

# Johns and Lynch's Hypotheses of Relationship Development for First-Generation Women Students

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Many theories that student affairs professionals learn and practice, both in past and present, have been created and applied to understand the development of students with historically privileged identities (Patton et al., 2016). While theories of student development have expanded to include students with minoritized identities, there are still many scholars that do not acknowledge how theory may not be easily applied to all students equally, or how certain theories can be inapplicable for some students based on their backgrounds, experiences, and intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Because of this exclusionary history, we have decided to explore the intersection of gender and first-generation status. Although women are attending college and university at higher average rates, than men today (Matias, 2019), and that 56% of today's college students identify as first-generation (RTI International, 2019), these populations have largely been ignored in previous developmental theories. We present hypotheses that recognize the unique social development of first-generation women students. We also address how the differing states of various relationships contribute to feelings of support and belonging within higher education. This feeling of support and belonging is important because as an antecedent to involvement on campus and in the classroom, students need to feel like they matter and are cared for (Schlossberg, 1989). Additionally, when students feel connected and supported, they feel more committed to the institution, and therefore are more likely to persist in their education (Brown, Morning, & Watkins, 2005; Tinto, 2017).

In order to further understand relationships and the impact that they have on the development of first-generation women students, we have chosen to focus on three types of interpersonal relationships. We emphasize family relationships, peer relationships, and mentor relationships as being impactful on the development of first-generation women students' sense of belonging in higher education because of the array of evidence that suggests these relationships are significant for first-generation students generally (Rodriguez et al, 2003; Morse & Shulze, 2013; Martina, 2019; Demetriou et al 2017). Our selection of relationships is also informed by Bronfenbrenner's definition of interpersonal relationships in a student's microsystem (1993). This will be discussed further in the relevant theories section.

The hypotheses will explore how these relationships contribute to the students' sense of belonging and development overall in college. Before we examine these different relationships, we will discuss important considerations for this research and why we have chosen to study this population.

Finally, we would be remiss if there was no mention of the subjectivity in the formulation of our hypotheses. This work has not been replicated to prove validity, nor have we collected qualitative or quantitative data to support our claims. We address this further in the practical application section of this paper. We refer to our work as hypotheses and not as a theory

because, as Love (2012) describes, our work cannot explain, predict, or control student behavior in the way "formal" theory might, but it can guide the behavior of practitioners working with this population. Love articulates that formal theory is typically considered more valid than informal theory in the academy, but we resist this pattern. Grounded in academic research, our work has also been guided by self-reflection, exploration, and storytelling with other women and first-generation students in our lives. We suggest that these informal types of data collection are all worthy sources of information.

## Considerations

There are varying definitions of what it means to be a first-generation college student. For the purpose of this work, we refer to the definition used by the Higher Education Act (HEA). The HEA defines a first-generation college student as "(A) An individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree; or (B) In the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree." (Amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965). This definition is widely accepted by many support programs for first-generation students, including federally funded TRiO programs and programs through student affairs organizations such as NASPA ("Council for Opportunity in Education: Events", n.d.). We have chosen to use this definition in an effort to reach a wider scope of students than more restrictive definitions may allow.

The overall body of research on first-generation students has expanded considerably in the last two decades. Much of this research analyzes first-generation status alone, though often in tandem with social class and/or socioeconomic status (SES) (Ardoin, 2018; Azmitia et al., 2018; Hurst, 2010). While SES refers to income and other forms of wealth, social class encompasses wealth along with forms of capital, educational status, occupation and culture (Ardoin, 2018). In the literature, first-generation students are often found to come from low-income or working-class backgrounds (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). When discussing the development of first-generation students in higher education, we believe that the use of social class is often a better fit, given that the definition describes a more holistic experience. For example, if first-generation students do not come from a poor SES background, the term "social class" (whether it be working-class, lower-middle class, etc.) may still encompass and describe their experiences. Since the higher education system historically aligns with middle and upper-class norms and values, using the term "class" instead of SES may be beneficial in helping faculty, staff, and researchers understand the students' experience as it relates or differs from the middle and upper-class culture of higher education beyond fiscal terms. Given that the system of higher education in the United States is highly stratified and privileges middle and upper-class students, it is almost certain that students who come from poor, working or lower-class backgrounds will recognize differences in the norms, values, and beliefs of their families and social networks compared to those in the higher education system (Kammerer, 2019).

