

ORAL HISTORIES OF FIRST-GENERATION
OKLAHOMA COLLEGE GRADUATES
WHO EARNED DOCTORAL DEGREES

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Abstract:

Education has always been a tool for individual and social advancement in Oklahoma. Even before statehood, an education system began to develop in the territories that both educated individuals and served as a tool for transforming society. The modern education system in Oklahoma continues to serve as a catalyst for growth and advancement in a dynamic culture and economy. However, research shows certain student populations struggle to matriculate through to graduation. One such population is first-generation college students. This study records and examines oral histories of first-generation college students who earned doctoral degrees in Oklahoma in order to preserve their stories, provide glimpses into their schooling experiences, and explore the forces that shaped them. These participants/narrators, who ranged in age from 43 to 99 at the time of interview, represent schooling experiences across different decades in Oklahoma's history. One unique characteristic of the data is that it includes the stories of three brothers, aged 99, 90 and 84 at the time of interview. Though all three came from the same background—the same parents, the same high school, and the same family farm in rural Oklahoma—their experiences as first-generation college students varied tremendously. Together these stories portray the value of education to the participants and the value of the participants to education. Bourdieu's theories of cultural reproduction and social reproduction (1973) as well as his uses of capital (1977, 1986) served as lenses to analyze participants' experiences. The broad historical perspective captured in the participants' oral histories presents insight into education in Oklahoma's dynamic economy, culture, and education system.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the primary tools of individual, economic and social development in the United States is education. The transformation of a struggling faith-based school into The University of The State of Pennsylvania in 1779 mirrors the evolution of education in America and opened the door to state-supported institutions designed to provide students with a broad education as well as practical skills to improve the local workforce. Federal programs such as the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 were key initiatives in expanding the Federal Government's support for state-managed higher education. These acts helped to create university systems in every state and provided educational access to more students than previous periods in United States history. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 served as a tool for economic stability after World War II and laid the foundation for President Truman's commission on education in 1947. These policies served as a catalyst for a massive influx of students into higher education and dynamic changes in the social and economic structures at the national level and particularly in Oklahoma. The Higher Education Act of 1965 and its subsequent reauthorizations expanded access to higher education and further demonstrated a public commitment to higher education during an era of great progress and improvements in

civil rights. While these examples underscore an enduring national history of public commitment to higher education, the outcomes and consequences vary greatly among states.

Like other states, Oklahoma has a long history in support of higher education. Even before becoming a state, the territorial legislature in Oklahoma established three universities to fulfill the requirements of the Organic Act of Congress in 1890. These institutions provided liberal arts, teacher training, professional education, and agricultural and mechanical arts which the Morrill Act of 1862 required. Prior to statehood, sixteen additional institutions of higher education were chartered by the territorial government. The establishment of these institutions shows the historic commitment of Oklahoma to workforce development and societal progression through educational attainment, and higher education specifically. Programs such as Brain Gain 2010, an Oklahoma initiative designed to meet specific educational benchmarks, are evidence of Oklahoma's continued commitment to higher education; however, Oklahoma still lags behind most states in the percentage of adults over the age of 25 who hold bachelor degrees. Further, researchers have noted that first-generation students in particular struggle to navigate the higher education system (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; London, 1989; Warburton, Burgain, & Nunez, 2001; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Despite a long history of support for higher education in Oklahoma, Oklahoma still struggles to create and maintain educated people.

Edmond Burke is credited with saying "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it." In order to understand how some students, specifically first-generation college graduates in this case, were able to navigate the higher education system, requires in depth and detailed investigation into their experiences. One way to understand these experiences is by collecting oral histories. "Oral history is the systematic collection of living people's

testimony about their own experiences ... [reflecting] the belief that the everyday memories of everyday people...has historical importance” (Moyer, 1999). This research study collected and examined oral histories of first-generation Oklahoma college students to preserve and illuminate their experiences. Additionally, by considering both unique elements within and similar elements across each participant’s experience, we may better understand the educational experiences of first-generation Oklahoma college students that are valuable to other first-generation college students and the educators who support them.

Context of the Problem

Though public policy in the United States and Oklahoma has historically encouraged access to and attendance at institutions of higher education, certain populations of students still struggle to participate and persist in higher education at all levels, from community college through graduate programs. One such population is first-generation college students. First-generation students do not attend or persist through college to graduation at the same rate as students who had at least one parent with at least a bachelor degree (Choy, 2001; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Many reasons they do not matriculate can be attributed to insufficient social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973; 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Social and cultural capital are sociological terms that refer to particular characteristics, values and beliefs tied to social and class structure, and are often passed, or reproduced, from parents to children. These concepts are often used to explore and explain first-generation college student experiences and Bourdieu’s (1973) *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* and subsequent expansion with Passeron (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) as well as *Forms of Capital* (Bourdieu, 1986) often serve as the analytic lenses for examining first-generation college student success rates, experiences and attributes. The

passage of particular characteristics and assets, from the way one speaks to group membership, has implications for social mobility through educational systems and the class structure.

Oklahoma trails most other states and the national average with respect to the percentage of adults with at least a baccalaureate degree (U.S. Census Bureau). While the graduation rate of first-generation Oklahoma college students is not readily available because it appears data is collected only at the institutional level, it is known that they have the same characteristics as the national first generation population: they tend to be older, often married and employed (Choy, 2001; Nunez, Cuccaro-Alamin, & Carroll, 1998; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). These realities coupled with the unique history of Oklahoma's social and cultural contexts, including dynamic shifts in industry and population demographics, created sets of circumstances that affect the educational attainment of its people.

Since statehood, Oklahoma has experienced substantial changes in agriculture and industry which have not only shaped its economy, but have also predicated cultural and demographic shifts. These changes helped to shape and, in turn, were shaped by all levels of Oklahoma's education. The changes in Oklahoma's educational systems, economy, and society in general are reflected in the oral histories of the first-generation college students who participated in this study. These participants' stories provide insight into life in Oklahoma as it transformed from an economy and society based primarily on family farms to an industrial state with a largely urban population. In addition to reflecting the demographic changes in Oklahoma, their stories also reveal the family values, historical events, racial and religious backgrounds, and many other societal and public policy-based conventions that shaped and influenced their experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Though many studies document the odds against first-generation college student graduation (Choy, 2001; Munoz, 2012; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012) certain Oklahoma first-generation college students graduated despite barriers often associated with their socio-economic and demographic characteristics (Tinto, 1993); others completed not only baccalaureate degrees, but continued in their educational journeys to earn advanced degrees. For those who continued past the baccalaureate degree, limited literature shows that first-generation graduate students face similar complexities and obstacles to those encountered early in college (Gardner, 2013). In order to understand how and why certain first-generation Oklahoma college students graduated with the baccalaureate degree and then continued on to earn additional degrees despite the odds against them, we must seek to understand the students' experiences within their unique contexts, with a focus on how they accumulated and transmitted social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

This study collected and examined oral histories of first-generation Oklahoma college graduates within their personal social and cultural contexts to both preserve and examine their experiences and contribute rich, vivid, personal accounts of individuals who, despite sharing the common characteristic of being a first-generation college student that graduated, had distinctive and personal experiences. While originally designed to study first-generation Oklahoma college graduates earning bachelor degrees, the study evolved and narrowed organically (Patton, 2002) to focus specifically on first-generation students who not only graduated from college, but also advanced through the higher education system and earned

doctoral degrees. Similarly, this study documented students' abilities to accumulate and reproduce greater levels of social and cultural capital, not only for themselves, but also for generations following through the lens of Bourdieu's (1973) *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction*.

Research Questions

At the onset of the study, two questions were posed:

1. What factors do first-generation Oklahoma college graduates perceive as contributing most to their success?
2. What role did social and cultural capital appear to play in their experiences?

As the study progressed, these questions transformed with the emergence of the study to reflect not only the factors that contributed to each participant's success, but also contextual references specific to the participant's story that contributed to earning multiple degrees. These contextual references often point to decades represented by the participant and were linked specifically to Oklahoma's changing educational system, economy, and society.

Besides basic demographic information—name, age, race, schools attended and graduation dates, the only question asked of all participants was to describe their family and experiences in school. In two cases, participants began telling their stories *before* their demographic information was complete and any questions were asked. Each participant was aware of the nature study through the recruiting and selection process, and I interpreted this free-flowing narrative as excitement for the opportunity to share their story.

Orienting Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Theoretical framing provided a lens through which data were analyzed. Scholars have used many lenses to examine first-generation college student success, and the challenges students encounter that often inhibit their ability to earn a degree; however, perhaps the most common theoretic framework is Bourdieu's (1973) *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction*. Cultural Reproduction Theory offers a framework for explaining why first-generation students do not participate in higher education at the same rate as students who have at least one parent with a bachelor degree. Similarly, it also helps to explain why first-generation students who do participate in higher education do not graduate at the same rate as students who have at least one parent with at least a bachelor degree. According to Cultural Reproduction Theory, in order to increase one's social standing, lower socio-economic classes must increase capital in three areas: social, economic and culture (Bourdieu, 1973). The level of capital in each of these areas passes from one generation to the next under Bourdieu's model; however, some individuals are able to cultivate particular forms of capital, breaking the reproductive cycle and surpassing the educational level of their parents (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

By collecting oral histories from participants representing various decades in Oklahoma's history, participants framed their experiences within contexts specific to their individual experiences and in their own words. These oral histories present a broad range of experiences that were shaped by early settlement in Oklahoma, The Great Depression, World War II, The Vietnam War, The Civil Rights Movement and a host other of events spanning more than a century. While many of these events that shaped the participants' experiences lack the easy recognition and notoriety of those previously mentioned, they are important

factors in exploring the experiences of these first-generation college students. Using oral history as a form of inquiry provided a vehicle for each participant to present their individual, personal story, highlighting and focusing on portions they deemed important and meaningful.

Researcher's Statement

I am a first-generation college graduate. My mother attended a private two-year institution after high school, but did not immediately progress toward a baccalaureate degree. After finishing an associate degree, my mother and father married. Her focus for most of the early years of their marriage involved managing our home and mothering my older brother and me. As my brother and I approached high school, my mother did return to school, but still did not complete her baccalaureate degree.

My father joined the military directly out of high school. Joining the Army provided him a means of escaping agrarian life in west Texas. He retired from the Army and moved into private industry. Though eligible for educational benefits through the military, he only attended one class at a community college. He could build or fix anything, perhaps because of his childhood setting and the vocational classes he took in high school. He was a very clever and resourceful man, but saw reward in 'doing,' not 'learning'.

I always assumed I would go to college, though my parents never pushed my brother or I to do so. Growing up, I also always assumed I would be a medical doctor. I took classes in high school to prepare me for collegiate studies in biology, math and even Latin; however, I do not possess the aptitude to practice medicine. I found myself--like many other first-generation college students--married with children, working, and older than my classmates. I left school without a degree, only to return when I moved to Oklahoma and began working

for an employer who would pay for it.

With that, my experience mirrors that of many other first-generation students. I was destined to progress through higher education at the same level as my parents until something served as a catalyst to break the cycle. While it is impossible to test whether or not I would have graduated without my employer's assistance, it is part of my story. It is part of my history. This has piqued my interest in others' experiences from similar backgrounds.

Epistemological Perspective

Constructionist epistemology served as a platform for this study. Constructionism is a theory of knowledge that holds that meaning is constructed by people as they experience life (Crotty, 1998). An interpretivist theoretical perspective was employed to guide the methodological choice of oral history intended to “understand and explain human and social reality” (Crotty, 1998, pp. 66-67). Together, these perspectives, common to framing and conducting oral history, provided the foundation for collecting both participants' meaning and understanding in their experiences as well as creating broader meaning across the participants who share a common characteristic key to their lived experiences. Combining this epistemology with oral history allowed me to approach the inquiry as a search for meaning held within each participant's story.

Study Site and Participants

The population for this study consisted of first-generation college graduates that graduated from high school in Oklahoma. For the purpose of this study, first-generation college graduates are defined as graduates of four year institutions for whom neither parent had a bachelor degree. Students from various time periods, locations, institutions, and both

sexes were desired as participants. By using a group of Oklahomans with somewhat different backgrounds, a better understanding of issues, challenges and experiences was documented along with experiences that were unique to the individual participant.

As students were recruited and selected, a trend emerged in the participants' educational histories. The first two participants had earned doctoral degrees. When I learned of their educational accomplishments, I recruited a third first-generation college graduate with a doctoral degree to participate in the study. Following this interview, I decided to narrow the study following emergent flexible design (Patton, 2002) to a population that included first-generation Oklahoma college students who not only held bachelor degrees, but also matriculated through and earned doctoral degrees. The narrowing of participants not only helped to further frame the study, but also helped when recruiting participants; most who had been through the dissertation process would agree to participate in a study. In total, six oral histories were collected and analyzed from participants representing different decades of undergraduate school attendance with dates ranging from the 1940s through the 1980s. In addition to the six participants, the oral history of an older brother of two participants was included for contextual and historical insight regarding life in Oklahoma early after statehood. This older brother was also a first-generation college student, but not included as a participant because he did not graduate. The inclusion of his story provided great depth in understanding their family's experiences, values, and attitudes toward education in Oklahoma in the early 1900s through The Great Depression.

The interview sites were chosen by each participant, and each interview was conducted individually. Sites varied and included living rooms, offices, restaurants, and a variety of locations in which each participant felt comfortable.

Methodology

“Oral history is ... [an] intensive biography interview. During an oral history project a researcher spends an extended amount of time with one respondent in order to learn extensively about [their] life or a particular part of [their] life” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 151). In order to collect information, a series of interviews with first-generation college graduates were conducted. These consisted of face-to-face interviews following a semi-structured protocol with open ended questions used to elicit responses that allowed participants to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and memories. This approach captured participants’ oral histories. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher as part of the analytic process (Poindexter, 2002).

In addition to recording and transcription, basic demographic information was collected from each participant including date of birth, high school graduation date and location, race, and degree granting universities and dates. During the first two interviews a large body of research notes was compiled; however, during the transcription process it became evident that participants stopped narrating their story when the researcher started writing, so very few notes were made during subsequent interviews.

Data Analysis

Once oral histories were collected and transcribed, an inductive process (Patton, 2002) was used for analysis. Through the process of storytelling, inherent in oral history, each participant presented their experiences in their own words and reflected on the culturally and historically-situated interpretations of their experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Data were then analyzed using techniques from thematic narrative analysis which “honors people’s stories as data that can stand on their own as pure description of

experiences [or be] analyzed for connections between...experiences” (Patton, 2002, pp. 115-116). This included both “porthole” and “process” approaches as suggested by Luttrell (2000) and Tierney (1998). The “porthole” approach framed the narrative within the context and culture in which it was set and external to the participant. The “process” approach focused on the structure and self-understanding each participant used to position themselves within their stories (Peacock & Holland, 1993). Tierney (1998) described the process as the interpretation of narrative “codes” which may differ from the reader’s. Also through analysis, themes emerged from the data that were both convergent, similar across the data, or divergent, unique to a specific participant or context (Patton, 2002).

Significance of the Study

Collecting, preserving and examining the oral histories of first-generation Oklahoma college graduates provides valuable information to a variety of stakeholders; however, the emergence of participants with doctoral degrees makes this study somewhat unique and salient to broader issues in education because literature exploring the lived experiences of first-generation doctoral students remains somewhat sparse even though first-generation college students account for a significant portion of contemporary doctoral students. While many studies focus on first-generation college students, the inclusion of Oklahoma as a selection criterion for participation makes this study distinctive and restricting participants to those earning doctoral degrees makes this study timely as a new line of inquiry develops in literature. Future first-generation students may be able to gain information from the experiences of others that will help them matriculate through to graduation while navigating the particular conditions, opportunities and challenges present in Oklahoma. This is valuable for students at all levels, as in 2012, first-generation college students, when defined as

students that neither parent had a bachelor degree, accounted for about one-third (31.3%) of all graduates from doctoral programs (National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2012) and carry forward many of the same barriers to success throughout their degree programs (Gardner, 2013). Institutions can foster learning communities and services that help address the issues and opportunities narrated in the oral histories of first-generation Oklahoma students. To provide student and institutional support, Oklahoma policy makers who develop programs and allocate resources will also benefit from understanding the experiences of first-generation students. Finally, this study enhances the ever growing body of literature relating to the experiences of first generation college graduates making four unique contributions:

1. It focuses on students from a specific geographical context, Oklahoma.
2. It focuses on the oral histories of the participants presented in their own voices.
3. It focuses on how first-generation students persisted through to a doctoral degree rather than focusing on factors that inhibited success.
4. It provides insights into themes and experiences that were common in the experiences of first-generation college students representing a broad historic range.

Perhaps the most significant contribution this study makes to the growing and evolving body of literature regarding first-generation college students is that it captured the oral histories of participants at different points in Oklahoma history who, despite sharing certain demographic parameters, had personal and meaningful experiences. These narratives not only tell of educational accomplishments, but also the everyday experiences that make each story exceptional and important, told in the participants' own words. The oral histories

thus also contribute to recording and exploring a niche but compelling aspect of Oklahoma's educational history.

Summary

Higher education has always been an important part of Oklahoma's history and continues to guide Oklahoma's future. However, despite this history and current policies, Oklahoma's population remains undereducated when compared with the nation and its stated goals. In order to meet said goals, many Oklahomans will have to exceed their parents' educational levels. Oral histories of first-generation college graduates may help others to understand what factors contributed to this increase in cultural capital. By narrowing the participants to only include first-generation college students that earned doctoral degrees, this study captured and explored experiences that are complicated and nuanced in the first-generation college student literature. This study, like Munoz's (2012) work, attempted to understand why these participants were successful in college rather than focusing on why first-generation college students struggle to persist. Constructionist epistemology helped to guide this study of subjective meaning and an interpretivist theoretical perspective was used to guide the methodology and analysis of data.

Chapter two presents a review of literature pertaining to first-generation students, Cultural Reproduction Theory, and Oklahoma higher education. Chapter three provides details regarding methodology used to collect, analyze, and interpret data. Chapter four presents a brief account of each participant's biographical information and personal story along with "portholes", or historical and contextual references reflected in the data. Chapter five contains an analysis of data from all participants through the lens of *Cultural*

Reproduction and Social Reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973) and chapter six contains a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Education in America served as a means of social and cultural advancement and integration since colonial times. As the colonies were settled, education systems formed which often mirrored systems found in Europe. These schools were often tied to specific Anglo-Protestant religious and mission movements and used as tools to promote not only education, but also social change and religious indoctrination in indigenous people native to the regions settlers colonized. These mission schools not only served to advance the doctrine of the founding fellowship, but as a means of creating social norms. While these schools were open to new immigrant populations and often specifically for Native Americans in the colonies, they conspicuously omitted two specific populations: women and African Americans (Thelin, 2004). This religious, mission based system of education and its exclusionary practices in education were common nationally as well as in Oklahoma's history even prior to statehood (Baird & Goble, 1994).

In addition to mission-based colleges, higher education has long been a part of the

public policy agenda in the United States. In his effort to raise support for what became the University of Pennsylvania, Ben Franklin in *Proposals Related to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania* (1749) openly supported higher education as a means of societal progress. He wrote,

The Good Education of Youth has been esteemed by wise Men in all Ages, as the surest Foundation of the Happiness both of the private Families as of the Common-wealths. Almost all Governments have therefore made it a principle Object of their attention, to establish and endow with proper Revenues, such Seminaries of Learning, as might supply the succeeding Age with Men qualified to serve the Public with Honour to themselves and their Country.

Many of the first Settlers of these Provinces, were Men who had received a good Education in Europe, and to their Wisdom and good Management we owe much of our present Prosperity. But their Hands were full, and they could not do all Things. The resent Race are not thought to be generally of equal Ability; For though the American Youth are allowed not to want Capacity; yet the best Capabilities require Cultivation, it being it being truly with them, as with the best Ground, which unless well tilled and sowed with profitable Seed, produces only ranker Weeds. (pp. 4-6)

Though penned over one hundred fifty years prior to Oklahoma statehood, certain contentions of Franklin's arguments in favor of higher education are reflected in Oklahoma's educational history.

1. Value for education was inherent in the culture many settlers brought with them.
2. An educated population produces benefits not only for the individual and family, but also for the “Country”
3. Women and Non-Whites were often restricted from participating in education.
4. Education requires resources, and money is often provided by the Government.
5. Education is cultivated and over time.

Despite the long history of higher education, certain populations still struggle to persist through the higher education system and graduate. One such population is first-generation students. Though first-generation students have always been a part of the student population, they still do not matriculate through and graduate at the same rate as their peers. While often studied at the undergraduate level (Auclair, et al., 2008; Choy, 2001; Nunez, Cuccaro-Alamin, & Carroll, 1998; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012), an expanding body of literature focuses on similar experiences for graduate students, particularly doctoral students that are first-generation college graduates (Gardner, 2013; Lunceford, 2011; Seay, Lifton, Wuensh, Bradshaw, & McDowelle, 2008). In the current study, collecting and examining the oral histories of past first-generation students who completed college degrees provided insight into their unique historical and culturally situated stories and may help future first-generation students, institutions and policy makers understand why certain students graduated. The collection and preservation of these oral histories also serve as rich historical accounts of lived experiences found exclusively in each participant’s story.

Following is a review of literature related to three aspects of this study. First, a history of Oklahoma higher education is presented. Evidence of early mission-based education is found within Oklahoma's history and its influences on Oklahoma's Native American population. Descriptive statistics show Oklahoma's resource commitment for education. Next, I present a review of literature regarding first-generation college students. This literature includes not only reference to parental attainment as a parameter for studying educational success, but also concurrent classifications of students based on race and income level often found in first-generation literature. An overview and introduction to the concept of cultural capital, in Bourdieu's (1973) *Cultural Reproduction Social Reproduction*, this study's theoretical framework, is provided to not only explain low persistence rates among first-generation students, but more importantly to help explain why some of these students are able to matriculate. Finally, an introduction to oral history, the methodology employed in this study, is included to provide reference to the value of this methodology for studying first-generation Oklahoma college graduates. Together these sections offer background and insight for studying first-generation college students who earned doctoral degrees and represent various decades throughout Oklahoma's history.

History of Oklahoma Higher Education

Oklahoma has a long history of supporting education to better its people. Commitment to education in Oklahoma is evident in its history even prior to statehood and before it was opened for settlement (Montgomery, Mosier, & Bethel, 1935). As the Five Civilized Tribes settled Indian Territory in the 1830s and 1840s, each tribe, often with the help of Christian missionaries, established schools that were, according to Baird

and Goble (1994), superior to their neighboring states. While each Oklahoma tribe had its own education system, the curriculum often contained similar elements, and students learned reading and writing in both English and often their native language. Native American students also studied math, history, Latin, Greek, philosophy, biology, astronomy, vocational training, and Bible. Substantial funds were devoted to education (Baird & Goble, 1994). While these schools present a case for a long standing history of commitment to education in Oklahoma, they also demonstrate the use of education as public policy tool focused on a larger assimilative agenda. Some historians present the schools in Indian Territory as shining examples of excellence. Others contend that in Oklahoma, beginning in 1836 and continuing through the 1860s, and nationally dating back to colonial America, schools were instruments of indoctrination into western (White) culture and religion (Lomawaima, 1994) and molded the “head, hands and heart of each Indian after the fashion of White Americans” (Baird & Goble, 1994, p, 166). Oklahoma visions of higher education thus reflected a range of cultural and philosophical goals that had affected its people in different ways.

As Oklahoma Territory opened for settlement, higher education became an important part of public policy. “Passage of the Organic Act in May, 1890, made a system of education possible for Oklahoma Territory” (Harlow, 1961). The Act required the establishment of three higher education institutions:

1. A liberal arts college
2. A normal school to train teachers
3. A land grant college in accordance with the Morrill Act of 1862

(Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2012)

The First Territorial Legislature established three schools to address these requirements, now known as The University of Oklahoma in Norman, The University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, and Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. Each was funded in part by the state, but also required the local county and town chosen to help fund these institutions (McReynolds, 1964). Before Statehood, the territorial government established three additional colleges, now known as Langston University, Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Southwestern Oklahoma State University and a preparatory school, now Northern Oklahoma College, thus expanding the system of higher education in Oklahoma Territory (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2012).

As Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory prepared for statehood at the turn of the twentieth century, additional expansion of the higher education system was necessary. The United States government would not allow the two territories to enter as separate states, and expanding higher education was one way to unite policy makers of both territories. While Oklahoma Territory had seven institutions of higher education; Indian Territory had none. The first Oklahoma Legislature sought to duplicate institutions in the west by creating three new colleges. The legislature also created six new agriculture schools across the state. The 1909 Legislature again expanded higher education access by creating three additional normal schools (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2012). Since then, several institutions have closed, changed focus and/or name, and a few more have opened; however, it is apparent that higher education has been a focus of public policy for Oklahoma as it developed and transformed socially and economically from settlement and beyond.

In addition to higher education, primary and secondary education changed in Oklahoma. Early in Oklahoma's history, a wide network of small schools provided public education to Oklahoma's largely rural population. Each school serviced students from an area of approximately nine square miles. There were four schools in each township (36 sections), and each school operated independently, but often without means of leveling tax or generating revenue. When Oklahoma became a state on 1907, it had over 3,000 independent school districts; however, over time the original school districts consolidated (Harlow, 1961). Though the number of schools decreased, participation in education increased as did high school graduation rates.

