming evidence: A procedure closely related to triangulation that is the search by researchers for disconfirming or negative evidence.
- Researcher reflexivity: A procedure where researchers disclose their own assumptions, beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their study.
- Member checking: The process of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account.

- Prolonged engagement in the field: A process where researchers spend prolonged periods of time in the field observing and building trust with participants.
- Collaboration: A process describing a close collaboration with participants throughout the process of research wherein participants may help develop questions, assist with data collection and analysis and may actually be involved with the writing process.
- The audit trail: A process in which individuals who are external to the research, such as auditors or readers are formally brought into the study for the purpose of examining the process and the product of the inquiry and determining trustworthiness of the findings.
- Thick rich description: A process in which credibility is established through the lens of the reader by being transported into the setting or situation through the reading of qualitative studies that are rich in detail.
- Peer debriefing: The process of reviewing or debriefing the data by someone who is familiar with the research or the phenomenon being studied.

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest validity encompasses terms such as authenticity, credibility, conformability, internal coherence, transferability, reliability, and significance (p. 603). In order to establish validity in this study the interviews were recorded upon the permission of the participants, and a signed consent form was obtained from all participants before the interview. A transcriber recorded each interview and afterwards I reviewed the audio recording. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) stated that because people often speak in run-on sentences, transcribers often miss the meaning of an entire sentence by inserting a comma or period in the wrong place. Therefore to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, I read the transcripts while listening to the recordings. Intensive interviews enabled me to collect rich data captured by recordings and verbatim transcripts.

Because I am a first-generation female and am connected to the topic of the research, bias could be constructed. During the course of the study I remained cognizant of this phenomenon and took extra precaution not to allow my own biases to interfere as the patterns and themes emerged from the data. Leading questions were avoided by using a predetermined set of protocols (Appendix A).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 described the methodology that was used in this study to investigate the perceptions of first-generation women from the South-Central region of Appalachia who have obtained a doctorate degree. A qualitative, grounded theory approach was used for data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the educational, socio-cultural, and professional experiences of first-generation women from the area of South-Central Appalachia who have completed a doctoral program in educational leadership. Data collection consisted of 10 individual interviews with women who met these criteria. The interviews were focused on their perceived experiences as they matriculated through undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs in educational leadership.

The questions that guided this qualitative study were taken from research conducted by Jackson and Mazzei (2012).

1. What is the importance given to life events and/or individuals in the participants' decisions to pursue first undergraduate, then graduate study?
2. What have they learned as a result of forging new territory without familial/social role models?
3. How do they understand/articulate multiple identities? (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 10)

Network sampling was employed in order to find participants in this study. Through my network of connections in a higher education setting located in South Central Appalachia, I was referred to potential participants who might meet the criteria of being a first-generation female who had obtained a doctorate degree (EdD) in educational leadership. As I contacted these women they then referred me their acquaintances who possibly met these characteristics. Patton (2002, p. 237) referred to this approach as snowball or chain sampling.

After approaching prospective interviewees via phone to find out if they met the criteria and were willing to participate in the study, I then sent them a cover letter (Appendix B), interview questions (Appendix A), and the Informed Consent form (Appendix C) for their review. Afterwards, I contacted each of the interviewees via phone to schedule the interview. Participants selected the venue in which to meet me. All interviews were conducted face-to-face except for one and we met via Skype. The data are presented in the chronological order of the interviews. To help the reader understand the participants being interviewed, a short profile of each participant follows. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this section.

Participant Profiles

Abby who described herself as “a poor kid from Southwest Virginia” began her undergraduate studies at a prestigious college in Williamsburg, Virginia about 6 hours away from her small hometown. She was raised in a large family with several siblings. Throughout the interview, Abby stressed the closeness of her relationships not only with her parents and siblings, but also with extended family members including aunts, cousins, and distant relatives. Abby is married and has one young child and is currently employed in an administrative position at a mid-sized university located in East Tennessee.

Betty began her undergraduate studies at a small private Christian college located not more than 20 miles from her hometown located at the foot of the Smokey Mountains in East Tennessee. Betty disclosed that her parents were in the process of divorcing when she began her undergraduate studies and that she, like Abby, did not come from an affluent background. Like Abby, Betty also holds an administrative position at a mid-sized university located in East Tennessee.

Connie was from a mid-sized town in East Tennessee. Although neither of her parents ever attended college, her mother had seriously considered the possibility. Connie stated that she was prepared for the rigors of college largely because of the preparation that she received while attending a relatively large high school. Connie obtained her doctorate degree during a time that she was working at a public community college. She now works as a part-time faculty member and full-time administrator at a mid-sized university located in East Tennessee.

Deborah was the only African American woman in this study. She had recently been promoted to an elementary school principal when I conducted my interview with her. Growing up, Deborah was the only girl in a family of three with two younger brothers. Deborah described her father as having a strong work ethic and being a whiz at math, although he had only an eighth grade education. He died when Deborah was 15 years of age.

Deborah was also the only participant who had a parent with an associate's degree. Her mother graduated from community college but was unable to work in her chosen field of secretarial management after an accident amputating the tip ends of her fingers. When Deborah was 7 her mother was forced to take early retirement due to health issues. Although Deborah stated that her family was very poor, she always had what she needed to be a successful and active student. Deborah began college immediately after graduating high school and described her college experiences as being very positive.

Ellen was the only woman in the study who began college as a nontraditional student. She grew up in a very small town in Virginia. Although Ellen described her parents as being highly intelligent, neither had obtained a high school diploma. Ellen's mother had a third grade education and her father quit school after the seventh grade. Ellen married and moved away right after high school and remained a stay-at-home mom until her husband retired from the

military when she was in her mid-30s. After settling in East Tennessee, she began working at a university where she later began taking classes. After working in higher education for 20 years she retired and is now working with her husband as a couple's counselor.

Fran worked as an adjunct instructor for several surrounding colleges and universities. After spending much of her young life in South-Central Appalachia, she moved to the coast of North Carolina, where she completed high school. Fran later returned to the area and attended a university located in the mountains of North Carolina. Fran's parents were divorced and she spoke of two sets of family members. One set from Tennessee and the other from West Virginia.

Gwen grew up in a small town located in East Tennessee in the mid 70s and attended a relatively small high school. Her family was working class and her father was insistent that his children attend college to avoid working shift-work in a factory. Gwen works as an administrator in a community college located in East Tennessee.

Helen grew up in a working class family who had strong Christian values. Helen received very good grades throughout school and both she and her brother grew up with the expectation of one day attending college. After high school Helen was awarded a work scholarship that paid her tuition towards a bachelor's degree in pre-medicine. Although Helen changed her major, she continued to receive the scholarship throughout undergraduate school. After graduating with a degree in science, she went to work at an industry for 2 years, while saving money to attend graduate school. Helen's parents were very supportive of her attending college; however, it was very important to her father that she did not acquire any debt while receiving her education. Helen is an administrator in a community college.

Idelle grew up in a small town in East Tennessee. Her father, who worked in a factory and as a farmer, was insistent on her attending college to avoid manual labor in a factory. Idelle

was the only participant in the study who first attended a community college. After working as a secretary in industry, she returned to college to obtain a teacher's certificate. She then went on to acquire a master's and then a specialist degree before pursuing the doctorate. Idelle resides in East Tennessee with her husband and has adult children. At the time of our interview, she was on the brink of leaving her job at a university and taking a position at a technology center located in East Tennessee.

Joy worked in a Virginia public school district as a principal. Neither of her parents had a college degree; however, both had some post high school education. Joy grew up with the expectation of attending college. She disclosed that she was married and had small children.

The Interviews

Each participant in this study responded to 11 interview questions as well as impromptu questions that came about during the interview process. This section conveys the stories of these first-generation Appalachian women and how they matriculated from undergraduate school on to the doctorate.

Question 1: *Take me back to your first day of college and reconstruct the events of that day. (Include decisions, people, circumstances, etc.)*

Even though Abby participated in a program designed to remove barriers for college success for first-generation students while she was in middle and high school, she described her first day at her college as overwhelming and intimidating. When Abby arrived at college 2 weeks early to attend a freshman orientation, she chose to stay with her mother and aunt in a hotel room instead of the college dorm.

We borrowed my Aunt Patsy's truck to take me to school. I remember being....initially, just pretty overwhelmed because there was all this activity and people there to help us

unpack. My mom and my aunt had rented a hotel room, so I stayed with them and then they said goodbye to me the next day and I remember it being so overwhelming that I really had to um...just get away from it for a little while.

Abby recalled her sense of not belonging as some of her peers from the northern part of Virginia stereotyped her as bigoted and racist even before they met her.

I remember seeing this guy whose name I don't remember. He was talking with me and then this other student came up behind me and as soon as he learned that that person was from the D.C. area too, he completely stopped talking to me and talked to the other person. So there were lots of incidents like that throughout my freshman year where there was a sort of where are you from. My roommate told me later that she was really worried that I was going to be a racist...a bigot because she was Korean and I was from Southwest Virginia, so her views of the area were that I would be some Confederate flag waving jerk. Her family was all there as was mine and our families met. Of course it was her mother and father and it was my mom and my aunt and me and I just remember it being so overwhelming actually that I didn't even stay in the room that night.

Betty, who came from a very small community located in the mountains of East Tennessee, attended a small liberal arts private college located within an hour from her home. She began commuting to college during the summer after high school graduation and moved to campus later in the fall. Betty recalled the first day of college.

So I went in and sat down for my first summer school class, and about 10 minutes into the class, that was when I realized I was in the wrong class. And I was a freshman and kind of not even a freshman because I was there in summer and the class was full of sophomores and juniors. And so, I had to get up and excuse myself and it was a small

class. So I get up and excuse myself and said I was in the wrong class and had to go to the correct class which I was late for. It was like the nightmare on the first day where someone is anxious and impressionable...I made it to my class, and my professor was kind about me being late to class. But yeah...I was sweating that first day. It was emotionally draining.

Although Connie was somewhat anxious about the first day of school, she had been introduced to the first college she attended through a weeklong music camp that seemed to make the transition smoother.

My first day of college was in the fall and it was about 3 hours away from home. My mom and dad took me there and dropped me off and we all cried and cried. I was excited about it, but I also...I mean, you know...it was a little scary. But I mean I went to a small little arts college and I chose that college because a friend of mine from high school, that's where she was going. I hadn't really thought about where I was going, and I had been down to that particular college at a music week camp and I liked it. It was out kind of in the middle of the pasture field, but, anyway, I liked it, and so when I think about my first day of college, that is what I'm thinking about. I can't remember classes or anything like that. I knew I wanted to go somewhere and it was exciting and a little scary.

Deborah began answering this question by describing the relationship she had with her parents, especially her father. She tearfully reminisced a time when she was 15 years old and had promised her dying father that she would attend college. After his death she continued to have a great deal of support from her mother and siblings. Deborah recalled her first day of college as being a festive occasion with her family.

It was a big deal. I am the only girl. So, you know, everybody kind of rallied around me. It was a Sunday and we probably had three or four vehicles driving to campus that day and it was like the first day. My mother has been my rock since kindergarten! And, you know, it was hard for my mom to leave me in a sense, but I did just fine.

Deborah described herself as a very sociable person and did not have any difficulty acclimating to college life.

I am a social person, so I actually already knew a couple of people there. They came and got me, but, you know, I basically got all of my stuff moved in, unpacked and got everything kind of set up and I think we went out to eat. As soon as my family left, I started hanging out with my friends.

Although Ellen was a nontraditional student beginning classes at a university where she was employed, she remembers being scared and anxious on her first day of class.

I was scared to death because I didn't think I was really interested in the academic part of school, you know, it was just social and fun, so I had really kind of forgotten about school.

Fran was part of a precollege program and like several others in this study; Fran arrived to school in the summer before classes began in the fall. Fran described herself as being terrified the first day she began. To add to her anxiety, she had received news the day before that her grandmother had experienced a heart attack.

Well the first day of college for me, I was terrified! Absolutely terrified. At the time, I had been living on the coast of North Carolina. So it was pretty far from home and I was the only person from my school that was going there. And I thought the small town was huge, which is really funny now! It was just terrifying. I had spoken to my roommate

before I got there because I was living on campus. And we didn't really hit it off, so that wasn't good. But yeah, it was tough. They took us on a tour of the small town and I actually got lost. Us rural kids have trouble with those kinds of things! And it was a little different for me because I actually started in the summer school. I didn't start in the fall. I got accepted into a program for students who kind of wanted a jump-start, so we actually started in the summer session.

I was there before anybody else. It was only...I think 150 of us in that program.

I mean how do you pack all your stuff, and being that far from home. It was really difficult because we had come up the day before and my grandmother actually had a heart attack the day before while we were up here. So she was in the hospital. Mom was trying to get me on the college campus. I didn't drive, so she was trying to go back and forth between everything.

Gwen's older brother had attended the university the year prior to her beginning school and she had visited him at the college several times. Gwen recalled the day her parents moved both she and her brother about 2 hours away from her hometown. Coming from an all white high school Gwen's first experience in college originated from racial conflict.

The first day that we moved in, it was a very big deal and my mom and dad took my brother and me down and during the summer, I had received a postcard that gave me the name of my roommate. And she was from Memphis. Her first name was Nicki and I can't remember her last name. But I have a very unusual name, as you know. So at any rate, when I checked into the dorm, when you go up, you go up to the desk to turn in your card to check in. The population there at the desk in the dorm was black, so when I turned in my name card, they said, "Are you Nicki's roommate?" and I said, "Yes I am. And you

know Nicki?” “Yes, we know Nicki.” So I had arrived earlier than Nicki, so I went ahead and moved in...was unpacked and so forth. By the time she arrived, and I think she arrived the next day or so, and I was just an incoming freshman, and I also believe she was a junior. But at any rate, I happened to be in the room when she came in. And she opened the door and said, “You are going to have to move.” So that was my first experience.

Had it not been for the support of her brother, Gwen stated that she would have returned home that day.

So I left my dorm room at that time. My brother was already down there, as I said, so of course I went to him. Had it not been that I already had a support system in place, my brother and some of his friends that I had met, I probably could have come home that day.

Gwen still remembered the anxiety experienced by her mother the day she moved to college.

Yes, my mom and dad moved us down...you know you never really think about how hard it is on your parents that you're moving and so forth...and then realize ...that my mama's stress showed in the fact that...and I won't forget this either. She wore two different earrings that day! So she was all shook up. But they didn't stay...I mean they took us down and they were long gone by the time Nicki asked me to move!

Helen began college when she was 17 years old on a premed work scholarship. The summer before she began classes in the fall she began working at the college's registrar's office; therefore she considered herself well prepared to begin classes.

I guess the one advantage I had prior to the first day of college was that I had the opportunity to begin work at the college on a scholarship of federal financial aid, prior to my first day as a freshman.

She explained.

...that sort of laid some groundwork because I felt comfortable with the institution because I had already met the admissions people, I had already met my advisor and so that was a really unique experience that I had.

Helen elaborated about her family background and the support she received from her parents.

My parent's primary vision or goal for both me and my brother was that one, we came from a religious background, so they always wanted us to have that Christian-based lifestyle. And so, regardless of what we did, as long as we had that Christian belief, that was their priority. But then, we began early conversations about going to college...very early on, but it was never implied that if we did not go, that that was a negative thing. So both my brother and myself knew...we started in high school, planning. We do want to go to college. So we had that support.

Although Helen was prepared for college, she stated that she was still nervous.

I was very nervous and what made me nervous was I was that East Tennessee small town girl and then I was mixed in with out of state students, students from different backgrounds, really, a lot of students from different races. Living in Tennessee, there was not a lot of diversity in my hometown, so you know that anxiety from being with students from different states, different family backgrounds, and even the diversity...you know, that was exciting. But at the same time, I was very shy and intimidated.

Idelle began attending community college right after she graduated from high school. Her father who had worked two jobs all of his life; one in a factory and the other farming, pushed her to attend college.

Oh, he encouraged me with, "If you don't go on to school, you're not living here."

She reminisced about her first day of college.

My first day of college was at a community college. And I just remember feeling like I didn't know anybody and just having to go try and find my classes.

Even though Idelle admitted to being somewhat lost she was excited about her newly acquired independence.

I just remember also the independence. I was at the stage of my life where I wanted to be independent and thought that I wanted to move as far away from where I grew up as possible. I sort of adopted that place as my home. I hardly went home except to go to bed at night. So I had found my niche.

Joy grew up with the expectation of attending college. Although neither of her parents obtained a degree, both had some experience in higher education. While she found it difficult to be left by her parents her freshman orientation helped her acclimate quickly.

Well for me, there was never any question that I was going to go to college. My parents instilled that in me. There was high school and then college and there really was no question about whether or not I was going...I was just going. My mom had business school and my dad had a little bit of trade school. He always said that going to school was like money in the bank! That was his logo and so there was really no question that I would go. My parents took me to school. I never...I was always a home girl, so going that day was really hard. I remember we went for a campus visit with my parents and

when I got there I just knew it felt right and where I was supposed to be. And so...then when they took me, what I remember most about that day is them leaving.

Although Joy found it somewhat stressful to leave home, her freshman orientation experience helped her adjust.

That was difficult, but I had a great freshman orientation and they got us right into things and so it was good.

For the women in this study the move to college was a memorable experience. Whether it was the day they moved to campus or their first college class, there was a great deal of emotion expressed by each participant. Similar to past research regarding the transition of first-generation students from high school to college (Barry et al., 2009; Mehta et al., 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004) the majority of women in this study not only experienced the typical anxiety associated with such a transition but substantial social and academic transitions exist as well.

All of the women in my study recalled strong parental support as they reminisced about their first day of college. Although their parents did not have the expertise to help them navigate through a new and somewhat intimidating experience, most of them drew from some type of precollege or orientation experience to help them navigate entrance into a new culture.

Question 2: *What was influential in your decision to pursue advanced graduate study?*

Despite the limitations for employment in her area of study, Abby chose to move back home after she had completed her bachelor's degree at the age of 20. However, the discontent she was experiencing in regards to her job in addition to her fondness of school encouraged her to explore the idea of returning to school.