For this work, we hypothesize that the intersection of first-generation status with gender identity can have a significant impact on student development. While there is growing work on first-generation students and women in higher education, the intersection of these identities has

not been explored sufficiently in the academy thus far. At the time of this paper, the only formal scholarly research we discovered on this specific population was the work of Youngblood-Giles (2018). Based on our own experiences, anecdotal evidence, and research, we need to address the intersection of these identities the specific biases and discrimination first-generation women students face due to the unique intersection of classism and patriarchy.

## **Women and their Relationships**

Much of the research that explores the development of women or first-generation students in higher education is often framed in a deficit lens, focusing on what first-generation students do not have in relation to other students, or what they need to do to “catch up” to their peers (Ardoin, 2018). Instead of focusing on what first-generation women do not possess, our theory will focus on the ways in which this population’s ability to cultivate relationships serves as an asset in their development.

One reason to examine the relationships between these women is because students do not learn and grow in isolation. Much of the development that students undergo in college is in community or relationships with others (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); this is especially salient for women students. According to Janet L. Surrey’s 1983 “self-in-relation” theory of women’s development, women do not typically view relationships as separate from work or activities and are encouraged to work and act in connection with others. Self-in-relation theory posits that for women, the primary experience of the “self” is developed relationally, or in the context of their important relationships (Surrey, 1983). Additionally, women’s self-concept is more highly defined by interpersonal relationships than that of other genders, especially during transition to the late adolescent stage of development, which is often correlated with college attendance and is the age group on which our theory focuses (Hagerty, Willaims, Coyne, & Early, 1997).

It is our view that women’s capacity for empathy and interest in connection with others is a unique strength; thus, an emphasis on interpersonal relationships is necessary for a deeper understanding of this demographic’s development. These components of development are often overlooked as a consequence of the aforementioned exclusionary history of higher education in the United States. High value is often placed on notions of self-reliance and independence that are rooted in an individualistic perspective (Surrey, 1983), and we seek to challenge that assumption by orienting our work towards community, and centering relationships as essential to student development.

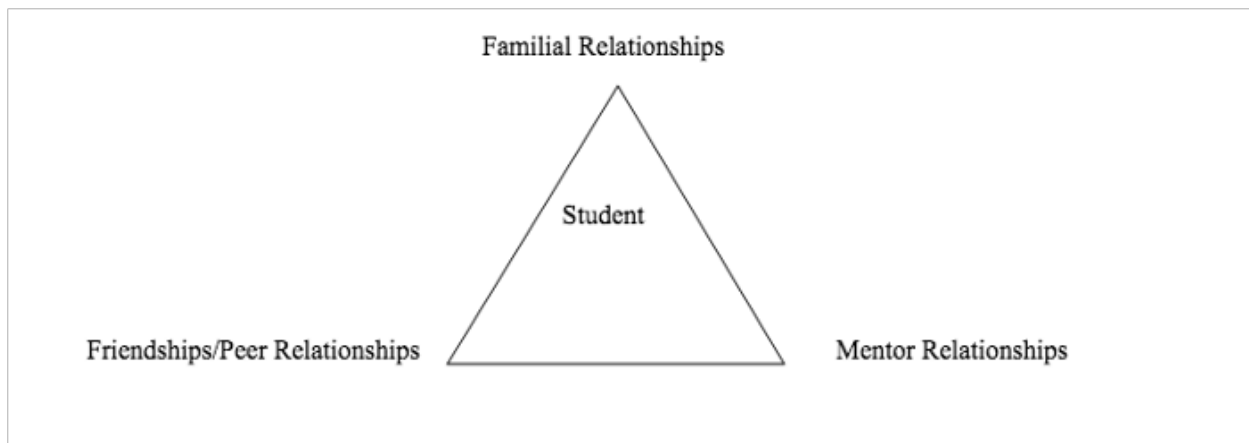
Finally, focusing on women can motivate other women-identified scholars and students to feel empowered in their abilities, inspired by the individuals and communities they engage with, and more deeply connected to the relationships they have. As described previously, relationships are an essential component of students’ feelings of belonging and support in a higher education setting (Brown, Morning, & Watkins, 2005; Tinto 2017). It is our hope that when other first-generation women (or continuing generation women) read this work, it inspires them to reflect on the effectiveness, productivity, and congruence of their current relationships and how they can cultivate new relationships that will encourage growth and provide support in their educational experience.