World War II changed higher education in the United States, and its effects on higher education in Oklahoma were dramatic. As the war escalated, many young men left universities to enter into military service or industries that supported the war effort. This trend reversed after the war, primarily due to the "GI Bill of Rights." The GI Bill, as it became known, provides assistance to military personnel who wish to complete higher education. Oklahoma benefited greatly from the veterans using this benefit. Even though Oklahoma was the forty-sixth state and ranked twenty-eighth in population, Oklahoma colleges enrolled more students than all but 14 other states by the early 1960s. This surge in enrollment showed not only a national shift in educational policy, but also Oklahoma's commitment to serve students in higher education (Harlow, 1961). Evidence of this commitment is demonstrated in the continued growth of the student population in Oklahoma before and after World War II. In the 1939-1940 school year, 38 public institutions of higher education had a total enrollment of less than 27,000 students. By 2010, the number of public institutions had decreased to 25 and the total number of

students was more than 247,000 (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2012). These numbers represent an annual student growth rate of more than five percent annually while at the same time Oklahoma's overall population grew less than one percent annually (U.S. Census Bureau). The growth of student bodies coupled with a decreased number of institutions also suggests that institutions grew substantially larger.

In addition to the GI Bill, other public policies supported the use of higher education to progress society. President Truman's commission on higher education (1947) called for expansion of education. The Higher Education Act of 1965 and its subsequent reauthorizations created policies and programs to expand access to higher education throughout the United States. Though Oklahoma colleges opened to minority students after *Spuiel v. Board of Regents for the University of Oklahoma* (1948), Oklahoma still maintains a public historically Black college (HBCU), Langston University. Historically Black colleges are higher education institutions established prior to 1964 for the purpose of serving Black students, especially during school segregation.

As higher education expanded in Oklahoma, a coordinated governance system was needed to provide stability and structure to the state's higher education system. Prior to 1941, several attempts were made to coordinate the efforts of Oklahoma's various institutions, but with limited success. The 1941 Legislature aimed to provide structure and efficiency in Oklahoma's higher education system by proposing Article-XIII-A of the Oklahoma Constitution. This Article created a coordinating board for higher education in 1942, now known as The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. The board reported in 1942 that "Oklahoma now has the greatest opportunity in its history to chart an intelligent course for higher education on a state basis, and to assume a

greater leadership throughout the nation than has ever before been possible” (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2012, p. 5).

Oklahoma in the 21st Century

As of 2011, Oklahoma spent more per student for higher education than the national average and ranked thirtieth in spending per full time student (spending \$6,338 per student compared with a national rate of \$5,492). Similarly, though education expenditures in Oklahoma declined during The Great Recession, they did not decline as much as the national average (NCHEMS Information Center). This continued commitment to education displays how policymakers continue to provide resources for Oklahoma’s changing population demographics, industries, and general societal advancement.

Despite Oklahoma’s long history of making education a state priority, Oklahoma continues to perform below the national average for adults with at least a bachelor degree, and when ranked by state, comes in forty-fourth out of fifty states and the District of Columbia. According to the 2008 population data from the United States Census Bureau, about 30% of adults in Oklahoma have at least a bachelor degree, compared with 37% nationally. This low graduation rate may be attributed to low college attendance and persistence rates as Oklahoma high school students graduate at a rate of 87.7%, above the national rate of 87.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). While high school graduation rates are encouraging, college graduation rates fall far below the rates for the nation. Oklahoma ranked forty-third in 2010 with a six year graduation rate of about 45% (College completion: who graduates from college, who doesn't, and why it matters). In

sum, about 25% of the adult population of Oklahoma, nearly 480,000 people, have attended some college courses, but did not earn degrees (Lumina Foundation, 2011).

Oklahoma is currently home to a robust, prosperous economy. As of the first quarter of 2013, Oklahoma had the sixth lowest unemployment rate in the United States (Bureau of Labor). If Oklahoma is going to maintain healthy levels of employment, it must increase its number of college graduates. According to the Georgetown University Center on Education, as presented by the Lumina Foundation, Oklahoma will need to fill 541,000 jobs by 2018. Of these, 308,000 will require postsecondary credentials (Lumina Foundation, 2011). Consequentially, by the year 2020, 62% of Oklahoma jobs will require some form of higher education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). In order to meet the demand of the labor market, Oklahoma must educate and retain its people at rates higher than its current patterns reflect. One way Oklahoma can increase the number of college graduates degrees is to increase matriculation and graduation rates among student groups that do not typically participate in or continue through the higher education system.

One classification of students who are less likely to participate in or graduate from higher education institutions in Oklahoma is first-generation students. First-generation students are known to have less participation and lower graduation rates at all levels of higher education: community college, four-year institution, and graduate school (Choy, 2001; Gardner, 2013; Munoz, 2012).

First-Generation College Students

The concept of first-generation college student was first developed in the 1960s and referred to students who do not have a parent who completed a bachelor degree. These students were recognized as a class that did not participate in or graduate from higher education institutions at the same rates as their peers who were second-generation students or beyond. The concept “comes from the United States, where it was first used at the administrative level as an eligibility criterion for federal access and outreach programs” (Auclair, et al., 2008, p. iii). Collectively these access and outreach programs form a broad-based initiative commonly referred to as TRIO. The Higher Education Act of 1965 created TRIO in order to coordinate programs designed to provide access and support to underserved populations in higher education. Though originally encompassing Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services, TRIO currently includes seven outreach programs designed to aid disadvantaged students, including first-generation students (Auclair, et al., 2008; Oklahoma Division of Student Assistance TRIO Booklet Committee, 2009; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). The Suder Foundation, through The First Scholars Program, also provides support nationwide for first-generation students through scholarships (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). These programs identify first-generation students as students who have “non-financial obstacles to post-secondary education” (Auclair, et al., 2008, p. 3). This network of programs recognizes uneven persistence among first-generation students as a group and also provides resources designed to aid in access and persistence.

In addition to the number of programs that support first-generation students, as well as other disadvantaged students, the magnitude of the budget and number of students

served by the programs also points to their importance as public policy tools at the national level and in Oklahoma. Though funded through Federal appropriations, TRIO programs are implemented at the institutional level. In 2008, 841,716 students received \$878,850,304 nationally from TRIO programs. In Oklahoma, 26,491 students received \$25,693,944 TRIO funds that same year (Oklahoma Division of Student Assistance TRIO Booklet Committee, 2009). These figures underscore the sheer number of people these programs serve as well as the fiscal commitment to education at both the national and state levels. In order to understand the impact of these statistics for Oklahoma, it is important contextualize the population and appropriations. While Oklahoma students only received about three percent of the TRIO funds distributed nationally in 2008, Oklahoma post-secondary students only accounted for one percent of the total national population in that same year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). These figures suggest that Oklahoma post-secondary students are much more likely to qualify for assistance from TRIO programs than the national student population.

While TRIO and other programs recognize the decreased persistence of first-generation students and provide a means of assistance, it is important to understand the scope of first-generation students within the overall higher education population. “First-generation students represent a significant and growing portion of higher education enrollments” (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012, p. xiii). Nationally in the 1995-96 school year, 47% of post-secondary students were first-generation students (Choy, 2001). This population estimate is based on the definition of first-generation student presented by TRIO programs meaning “neither of their parents had more than a high school education” (Choy, 2001). While TRIO uses these criteria to define first-generation

students, others define them as “those whose parents did not attend college” (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012, p. xiv).

Various studies regarding first-generation college student participation and graduation rates exist. Choy (2001) Warburton (2001) and Chen (2005) present data in conjunction with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) pertaining to the participation rates and persistence rates of first-generation college students. All define “first-generation college” as students whose highest parental education level is less than a bachelor degree, though each presents data for students that have a parent or parents with “some college.” These studies look at first-generation academic preparation for college (Warburton, Bargain, & Nunez, 2001) matriculation rates and fields of study (Chen, 2005), and the importance of first-generation college students as a class of students that do not graduate at the same rate as their peers who have at least one parent with a bachelor degree. These studies also present the fact that first-generation college students are often racial minorities from families with low incomes.

The National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (2012) reported similar traits and trends for doctoral graduates as 31.3% of doctoral recipients were first-generation students when defining them as students with the highest parental education level as some college but less than a bachelor degree. This statistic was based on the aggregation of “high school or less” (18.9%) and “some college” (12.4%) reported as “highest educational attainment of either parent of doctoral recipient” (National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2012, table 34).

Differing definitions of first-generation students creates some inconsistency across literature and discussion of some of the impacts of these inconsistencies follow, primarily as they relate to cultural capital. However, “students whose parents had some college experience, but not a bachelor’s degree, did not appear to have an advantage [in persistence] over those whose parents had no postsecondary education” (Choy, 2001, p. 8). As previously stated, for the purpose of this study, first-generation students were defined as students that neither parent has at least a bachelor degree; however, due to the emergence of an interesting and meaningful characteristic, the focus of this study narrowed to include first-generation Oklahoma college students who earned doctoral degrees. Of the participants in this study, only two parents had “some college.” One participant’s father took one computer class and another had “some college,” though the participant did not know how much or in what subject area.

After completing bachelor degrees, first-generation students often carry forward many of the same challenges when choosing to attend graduate school: they do not understand the “rules” of navigating the institution, tend to have financial constraints often tied to lack of support from family members, and take longer to complete degrees (Gardner, 2013). Navigation of education institutions remains burdensome (Lunceford, 2011) as many move to larger, more complex, comprehensive institutions for graduate school, and many first-generation college students begin their collegiate careers in community colleges (Choy, 2001; Munoz, 2012).

Oklahoma has a stated goal of having a workforce educated at the same level equal to or above that of the national population by increasing enrollment in higher education and raising graduation rates in Oklahoma’s colleges and universities

(Education, 1999). In order to increase the educational attainment of the population as a whole, members of underserved populations must participate in and matriculate through the education system at rates higher than previous generations. As history shows, public policy has attempted to provide greater access to higher education both on a national level and within the state of Oklahoma; however, increased access is only part of the solution. Though access has increased and expanded for many students once excluded overtly or by construct, lower graduation rates among certain classes suggests a need to develop programs, institutions and cultures that encourage and foster systems and environments that aid graduation.

Student Characteristics

Because of public policy focus, growing populations, and the expanding body of research on undergraduate student populations, a great deal of literature exists about the low graduation rates of first-generation students; however, despite this growing body of research, little is known about *persistence* in first-generation students (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). “First-generation represent a common thread cutting across all student cohorts and institutional types, yet they are the one population that remains largely unnoticed and poorly understood despite all of the research on students that has emerged in past decades” (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012, p. xiii). One reason for this lack of understanding is first-generation students are not a homogenous group nor are they easily discernible within the larger student population. Other demographic variables such as race, religion, or family income are easily identified and are usually nominal or ordinal and may be

apparent; however, parental educational attainment is not easily observed by either peers or educational staff (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

Additionally, when first-generation status is measured, it often is often based on data self-reported by students to institutions (Davis, 2012; Gardner & Holland, 2012). All identity characteristics and categories that are self-reported can lead to inconsistencies in reporting; in addition, inconsistent definitions across institutions of what constitutes “first-generation” creates difficulties in forming useful parameters for first-generation student studies and may also inhibit the validity of studies, especially when comparing data across time, institutions, and geographic areas. This ambiguity is represented in the current study as one participant mentioned that her father had a “computer class,” yet they were not sure of the institution, content or outcome. Similarly, another knew her father attended college and did not graduate, but knew little if any detail about his experience. The limited information participants sometimes had about their parents’ and grandparents’ education also suggested hearing few schooling stories in their family interactions.

As the body of literature continues to grow in regard to first-generation students, studies are beginning to develop lines of inquiry into understanding why and how certain first-generation college students are able to matriculate and ultimately graduate. In one such study, *Low Income, First Generation Community College Students: Reflections on Their Success and Their Motivations*, Munoz (2012) developed a qualitative line of inquiry into the experiences of low-income, first-generation community college students who persisted and earned bachelor degrees. This line of inquiry is particularly relevant to the current study in that it not only seeks to understand the experiences of first-generation

students who graduated, but due to matriculation from community college to baccalaureate degree, included students that attended multiple institutions. Munoz' findings, viewed through the lens of self-determination theory, suggested that students benefited from programs, such as TRIO, tied to their socio-economic status as well as support networks within institutions.

Munoz's study also points out the fact that many students classified as first-generation college also share other social and demographic characteristics. The inclusion of "low-income" as a parameter with "first-generation" by Munoz (2012) is an example of a layered parameter within the first-generation population. The inclusion of both parameters shows the effects of separate, but inseparable distinctions. The frequent combining of such variables creates complexities in studying either group and neither is a variable that can be isolated in a particular participant's experience. This combination of student characteristics (low-income and first-generation) is especially relevant in first-generation college student populations as programs such as Pell Grants and other financial assistance programs were often designed to aid low-income families, but often simultaneously influenced the educational experiences of first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

Race is another layered element that shapes student experiences and, accordingly, is a line of inquiry that has been employed in tandem to study first-generation students. As espoused in Franklin's previously presented arguments, race and ethnicity have always been elements affecting college students in America. Many studies (Hewing, 2011; Paulsen & Lohfink, 2005; Pike & Kuh, 2005) point out that some students face both racial barriers as well as challenges from being a first-generation college student that

interfere with educational progression, especially when students of color attend primarily White institutions. Similarly, Melvin and Stick (2001) argue that racial minorities also have more difficulty interacting with faculty members from dominant groups than do their White peers. Schmidt and Akande (2011) found concurrent factors in Native American first-generation students, and Levya (2011) found stratified gender and ethnic based themes that concurrently influenced educational experiences when studying the experiences of Latin American women in graduate programs. The institutional challenges facing racial and ethnic minorities can complicate the experiences of first-generation college students of color (Hooks, 2000).

While first-generation college students may not be homogenous and they may not be visible and identifiable in comparison to, for example, non-traditional students who are older than their peers, they do share certain characteristics. First-generation college students are more likely than their non-first-generation peers to:

1. Select a two-year institution to begin higher education
2. Delay beginning post-secondary enrollment
3. Have interrupted enrollment
4. Enroll part-time
5. Have lower standardized test (ACT/SAT) scores
6. Not have taken a standardized test
7. Be employed and work more hours
8. Be older

(ACT, 2013; Choy, 2001; Nunez, Cuccaro-Alamin, & Carroll, 1998; Warburton, Burgain, & Nunez, 2001; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012)

While these characteristics are not causal in terms of determining why certain first-generation students do persist and graduate, they may be important factors to include when attempting to understand the experiences of first-generation students.

It is difficult to examine the demographic characteristics or graduation rates of first-generation college students in Oklahoma primarily because data is kept at the institutional level with varying consistency and may also reflect different definitions of first-generation students. First-generation college students in Oklahoma are less likely to take the SAT test than their peers, and when they do, score lower than their peers for whom at least one parent has a bachelor degree (CollegeBoard, 2011).

Oral History as Methodology

Previous research focused on first-generation college students explored primarily one of three fields. The first line of inquiry tends to focus on student expectations and college choice. The second focuses on student preparation and the resulting transition from high school to college. The third focuses on student experiences and the effects on persistence and educational attainment (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Similarly, most of the existing literature uses national secondary data and regression analysis for their studies. Several studies focus on particular classes of first-generation students such as racial group, field of study or a particular institution (Auclair, et al., 2008). Most have some reference to culture reproduction and/or social capital as their theoretical framework (Auclair, et al., 2008; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). While these quantitative, grounded theory studies do provide a solid body of research, qualitative interviews of students are “revealing and enlightening

in that they give human voices to compliment previous research on first-generation students” (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012, p.17).

One such study was conducted by Howard London (1989). In *Breaking Away: A Study of First-Generation College Students and Their Families*, London presents the life stories of fifteen first-generation college students from Boston, Massachusetts (London, 1989). London’s work is unique in that it relies on loosely-structured interviews in which first-generation students and their families presented their stories in their own words. While participants’ backgrounds were racial and socially diverse, the sample was not constructed to be representative of a large population. Instead, the sample consisted of a set of willing participants with shared characteristics that were worthwhile to understand in depth. London’s work was somewhat different from a methodological perspective in that it, unlike previously mentioned studies did not employ statistics from a national database, but instead captured and examined the stories of individuals from a single geographic setting. London considered the following research questions:

1. How, if at all, do the social histories and psychodynamics of families contribute to the matriculation of first-generation students?
2. How do students reconcile (or not reconcile) the often conflicting requirements of family membership and educational mobility?

(London, 1989)

While not expressed as such, these questions build firmly on the conceptual foundations of cultural capital and social capital. London’s study provides a foundational qualitative

study that investigated the experiences and issues first-generation students encountered in higher education in a specific geographic area using the participants' own words.

Another study, *College Readiness and Academic Preparation for Postsecondary Education: Oral Histories of First-Generation Urban College Students* (Reid & Moore, 2008), shares a similar methodology and structure. In this study, the oral histories of 13 first-generation college students who graduated from the same high school were used to explore the experiences of first-generation students who all shared a common geographic context. While Reid and Moore's study used a single time parameter and explored the experiences of first-generation college students while they were still in college, the parameters of the study further demonstrate the value of a studying a group with shared geographic and demographic characteristics.

Davis (2003) formed a similar study by collecting the narratives of 15 first-generation college students who attended the same university. His study examined the experiences of undergraduate students with different classifications. The students participating in his study were all TRIO program participants. By using students from different classifications, Davis was able to study their experiences both individually as well as build a study showing how experiences and similarities emerged from the data. In addition to collecting and analyzing the individual narratives, Davis analyzed the data across the narratives looking for common themes. Thus, the Davis's study resembles the current study in form and structure.

Culture Reproduction and Social Reproduction

Cultural capital and social reproduction theory grow from the works of Bourdieu (1973, 1986) and his work with Passeron (1977). Some scholars contend that “the key construct in the experience of first-generation students is cultural capital” (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012, p. 6). As described by Sullivan (2001, 2002) and Ward (2012), cultural capital is a system through which parents pass along information, skills and assets to their children. With respect to education, this information includes an understanding of the value of education. College educated parents may pass on information to their children that help them navigate educational systems and succeed in university environments. They may also discuss the details of their educational experiences in the household. Consequentially, students who do not have access to this capital are limited in their ability to successfully navigate educational environments and are therefore limited to only be as successful in terms of educational attainment as their parents (Sullivan, 2001; Sullivan, 2002; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

Other qualitative studies (Gardner & Holley, 2011) also use the lenses of *Cultural Reproduction* and *Social Reproduction* to analyze the experiences of first-generation doctoral students. In “*Those invisible barriers are real*”: *The progression of First-Generation Students Through Doctoral Education*, Gardner and Holley interviewed 20 first-generation doctoral students from two land-grant institutions. Their study found that doctoral students often carried forward many of the difficulties they faced in their undergraduate studies throughout their educational experiences. These experiences were combined into four distinct themes:

1. Breaking the chain: a resilience and sense of pride each student felt having overcome significant obstacles in their education.
2. Knowing the rules: a feeling of confusion in navigating the education processes expressed by being “clueless” and “[My peers] knew things that I didn’t know”
3. Living in two worlds: feeling caught between working-class values and academia, and having to cut ties with people “back home”
4. Seeking support: in spite of challenges, students were able to persist because of support received from “mentors,” often faculty and peers.

These themes are common in first-generation college literature and display first-generation students’ lack of knowledge due to their parents’ lack of shared experiences.

While cultural capital is often used as a theoretical lens through which data is analyzed (Choy, 2001; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012; Soria & Stebleton, 2012), some studies (Sullivan, 2001; Sullivan, 2002) point to the limitations of its usefulness in understanding the persistence differences in first-generation and non-first-generation college students. The primary constraint for using cultural capital as a means of analysis is that it, like many theoretical constructs, is difficult to measure and quantify. The subjective meaning and shared values passed through families is held within each unique system and therefore evident, but not easily measured across populations. However, the concept is compelling because many studies show that first-generation students lack the practical and contextual knowledge of how to navigate college life (Garnder, 2013; London, 1989; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). London (1989)

emphasized the importance of family experiences and family culture in students' struggles to balance their aspirations and goals with the guilt associated with "breaking away" from the family culture, and often removing resources that could contribute to the well-being of the entire family unit. For example, going to college often meant not getting a job and contributing financially to the family.

Cultural capital is not data which can be easily obtained, transmitted, or objectively quantified. Instead, cultural capital is a body of knowledge gained through a lifetime of experiences. Cultural capital includes knowledge students and their families have about: getting into college, persisting once there, making social connections, and navigating curriculum (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Because first-generation students' parents are not able to pass along this knowledge, cultural reproduction theory explains why first-generation students have lower persistence rates than their classmates (Bourdieu, 1973, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1986).

Cultural capital is also difficult to quantify as it pertains to first-generation students because of differing definitions of first-generation students and differences in capital within their family units. Ward presents several examples of these discrepancies. As Ward explains, a student for whom neither parent attended college is considered a first-generation student as is a student for whom both parents attended and completed community college. For example, if Sam Bradford, a former Oklahoma college football star, were to have a child with a woman who did not have a college degree, the child would be defined as a first-generation student even though his/her father was a Heisman Trophy winner, highly compensated NFL quarterback, and persisted through his junior year of college with high marks. While all three students are considered first-generation

college students, their parents would have vastly different levels of understanding of higher education institutions, cultures, and systems (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Like the distinctions among salary, occupation, and socio-economic class, the broad category of first-generation student contains meaningful nuances.

Because each student has a personal level of cultural capital and such levels are hard to measure, Ward (2012) and London (1989) attempted to understand the role families play in educational attainment and experiences of first-generation students. Both used interviews to collect data on student experiences. By capturing the students' stories in their own words, the perceptions of the students regarding experiences and levels of family assistance are available (London, 1989; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). This methodology seeks to understand the experiences of first-generation students rather than simply attempting to measure levels of cultural capital based on demographic variables.

In studies regarding first-generation college students, many other theories are also employed. London (1989) employed oriented family theory. Reid and Moore (2008) used social capital theory instead of relying on the framework commonly surrounding the work of Bourdieu; however, their study still focused on value passage within families. Munoz (2012) used self-determination theory, a lens that aided in framing an understanding of first-generation college students from a motivational perspective. The breadth of theoretical frameworks points to the multifaceted, complex nature of research efforts focused on understanding the experiences of first-generation college students.

Though Bourdieu's theories on capital and its transmission and reproduction are common in education literature, his ideas are often subjects of criticism. Goldthorpe

(2007) asserts that Bourdieu's theories are flawed because they assume that "upper" classes are superior to others, and thus people desire to be upwardly mobile. Goldthorpe also contends that other factors such as ethnic differences were factors in educational attainment and class mobility. Lin (2001) included Bourdieu's work in the argument that social capital exists as a mechanism for transmission of values, but Lin took a broader view of the source of that capital using social networks outside of the family as sources of influence. Lareau and Weininger (2003) point out that many authors use differing definitions in defining capital when using Bourdieu's theories in educational research, and Bourdieu's concepts of increasing one's level in the class structure is also subjective in nature. These critiques point to limitations and considerations that must be taken into account in applying the works of Bourdieu and Passeron.

Conclusion

Higher education serves as a means to advance society. It has long been used as a catalyst for progress at both the state and national levels. Oklahoma chooses to invest in higher education at increasingly high levels, yet still struggles to develop and maintain an educated population. In order to better educate its populace, Oklahoma provides access to a rapidly growing student body; however, many Oklahoma students do not persist through a bachelor degree. In order to increase persistence, Oklahoma must understand and serve its underperforming students. First-generation students represent an underperforming population in higher education. Descriptive statistics imply that this may also be the case in Oklahoma. Bourdieu's *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* (1973) and his forms of capital (1986) (cultural, social, and economic) help to frame an understanding of why first-generation students do not persist in higher

education settings and likewise may help explain why some graduate. Because cultural capital is difficult to measure and quantify, by collecting and analyzing stories as oral histories, first-generation students provided an avenue for understanding their perceptions and experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A solid study can be built only by using a sturdy foundation. This foundation is found in the methods employed to collect and to analyze information as it pertains to the problem being studied, as well as the perspectives that undergird those methods. This chapter presents an outline of the methods employed in this study, along with the analytic processes that emerged as the study progressed (Patton, 2002). It revisits the problem statement, purpose of the study, and research questions, as well as discussions of qualitative methodology, interpretivist theoretical perspective, and oral history. The rationale used to select participants is also presented followed by the processes that were employed to analyze information and ultimately present the findings of this study. Finally, practices employed to promote trustworthiness, transferability, and ethical considerations are presented.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the odds numerous studies detail (Choy 2001; Munoz, 2012; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012) certain Oklahoma first-generation college students graduated

successfully (Tinto, 1993); others completed baccalaureate degrees as well as advanced degrees. For those who continued past the baccalaureate degree, limited literature shows that first-generation students face similar complexities and obstacles to those encountered early in college (Gardner, 2013). In order to understand how and why certain first-generation Oklahoma college students graduated with the baccalaureate degree and then continued to earn additional degrees despite the odds against them, we must seek to understand the students' experiences within their individual contexts, with a focus on their perceptions of how they accumulated and transmitted social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

This study collected and examined oral histories of first-generation Oklahoma college graduates within their unique social and cultural contexts to both preserve and examine their experiences and contribute rich, vivid, personal accounts of individuals who had distinctive and personal experiences, despite sharing the common characteristic of being a first-generation college student that graduated. While originally designed to study first-generation Oklahoma college graduates earning bachelor degrees, the study evolved and narrowed organically (Patton, 2002) to focus specifically on first-generation students who not only graduated from college, but also advanced through the higher education system and earned doctoral degrees. Similarly, this study documented students' abilities to accumulate and reproduce greater levels of social and cultural capital, not only for themselves, but also for generation who followed, through the lens of Bourdieu's (1973) *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* theory.