But I finished school as quickly as I could and then I moved back home and was looking for a job and I went to work in my hometown as an optometric assistant and my degree was in government for heaven sakes! So I wasn't really...I was really afraid of looking for work in a big city or anything like that. Just ...one of the things I would change is I would try to be more brave with making those kind of decisions and then I not only started working, but I moved back in with my mom and I was miserable. And then I started thinking, maybe there's something else to do with school. I'd always loved school. I believe it is the way we give to the American dream.

Betty's plan throughout her undergraduate studies was to transition straight from undergraduate school to graduate school. Discouragement from her advisor only made Betty more determined to persist.

The most practical thing was to get a job. But I was always open to further education. I knew that I would try to go on and when I initially wanted to go on to further my education from the Bachelor's degree, I had some roadblocks because I was at a private liberal arts school and it was a difficult school. My GPA was not great, it was average. And my advisor was not completely assured that I would get into graduate school, so ...She was kind of dismissive of me in a way like..I don't know if you'll get into graduate school or not..and in a way there was some truth to that because it was pretty close, but her tone made me even more determined to try to get in.”

Similar to Betty, Connie transitioned straight into a master's program from undergraduate school; however support from a professor encouraged her to move forward.

When I started looking for a Master's it was weird because I knew I wanted to go on. I started looking at the different degrees that were offered and I thought at this particular

university counseling would be good, so I met with the mentoring professor and really liked him.

Connie seemed to have made a decision to go for a master's degree while she was in her undergraduate program. She chose to go into the counseling field because it seemed to be a natural fit.

The master's degree was in counseling and that was just something that...it seemed like would do in college. That people come to me for whatever reason...visiting, talking, counseling and it seemed to be just a natural fit.

Connie went on to describe what influenced her to pursue a doctorate degree.

Now as far as the next degree, I was already employed through the state and as working for the state, it was a benefit to take classes. I also was encouraged by my current supervisor who was in that program as well. So I knew of some people in that and I thought, well, you know, I'd like to have...I didn't really have any big aspirations of having any huge big leadership position because my passion was just to teach. That's really what I wanted to do. But I thought, well, this is out there and you know I don't know if that is the particular one I would pursue now or not, but anyway, it's worked out.

Although Deborah had not intended on pursuing a degree beyond the bachelor's degree after going to work, she found that in order to advance in the public school system she needed to further her education.

And at that time, I was thinking bachelor's degree...we all were. And by the time I finished in education, and when I started working, I thought...oh...I guess you need another degree! And for me, it obviously wasn't a money thing, it was an advancement thing. I did not want to teach forever and I felt like in order to be more marketable, I

needed an advanced degree. So I didn't want to do it my first year teaching, but by my second year, I thought, I need to go ahead and get a master's degree. So by the end of my second year, that's when I started my master's degree.

Ellen made a decision to pursue a master's degree in counseling after an experience she encountered while working at the university. She elaborated,

I was in my bachelor's program, and I normally went to...I tried to get to work pretty early every day and I worked in the Advisement Resource and Career Center program at the university, and I got in a little early and had gotten a call that came in on the main line and I normally didn't answer the main line. But since I was there early I thought I would answer. If anything rang, I just answered it. And I had an attempted suicide on that line. And to be able to keep that person on the line for about twenty minutes with my cell phone at my ear dialing 911 and getting them and still listening to this person and just trying to talk her through waiting and hold on there and let me get you some help...and I realized how even though I was being very successful, and I felt very inept at what I was doing. But there was this adrenaline rush that I can't explain whenever I was on the phone with her and someone knocked on her door. It was the people that I had been dialing on the cell phone to get all of that to take place. And I was probably a good semester away from.... well actually, I was in my last year...my undergrad. And I was like.I finally had a clear view of what I wanted to do in my graduate program. And so I finished out that semester and registered for my final semester and I talked to the advisors over in the counseling program and they told me I needed abnormal psych so I threw that in...finished it...took my GRE and that was it.

Ellen also saw the master's degree as an opportunity for advancement and made an analogy between advancement within higher education and progression in military rank.

And I knew that I didn't want to be...well, in the Marine Corps....we always call it...you're either enlisted or you're officer rank. And whenever I was working at the higher ed center, I always told my group...the support staff are kind of like...had people that couldn't understand support staff and administrative staff, so whenever I put it into terms to them like enlisted and officer rank, they understood. So that's the way we always talked about it. So I went from enlisted to....I knew I wanted to go from enlisted to officer rank and I knew that the administrative field was where I wanted to be. I didn't want to be in the secretarial field or in the supportive staff field forever, so this was my gateway and I got my degree and had a dual concentration in counseling. It's a community agency for counseling and higher education.

After going to work, Fran also saw pursuing advanced degrees as opportunities to "do more".

Well, I really liked college.... after I got started, I really liked college. I was even a resident advisor at one point...really involved with it. I did dorm security, which was hilarious. And I got out and I got a job working at a group home with mentally handicapped adults, and I'm like, this is fine. I kind of like this. And then it was like I want to do more. So I went back. I originally went back to graduate school with criminal justice. And decided I didn't like that after the first semester. So then I switched to sociology. I did the master's degree in sociology. It was tough, very tough. And got hired as an advisor. And that was when I decided to go back and get the doctorate.

Gwen's pragmatic approach to life resonated during her interview. Like some of the other participants in this study, her desire to attend graduate school was job related.

It was out of necessity in order to continue my teaching career. I taught at a technical school for 4 and one half years. And a bachelor's degree was what was required. We moved back up here in 1980...let's see. We moved back here in 1983 and I started teaching adjunct here at this college because I wanted to get back into teaching. But in order to be able to apply for full time...it wasn't necessarily a SACS requirement at that time, but the academic vice president at that time, required anyone coming in to have a master's degree. So then I was working at the time, but I went over to a local university and applied to the master's program and there was someone here who looked like it might be within a couple of years until retirement, so I completed my master's degree in 14 months. So I could be ready for that job. And I didn't get that job because she did retire just exactly when I thought she was going to, but someone internally transferred into that teaching position. But then someone who took a year off to be with her sick parent...and I got that position as a temporary full term, and then she resigned. So then I applied.

Gwen made it clear that her desire to continue her education was strictly need based.

So it still worked out, but it didn't have anything to do with wanting more education. It was specifically need.

Although Helen worked for a couple of years in an industry setting, it was a means to an end.

Her intent was to attend graduate school after saving money and gaining work experience.

Ok, well after I finished with my undergraduate, I worked in business and industry for a couple of years. Really that was really to just gain some more work experience directly

related with biology and chemistry...um....I knew when I entered that environment that I was going on to graduate school, but at that point, I was not sure where I was going or exactly what I wanted to do. So I was able to work for two years in an industry, primarily in chemistry because that was my minor, was chemistry. And so during that two year time period, I really thought ahead about where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do.

Remaining debt free was very important to Helen and her family.

I knew I wanted to do something in the sciences, but that two years gave me an opportunity to one, really research, and also gave me no debt with my graduate program. And so that 2 years, I lived at home and I saved and so that way I was able to start graduate school. And so that was sort of why I used those 2 years to just sort of get my feet wet, as far as working and industry, and then to save and to actually make a decision....somewhat what I call an educated decision.

Unlike Helen's calculated decision to attend graduate school, Idelle's decision to pursue an advanced degree was somewhat happenstance. However, similar to most of the other interviewees, Idelle based her decision to continue her education beyond the bachelor's was based upon job advancement. Idelle had two jobs in secretarial positions and then decided to go back to college to obtain a teaching certificate. After being required to return to college in order to maintain her job, Idelle decided to move forward with her education since she was so close to having a master's degree.

After I got my teacher certification, I was told that my degree was not broad enough. I got hired, but I had to go back to school so I could teach vocational and while I was doing that, a professor at the university said that you need to get your master's degree because you only lack nine hours. So that's why I got my master's.

Idelle was first talked into pursuing an education specialist degree by a co-worker. Afterwards she was coerced by her employer to obtain her doctorate and despite her reluctance, she advanced on towards a terminal degree.

I got my EdS because a gentleman who worked beside me teaching said, I need a partner. I'm going into the EdS program and I drive. Will you do the work? And that was our arrangement, and so we drove to Maryville to classes from Morristown, got my EdS and then my doctorate, I got it because my boss came to me and said because I was at the college level working, and she said, "If you want to advance here or really maintain the position you're in, you're going to have to have a doctorate because LMU is going to a level 6 university and they want people at the level, so you're going to have to have a doctorate." And I kicked, I screamed, I did not want to do it. I did not want to write a dissertation. But I knew I had to keep the job, so I did it. So my life goals were not really well defined. It just sort of happened.

Joy also wanted to advance within the educational arena and felt that continuing her education would help while giving her more career options to choose from.

Well, I was teaching and I loved teaching, but I wanted to have more options and I wanted to expand my focus from on the classroom. I wanted to have more of an impact in my school and, you know, in education there's not a whole lot of ways to go, so I moved into Educational Leadership. It was really just to....I didn't want to be....I don't want to say trapped because I loved teaching, but I wanted to have options.

Joy's encouragement from her family impacted her decision to progress in educational advancement.

I know I was always encouraged. If I mentioned it to my parents or to my husband, I had a great support group...you know....a family that would really encourage me when I mentioned or brought this up they were very supportive and I think that makes all the difference.

For most of the women in this study, the choice to pursue an advanced degree was based upon the need for career advancement. These decisions were congruent with Boyd's 2007 study findings that people from Appalachia were more likely to view education as a matter of choice based on need rather than a desire to expand one's world view (Boyd, 2007), as well as other research regarding first-generation students, finding that these students have lower degree aspirations than their non-first-generation peers (Sy, Fong, Carter, Boehme & Alpert, 2011).

Question 3: *What tensions have you experienced between the culture of your upbringing and the culture higher education?*

Because of the stigmatism she had experienced in regards to her Appalachian dialect Abby had changed the way she spoke and her family perceived this change negatively.

When I went home, I had tried really hard to get rid of my Southwest Virginia accent at school. People noticed it right off the bat and it automatically set me apart as a different person. And I went home and my mom was one of seven children and so Thanksgiving dinner can be like 40 people...a bunch of kids and their kids' kids and cousins and all that. We were at my grandmother's for something and my Aunt...the one that gave me the truck to go to school. Uh...she said to me, "Why did you come home talking like a rich bitch?"

Abby developed a strategy that helped to avoid being teased by her peers and ostracized by her family.

I have a code switcher and I didn't know it was called code switching and I remembered it so much that the girlfriends on the hall that I lived in when my family would call...they would run down the hall to hear me talk because I talked so differently on the phone than I did at home and so that was a major difference.

During this critical time of transition, Abby was experiencing pressure to speak one way at home and another at school, creating an inner conflict that Abby found to be challenging.

But I mean this time I'm like still 17. I didn't turn 18 until December of my freshman year. So I was being a little snotty, but also, I know I was not using the same language any more. That was really hard. That's how I learned there was a tension between education and um...talking with my family.

Despite the changes and growth Abby experienced as a result of her educational pursuits she still made an effort to remember the culture of her origin and maintain a good sense of humor.

They (my family) like to keep me humble, so when I was working on my doctorate, you'll see up here all my degrees, but you'll see up here that barn use sign and that is because I had just taken my qualifying exams and I had gone home for some reason or another and...um...gotten in my cousin's truck and I said to him, "Jason, what does barn from u s e mean?" And he said, "Uh...that would be barn use!" And he gave me this sign, so I keep it out just to keep me humble, but also just to remind me kind of where I came from.

Patton (2012) found that working class individuals place a high value on physical labor and often do not understand the work that takes place within academia. After Abby began working at the

university, she noticed a disconnect not only due to the existing language barriers but also between the type of work that she did and the type of work done by other members of her family.

So language was a really big deal and also the kinds of work I do is so different. It's not the kind of work that most of the people in my family do, so I don't do physical labor like a lot of people in my family. I have a fairly flexible...now, I have a very flexible schedule, so I do have more...I mean here, we get 25 days a year of vacation...24. And so that's incredible. Most of the people that I know...I mean my mom still works third shift as a nurse's assistant and she doesn't have much control over her schedule at all and that's really different too. The way we work is so different and so. A lot of times I'll hear comments like I don't work, but some...there are sometimes when I'm working...you know...60-65 hours a week. It's just that those times are usually more concentrated in the August to May period, so in the summer, there's a lot more flexibility that...so the kind of work we do is so different..I am the only person of my siblings who has a bachelor's degree, so I have a brother that makes almost as much money as me, but he climbs a telephone pole. I mean...so the kind of work we do is really different.

Despite the tension between Abby and her family over the differences in the types of work they do, Abby stated that she strives to find common ground when talking to her family about work.

It sometimes creates some tension; however, it does allow us to talk a lot about...but it's amazing, I mean because work is really important in my family...I mean typical Southern Appalachian strong work ethic family. But we still talk about management issues and things. I mean a lot of the leadership...the ideas that happen with them in their work, also happen with me in my work. It's just a different kind of thing, so we try...I try to work really hard so we have common ground for those kinds of conversations because I would

say that about 50% of the family conversations we have center around the kind of work that we do.

Abby commented that convincing her family that she had not grown “above her raisings” was an ongoing process.

I think a lot of them thought I was going to change a great deal...um..and I sort of had to keep proving to them that I was still one of us and that my mission is to help other people like us have better lives. And that is why I do the work I do and why I work at an institution like this one that still serves so many first generation college students.

Like Abby, Betty seemed to take responsibility for the tension between her and her family resulting from her transformative experiences in higher education.

Yes...at first I did...because as Iwell going through those growing pains where you can get a little education and you know it all. It was a not a good time for me initially those first couple of years because I thought I knew it all and it took a little bit more education to realize I didn't know it all. So I am sure I was difficult to be around at times. But also I saw as education opened up my mind and my world, you know...family members would call me all sorts of things like...you're getting above your raising and things like that. Typical.

Unlike Abby and Betty, Connie had always planned on attending college. She attended a large high school in the town where she grew up. Even though she stated that her high school counselors did not encourage her to go into the science or math field, they encouraged her to attend college.

I always loved school and I always knew I wanted to teach. I always knew that...I always knew that I would go to college because that's just what I thought I would. Now neither

of my parents did. My mom actually was signed up to go, but never did get to. She decided to drop out because she thought the school where she signed up was far, far away, but it really wasn't. She got married and didn't go. But...uh..I just loved school and I guess just seeing it as just a good thing. I had pretty good grades. I do regret, though, that the counselors that were where I went to high school, at the time, did not encourage women to really major in what I really would have loved to major in. I loved the sciences and I loved math, and neither one of those two things was I encouraged to do.

When asked about the tensions between the culture of her youth and the culture of her upbringing, the tension Deborah experienced was between her and her lack of financial resources. Like the majority of other first-generation students Deborah came from a low-income family. She discussed how she had to search for the finances to fund her college education and how the scarcity of money continues to produce significant stress.

I would probably say...and it's probably money. You know my parents did not have money saved for college. So just finding ways to pay for it on my own has probably been the biggest tension because it affects my life. I mean it wasn't a decision that affected me while I was in college, but a few years later, it is still affecting my life. I think that's probably been the biggest tension. You know I've been in....I've had roommates and I've had friends' parents that could afford to or save for their college. Those just weren't the cards I was dealt.

Deborah went on to discuss her family background. Her father was the youngest of 12 children. He quit school after eighth grade and went straight to work.

My dad finished eighth grade and he was the baby of 12 children. And he finished eighth grade and it was time to go to work.

Her mother also came from a large family and even though she had obtained an associate's degree in secretarial management, the tips of her fingers were severed as a result of a work related accident and she was never offered the opportunity to use her degree.

My mom was the fifth child of eight and she did get an associate's degree, but she wasn't able to use it. She got an associate's degree in secretarial management, but while in school, she was at a job and she cut the tips of her fingers off, so she never used that degree.

Deborah elaborated about her mother's health and her family's financial status.

And then she had health issues that she never really worked much anyway.

Later in the interview Deborah shared that some of her more affluent extended family members were surprised and somewhat jealous of her success.

And I think about if I had just been in the classroom, it would have been great. She's doing good. But as soon as I started moving up...it's like...and I don't make phone calls and say, "Hey, I just got a new job!" But they find out and then when I see them, it's like...oh...that's what you're doing now? And where they have kids that could be in similar situations but they're not...it's like...you know...

Ellen, who came from a large family that included seven sisters and one brother, stated that although her family did not always understand her educational pursuits, they always were very supportive.

My immediate family has always been so supportive. Sometimes they don't understand why...you're still in school? What are you in school for? What are you taking now?

Ellen stated that she has been somewhat of a role model or example for her nieces and nephews.

But other than that they just got used to that being a way of life for me because I always had something that I was studying or working on and so my immediate family...because I have seven sisters and one brother all the way down to their spouses and kids have been very supportive and actually that's been an example for the younger...for like my nephews and nieces. I've got one nephew that is a doctor...a doctor of physical therapy and I've got pretty much...well there's a lot of them now that have bachelor's degrees. And a lot of them have associate's degrees.

Even though Ellen received support from her family, she found there were still some people from her hometown, including extended family members that were somewhat jealous of her accomplishments.

There are some folks...I think there's always going to be folks that are kind of jealous or they can't figure out why you want to do that. I don't know why it would bother them.

Ellen associated the tensions created by her pursuit of education to the tensions that were generated by her decision to move away from her hometown.

But, you know I've had some tensions, but, of course...tensions whenever I left home at 18, it was from those same cousins that couldn't believe I was leaving home.

When asked about tensions she experienced, Fran told me a little about her family who are from West Virginia and described how she was ostracized.

A lot...almost all of my family lives in central West Virginia. Very rural...very uneducated...very set in their ways. Very much don't tell me how to do anything kind of people. And it seems like I'm excluded because I'm educated. Most of them...like some of them never even finished high school, but most of them did high school but no college.