## Relevant Theories

It is widely understood that relationships are considered significant developmental factors for college students, for example in Bronfenbrenner's Developmental Ecology Model (1979). There are four components to development ecology: process, person, context, and time. Most relevant to this discussion is context, where Bronfenbrenner outlines a nested model of the levels of context (drawn as concentric circles by Renn and Arnold (2003) to illustrate the collegiate environment). The example includes the macrosystem, the exosystem, the mesosystem, and the microsystem, all surrounding the student. A student's microsystem includes patterns of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships that students experience as they develop in college (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The microsystem's inclusion of relationships as a part of development makes this contextual element most pertinent to our discussion, as it honors that students are shaped by their social environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory of self-authorship has three dimensions: the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Specifically looking at the interpersonal dimension, the question that students must ask of themselves is "How will I choose to construct relationships with others?" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 366). In following Baxter Magolda's (2001) developmental phases, students begin by allowing others to define them in phase 1, to being more authentic instead of waiting for others to define them in phase 2, to renegotiating relationships to meet their needs in phase 3, to having mutuality in relationships in phase 4. The interpersonal dimension can help us understand how students may or may not choose to be engaged with relationships depending on which phase they are in. In phases 1 and 2, students may feel more restricted and allow other individuals in relationships to dictate how they will function (2001). In contrast, in phases 3 and 4, students may feel that if relationships are not adding anything to their lives or development, or if they feel their relationships are unsupportive and not meeting their needs, they may choose to end those relationships and find other individuals in the same type of relational category (2001). They may find a different mentor or may seek out other individuals to provide the support they need (e.g., if your family is unsupportive, you find more peers in your same situation and bond over mutual experiences).

## Relationship Development Model



The structural model for our hypotheses represents a triangle that surrounds the student,

with each type of interpersonal relationship forming each side. As the student begins to cultivate these engaging and encouraging relationships, the student should feel a strong sense of belonging and support. This visual representation speaks to the nature of positive and affirmative relationships, which can surround the student with care and support to help them feel empowered and motivated in their academic studies and engagement outside of the classroom (Schlossberg, 1989).

If these relationships are established before the student pursues higher education, they will most likely shift and change when the student encounters new information that they bring to the relationship. The changes and adaptations in relationships continue as the student has new experiences over the course of their education. The new knowledge that the student acquires contributes to shaping the individual's values, identity and social relationships (Patton et al., 2016, p. 355). Because of the dynamic nature of relationships, this model is fluid and malleable across time. As individuals change, so do their relationships, which causes fluctuation in levels of support that those relationships provide.

In the following sections, we describe how the nature of these relationships runs along a spectrum, with changing levels of support as they relate to the student in a higher education setting. At any point, each relationship may be at a different point on the spectrum, which can indicate more or less support coming from these relationships. This scale is meant to be used as a general guideline to help students and scholars assess relationships, but not to define them into absolute categories. We contend that as relationships lean towards the more supportive and encouraging end of the spectrum, the student will feel a greater sense of belonging to their college or university.

Additionally, if a student has multiple relationships that do not lean towards the supportive side of the spectrum, this is not a reflection on the student. This does not necessarily imply that the student lacks any personal characteristics that prevent them from having supportive relationships, nor does it mean that the student cannot ever feel supported or like they belong in a higher education environment. Finally, though the three relationships we have included are particularly consequential for first-generation women, it is worth noting that other forms of support outside of familial, mentor, and peer relationships can also be beneficial for students such as romantic partnerships or peer mentorships.