Research Questions

At the onset of the study, two questions were posed:

1. What factors do first-generation Oklahoma college graduates perceive as contributing most to their success?
2. What role does social and cultural capital appear to play in their experiences?

As the study progressed, the position of these questions transformed with the emergence of the study to reflect not only the factors that participants perceived as contributing to their success, but also contextual references specific to each participant's story that contributed to earning multiple degrees. These contextual references often point to specific decades represented by the participant and were often tied to Oklahoma's changing educational system, economy, and society.

Besides basic demographic information—name, age, race, schools attended, and graduation dates, the only question asked of all participants was to describe their family and schooling experiences. In two cases, participants began telling their stories *before* their demographic information was complete and any questions were asked. As mentioned earlier, each participant was aware that this study focused on their first-generation experiences and I interpreted this free-flowing narrative as excitement for the opportunity to share their stories.

Overview of the Design of the Study

In order to build a scholarly study, it is imperative that the researcher uses a design that supports the focus of the study. Oral history served as the guiding methodology for this study. Constructionist epistemology and the interpretivist

theoretical perspective were employed to design the study and consider the data found within each story, seeking to find meaning in each participant's historically and culturally situated account.

Constructionism.

This study is situated in a constructionist epistemology. "Constructionism claims...that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage in the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Constructionism holds that meaning is neither entirely objective nor subjective, but instead constructed by people in unique contexts and through personal perceptions and interactions. Constructionism looks for deep meaning rather than absolute truth. This meaning is found in how "one's own experiences and background affect what one understands and how one acts in the world" (Patton, 2002, p. 54). The search for contextually-based meaning and an understanding that meaning is constructed in relation central to constructionism supports the use of interpretivism as the guiding theoretical perspective.

Interpretivism.

Interpretivism is the theoretical perspective that was determined to be an appropriate methodology for this study. "The interpretivist approach...looks for culturally and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). From this perspective, interpretivism holds that the only way to understand these social interpretations is to realize that individuals react to and interpret their experiences through their own unique perceptions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Interpretivism stems from hermeneutic tradition (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) as well as the works of Max Weber (Crotty, 1998). The hermeneutic tradition “seek(s) deep understanding by interpreting the meaning that interactions, actions, and objects have for people” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 17). This understanding of meaning, rather than the pursuit of absolute truth, is the nature of interpretivism and allows for subjectivity in interpretation. Weber contended that human sciences are concerned with ‘Verstehen’, or understanding. Understanding contrasts with the casual relationships inherent in the natural sciences. Instead, ‘Verstehen’ is “for the purpose of explanation” (Weiss 1986, p. 68 as cited in Crotty 1998). This explanation, Weber contended, was the only way to understand perceptions and motivations inherent in social science research (Crotty, 1998). One way to capture this meaning is by collecting the stories of the participants in their own words, or their oral histories, with particular attention paid to the contexts in which their stories occurred.

Oral history.

“Oral history provides a way to invite people to tell their story—of their past, a past time, [or] a past event ... however, their individual story is always intimately connected to historical conditions and thus extends beyond their own experience” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 137). Oral histories are in-depth, focused interview(s) intended to tell an individual’s story. Thus, they preserve the voice and rhythm of a given account as presented by the individual participant. Oral history differs from other qualitative methodologies in part because it deliberately employs a process of *storytelling*. This approach allows the researcher the opportunity to understand particular participants or a particular facet of their lives, framed by each participant’s perception of the communities,

cultures, and historical contexts in which their experiences occurred. Oral history methodology primarily relies on in-depth interviews which are recorded and transcribed to preserve the accounts. While qualitative interviews are typically focused on particular topics and questions posed by the interviewer using a semi-structured protocol, oral history is much less focused or led by the researcher. Instead, the process of gathering oral histories encourages participants to present their experiences in their own words.

Many argue that oral history is an empowering methodology because it not only documents experiences that may not be captured in other historical accounts, but also gives the participant(s) the opportunity to frame their experiences through their personal perceptions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; London, 1989; Moyer, 1999). This freedom allows the participant(s) to present their culturally and historically-situated interpretations of their experiences. “What is really underlying the strength of the method is that [one] can study process” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 134). In this case, the process was the experience by which a first-generation student earned a doctoral degree, framed within its unique cultural and historical setting.

History is collected and reported for social purpose (Thompson, 1978). This purpose, whether “obscure” or “blatant” helps ordinary people to “understand the upheavals and changes they experience in their own lives” (Thompson, 1978, p. 2) and as such, oral history “can be a means for transforming both the content and purpose of history” (p. 3). Thompson (1978) contends that:

[Oral history] can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry; it can break down barriers between teachers and students,

between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside; and in writing of history—whether in books, or museums, or radio and film—it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place (p. 3).

Thus, oral history creates and preserves history as experiences that reveal the concerns, attitudes, and values of ordinary people.

In this study, oral history captured the stories of seven individuals that shared certain demographic parameters, but had greatly different experiences. By using a broad historical population, it included the oral histories of students that went to school on horseback and another that administers an Internet based high school. It captured the stories of two young men who attended college during two different wars, some 30 years apart which created very different challenges and opportunities for the participants and their families. It recorded the narrative of a single mother that used education to create “stability” for herself and her young daughter. It included a discussion of the experiences of an African American woman on a primarily White campus in the late 1980s—an undergraduate timeframe I share, but an experience separate from my own as a White male. These seven individuals are not celebrities, but instead represent common people found throughout the State of Oklahoma’s history.

Procedures and Methods

This qualitative study collected and examined the oral history of first-generation college graduates from Oklahoma who earned doctoral degrees. Following are the

selection criteria for participants, data collection, and analysis techniques, and a summary of the methodology that were used.

Study participants.

Selection of appropriate participants was crucial to this study. A broad selection of first-generation college graduates from Oklahoma that earned doctoral degrees was used. First-generation college graduates were defined as individuals who earned at least a baccalaureate degree when neither parent earned one. This designation differs somewhat from other definitions in literature as participants may not be the first in their families to *attend* college; however, neither parent *graduated* from college. This definition is consistent with other studies of first-generation doctoral students (Gardner, 2013). In order to determine residence status, Oklahoma students were defined as students that completed secondary education (high school) in the state of Oklahoma.

To create breadth and diversity in the study, other criteria were desired when selecting participants. Students from various time periods throughout Oklahoma's history were interviewed to provide proximal indicators of individual experiences. Six participants of various ages were selected, and another first-generation student, though not a college graduate, contributed to the study. At the time of interview he was one week shy of turning 100 years old. Finding another participant representing his era and experiences who met the criteria of the study proved fruitless.

Though only six participants contributed to the study, capturing and exploring their oral histories provided glimpses into many factors, contexts, and trends found in Oklahoma's history. Historically Oklahoma had a larger rural population than it does

today, and that trend is reflected in the participants' backgrounds. Oklahoma's history is also steeped in racial and ethnic dynamics. Having participants that were African American, Native American, and White helped capture perspectives that included some of the racial themes found in Oklahoma's history. Finally, because participants attended liberal arts colleges, regional universities, and research institutions, their histories include experiences related to a variety of educational structures.

While each participant was offered the opportunity to use a pseudonym, all chose to use their given name. All data were sorted and stored according to the participant's name and date of interview. All oral history recordings were stored in a locked facility and password protected media, and all interview transcripts and researcher notes were stored in a locked file and on a password protected data source. This protocol was approved by IRB prior to the recruitment of any participant or collection of any data.

Participants were solicited through word of mouth and from referrals from colleagues. Participants were first contacted by electronic correspondence (email) as presented Appendix A. Telephone calls followed electronic correspondence. The introductory script for these calls is attached in Appendix B. Before interviews began, participants were furnished with an informed consent form explaining the purpose of the research, data collection, and storage methods. Participants were offered the ability to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Prior to recruiting participants or collecting any data, research protocol, solicitation scripts, informed consent forms, and agreements granting permission for the

use of stories for this study were approved by the institutional review board. This approval and subsequent modifications are included in Appendices F and G respectively.

I knew several participants personally before they were recruited for this study. I attend church with the Bryan brothers and work with Walter's granddaughter. Ken Johnson administers the MBA program at the university where I teach. Dr. Shultz was referred by one of my committee members. Dr. Wansick was one of my classmates during my doctoral program, and Dr. Gilkey was a teaching assistant in that same program. Several other participants were recruited to participate in this study but either chose not to contribute or, in one case, was surprised that his father had earned a bachelor's degree. While the participants in this study were all first-generation by definition as students whose highest parental educational attainment is less than a bachelor degree, two participants did have one parent with "some college."

While limiting the pool of first-generation students to those who earned a doctoral degree was an emergent decision as the study developed, it was also practical. As all participants had successfully completed dissertations, I believed recruiting students with earned doctoral degrees would increase their willingness to participate.

Data collection.

As is appropriate for the oral history methodology, data were collected primarily through individual face-to-face interviews at locations chosen by each participant. In these interviews, participants were asked to present their memories of how and why they graduated from college. This loosely structured process is consistent with oral history collection. Basic demographic information was collected in writing, as presented in

Appendix C. The researcher recorded this demographic information prior to conducting interviews. Audio recordings were made of each interview and transcribed verbatim. Interview notes helped to augment data collected. Collection and tracking of the interviews, transcripts, artifacts, and other research materials and processes were tracked using Appendix D, a form created by Moyer (1999). As oral history is considered copyrighted material belonging to the interviewee (Moyer, 1999; Shopes, 2007), participants also agreed to donate their stories for the purpose of this study and agreed such in Appendix E. Appendix E is based on oral history consent forms made available by the Ohio University Press (2008) and Neuenschwander (2009). Based on interviewee choice, copies of interviews and transcripts may be returned to the interviewee at the completion of the project.

Interview durations ranged from just over an hour to the better part of the afternoon—almost six hours total. The nature of each interview was very different. When conducting the first interview, conversation often stopped and the participant glanced at the recorder as I scribbled countless notes and follow up questions. Once the recorder was turned off and put away and my notes were in my briefcase, the participant began to speak freely and openly about many experiences that I would have never thought to ask about, such as traveling the world to teach and living in a “White-flight” neighborhood. When transcribing that interview, I noticed that the participant stopped talking when I started writing (I could hear the pen moving on the recording), so in subsequent interviews researcher notes were kept to a minimum and the recorder was positioned so that it was not conspicuous or distracting during the interview. This

positioning may have diminished the sound quality, but seemed to greatly enhance the richness and freedom of the oral history being told.

Due to the differing nature, duration, and richness of the oral histories collected, various additional contact was required from each participant to clarify information that was missing or obscure in the data. Some participants freely and openly answered additional questions while others remained somewhat distant. It should be noted that the eldest brother of the trio interviewed, Walter Bryan, died soon after his story was recorded. This fact points to the importance of collecting oral history as each person takes their story with them.

Data analysis.

Data analysis occurred through an inductive process. Analysis was guided by techniques presented in Patton (2002) and (Luttrell, 2000). The first step in these processes was an open, inductive narrative analysis. Narrative analysis “honors people’s stories as data that can stand on their own as pure description of experience [or] analyzed for connections between....experience” (Patton, 2002, pp. 115-116). This analysis employed both “porthole” and “process” approaches. In the porthole approach, the researcher documented elements that were external to the participants and their stories (Luttrell, 2000; Peacock & Holland, 1993; Tierney, 1998). In this case, the “portholes” were the culture in which the participant was raised, the school they attended, the time period they represented, or any number of outside forces that contributed to their experience in completing a college education and a doctoral degree. In addition to the porthole approach, through the process approach, the researcher documents “structure, coherence, and discourse” in how each participant formed their stories (Luttrell, 2000, p.

4; Peacock & Holland, 1993). Tierney (1998) described the process approach as the interpretation of the narrative like “understanding a proverb or folk saying” (Tierney, 1998, p. 60). Narrative analysis helped to “create meaning” and “reveal[s] cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 478).

Analysis of the oral histories took place in two distinct steps. First, each individual’s account was examined to find themes that ran throughout it. This provided insight into each individual’s unique experiences and helped to develop a holistic view of each participant’s narrative. Next, analysis occurred across all of the participants’ histories clarifying commonalities and differences within their oral histories and helped to understand shared traits of a non-homogenous group.

“Meaning-making also comes from comparing stories and cases and can take the form of inquiring into and interpreting causes, consequences and relationships” (Patton, 2002, p. 478). Luttrell presents this as a layered process, and her concepts were used as guides in developing analytic themes. The first was evaluating transcripts for “recurring images, words, phrases, and metaphors” (Luttrell, 2000, p. 4). In the second step of this process, the researcher examined each story looking for strings of coherence within each story. These strings helped to gain insight into how each participant understood themselves in the context of their story. The third step in this process looked for patterns across the various stories of the participants (Luttrell, 2000). This layered process may help to understand and make meaning of each participant’s experiences, as well as those shared across first-generation Oklahoma college graduates. As patterns emerged across each participant’s oral history, the theoretical framework of *Culture Reproduction and Social Reproduction* (Bourdieu, 1973) and Bourdieu’s forms of capital (1986; Bourdieu

& Passeron, 1977) aided in classifying these patterns as well as helped to find meaning within them.

Trustworthiness.

While rubrics and measures are often employed in qualitative research (Patton, 2002), using oral history as the methodology for this study does not fit well within the parameters often associated with traditional validity criteria in qualitative research such as triangulation and transferability. The art of oral history depends on careful capturing of the stories in the participant's own words. Instead, this study relied on careful data collection, transcription, and analysis including: prolonged engagement, peer reflection, analysis, and debriefing which included transcript reflection and follow-up. Participants were free to add to or alter any aspects of their original stories and approve them for preservation for a wider audience. These steps helped to ensure that stories told were accurately captured. As the stories were analyzed, additional follow up questions were posed to the participants to provide both depth and detail.

As part of this process, interviews were transcribed and compared with recordings multiple times (at least three and many more in one case) to ensure transcription was accurate. When audio recording were vague or inaudible, participants were contacted to clarify certain aspects of their stories. Once transcription was completed, audio recordings were reviewed many times and themes were noted and developed that emerged from the review process. This data were then discussed with peer researchers—academic advisors in this case—and discussed as part of the analytic process. As analysis occurred, several rounds of analysis were shared between the researcher and peers. This analysis helped to create not only accurate data, but also credible findings.

Summary

In summary, this study was designed to collect and analyze the oral histories of first-generation college graduates from the state of Oklahoma. As trends emerged from the data, it narrowed to focus on first-generation college students from Oklahoma who earned doctoral degrees. A qualitative approach was appropriate in that this study intended to find meaning and understanding in each participant's story, as well as illuminate events relevant to the broader group under study (Crotty, 1998; Patton 2002). Constructionism aimed to find meaning rather than absolute truth in understanding (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). The interpretivist approach looked at how the individual understands their experiences framed by their own perceptions and in each participant's individual context (Crotty, 1998; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Oral history provided a way that an individual could present their personal story in its unique context through the perception of the person that experienced it (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Together, these formed the methodology of this study.

Collecting the oral histories of various Oklahoma first-generation college graduates who earned doctoral degrees allowed each participant to present the events in their lives as they lived and remembered them. Oral history gave each an opportunity to create meaning so that their experience could be recorded and analyzed in their own words. Also, it allowed them the opportunity to present their perceptions of the context and culture in which their experiences occurred, the significance that Thelin (2004) contends most people do not fully understand at the time history is occurring. Once collected, data were analyzed as it emerged from each person's narrative and then

compared and contrasted with the histories of others with similar outcomes positioned in a different experience.

CHAPTER IV

ORAL HISTORIES IN BRIEF

Oral history is the collection of a life's story from the perspective of the person telling it. Joseph Gould, also known as Professor Sea Gull, once stated "What people say is history" in his quest to capture "the informal history of the shirt-sleeved multitude" (Ritchie, 1995, p. 3). The following collection of narratives attempts to do the same. Thelin noted (2004), that these stories related to education were often tied to historical events "whose outcomes were neither clear nor certain to the participants when the events were taking place" (p.xiii). Each is the story of a first-generation Oklahoma college student that not only graduated, but also earned the doctorate; however, each is unique. The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of each participant's story as they told it. Each story is individual to the participant and comes from their perspective and recollection. Each story is also separate so that each individual's voice can be isolated from the others who contributed to the data corpus.

Though each participant contributing in this study carries the characteristic of being a first-generation college student, it is important to realize that each had an individual story to tell. Participants were selected across varied times in Oklahoma's

history to represent various generations of students, cultures of institutions, and social-political climates. Their stories are presented in chronological order based on the participants' ages. Participants also came from varied locations across the state.

Collecting and analyzing each story surfaced particular themes related to the student's ages, experiences and backgrounds. For the purposes of framing and understanding, additional contextual information related to participants' demographic information, educational setting, or social-political climate is included in some stories. A title was given to each story reflecting a theme specific to the particular participant's story. This title came either from the participant's own words or contextual information related participant. A direct quote from the participant's data corpus which exemplifies each theme is included to introduce the reader to story of the participant. This emic perspective is intended to bring forth a theme found within the data from that the participant presented as central to their story (Patton, 2002).

Whenever possible and appropriate, a participant's exact words are incorporated within the narration of the participant's story. All participants chose to use their names instead of pseudonyms; however, the names of other individuals named within particular stories were omitted if inclusion might somehow reveal their identities. For example, the names of faculty members that participants considered 'poor' are omitted. For reference and geographic context, a map of Oklahoma showing the location of each participant's high school is included at the end of this chapter.

The Greatest Generation

“Brother Smith came-we were chopping cotton-he came out and walked up the cotton row and figured out how much it would take for me to go to school that first year. What it would take to buy groceries, rent a room, and so forth, and persuaded dad that I could go and gave me a small scholarship. I don’t know what it was. Twenty-five, twenty-five dollars probably.”



Figure 1. George, Raymond, Alvin and Walter Bryan, 1943

Born June 21, 1923, James “Alvin” Bryan is the son of southwest Oklahoma farmers. He is the grandson of homesteaders who came to Tillman County around 1900 and the second of three sons. He is the valedictorian of the 1941 graduating class of Weaver Consolidated High School #13 and is also a member of “The Greatest Generation”: a name coined by journalist Tom Brokaw to describe children of the Great Depression who went on to fight in World War II and supported the war effort from home.

Alvin's parents were farmers near Frederick, Oklahoma. The family farm, which Alvin and his brothers still own, originally belonged to his maternal grandparents. His parents took over the farm in 1916 when Alvin's grandfather passed away, and Alvin still calls it "home." Alvin's father lived in Little Elm, Texas, a few miles east of Denton, before moving to Frederick, Oklahoma. Alvin's father was one of seven children and completed the sixth grade. Alvin's mother grew up on the same farm as Alvin and attended the same two-room school that Alvin attended. She completed the eighth grade.

Growing up, Alvin always did well in school, earning the top grades out of a class of thirteen. He was the first of his family to graduate from college, though he was not the first to attend. His older brother Walter, ten years his senior, attended what is now Abilene Christian University and The University of Central Oklahoma, each for one semester: however, Walter was unable to complete his degree due to the financial pressures of the Great Depression. Alvin very vividly remembers the day he decided to go to college:

Brother Smith came-we were chopping cotton-he came out and walked up the cotton row and figured out how much it would take for me to go to school that first year. What it would take to buy groceries, rent a room, and so forth, and persuaded dad that I could go and gave me a small scholarship. I don't know what it was. Twenty-five, twenty-five dollars probably.

Thanks to Brother Smith's recruiting efforts and generous scholarship offer, Alvin started school at what is now Abilene Christian University in the fall of 1941 as a math and chemistry major; however, like many other young men of his generation, his academic

career would be interrupted by World War II as he was drafted into military service in 1942. From November 1940 until October 1946, over 10,000,000 men were drafted into the military during World War II (Selective Service System).

In 1946 Alvin returned to Abilene to complete his degree using the GI Bill. The GI Bill was part of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 and provided education, housing and relocation benefits to veterans returning to civilian life at the end of World War II. He also changed his major to business administration with a minor in Bible. Alvin did clerical office work in the military and found that business administration fit with his aptitudes better than chemistry because "when I started to work on those weights, that [chemistry] wasn't for me." During his senior year of college, Alvin decided he wanted to teach school after graduation. Continuing to benefit from the GI Bill, Alvin attended graduate school at Peabody, now part of Vanderbilt, because it "was the best school in the south" to earn a master's degree in education.

Alvin joyfully recalled his time at Peabody; however, despite mentioning the reputation of the school, Alvin said little about his curricular experience during the years he attended. Instead, Alvin focused on his interactions with the people there. First, he recalls that "there were a lot of us there" referring to his fellow veterans who were also attending school through the resources the GI Bill provided. Nationally, veteran enrollment in colleges and universities grew from around 80,000 in 1944 to over a million in 1945. Peabody, like many other schools, benefited from growing enrollment supported by the GI Bill. In 1949 over half of Peabody's tuition came from the 833 veteran students enrolled there. In 1951, Alvin's final year at Peabody, veteran enrollment at Peabody peaked at 1,905 students. The makeup of the student body also

changed substantially as the pre-war student body was seventy-five percent female. Following the war, the makeup of the student body was approximately equal between women and men (Conkin, 2002). Second, he proudly pointed out that the faculty member who was in charge of student teaching, Jess Cardwell, was also from Frederick, Oklahoma, and knew Alvin's father. The story of Alvin's experience getting his master's degree focused completely on relationships.

Cardwell became the personnel director for a school district in Dallas at the time of Alvin's graduation and urged him to move to Texas. Alvin opted instead to return to Oklahoma after completing his master's degree. He came to Oklahoma City to teach under Frank Malone, Alvin's former high school principal in Frederick, at Jackson Junior High. Alvin had only one word to describe his experience there: Miserable! He recalled pushing projectors, keeping the school's books, and policing the parking lot--nothing that resembled teaching. Alvin became unhappy working in primary education and chose to switch careers.

After ten years in secondary school, Alvin left to begin teaching at Central State, now The University of Central Oklahoma (UCO). Alvin remembers many other teachers making the same type of career change around the same time. During his time at UCO, Alvin taught a variety of business classes, starting with business machines: typewriting. He proudly remembers how many of his students still comment that it was one of the better classes they had taken. He also taught bookkeeping and accounting. To further his teaching career, Alvin enrolled at Oklahoma State University in 1965 and started working towards a doctoral degree. He earned an Ed.D. in higher education with an emphasis in accounting in 1974. Like his time at Peabody, Alvin's recollection of his doctoral

program focused primarily on relationships, particularly the department chair who told him while working on his dissertation, “You ain’t going to prove nothing with that!”

Upon completing his doctoral degree, Dr. Alvin Bryan returned to UCO to teach accounting. In addition to earning his doctoral degree, Dr. Bryan became a CPA at the age of 50 at the request of his students. Dr. Alvin Bryan remained at UCO teaching until he retired in 1987.

Today Dr. Alvin Bryan lives in Oklahoma City. He is active in his church and still leads singing. He and his younger brother, George, still own the farm they grew up on. Dr. Alvin Bryan and his younger brother George, despite living elsewhere for decades, still call the farm “home.”



Figure 2. Dr. Alvin Bryan, 2014

The Brother

“After ten years of full time preaching, I decided I had tried the brethren sufficiently.”

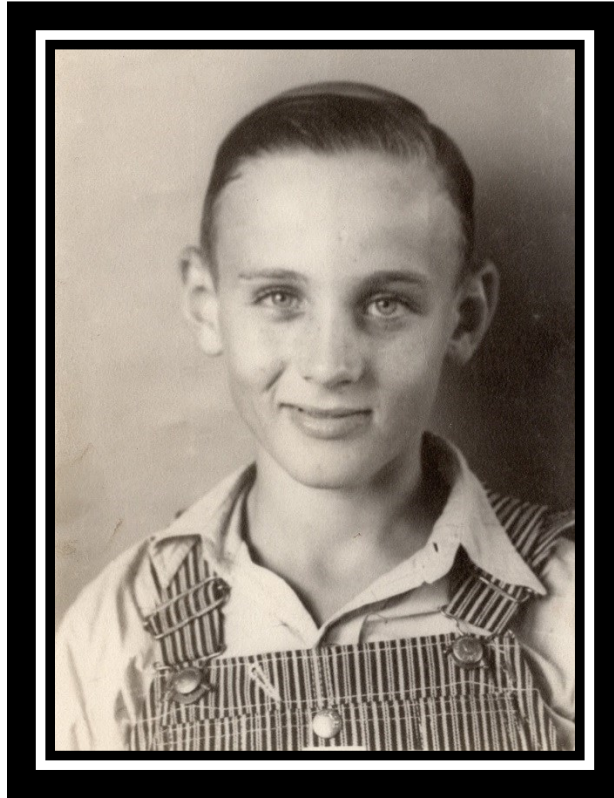


Figure 3. George Bryan, 1942

George Bryan, born January 26, 1929, is the youngest brother of Walter and Alvin. At the time of the interview he was 84 years old. He too grew up on the farm outside of Frederick, Oklahoma and attended Weaver High School, the same consolidated school as his brothers.

Like his brothers before him, George attended what is now Abilene Christian University (ACU); however, his college story differs substantially from his brothers'. Unlike his older brothers, both of whom recall exactly why they went to college, George

claims that he always knew that he would go to college and it was “expected” of him because “it was the thing to do.” Nothing remarkable happened to influence his decision. George also had choices. In addition to being offered a small scholarship to Abilene Christian University like his brother Alvin, George was also offered a scholarship to attend Oklahoma State University. George chose to attend ACU in the fall of 1946 where he roomed with his brother Alvin and also majored in chemistry. At that time, Alvin was simultaneously attending school on the GI Bill. This meant that not only was Alvin’s room paid for, but so was George’s as he was Alvin’s roommate. This created opportunities for George that neither of his brothers had.