If they did go to college, I think only one of my cousins actually finished college. The rest of them all dropped out. So when I go up there and visit with them, it's like a different world to me. And there's a lot of things that they do that I don't get invited to ...that kind of stuff..

When asked when she noticed these tensions Fran stated that she first become aware of a difference in the relationships she had with family members while she was working towards her master's degree. She found that she and her family were no longer able to relate to each other.

I could tell a difference. It was like...I was too different now. Well, there's a lot of conversations that they have...if I try to put my word in, it's like...they don't want to know because it doesn't fit with what they think.

Gwen's experience with going away to college was very different than that of Fran's. As she talked, it became clear that Gwen had found a way to keep the culture of her origin and the culture of higher education from being separated.

I really don't have an example there of any type of a tension. No, I really didn't because my high school friends who didn't go (to college), they would come down to UT and spend a weekend! Like a couple had gotten married and a couple of my friends, they had gone to work at Eastman, so I would come up here and spend the weekend with them. So, no, there wasn't anything like that with the people I knew best.

Later in the interview Gwen elaborated on how she remained close with her high school classmates and did not assimilate into the college culture.

And then too there were a small group down there from my high school...all of us from a couple of years of each other. And we more or less formed our own group and hung out together and did types of things and really didn't branch out a whole lot other than if

somebody was dating somebody else they met in class. Then you entered as a new member into the group. If I had been more mature, aside from just academics, then I missed out on a whole lot UT had to offer...a whole lot...people-wise, culture-wise because I didn't have the maturity or maybe even confidence at that time to go after it and seek it out.

Helen, whose interest was in the sciences, found that because she was a woman those outside her immediate family expected her to get married and have children.

Probably I would say, and this would not be from my immediate family, but I think one of the things about the culture of East Tennessee. You know...why do you want to go on? Because in the environment that I grew up in, it was predominantly men in the workforce and the women stayed at home and so, especially just with the population of the town was...why do you want to do this? And so that's not really a tension, but there were questions about why do you want to go to college? And then, when I actually left the area and moved, do you think you're above and beyond your small town raising? And I've never felt like that. But I always knew that no matter what type of education I got, that nobody could ever take that away from me. And so, I actually, even when I went on to graduate school, I thought, someday I might come back to this small town environment, but I knew that I needed to get that education, and I wanted to do that. So really, that's really not a tension, but at the same time, it was. And it was really twofold. One, because you were continuing your education, and then the second piece was because I was female. My brother didn't have near those

questions, but it was just sort of expected...well, why don't you stay here, get married and have children? Why do you want to go on?

When asked about tensions between the culture of her youth and the academic culture, Idelle laughingly stated.

The people where I grew up think we're really weird. In my family, they just really, they think automatically because I have this advanced degree that I think I'm better than they are. They really do. I literally had not gone back home much.

Because of the tensions between her culture of origin and the culture of higher education Idelle refrained from going home and keeping in touch with old friends. When she finally decided to attend her high school class reunion, she encountered resistance from her high school classmates who were primarily from working-class backgrounds.

I went to my 40th class reunion and saw people I hadn't seen in 40 years. And they were like standoffish when I first got there, but when they realized it was still me, they were ok. And then there are people that are proud. Sometimes people that I grew up with are really proud that I have a doctorate and they are proud of me. But then there are others who think, yeah, you think you're better than me.

Even though Joy was a first-generation college student the culture of her upbringing included plans of attending college. As such, she stated that there was not a conflict between the culture of her youth and the culture of her upbringing.

For me, there really hasn't. I knew I was going to college and that was really my culture growing up. I knew I was going to high school, college, and then get a job. I always wanted to...my mom was a stay at home mom and my dad worked. And I knew I wanted

to work. And I was going to college and I knew I was going to work, so it was part of the plan.

For all but a few of the women in this study, going to college was not a given. Often times they experienced tension between their culture of origin and the culture of higher education. Throughout the interviewing process the notion of tensions that stemmed from the participants' Appalachian dialects emerged. Abby found that her strong Appalachian dialect set her apart from her college peers; however when she adapted her speech to fit in with those at school, tensions within her family rose, "Why did you come home talking like a rich bitch?" Even though Betty attended a college not much more than 20 miles from her hometown, she felt her Appalachian accent created tension.

I felt like they would pick on me because of my accent and because of my culture. You know, I can remember my professors making jokes about moonshine and did I know where to get moonshine? You know, at times it was in gest and good-hearted and sometimes it wasn't so much.

In addition to conflict created by dialect, there was also tension that stemmed from the transformation these women experienced as a result of their education. Congruent with Holley and Gardner's (2011) study, the first-generation women in my study found that as their persistence in their programs of study increased, so did the relational gap between family and friends. As Betty stated, "education opened up my mind and my world, you know...family members would call me all sorts of things like...you're getting above your raising and things like that". Helen echoed this stating that some people from her hometown said that she was "above and beyond her small town raising". Idelle remarked that she seldom returned home because of

the attitudes of family and friends regarding her advanced degrees. Fran seemed to best describe this transformational process,

“I could tell a difference. It was like...I was too different now. Well, there’s a lot of conversations that they have...if I try to put my word in, it’s like...they don’t want to know because it doesn’t fit with what they think”.

Although all the parents of the participants in this study supported their daughters’ decisions to pursue higher education and advanced degrees, all but two women in the study indicated that they had experienced tension with extended family and hometown friends as a result of their choice to pursue advanced degrees. These findings are consistent with Engle’s (1998) early research stating that first-generation students were found to experience incongruities between the norms, expectations, and values of their families and communities and with the culture of the college campus

Question 4: What were some of the most difficult experiences you had when you first entered the higher education? (As well as in the years following)

Abby vividly remembered the feelings she had when her peers remarked about buying clothing from K-Mart. She recalled a time when she and several of her college friends were reinventing the first 3 weeks of college.

One of my friends..he had come from Idaho and his luggage didn’t get here, so he said he had to go to K Mart and buy clothes for the first week of school and this girl said, “Oh my gosh! I can’t imagine wearing anything from K Mart!” And all I could think of was...you know...I was wearing a K Mart turtleneck.

In another instance she was called out by a classmate for wearing hand made clothing.

I had a couple of dresses that my Aunt Leah had made me and some of them had a seam in the middle...and she called me out on that. She said, “You didn’t buy that dress, did you?” and I said, “Well no, my aunt made it for me.” And she said, “I could tell because of the way the seams run.” And it was just that a material culture was a big deal...just as it is now...I mean, just in a different way.

Abby also did not have spending money like her peers and in one instance sold her books back in mid-semester

I also didn’t have spending money like other students had, and my peers and colleagues...I went to school with people like...the NATO commander’s son was in my class and these were people who had lots of money and I didn’t and so having to forego things like Spring Break trips and that kind of thing that just didn’t happen for me. And things like eating out and going for ice cream...I just didn’t have.. I sold my books back in the middle of the term so that I could have money and then just borrowed textbooks for the rest of the term.

In addition to being at a financial disadvantage, academics were also a struggle for Abby when she first began college. She went from being at the top of her high school class to barely passing some of her college classes.

I was at the top of my class and I was knocking it over as a high school student and then here it wasn’t happening like that. I also didn’t have great study skills and I also was just kind of just crazy! I don’t know what happened. But I remember my grades in chemistry and I started out as a bio-chem major, but my grades had gone 90, 70, 50 in that course.

After doing poorly as a biochemistry major and excelling in a government class, Abby switched majors.

I passed, but I was not a bio-chem major after that, but that's when I really fell in love with government and I had a great government instructor my freshman year and that was the real reason why I made the switch..

Betty found navigating the college system difficult without parents to assist, but took advantage of precollege services to help her through the process.

I had to do it all on my own as far as learning how to complete a FAFSA and submitting that...time frames for submitting forms...how to register...I mean something as simple as finding your bookstore because neither of my parents went to college, so they couldn't help me with any of the processes to prepare. So I knew I had to read things and be on top of things and seek out types of workshops in high school that would help with those processes. And they did. They helped a lot. I went to those workshops and I even took an after-school class in high school to try to prepare me for the college prep course.

Unlike Abby and Betty, Connie was not surprised by the rigors of college and seemed to fit in well.

I don't really...when I think about difficulty, I mean other than being sick and being away from home and from my mom...that was challenging.

Similar to Abby, Deborah found the financial piece of the college experience to be the greatest challenge although she didn't feel that she was judged by her peers.

The financial part was probably the and still is the biggest struggle. As far as experience, I mean I wasn't looked at any differently or judged by my peers or my friends...at least that I think...because I had less as a child coming into college, so I went to a really good school.

Ellen's perspective as the only non-traditional student, was somewhat different than that of the other participants. Because Ellen worked in a public university, her tuition was paid and she had easy access to information and tools to help her navigate the college system. Ellen's difficulties emerged from the responsibilities experienced by many returning, nontraditional students, however these hardships failed to diminish her determination to succeed in college.

You work through situations where you're raising kids, juggling schoolwork and job and family and their sports activities. Our daughter played every sport that you could play and they all overlapped and there would be times when my husband would go to one that had a wrestling match and I had to go the other who had whatever. So we just had to ...these were a little difficult and they were challenges, but they weren't anything that dampened my desire to earn a degree.

For Ellen, her most difficult experience was when she entered her doctoral program.

In the years following, I find that the most difficult experience for me was getting finished with my doctoral degree. I thought, oh my goodness, I don't have anything else to go to school for and I am a lifelong learner. I love school! The first time I said that to my husband, he was like what? And I didn't realize that family picks up a lot of slack when we are in school. And you know if you have anyone at our age...there's going to be somebody with some health issues. Well school doesn't stop when someone has a health issue. We kept my little aunt for six weeks when she had a hip replacement. And he carried a lot of that burden. My husband did. My kids have had to carry a lot of burden because Mom had school all day on Saturday...in my doctoral program. Those are my challenges.

Fran found that she was not prepared for college. She expressed that upon entry she had neither the social nor the cultural capital needed to succeed.

High school did not prepare me with anything in higher education. It was a very rural high school and while it wasn't...I didn't go to high school in Appalachia. I was on the coast of North Carolina, but my background has always been Appalachia and so I was even treated a little different at that high school because I seemed kind of hillbilly, I guess.

She elaborated.

So it was difficult...like I don't feel like my high school prepared me for college at all. I don't think I had a clue what I was getting into and my first semester...that was very evident. My grades were not very good that semester. But I was able to adjust and fit in and figure it out.

However as time passed she gained the experience and began to "figure out" her way.

The more I got into college, the more I enjoyed it...it felt like where I should be. The first semester was really hard, but after that it got a lot easier. How do you make friends? How do you interact with people? Like I said, I was the only person in high school that went to App State. I was the only one and that was really difficult.

As time passed Fran experienced transformation.

And when you are in college, you have to figure out who you are and you have to get away from who you were as a kid and become what you are as an adult.

Like many of the other women I interviewed, Gwen found navigating the system difficult when she began college.

On the front end, understanding registration, drop-add, and all those types of things, of course that was pretechnology.

Even though she thought she was well prepared academically, Gwen still struggled in certain areas.

Even though I had gone to a small high school, you know I think I was well prepared for college. I wasn't as prepared for math as I could have been, but that was more my fault than anything else. I just didn't care for math. And then too, I chose UT because I wanted to get away from home and live on my own and so a difficulty was immaturity and that...you know there were two or three different classes that I didn't attend like I should have. So I didn't make the grades I could have.

At one point during her undergraduate studies, Gwen actually quit school, but after spending a semester working at a doughnut shop, she decided to return.

Now there was one spring semester...I can't remember if it was the spring of my sophomore year or junior year, and I decided I'd had enough.

And I came back home and I worked that semester. And that was a good thing, though because then when I came back and lived with my mom and dad and worked for a semester, I realized...this was ridiculous! So I went right back down there and I think I went that summer to get caught right back up, and I never looked back. It was a turning point.

Although Helen found it difficult to walk into her graduate school classrooms with being the only female, she quickly adjusted.

This probably came more so from when I entered my master's, not the bachelor's, but probably with the master's program, with me being in the sciences, there were many

classes when I was the only female in the class. Now at the same time, in the majority of those classes, oh, it was wonderful. I mean, the male students, we became friends and it was wonderful, but I could see because I remember walking to a few of those first classes, I was the only girl in this room. That's different!

However, it was at this point the culture of her youth and the academic culture was in direct conflict. She elaborated.

And probably a second feature was in my undergraduate, the theory of evolution was taught more as a theory, not a fact, and then when I moved into the graduate program, it was taught as a fact. And so that was also sort of a difficult experience on me, because I went from a Christian-based family and upbringing and in undergraduate, it was taught as a theory, and then I went to this is a fact and as long as you are in this program, this is the way we will approach this. So that was just sort of a difficult experience there.

Because most of the graduate students at the university Helen attended had completed their undergraduate studies there as well, she was treated as an outsider.

And then a few of my classes in my graduate studies, some of the professors did not necessarily like transfer students, so I remember sitting in one class thinking, ok I am a female, Christian, and a transfer.

Idelle found the rigors of higher education difficult and was not prepared.

I was not prepared academically for community college. I thought I was. I didn't know how to study. My first test I will never forget...in psychology, I flat failed, much to my shock because I had studied. First thing I ever failed in my life. I mean I had always been a straight A, B student.

When asked to write a research paper, Idelle did not know where to begin.

When I went into my first English class and the professor got up and said, “Now we’re going to write a research paper.” I had never written a research paper. I had no idea what she was talking about. I had to go to her after class and say, “I’ve never written a research paper.” And she said, “You mean when you were in high school, you never had to write a research paper?” And I said, “No.” So she took time out to help me and I have enough initiative and smarts, so I’m told, that I was able to pick up on it and go.

Although Joy was academically prepared for college, she did not have the confidence in her ability to succeed.

Well, first of all, leaving home was hard for me...and I think, also confidence in my ability to do it. I knew I wanted to and I knew I was going to, but I didn’t really have the confidence in my ability going there and so I really had to...that really had to grow as I went to school, so I would say just confidence in myself was probably the most difficult.

All of the women in my study except for Ellen and Helen found their entrance into higher education the most difficult time of their academic career. While most of these women faired well in high school they experienced difficulty adjusting to the rigors of college. Not only did they cite struggling academically but also had difficulty learning to navigate the college system. Like many other first-generation students most of these women did not have the prior learning of their parents to lean on as they entered higher education and encountered issues such as financial literacy, dropping and adding classes, study skills, and general college success skills. Even though they expressed a lack of confidence and social skills, when they first began college they were eventually able to adapt and succeed.

Question 5; *What were some of the most pleasurable experiences you had when you first entered the higher education? (As well as in the years following).*

With a smile on her face, Abby delightfully reminisced about the great times she spent with her friends as an undergraduate student.

I had incredible discussions with my peers and sitting in dorm rooms talking till three in the morning about things that really mattered to the world...I remember those times just being really incredible.

Abby went on to highlight other incredible experiences as an undergraduate student.

But also, the first few weeks I was there, I was the president of the ACLU and I sat in the front row and I got to ask a question to the president of the ACLU and that was incredible. I mean, here I am, just this poor kid from Southwest Virginia getting to interact with these people. Also, we had a NATO conference on our campus and I got to meet Maggie Thatcher..Margaret Thatcher, I guess I should say...

Those were incredible experiences..those where I fell on my face in front of the NATO Ambassador from Turkey..and at the time, Turkey wasn't a member of NATO. They were trying to get in. The representative from Turkey..um..you know, I also went to DC for the first time in my life because I had friends who lived there, so I would go home with them on the weekends. I had friends in Virginia Beach that I would visit on the weekends too, so I was having opportunities that I never would have had if I stayed home or even gone to community college or something like that.

As Abby's relationships with her friends grew, as did her pride in her Appalachian heritage.

Those were really great experiences, and I also made some really great friends my freshman year, and so people began to appreciate where I came from, I guess. The more I

shared, the better it got, so when I went home, I would bring homemade applesauce, apple butter, jelly, jam and bread for all my friends and people loved that. So bringing a little bit of Appalachia to Williamsburg and those were some of the really, really good experiences.

Betty's love of learning shown through as she elaborated about her positive academic experiences.

Just the number of different classes you could take and different subjects and different learning and professors who had so much information and experience. I was amazed at the things that they could bring to the table. To me, being in the classroom, if you're really interested in the subject, the professor is almost like an entertainer. You can really connect with them and they show you things that can stick with you your entire life, so I was lucky to have some good professors. And the ones that weren't so good and that's totally my opinion! So, yeah, just being around that learning is kind of like being handed the keys to the world. It was nice.

Connie found her relationships with her professors and teachers to be the highlight of her academic experience.

The relationships that I had with the professors and then the teachers. We were close. I went to small schools where there were smaller programs.

Like Connie, Deborah also expressed that her relationships with her professors and friends were the most pleasurable part of college. However, the financial debt that she encumbered while in college is what stood out to Deborah the most.

I'd say making friends...that's probably the thing that's stuck with me the most, besides the debt. I mean my closest friends are people I met in college. I do not have one

negative thing to say about the experience. My professors were great, my friends were great. Everything was great. I mean every department on the campus was great.

Ellen was very proud of the status acquired by having the name of a large university attached to her doctorate degree and stated.

Well, for me, I've always enjoyed learning, so I think the most pleasurable for me was whenever I got accepted into the UT doctoral program.

Fran described the most pleasurable experience that she encountered while in school was when she made a decision about what she wanted to do and realized she could succeed in college.

The sense of achievement. You know the sense of....hey, I really can do this. I can be successful. I can achieve my goals. There was a lot of indecision when I was doing my bachelor's degree about what I wanted to major in and I think I changed my major six or seven times! It was a lot of different times! And even in my master's program, I changed my major once. There was a lot of indecision and stuff like that, but then you get in it and it's like, hey, I can do this and I can be successful and I can make friends and I can do what I love and the more time I spent in college, the more I wanted to stay in college.