## Familial Relationships



Family discourages educational goals, do not provide any type of support (emotional, informational, appraisal or instrumental) and have no contact	Family is encouraging of educational goals, student has contact with family, but family is unable to provide any support because of lack of resources	Family is encouraging of educational goals, student has contact with family, family provides minimal support	Family is encouraging of educational goals, student has frequent contact with family, family provides a great deal of support
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For first-generation students, beginning a journey in higher education often means moving away from family and moving up in social class upon completion of a degree. It also means learning the norms and values of the higher education system, which may conflict or differ from those that the student already holds. This time also can mark a new phase of life and increased independence. Because of these changes, there are often tensions or disagreements between a first-generation student and their family. There are several ways this tension may manifest.

First, if the student decides to adapt to their environment with the new norms and beliefs they are presented with, the family can feel as though the student is betraying them. The family may see this as an attempt to assimilate into an environment the family is unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable with, or does not want to identify with (Azmitia, Sumabat-Estrada, Cheong & Covarrubias 2018). They could also see this assimilation as a way to reach upward class mobility, which may look as though the student is embarrassed of their class of origin (Ardoin 2018; Hurst 2010). Additionally, the family may feel upset or struggle with division of labor once the student begins attending college, since women are often seen as, and act as, caretakers, homemakers, and emotional laborers for family units (Mollaeva, 2018). However, families could also see this adaptation and assimilation as a positive change in that the student is achieving what was not possible for them. If the student assimilates in an attempt to move into a higher social stratum, this upward mobility could also potentially increase the class status of their entire family in being able to provide them with resources they may not have previously possessed (Azmitia et al., 2018).

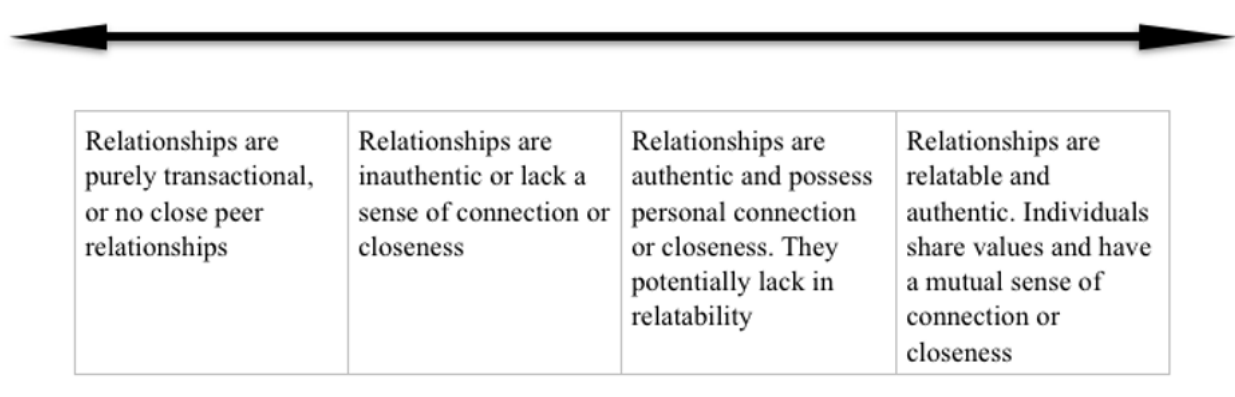
If students reject the notions of the upper and middle class and commit to their poor or working-class identity while in college or university, their families may feel more inclined to support them in their goals knowing their student is not leaving them behind. This may also be an opportunity for students to take their knowledge from their education and use it to give back to their communities (Ardoin, 2018; Hurst 2010). This may also be an expectation for first-generation women rather than an opportunity, as women are socialized to work in helping professions such as social services or education (Mollaeva 2018). We also argue that the possibility exists that if the student continues to identify with their class of origin the family may feel as though the student is not using their resources wisely and should be making an effort to

move up in social class.