Like Alvin, George switched majors. He graduated in 1950 with a degree in Bible and speech. After graduation George began his career as a preacher. His father was a leader in his congregation in Frederick and his older brother Walter was also preaching in Oklahoma. However, after some time in the pulpit, George decided it was time to make a change.

After ten years of full time preaching I decided I had tried the brethren sufficiently and I wanted to be more independent of the brethren. So, I decided I would go back for some courses in education so that I could get a teaching certificate.

George left the pulpit and moved into a junior high classroom in Fort Worth, Texas. As a Bible major with a speech minor, the only courses George was credentialed to teach were speech classes. He enrolled in correspondence classes in education from ACU and

commuted the 30 or so miles to Denton to take additional speech classes at North Texas State University.

While at North Texas, another former preacher urged George to explore the upcoming field of speech pathology. George enrolled in speech pathology classes at North Texas in 1956 and worked as a teaching assistant; however, the speech pathology program at North Texas was not yet accredited. In 1957, George transferred to The University of Oklahoma (OU) to study speech pathology in an accredited program.

George, like many students studying at the OU Health Sciences Center, lived near the School of Medicine because housing was cheap in what he called “White-flight” communities: inter-city neighborhoods home to primarily minority populations as Whites moved to suburban areas. George earned both a master’s and doctoral degrees in speech pathology. Dr. George Bryan started teaching at OU after graduating with his Ph.D. in 1963. In 1966, Dr. George Bryan was named a Fulbright Scholar and moved to India to start the country’s first speech pathology program. He returned to Oklahoma in 1968 “when the rupees ran out” and taught at OU for thirty years.

Though not a direct beneficiary of the GI Bill, Dr. George Bryan admits the support offered indirectly through his brother helped him graduate. Dr. George Bryan’s higher education career also demonstrates an increased emphasis placed on higher education by the federal government as a means of societal advancement. The Report of the President’s Commission on Higher Education of 1947 called for increased federal support for higher education with a goal of 25% of Americans holding a bachelor degree by 1970. This report also predicted a shortfall in faculty as student populations grew and

called for expanded support for graduate programs (Education, Report of the President's Commission on Higher, 1947). As previously stated, Dr. George Bryan was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship. The Fulbright programs are named for Senator James Fulbright, the architect of the program founded in 1946 to provide international education exchange programs (Fulbright Association).

Dr. George Bryan, now retired, lives in Oklahoma City. He is proud that all four of his children have degrees. He still preaches weekly and is heard around the world via radio broadcast. He travels frequently to do short-term foreign missions. Dr. George Bryan often spends his weekends back “home” on the farm near Frederick.

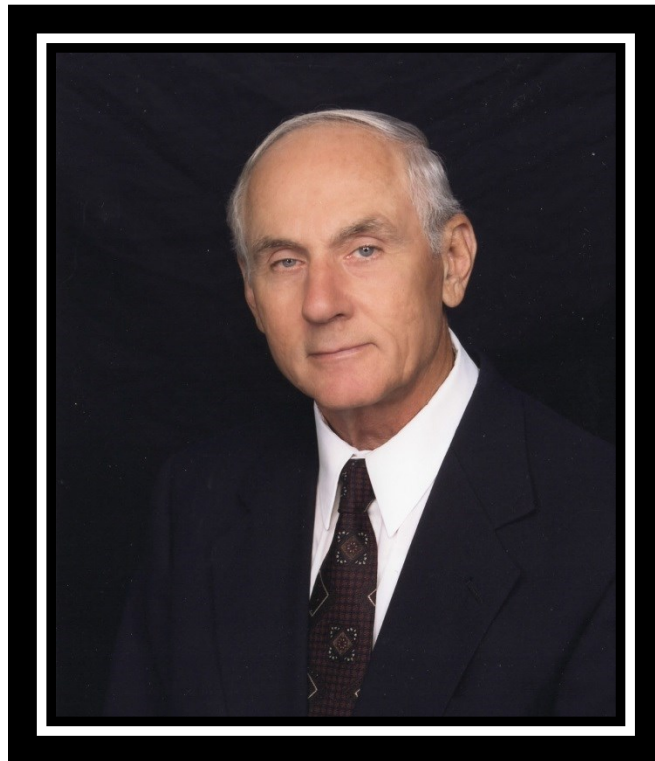


Figure 4. Dr. George Bryan, 2000

The Workaholic

“When I turned nine, that spring, he [my dad] said you’re a man now Fred. You need your own tractor. So we went to Sweetwater, Oklahoma and he bought me a tractor just like his.... I was one of those kids that wasn’t going to college.”



Figure 5. Dr. Fred Shultz, 2002

Fred Shultz enjoys work. Born October 9, 1940, in Boise City, Oklahoma, Fred Shultz grew up on a tractor. His childhood memories begin with riding on a tractor with his dad from the age of two and sleeping in the pickup at the end of the field when he got tired. Fred also helped his dad scoop grain from the back of his dad’s truck as soon as he was old enough to hold a shovel. He recalls fondly the day he finally had a tractor of his own:

When I turned nine, that spring, he [Fred's father] said you're a man now Fred.

You need your own tractor. So we went to Sweetwater, Oklahoma and he bought me a tractor just like his.

From that time on, Fred presents his story as a boy who made his own way in the world. From the age of twelve, Fred tried to lease land to farm and to run his own cattle. At the age of fourteen, Joe Dawson Sell, a man that once paid two-year-old Fred fifty cents a day to scoop grain from his father's trucks, agreed to lease Fred some land. At the age of fifteen, Fred leased an irrigated farm east of Boise City that he farmed until well after finishing college. Thus, Fred Shultz grew up on a tractor.

Fred's home life growing up lacked structure. His parents divorced when he was about thirteen and Fred lived with his father. Both parents attended school only through the eighth grade and his older sister dropped out of high school to get married. Though Fred describes his father as a good man, he and his father were both busy on the farm. Summer days were spent on the tractor and during the school year Fred worked on the farm after school and well into the evening. He was involved with his church. He was involved with 4-H. He would often "run with older kids until midnight." Despite his hectic life and missing forty-eight days of school his senior year, Fred said he did well in high school. Following graduation, Fred went to work for the soil conservation district and kept farming while he waited for the love of his life, Barbara, to graduate from high school.

While at the soil conservation district, Fred worked for a non-degreed engineer named Kenneth Saunders. Saunders told Fred he needed to go to college because "the

way things are going you're going to have to have a degree to be successful." While Fred knew many successful people, none of them had college degrees. Fred's father also urged him to stay in Boise City. Fred recalls his dad saying, "Fred, I don't want you to go to college. You stay here and run cattle and farm and you'll make more money than you ever thought about in college." Fred's soon to be mother-in-law, told him "You can't go to college... You don't have money." To which he replied "Hide and watch." With Saunders' suggestion, his father and mother-in-law's discouragement, and the fact that "sitting on that tractor from 7:00 [am] to 7:00 [pm] six days a week pretty well cured me of wanting to farm," Fred and his new bride Barbara enrolled at Panhandle State University in 1959. Panhandle State is located in Goodwell, Oklahoma, and not far from Boise City.

Saunders' prediction of the necessity of having a degree proved valuable, timely, and accurate. As previously stated, shifts in educational policies called for continued growth in higher education. In the decade between the Bryan brothers' graduations and Fred's enrollment, college enrollment grew by over 60% nationally. This tremendous new enrollment growth was attributed not only to military veteran enrollment, but also an increased focus on expanded educational access (Trow, 1997).

Fred wanted to major in veterinary science or vocational agriculture. After three years at Panhandle State, Fred and Barbara transferred to Oklahoma State University (OSU) because Panhandle State did not yet offer a degree in vocational agriculture. In 1963 Fred received his bachelor's degree in vocational agriculture and Barbara earned hers in consumer science. During his years in school, Fred continued to work full time--farming, working livestock, and in construction. Fred is very proud of the fact that he

and Barbara both graduated in four years without any assistance, financial or other, from either set of their parents.

After graduation, Fred and Barbara moved to Laverne, Oklahoma, where Fred taught vocational agriculture for six years. He bought 320 acres of land and opened a little feed lot. He would drive back to Boise City and farm on weekends. He drove 150 miles to Alva, Oklahoma, to take night classes towards his master's degree from Northwestern State University. He also took classes at OSU in the summers. The long hours, a case of the flu and an allergic reaction to Compazine took its toll on Fred, landing him in the hospital for thirty days at the age of twenty-seven. After explaining to the doctor his schedule and lifestyle, the doctor told Fred "You just keep doing what you're doing and I'd say your life expectancy is probably....thirty. You've got to slow down." With that, Fred let go of the irrigated farm he had leased for so many years in Boise City.

The superintendent for Laverne Oklahoma schools, Harry Schackelford, told Fred about a new program starting in Oklahoma: vocational-technology schools. Though Shackelford did not know much about the schools, he suggested Fred look into getting a doctoral degree and going to work with them. Later, while on a trip to Texas with high school agriculture students, Dr. Robert Price, head of the agriculture department at Oklahoma State University, asked Fred to start work on his doctoral degree and offered him an assistant position at OSU. So, in 1969 Fred and Barbara returned to Stillwater where he earned an Ed.D. in Educational Administration with a minor in agriculture education in 1971. After completing his doctoral degree, Fred went to work for Dr. Francis Tuttle in administration for the new "vo-tech system" in Oklahoma. Eventually

he became the superintendent of the Meridian Technology Center in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Dr. Shultz and his wife Barbara have been married for 54 years and still live in Stillwater. Though retired, he still raises show cattle and deals in real estate. He has three grown daughters, all of whom have earned graduate degrees. One has a master's and the other two hold doctoral degrees. In describing his view of the value of education, Dr. Shultz stated:

I don't think the degree makes you successful. I think it gives you a tool to help you be successful.... I viewed a doctor's degree for me as a tractor for a farmer. A farmer needs the best tractor he can have. An educator needs the best degree they can get.

Dr. Shultz says people would describe him as a workaholic, but he just loves work.

The Kid

“Every summer, since I’m the youngest...son of a farmer, as soon as school was out, I would go home and do the farming”.



Figure 6. Ken Johnson with older siblings, 1960

Born in 1953, Ken Johnson grew up on a farm outside of Frederick, Oklahoma. His father had a high school diploma, but his mother left school in the eighth grade to take care of her siblings when her mother died. He is the youngest of three children, but the first to earn a bachelor degree. His older sister earned an associate degree from Oklahoma Christian University in secretarial science. His older brother attended college briefly, but left to join the Air Force before being drafted and sent to Vietnam.

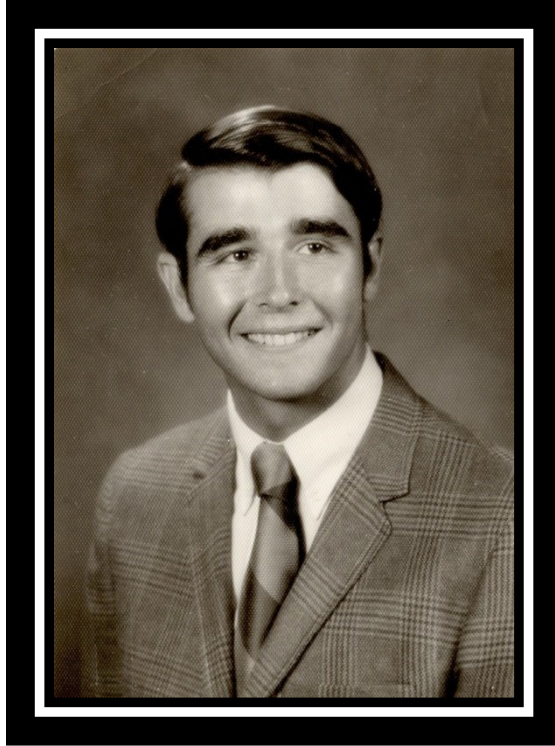


Figure 7. Ken Johnson, 17 year old high school senior

Ken excelled in school. In fact, he performed so well that he skipped the sixth grade and moved straight from the fifth to the seventh because he was not sufficiently challenged. He was voted most intelligent in his high school class and excelled in math. In fact, he credits much of his academic success to those early years in school.

In the 3rd grade I had a teacher named Irene Barker and she was a brilliant English teacher. She was a brilliant teacher, but she taught us English and how to write and how to really utilize the language. And the things that I learned from her and built upon that foundational bit helped me tremendously throughout my college years.

In high school, Ken remembered attending “college nights” where students were recruited to attend area universities. Ken considered Southwestern Oklahoma State University and Oklahoma Christian University before finally choosing Oklahoma State University. He went to OSU on a president’s ambassador’s scholarship because of his academic achievements and leadership roles in high school.

Ken is the first participant in this study that entered college after the passage of The Higher Education Act of 1965. The act expanded and changed federal funding for higher education. Under the programs it created, federal funds were appropriated for libraries and research. Also, funding was provided to *students*, in the forms of scholarships, work-study and loans to pay tuition and other expenses (The Higher Education Act of 1965). About the same time, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided unprecedented access to minority students at institutions of higher education. The funds provided by the Higher Education Act of 1965 coupled with access provided by The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and two decades of federal focus on higher education, caused college enrollments to more than double from 1960 until 1970 (Trow, 1997). Ken is also the oldest participant to enroll in college after the creation of TRIO Programs, a triad of federal programs created between 1964 and 1968 that aimed to provide access and support to students in higher education. One population specifically identified as needing and receiving assistance were first-generation college students.

Ken enrolled in OSU in the fall of 1970 at the age of seventeen. Being young and coming from a small high school, Ken found his first year at OSU “intimidating.” Because of his high test scores, Ken was enrolled in advanced math and chemistry: eighteen hours of heavy duty courses including calculus and analytic geometry. Outside

the classroom, academic life was intimidating as well. “I went to the library to do a report ... I would just read the book there. I never grasped how to check out a book.” Ken calls his freshman year his “growing up year.” His grades suffered and he lost his scholarship. He had to make changes.

Ken’s second undergraduate year was a time of change. He became involved heavily in church. He switched majors to business and moved out of the dorm with a roommate, who remains a close friend many years later. He was forced to work during the school year delivering the *Daily O’Collegian*, the campus newspaper at Oklahoma State University, and farmed during the summers. Ken made sure he performed well enough in school to avoid being drafted and sent to Vietnam; however, procrastination and lack of long term goals limited his academic performance. Spending summers on the farm also prevented Ken from gaining experience in accounting like many of his peers. After graduating with a degree in accounting in 1975, Ken went to work for his alma mater and abandoned his hopes of working in public accounting.

With less than stellar academic credentials, Ken looked again to education as a way to advance his career. Ken eventually entered industry. He also earned his CPA in 1983, at the urging of his employer. Later, while working at a medical practice, Ken began work on an MBA at the University of Central of Oklahoma in 1994. Taking a very light course load, Ken completed his MBA in 1998. Earning a master’s degree allowed Ken to make a career change and become the CFO of a state agency which is now part of the OU Health Sciences center. While working at OU, Ken was asked to teach accounting as an adjunct instructor at Oklahoma Christian University (OC). This would serve as Ken’s introduction to the institutional side of higher education.

In 2002, the dean of the college of professional studies at OC encouraged Ken to leave OU and administer OC's MBA program. In discussions with the dean, Ken expressed that he did not feel qualified to work in such a leadership role in academia. At the dean's urging, Ken switched careers anyway. He also started work toward a Doctor of Business Administration degree.

Switching careers, family responsibilities, church responsibilities, and a number of other "distractions" hindered Ken's progress toward his doctoral degree. His mother's failing health coupled with the demands of writing a dissertation led to what he described as "the most difficult time of [his] life." At this point Ken became so discouraged that he considered quitting his doctoral program. In fact, he began to pen his response to those who asked him why he had not completed his program. Eventually Dr. Johnson regained his motivation and completed his DBA in 2010. He credits his turn around with a change of focus: he began writing for himself instead of for his employer. Dr. Johnson's motivation to persevere and complete his doctoral degree appeared to be intrinsically motivated, and fueled by a sense of accomplishment, closure, and pride.

Today Dr. Johnson lives in Edmond, Oklahoma, and still administers the MBA program at Oklahoma Christian University. He is married to Myrna, his girlfriend that he met while attending church in Stillwater. He regrets not finishing his doctoral degree while his parents were still living. Together they have two grown daughters and he hopes to instill the value of education in his grandchildren saying "I hope I'm not the last doctorate in the family."

In the decade following Dr. Johnson's undergraduate studies, continued changes and expansion of higher education solidified the predictions of President Truman's commission in 1947. The Higher Education Act of 1965 and its subsequent reauthorizations and expansions provided additional access and funding for higher education. By 1985, almost half of tuition was paid by federal grants, scholarships and loans. At the same time, federal research funds rose to over \$6,000,000,000. This injection of funds and expanded access created a fifty percent growth in student population from 1970 until 1985 despite declining numbers of traditional 18 to 24 year old domestic college students. This decline was due primarily to decreased birth rates in the generations following the baby boom. International student populations increased, minority student populations increased, "non-traditional" student populations increased and older students began to return to school. By 1980 over half of U.S. high school graduates intended to enroll in higher education and over 90 percent of high school students graduated. This growth in population and ever increasing student diversity changed the academy for the students who followed. The financial model used to pay for higher education greatly differed from previous participants (Ottinger, 1987).

The Nurturer

“In Oklahoma....we do a phenomenal job of welcoming students of different backgrounds and...I felt as a college student [I] was not accepted and looked upon as a[n] anomaly as an African American attending school.”



Figure 8. Eschelle Gilkey, 1988

Eschelle Gilkey grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She was born in 1968 and raised primarily by her mother who did not graduate high school until the age of twenty and after giving birth to Eschelle. Her father was in the military. He did attend college briefly before enlisting, but did not earn a degree at that time. Eschelle’s father eventually did graduate from college; however, it was well after Eschelle completed her bachelor degree and after he retired from the military. Eschelle graduated from Tulsa McClain High School in 1986. Though raised primarily by her mother, both of

Eschelle's parents "ingrained" in her that she would go to college. "It was understood. You go to college. You go to high school and then you go to college."

Eschelle enrolled in The University of Oklahoma (OU) in 1986 and majored in broadcast journalism. Her account of her undergraduate experience centered on chaos.

It presented a challenge for me, going to college, because I didn't know [what] to expect. ...I learned as I went along...expectations...finding classes...buying books...using a meal card...student loans. ...Nobody could tell me. ...Nobody knew.

This lack of "knowing" presented challenges for her navigating a large higher education institution. The lack of campus experience by Eschelle's parents is central to her educational experience. To navigate the experience, Eschelle was able to draw on the experience of an older friend who entered OU a year before she did and came from a similar background. Eschelle credits this friend with helping her throughout college.

Entering college, Eschelle had the benefit of a financial aid package. She was awarded a Pell Grant and work study, and she relied on student loans. This was the only time a participant in this study referred to a benefit provided by The Higher Education Act of 1965. Eschelle attributes receiving aid to the fact that her mother was independent and there was an institutional push for increased diversity in the 1980s. However, this push for diversity fueled the chaos in her experience. She stated:

I think we do a phenomenal job of welcoming students of different backgrounds...[and] I felt as college student as not being accepted and looked upon as a[n] anomaly as an African American attending school. ...There's still a

presumption or judgment against students, especially African American students.

It's assumed they're on a scholarship for basketball, football, etcetera.

Thus, Eschelle claimed that while minority students were being admitted to colleges, they were not necessarily accepted into the campus culture. She stated that this experience motivated her to graduate because she was not an "anomaly" or a "statistic." Eschelle graduated from OU in December of 1990, a semester "late" because she added a minor in sociology. While Eschelle stated that she went to college to "get a job," her story also contained evidence of an intrinsic desire to succeed fueled by pride.

After graduation Eschelle entered the workforce and thought "the world was just going to be at [her] feet." However, she "realized [she] needed more education." A self-described nurturer, Eschelle wanted to go into social work and counseling. She went to work at the Lloyd Raider Institution counseling juvenile male criminals. She enrolled in a master's program at OU in Tulsa majoring in human relations. She spoke fondly of her experience there: "I loved graduate school. It was absolutely awesome." She felt blessed to work under Dr. Henderson, a renowned scholar of African American student experiences. She also expressed gratitude to her other faculty, many whom were members of minority groups. In her master's program, she felt much more accepted than in her undergraduate program. Upon completing her master's degree, Eschelle went to work as a school counselor so that she could be more proactive in influencing youth.

While working as a school counselor, Eschelle did some adjunct teaching for Tulsa Community College where she felt drawn to higher education and began to explore a career in student services. She wanted to help with the enrollment and orientation

processes. She wanted to be more proactive for students like herself who struggled to make their way in college. So, she enrolled in a doctoral program at Oklahoma State University in Tulsa. In this program, in a Primarily White Institution (PWI), she felt isolated from faculty similar to her undergraduate studies. One faculty member suggested she read her classmate's papers, who were White, so that she could write like them. Dr. Gilkey did eventually complete her doctoral degree in education administration in 2012.

Today Dr. Gilkey still works for Tulsa Public Schools assisting students with online classes. She has a daughter who is a freshman at Oklahoma State University and is a cancer survivor. The older friend who mentored Dr. Gilkey during her undergraduate years also holds a doctoral degree.



Figure 9. Dr. Eschelle Gilkey, 2013

The Mother

“She really served as motivation for me...I was very focused where I wanted to go and I think a lot of that is because I had a child.”

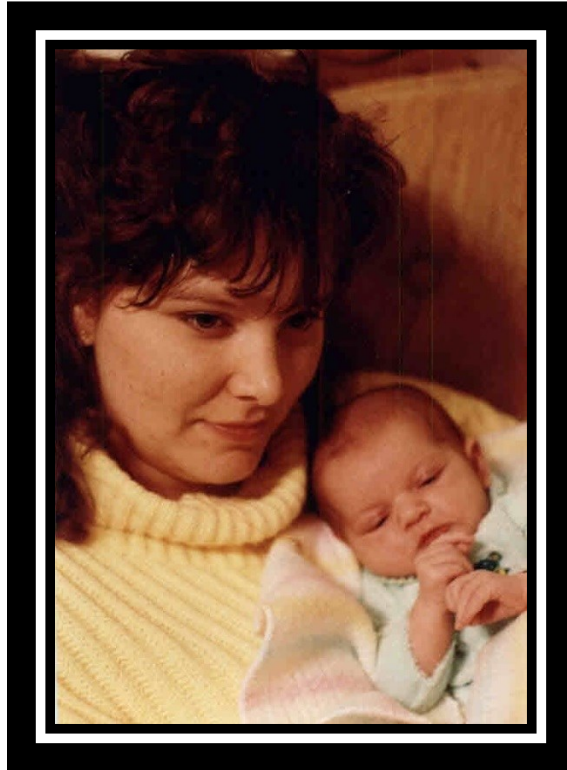


Figure 10. Janet Wansick and Daughter, 1989

Born in 1969, Janet Wansick grew up around Oklahoma. She graduated from Byng High School but attended ten different schools from kindergarten through her senior year. Her mother earned a GED when Janet was twelve. She dropped out of high school to marry Janet’s father. He was in the United States Marine Corps and then held various jobs after leaving the military. He did take one computer class at the college level.

Janet grew up expecting to go to college. She saw it as a way to move up and avoid the struggles her parents faced. She also has three brothers. One possesses a master's degree, another holds a bachelor's degree, and the third completed vocational education and works as an airline mechanic. Though their parent's had limited education, all four children completed some form of higher education.

Immediately after high school, Janet got married. She admits it "was probably not the best decision I ever made." Soon she found herself a single mother trying to make a life for herself and her daughter. She enrolled at East Central University in Ada and majored in math. She chose East Central because it was close to Byng. During her time at East Central, she worked full time, tutored, and graduated with her bachelor's degree in math education in three years. She credits her daughter as her motivation.

She really served as motivation for me...I was very focused where I wanted to go and I think a lot of that is because I had a child.

After graduation Janet went on to teach high school math.

Despite her motivation and quick progression through school, Janet felt pressure to balance work, life, and school. "My parents didn't know really how to balance work and school and you know all of that kind of stuff because they had never done it." She did not understand scholarships or financial aid. She did not understand the registration process. However, she found support in her faculty, and one member in particular.

I had an education professor that had been there for a long time and he was very pro-education. Go as far as you can kind of person and kind of a cheerleader all the way through for me. He was like, you need to make sure you do this and you

can better your life if you have the ability to do it. So, he was kind of a cheerleader type for me all the way through.

Thus, Janet found support from faculty members to help her through experiences her parents did not share.

When Janet's daughter entered pre-school, Janet began to explore ways to advance her career. She enrolled in a master's program with the goal of eventually becoming a principal. She also saw this choice as a way to show her daughter how to move forward in life. After obtaining her master's degree, Janet left the junior high math classroom for a community college. This sense of accomplishment motivated her to seek more education and continue the progress of her career. She enrolled at Oklahoma State University with the goal of completing a doctoral degree in Educational Administration by the age of forty; she completed her Ed.D in 2007.

Dr. Wansick viewed education as the means by which she could advance her career.

For me, I think the expectation was go to school, get a career, and if it takes a year or two or whatever. There was no expectation of how far to go. You just go to school because you want a career.So it could have been a tech school.... or a community college.

Today she expects her daughter to get multiple degrees.

Currently Dr. Wansick lives with her husband Gary in McAlester, Oklahoma. She is an administrator at Eastern Oklahoma State College. Her daughter recently graduated from The University of Oklahoma and is pursuing a master's degree.