Gwen, who enjoyed the freedom and independence, found while away at college was quick to point out what she enjoyed best about her academic experience.

Well, you know, the most pleasurable experiences were not related to academics. Or related to having my own space...even though it was a dorm room the first year, an apartment the next year, so it was all the types of things that related to being your own person, schedule-wise and those types of things.

Helen reiterated the importance of her relationship with college faculty and staff.

Probably what I would call my faculty members, the staff that supported the college, whether it was the registrar's office, my academic advisor...the academic experience was pleasurable.

Emphatically she shared her love of learning and the academic process.

I loved school. I still would be a student if I could. But I would say it would be the people and then the academic focus and then just the entire learning experience. And that would also include the co-curriculum and the activities associated with that.

Idelle reverberated the importance of relationships, especially the positive relationships and genuine encouragement she received from her professors.

Meeting all the different people, first of all, all of the contacts. Finding out that I really could study and learn and do things. Finding out...I've always had as a general rule in my major...professors who saw something in me I didn't see and pushed me. At ETSU, I had the professor who said you really need to be a teacher. As a matter of fact, I am still a friend with him. He's up in his nineties..

Joy echoed Idelle's sentiments.

I think, for me, it was meeting new people and to make those really close friends that you can really only do in college when you live with people. That was definitely part of it, and also, just later on in college, professors challenge you more. You turn something in and they're like I know you've got more in you. And then realizing what you can actually so was really amazing for me...just having those professors that brought it out in me. I think that was really enjoyable, just seeing what I could do.

When asked about their most pleasurable college experiences, the majority of women in this study cited the importance of the individuals that they had met while in college including peers

as well as college faculty and staff. These individuals had a significant influence on the trajectory of their academic success especially as undergraduate students. These positive relationships acted as a springboard for the confidence and vision needed to move forward to a terminal degree as well as a catalyst for the love of learning.

Question 6: *Was the academic life what you expected? If not, how did it differ?*

Because of Abby's pre-college experiences she was more prepared for the rigors of college. She elaborated,

It was...I have to say here, that in high school, I was so lucky to have been in a program called Upward Bound. So when I was in Upward Bound, I spent the summers on Virginia Tech's campus. And also when I was in college...I was in Upward Bound for 3 summers and I gave them 3 summers as a college student, myself. So I worked as a tutor/counselor there through college. But Upward Bound not only put me on a campus for an extended period of time...it was sixteen weeks every summer, but it also gave me a good idea of what to expect and I had some classes with some teaching assistants and some college professors who were really good at showing me what college was going to be like. So I don't think that academic life...in terms of what to expect in the classroom was much different than what I was going to expect, but I do think that culturally...I mean, again, Virginia Tech was just thirty minutes from my house, so culturally, college wasn't what I expected it was going to be, but academically, it was what I thought it was going to be, so it was really hard.

Betty found college to be as she had expected, but much more difficult.

It was what I expected, but it was also much harder than what I expected. And I wasn't well-prepared, coming from high school. I had some skills, but definitely not where they needed to be, so it was up to me to try to hone those. It took a lot of work.

She added that the precollege experiences that she pursued out were a big help.

I knew I had to read things and be on top of things and seek out types of workshops in high school that would help with those processes. And they did. They helped a lot. I went to those workshops and I even took an after-school class in high school to try to prepare me for the college prep course.

When I asked Betty if that helped influence her decision whether or not to attend college she answered.

I already knew I would go and I think it made me feel more comfortable because I didn't have a lot of tools in my toolbox and everything I could add to it made me feel better.

Connie who had graduated from a large high school located in the heart of her hometown reiterated how her high school had prepared her for college.

I think looking back on it at the time, it was pretty much what I expected. I attribute that to where I went to high school...and...I can remember even taking classes and I thought...what am I doing? This is just a repeat of what I already had.

Although Deborah also attended a large high school, she was not prepared for the rigors of college.

It differed for me because all the way through high school I didn't have to study.

And I just made As and Bs because I paid attention in class and did homework. Then I went to college, and you had to study. And it was new to me. That was a struggle too...when I took my education classes, not so much, but all the biology was tough. I was like, what? Study this table? And that was new to me. And I could have made

myself study. I just never had to. So that was a big academic adjustment for me.....the studying, days, taking good notes...that was a big challenge for me.

Ellen, who worked at a university, found that college was as difficult as she had expected.

I think it was everything that I expected because it was very challenging work.

Fran found college to be very different than what she had expected.

Not at all what I expected. I expected it to be like high school and that's what I was prepared for and then I get to college and it is like completely different. You have to do all these things outside of class on your own time and time management and all that stuff is so important and then trying to find a job on the side as well especially in a community where you don't know everyone.

Despite what Fran had heard about the reputation of the university being a "party school", she was surprised to find it much more rigorous than high school.

I think everybody thought...well you go to App State. It's a party school. So you go there and you're going to party more than you study and that was not the case with me. I was never a partier, but you expect...I don't know...you go in thinking it's going to be a lot like high school and it's really not. It's a lot harder.

I don't think I ever studied in high school, so I didn't even know how to study when I got to college.

Similar to Abby and Ellen, Fran's precollege experiences were very helpful.

So that summer session that I took...they offered a class called the Freshman Seminar and that class saved my life I think. It was how to be successful in college...how to study...introducing you to the community around the college...that kind of stuff.

Helen was surprised at the diverse student population as well as the diversity of each institution she attended. She explained.

I would say yes, it's exactly what I expected. Probably the added piece, whether it was undergraduate, master's or anything doctoral, there was a lot of population of people and the diversity, not necessarily racial or ethnic, but just the diversity in all three institutions and all the programs. That was educational and I guess I didn't expect that so much.

Earlier during our interview, Idelle disclosed that she was not prepared academically for the transition from high school to college. She failed her first test in psychology and had never written a research paper before entering higher education. However, to her surprise, most of her instructors and professors were more than willing to help and it did not take her long to be comfortable communicating with them.

Until you get in and you start doing these things, you think, wow, they are just super special people. They have to be. And then you realize they're people, just like you. They have expertise in some areas and don't in others, and some of them are just not even smarter than the rest of the world and you think, oh my degree isn't worth much because they have the same thing.

Joy's undergraduate studies were pretty much what she expected. While graduate school was difficult, the cohort model in her doctoral studies seemed to be a plus. The close relationships that she developed with her peers were an unexpected surprise.

I think it was I expected. I think...the thing about my graduate school...it was again a challenge that I loved. I think one of the best things out of graduate experience was the cohort. I really didn't expect to find this group of people that...we still keep in touch and

we were able to work together so well. So that was a little different. I loved the cohort experience.

Although the participants offered various responses to question 6, most agreed that college offered some surprises. Most of the women were shocked by the rigors of college, although others were more prepared. The majority of the women in this study had some type of pre-college experience that helped them navigate the rigors of college. Interestingly, Idelle found her college teachers and professors to be much easier to relate to than she had envisioned them to be.

Question 7: What were the most rewarding aspects of your academic life? Most frustrating? How do these correspond (or not correspond) with your personal life?

Abby elaborated about her passion while working with returning adult students who had significant barriers that prohibited them from completing a college degree at a younger age.

I think, for me, I worked for 10 years for the school of continuing studies, which is where I got the experience with working with adult students, who, for some reason, didn't finish a college degree, and I could see myself in those students because I felt that as an undergrad, there were several points that if something had happened...if there had been just one more break in the chain...I could have stopped out too and not finished.

Abby could relate to Appalachian students who have a strong sense of kinship. As a college student, she found herself in a conundrum when her uncle died during the same week as final exams.

It was really difficult at times. Particularly, I had an uncle who died during my freshman year of college and I couldn't go to the services...he lived in Iowa...because I had final

exams. And...um...and I didn't want everyone else.. you might have figured by now that family is really important to me. And that was really hard. I just wanted to say to hell with this and to go to the services rather than finish my freshman year of school! And so...that's really...I mean working with students who went through things like I did and then seeing them achieve their dreams, is kind of unbelievable.

Concerning frustrations Abby continued,

Most frustrating? So..every organization I have ever worked in has a lot of bureaucracy and sometimes we make policies that are best for us and not best for students and sometimes we make decisions based on anecdotal evidence rather than really carefully consider data...and so it is often frustrating for me that a student can't re-enter because they owe sixty-five dollars or something, but once they're re- registered, they are eligible for this much aid and, you know, and those kind of bureaucratic things are really frustrating for me because I know for me now, 65 dollars isn't hard to come up with, but I remember when I made the deposit for William and Mary, 300 dollars...it was going to be tough. I mean that was 2 rough months for us...and I ...it was money I could get back later, but I had to make that deposit in order to go to school. That's really frustrating and now what I do in my work life is I do faculty training and development, and sometimes I think it is easy for us to forget what life is like beyond this campus and we sometimes lose sight with what is going on with students in their everyday lives because we are not experiencing those things and so money, for example, might be a challenge for you and your family, but it's probably not the same kind of challenge as a student who is coming from a family where both parents are making minimum wage and really trying to scrape it all together.

With regards to these frustrations Abby elaborated.

So I think we don't think outside of ourselves a lot and matters like that can be really frustrating for me. And, in terms of academic preparation, too, I think that because we chose to work here and we chose student service and those who are admitted here, we have to figure out a way to give students the scaffolding they need to be successful. And that means everything from academic and tutoring support to the kind of social supports..the food pantry here, for example, which is such a good tool for students to use, so if we are going to serve this kind of population of students and bring them here than we really need to work to try to give them the support that they need. Not just to graduate, but to get jobs and be contributing members to the community. I have worked with students here who have gone on to do amazing things and I know some of those same students are the ones who had the most difficult time while they were here dealing with their own lives, while also trying to go to school and so I try to remember that when I'm teaching because sometimes I...one of the things that I declared last year was ...I was teaching...I used to complain about student writing a lot, and then I thought, why am I complaining about this? It is my job to coach them and it is my job to teach them....complaining about it is not going to matter. Now do I wish that students could make subjects and verbs agree? Yes! I still do! But as long as I am holding them accountable for it, then I am doing my job as a coach to them.

Abby's passion and ability to relate to first-generation students from Appalachia resonated as she continued.

So that can be really frustrating and also this mentality of not remembering what it was like to be a student...and also maybe never knowing what it's like to be a first generation

student who might also be from a low income family...who might also be struggling with Appalachian social constructs that other cultures don't have. A good example of that...I had a student and this has been five years ago now, but he was from Cocke county and his freshman year, I was teaching a First Year Experience course and he came up to me after the first week of class and he said, "My mom has been diagnosed with breast cancer. She is in treatment. My siblings are taking care of her during the day because I am in school during the day. I drive home to take care of her at night." So he was driving to Cocke County after school every day, spending time with his mom there at night. Who know's if he is resting or not? And then trying to drive back to school the next day. In a lot of cultures, it would be okay for him to just be gone.

Betty reflected on her most rewarding experiences.

The most rewarding aspects were good discussions that we had in class and moments where things really clicked and made sense...you know it was almost an epiphany-type moment where you have an "a hah" moment and everything began to fit together. At Milligan, they did a good job with interdisciplinary regimen where you take such things as arts and sciences and they fit it all together and that works out very well and it's doable since they have a limited number of students that they work with, so those were the most rewarding things.

Similar to Abby, Betty's source of frustration originated from the barriers she faced from being Appalachian and having lower income. She added.

Frustrating things? You know to go back to your topic was that I was very much a minority there. An Appalachian student, and most of their student body is from the Midwest. There were a lot from Ohio and Indiana. So, in a sense, I was an outsider. Even

in my own area. And the professors are not generally local either. They're transplants. So, at times, I felt like they would pick on me because of my accent and because of my culture. You know, I can remember my professors making jokes about moonshine and did I know where to get moonshine? You know, at times it was in jest and good-hearted and sometimes it wasn't so much.

Yeah....so, at times, I felt, and I don't know if it was entirely accurate, but I felt like I was this poor Appalachian person who just happened to be going to school here with a bunch of rich kids. So there was that outsider mentality to some extent and again a sense of doggone it, I'm going to do just as well as the rest of you!

Connie reflected on her college days.

I think now looking back on it, I would like to believe that my experience that I had in college, helps me the most in counseling and advising and helping the students who I work with now. And I loved college then. I loved being in the college environment, so that would probably be the most rewarding thing, and the fact that I could represent my family. And do something meaningful with my life.

The source of Connie's frustration came from her unmet expectations regarding leadership within academia.

Maybe the most frustrating thing, too, is all the times, the things that we learn and theories and things, I am frustrated when I don't see that end leadership.

Connie was very disappointed in a fellow supervisor when she heard him say,

“Well, it's just good theory, but it's not always in practice.”

She added,

That was a big letdown for me. I guess I'm just really naïve when it comes to stuff like that because I just don't think the world should be like that!

When asked about her most rewarding experiences in academia Deborah reminisced.

I had a great experience and when I think back to times in my life, I wish I could go back to that time in my life.

Deborah also enjoyed the academic experience; so much it was difficult for her to move back home.

My mom was willing to take me back in. But I cried all the way home...just not wanting to leave. I cried and like boo-hooed. I could like barely drive....just crying and thinking about leaving that behind me.

Even so, she found the milestone of obtaining her bachelor's degree the most rewarding experience.

And ityou know...probably the most rewarding would be obtaining the degree.

Both Ellen and Joy went through the same doctoral cohort. Like Joy, Ellen found the cohort experience very rewarding.

Most of our classes in our doctoral program...well our whole program was a cohort program. So I definitely liked that. I am a real cooperative learner...you know...that's just the way I like to learn. I think we learn a lot from other people; especially, when we are in a group setting and you have that team effort and then you hear another person's perspective. I think that's a great way to learn. It's a great way to teach. So, for me, my most rewarding aspect of my academic life was probably cooperative learning.

Regarding frustrations Ellen added.

Frustrating...uh...was probably..in our program we had three weeks where we worked on our own pretty much. We did a lot of Skype with the professor. We did a lot of journaling. We did a lot of things like that. We did a lot of weekly assignments that we had to submit and they weren't really too awfully frustrating...just part of the program. But it was my least favorite. Now how those all correspond to me, like I said, I'm just a collaborative person.

Laughingly Fran elaborated one of her most rewarding experiences.

The first time I got an A on a paper....it wasn't my freshman year. It was later on....just the feeling that it's ok, I can do this.

Although it was difficult to see her roommates drop out of school, it seemed to make Fran realize that she was making an accomplishment that could not easily be achieved.

My freshman year I went through four or five different roommates. They dropped out.

And that was really hard seeing them give up. And I was still trying to push through. And that was rewarding and being able to see myself do it.

Fran also found the academic freedom that she encountered while in college to be rewarding.

Other stuff...just the ability to choose classes that interested me and still go towards a goal. I mean I took some classes that really had no relevance on anything that I ever done. But they were fun! I got to learn more about them.

Although Fran found taking classes outside her scope of study to be enlightening, at the same time, she was frustrated that she had taken classes that were not applicable to her major.

Frustrating would be taking classes and then changing my major and those classes not counting. I think that if I hadn't been made to choose a major at first and just started out with the core classes, I think it would have been better for me. Just doing some

exploration. I mean at one point I wanted to major in speech therapy and have classes like audiology and anatomy of the hearing components and just stuff like that I couldn't really have taken unless I was 100% sure.

Later, during the interview Fran disclosed another frustration was her acquisition of student loan debt and an adjunct teaching position that didn't pay well.

It's kind of frustrating, you know? You have a doctorate degree and you are still working part time making \$22,000 a year. You know, it's frustrating.

Yeah, and I have \$160,000.00 in student loans I've got to pay back and on \$22,000.00, you can't do that.

When asked about the most rewarding aspects of college, Gwen reminisced about the last 2 years she spent away attending the University.

Well, the most rewarding aspects came in that last couple of years because in that last couple of years, I did have a roommate and we lived off campus and we worked at the same place...which we worked on UT campus. But the most rewarding aspects then were becoming a little more dedicated to academics and making really good grades that last couple of years.

Gwen's source of frustration came from the distant relationships with her teachers and professors in a large university.

The most frustrating, I'd say were always tied to the bureaucracy at the University and the size and I couldn't...there were probably...well there were very few teachers who learned their students' names. You know, they were very large classes and then because it was 10 weeks because it was quarters as opposed to semesters, so probably the most frustrating was being...just really sort of being a number. And then having a name and

having such an unusual name, it was always mispronounced and nobody ever bothered teacher-wise to say, well how do you say that?

Helen, who was a biology major, found the academic piece of college to be the most rewarding aspect, along with the people who supported her and helped her succeed. She revisited the time during her undergraduate studies.

Probably the most rewarding would be just the entire academic experience...the people associated. And I will say with the academic piece, it's the people at the institution, but then I also had a very strong family support, as well. And then also had some selected high school teachers that tracked me as well.

She added.

The frustrating? Probably, when I think about my bachelor's program, I don't really remember anything that frustrating. It was just a very positive experience.

Helen found navigating the system of graduate school to be somewhat difficult and frustrating. She stated.

With the graduate, it's probably sometimes the paperwork associated with it...with just trying to navigate through the channels and it's not the academic piece...it's the how do I take my GRE...when do I take my GRE? So it would almost be navigated through the system.

Although she attended a small private school for her bachelor's degree, Helen attended a large public university for her graduate studies. Like others in the study, Helen found the bureaucracy within a large university frustrating. She added.

I hate to say this. I went to a private school for undergraduate and I don't know whether the public because it's a larger university, probably because of the number. I think that

may have been a factor. But I don't want to say that in a negative way because obviously going from a small private school to a larger university, you know, there's got to be infrastructure there.

As she pondered more on the subject she explained.

And at the same time, with the private school, I actually was embedded within an office.

When I went to the public school, I was not embedded. So I would want to be careful about stating that because I am not really for sure that it had an impact. It may be because I was the new person. I was a transfer and I was just not familiar with how to navigate.