Figure 11. Dr. Janet Wansick, 2007

Summary

These stories introduce the six participants in this study which captured and explored oral histories of first-generation Oklahoma college students. All six not only graduated from college but also went on to earn doctoral degrees. Though each shared similar characteristics when entering college and when completing their terminal degree, each story is unique to the participant. Different time periods, institutions, policy climates, and an infinite number of other factors make each participants' experiences individual and special. Oral history acknowledges the inherent value of capturing and sharing individual stories told in the participants' own words. Participants pointed to varied factors that made a difference in their persistence, ranging from faculty support, family expectations, government programs, and a sense of pride and accomplishment. To further examine the meaning held within the total body of data, additional analysis across and between the stories follows.



Figure 12

Map of Oklahoma from www.geology.com

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of first-generation Oklahoma college students' oral histories. Though each history is personal, as presented in chapter four, when combined, themes emerge that both converge and diverge across stories. These themes help to understand the participants' experiences as first-generation students from different decades and locations in Oklahoma.

As stated in chapter two, the constructionist epistemology "claims....that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage in the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). The interpretivist theoretical perspective "looks for historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). This interpretivist approach proceeds from the assumption that researchers can use particular research methods to seek understanding of a given phenomenon, in this case, oral histories of first-generation college students, rather than a belief that absolute truth can be obtained from the data. Meanings are thus always partial and contextual. As the previous chapter

presented descriptions of each participant's experience through their oral histories, this chapter presents an analysis of the connection between their narratives.

The oral histories of these participants are a collection of diverse, individual, education stories. This storytelling allowed each participant to present their culturally and historically-situated interpretations of their experiences in their own words (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This data were then analyzed through thematic analysis which “honors people’s stories as data that can stand on their own as pure description of experience [or be] analyzed for connections between...experience” (Patton, 2002, pp. 115-116). These stories were analyzed through both “porthole” and “process” approaches (Luttrell, 2000; Peacock & Holland, 1993; Tierney, 1998). The “porthole” approach examines the narrative in the context and culture in which it is set and is external to the participant. For example, this analytic approach holds that stories are not solely reflections of individual experiences, but they also reflect the environment in which they are situated. By including the time period, locality, and social-political environment in which these stories took place, layers of meaning are exposed that are specific to these participants and Oklahoma. Conversely, the “process” approach focused on structure, identities and self-understanding used to tell stories (Peacock & Holland, 1993; Tierney, 1998). An example of this “process” approach is demonstrated in examining the way each participant narrated themselves within their stories.

This chapter presents both “portholes” into the participants’ stories by framing experiences within contexts related to Oklahoma found within each story, and often tied to the years in which it occurred. These “processes” emerged as participants framed their

roles within their families, communities, and time periods, and are important factors in understanding the creation and transmission of capital as well as motivation.

Findings

The following is a presentation of the themes that emerged from the data through inductive analysis of life stories. These themes reflect both convergent and divergent patterns within the stories of these first-generation college graduates. The themes that emerged from inductive analysis of the stories focus on the “meaning“ and “reality” they hold for participants rather than strictly the facts presented. Education holds significance for the participants and is central to their stories; however, in order to understand education as a theme within the study, it is important to understand how each participant’s experiences are woven into Oklahoma’s educational history. Analysis in part focused explicitly on how participants understood factors that allowed them to matriculate and graduate when statistically many first-generation college students do not. To further analyze the data *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* (Bourdieu, 1973), serve as a guiding framework for interpreting meaning from the participants’ stories and their connection to a broader body of scholarship, especially related to why these first-generation Oklahoma students attended and graduated from college.

Following is an analysis of the data across all participants. It is organized into four distinct sections: Oklahoma: the setting of the study, and Reproduction: growth of capital across generations in the forms of economic, social, and cultural capital.

Oklahoma: The Setting of the Study

Participants were selected because they were first-generation college students who matriculated through college and graduated high school in differing decades in Oklahoma's history. Though tangent to the study, each had at least one parent who did not graduate from high school. Similarly, many of the participants' parents did not *attend* high school, thus, they exceeded their parents' educational attainment when they *started* high school. This exemplifies the importance of understanding aspects of Oklahoma history in the development of its education system, and how that framed each individual's educational opportunities, experiences, and aspirations.

Family Farms to Oil Wells

Changes in agriculture and industry in Oklahoma from 1930 through 1960, the decades represented by the "farm kids" participating in this study, the Bryan brothers, Dr. Shultz, and Dr. Johnson, are important to and reflected in their stories. During early settlement and through 1931, Oklahoma's economy relied heavily on agriculture. Oklahoma was one of the top ten producers of corn, cotton, wheat, sorghum, and peanuts. Large grasslands, once home to herds of native buffalo, were cultivated for crops and used to run cattle. This agrarian economy was supported by a large number of family farms, many which were homesteaded by families like the Bryans. However, the drilling of the "Stout" well in 1931 was symbolic of a dynamic shift in Oklahoma's economy away from agriculture to oil and gas production (Montgomery, 1935). In 1940, 62.4% of Oklahomans lived in rural areas and 37.6% were urban. By 1960, these numbers reversed with 62.9% of Oklahomans living in urban areas (Harlow, 1961). Since 1935, the year Walter Bryan would have graduated college, until 2007, the number of farms in

Oklahoma had decreased drastically. In 1935, Oklahoma had over 213,000 farms. In 2007 that number was less than 87,000. Of those 87,000 farms, roughly 58% were operated by people that had a primary source of income other than farming (USDA, 1954, 2007). The “*family farm*” is a theme, especially significant to the four oldest participants, that runs throughout the data corpus. Exploring the changing nature of agriculture and economy in Oklahoma is paramount to the meaning education holds in the story of many first-generation Oklahoma college students.

Going to Town

As Dr. Ken Johnson and Walter Bryan stated, their mothers attended school only through the eighth grade because it was “normal” at the time; the time period to which they referred was 1929 through 1937 for Dr. Johnson’s mother and around the first decade of the twentieth century for the Bryan brothers’ mother. This normal pattern of attending school for farm students can be attributed to the fact that in order to go to high school, you had to “go to town” as Dr. Johnson stated, and children, as was the case for Dr. Johnson’s mother, were needed to help manage the family farm. This is an example of how attending school presented an opportunity cost for families that needed children for labor on the family farm. While the Organic Act (1890) provided federal funds to create and expand public schools in Oklahoma, it did not provide funding for their ongoing operations. As a consequence, though each township in Oklahoma set aside land for a school building, ongoing funding was the responsibility of the individual district. A township in Oklahoma is a measure of land, six sections square. Each township was then divided into four rural school districts. By establishing this matrix of public, rural schools, Oklahoma had over 3,000 school districts when it became a state in 1907. Rural

districts did not have the population base to support the schools and homestead lands were often exempted from taxes to support schools. In contrast, towns with populations in excess of 2,500 people could establish independent districts and raise taxes to support schools. As a result, rural schools did not have the same resources to pay teachers or maintain facilities as urban schools. Thus, often to attend high school, one literally had to “go to town,” often on horseback or foot (Harlow, 1961).

The Bryan brothers’ parents recognized the inadequacy of school availability for rural students in Tillman county and took action. In the late 1920’s, the Bryan family bought a chassis for a grain truck and converted it into a school bus. Walter, the oldest of the Bryan brothers, then used the converted grain truck to drive his peers to school. Four other families also operated buses. By the time Walter graduated from Valley Home High School in 1931, the graduating class grew from seven to eighteen students. It also had a separate gymnasium and auditorium. As students became more mobile, small rural schools merged into what became larger consolidated school districts. The different schools the Bryan brothers attended shows the effects of technology, a school bus in this case, had on education. Valley Home, the school Walter attended, was part of the original Oklahoma school matrix and served a population within two miles. In contrast, Weaver School, the consolidated school his younger brothers attended, served students from seventy six square miles (Wynn, 2012).

From the time Walter graduated from high school in 1931 until Dr. Shultz did in 1958, funding for schools in Oklahoma changed dramatically. In 1955, the Oklahoma Constitution was amended to provide state funding for public schools, elementary through high school. By doing so, state funding of school increased from \$100,000 in

1920--the year after Walter Bryan started school—to almost \$145,000,000 in 1960—the year after Dr. Johnson started school. This new technology, school buses, changed the structure of Oklahoma schools and predicated a dynamic shift in funding and participation. In 1920, less than 30% of the U.S. population attended high school, and less than 20% graduated. Today over 75% of Oklahomans graduate from high school and almost all attend high school (data.ok.gov). Though public primary and secondary education existed in Oklahoma history, the scope and nature have changed greatly, and these changes permeate participants' stories.

Close to Home

In addition to changes in primary and secondary education, Oklahoma's development of higher education systems is evident in, and important to, the participants' stories. As Oklahoma prepared to enter statehood, a system of higher education began to develop. The first four universities established in Oklahoma Territory, now Oklahoma State University, The University of Central Oklahoma, The University of Oklahoma, and Langston University all opened between 1894 and 1897. As the population in Oklahoma Territory grew, additional colleges and universities were founded. As a provision of statehood, a similar higher education system was created to serve the population living in Indian Territory. Many of the larger independent school districts in urban areas established community colleges, and several religious denominations opened colleges across the state (Harlow, 1961). Today Oklahoma is home to 54 colleges and universities. This vast network of colleges and universities offers increased opportunities for students to study close to their childhood homes, family farms, and parents. The

proximity of universities to home is an important theme in Dr. Shultz and Dr. Wansick's stories.

Located in Guymon, Oklahoma, Panhandle State University was only about sixty miles from Dr. Shultz's childhood home in Boise City. Early on Dr. Shultz's story centers on his life as a farm kid on a tractor. Even prior to graduating from high school his time was filled with running cattle and maintaining an irrigated farm in Boise City, Oklahoma, located on the far western side of the Oklahoma Panhandle. After graduating from high school and sitting out a year waiting for his fiancé to graduate, Dr. Shultz and his new bride enrolled at Panhandle State University. This close proximity allowed him and his wife to begin their college educations while still maintaining his farming and cattle operation. The proximity of Dr. Shultz's farm to an available college is crucial in understanding his story because farming provided economic capital, discussed later in this chapter. Eventually Dr. Shultz and his wife switched universities and completed their degrees at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma, well over three hundred miles from Boise City.

Like Dr. Shultz, Dr. Wansick also chose to attend college close to home. Dr. Wansick recalled moving often as a child and attending ten different schools from kindergarten until she graduated from high school in Byng, Oklahoma. Byng is in the center of Oklahoma. Her family moved often as her parents looked for job opportunities. Though she had lived in many areas and towns in Oklahoma, Dr. Wansick chose to attend college at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma, less than ten miles from her high school in Byng. This close proximity allowed her to keep the job she held during high school throughout her college career, and offered close family support from her

brothers and parents. Dr. Wansick relied on both the income her job offered and her family's support because she had a child. Though married immediately after high school graduation, Dr. Wansick soon became a single mother. Her story centers on providing stable home for her daughter, and education was the means to provide that stability. By attending college close to home, Dr. Wansick had the financial means and family network needed to complete her degree. Ironically, the proximity of East Central University to Byng, Oklahoma is steeped in Oklahoma's political history. As "institutions" expanded throughout Oklahoma, many towns sought the economic well-being that accompanied them. As a political compromise, Ada was awarded a college, now East Central University, while McAlester received a prison (Harlow, 1961; Montgomery, Mosier, & Bethel, 1935).

The Brethren

Though Oklahoma had a wide and diverse system of higher education throughout its history that would have allowed the Bryan Brothers to attend college close to home, all three Bryan brothers started their college careers in Texas at Abilene Christian University (ACU). Western Oklahoma State College in Altus, Oklahoma was only about forty miles from the family farm and Cameron University in Lawton was about fifty miles away, all three brothers still chose to begin college in Texas at Abilene Christian University. Walter only attended ACU for a semester, but Drs. Alvin and George Bryan both completed their entire undergraduate degrees there. They chose this school because of family input, an uncle in Walter's case, the previously mentioned invitation from Brother Smith, and because they wanted a "Christian education." Though several Christian faith-based private colleges existed in Oklahoma, none were affiliated with the

Churches of Christ. All three Bryan brothers attended college in Texas for at least part of their undergraduate studies because Oklahoma lacked a college that aligned with their religious doctrine. Though Drs. Alvin and George Bryan earned bachelor and master's degrees outside of Oklahoma, both earned their doctoral degrees in Oklahoma. Dr. Alvin Bryan attended Oklahoma State University because it was close to his employer and home in Oklahoma City. Dr. George Bryan moved back to Oklahoma because he did not find an accredited degree program in speech pathology from any institution in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

From First-Generation Students to Educators

All participants were shaped by their experiences in Oklahoma's education system: primary, secondary, and university. Conversely, as educators, all participants helped to shape education in Oklahoma. In addition to being first-generation college students that now hold doctoral degrees, all participants worked in education at some level. Most taught in secondary schools at some point in their careers, and all teach or taught at the college level. By doing so, they have shaped the history of Oklahoma's educational system not only as students, but also as educators. All participants' children either hold, or are in the process of earning, college degrees. All stated that they expected their children to attend college, and many expected their children to earn graduate degrees. In doing so, all participants have helped to create expectations in future generations of Oklahoma college students and helped provide the social and cultural capital needed for success.

Bourdieu's Reproduction Theory as an Analytic Lens

As presented in chapter two, many studies of first-generation college students use *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* (Bourdieu, 1973) as a lens to analyze data. Additionally, Bourdieu's (1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) classifications of capital help to define, categorize, and analyze the resources needed by students to degrees and some of the shared elements across these first-generation college students' oral histories. These forms of capital help to frame the understanding of why these first-generation college students graduated. By examining the data through the lens presented by Bourdieu (1973, 1986), the means by which participants were able to overcome situational constraints emerged from the narratives.

Cultural Capital

First utilized by Bourdieu in 1973, *cultural capital* is a concept that refers to how and why values and beliefs about social status and mobility are passed from one generation to the next within families. As presented in chapter two, it is widely used and deeply developed in terms of educational attainment and class reproduction in society. Applied to these oral histories, cultural capital a concept useful to explain in part reasons students from uneducated families do not attend or persist in universities, or the capital reproduced across generations. According to Bourdieu (1973), cultural capital is the accumulation of beliefs, skills, objects, resources and values that are potentially transmitted from parents to children and contribute to the reproduction of class structures and privileges, including education as a key form of cultural capital. Scholars argue that because the parents of first-generation students lack knowledge of how to navigate higher

education systems, they are not able to cultivate cultural capital in their children in the forms recognized in middle-class schooling culture.

First-generation students lack much of the capital that their non-first-generation counterparts enjoy because their parents do not possess the information and emotional bearings that the students need to effectively tackle the challenges of the college environment (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

Bourdieu (1986) explains that there is often a disconnect as education policy is often evaluated by a cost-benefit analysis that ignores values and propagates ideas about education that may have been cultivated in families for several generations. Though most stories portray parents as supportive in their children's education, they also illuminate Bourdieu's theory in regard to a lack of understanding of the education process.

Absence of traditional cultural capital: I wasn't going to college.

One of the most apparent examples of transmission of value for education from parent to child came from Dr. Shultz's story. The statement by his father "Fred, I don't want you to go to college. You stay here and run cattle and farm and you'll make more money than you ever thought about in college" is indicative of this lack of capital transmission. Applying Bourdieu's (1986) concepts to this data, Dr. Shultz's father created value in family tradition and status quo, staying on the farm, and reproducing the values and attitudes cultivated throughout Dr. Shultz's childhood. The value of the farm fostered an attitude and value system expressed as "I was one of those kids that wasn't going to college." This example demonstrates the message many first-generation college students receive from their parents; work generates income and formal education is a

waste of time and resources. It also echoes the themes found by London (1989) Gardner and Holley (2011) as first-generation students have difficulty “breaking away” from family traditions and norms, and when they do, feel torn between two realities. Values and beliefs about social status and mobility, in this case represented by educational attainments, are duplicated across generations.

Absence of traditional cultural capital: “I didn’t know.”

While the lack of cultural capital is expressed directly in Dr. Shultz’s story, it is found throughout the stories of other participants. Several participants explicitly said “I didn’t know” about some part of the higher education experience. Walter Bryan’s statement “I didn’t really know what a degree was” exemplifies this lack of understanding of higher education. Similar statements by other participants expand on this lack of understanding. Other participants also mentioned they “didn’t know” to describe the campus experience related to services such as financial aid, registration, buying books, and even using the library. This lack of understanding of how to navigate the higher education environment and institution are especially prevalent in the stories of the three youngest participants, ironically, these three participants attended college after first-generation students became a category by which students were classified and began to be identified institutionally as disadvantaged.

Dr. Johnson’s story is that of a young farm kid who graduated high school early and enrolled in college at the age of 17. He performed well academically in high school and expected to go to college; however, once enrolled in school he felt lost due to the sheer size of the school and difficulty of curriculum. Dr. Johnson expressed his lack of knowledge about the institution and the difficulty it created in his education.

[When] I went to the library to do a report or check out a book or something; I would just read the book there. I never grasped how to check out a book. I had that mental block of not wanting to take a book out of there just read it there and take care of it. So there were... things I set myself up to that made it more difficult than it needed to be.

This lack of understanding is evidence of lack of cultural capital. Though Dr. Johnson expected to attend college, believed he had the academic tools to succeed and was motivated to remain, the lack of understanding of the daily processes and operations of the institution proved challenging.

This lack of understanding, a lack of cultural capital, is also evident in Dr. Gilkey's story. She articulates the lack of cultural capital in first-generation college students directly: "You don't know that you don't know, and those who do know think that you know." This lack of knowing is evidence of deficient cultural capital. In reflecting on her experiences entering college as a first-generation college student, she stated:

It presented a lot of challenges for me going to college because I didn't know what to expect. No one gave me any how-to's or what to expect so it was all very brand new.

This lack of knowledge flows throughout her story. She also commented on her parents' lack of understanding:

All my parents knew to do was take me and leave me and okay you're in college now... But when you think about... childhoods and you think about rearing and

you think about backgrounds, there's just some things that go left unsaid if it wasn't your parents experience.

Like Dr. Johnson, Dr. Gilkey's parents instilled expectations of going to college; however, the lack of understanding of how to navigate the college experience proved difficult and her parents were not able to provide this understanding.

Dr. Wansick's story echoes many of the same elements found in Dr. Gilkey's story in that her parents expected her to go to college. However, because her parents did not attend college, they were unable to pass along the specific skills, dispositions, and understanding of how to navigate it. This lack of knowing is expressed throughout Dr. Wansick's story as well.

My parents didn't know really how to balance work and school and you know all of that kind of stuff because they had never done it.

Dr. Wansick also recognized that this lack of understanding created a different environment for her non-first-generation classmates. In comparing her experiences with those of her classmates, Dr. Wansick stated:

They were quite a bit different I think. I think that a lot of the people that I was in class with, they kind of, they knew the life if that makes sense. They knew what financial aid was about. They knew, you know, to go to the registrar. They knew all the student services and things that were available because they had parents that, you know, had done it before. So when I first started, you know there really wasn't anybody in my family. ... So I didn't have anybody, you know, and if I didn't know something it was a professor that I would go to to ask a question

about how to do something. It wasn't my parents. And I think other student had kind of a little bit of an advantage in that 'cause they knew a lot of what was available, and I didn't have a clue when I first started what was available.

Dr. Wansick story highlights the disparate levels of cultural capital she believed characterized her own resources in college and her presumably non-first-generation peers.

Together, these stories display the lack of cultural capital often associated with first-generation college students that differ to some extent, across decades and families. Participants shared their uncertainties during school freely, consistently, and without prompting. Their childhood experiences included little information about college degrees and, in the case of Dr. Shultz, a suggestion that staying on the farm would be more beneficial than gaining an education, and a vocation—farming—was a better investment of time and resources. For Dr. Johnson, Dr. Gilkey, and Dr. Wansick, the message from their families was that they should go to college but there was little direction or knowledge about how to accomplish this goal. This suggests that their families knew some value existed in education, but they did not understand the personal investment or resources required to reap that benefit. The lack of family investment in education, not just financially in this case, but through an accumulation of attitudes and actions is also reflective of Bourdieu's (1986) assertions about cultural capital within families.

Transmission of capital to future generations.

As these participants progressed from being first-generation college students to first-generation college graduates, they were able to pass cultural capital, as evident in

their attitudes toward education, to their children, grandchildren and students. All but one of the participants' children either holds or is in the process of earning a bachelor degree, and many hold advanced degrees. The transmission of the value of education as a means of social attainment is evident in their stories. Dr. Shultz expressed this overtly.

It's something I tell every young person that visits with me now... I just think you've got to get your education. I just think it's very, very important. ... I tell my daughters and [they] would tell you that I over did it probably... But I always said to my daughters, I want you to be educated to the point that you don't have to depend on a man.... And you should always have yourself prepared where you can make it on your own and educationally you can prepare yourself to do that. And so I always really, really preached that to our girls. Our oldest daughter got her masters and [our second daughter] has her Ed.D., and our youngest daughter has her Ph.D. So our daughter[s] really took that to heart I guess.

Dr. Johnson shared similar sentiments and expectations.

My wife and I [have] two grown girls with their own families and we all live close by. So it's fun. And I hope that I can convey to my grandkids the importance of education. I think that I-I think that I attempt to be a good role model for them that they can go as far as they want to go. I hope I'm not the last doctorate in the family.

Participants' stories all reflected their conviction that education was a value to pass from one generation to the next.

In addition to passing along their expectations about higher education, the participants were also able to share knowledge about how to successfully navigate higher education institutions and cultures to their children.

I would tell her all the experiences. My experiences in college, um, will [help] her as a student because I can guide her. I can give her direction. I can't go to the classes for her and take the tests and do the work, but I can tell-give her expectations. Ah, she won't be a deer in the headlight for a lot of stuff because... I would like to think I've prepared her with some stuff. I can't prepare for everything. But the expectations of what it means to go to school, and study habits, and staying focused on why you're there.

This statement portrays the transmission of a form of cultural capital from Dr. Gilkey to her daughter who was a first semester college freshman at the time of interview. This contrasts greatly with her expression of "all my parents knew to do was take me and leave me and [say] 'okay you're in college now'" as an incoming freshman.

The stories of these first-generation Oklahoma college student reflect limited cultural capital. The passage of value for higher education and the knowledge about matriculating through the various institutional programs and processes was lacking from parent to child for the participants in this study. However, by persisting through to graduation, the participants seemed to have gained the capital needed to pass the value, expectations and understanding about college on to their children. This accumulation of academic investment echoes the intergenerational passage of beliefs about education (Bourdieu, 1986)

Economic Capital

The second of Bourdieu's classifications of capital is economic capital. Economic capital is found in the wealth of the individual, and according to Bourdieu (1973; 1986) is often passed from one generation to the next. Limited financial resources, which often hinders participation in higher education for first-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008) was found throughout these participants' stories.

Walter Bryan's exclamation "I'll tell you, it was sure hard to go to school in the depression" and Dr. Shultz mother-in-law's contention that "You can't go to college...because you don't have money" point to the importance of the fiscal resources necessary to complete a college degree. Though participants discussed different financial challenges in their individual histories, all participants directly refer to financial resources when telling their stories. This suggests that they needed to acquire money to complete their degrees.

Dr. Alvin Bryan's academic career started with "what it would take to buy groceries, rent a room and so forth ... [and] small scholarship ... twenty-five dollars probably" and progressed to an education paid for by military benefits provided by the GI Bill. His brother, Dr. George Bryan reaped the rewards of his older brother's educational benefits. Dr. Shultz and Dr. Johnson farmed. Dr. Gilkey and Dr. Wansick worked both on and off-campus jobs and Dr. Gilkey had the benefit of a grant.

Though economic capital was part of all participants' stories, few direct references to "low-income" families were found. Walter commented that his family still made a crop every year during the dust-bowl, suggesting that his family was not as bad

off financially as many farmers in the 1930s. Dr. Shultz stated he was financially secure. However, Brother Smith had to convince Dr. Alvin Bryan's father that he could afford to go to school, a statement that suggested his father was reluctant or unable to pay for school. In her story, Dr. Gilkey stated that "they were throwing money at us," but she also mentioned that she received grant monies because of her family's socio-economic status. These subtle and somewhat ironic contrasts found within the participants' stories suggests that participants may not have been completely aware of their families' economic well-being or a reluctance to appear "poor."

Economic capital derived from family farms.

Farms are an important source of economic capital to many of the participants in this study. As stated previous, agriculture has historically been an important industry for Oklahoma, and it was for all but the youngest two participants. The Bryan brothers, Dr. Schultz, and Dr. Johnson all worked on farms in order to pay for school. This agrarian lifestyle permitted them to earn much of their income during the summers. Though all had jobs during the school year, all farm kids stated that they were able to afford to go to college because they worked on the farm during the summer. This seasonal education calendar is common not only in Oklahoma, but also in agricultural and ranching areas throughout the United States, and serves a reminder of the importance of agriculture in shaping our education systems at all levels. By working on farms during the summer when school was not in session, these first-generation college students were able to generate much of the economic capital needed for their education.

While the family farm appears as a source of capital in all of the farm kids' stories, few additional references were made to parental involvement or ability to pay for

college. As stated previously, Brother Smith had to convince Dr. Alvin Bryan's father that they could afford to pay for school, a suggestion that implied he needed convincing. Dr. Schultz stated that he and his wife never accepted any financial help from either of their parents, but inferred that it was available as his wife's parents paid for his brother-in-law's college education. When Dr. Shultz needed money while in college—which he stated was frequently—he borrowed money from the same bank that loaned him money to buy show cattle beginning when he was nine years old. Though family farms provided economic capital for the farm kids while they were in college, their stories suggest that additional family monetary support was limited.