Helen recapped,

It would probably be about the same thing when I still think about what were my rewarding aspects personally, it would still come back to that learning...that lifelong learning experience...support of family and friends and probably frustrating even making sure I know how to understand a system and how to navigate through the system.

When asked about the most frustrating experiences she had encountered during her educational experience, without having to think long, Idelle quickly answered,

I didn't expect that it would take so much time. That was the most difficult, and I was talking to my co-worker and he has just finished his master's. And he said, "I look back and think it wasn't that hard, but the whole time I was in it, I felt like it was there every minute." And I said, "That's right. When you're in a degree program, even back to your associate's, you know you just live it the whole time. I've got this assignment, I've got this reading, it takes over your life." I don't care how much you say it doesn't, if you're really going to be a student, it takes over your life. When I was doing the doctorate, there

was no life. Of course, I did the one they call the speedy one. I did it in two years and I just always said, I survived this.

She elaborated.

I was lucky my husband was working evenings, my kids were grown and I mean I literally broke down a couch, sitting with the laptop, books and notes and every spare moment I had. It was the best of times and worst of times!

Unlike Helen, Idelle did not have the support of her spouse as pursued her doctorate degree. She added.

...a situation that intensified the stress. And it did affect my personal life because my husband did not want me to get the doctorate. He was upset that they were forcing me. His words were what are you going to do if they tell you to jump off a bridge? And I said, well then I'll tell them no. And he said, well you've not told them no yet. So he was not happy, but we just didn't talk about it. It was like this hidden secret, but I would only work on it when he was asleep or at work....with a few exceptions.

When I commented on the stress that this situation must have created, she replied, emphasizing the importance of the peers who were in her cohort.

Yeah, it was. If I hadn't had the friends...you know that's the other thing...it was a cohort situation and that's another plus that in most academic programs and states, you're in a cohort situation and that helps a lot. I have a friend still in Mississippi that we called when we were going through the program constantly.

Joy found being able to overcome the challenges of graduate school to be the most challenging aspect of her educational experience. She stated,

Well the rewarding was the people and the challenge and just seeing what I could do.

Similar to Idelle, Joy found the time that it took to obtain her doctoral degree on top of her other obligations to be frustrating.

I think the most frustrating when I think about graduate school and personal life, was being a mom, working full time, getting that doctoral degree. That could be frustrating because you put your kids first. When everybody is in bed, time for you to concentrate on what you want to do. So I think that was definitely frustrating at times.

Question 8 *What relationships in your life have changed as a result of you receiving your doctorate degree? What is the nature of these changed relationships?*

When asked about the change in relationships Abby first thought it important to discuss her husband and his educational circumstances. She stated,

In terms of my primary relationship with my son and my husband, that relationship didn't change at all. My husband knows that I've always valued education and that's something....

Abby then explained how the relationships with her family have remained close.

My family calls me Dr. Duck now. They called me Duck before. I don't think my relationships have changed much at all.

Emotionally, she told me of how proud her father was of her accomplishments.

My dad died last year and when he was sick, he liked to tell the doctors in the hospital that I was a doctor, and so they should talk to me! He thought that was just incredibly funny that I was a doctor that couldn't help people! And so, there has been a lot of teasing, but nothing that would separate me.

She continued,

There are some financial situations that challenge, so I have some siblings that I can travel with and go to concerts with them and things like that. Other kinds of siblings aren't in the same financial bracket, so we do different kinds of things together. There is some separation in that way, but not.....I actually really try to work hard at spending lots of time with all of my siblings and doing things that they are ...their personal circumstances...

Abby explained that by adjusting her communication style she stays connected with her audience whether it is family or co-workers.

So sometimes I feel like I have to be six different people...with my family because I can be this person here and I've got to be this person here...I have always thought people from Appalachia...particularly people of color...but there is sort of multi-consciousness going on where you're this person here and you're this person here and I feel like I am even a different person here at work with administrators versus how I am with faculty or with students and the same is true with my family. I'm a different person there too. But I think that ability to shift..I mean I am still the same person a lot of ways too...the way to communicate is different if the audience is different.

She concluded,

This has really helped me in being able to work with students and people of all sorts, whether it is in the community or at work because I sort of gage where I need to be in terms of what kind of vocabulary do I need to use...that kind of thing. So...no....I haven't noticed a lot of changes.

Betty noted that although her family first perceived her education as a threat, they now see it as an accomplishment that reflects well on them as well. She explained.

Personally, I can see that my family is very proud of me and they will often introduce me to other people when we are out and tell that I have a doctorate. You know, it's very sweet of them, but somewhat embarrassing at times! You just kind of roll with it..um...so that kind of relationship has changed. I've seen it kind of come full circle and the distrust and mistrust of education to oh you've made it now and we're proud because you're reflecting well upon us now.

Concerning work, Betty continued,

So there is some of that. Workwise, big change with your doctorate because suddenly you have a lot of opportunity to move forward.

When asked how having the doctorate degree has changed her relationships, Connie thoughtfully reflected,

I don't know if my life has really changed any. I haven't because it was a goal that I had, but I certainly would want my friends and people to know me as me and there's a lot of people that I would just prefer that they call me by my first name. It's a little different when I'm teaching...just out of respect because I worked hard for it.

Similar to Connie, Deborah doesn't feel that having a doctorate degree has changed her relationships with the people whom she is the closest.

The people that love me and support me, they have supported me ever since they have known me. I mean even before there was even a thought of a doctorate degree. And people that I have met since I moved here...they are just as supportive. My friends are like family.

However with some extended family members she senses some tension. She added,

You know I might be venturing out a little here. It's just my personal feeling. I feel like some of my family members....some...whose parents are like siblings of one of my parents, in particular...who probably had a more affluent life are kind of shocked that we have made it as far as we have made it. I think....I sometimes get the feeling that they always want to know what I'm doing or.....I feel like they probably want to compare me to their children or kind of want to say like, "Oh, that's what you're doing?" or like "Yeah....why can't I do it? I'm just as good as anybody else." And I'm not talking....I mean they haven't discouraged me...I mean...I just get that feeling sometimes like what is that about?

She elaborated,

And I'm just using myself as an example. My brothers have good jobs and can handle themselves...but...myself...as an example because I do come from a family of on this particular family side of educators in a sense. And I think about if I had just been in the classroom, it would have been great. She's doing good. But as soon as I started moving up...it's like...and I don't make phone calls and say, "Hey, I just got a new job!" But they find out and then when I see them, it's like...oh...that's what you're doing now? And where they have kids that could be in similar situations but they're not...it's like...you know...I guess it is jealousy. But I don't know why people think because they were afforded a different life, they should be privy to something other people have just as much right to be as anybody else.

Deborah laughingly concluded,

To me, it just makes me happy when I can tell them something else that I'm doing

So you know...I don't let things like that bother me. I have too many people in my life who love me because I am what I am. Not because of what I do or any degree that I have...and I can't let two or three other people that could be jealous affect all that.

Like Deborah, having the doctorate has created tension with extended family members. She touted,

I've got some extended family that have kind of withdrawn because they think that you've outgrown your raising, but you know, they thought that whenever I left home at 18, so it hasn't bothered me. But whenever I read the question, I was like, well yeah, it is true, so....

Fran found that her relationship with extended family members has decayed since she completed graduate school. She earnestly stated,

With the family a lot has changed since the master's. Like I haven't had much contact with the West Virginia side of the family since I got my doctorate, so I don't....one of them....my grandmother sent me a check for a hundred bucks.

Gwen, who works in a community college setting stated.

Well, I don't know specifically about changes. It's funny in a way, of course, working in a college environment where others have doctorates; it's not really anything unusual. And then, of course, you have the transition of the students, and I think, sometimes it encourages students to see that their teachers are also continuing on their education and getting more degrees. And particularly, I think I was 45 when I began work on my doctorate. It also shows them...you keep going...it's lifelong learning...you can keep going back at any age, and you can pursue a degree at any age.

Regarding family relationships, she lightheartedly continued.

I don't know that...I think my family was proud of me. To say that they found it really impressive or that type of thing, I don't think that would be the case. I think they were proud of me and they celebrated when I finished. I have a sister-in-law that was very curious about the dissertation and she asked me to see it. I think she read a few pages and then realized that it was not too entertaining!

Although Gwen expressed a sense of pride in her accomplishments, she didn't find the need to emphasize her doctorate degree. She concluded.

And then, I think too, people wait to see what you think about it, in that are we supposed to call her Dr. so and so now? And how much emphasis you put on a title or something along those lines. Now I don't feel I have a need to do that, you know, so I didn't do that, so I didn't...so I have experienced other situations where people would be sure people called them by their title. I don't feel the need to do that. By the same token, for the longest time after I earned it, when people would call me Dr. so and so, it was all I could do to keep from giggling...and I could feel a big smile all over my face, so I'm proud of it, but by the same token, I don't need somebody to make sure they use Dr.

Helen saw having the doctorate degree as merely a professional accomplishment and the idea of changed personal relationships did not seem to come to mind. She explained,

Probably the key relationship would probably be...had I not received my doctorate, I would not be in this position. So it has allowed me affirmability, and also the doctorate would provide me other opportunities if I wanted to go outside Northeast. You know, opportunity whether it's a public or private school or even at TBR in a systems office or at THEC. There would be positions there what I call academic focused, but without the doctorate, I would not be even considered.

After having to think about the question for a moment, Idelle elaborated,

Um...just a little. You know, I wouldn't say that they have that much. There might be...when I got my doctorate...the dissertation chair said you're about to enter this clique of people where if you have your doctorate, you just automatically get more respect.

When Idelle left the university and then moved to a position where she was the only person with a doctorate, she downplayed having a terminal degree.

But really as far as relationships otherwise, I don't let it. When I took this new job, nobody around me has a doctorate. I was used to being surrounded by doctors and now nobody around me...and so I literally went to a meeting before I was hired, and I sat there and I said, "One thing I want to tell you is the doctor in front of my name does not mean anything unless I do a good job. And I want to tell you personally that I am still who I have always been and I don't want you all to think just because I'm a doctor I'm going to be a snob." And as a matter of fact, I said, when I was teaching at high school, a student of mine who was not from East Tennessee, and he said, "What's your definition of a redneck?" And I said, "Besides me and my family, what else do I need to tell you?" And he cracked up. And so that is how I feel.

When reflecting about changes in relationships Joy discussed the professional advantages.

No, actually there wasn't a pay increase from master's to doctorate, so it was just the thing that I wanted personally to do. I think it does open up doors...maybe not necessarily in my current job position. I have moved schools since then and I have taken on some work at home opportunities through ETS and Pearson and others, so as far as work opportunities, I think it has definitely opened up some doors. My current job...I think its...I think maybe peoplethey maybe treat you a little differently when you

have your doctoral degree. They maybe defer to your opinion a little more or look at you in a different light. I haven't seen any major changes, but I have noticed that a little bit.

As stated in the literature, the doctorate degree is the entry point for many high-level careers (Choy 2001; Engle & Tinto, 2008). For some of the women in this study, the primary change in relationships was on a professional level (opportunity for advancement, open doors, respect, affirmation, and pride). However, for others, the doctorate degree reportedly amplified a gap in their relationships with extended family members and others from their culture of origin.

Question 9: *What other changes in your life have you experienced as a result of your achievements?*

Betty has experienced many positive changes professionally since obtaining the doctorate and has an optimistic vision for the future.

It's just been really wonderful to be a part of some of the decision-making that goes on here. You never really think that you will be part of that and then the opportunities come and you think, my gosh! My opinion is valued and I can bring something to the table and so it opens up doors and it has made life really fulfilling. I feel really satisfied with life and I have a better outlook like where will the next opportunity take me?

Because of her degree, Connie has been able to fulfill her lifelong dream of teaching.

Well, the main thing I guess is just because of the doctorate I was able to teach in the current department that I'm in. Just as adjunct and it gives me the opportunity, with the terminal degree to do some upper level classes in addition to some graduate level classes. That's probably been the main thing.

Obtaining the doctorate meant advancement to a principal's position for Deborah. Because of this, Deborah is somewhat of a small-town celebrity.

You know, I think it affects me socially. I cannot go out and just be myself. I'm always....she works at my school...she's my principal! Just go inside...I want to be myself. And here it's so small where everybody knows you. I mean being my height and my build and being an African American...you know I stand out like a sore thumb...even worse. I think that's probably the only...I am fine with going to Wal Mart and just being a Wal Mart customer. But nope....if I go to Wal Mart, it's like a superstar production! There she is! She eats! She's not at work? I just want to be normal...you know. I feel like the president of the United States in a small town.

Ellen is very pleased with her place in life. While at the end of her degree program, she retired from her full-time position as an administrator in a community college.

Well, I'm retired now and I live at the beach. I do some research for a corporation out of New York. You know he sends me assignments or job projects that he needs me to research and I do the work and send it back to him and that kind of thing, so I never...as long as I have my laptop and my Internet connection, you know, I couldn't do that. My husband and I are certified pairs instructors for couple's retreats with Credo which is an organization through the chapel, and so we do that...it's a great place.

Fran's success in education has given her much more confidence. She was hopeful about receiving a full-time faculty at a community college.

A lot more confidence....I've gotten a lot more confidence. I used to be this shy little kid that...I was very shy. I didn't talk much. I didn't go out of my way to talk to people or things like that. And now I'm just like everywhere. It is kind of difficult right now with

my work schedule...teaching at so many different colleges and all. So I would like to see it get to the point where I am just at one college full time. That would be my next achievement I want. And I'm talking to Walter's State right now about getting in there. I've had a phone call with them.

Gwen saw that having a doctorate provided her with job security. She elaborated.

Well, the changes in my life...I have always pursued professional development, but not necessarily a specific degree. Each time I have pursued a specific degree, it was work-related and I felt I needed that degree in order to validate my position, or, for example, I worked with a team for...well one for 20 years and another for 15 that both encouraged me to get my doctorate and saying...there will be new people coming in here and they will be much younger. If you get your doctorate, they can't be more educated. So you might consider what your doctorate would mean over time. And I never really had thought about it that way. It always reminded me of in "Fried Green Tomatos" when Kathy Bates pulls into the parking lot and there's those two young ones. And they have taken her parking space and she backs up and rams them and says something about that I have more insurance. I guess it was my insurance policy! It enabled me to be then promoted to professor and has given me the opportunity to be eligible to apply for other types of positions, whether I chose to or not. So I guess the diploma and then the...there was some re-numeration that went along with that. Those would be the changes.

Similar to Gwen, Helen viewed having the doctorate as a professional advantage.

Probably, as a result, whether it's from a faculty member to a dean or a dean to this position, it's provided me exposure to higher ed. And here again, it goes back to that

public or private or both. It's just higher ed in general. And so I see that not necessarily as an accomplishment, but an advantage of having that advanced degree.

Like the other women in this study, the primary change that Idelle experienced as a result of having the doctorate is professional advancement.

New job! That and again...respect from some people that kind of felt like well she doesn't have her doctorate. She doesn't need to be in that position or.....and people come up to me who again don't know the academic life or that I go to church with think man, you're a doctor! You know everything! NO!

For Joy, having the doctorate means more job opportunities.

Well, I was offered a job at a local university because of my degree. However, I could not accept it because of the pay. It was such a decrease in pay which was kind of interesting, but I think it's difficult when you stay in this area...you want to stay in southwest Virginia or northeast Tennessee and to really do something with your degree...sometimes I think that's a challenge. I would have loved that position, but we weren't at a place in life I could take that significant of pay cut. So that's one thing. Also I think just working with Pearson and working with ETS....I think when they see that doctoral degree, it's easier to kind of get in the door and get started. Those are some of the things that have changed.

All of the women in this study responded to question 9 in a similar fashion, agreeing that the major change in their lives as a result of having obtained their doctorate degrees in educational leadership has been in relation to work. Betty not only sees having the doctorate as opening doors, but also remarked that her opinion is now valued more and that she has more to "bring to the table". Fran not only has more confidence in herself, but also is hoping to be hired

on as a full-time faculty member at a community college. Gwen likened having a doctorate to having an insurance policy and found that it afforded her the opportunity to be promoted. The idea of opening professional doors, as well as both self-respect and respect from others permeated throughout question 9.

Question 10: *Are there any parts of yourself you put away or keep hidden in your personal relationships? In your work relationships?*

In many ways, Abby was the participant who had the strongest disconnect between the culture of her upbringing and the culture of academia. She stated that she is able to connect with students by sharing her background with them; however, she does not feel comfortable sharing her story with faculty and administrators. Abby elaborated,

So, at work I don't talk about particularly with faculty and administrators...I talk to my students about it, but with faculty and administrators, I don't talk a lot about who my parents are or my dad was a janitor. My mom is a nurse's aide, and so coming from that kind of background, it's just not the kind of background most people in this field come from, and so I don't tend to talk about my crazy family tree. I told someone one time...sometimes it feels like I have every Appalachian stereotype in my family. You know..you name it...I've got one of those. So I don't talk about that much because family is so important to me and it's kind of hard to do that. And so...I do think I hide what my background is. I know there have been a lot of studies about first generation graduate students or faculty who try to hide their blue-collar roots. And so I know I do that.

Abby also discussed how she does not disclose her work life with her family members because of the tension she sees between the blue-collared work they do and the professional type of work that she does.

And I also think that as far as my personal relationships go, I do think that there are many parts of what I do...I mean I used to tell people that I just taught in my personal life because my family, in particular, couldn't understand what is it that you do all day? There is tension between kinds of work.

Similar to Abby, Betty stated that she does not share parts of her work with her family.

I guess I don't always share everything that I do at work with my family. And there's no real reason behind that. It justI always think, will they would probably be bored. And I share some of what I do and I don't know where that sense comes from. Maybe it's sort of ayou know....I don't want to seem arrogant. You know you really do have that sense that you don't want to get too big for your britches.

Likewise, Betty does not share much about her family to her coworkers.

With my work relationships, I am a very private person. I don't share too much. I think we do have a good teamwork mentality in this office and we care and ask about each other and doing what we do in our personal lives.