Economic capital provided by the environment: The GI Bill.

In addition to farming, Dr. Alvin Bryan received economic capital from the GI Bill. As previously stated, Dr. Alvin Bryan's college story started with “what it would take to buy groceries, rent a room and so forth...[and] small scholarship...twenty-five dollars probably.” Economic capital was central to his story from the beginning, perhaps due to his brother Walter's experiences trying to attend college during The Great Depression. This constrained capital was removed when he returned from World War II and received GI Bill benefits. This program not only provided Alvin with the financial resources necessary to attend college, but also allowed his younger brother George to forego a scholarship to another institution because he lived for free with Alvin. In addition to his bachelor degree, Dr. Alvin Bryan also attended graduate school on the GI Bill and earned a master's degree. While Dr. Alvin Bryan did not directly share why he chose to earn a master's degree, he did say that he attended Peabody because he had benefits remaining from his GI Bill.

Economic capital and policy: “They were giving money away.”

Economic capital also appears in Dr. Gilkey’s story, and like Drs. Bryan, does not appear to be a constraint. Dr. Gilkey believed the socio-economic environment shaped her access to resources during her years as a student.

I did receive a lot of Pell Grant, so my undergrad degree I did not have... many student loans at all. So I was blessed 'cause my mom was considered a single parent and back then in the 80s it was big push for diversity in school so they were giving money away.

Thus, despite coming from a home that lacked economic capital, Dr. Gilkey perceived that the timing of available funds for students of color made it possible for her to attend school. Though not directly related to cost of attendance, lack of cultural capital appears again in Dr. Gilkey’s story related to economic capital. She recalled that:

They were just giving us credit cards back then. It was just hey sign up here and you can get your free card and a free t-shirt. Okay! That’s sweet! You know I was like yeah. All those type of things you just-I didn’t know.

Though she did not mention having limited resources to attend school, she did describe limited knowledge about how to evaluate and manage that capital, a circumstance scholars now refer to as “financial literacy.” Knowledge about how to navigate financially through college, in addition to the resources to do so, demonstrates the connection between cultural and economic capital.

Economic capital and self-efficacy: Work.

In addition to farming and capital provided by programs such as Pell Grants and the GI Bill, all participants worked while in school. Though most were part-time jobs like delivering campus newspapers in Dr. Johnson's case and running a mimeograph machine in Dr. Alvin Bryans's case, Dr. Shultz and Dr. Wansick both worked full-time while in college. Dr. Wansick worked both on campus as a tutor and full-time at a fast food restaurant while an undergraduate student; however, other than mentioning the jobs she held, she said very little about economic capital as it related to school. Conversely, Dr. Schultz's story centers on earning funds necessary to complete school. Dr. Shultz worked on the farm on weekends, did construction, and worked at the "beef barn" during the week throughout the school year. His story centers on a desire to be "financially secure" using self-reliance to accomplish this goal. Dr. Shultz proudly stated "you know the obstacle was just doing it on my own, you know. I never had any help from anybody on any of my degrees." Dr. Shultz and Dr. Wansick both worked full-time to provide the economic capital required to complete their degrees.

Though each participant relied on funding from different sources, each shared that economic capital was an important factor in each participant's ability to complete their bachelor degree. Examining the concepts of economic capital in participant's stories once again reflects the importance of farms in Oklahoma's history. Farms were part of several participants' family histories and identities, as well as sources of skill and funding to attend school. Public policies and programs, like the GI Bill and Pell Grants also contributed to the success of these first-generation college students. However, when

these students lacked economic capital they, like many first-generation college students, had to generate it themselves by working full-time while enrolled in classes.

Social Capital

Bourdieu's third classification of capital is social capital. According to Bourdieu (1986) social capital is the benefit found within relationships and social networks.

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships and recognition—in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 248-149).

Often these relationships are external to one's family unit. The value of social networks and relationships is perhaps the most pronounced theme running through these first-generation college students' stories. Though each story conveys the power and importance of social capital, the sources differ somewhat across participants' educational stories. Several representations of social capital follow accompanied by a discussion of the meaning created within a given story.

Social capital: Invitations.

Social capital appeared important in this collection of stories, because without it, two participants may have never even attended college. Dr. Alvin Bryan and Dr. Shultz both recall exactly why they chose to attend college: someone from outside of their family suggested it. Dr. Alvin Bryan explained:

Brother Smith came. We were chopping cotton. He came out and walked up the cotton row and figured out how much it would take for me to go to school that first year. What it would take to buy groceries, rent a room, and so forth, and persuaded dad that I could go.

Similarly, Dr. Shultz credits his decision to attend college to the encouragement of another, Kenneth Saunders, a non-degreed engineer with whom he worked. Dr. Shultz admits his plans in high school did not include college, but Saunders convinced him.

Every day he'd say 'Freddy you've got to go to college.' I'd say 'Why Ken?' and he said 'The way everything is going... You're going to have to have a college degree to be successful.' And I [Dr. Shultz] listened to that.

These examples demonstrate how others outside of the participants' families influenced their decision to attend college.

Both examples contrast other experiences found in each family. Though Dr. Alvin Bryan's older brother did attend college, he was only able to persist for two semesters. Though some thought regarding college attendance might have existed prior to Brother Smith's invitation, Dr. Alvin Bryan directly attributes his attendance, particularly at Abilene Christian University, to Brother Smith. Dr. Shultz openly stated he did not plan to go to college and his father urged him not to go. Saunders insistence and persistence influenced Dr. Shultz's decision to attend college.

Veterans: "There were a lot of us."

"War" appears in two stories, first in Dr. Alvin Bryan's and again in Dr. Johnson's; however, the result of "war" creates two very different environments and

meanings for the participants. Wars created social networks in both stories, and though both had very different meanings and contexts, war contributed social capital.

As previously discussed, Dr. Alvin Bryan attributed his access to college to funding from the GI Bill; however, being a veteran also contributed to a certain type of social capital, especially during his enrollment at Peabody. Dr. Alvin Bryan recalled that “there were a lot of us there then” referring to the World War II veterans attending Peabody. His story also referred to living in a boarding house primarily with other veterans. Peabody’s written history tells of a culture that “unlike those at Vanderbilt, the veterans at Peabody blended into the general student population” (Conkin, 2002, p. 272). When Dr. Alvin Bryan attended Peabody, over half of the students were World War II veterans receiving GI Bill benefits. Dr. Alvin Bryan’s story of his time at Peabody also included mention of a faculty member who was also from Frederick, Oklahoma. Dr. Alvin Bryan’s entire story of his master’s program focused on relationships and social capital. He said nothing about finances during that time, and he said nothing about academics.

Dr. Johnson’s story also has “war” as a means of creating a social bond between young, male college students; however, it is very different than Dr. Alvin Bryan’s. Dr. Johnson talked about going to college during the Vietnam War and what that did to the culture of the students while he was in school. Instead of being part of an accepting community, as was the case for Dr. Alvin Bryan, Dr. Johnson and his peers were bound by fear.

Pretty typical during that time where what we were hoping to do is make the grades and have a low lottery number where we wouldn't be drafted... to go to Vietnam. And my number was relatively high and I remember the day that those numbers came out and the devastated loom on some of the faces of my friends who had very, very low numbers. And so that was a prevailing thing at the time.

Dr. Johnson understood what being drafted meant to himself and his classmates because, as previously mentioned, his two older brothers were serving in the military at the time. Though very different from the meaning created by war in Dr. Alvin Bryan's story, war created a social network and thus social capital in Dr. Johnson's story.

The contrast found in the meaning of "war" in Dr. Alvin Bryan's educational story when compared Dr. Johnson's perhaps suggests that "group membership" (Bourdieu, 1986) may not only imply social capital, but also symbolic capital for the group members. Dr. Johnson is a "baby boomer," a large generation of children born between 1946 and 1964, the years Dr. Alvin Bryan's veteran peers formed families and had kids; however, the great difference in meaning and perception about the wars that occurred during their undergraduate careers is perhaps reflective of the societal attitudes toward the wars during their historical contexts.

"Church."

Another social network apparent in many stories is "church". Several participants mention church as a place that provided structure and support. Dr. Shultz stated "I was very active in 4H club and FFA and I was very active at church" referring to his years in high school. These communities were very different from his labor-packed home life and

somewhat suspect academic efforts. Brother Smith, previously mentioned in Dr. Alvin Bryan's story, came from Abilene Christian University, a Church of Christ school. Dr. George Bryan said he expected to go to college, a "Christian college." The image of church as a community appears in these stories.

Though Dr. George Bryan chose to attend a Christian college, his decision to continue his education was spurred by his motivation to leave ministry.

After 10 years of full time preaching I decided I had tried the brethren sufficiently and I wanted to be more independent of the brethren. So, I decided I would go back for some courses in education so I could get a teaching certificate.

A separation from church and strain in that "community" provided motivation for Dr. Bryan to return to school and earn a master's degree. Church returned to his story as he participated in mission campaigns while a college professor and Fulbright Scholar.

Church also holds meaning in Dr. Johnson's story, but it is much more defined and prevalent. In fact, Dr. Johnson used the term "church" two dozen times in telling his story. He spoke of being a leader at church in high school. He spoke of becoming involved in church when he felt lost during his undergraduate studies and meeting his wife there. He spoke of an older student at church in his MBA program. He also spoke of the support and distraction church offered during his doctoral program. Though apparent in other stories, "church" is the central source of support and identity that runs throughout Dr. Johnson's story.

Diversity.

Though the idea of community is evident in all stories, Dr. Gilkey's narrative also contains a sense of isolation within the academy both in her undergraduate and doctoral studies. Though she suggests institutions during the 1980s were actively seeking minority students and providing economic resources to support this mission, certain students were isolated from the middle-class, primarily White culture within the university.

I felt as [a] college student as not being accepted. And looked upon as a[n] anomaly as an African American attending school.... You can see it. It's accepted but there's still a um presumption or a judgment against students, especially African American men who attend college. It's assumed they're on a scholarship for basketball, football, etcetera.

She experienced similar isolation in her doctoral program in part through her interactions with faculty.

I had my very first teacher who....was very condescending. She even told me 'why don't you sit next to, or why don't you look at such and such's writing' because she, she knows how to write and you need some help with writing and I'm not sure how you make it through your undergrad and master's program writing like this.

Dr. Gilkey is an African American woman. Both the faculty member referenced and the student after whom Dr. Gilkey was to model her writing were White. Read through Bourdieu's concepts, the perception of being isolated from the institution, her classmates,

and faculty suggests institutional structures created difficulty in forming social bonds in both her doctoral and undergraduate programs; however, Dr. Gilkey was able to develop a social network with other minority students.

Though she felt isolated in both programs at primarily the White institutions (PWIs) she attended, Dr. Gilkey and her classmates cultivated communities within each institution to provide a form of social support. This is evident in how she presented her story as an African American, female, first-generation undergraduate student.

When I wake up every day, I am who I am. So I never really did deal with the fact that I was an African American woman every day. You know, as much as I was a first-generation college student... I was new to being a student... but I didn't have to deal with it as much because I would then choose to associate with people that looked like me and that I felt comfortable with. And that I felt valued me.

Dr. Gilkey's desire to reduce tension in her undergraduate career resulted in seeking out and bonding with other students with similar experiences and characteristics.

During both her undergraduate studies and her master's work, Dr. Gilkey found support in particular individuals, which helped form a network of support that served as a psychological and practical aggregation of profits and resources (Bourdieu, 1986). During her undergraduate studies, Dr. Gilkey relied on the experiences of an older classmate from "home" that had a similar background as a first-generation college student. She provided Dr. Gilkey with knowledge about how to navigate the university, what classes to take and from whom, and how to study, which were necessary to

successfully complete her bachelor degree. Dr. Gilkey also mentioned that this peer-mentor also now holds a doctoral degree.

During her master's program, Dr. Gilkey found support not only from other minority students, but also from faculty. This is one of a very few positive references to faculty found in the data. During her master's work, Dr. Gilkey studied under Dr. Henderson, a faculty authority on and activist for African American college students employed at The University of Oklahoma for over 40 years. She also mentioned that many of her classmates and other faculty were people of color and other minorities. The sense of inclusion and group membership, often associated with social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is evident in Dr. Gilkey's narrative regarding her master's program.

You know I loved graduate school. It was absolutely awesome. I had the best professors. I had one of OU's predominant Black professors... Dr. Henderson ... I had several classes from him. I took almost everything from him ... and then the other professors were Hispanic. I had maybe one or two that were not. So, it was definitely a different experience.

And one of the young ladies ... that [I] had a class with, who was White, she happened to be, I hate using the word lesbian, ... so she also had a different, a more open view of acceptance because of her orientation and things she had to deal with. ... I didn't have any ... traditional quote unquote ... White male or White female instructors ... In my master's program. Now when we got to the doctorate, now that's a whole other thing.

Being a member of a minority class in a PWI not only created conditions in which Dr. Gilkey felt isolation, but also helped her to identify with communities that ultimately provided the social capital necessary to complete college and graduate. The inclusion of faculty as group members in Dr. Gilkey's master's program suggests that some group members had seniority and power within the larger institution and therefore shared that with other members of the group who did not (Bourdieu, 1986).

The baby.

Like Dr. Gilkey, Dr. Wansick's story also contains references to isolation during her undergraduate studies. Dr. Wansick had a unique situation during her undergraduate studies. She had a baby soon after graduating from high school and wanted to provide a better life for her daughter. She saw the "struggles" her parents encountered trying to provide for their children. She attributed these "struggles" to her parents' lack of education and consequential job hopping and under-employment. Though Dr. Wansick credited having a child as motivation for graduating, which other adult female students report as well (Luttrell, 2000) she also realized that raising a child while in school prohibited her from participating fully in "college life."

I don't think I really had the traditional college experience because I had a baby and worked full-time. I didn't do a lot of the college type things. I didn't do sororities or fraternities. I wasn't involved with a lot of things on campus just because I worked. I had to put myself through school basically. And so, in some ways I kind of feel like I missed all of that.

Dr. Wansick's story is that of a single mother trying to provide for her baby more than a college student navigating school. Being employed and having children while in college are traits common to first-generation students (Choy, 2001). Her circumstances also suggest that she did not have the level of involvement in the cultural fabric that Tinto (2012) contends is perhaps the most important factor in college student retention, as involvement creates a sense of belonging to and within the institution.

Unlike the stories of other participants, Dr. Wansick's story does not refer to classmates, informal, or formal social networks. Instead of finding social capital in a "peer" community, Dr. Wansick found support from faculty members.

So I made a lot of really good connections with those professors. And so, I think that really helped me see that there was something to move toward. Um, some of them just by being there when I was going through struggles I knew I could go in and visit with them about, you know, balancing life and figuring out how to make that balance... My parents didn't know really how to balance work and school and you know all of that kind of stuff because they had never done it. And so really having them, somebody as a sounding board when things were going on, that was a big help. And then I had a[n] education professor that had been there for a long, long time and he was very pro-education. Go as far as you can kind of person and kind of a cheerleader all the way through for me. He was like, you need to make sure you do this and you can better your life if you have the ability to do it. So, he was kind of a cheerleader type for me all the way through.

Dr. Wansick's references to the math and education faculty during her undergraduate studies are the only reference by any participant to an institutional system or community that she attributed to helping complete her degree. The mention of faculty members providing capital which her parents could not displays the value found in social capital and relationships.

Summary

Though different in each participant's story, networks of social support and identification, and some forms of social capital, seemed to contribute to the success of these first-generation college students. Read through the lens of Bourdieu's concept of social capital, the data suggest that social capital helped to remove constraints created by low levels of cultural capital inherited from the family unit, and in some cases also appeared to parallel low economic capital. All participants found value in a community or an individual outside of their family. Many of these communities were external to the university, and those that were not were informal. Cultivating social capital helped each student to graduate.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an analysis of the stories of these first-generation college students. It is important to understand the role Oklahoma played in each of their stories. The changes in Oklahoma's industries, especially farming, contributed greatly to the stories and must be examined to understand the participant's experiences. The structure and composition of Oklahoma's systems of education at all levels also contributed to each participant's story.

The motivation for participating and completing higher education is central to each story. Though each participant expressed different expectations for the results of completing the “task” of graduation, each of them used education, a bachelor degree specifically, as the means of reward. In order to graduate, each believed they possessed the resources necessary complete college, and when constraints arose, they had to find way to overcome them.

To understand how these first-generation college students overcame the constraints they faced, it is important to understand the capital, or lack thereof, that was available to them. Capital, classified by Bourdieu (1973) as cultural, economic and social, is evident in each participant’s story.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This research project explored the oral histories of first-generation college students from Oklahoma who earned doctoral degrees. Participants, born between 1914 and 1969, represented different decades throughout Oklahoma's history. The purpose of this study was to gain understanding of the experiences of first-generation college students from a broad historical perspective, add to the body of literature regarding first-generation college students, and preserve and analyze the stories of students who despite their first-generation status, successfully navigated higher education processes and institutions, ultimately earning doctoral degrees.

Chapter one provided an overview of the study and chapter two provided a review of existing literature related to this study, particularly in the areas of first-generation college students, Oklahoma's history, and Bourdieu's theories of cultural reproduction and social reproduction. Chapter three outlined the methodology used to construct this study. The previous two chapters (chapters four and five) presented the life stories of the participants as individuals and an analysis of their oral histories viewed through the lens

of Social and Cultural Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu, 1973). This chapter will briefly revisit the research questions and research design, discuss the findings of the study, and present the implications for practice, theory, and further research.

Research Questions Revisited

At the onset of the study, two questions were posed:

1. What factors did first-generation Oklahoma college graduates perceive as contributing most to their success?
2. What role did social and cultural capital appear to play in their experiences?

As the study progressed, questions transformed to reflect not only the factors that contributed to each participant's success, but also contextual references specific to the participant's story that contributed to earning multiple degrees. These contextual references often point to specific decades represented by the participant and were often specific to Oklahoma's changing educational system, economy, and society.

Design Revisited

Oral histories were collected from first-generation college students who graduated from high school in Oklahoma and then earned baccalaureate degrees. These oral histories were recorded and transcribed. Once transcribed, reviewed, and edited, data were analyzed inductively through thematic analysis (Patton, 2002). Through the analytic process, themes emerged from the data. These themes were both convergent, having "recurring regularities" throughout the data, and divergent, themes that "don't fit the dominant identified patterns" (Patton, 2002, pp. 465-466). In conjunction with these themes, "porthole" and "process" approaches (Luttrell, 2000; Peacock & Holland,

1993; Thelin, 1998) were used to classify themes emerged tied to the “context and culture” in which stories were set and how participants positioned themselves within their social and historical contexts.

The constructionist epistemology was the guiding perspective for this study as it holds that meaning is constructed by people as they experience life (Crotty, 1998). The interpretivist theoretical perspective was used to “understand and explain human and social reality” (Crotty, 1998, pp. 66-67). *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* (Bourdieu , 1973) served as the theoretical lens through which the data were analyzed.

As participants were selected and interviewed, additional trends became apparent in their demographics. Though the study was originally constrained to first-generation college graduates, the first two participants also held doctoral degrees. This led to the inclusion of a third participant, another first-generation college graduate who also had earned a doctoral degree. Following this interview, the decision was made to seek other participants with doctoral degrees. The final population of this study consisted of six first-generation college students who not only earned baccalaureate degrees, but also terminal degrees.

In addition to the six participants mentioned, Walter Bryan, the older brother of Drs. Alvin and George Bryan (two participants in the study), provided data that enriched this study. Though not a participant according to the definition “first-generation college graduate”, Walter was a first-generation college student, and his oral history provided insight into the Bryan family history and values. Walter’s story also provided a glimpse into life in rural Oklahoma in the early 1900s, as well as into the life of a first-generation

college student during The Great Depression. Due to his age at the time of the interview, one week shy of 100 years old, finding another participant who fit the criteria of this study and who was also Walter's peer proved fruitless. His data was thus retained for its unique and valuable contextual contribution to this study and the glimpse his unique story offers insight into the influence siblings might have in imagining college as a possible life choice. Throughout the reporting of Walter's story, I have clarified that he did not complete his baccalaureate degree, a stated requirement for full study participation.

Following is a discussion of the implications and significance of the findings presented in chapters four and five, as viewed through the lens of Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu, 1973).

Discussion

According to Bourdieu (1973), values and beliefs regarding class structure and mobility are passed from one generation of a family to the next and reinforced through various social institutions. Education is one way members of society can increase their "place" in social structure; however, research suggests certain students, such as first-generation college students, have difficulty navigating the education process because their parents cannot pass along a value system they never experienced (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). The ability to navigate these systems is understood in Bourdieu's framework as a form of capital: social, cultural, and economic. The creation of capital, as presented by Bourdieu, is evident in the participants' stories; each completed levels of education beyond that of their parents and ultimately passed this capital to future generations, evident in the educational achievements of their children and grandchildren.

Family Farms

One theme found throughout the stories of the oldest four participants is that of the family farm. Family farms became a significant idea in terms of thinking about the experiences of first-generation college students from Oklahoma through the lens of Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction Theory. As previously explained, the four oldest participants, the farm kids, grew up on family farms in Oklahoma, including Tillman County in southwest Oklahoma and in the Oklahoma Panhandle. While this study focused on the experiences of first-generation college students, an interesting inductive point that emerged from the data is that much of the farm kids' oral histories centered around their lives on family farms. According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), the children of farmers are much less likely than others to participate in and complete higher education than children from families employed in other industries. This is due to the intergenerational passage of the value of the family farm, the labor required to sustain them, and the distraction that extensive formal schooling might introduce. The fact these participants grew up on farms is inherent to their life experiences as Oklahomans and to the telling of their stories; however, realization that their childhoods were set on family farms throughout Oklahoma within different periods of time is also an important factor in understanding each participant's personal perspective and how it might connect to their first-generation experiences.

When the grandparents of the Bryan brothers came to homestead in Oklahoma, both the Oklahoma economy and the focus of its population were centered on agriculture. Homesteading was a common practice in the western United States that allocated federal land to the families who settled and farmed the land. As time went on, technology

allowed farms to grow larger and fewer people were needed to work them. As a result, for farm families with multiple children, opportunities for all offspring to continue farming diminished. Though literature and demographic information support these historical trends in the data, the implications for these “farm kids” is somewhat absent from the data. None of the farm kids provided a specific benefit they expected to receive from going to college and all referred to the family farm as “home”; however, by completing a college education, the farm kids created opportunities for themselves away from the family farm that may have required some identity transformation. While family farms symbolize “home” to these participants, their move away from farms is reflective of the economic and demographic realities of Oklahoma from the 1930s through the 1970s.

Dr. George Bryan and Dr. Johnson said they expected to go to college, but neither gave a reason for leaving the family farm or why that expectation existed, and neither’s story referenced who set those expectations. Both claimed to be exceptional students in high school and were thus expected to attend college, and both had older siblings who attended college, though none who graduated before they enrolled. Though Drs. George Bryan and Johnson attended college, they seemed to do so with little expectation of specific outcomes or benefits. Initially majoring in science, each soon found himself academically unprepared for the college science curriculum and switched majors. Lack of academic preparation is a trait often observed in first-generation college students (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

Dr. George Bryan switched majors to Bible and communications, and after graduation, he entered into ministry like his oldest brother, Walter—a vocation that, at

that time in their denomination, did not require a degree. In Dr. George Bryan's story, going to college was a means for leaving the family farm; however, it did not appear predicated on specific aspirations of achievement or career opportunities. Thus, it appears that changing economic and demographic realities in Oklahoma during the 1940s and 1950s may have been the primary motivator of his decision to leave the family farm. References to Dr. George Bryan's older siblings are prominent throughout his story and may demonstrate capital creation within families that cannot be attributed to parental educational achievement. This topic is discussed further in the section titled "Generations: educational attainment of parents, children and siblings."

In contrast to the stories of Dr. George Bryan and Dr. Johnson, Dr. Alvin Bryan and Dr. Shultz both had specific reasons to leave the farm: someone outside of their family told them to go to college. This injection of expectations from outside the family unit may influence the college selection process and decision to attend process (Lin, 2001), which is often external for first-generation students compared with intra-family expectations often found in second-generation-and-beyond students. Dr. Alvin Bryan and Dr. Shultz both named the people who "invited" them to attend college: Brother Smith and Harry Shackelford. Similarly both recalled very explicitly why they went to college, and both recalled very vividly why they stayed in college.

Dr. Shultz's story is somewhat divergent from the other farm kids in that he had a specific reason to leave the farm. Though Shackelford persuaded Dr. Shultz to attend college, he continued farming and ranching as a means of supporting his family. He was eventually forced to quit farming when the rigors of farming, raising a family, and going to college took a toll on his health; Dr. Shultz was literally working himself to death.

Dr. Shultz story diverged when compared to the statements of other farm kids because he had a specific expectation that when he graduated, he would leave the farm. This is especially significant in Dr. Shultz's story because, while all of the farm kids seemed proud of their "homes", the imagery and analogies of life and farming more vividly and overtly permeated Dr. Shultz's story. Dr. Shultz's oral history centered on being a child on a tractor, and "tractor" became an analogy for his accomplishments in life, including his education. Dr. Shultz was the only farm kid to state a specific career goal that required a degree: he wanted to teach vocational agriculture. Dr. Shultz also stated that he wanted to be financially secure. This was a somewhat curious statement in that most of Dr. Shultz's childhood story centered on how he became self-sufficient at a young age and the only statement made to indicate lack of financial stability came from his mother-in-law. Though Dr. Shultz's story did not contain evidence of why he left the farm, other than the health hazards his doctors emphasized, it presented value and expectations of what would happen when he completed his undergraduate education, thus why he went to college. Dr. Shultz's story also demonstrated an intuitive understanding of the concept of class mobility and the capital accumulation higher education might afford, reflective of Bourdieu's theories. These two elements, awareness of financial stability and the opportunities available to educated people, were not visible in the oral histories of any of the other farm kids.

The oral histories of the farm kids provided both convergent and divergent themes related to the meaning of going to college. For all of the farm kids except Dr. Shultz, little if any evidence appeared in their stories regarding what they intended to do after leaving the farm and completing college. This convergent theme, lack of direction and

understanding of the value of higher education, greatly resembles Bourdieu's (1986) observations about the reproduction of class indicated by educational achievement, as they participated in higher education without distinct expectations or purposes. A divergent, and somewhat ironic, theme emerged from Dr. Shultz's story as he had a distinct reason for leaving the farm: he was tired of the tractor. Despite Dr. Shultz's goal oriented purpose for attending college, he, more than any of the other farm kids, maintained close ties to farming longer and used the farm to generate the economic capital required to complete his education.

The ties to and departure from farming echo the theme found by London (1989) as first-generation students try to balance their own goals and aspirations which are often contrary and conflicting with family culture. In Dr. Shultz's story, he stated very directly that he left the farm to leave the tractor—against his father's advice and persuasion to stay on the family farm. Conversely, Dr. Johnson left the farm because he “expected” to—expectations that seemed to come from his parents and perhaps older siblings; however, the financial resources summer farm work provided allowed both of these farm kids to gain a college education. The progression of educational achievement within the Bryan brothers perhaps hints to a gradual departure from the family farm that started with a couple of semesters in college followed by an invitation to attend college and an ultimate expectation of attending college. While the attitudes toward departure from the family farm varied in each story, the fact that each of the farm kids continued to carry a reverence for farm life speaks to the value each farm kid holds decades after “breaking away.”

Though each of the four farm kids (plus Walter Bryan who attended but did not graduate from college) left home and went to college, all still valued farming and agriculture. All three Bryan Brothers still call their family farm “home” though none of them has lived there in over half a century. Dr. George Bryan spends weekends on the farm, and his older brother Walter owned a farm in northeastern Oklahoma that his son works. Dr. Shultz shows cattle, and Dr. Johnson kept his family farm until his mother died, though neither he, his mother, nor his siblings lived on the farm for years. This lifetime affinity for and identity with farm life reflected the idea of passage of the value of family farms espoused by Bourdieu and served as a vivid, significant image of family life for the farm kids; however, their departures from the family farm, though reflective of demographic changes present in Oklahoma at the times they chose college, represented a new cycle of value creation and reproduction, which became evident in the “farm kids” families, especially their children.

The oral histories of the farm kids contain evidence of dynamic shifts in Oklahoma’s agriculturally-based economy, demographics, and industry. The farm kids were the oldest participants, and each came from very rural areas in Oklahoma. Though the decline of family farms is not stated overtly in any of their stories, the fact that each went to college, earned degrees, and lived in urban areas in Oklahoma reflects trends found in Oklahoma during the decades they represented.

Bourdieu’s (1973, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1986) ideas of the passage of cultural and social values from one generation to the next are central to studies of first-generation college students (Auclair, et al., 2008; Gardner & Holley, 2011; London, 1989; Choy, 2001) and the stories of the farm kids; however, the upward mobility in class

from one generation to the next for the farm kid participants in this study appeared to be predicated more on practicality and opportunity than replication of class. The fact that at the time of their interviews all of the farm kids except for Dr. Johnson still participated in agriculture in some way also suggests that they do not see their social mobility off of the farm through education as a step up in class, but rather an appreciation for the foundation provided by their young, agrarian lives. Though Dr. Johnson no longer farms, he smiled readily as he spoke of the family farm. He concluded his story, the last of the farm kid stories, happily recalling the five acre pond stocked with bass “way back then.” For the farm kids, education created a path for life away from the family farm; however, for the farm kids in this study, life on a rural, Oklahoma, family farm became a central, permanent part of each participant’s identity and is paramount to understanding their experiences. This pattern points to an important experiential element for some first-generation students that merit institutional awareness and attention in how educators support students’ farm backgrounds and allegiances while also enhancing their educational opportunities and resources.

Breaking Away

Unlike the stories of the farm kids, Dr. Gilkey’s and Dr. Wansick’s stories suggest a family understanding of the value and potential opportunities created by moving beyond the educational attainment of their parents. Both women said they went to college to get jobs that were better than their parents. They wanted “stability” and “expected” education to provide that stability. This quest for upward mobility seemed to come from parents who “expected” their children to go to college, but did not know how to help their children in that process.

Dr. Wansick's story particularly espoused social mobility through education. She went to college to get a job to provide for her baby. She went back to college to advance her career—twice. Her story perhaps most directly articulated how education broke a family cycle and created not only stability, but also increased levels of social achievement.

First-Generation Over Time

One of the ideas discovered when examining the entire data corpus is that first-generation student experiences have changed over time. While recognized in the 1960s, first-generation college students have always existed in higher education, and someone had to be the “first to go” in a family. The meaning and value of a college education is evident in the Bryan brothers stories that started in The Great Depression and the 1940s during the massive growth in student bodies following World War II through the GI Bill. Though they were three brothers from the same home, the meaning and value of a college degree varied greatly in their stories as Walter did not know what a college degree was, Alvin chose to attend Peabody “because it was the best school in the south” and George switched institutions because of accreditation. This pattern shows different understandings of the benefits of education across brothers from the same family.

The programs that first recognized first-generation students, TRIO, are evidence of the evolution in attitudes toward first-generation students. While first-generation students existed before 1965, the identification of them as a class that struggled to persist seems to have created a line of inquiry that continues to grow and evolve. Since identification, many institutions and policies aim to aid first-generation college students. These programs provide benefits and opportunities that were not available during most of

these participant's college years. Dr. Shultz did not experience the confusion that the younger participants did with financial aid—because it did not exist.

Similarly, desegregation of institutions which became prevalent in the 1960s is missing from many participants' stories. Due to the nature of education, Dr. Gilkey most likely would not have attended college with the Bryan brothers because she probably would not have had access as an African American woman. The same could be said for Dr. Wansick as a Native American, a class excluded from the onset of Ben Franklin's first public institution.

These changes point to a trend apparent in the data: though all participants were first-generation college students, the meaning of that classification has most likely changed over time on college campuses. Realizing that change is constant and evolutionary in education points to the continued need to understand the experiences not only of these first-generation students, but also those that follow them.

In addition to first-generation students changing over time, the kinds of capital required for their success most certainly has as well. When Walter first went to college, ACU had a population of fewer than 500 students. Today, in 2014, The University of Oklahoma has around 22,000 undergraduate students. Perhaps the Bryan brothers did not have the same sense of chaos and bewilderment in their institutional setting as younger participants in this study because of the vastly different sizes of the universities they attended. Similarly, Brother Smith's twenty-five dollar scholarship offer would most likely seem trivial today. Even adjusted for inflation over 70 years, it would equate to roughly \$200—barely enough to buy one textbook.

Generations: Educational Attainment of Parents, Children and Siblings

While the intent of this study was to collect and analyze the oral histories of first-generation college students from Oklahoma, it also captured the oral histories of students who were also first-generation high school students and graduates. The Bryan Brothers' parents and Dr. Shultz's parents left school prior to high school graduation as did Dr. Johnson's mother. Though Drs. Wansick and Gilkey's parents earned high school diplomas, their mothers did so by completing GEDs. While tangential to this study, these accomplishments provide glimpses into Oklahoma's progress in making educational opportunities available and also demonstrate how these students were able to complete several levels of education beyond that of their parents. Recent research shows that first-generation high school graduates are often academically unprepared for college (ACT, 2013). Academic difficulties in college appeared in several participants' stories, especially in the areas of math and science.

First-generation high school graduates, struggle to participate in and matriculate in higher education even more so than those who are only first-generation college students. According to Choy (2001), in the year 1999, 54% of first-generation college students enrolled in college immediately after high school graduation, while only 36% of first-generation high school graduates did. As high school graduation is normally a requirement for college participation, first-generation high school graduates represent a new class of students able to participate in college. Though the magnitude of this class has declined as high school graduation has become increasingly more common, the progression found within these stories shows the importance of educational progress within families from one generation to the next, and at all levels.

In addition to parental educational attainment, sibling education appeared to be a common feature in these stories. All participants with older siblings, with the exception of Dr. Shultz, had an older brother or sister who had some college education; however, none graduated before the participant. While their participation without graduating may seem indicative of first-generation college student experiences, within this population it seemed to lead to expectations for college attendance by younger siblings. All participants who had a sibling or parent with some college attended college because they “expected” to attend. This trend may represent capital accumulation within a family that did not necessarily come from the parents. Also notable within the framework of capital accumulation and representative of common first-generation college experiences, Dr. Gilkey’s father and Dr. Wansick’s older brother both completed their degrees but not do so until after the participants had done so. This could represent a new understanding of higher education and its value shared within a family moving both horizontally and upward generationally.

The educational experiences of older siblings seems especially relevant in the Bryan brothers’ stories. While Walter only attended college for two semesters, he did in that time develop some understanding of higher education institutions. In recalling his semester at Abilene Christian University, he told of how a benefactor saved the college from financial ruin by paying off its debt and creating the first charitable annuity in the process. As a professor of finance, I find it fascinating that a student would have such a deep understanding of institutional operations and finances. With this understanding, surely he was able to provide some guidance to his younger brothers. This passage of resources is evident in the that Drs. Alvin and George Bryan shared the benefits of the GI

Bill, but suggested in Dr. George Bryan's story as he picked the same major as his brother, Dr. Alvin Bryan, and also had to switch because of the difficult math and science curricula.

The fact that all participants except Drs. Shultz and Gilkey had an older sibling who had at least participated in college education is demonstrative of capital creation in families as described by Ward (2012), though each participant was still defined as first-generation college. Ward contends that students from parents with some college education had higher educational aspirations, participation rates, and graduation rates than students for whom neither parent had any college education. The experiences and accomplishments of the students in this study suggested that sibling participation might also increase the educational achievements of younger brothers and sisters.

Besides breaking the cycle of reproduction of social and cultural capital received from their parents, these participants started a new cycle that is apparent in the achievements and expectations of their children. In speaking of their children, none of the farm kids mentioned careers or aspirations tied to their farming roots. Instead, they bragged about the educational achievements of their children and grandchildren. The other participants stated that they expected their children would earn degrees, and in some cases, graduate degrees.

These expectations seem to align with the reproduction in class values expressed by Bourdieu. All participants included their expectations of their descendants' education as part of their stories. This is by definition the reproduction of capital found within Bourdieu's theories. By experiencing higher education as a student, and in most cases

working in higher education professionally, these participants were able to not only generate the expectation of going to college in their children, and by extension their grandchildren, they were also able to help their children navigate through educational institutions and programs.

Public Policy as Part of Their Stories

It is important to understand the role particular policies played in the participants' experiences. First-generation college students were first recognized via TRIO programs as a class who struggled to matriculate; TRIO programs were established in conjunction with the Higher Education Act of 1965. Though some TRIO programs were designed to specifically help first-generation college students, none of the participants in this study specifically referred to benefiting from or participating in them; however, all students referred to some kind of public policy with regard to their education.

As explained in chapters four and five, Dr. Alvin Bryan credits much of his success to the GI Bill after World War II. This is an interesting observation from the perspective that a policy directed at a specific social and economic problem became a central theme that influenced most of Dr. Alvin's educational story. The fact that this benefit existed and was available to World War II veterans is well documented; however, the meaning and value it provided to a young man from a rural, agrarian background in Oklahoma is specific to Dr. Alvin Bryan's story. Dr. Alvin Bryan spoke about the resources offered by the GI Bill during his undergraduate studies. He also cites those resources as his motivation for entering graduate school, and the community they created at Peabody for part of the selection process. It is apparent that to Dr. Alvin Bryan, GI Bill benefits helped to shape his reality; however, sans time machine, it is impossible to

know what would have happened had he not received them. From this observation, the benefits of the GI Bill meant Dr. Alvin Bryan not only had access to fiscal resources, but also to a network and community of students sharing similar experiences as Veterans in college after World War II. The value these networks created would be difficult, if not impossible to evaluate, quantify, and replicate fully in terms of their influence.

The same can be said for his younger brother, Dr. George Bryan. Though not a direct recipient of GI Bill benefits, receipt by his older brother meant a free room while in college and the luxury of turning down a scholarship to a state school in Oklahoma. It also meant that he could afford a “Christian” education that was not available in Oklahoma at that time, but instead chose to attend Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas. Dr. George Bryan chose to complete his graduate studies in Oklahoma because the program he started in Texas was not accredited.

Other policies and programs appear prominently in the participants’ stories. Dr. Shultz briefly mentioned a “5-5-1” program during his doctoral studies. Drs. Wansick and Gilkey both mentioned work-study jobs on campus. Dr. Gilkey stated “they were just throwing money at us,” referring to African American students in the 1980’s; however, she does not define who “they” were.

Dr. Johnson’s story reflects the reality of policy during his undergraduate career: if he failed at school, he would be sent to Vietnam. As the youngest child, he seemed free to return to the farm, and did so during the summer. Later in life, he was the care taker of the farm once his father passed and his mother was unable to maintain it alone. Despite his fondness of the farm, Dr. Johnson stated that if he did not make good grades

and stay in school, he would be drafted. Once again, this observation is not readily testable with a hypothesis, but was important in Dr. Johnson's story. Being in school meant not going to Vietnam. Though a consequence of policy external to education, the reality of Dr. Johnson's environment and the policies that governed it, policy influenced Dr. Johnson's higher education achievements and aspirations.

A final reference to public policy is found in Dr. George Bryan's story. Dr. George Bryan was a Fulbright scholar. As a Fulbright scholar, Dr. George Bryan went to India and started the country's first speech pathology program. Though he would later return to Oklahoma and both teach and practice speech pathology, the resources from the Fulbright program helped Dr. George Bryan to expand the scope and reach of his influence and consequentially his social network.

All of these are examples of how policy influenced the experiences of these first-generation college graduates. The availability of each of these programs was important to each participant's story. Some policies, such as the GI Bill for Dr. Alvin Bryan and the military draft for Dr. Johnson, were espoused openly by the participant. Dr. Gilkey mentioned policy in telling her story, but without specificity. The inclusion of policy, both overtly and as an underlying theme, came from each participant's story organically through oral history. The importance of these programs as part of their stories demonstrates the need to look at first-generation college students' experiences as multiples processes, programs, and encounters that lead to graduation or premature departure from higher education.

Race and First-Generation: Themes in Tandem Found in Oral History

Dr. Gilkey's story is very different from others in this study. As one of the youngest participants in the study and the only participant from a metropolitan area, Dr. Gilkey's experiences reflected the realities of an African American woman attending a primarily White institution in the 1980s. As presented in both chapters four and five, Dr. Gilkey expressed the feeling "I didn't know" when explaining the difficulties she had navigating university life as a first-generation college student. She expressed that she, and many of her fellow first-generation classmates, did not know how to navigate the university and its systems. She did not know how to register, buy books, or use her meal plan—basic transactions that were part of her experience. This sentiment is common to the participants not only in this study but in first-generation college student literature (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). However, Dr. Gilkey focused much of her story on race, which is an element of lived experience that shapes first-generation students. Race was a divergent theme overtly expressed in Dr. Gilkey's story.

Even when answering basic demographic information, Dr. Gilkey hesitated on race and then stated "I'm African American. That's the political term." Race appeared more important to Dr. Gilkey's experiences as a college student, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, than did her first-generation status. It should be noted that Dr. Gilkey was born after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Higher Education Act of 1965. Stories from older participants may not reflect racial observations because they were White. Scholars in critical race studies commonly note that "Whiteness" is often experienced and perceived as an unmarked normative category rather than a race (Johnson, 2005) while people of color are marked as "having race."

Also, some attended college prior to desegregation, and may not have had classmates of color.

At one point, Dr. Gilkey's story stalled. After she told how her mother and father insisted she go to college, her experiences in school, and her hopes for her daughter, a freshman just starting college, Dr. Gilkey became somewhat quiet. Sensing there was more to her story, I asked Dr. Gilkey what else I needed to know about her college experiences. Her response was "No one like[s] to talk about race relations, but unfortunately in Oklahoma we have a predominantly...all of our public campuses are not as diverse." Oklahoma universities are primarily White institutions with several notable exceptions, and all of the schools she attended were primarily White institutions. These key demographics matter in framing the oral histories collected for this study, in particular, Dr. Gilkey's. Her discussion of race, particularly her experiences as an African American college student in the late 1980s, accounted for over half of her oral history.

I found Dr. Gilkey's comments both intriguing and shocking. I am in many ways a peer of Dr. Gilkey. Though at different institutions for most of our college careers, we had similar undergraduate dates of enrollment and were enrolled in the same institution at roughly the same time for our doctoral programs. I, as a White male, wanted to talk about race in her story, once introduced by her, but found difficulty relating to her experiences. When reviewing and analyzing her story, I began to wonder how many times during my fourteen years as an educator I made students feel like they were "anomalies" and did not belong.

Literature shows that first-generation college students of color face a variety of boundaries due to both first-generation status, as well as race at primarily White institutions (Kuh, 2005). Other studies show that these students also have difficulty interacting with faculty (Stick, 2001). The combination of racial barriers and feelings of confusion common to first-generation student populations permeate Dr. Gilkey's story. These themes, occurring concurrently throughout her story, are important to consider when exploring first-generation doctoral students' experiences as over 80% are racial minorities, and 40% are African American (Gardner, 2013).

As an African American woman at a primarily White institution, Dr. Gilkey said she was "looked upon as a[n] anomaly as an African-American attending school." She also expressed observing her "non-African American" classmates having different experiences. She perceived different expectations from faculty at both the undergraduate level and during her doctoral studies. She recalled that White students were offered tutoring and mentoring while African American students were not. Dr. Gilkey also stated that others assumed African American students were all athletes, and during her doctoral program, she was instructed to write like her White classmates. All of Dr. Gilkey's degrees were completed at two different primarily White institutions. Conversely, her discussion of race changed greatly when telling of her master's program where she studied under Dr. Henderson, a "predominant Black professor." While she did not expand greatly on her experience with Dr. Henderson, it should be noted that she was referring to Dr. George Henderson, an influential and respected scholar on race, especially in education. Dr. Henderson has produced dozens of articles, books, book chapters, and other scholarly works, most recently a memoir on the work he did during

his career to at the University of Oklahoma to create space for African American students on college campuses (Henderson, 2010).

In regard to her master's work, Dr. Gilkey's story revolved around the relationships with her peers and faculty. As previously mentioned she appeared proud and honored to have studied under Dr. Henderson. She also spoke fondly and openly about how much more enjoyable her master's work was because of the other minorities she associated with; however, her associations included many minorities, not just African Americans. She also mentioned that many of her other professors were Hispanic and one of her classmates was a sexual minority. Dr. Gilkey appeared to find comfort and value in the fact that she was surrounded by other minority students and faculty during her master's program, even though many were not African American or racial minorities.

Dr. Gilkey's observation that she always knew who she was as an African American woman, but did not realize the implications of being a first-generation college student, mirrors Ward's (2012) assertion. Ward (2012) points out that racial aspects of identity are often "visible," while first-generation status is not. Dr. Gilkey's experiences, as both an African American and first-generation college student reflect Ward's observations. By recognizing others with like traits, for example racial minorities, both formal and informal institutions provide communities within larger, more structured institutions; however, because first-generation status is not readily visible, students are often more difficult to identify and thus may lack the ability to form similar social bonds.

Faculty

The inclusion of Dr. Henderson in Dr. Gilkey's story and the "cheerleader" education faculty member's story display the role and influence faculty can have in students' educational achievement both within and outside of the classroom. Tinto (1993) presents the argument that because faculty are often the primary point of contact with students within the formal institution, their relationships with students are crucial in promoting achievement, persistence, and ultimately graduation. The tension created when this relationship is strained also appeared in Dr. Gilkey's story during her undergraduate and doctoral programs. However, these relationships were rarely mentioned throughout the other participants' stories, which suggested that other relationships may have been more influential in those participants' success.

As noted in chapter five, most participants referred to some kind of social group membership that was external to that of the formal institution. The prevalence of group membership in the participants' stories suggests that perhaps acceptance into groups like church, minority social groups, and military veteran student bodies served as surrogates in place of, and in one case in spite of, formal relationships with the university. This group membership is the essence of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and the role it can play in educational success. These extra-curricular associations provided the participants with the knowledge and support necessary to navigate higher education institutions and processes even though they were not formally created by the universities, and in some cases, completely outside of the universities' control.

Self-Actualization

One theme that tied to persistence, especially graduate programs, was personal accomplishment. This theme is somewhat unique in that is very intrinsic when compared with government programs and scholarship offers. Dr. Alvin Bryan first suggests this when he mentioned that he went to “the best school in the south,” a criteria not seemingly necessary when he chose to begin his undergraduate degree. He echoes this when explaining that he started his doctoral program and became a CPA to impress his students. Dr. Shultz story also contained the analogy of doctoral degrees as “the best tractor” and explained that he never considered quitting school because he would never want to explain to people why he did not finish. Dr. Johnson’s story repeated this idea because he considered quitting his doctoral program, but persisted when he decided to do it for himself—a completely intrinsic motivation synonymous with self-actualization.

First-Generation with Multiple Degrees

The population for this study narrowed from first-generation Oklahoma college graduates to first-generation Oklahoma college graduates with doctoral degrees. This transition occurred organically as participants responding to the call for participants happened to have earned doctoral degrees. After the first two participants, the Drs. Bryan, were found to have earned doctoral degrees and a third participant, Dr. Shultz, was known to hold a doctoral degree, a decision was made to depart from the initial design; by doing so, an additional line of inquiry and understanding developed.

First-generation students working toward graduate degrees struggle to graduate for many of the same reasons as undergraduate first-generation college students (Gardner, 2013; Lunceford, 2011; Seay, Lifton, Wuensh, Bradshaw, & McDowelle, 2008). They

tend to delay enrollment, lack financial resources, and struggle to navigate education institutions. Furthermore, because first-generation students tend to earn undergraduate degrees at universities that do not offer doctoral degrees, they often must learn to navigate another institution to earn their doctoral degrees. Despite these limitations, almost one-third of all doctoral students are first-generation college students (Gardner, 2013).

The addition of a terminal degree as an organic characteristic of the original data and then a requirement for participation, not only narrowed the selection criteria, but helped to grow understanding in a relatively new and growing body of literature. The fact that all but two participants pursued doctoral degrees in an education field is also common for first-generation college students in doctoral programs, as education is the most common field of study for first-generation college students seeking doctoral degrees (Gardner, 2013).

While espoused motivation and benefit was absent from many of participants stories as undergraduate students, each had a distinct purpose and expected benefit for earning additional degrees, especially doctoral degrees. Earning a bachelor degree resulted in leaving a childhood reality. All participants advanced their careers in education by means of additional formal degrees. All participants' careers ultimately steered them toward education even if originating in other fields like accounting or ministry. By seeking careers in education at all levels, participants were able to convey value for education to future generations reminiscent of the roles of Brother Smith and Harry Shackelford in Dr. George Bryan's and Dr. Shultz's stories. Earning doctoral

degrees meant possessing “the best tractor” as educators and served as the ultimate image for the value education held for these participants.

Within the population for this study, the experiences each student had in their undergraduate programs often repeated during their graduate work. For example, Dr. Shultz and Dr. Wansick both took direct, efficient paths through their undergraduate programs and seemed to have little difficulty academically or socially. Similarly, both stated they moved quickly through their doctoral programs and had very distinct aspirations and goals. In contrast, Dr. Johnson spoke of the confusion as an undergraduate student in a large institution and the challenges he had academically. The same was true of his doctoral studies where he became distracted and discouraged both academically and socially. He was the only participant who openly stated that he wanted to quit at one point. Dr. Alvin Bryan’s story centered on relationships, especially with fellow World War II Veteran classmates, at all levels of education. Dr. Gilkey’s story at all levels of education also seemed to revolve around relationships, often formed and influenced by race. These patterns of repeated experiences may be reflective of first-generation status (Gardner, 2013), and either continued accumulation or consistent lack of capital regarding higher education as described by Bourdieu (1973).

The similarity across experience from the undergraduate through doctoral level studies, found within each participant’s unique oral history, displayed the barriers many first-generation students carry throughout their educational careers. The growing population of first-generation college students who are seeking doctoral degrees shows the importance for understanding the experiences and the factors that aid and hinder matriculation of first-generation college students at all degree levels.

Oral History: A Reflection on Method

Perhaps the most important aspect of the current study is that it captured the oral histories of participants from a broad time period. In doing so, stories were told that gave insight into experiences I as the researcher would have never thought to inquire about. While the National Center for Education Statistics (the source I intended to use when beginning the dissertation process) houses and distributes vast amounts of data, it cannot possess nor convey the personal value and context held within each story as people tell “what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, [and] what they now think they did” (Ritchie, 1995, p. 7).

A longitudinal survey and extensive data tables no doubt capture a great deal of statistical measurement on students. Regression and correlation might point to the decline in number of family farms in Oklahoma in concert with an increase in higher education participation, but it cannot convey the meaning of a tractor to a young man from the Oklahoma panhandle who would eventually help lead the development of the vocational technology system in Oklahoma—a system Oklahoma has fostered adjacent to its higher education system to provide vocational training. Dr. Shultz’s oral history also proudly and joyfully included three daughters who have all earned graduate degrees.