Although Connie doesn't believe that she acts differently at work than at home, she still does not share much of her personal life with her coworkers.

I don't think I'm much different one place or the other. I mean it's just kind of the same. I mean like with everything...I tend to be fairly private and so there may be things in my personal life that I don't want my work family to know about.

In contrast, Deborah who presented herself as a very high-spirited and outgoing person clearly stated that she does not hide any parts of herself to anyone.

No I haven't. I told my boss this and I told other people this that I am myself. I can be sitting here like I'm talking to you or I could be talking to my boss or I could be talking to the president of the United States. I am who I am and I don't hide that and I don't hide that from anybody and like I said and I don't carry myself that way like I'm better than somebody.

Connie sees that by sharing her story she can encourage others.

I'm here by the grace of God and I have worked hard to have the things that I have.

There's nothing about me that I hide. If anything, I tell people my story to encourage them. I always taught in Title I schools and some schools that were worse than others. I always told my kids you can do whatever you want to do!

When asked if there any parts of herself that she hides from others, Ellen very bluntly stated.

Nope. Never have.

Similar to Abby and Betty, Fran keeps a part of herself hidden from her family.

Oh yes....there's always stuff we hide. Like, I don't talk a lot about my education to my family because they just don't get it. They don't get it. I mean I know my mom is proud of me for that. My dad has passed away. He passed away this past January. I would assume he was proud of me, but I don't know. We weren't really close or anything. But I don't go around calling myself doctor or anything like that. I mean I've made a few jokes about it, but I try not to act like I'm better than or seem like I'm better than anybody else.

I'm still just me, but I think people do still see me differently.

Gwen, who like Connie and Ellen, is very direct and matter of fact, stated.

I try to be open and transparent and direct and I like to be able to say and mean it...what you see is what you get.

When Helen discussed question 10 she had a different take on the question and focused on how she compartmentalizes nearly every aspect of her life in order to create balance.

Probably, and I tried to do this as a faculty member. It really stemmed from a family/student relationship, and I could even take it back to business and industry. When I left the undergraduate and went into industry... one of the things that I was always taught when I had the experience in business and industry, and even as a faculty member. I tried to keep those two things separate because I wanted...you know, I'm here to support the students as a faculty member, but I need to draw that line and so I was always very careful to make sure that the students did not become my friends. Because you do have to draw that line between...I am the faculty member and you are the student. And so I always tried to keep those two separate.

Helen continued.

I can compartmentalize fairly easily, so that's the way I sort of divide things into functions because I think ok...this is like my church life...and this is my home life...this is my education...and this is my work life. So that way I can separate those two.

She added.

And not only did I teach it, but I actually believe that you have to have that balance.

Idelle stated that she is a very open person with most all of her coworkers and only keeps parts of her work life hidden from her spouse to save him from worry.

I'm pretty open. The people I work with pretty much know me inside and out. I do hide difficulties at work from my husband. He doesn't handle it very well if he thinks I'm having difficulties at work. So I just don't talk about it.

Similar to Abby, both Betty and Fran keep a part of themselves hidden from their family believing that their families would see them as arrogant or as Betty described "too big for your britches". On the other hand, Connie found that by sharing her story she can encourage others who may come from similar backgrounds and let them know that they can accomplish whatever goals they establish for themselves. For Helen, choosing to keep her professional life and home life separate has become a way of life and has helped her maintain balance. Although Idelle does not disclose some situations at work to her spouse, she is otherwise a very open person and behavior at work and at home are congruent. Likewise, Joy does not keep parts of her life hidden or tucked away.

Question 11: What do you want others who are entering higher education to know about your experiences as a woman from South-Central Appalachia who has obtained the doctorate degree as a first-generation student?

Abby had several audiences that she addressed when answering question 11. She began by encouraging students who are entering higher education.

If I was talking to a student or mentoring students, particularly from where I am from, I would probably say number one that you can do it and that your separateness doesn't mean you don't belong.

She went on to discuss the challenges that they might face as first-generation student from Appalachia,

Just because your culture is different, it doesn't mean that you can't accomplish these things and I would also say that a lot of the things that you are going to encounter in your academic career are going to be subtle things that would be very offensive to you that others have no idea about.

Abby then went on to speak to administrators and, or faculty who are entering higher education.

You have to understand about my people, is that family is perhaps the number one value because it's where your safety lies.

She continued.

You know, I mentioned earlier, when I went to college that was an aunt who gave us her truck and an aunt to go with us, and other aunts...I mean my extended family bought my luggage that I took to college. And when my mom had her hysterectomy, I was really young then, my family...I had an aunt who took off a month and a half to come stay with us while she recovered because we were young children. So for us, it's not that school is less important to my family, it's just that family is where we've been picked up our whole lives by these people...and now, my grandmother, who I can't go take her grocery shopping because I'm studying for tests, that's a harder decision than you might think it is. And, so, I would want you to know that. I would also want you to know that, yes, if my third cousin died, I'm going to the funeral because I knew that person. Maybe you don't know your third cousins, but I did. That person was at Sunday dinner, was at holiday events...so, yes, I'm going to that service. And that might mean I have to miss your class...um...and so that's a really important thing.

She added.

The other thing is that I need you to show me why this is worth it. I need to help me decide whether this is worth it because I think there were times as an undergraduate, in particular, that I was risking a lot. There was a lot at stake. I mean when my aunt called me a rich bitch, I thought, oh this is what I am giving up. This is what I have to give up to do this and that was a hard decision to have to be making. It turned out it didn't have to be done, but that is the way I perceived it at the time and that's what your students might be perceiving too.

In regards to removing barriers Abby concluded.

And I would say anything to remove the barriers from completing, and those often include psychological barriers and I do think it's better here at this university where we do have a stronger population of students who are first generation, but not everyone came from the same background and \$125.00 fee for renovating a building is going to make a difference in my life as a student. I think those are all really important things.

Abby went on to share about her stereotypical characteristics as a first-generation woman from Appalachia,

And so...I would like people to be very aware of the fact that I know what it is to work hard and I have worked hard. That's very much a characteristic of my culture. I might seem clannish because that is the number one characteristic of us people from Southern Appalachia, but that's a strength, as well as a liability in an academic career

She finished by addressing those who are considering graduate school,

...and I would want, in terms of graduate education, I think that to the student who would be like me, I would say, do as much as you can to finish graduate work before you have a family. You can do it and work, but it is going to be a lot harder to have a family and

um..go to school and work at the same time...I mean that's what I was doing during all of my degrees. So if you are going to do that you'd better find a good partner because without a good partner, you're not going to get through it. So that's a lot..

Betty stressed the importance of perseverance and taking ownership of one's heritage.

Perseverance is the major thing. Just to keep going even when times are tough and it seems impossible. I have another student who is also an Appalachian native and she said, "Anybody can do anything for 15 weeks." And I thought, that's kind of a good mantra to use that it's tough, but it's only tough for this short period of time and I can do that. So I do think it's about perseverance...and also it's about owning who you are. For us, it's been Appalachian and I think that's good. It shouldn't be a shameful thing. It should be part of what you are and what are those classic traits from Appalachia that you bring to the table? I can use that perseverance and making do and being creative, too, at times, with what you have. I like to think that all those things make us even better! With people from other areas, we've had at times a hard scrabble existence in life and that is typical of the area and has made us tougher and intelligent people as opposed to people that needs to be looked down on.

Connie focused on being female.

I could be wrong, but I think that the societal view of women now is different now than it was 20 or 30 years ago, or maybe even 10 years ago. But I personally believe that regardless of gender a person needs to be their true self and to be a person of integrity and good moral character and ethics, but as a woman, I think that a woman needs to strongly consider getting her degree and going as far as she can in education, because that's one thing that can't be taken away. And there may not always be a man around. I know that

whatever happens, I can support myself. And I think not only it is just a matter of supporting myself, but a matter of personal rewards, but part of this has to do with my own upbringing and my faith and my goals and values too that I truly believe serve a purpose and I want to be open to that purpose and the particular pathway that I am supposed to be in. So I think that I would feel comfortable. I mean you could say that to somebody regardless of their values or faith or whatever it is. There are still pathways that people can take and goals. And I would encourage a woman to do what her passion is and not what somebody else is trying to get her to do if they are trying to get her to be a nurse and she can't stand the sight of blood or whatever. And don't do that.

Regarding finances she added.

One thing that I wish I would have done differently is to really look at what is available as far as scholarships and help and things like that. In the income level that my parents were, it was very difficult to put me through school, and I worked and I got some scholarships and I worked work study and I did everything to try to get through. They made too much money to get grant money and not enough to get federal loans. I paid on student loans for years. Ten years, I guess. And here again, people say that they don't want to do loans, but it's an investment. And, to me, it's a very small investment for your future and your education and something that you really want to do.

When asked what she would like to say to others who are entering higher education to know about her experiences, Deborah emphasized her strong religious beliefs.

That it can be done. One of my favorite scriptures is Philippians 4:13, I can do all things through Christ and that Christ strengthens me and being where I am today in my career. I mean I'm living proof that that is a true. That's like my daily life.

She added.

...but that would probably be what I would want people to know. It can be done. You just have to have a vision in mind and a goal and you just have to work hard toward it. If I can do it, you can do it!

Ellen emphasized the importance of self-motivation and family support.

That I never thought I was smart enough to do it. But if you'll keep putting one foot in front of the other, seek out good mentors, seek out people who believe in you. My husband has always been my best and the loudest cheerleader I've ever had. My kids, you know, have been pretty loud cheerleaders, as well. I had a mentor for the first few years and I didn't even realize because she was my boss. I didn't even realize that she was...man, that's the perfect example of a mentor, you know? I just encourage people to get a good mentor...someone you can trust and someone you will be honest with you.

She elaborated.

But never give up on yourself. Put one foot in one of the other. You start out with one class a semester, and before you know it, you're there. You're taking comps. You're doing what you need to do and don't think that you have to do it all in three years like I thought I had to do and work full time. Don't think you have to do that. Take your time and enjoy the journey. Sometimes I don't think I enjoyed the journey as much as if I had slowed down just a little.

Fran echoed what Ellen had said about the importance of support.

That you can do it. I've had so many people in my life tell me you can't do it. And you don't need to be telling people they can't achieve. You need to tell them they can. And we need to say...hey, you can do this and I'll help you do this. I'll help you with

whatever you need. It's just so many people are like..oh, you are from this region...or oh, you are a woman or whatever...you can't do this. Sure you can! You can do whatever you want, you know?

Gwen emphasized the importance of persistence and resolution.

That if you've got fortitude and attitude, you can do it. Now certainly, there would have been greater challenges in different types of doctoral programs, so I don't know that this same advice would apply to all, but in the particular doctoral program that I completed, and that educational leadership..that's what you need...you needed the right attitude and you needed the fortitude.

Helen wanted to let other's know that having a degree opens doors that might not otherwise be accessible.

Probably, I think I've already answered this in another question. Probably it's just that personal philosophy that once you have the education...where I go and what I do, no one can ever take away from me what I have learned or my degrees. And I'm not really that hung up on the degree, but I know that everything that I have learned...that that's from me. And then, hopefully, obviously, it's going to be part of my job. But I think that's important for women to especially know that they can earn that degree. And it may be that they earned that degree and they want to be a stay at home mom. That's great, but then if they do earn a degree, then maybe they have some opportunities. To me it will lead to doors that will open that they never had had they not earned that degree.

Once again, Helen emphasized the importance of family support as well as inner determination.

I guess I was just blessed that I had a family who wanted me to go to school, so I never had that obstacle. So I had that support and then I had two or three teachers in high

school that really supported and then I just had that drive. I thought...I am going to do this.

And she laughingly added the importance her family placed in remaining debt free.

It was like you can do anything you want, we will help you, but you're not going to go in debt! You're not going to come out with that high debt. And they could not afford to send me to school, so everything I did, I had to work to receive scholarships and those types of things.

Idelle's advice to others entering higher education focused on using correct English.

I have a dear friend at LMU that gives a speech that says just because I talk this way, doesn't mean I'm stupid. And that's what...and I would talk about...when I first went to LMU I was over student teachers, and a lot of them are first generation. And I would talk to them about how you talk. And I said, I'm not saying you have to give up your Appalachian heritage, you don't have to give up your speech, but you do need to use correct English. One thing is that you're teaching future students, and people assume you're stupid if you're saying ain't.

So that's what I try to say to people entering higher education. And they would say that the people at home would think I'm a snob. And I said, then you talk two different ways. You learn to talk to your people at home the way you've always talked, and you learn to come out in the work world and you modify your language.

Joy focused on finding inner strength.

I think I would want them to know to go for it...to dig down and find that confidence in yourself and really try if it's something that you really want. Don't ever let where you

come from or anyone hold you back. If it's your dream, go for it because it can be done.

It really can.

As a researcher and a first-generation woman from South-Central Appalachia pursuing a doctorate degree in educational leadership, I was anxious to hear what stood out to them most regarding their experiences as first-generation Appalachian women who had completed a terminal degree. Most of the women in this study agreed that having internal perseverance and family support were the major components of their educational success.

Question 12: *Is there anything I should have asked but didn't?*

Abby wanted people to know how the adverse experiences that the women in her family endured impacted her life.

One thing that I did not say that I would add is one of the major driving me forward in my life towards education was the experience that my mom...and really a lot of her sisters had..all of my mom's sisters...I tell people I have five moms because I am so close to my four aunts. All of them grew up in sort of the...my mom graduated from high school in 1963. She is right in the middle, so they're in that late 50s through the 60s era. They were all married and had marriages go awry and then many of them were very financially destroyed by those marriage dissolutions and that really had a major influence...particularly my mom because she was working so hard to just make it and a lot of times my Christmas present would be a new mattress because that's what I needed. And I think that I was always determined that I was going to be prepared to be on my own regardless of my marital status. That was not a major issue in my life and I didn't want to struggle the way that my mom had struggled to be a mom to us..and to me, the

only way I could see to get out of that...because I couldn't sing, I couldn't dance, I couldn't act! and I certainly couldn't play sports...I mean like really, really! So the only way out of there was through my brain and there wasthat really was a major motivating factor for me through high school, undergrad, and graduate school.

In contrast to the women in her life who did not have an education, she modeled after a mentor who was a counselor in a TRIO program that provided support for first-generation students.

I hit a point where...the reason I...I had great mentors throughout my life like my Upward Bound counselor here, probably one of the most influential woman in my life. In part because she was an educated woman who was helping other women become educated people and she was single with a child, getting by very nicely and not having to work more than one job.

Abby elaborated about other mentors in her life.

Because I have...almost at every point of my career...maybe not undergrad, has someone in my life who was a professional mentor...that really..The reason I started my doctoral degree was because the first day I was at work at ETSU, my boss said, "So when are you going to start working on your doctorate?" and...um....without him pushing me to move forward, um...I am not sure that I would be finished now. I think I would have eventually done it, but not in the same time frame and not in the same way. So ...it would have taken me longer to...the other thing that was really driving me is that I hit a plateau in my career here that and this happened for the students that I serviced all the time. They would hit a place in their career where they had to have a bachelor's degree to move forward and that's why they were in my program. I hit a point in my career here where I had to have a doctoral degree or I wasn't going anywhere and so that was a major

motivating factor. But without that mentoring quality, I wouldn't have had, you know there's that saying that luck is where opportunity meets preparation. I wouldn't have had that luck if I hadn't have had good mentors in my life, so mentoring is, I think...and not formal mentoring, but I have just always had people in my life who believed in me and that was really good.

She expounded about the support that she has received throughout her academic career from her family.

I mean even when I was being a brat as an undergraduate, there was not ever a doubt in my life that every person in my family wanted me to graduate from school. My third year of school, which was my last year. My Uncle Donnie took me to school that year and he lived in northern Virginia, about an hour from Williamsburg...and we...I was living in a single...I got there and I got all my stuff in and he said, "You can't live here." "It is so small." So we packed all my stuff back and went back to his house. He measured all the walls and everything. He...that weekend...built me a loft. He built custom shelves to go above my beds. He measured the carpet and custom fit the carpet to that room...and I mean...there was never a time in my life where I felt like people didn't want me to finish school. And that is so important...it's really important. I'm not sure all families are like that...

Betty wanted other women from Appalachia to know that they should pursue their educational endeavors even if it meant having tense relationships with family members on a temporary basis.

I just think that women from Appalachia should pursue education and know that at times it would be difficult to have relationships with your family that might become strained but if they can persevere, sometimes there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

When asked if there was anything I should have asked and didn't, Connie stated that she wanted to add to question 10 regarding what she would say to other women pursuing an educational doctorate degree.

I think that they need to exercise great wisdom in the relationships that they have. And how they present themselves with their classmates and their professors and all of that. And you are going to get some hard knocks, whether or not it's a woman or a man or whatever, you are going to get some. I think to let them know that there's a huge political game going in that arena just like with anything else. It's not just in higher education; it's anywhere in business or whatever. And so I think it probably would have been helpful to have known that type of information as you are going on and looking for jobs and things like that.

Ellen, who was one of three women I interviewed who disclosed that at least one of their parents did not have a high school diploma, stated that she thought it would have been good to know if the parents had a high school diploma. When I asked her about her own parents she elaborated,

My mom had a third grade education and she is smart as a whip. And my dad finished the seventh grade. Both of them were as smart as they could be. I couldn't believe that my mom had a third grade education.

Because neither of her parents had completed high school, I was curious to know what her family's attitudes were in regards to higher education. She stated that even though she had received a voice scholarship to the School of Fine Arts in New York, City she turned it down.

My voice instructor sent in all the stuff....sent in a demo tape and all that kind of stuff. So, no, I wasn't interested in college because all I ever wanted to do was grow up, get married, and have babies. And that's all I ever wanted to do. Just be married and have a

bunch of youngins! But then as you get into your life, you realize that it takes a lot of money to raise these kids! You want to give them everything that you didn't have and to give them every opportunity that I didn't have. So you start thinking, I'm going to have to have a career and be able to support all the stuff that we want for our kids.