Oral history also helped to capture the experiences of three brothers from the same farm in Tillman County. While from the exact same demographic and family background (race, religion, income, etc.) each had different, individual experiences that appear in their stories. The impacts of The Great Depression and World War II are prominent in their stories, and due to the age of the participants, only available for a very short period of time. Walter will never re-tell his story and Alvin has “senior moments”

where he does not recall details about events. We all have a story that will vanish with us unless someone preserves and protects it, and the value of that story may not be known until hundreds of years in the future (Ritchie, 1995).

Dr. Johnson's story told of life on a college campus during the Vietnam War. While the setting is easily triangulated with historical accounts of the war, Dr. Johnson's oral history captured the fear of a young man and his peers who might ultimately be drafted into military service and sent to fight. It also captured the joy of a pond stocked with fish "way back then" and the proud parent of two college graduates.

Uncomfortable silence in one account led to the recounting of experiences as not only a first-generation student, but also an African American woman from what appeared to be a fairly low economic background. These demographic traits are widely documented and reflected in first-generation literature (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Munoz, 2012); however, the realities these characteristics created in the participant's story could never be captured by mere nominal or ordinal data. The meaning held in "African American" and "female" that emerged from Dr. Gilkey's story were particularly interesting and meaningful to me as a researcher because I as a White male can never share similar experiences.

Dr. Wansick's quest to use higher education as a means of "stability" for not only herself, but also for her young daughter provided a special insight into the motivation of a young, single mother. While I share the experience of being a young, single parent as Dr. Wansick, we took *vastly* different paths through higher education, and I used education as an "excuse" for not providing stability to my children.

The stories contain many “firsts” in addition to being the first in a family to finish college. They told of the first school buses and the impacts those buses had on Oklahoma education as school districts consolidated. They told of leaving the farm and being the first in a family not to rely on agriculture. They told of going to India and starting a speech pathology program—the first in that country. They proudly told of children—the first generation to go to college with the advantage of having a parent who knew the value and process of higher education.

Perhaps the greatest example of the power of oral history for me as a neophyte researcher came from a story tangent and external to this study. I called Walter Bryan on a Monday afternoon to schedule an interview for the following Friday afternoon to which he replied “at my age you can’t plan four days in advance.” I called that Friday morning as he requested and scheduled (through his wife) a time to meet that afternoon. When I arrived Walter was tired and often drifted off to sleep, but his wife encouraged me to continue because Walter really wanted to help. As time went on, Walter became more alert and proudly told of his early life in Tillman County in greater detail than his younger brothers Alvin and George predicted, but did not remember. During one of Walter’s “naps” when recording was paused, his wife told of a hail storm soon after they were married that wiped out their cotton crop. She went on to tell about how they gathered hail stones and used them to make ice cream—a shining example of how challenge and perhaps even tragedy was transformed into opportunity and celebration. This story not only shows how oral history captured an experience that would someday surely be lost, but also provides a great analogy of how all the participants in this study took

experiences that seemingly created obstacles and turned them into opportunities and accomplishments.

Summary

The collection and examination of the oral histories of these first-generation Oklahoma college students revealed several significant themes which were important in their experiences.

1. Oklahoma, specifically the time in Oklahoma's history in which each oral history occurred, mattered to the participant's experiences. This is evident particularly in the "farm kids" stories and the proximity of some participants' homes to the college they chose to attend. Oral history allowed participants to frame experiences and perceptions within each individual's personal context.
2. In addition to first-generation status, other demographic factors were important to participants' experiences. This is especially apparent in Dr. Alvin Bryan's story as it related to being a veteran of World War II and Dr. Gilkey's story as an African American woman.
3. Educational attainment and expectations seemed to increase across the generations reflected in the data. All participants came from families with at least one parent who did not graduate from high school, and most from families with parents who did not attend high school. All participants now hold doctoral degrees and all of their children either hold or are in the process of earning bachelor degrees, and some already hold advanced degrees.

Literature suggests that this has improved likelihood that future generations will earn college degrees.

4. Progression toward doctoral degrees is common among first-generation college students, and first-generation college graduates make up a significant portion of doctoral student populations; however, the factors that inhibit first-generation undergraduate students often persist in graduate programs.
5. The fact that all of the first-generation students in this study earned doctoral degrees suggests that they were able to overcome the obstacles they encountered along their educational journeys and earned multiple degrees.
6. Public policy, though not specific to first-generation college students, was important in each participant's story.
7. By collecting data through oral history, participants narrated their experiences in their own words, expressing and highlighting experiences and factors that they deemed important to understanding their experiences as first-generation college students from Oklahoma.
8. The trend among first-generation student to be employed more than their peers (Choy, 2001) often appears as a reason for lack of first-generation college student persistence; however, the participants in this study were all able to work and generate the financial resources that ultimately helped them graduate.

Implications for practice, research and theory

Practice.

This study provides great opportunity for understanding the actual, contextualized experiences of first-generation students from Oklahoma who are also graduates of Oklahoma institutions of higher education. As stated previously, many contemporary Oklahoma institutions participate in programs designed to aid first-generation college students. These “first-to-go” programs are designed to help students that “don’t know” how to navigate the higher education process. Some participants who attended college before these programs existed received direction from faculty, both at the undergraduate and graduate level; however, most participants found support from social networks tangential to the university. While the formal programs were not developed by the university, these participants formed “mentoring” programs through association at church, with minority students, and fellow veterans. Creation of formal networking and assistance programs within the university geared toward first-generation college students may have helped these participants navigate higher education. By understanding how previous generations were able to matriculate through to graduation without programmatic assistance, institutions and policy makers might be able to emulate similar results by encouraging and facilitating similar behavior.

“First-to-go” programs often focus on undergraduate students; however, an expanding body of literature and this study show that factors that inhibit first-generation students at the undergraduate level often persist in graduate programs. As such, it may be beneficial for “first-to-go” programs to expand their scope to include graduate students.

Conversely, due to the trend among first-generation college student populations to lack academic preparation, perhaps addressing the problems faced by many first-generation college students *before* they begin college could aid in both college attendance and persistence.

Within the body of first-generation college students, certain populations have specific risk factors. First-generation high school students are particularly at risk (Choy, 2001). Racial minority students also face additional challenges to graduation (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). By coordination of programs and addressing specific needs within the first-generation population, institutions and policy makers can holistically approach disparate graduation rates of first-generation college students at all levels of higher education.

Increased graduation rates are especially important for Oklahoma to meet its stated education rates and demands from the labor market, and continued grooming of educated citizens for society in general. By increasing the number of first-generation college students who attend college and graduate with bachelor degrees, not only does the number of degreed citizens rise, but the probability of future generations earning college degrees does as well. By completing a bachelor degree, a first-generation college student can become a conduit of capital and degree attainment for many that follow.

From the organic emergence of first-generation Oklahoma college students who earned doctoral degrees as the population for this study, several themes became apparent that have practical application. Perhaps the most apparent and important is that while levels of education increased, the participants in the study retained many of the traits that

contributed to their experiences. Each carried forward challenges as well as their aptitudes throughout their educational experiences. As first-generation college students become larger portions of doctoral cohorts, institutions, both formal and informal, must aid student progression. As racial minorities make up large portions of first-generation college student populations in doctoral programs, the challenges associated with combining multiple factors affecting matriculation must be addressed.

While “first-to-go” programs often seek to enhance the experiences of first-generation college students, especially during their first two years in college, the implications for their success can be vast and have repercussions for generations to come. As displayed in these participants oral histories, completion of a college degree lead to greater educational aspiration and achievement in their children and grandchildren. Of equal importance, and not addressed in the literature, by completing doctoral degrees and choosing to work in education, these first-generation college students who earned doctoral degrees impacted thousands of students in their combined 200 plus years working in education. This passage of value for higher education from one generation to the next is not only reflective of Bourdieu’s theories of reproduction and capital (1973, 1977, 1986), but invaluable as Oklahoma seeks to increase the education level of its people.

In addition to “first-to-go” programs, public policy affected these first-generation college students throughout their educational careers. Though only one brief reference to a “5-5-1” program appeared directly in these oral histories regarding doctoral programs, all stories contained evidence of benefits derived from educational programs or social policies. Almost 50 years removed from the Higher Education Act of 1965 and 70 from

President Truman's study, perhaps a holistic, systemic re-evaluation of higher education policy is necessary. By realizing the realities housed in colleges and universities, perhaps more efficient and effective programs can develop to address the needs of not only first-generation students, but other classes not yet identified who struggle to persist.

Both existing literature and this study show that first-generation students often struggle to navigate educational institutions because their parents did not have experiences that taught them how to do so. This lack of information passage from one generation to another may not be exclusive to first-generation students. As stated previous, when recruiting students, one potential participant discovered that his father had a bachelor degree. This suggests that education stories were rare in their family even though the parent had a degree. If parents cannot or do not pass along information about how to navigate educational systems and institutions to their children, these students, though second-generation, may not have the capital needed to succeed.

In addition to first-generation specific practices, this study also presents implications for current and future Oklahomans. Just as the changes and transitions in family farms and industry are found in the participant's stories, similar changes in economy and industry will most certainly appear one day in today's students' stories. One day history will tell of changes in the oil and natural gas industries brought on by changes in technology such as horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracking. Farm kids may one day tell about genetically engineered crops, ethanol subsidies and the ongoing drought of 2012-2014 which is affecting agriculture as these words are being written. One day the Internet may be old technology.

While impossible to predict, modern realities for today's students will one day be history, and these modern realities echo those found in the stories of these participants. As energy becomes an increasingly larger part of Oklahoma's economy, it is important to remember the oil boom and subsequent bust of the 1980s and the social and economic devastation it caused in Oklahoma. Similarly, changes in production, irrigation, and other technologies and policies will further change the meaning and nature of family farms in Oklahoma. And finally, as online education becomes more common at all levels, the Internet may one day change Oklahoma's educational system in much the same way the Bryan Brother's parents school bus did: dramatically.

Research.

A large and growing body of literature exists regarding first-generation college students and the factors that contribute to and inhibit their success in college. The current study is unique in that it focuses on first-generation college students from Oklahoma, a state that historically has underperformed other states in regard to higher education attainment. By examining first-generation students from Oklahoma, the historical role Oklahoma played in their decision to attend college and reasons for persistence became evident. By narrowing the scope of the study to include only first-generation college students who earned doctoral degrees, the study developed a somewhat new line of inquiry.

As all progressed through higher education and earned doctoral degrees, their experiences as first-generation students at all levels of education are in evidence. This

local study is important because many of the policies discussed previously, though developed nationally, are administered at the state and institutional levels.

The inter-generational expansion of educational attainment found in this study is also somewhat uncommon in literature. Though literature exists related to college participation by first-generation high school graduates, first-generation college students at both the undergraduate and graduate level, and second-generation and beyond college students, this study contains evidence into the experiences of students from all of these levels. The broad range of educational attainment found within this study expands a niche within the literature.

While the emergence of first-generation doctoral students as a population makes this study timely and salient, themes found within their stories also make this study unique. The wide range of ages of the participants helps to shed light on experiences throughout Oklahoma's history. These stories can only be captured for a brief period of time as evidenced by the fact that Walter Bryan died less than three months after contributing his oral history to this study. Without understanding the experiences of the "shirt-sleeved multitude," (Ritchie, 1993, p.3) society is perhaps doomed to repeat its history.

This historical perspective also provided a window into life on family farms in Oklahoma. Understanding the importance of family farms is paramount to understanding how Oklahoma has developed economically, industrially, and socially over the past century. While this study focused on Oklahoma, similar transitions may have occurred in other states in the Midwest that once relied more heavily on agriculture as not only an

economic base, but also held symbolic capital in the meaning represented by family farms. While the past century was represented in the experiences of participants in this study, it is interesting to note that Manhattan was also once a center of hunting, trapping, and agriculture for Native Americans, and that history is almost invisible in today's jungle of skyscrapers and financial institutions.

The inclusion of additional themes that occur in tandem with first-generation students experiences also adds to a variety of lines of inquiry. The overt expression of race in Dr. Gilkey's story points to the fact that racially created barriers still permeate society 50 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Her reluctance to identify and then her classification of herself as the "politically correct" term "African American," coupled with the statement that "no one wants to talk about race relations," displays the tension such valuable and necessary dialog can create. Dr. Gilkey's reluctance, along with the researcher's hesitation when writing chapter four, to label another minority class based on sexual orientation, is perhaps indicative of multiple additional tandem classes of first-generation college students who may be hidden and thus underserved by institutions of higher education.

Theory.

In addition to practice and literature, this study also contains implications for theory. Bourdieu's (1973) theory on Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction, served as the theoretical lens for many studies on first-generation college students. This literature often frames its analysis with Bourdieu's (1973) Social Reproduction and Cultural reproduction and other tenants. This theory contends that values and beliefs are

passed from one generation (parents) to another (children) regarding social status and social mobility. One means of gaining increased social status is through increased levels of education, and specifically in these studies, higher education. This is true of studies regarding first-generation college students at both the undergraduate as well as graduate levels. This study is unique in that it examines the experiences of students across multiple levels of education and displays how capital flourished across generations from various times through Oklahoma's history by means of education, especially higher education.

Additional parameters and theoretical lenses could also be used to analyze these oral histories. In addition to Bourdieu's theories, multiple motivational theories might prove enlightening and provide a different paradigm of understanding. Some might include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. These theories might not only help to frame the experiences of the participants while in college, but also their motivation for attending and earning advanced degrees outside of the realm of monetary costs and rewards. Hossler's (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) theory and model of institution selection and choice might also provide additional understanding as to why these students chose to attend college and selected their specific schools.

The passage of capital from parent to children is evident in this study through educational attainment of subsequent generations. While increased graduation rates for second-generation college students is well documented, a somewhat unique trend emerged from the data as all graduates who had older siblings—siblings who went to college and did not graduate—not only graduated, but often had innate expectations of

attending college. This seems to suggest increased value of education passed laterally across family trees in addition to post-generational transmission often studied in first generation literature.

Future Research

As portrayed in chapter two, a large and ever growing body of research exists pertaining to first-generation college students. Many studies parse out specific populations of first-generation students by race, religion, and a variety of other identifiers. To further this line of inquiry, similar studies could focus on other classes not commonly found currently in literature such as minorities based on sexual orientation and students who identify with multiple races; both populations are becoming more openly identifiable on college campuses. Another line of inquiry that might develop is *why* such large populations of women and racial minority first-generation students earn doctoral degrees, especially in the fields of education and social sciences.

Similar studies could be performed with participants who were all recent college graduates. Their experiences would be more reflective of current environments and institutions. A similar study consisting of all urban participants in Oklahoma could provide another layer of understanding. Even with the same historical contexts, rural to urban migration in Oklahoma could have substantially different meaning and consequences for urban populations than it did for this largely rural one. Perhaps the obvious quantitative study that could be performed with similar parameters would be to assess the overall success rates of first-generation students in Oklahoma. Though Oklahoma institutions of higher education receive substantial funding for TRIO

programs, at the time this study was conducted, graduation rates for first-generation college students remained unavailable at the state level, and unpublished at the institutional level in Oklahoma.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for future research regarding not only first-generation students, but many classifications of students who traditionally struggle to persist in higher education, is determining why and how students within those populations are successful. St. John, Hu, and Fisher's (2011) theories of academic capital formation bring together ideas of family values for education, reflective of Bourdieu (1977, 1986), factors that contribute to success, and public policies that traditionally have encouraged access.

Academic capital formation focuses on determining what makes students successful instead of merely identifying factors that contribute to low participation and graduation rates. By changing the focus of retention and persistence research to explore how and why students persist and graduate, researchers can help practitioners develop programs and cultures that contribute to students' successes. In addition, the authors call for dynamic, sweeping changes in education systems and develop ideas that might aid educators in fostering systems and programs that better serve students who often struggle to graduate in higher education such as low-income students.

Pre-college preparation and college selection processes are also key tenants of academic capital formation. St. John, Hu, and Fisher (2011) point to different participation rates by certain student populations, such as low-income students and racial minorities, at private and selective universities. Thus, their model begins with the college

selection process and carries through until graduation, and addresses a myriad of policies such as academics, finances, and inclusion in campus culture.

Conclusion

This study intended to examine the oral histories of first-generation college students from Oklahoma who earned bachelor degrees. Through an emergent process, oral histories were collected and analyzed from first-generation Oklahoma college students who not only earned bachelor degrees, but also went on to earn doctoral degrees. Once recorded and transcribed, data were analyzed and coded according to themes found within the data corpus. These themes were either found within to be unique to a particular participant's story (divergent theme), or appeared across the stories of several participants (convergent theme). Together these stories gave insights into life, particularly regarding education, dating back to the early twentieth century. This longitudinal, historical perspective developed by recruiting and selecting participants from various times throughout Oklahoma's history. Together these oral histories helped to build an understanding of the experiences each participant recalled, in the context in which it occurred.

Afterward

As previously stated, I am a first-generation college student. Neither my father nor mother earned a bachelor degree. I, like many first-generation college students, meandered through school. By the time I finally graduated, I was married, had two children, a career, and was 29 years old.

I resemble many of the participants in this study in a variety of ways. Both of my parents grew up in rural areas of West Texas. My father's parents farmed and ran a grain elevator in South Plains, Texas. My father earned a GED after joining the Army. His career in the Army took our family across the country and around the world. In 1981 we returned Lubbock, Texas when my father retired from the Army.

My mother grew up on a cotton farm between Hale Center and Cotton Center, Texas. She attended Lubbock Christian College and earned an associate degree before marrying my dad. She is a dedicated homemaker who worked tirelessly to raise my brother and me. She and my father were happily married until his passing in 2011.

My brother briefly attended college immediately after graduating high school but left to learn a trade. He, like my father, is an experiential learner and master of many crafts. He has credentials as an automotive mechanic, electrician, plumber, and heating and air-conditioning technician. Currently he manages the physical assets of a small, Christian, liberal arts university.

I attended college because I always expected to. I did very well in high school and took extra classes in science, math, and Latin. I always planned to become a physician, but somehow ignored the fact that blood and other bodily fluids make me ill. Without a clear plan of study, a very active social life, and mounting family obligations, I briefly left college, returning only when my employer would pay for it. I started a master's program because one of my classmates urged me to and my employer also paid for it.

My educational journey, like many of the participants, is framed as much or more by relationships as academic details. As an undergraduate student at Texas Tech, I was a member of Saddle Tramps, a social and service organization. My father often said, though only somewhat in jest, that I was majoring in Saddle Tramps. Some of my fellow members are like brothers to this day. My doctoral cohort consisted of other educators looking to advance and expand careers. Most of us had families and extended a great deal of support to one another when facing chaos in class, from the institution in general, or in personal and professional circumstances. Since ending classwork, this lack of direct, daily support from classmates has made the dissertation process lonely and chaotic.

I started teaching adjunct at the request of one of my undergraduate professors soon after earning my masters. After a year of adjunct teaching coupled with the stresses found in public accounting in 2002, I left industry and moved full time into higher education as a professor and director of enrollment management. Thus, like the participants in this study, I used higher education to not only advance but switched my career path to education.

As I reflect on this process, I see the characteristics common in first-generation college students throughout my doctoral work. I am the last of my cohort in my doctoral program who is working on a dissertation. Though I have a decade of experience working in higher education and over two decades experience as a student, I still find myself lost at times in the educational process.

Since the beginning of my educational career I, like many other first-generation college students, felt lost in the world of higher education, but never knew how or why I might need to express such feelings. As an undergraduate student, I gave thousands of prospective and incoming students campus tours, all the while struggling to understand how to graduate and rarely attending class, even though I entered college with over thirty credit hours and a fairly high SAT score. I began working full time in higher education as the director of admissions on a college campus, though I felt lost and inadequate in that position. This reflects “imposter syndrome,” a construct found in first-generation college students, and many other classes of students, in higher education who, despite qualifications and abilities, often feel that they do not belong or deserve to be there (Leonard, 2014).

In addition to collecting and presenting data, building this study has helped me complete my education, not only as a matter academic requirement, but also as a means of personal, intrinsic motivation. Dr. Johnson’s comment that he finished when he “began writing for himself” cause me to reflect and evaluate who I was doing this study for. I have a very good career, and for the most part enjoy my current employment. I have little desire to move into administration (one of my goals when beginning my doctoral program) and even less to move back into industry. Dr. Johnson helped me to realize that drive required for completing this document is almost completely intrinsically motivated, and for that realization, I am grateful. Had I not realized I had to write this for myself—not for my advisors, employer or family—I never would have finished.

The study of other first-generation college students has helped me see characteristics, experiences, and difficulties similar to ones I experienced throughout my

educational career. I find them fascinating and somewhat frustrating, and that makes writing this document both difficult and cathartic. My hope is that it makes the educational experience somehow better for a first-generation college student, particularly in Oklahoma, my home since 1997. God has blessed me with three wonderful children. The oldest holds a bachelor in education and works at The University of Texas. The second is working toward two bachelors and a master degree in business, and the youngest was just named to the gifted and talent program—in second grade. Perhaps more than anything, I, like the participants of this study, hope to provide my children with the resources necessary to live full, productive lives, and education is one of the primary tools I believe will help them accomplish those goals.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Solicitation Letter

Jody Jones
2501 E Memorial Rd
Edmond Ok 73013

Date ##

Dear _____:

I am researching the experience of first-generation college students from Oklahoma. For this study, first-generation college students are defined as students for whom neither parent had a bachelor degree. You were suggested to me by

_____.

As a fellow first-generation college graduate, I value your experience and I hope you can contribute to this study.

Participation will require an audio recorded interview(s) . Responses will be kept in strict confidence. Please let me know what other information I can provide about the study. I may be contacted at:

405-425-5590 or jody.jones@okstate.edu.

Please call or email me if you are willing to participate in this study. If I have not heard from you, I may follow up by telephone in about two weeks.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jody L Jones

Appendix B

Phone Solicitation Script

Mr/Ms_____.

My name is Jody Jones and I am a student at Oklahoma State University. I recently sent you a letter regarding research I am conducting on the experiences of first generation students.

Can I make an appointment to meet with you regarding your experience as a first-generation college student?

If you chose to participate, all information and correspondence will be kept in strict confidence.

Appendix C

Interview Demographic Questions

Name _____

Date of Interview: _____

Location of Interview: _____

DOB: _____

Place of HS Graduation _____

Date of college graduation _____

College Attended _____

Major _____

Pseudonym requested _____

Race _____

Appendix D-Interview Tracking Form

Interview Tracking	
Interviewer's name:	Interviewee's name, address, & telephone:
<input type="checkbox"/> interviewee contacted	<input type="checkbox"/> accession number assigned
<input type="checkbox"/> interviewee answer received	<input type="checkbox"/> recordings transcribed
<input type="checkbox"/> interview date: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> recordings indexed
<input type="checkbox"/> preliminary research done	<input type="checkbox"/> interviewee release form signed
<input type="checkbox"/> interview guide completed	<input type="checkbox"/> interviewer release form signed
<input type="checkbox"/> interview completed	<input type="checkbox"/> photo release form signed
<input type="checkbox"/> recordings labeled	<input type="checkbox"/> life history formed completed
<input type="checkbox"/> interviewer notes completed	<input type="checkbox"/> end product completed
<input type="checkbox"/> articles/photos borrowed (list with date)	<input type="checkbox"/> recordings archived
<input type="checkbox"/> articles/photos returned(list with date)	<input type="checkbox"/> paperwork copied and archived
<input type="checkbox"/> recordings copied	

Appendix E
IRB Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, November 26, 2013 Protocol Expires: 9/16/2016
IRB Application No: ED11164
Proposal Title: Historical Experiences of First Generation Oklahoma College Students

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt
Modification

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) **Approved**

Principal Investigator(s):

Jody Jones
2501 E. Memorial Rd.
Edmond, OK 73013

Lucy Bailey
215 Willard Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Kerri Shutz Kearney
315 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

The requested modification to this IRB protocol has been approved. Please note that the original expiration date of the protocol has not changed. The IRB office **MUST** be notified in writing when a project is complete. All approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:

Modification to add Dr. Bailey as co-advisor

Signature :



Shelia Kennison, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Tuesday, November 26, 2013
Date

Appendix F

IRB Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, September 17, 2013 Protocol Expires: 9/16/2016
IRB Application No: ED11164
Proposal Title: Historical Experiences of First Generation Oklahoma College Students

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt
Continuation

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) **Approved**

Principal Investigator(s)

Jody Jones
2501 E. Memorial Rd.
Edmond, OK 73013

Kerri Shutz Kearney
315 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:

The following modifications are approved: 1) reduce number of subjects to 6, 2) increase the length of the interview, 3) change from interviews to oral histories, and 4) add an oral history release form.

Signature :



Shelia Kennison, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Tuesday, September 17, 2013
Date

VITA

Jody L. Jones

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: ORAL HISTORIES OF FIRST-GENERATION OKLAHOMA COLLEGE
GRADUATES WHO EARNED DOCTORAL DEGREES

Major Field: Higher Education Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in higher education administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2014.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Business Administration at Oklahoma City University, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 2001.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in business administration at Oklahoma Wesleyan University, Bartlesville, Oklahoma in 2000.

Experience:

2006-Present Associate Professor, Finance, Oklahoma Christian University

2002-2006 AGS Director of Enrollment Services, Oklahoma Wesleyan University

Professional Memberships:

New York Society of Security Analysts
Christian Business Faculty Association