She elaborated,

Well, number one...we were so far away, college wasn't accessible. You would have had to go away. We were about an hour or an hour and a half from the nearest community college, one way. And I was from a very poor family and there was no way. And there was no talk of scholarships or grants, you know, from any of the local stuff. Never heard anybody talk about any of that.

Ellen went on to discuss the impact her socioeconomic status had on her decision not to attend college.

I had a lot of friends...I say I had a lot of friends...I had a bunch of friends that were on the college prep route. And out of them, only two or three, there was only a small handful that went and those were the upper echelon of economic families that could send their kids to college. Somebody had to buy them a car and the gas to drive back and forth and pay the tuition and all that. Well, that never entered my mind because I knew I couldn't afford to do that. And I knew that my parents couldn't afford to do that. It just never crossed my mind to go to school locally even though it was an hour and a half away. But that was the closest local thing we had.

Similar to Ellen, Fran thought it might have been good to ask more about the experiences of other family members.

Well, I could talk about my brother. He also has a lot of the same experiences I have had with the family. He started going to college but he dropped out because he was too high most of the time.

Although Fran's brother dropped out of college, he eventually returned and completed an online bachelor's degree program. Fran also thought it important to add how different she was treated because of her Appalachian dialect.

But you know, a lot of people just look at people from Appalachia and treat them very differently. I was even put in speech therapy when I was little because I had a West Virginia accent and I moved to North Carolina and they thought I had a speech impediment. I didn't say my words right because I had the West Virginia accent, so, I mean, when you're treated as if you have a learning disability or a speech disability simply because of where you come from? That's really bad. So you try to block it out and cover it up and all of that and before I moved back up here, I had pretty much gotten rid of my accent and now it's back. It's ok, though, now. But it is really sad that people from other regions view us as backwards.

Idelle summed up her educational experiences and gave credit for her success to God, her father and her husband.

I've been lucky and God looks after me cause I am pretty stupid on my own. And he's put me in the position to get these degrees, and I had a father who started me out the right way. I tried to quit school when I was at community college and I said two years was enough and I wanted to be a secretary and never do anything else the rest of my life. And my father finally said, ok, but you're on your own. And it was actually my husband, at

that point, who said we weren't going to get married unless I finished my Bachelor's Degree cause your father will never forgive me.

So I went and finished. And the rest is history as Paul Harvey used to say.

All of the women who responded to question 11 other than Connie brought up the importance of external supports including family, .

After my interview with Abby, I thought it might be of importance to bring up the subject of mentoring to the other women I interviewed. I asked them about their experiences with mentors. Had they had mentors or been a mentor to others?

Because Betty is one of the youngest women in her work group, she does not feel it her place to mentor at this point in time, however, she expressed the importance of mentoring other women for Appalachia.

...to know that you have someone in your corner. Someone else who has made a few steps in the upward direction and can share with you things that they've learned.

Connie stated that various mentors encouraged her throughout her academic and professional career, including a previous fiancé's mother, her own mother, and others who had obtained their doctorate in educational leadership. One mentor who stood out to her in particular was a former president of the community college where she had once worked who said "You can do this. You just have to be persistent. No matter what, you just be persistent."

When asked about mentors in her life, Deborah quickly thought of a lady from her church that had a doctorate degree.

...but she was always there...like she helped me when I got my first job...at a grocery store. And she helped me enroll in college, like even to this day if I have a problem, I

can call her or text her, so she's probably been the longest mentor I've had and that's been all my life...

Although Deborah does not yet have children, she still is inspired by the thoughts of giving her future children a better life than she had.

...one of my motivations was for my children that I don't have yet, but if I have children, my parents provided the best life they could for us and if I ever have children, I want to give them a better life than what I had. And if they have children, I want them...so like that was my whole motivation. If I'm going to do better, I'm going to be better.

She concluded by stating the importance of support from friends and family.

...so just having people in your corner that are supportive...I think that's...of course I wouldn't have made it to what I've got, but my friends and other people that have encouraged me, I would not have finished. When my mom died, I would have stopped. And of course my parents, even though they're not here, I know they would be proud of me and want me to finish.

Earlier in the interview, Ellen had discussed the importance of having a mentor stating, "I just encourage people to get a good mentor...someone you can trust and someone you will be honest with you. That's the best road to take."

She elaborated about a particular supervisor who she had been an administrative assistant to at the university where she had worked, calling her "the perfect, all around mentor". She also mentioned one of her first college professors who said to her, "You can do this". When I asked Fran about mentoring, she quickly came up with a name and expounded.

She took a chance and hired me as an advisor when I and she really was like...you can do this...you can achieve more...you can go get your doctorate. I hadn't really thought

about it and she was like...you need to go back and do this...you do. And she has been very supportive of me through the whole program. Like she would tell me early on...go ahead and pick your dissertation topic now because you want to do all your papers on it so you have all that material ahead of time. And I would have never thought of that. And when I was about to give up, she would take me out to dinner and say...hey, you can still do this.

When I asked Gwen if there had been mentors in her life, she stated that her parents and her coworkers were mentors and encouragers. She added that although she considers herself to be a lifelong learner, her desire to learn comes from the practicality of being able to apply learning to her day-to-day life. When asked about her role as a mentor she said,

Throughout my career, I have been...I don't know...well, I've been either a role model or a mentor and tried to encourage people. And tried to set a standard of expectations for them, as well as to display a standard of expectations.

It was evident that the 10 women in my study received a plethora of support from immediate family members and/or other significant individuals in their lives. When asked what impact that mentors had on their academic success, it was evident that the academic achievements of the participants in my study were not only a result of their own resilience, tenacity and perseverance, but also stemmed from the support, encouragement and influence bestowed on them by their immediate family and/or significant other nonfamily members.

Summary

Chapter 4 includes a detailed description of the data collected for this study, including notes on the interview questions composed during 10 in-depth interviews with first-generation women from South-Central Appalachia who earned a doctorate degree (EdD) in educational leadership.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study, “The Experiences of First-Generation Women from South-Central Appalachia Who Have Obtained their Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership,” included the stories of 10 women who were from the area of South-Central Appalachia who met the criteria to be considered a first-generation student. The criterion used to define first-generation was adopted from the United State Department of Education Federal TRIO program stating that neither parent graduated from a 4-year college or university (United States Department of Education, 2015). A network sampling method was employed in order to find participants for this study. The data were collected through individual interviews with each of these women and were then analyzed using a grounded theory approach.

Developed from the raw data that was derived from the individual interviews were 15 themes, which were 1) Support, 2) Parental Support, 3) Pre-College Support, 4) Support from Pre-College Orientation Experiences, 5) Support from Mentors, 7) Support from Cohorts, 8) Socio-Economic Status, 9) Intrinsic Motivation, 10) Transformation, 11) Self-Efficacy, 12) Persistence, 13) On Being Appalachian, 14) Kinship, 14) Dialect, and 15) Bicultural Identity.

These 15 themes were integrated with the research questions taken from research conducted by Jackson and Mazzei (2012) that I used to guide my study. The research questions were

1. What is the importance given to life events and/or individuals in the participants’ decisions to pursue first undergraduate, then graduate study?
2. What have they learned as a result of forging new territory without familial/social role models?

3. How do they understand/articulate multiple identities (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 10)?

Statement of Problem

Choosing to pursue a doctorate degree requires confidence in one's ability to succeed on both an academic and personal level. Of those who begin doctoral studies, between 40% and 50% drop out or stop out before graduation (Cohen & Greenberg, 2011; Gardner & Holly, 2012; Gururaj et al., 2010). While less than 1.5% of the population have acquired doctorate degrees, only 0.5% of underrepresented groups such as first-generation students have done so (Willison & Gibson, 2011).

Overall women are less likely to complete a doctoral degree after beginning. While 58% of men were found to complete their doctoral degree within 10 years, only 55% of women complete within that time frame. Masterman (2014) corroborated this in her study and stated "gender differences exist in doctoral degree completion rates across all disciplines with women lagging behind men" (p. 42). Because women experience more personal, institutional, and sociocultural barriers than men, women are less likely to complete their degree.

While studies exist that have recognized the challenges that first-generation college students face (Choy, 2001; Engle, 2007, 2008; Lohfink, 2005; Longwell & Longwell, 2007; Mehta et al., 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004; Seay et al., 2008), little empirical research is available regarding first-generation students at the doctoral level (Gardner & Holley, 2011). There is also limited research focusing on the persistence of first-generation female doctoral students (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Lohfink & Paulson, 2005). In addition, research is limited that focuses on women in specific programs and departments such as educational leadership (Mansfield et al., 2010). Because of the exceptional lack of research in this area, there is a significant need for further exploration to help fill in the gap regarding the persistence of first-

generation Appalachian women who have obtained their doctorate degree in educational leadership. I chose this problem as the focus of my research.

Summary of Results

Research Question 1

What is the importance given to life events and/or individuals in the participants' decisions to pursue first undergraduate, then graduate study?

In general first-generation students have a more difficult transition from high school to college than their non-first-generation peers (Padgett et al., 2012). Not only do these students encounter the typical anxiety and difficulties as any other college student, they also are confronted with substantial cultural, social, and academic transitions.

The literature suggests that a key factor in choosing to attend college for both first-generation students and non-first-generations students is encouragement from parents, relatives, and high school counselors (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012). However, first-generation students do not receive as much support in decisions to attend college. These students do not normally have the same knowledge handed down to them as compared to college educated parents, such as the process of college adjustment and how to socially integrate into the college life (Woosley & Shepler, 2011). Betty explained it well,

“I had to do it all on my own as far as learning how to complete a FAFSA and submitting that...time frames for submitting forms...how to register...I mean something as simple as finding your bookstore because neither of my parents went to college, so they couldn't help me with any of the processes to prepare.”

Support

A theme that surfaced during this study was the value of support. As themes began to emerge, I was inspired to revisit the literature regarding the importance of support for first-generation students. Tinto, a leading expert in college retention, stated, “without academic, social, and financial support, it is difficult for students to succeed in college” (Tinto, p. 24, 2012 This is especially true for first-generation students during their first year of college).

Parental Support

According to a 2007 survey conducted by the Institutional Research Program at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), first-generation college students were more likely to cite parental encouragement as the reason why they decided to attend college more than their non-first generation peers (Saenz, 2007). Because all of the students, with the exception of Ellen, began college as traditional students, it was understandable that parents were a source of support and were influential of their decision to attend college. Even though her father died when she was only 15 years old, Deborah’s primary motivation in attending college was to honor his wishes.

When I originally began my bachelor’s degree, I knew from like high school that I was going to get a bachelor’s degree. And at that time, of course, it wasn’t that long ago. At that time, I thought a bachelor’s degree was like gold. So my father actually died when I was 15. And on his dying bed, I promised him...yes I would go to college.

Parental behavior also indicated the level of support participants received. For example Helen stated,

Obviously my parents were with me, and we started exploring a couple of different institutions and I narrowed it down to really three institutions, and then we narrowed it down to two.

Although Ellen was older when she began her educational journey, she still received ample support from her immediate family including her spouse and children “my kids, you know, have been pretty loud cheerleaders.”

Precollege Support

A large part of the job that high school counselors do is to help students plan for and prepare for postsecondary education. First-generation students especially need guidance in regards to steps that promote college entry, including the admissions process, college search, college visits, and the process for obtaining financial aid (Perna, 2015). Reid and Moore (2008) found that first-generation students cited that their relationships with certain teachers during high school impacted their decision to attend college and the encouragement that they received, gave them people they trusted to go to for information.

Abby stated that one of the most influential women in her life was a counselor who worked with the Upward Bound program. Upward Bound is a federally funded college readiness program (Royster, Gross, & Hochbein, 2015). Abby went on to say,

In part because she was an educated woman who was helping other women become educated people and she was single with a child, getting by very nicely and not having to work more than one job.

Helen stated that the support she received from some of her high school teachers was one of the most rewarding aspects of her educational experiences and that some of her former teachers continue to track her educational and career progress.

Support from Precollege Orientation Experiences

In addition to the support received from relationships with family members and significant others, the participants also found that their precollege experiences were a significant source of support. Through both organized and formal experiences such as college introductory programs, summer bridge programs, college preparatory classes, band camps, employment opportunities, and informal visits to college campuses these students were given an orientation to college life experiences. Tinto (2012) stated, “Effective orientation is more than just information sharing.” Although this is an important component, orientation is formed through the “social affiliations” and the “establishment of a context in the year that follows in which students will know whom to approach with their questions and, just as important, be willing to do so” (p. 157).

Through these orientation opportunities social capital was increased. Based upon Bourdieu’s conceptual framework, social capital develops through interpersonal communication that social structures tend to reproduce themselves, (Padgett et al., 2012). As discussed in the literature, first-generation students often are at a disadvantage compared to their non-first-generation peers in the amount of social capital they have acquired negatively impacting retention and graduation (Padgett et al., 2012).

Nearly all of the women in this study cited some type of precollege orientation experience. For Abby it was a TRIO Upward Bound program that she participated in throughout high school.

But Upward Bound not only put me on a campus for an extended period of time...it was 16 weeks every summer, but it also gave me a good idea of what to expect and I had some classes with some teaching assistants and some college professors who were really good at showing me what college was going to be like.

Connie attended a weeklong music camp and Betty attended workshops throughout high school. Betty stated.

They helped a lot. I went to those workshops and I even took an after-school class in high school to try to prepare me for the college prep course.

Support from Mentors

Although parental support and support from their immediate family was crucial for the success of the participants in this study, all 10 women spoke of support from other sources. Because the parents of first-generation students are often unable to understand the challenges or offer practical advice as it relates to college, these students begin to pursue other sources of support from mentors who have the knowledge that their parents lack (Wang, 2012). During all the interviews participants spoke of supportive relationships that contributed to the trajectory. For example, Fran passionately shared,

Come on...let's push through...we can do this. And so she has been very, very supportive of me through this whole experience.

These mentors were often college professors. Idelle said,

I've always had as a general rule in my major...professors who saw something in me I didn't see and pushed me.

One of Helen's professors gave her sound advice that getting into medical school was more than just having good grades.

.... a faculty advisor kindly explained to me that I needed to become more social.

Support from Cohorts

Cohort experiences also place first-generation in contact with mentors and teachers who can serve as navigators for guiding them through the academic process (Boehmer, 2014). Both

Ellen and Joy were a part of the same cohort program while pursuing their doctoral degree and stated that this experience was one of the most enjoyable experiences of graduate school. Joy shared,

I think one of the best things out of graduate experience was the cohort. I really didn't expect to find this group of people that... We still keep in touch and we were able to work together so well.

Socioeconomic Status

Obtaining a college degree is often viewed as a critical component to upward social mobility and because parental education is so closely tied to social-class, first-generation students are more likely than their non-first-generation peers to come from working class or low-income backgrounds (Soria, Weiner, & Lu, 2014). Therefore, many first-generation students face significant economic and social challenges in college (Harackiewicz et al., 2014). The majority of women in this study came from either working class or low-income backgrounds and found that their socioeconomic status had a significant impact in the trajectory of their educational journey.

For Gwen it was her father's contempt of working shift-work in a blue collared job that spawned his expectation of his children's educational pathway.

My dad despised shift work and he saw education as a way to prevent his children from working shift work.

Idelle's father also wanted a better life for his children.

I had a father who said he wanted us to get an education. He worked in a factory all his life and farmed and he wanted his children to get an education.

First-generation students reported that their educational aspirations were attributed to having observed their parents in labor-intensive employment (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). After seeing her single mother struggle to raise her children on a nurses aid salary, Abby saw education as a vehicle to financial security and a better way of life.

And I think that I was always determined that I was going to be prepared to be on my own regardless of my marital status. That was not a major issue in my life and I didn't want to struggle the way that my mom had struggled to be a mom to us... and to me, the only way I could see to get out of that...because I couldn't sing, I couldn't dance, I couldn't act! and I certainly couldn't play sports. So the only way out of there was through my brain and there was. ...that really was a major motivating factor for me through high school, undergrad, and graduate school

For most first-generation students who come from working class or low-income families, the college experience is vastly different from that of their non-first-generation peers. The financial challenges faced by many first-generation students negatively impact their college success, as they are more likely to use their own resources to support themselves in graduate school and leave school with a greater amount of debt (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Because remaining debt free was a key issue for Helen and her parents, she paid her own way through undergraduate by participating in a work-study scholarship. After graduating with a bachelor degree, she then went into industry for 2 years in order to fund graduate school.

It was like you can do anything you want, we will help you, but you're not going to come out with that high debt. And they could not afford to send me to school, so everything I did, I had to work to receive scholarships and those types of things.

On the other hand, Deborah continues to struggle from the debt that she accumulated while in college. When I asked her what tensions she had experienced between the culture of her upbringing and the culture of higher education, she quickly stated that it was related to money.

So just finding ways to pay for it on my own has probably been the biggest tension because it affects my life. I mean it wasn't a decision that affected me while I was in college, but a few years later, it is still affecting my life. I think that's probably been the biggest tension. You know I've been in...I've had roommates and I've had friends' parents that could afford to or save for their college. Those just weren't the cards I was dealt.

First-generation students coming from working class and low-income backgrounds are also likely to face classist prejudice from their more privileged peers (Gardner & Holley, 2011). Both Abby and Betty stated that while attending colleges with the majority of students there coming from wealthy backgrounds, they felt like outsiders because of their socioeconomic status. Abby recalled an instance where she and a group of her college peers were hanging out,

We were all sort of reinventing those first 3 weeks and one of my friends... He had come from Idaho and his luggage didn't get here, so he said he had to go to K Mart and buy clothes for the first week of school and this girl said, "Oh my gosh! I can't imagine wearing anything from K Mart!" And all I could think of was...you know...I was wearing a K Mart turtleneck, so I remember this really vividly.

First-generation students are more likely to concentrate in specific disciplines and professional fields such as education (National Science Foundation & National Center for Science and Engineering Statics, 2012). The majority of students who pursued a doctorate of education degree (EdD) worked as teachers or administrators or in other diverse fields as only

one third of educational doctoral students have a bachelor's degree in education (Shulman et al., 2006). Likewise, the majority of women in this study were administrators or teachers in higher education, and their decisions to pursue advanced degrees were pragmatic in that they cited job advancement and job security reasons for pursuing the doctorate degree. Gwen best described it,

I have always pursued professional development, but not necessarily a specific degree. Each time I have pursued a specific degree, it was work-related and I felt I needed that degree in order to validate my position, or, for example, I worked with a team for...well one for twenty years and another for 15 that both encouraged me to get my doctorate and saying...there will be new people coming in here and they will be much younger. If you get your doctorate, they can't be more educated.

Research Question 2

What have they learned as a result of forging new territory without familial and social role models?

Question 2 is somewhat different from the other questions in this research. Whereas Questions 1 and 3 focus on the external experiences and perceptions of the participants in this study, question 2 focuses on the internal manifestations of these women during and preceding their educational journeys.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is motivation that comes solely from the activity itself. It is said to be more conducive to learning than extrinsic motivation, which is motivation to achieve an external reward or to avoid punishment (Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013). As Gwen put it,

But the most rewarding aspects then were becoming a little more dedicated to academics and making really good grades that last couple of years.

Helen also found intrinsic motivation to be part of her personal philosophy. Regarding intrinsic motivation she said,

Where I go and what I do, no one can ever take away from me what I have learned or my degrees. And I'm not really that hung up on the degree, but I know that everything that I have learned...that that's from me

Transformation

Their journey began with the fears and anxieties experienced by most college students on the first day of class coupled with the lack of knowledge about the voyage on which they were about to embark. At some point along the way they were able to see a change in themselves.

And when you are in college, you have to figure out who you are and you have to get away from who you were as a kid and become what you are as an adult.

Abby's transformation developed through the conversations that she had with peers.

I had incredible discussions with my peers and sitting in dorm rooms talking till 3 in the morning about things that really mattered to the world...I remember those times just being really incredible

Self-Efficacy

Social self-efficacy is believed to be a vital component in the career developmental process. Social self-efficacy in regards to graduate school is defined as "a student's belief in his or her ability to build meaningful, productive social relationships with faculty mentors, advisors and peers" (Tate et al., 2014, p. 3).

As these women progressed in their educational journeys, the self-efficacy they possessed increased. Gwen described self-efficacy as “all the types of things related to being your own person, schedule-wise and those types of things.” Or as Idelle said.

Meeting all the different people, first of all, all of the contacts. Finding out that I really could study and learn and do things.

As Fran put it,

A lot more confidence... I've gotten a lot more confidence. I used to be this shy little kid that...I was very shy. I didn't talk much. I didn't go out of my way to talk to people or things like that. And now I'm just like everywhere.

Persistence

Doctoral persistence is defined as “the continuance of a student’s progress toward the completion of the doctoral degree (Blair, 1999; Rockinson-Szapkiaw, Spaluding, Swezey, & Wicks, 2014). The literature states that persistence towards degree completion is positively associated with the educational status of parents (Ishitani, 2006; Mehta et al., 2011). As I listened to the shared life experiences of these women as they mind traveled from the beginning of their educational journey up to the time of our interview, several themes began to emerge. Overwhelmingly, their advice to other first-generation women who were pursuing advanced degrees was to say, “If I can do it, you can do it!” Or as Ellen advised others.

I never thought I was smart enough to do it but if you will just keep putting one foot in front of the other, you can do it.

Research Question 3

How do they understand and articulate multiple identities?

Disconnects Between Cultures

Yarborough (2012) found that first-generation women who obtained a doctorate degree experienced disconnects in their relationships with significant others, as well as disconnects within the process of navigating the system of higher education. Likewise, the first-generation women who had persisted on to a terminal degree experienced disconnects in their relationships within the culture of their origin and the culture of higher education as a result of their Appalachian heritage as well as their first-generation status.

On Being Appalachian

Returning to the literature, I found that the Appalachian people were described by deMarrais (1998) as a distinct cultural group who share “a rich cultural heritage that includes a strong sense of kinship, a love of the land, a rich oral tradition and a commitment to personal freedom and self-reliance” (p. 90). Abby strongly identified as being Appalachian because of the close relationship she has with her family.

You have to understand about my people is that family is perhaps the number one value because it's where your safety lies.

Betty described it best when she said,

For us, it's been Appalachian and I think that's good. It shouldn't be a shameful thing. It should be part of what you are and what are those classic traits from Appalachia that you bring to the table? I can use that perseverance and making do and being creative, too, at times, with what you have. I like to think that all those things make us even better! With people from other areas, we've had at times a hard scrabble existence in life and that is

typical of the area and has made us tougher and intelligent people as opposed to people that needs to be looked down on.

Kinship

As stated in the literature, family is significant to the daily life of Appalachia. The idea of “kinship” or having large close-knit families with an importance placed on extended family was said to be the fabric of Appalachia (Lewis & Billings, 1997). Abby’s story perhaps portrayed a picture of this idea of the importance of family or kinship best.

....so we borrowed my Aunt Patsy’s truck and my Aunt Judy...yeah, you heard me right! She drove with my mom and I and so we were all piled in this truck and all of my things were in the back of the pick-up truck...

Her passion for family was permeated throughout her story.

It was really difficult at times. Particularly, I had an uncle who died during my freshman year of college and I couldn’t go to the services...he lived in Iowa...because I had final exams. And...um...and I didn’t want everyone else.. you might have figured by now that family is really important to me. And that was really hard. I just wanted to say to hell with this and to go to the services rather than finish my freshman year of school!

Dialect

Bryan and Simmons (2009) found that college students from Appalachia often speak with a member of their family, usually a parent, at least once a day, if not multiple times a day. Briggs (2010) found that heritage plays an important role in the way Appalachian students perceive their college experiences and was defined primarily through the statements regarding family and home culture. Likewise, although the majority of participants in my study did not acknowledge their Appalachian heritage; however, the culture of Appalachia is a predominant theme throughout the

data. For example, although Ellen was offered a music scholarship she perceived the barriers that kept her from pursuing this offer as insurmountable.

Well, number one...we were so far away, college wasn't accessible. You would have had to go away. We were about an hour or an hour and a half from the nearest community college, one way. And I was from a very poor family and there was no way. And there was no talk of scholarships or grants, you know, from any of the local stuff. Never heard anybody talk about any of that.

Ellen could not envision any type of life other than the one her culture had presented,

“So, no, I wasn't interested in college because all I ever wanted to do was grow up, get married, and have babies.”

Bicultural Identity

In a qualitative study of first-year college students who identified as Appalachian, Gammell (2006) found that as students transitioned into the college culture through the formation of new relationships they began to accept the expectations of the new culture. As this happened a transition began to occur, causing students to shift between what was familiar and what was unfamiliar. During this transitional process a metamorphosis of self emerged. Students developed into being bicultural individuals, meaning that they had the ability to move and function between their culture of origin and their new culture. Although this bicultural phenomenon was not true for all of the women I interviewed, for others it was evident. Their new bicultural identity was particularly prominent in the way they communicated with those from their culture of origin and with those from the culture of higher education. This phenomenon was especially true for Abby.

Sometimes I feel like I have to be six different people...with my family because I can be this person here and I've got to be this person here...I have always thought people from Appalachia...particularly people of color..but there is sort of multi-consciousness going on where you're this person here and you're this person here and I feel like I am even a different person here at work with administrators versus how I am with faculty or with students and the same is true with my family. I'm a different person there too. But I think that ability to shift...I mean I am still the same person a lot of ways too...the way to communicate is different if the audience is different.

Idelle explained the advice that she gave to others who were entering higher education,

You talk two different ways. You learn to talk to your people at home the way you've always talked, and you learn to come out in the work world and you modify your language.

On Being First-Generation

As first-generations students persist through graduate degree programs the separation between their experiences and those of their family is evident. For many of the women in my study a gap in their relationship with those from the culture of their origin was expressed in both subtle and blatant forms. Idelle experienced tensions between the culture of her origin and the culture of higher education. After spending years avoiding her former classmates, she returned home for her 40th high school class reunion and was shunned by them until they realized that she was still the same.

And they were like standoffish when I first got there, but when they realized it was still me, they were ok.

The tensions Abby experienced between the culture of her origin and the culture of higher education were more transparent. When she returned home during the Thanksgiving holidays for the first time after going away to college her aunt Rosemary who had formally been a source of support asked, “Why did you come home talking like a rich bitch?” Even after years passed, Abby stated that she intentionally avoided the topic of her educational achievements with her relatives; “I don’t talk a lot about my education to my family because they just don’t get it.”

Implications for Practice

It is important to note that the findings of my research cannot be generalized and are limited due to the small number of participants. However, from the interviews in this study I found that the role that family has on the educational trajectory of these first-generation women from South Central Appalachia was of the utmost significance. With this in mind, colleges and universities should be sensitive to the meaning that family, especially parents, have on students as they enter the world of higher education. While the college where I work has “friends and family orientation session” this might be insufficient and poor timing for some first-generation students and their parents because it is held when a student first registers for college.

Consideration should be made for these orientations to be conducted for students and their parents long before students graduate from high school. Other orientation experiences such as summer bridge programs might also be considered. These early intervention strategies would promote a more seamless transition from high school to college.

Another factor for college administration and staff to consider is the notion of “kinship” and the significance that family relationships might have on students who are considered to be Appalachian. Because of these close family ties, many students from Appalachia have with their extended family members students may see themselves as having more responsibility to care for

elderly or sick grandparents, aunts, or uncles or experience more trauma when an unexpected event happens in their family. Cultural sensitivity training for faculty might be instated addressing these issues.

In addition, faculty might be trained on other issues faced by many first-generation students. For the women in my study college professors often had a significant impact on the critical decisions they made, such as college majors and graduate degree programs. Faculty should also be made aware that many first-generation students such as the women in my study might not know how to navigate the college system. Issues such as financial aid, how to register for classes, or, as Betty said, “something as simple as finding the college bookstore” may be more difficult for first-generation students than their non-first-generation peers. To address some of these issues the college where I work requires all students who are not in an allied health program to take a College Success class. This class is designed to build college retention by teaching students how to navigate the rigors of college.

Although significant progress has been made in regards to women’s access to higher education, this progress has been described as “glacial” and “excruciatingly” slow. The participants in this study stated that peers, mentors, and significant others also impacted their educational journey. Mentor programs for students, especially those in graduate school, might be considered.

Financial or economic status was another issue that was deemed important by the women in this study. As one participant pointed out, financial barriers need to be removed for low-income, first-generation students. More programs such as “The Student Need Project” (a program designed to assist students with emergency needs such as gas money and food) could be implemented.

Recommendations for Future Research

In order to understand the lived experiences of first-generation females from the South-Central Appalachia area who obtained a doctorate degree in education (EdD), I conducted 10 face-to-face, in-depth interviews. However, as noted earlier during this study, the findings of this research cannot be generalized and are limited due to the small number of participants. A larger study that includes more data would allow researchers to make stronger connections. Incorporating a group interview in conjunction with the individual interviews could have also collected additional information.

This study was also limited by the demographic constraints of study. I only interviewed participants who were graduates of an EdD program located in the area of South Central Appalachia. Conducting a study that examines the experiences of first-generation, female, doctoral graduates from other disciplines of study might be beneficial.

Other considerations for future research are;

- A comparison study examining first-generation, female doctoral graduates who studied outside the Appalachian region to the experiences of those who remained within the area. A study such as this might illuminate the meaning of being Appalachian.
- A study that limits the participants to either traditional students or non-traditional students.
- A more in-depth study comparing and contrasting experiences of doctoral graduates who began college as traditional students with those graduates who began college as nontraditional students or older students would be beneficial.
- A study on first-generation women who are part of a cohort program.

Conclusion

This research was the first that looked specifically at the lived experiences of first-generation women from South-Central Appalachia who completed a doctorate degree of education EdD focusing on educational leadership and will contribute to the small body of research regarding first-generation, doctoral students.

An analysis of the data revealed 15 pervasive themes that emerged; support, parental support, precollege support, support from precollege orientation experiences, support from mentors, support from cohorts, socioeconomic status, intrinsic motivation, transformation, self-efficacy, persistence, on being Appalachian, kinship, dialect, and bicultural identity. As the stories of these women's educational journeys unraveled through personal narrative, the importance of significant others, especially close family members and mentors, on their educational trajectory was illuminated. In addition to the support they received through these relationships, they also received support through the precollege experiences that in most instances included on campus experiences.

Most of the women in this study were familiar with the barriers faced by many other first-generation students and students from Appalachia. These barriers included a disconnect between the culture of their upbringing and the culture of higher education as well as financial barriers. Although financial and socioeconomic factors were at times found to be a deterrent for these women, more often they were the impetus for the desire for a better life. Most importantly from this study came stories of the importance of having a network of support and the transformation that derived from persistence and determination and encouragement to others on the pathway to a terminal degree.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview questions

1. Take me back to your first day of college and reconstruct the events of that day. (Include decisions, people, circumstances, etc.)
2. What was influential in your decision to pursue advanced graduate study?
3. What tensions have you experienced between the culture of your upbringing and the culture higher education?
4. What were some of the most difficult experiences you had when you first entered the higher education? (As well as in the years following).
5. What were some of the most pleasurable experiences you had when you first entered the higher education? (As well as in the years following).
6. Was the academic life what you expected? If not, how did it differ?
7. What were the most rewarding aspects of your academic life? Most frustrating? How do these correspond (or not correspond) with your personal life?
8. What relationships in your life have changed as a result of you receiving your doctorate degree? What is the nature of these changed relationships?
9. What other changes in your life have you experienced as a result of your achievements?
10. Are there any parts of yourself you put away or keep hidden in your personal relationships? In your work relationships?
11. What do you want others who are entering higher education to know about your experiences as a woman from South-Central Appalachia who has obtained the doctorate degree as a first-generation student?

12. Is there anything I should have asked but didn't? (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012)

APPENDIX B

Request for Interview Email

The following email, with appropriate modifications will be sent to potential interview participants.

Dear

I am pursuing a doctoral degree in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (ELPA) program at East Tennessee State University. To complete my studies, I am writing a dissertation dealing with the experiences of first-generation women from South-Central Appalachia who have obtained their doctorate degree in educational leadership.

I am interesting in finding out what your experience as a first-generation female was like as you navigated the academic pipeline all the way to obtain a terminal degree. The information you share with me might very well help future first-generation females who desire to obtain their doctorate degree.

Your interview will last approximately 1 hour and will be digitally recorded for later transcription and analysis. Your anonymity is extremely important, and all measure will be taken to guard your identity during all phases of the research process, including the storage of interview recordings and transcripts after the project is completed. Furthermore, your participation is completely voluntary. Should you decide to leave the project at any time, your interview recordings and transcripts will be destroyed. If you continue with the project, you will be invited to review the transcript of your interview and the dissertation text before the project is finalized.

If you are still interested in being interviewed, please contact me by return email by (date) so that we can schedule an appointment for the interview.

Sincerely,

Teressa Dobbs
E.T.S.U. Doctoral candidate
Email: tadobbs@northeaststate.edu

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is as follows:

To explore the perceptions of women from the sub-region of South-Central Appalachia who were the first in their family to complete college and persisted on to complete a doctoral degree concentrating in educational leadership.

Duration:

You will participate in one interview lasting approximately one hour and agree to discuss any follow-up questions via email.

Procedures:

The procedures which will involve you as a research subject include:

One interview and if you desire, a review of the transcripts and the findings. The researcher will record your interview to ensure complete recall of the interview. The recording will be destroyed on completion of the data analysis phase.

Alternative Procedures/Treatments

There are no alternative procedures available for this study if you elect not to participate. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time or withdraw any comments you make during the interview process without fear of harassment.

Possible Risks/Discomforts

The possible risks and/or discomforts of your involvement include:

There is a slight risk that your confidentiality will be breached, even though all measures will be taken to safeguard your identity.

Possible Benefits

The possible benefits of your participation are:

You will receive a copy of the final research report to review. The primary benefit of your participation in this study is to share your perceptions and opinions about being a first-generation female from South-Central Appalachia who has completed a doctorate degree in educational leadership with other students, scholars, and administrators; however, you will receive no direct benefit from the research other than the experience of participating in a scholarly research project. The findings from this research will be submitted for publication in an academic journal.

Financial Costs

There are no additional costs to participants that may result from participation in this research.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this research project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You may quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, all recordings and transcripts from your interview will be destroyed. You may quit by calling the researcher, Teresa Dobbs, whose phone number is 423-354-5151.

Contact for Questions

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, you may call the IRB Coordinator at the following number_____.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of the informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily chose to be in this research project.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Signature of Witness (if applicable) _____ Date _____

VITA

TERESSA DOBBS

Education: B.S.W East Tennessee State University,
Johnson City, Tennessee 1986
M.S. Rehabilitation Counseling,
University of North Texas,
Denton, Texas 2004
Ed. S. Specialist in Education,
East Tennessee State University,
Johnson City, Tennessee 2011
Ed.D. Educational Leadership, East Tennessee State University,
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Professional Experience: Social Counselor, State of Tennessee, Department of Human
Services; Kingsport, Tennessee, 1986-1992
Therapeutic Foster Care Case Manager
Frontier Health, Kingsport, Tennessee, 1996-1999
Child Care Program Evaluator, State of Tennessee,
Department of Human Services, 2006-2009
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, State of Tennessee,
Department of Human Services, 1999-2006
Program Counselor, Northeast State Community College,
Blountville, Tennessee, 2009-2011
Program Director, Northeast State Community College
Blountville, Tennessee, 2011-2013
Executive Director, Northeast State Community College
Kingsport, Tennessee, 2013-2015
Instructor, Northeast State Community College
Blountville, Tennessee, 2015-Present

Honors and Awards: Northeast State Targeted Leadership Academy
Nominee for the Distinguished Administrative Staff
Award, 2013-2014, 2014-2015