Whichever way the student chooses to identify, it is most important that the family supports this choice. Strong and encouraging family relationships not only provide motivation, but they can also be a source of social support through the transition into university (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; O’Shea, 2013). This support can be emotional, such as expressing empathy and care; instrumental, which includes sharing tangible aid like financial support; informational, which can be advice or suggestions; and appraisal, which provides the student with statements for self-evaluation like saying “I know you can do it!” if or when a student is experiencing negative emotions and thoughts (University of Pennsylvania, n.d.).

Familial relationships are also important because they provide familial capital for the student. Yosso (2005) defines familial capital as the knowledge gained through family interactions and experiences. While this capital may not include direct knowledge of the collegiate environment, there are many skills and other forms of capital children and young adults accumulate from their families that may aid them during their time in higher education. These could include aspirational capital, navigational capital, linguistic capital, and resistance capital (Yosso, 2005). This capital in itself can be a source of support, if the student can effectively recognize or employ the strengths they learned from family. This could include things such as work ethic and goal-oriented behavior (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).

### Peer Relationships or Friendships



The importance of peer support has been studied in the context of many demographic groups, such as Latino students (Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003) and students with significant mental health concerns (Morse & Schluzer, 2013). We assert that peer support plays a significant role for first-generation women students, as it assists in creating a sense of belonging for first-generation students, which in turn can lead to increased self-efficacy and likelihood to persist (Azmitia et al., 2018). This peer support can be found by students through numerous methods, including student organizations, community service, or on-campus housing communities. We suggest that peer relationships are most beneficial for first-generation women when they are authentic through mutual support and care, involve personal connection formed by emotional bonds and interactions, and are with peers that have relatable experiences or values.

It is worthwhile to note that the peer relationships we outline below are markedly

different from peer mentor relationships. We equate the peer relationships discussed in this section to friendships. Though students may look up to and admire their friends, there is no intentionality behind the mentorship aspect of the relationship, and they may participate in casual activities together to become close for the sake of closeness, not for the purpose of a mentorship.

All 16 students from Demetriou, Meece, Eaker-Rich, and Powell's study of the roles, relationships, and activities of successful first-generation students reported joining some form of small community on their campus, whether it be a student organization, major departments, housing communities, and employment (2017). These relationships contribute to first-generation women students' sense of belonging by giving them a network of people that they know and can engage with on campus. One student from Demetriou et al.'s study describes the impact of something as simple as seeing other students around campus that they met at the campus recreation center: "I can walk around and see people all the time saying hey to me that I know from [the campus recreation center] alone. So that's been very important. It made me feel a part of [the university]" (2017, p. 27).

Peers are also a major source of emotional support, a factor that can also lead to enhanced sense of belonging (Schlossberg, 1989). In Demetriou et al., one female student describes the other women in her Bible study group as integral to her successful college career due to the encouragement her peers provided and trust they established (2017). This emotional support is also identified as impactful on sense of belonging by the women in Nikki Youngblood Giles' study of 8 low-income first-generation college women, especially when it comes from a peer whose experience is relatable to that of the student (2018). For example, one student described an experience where their mutual group of friends went out to dinner, and both the student and her peer had only ordered a soda due to budget constraints that were disclosed by both students to be because of their working-class backgrounds (2018). Their relationship grew from this interaction, and both students benefited from their mutual support as they discussed "...the joys and angst they both were feeling as they approached the unknown." (2018, p. 32). On the other hand, another woman in the study describes meeting her roommate for the first time and being shocked by "... her family gathered in the room helping to put away what seemed like a never-ending supply of expensive looking clothing, sheets and towels, and toiletries" and that it made her feel "immediately out of place" (2018, p. 63). Though these anecdotes do not tell the full story of the friendships formed by these women, they provide insight into how peer relationships can play a role in first-generation women students' development.



## Mentor Relationships



Mentorship is purely transactional or instrumental. Lack of mentor figure overall	Mentorship emphasizes tasks and productivity. Overall lack of mutuality and lack of personal closeness	Potential Inconsistency in mutuality (mentor or mentee is giving or benefiting significantly more than the other) and differing expectations about personal closeness	Mentorship is authentic, empowering, and mutually engaging; both mentor and mentee benefit
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There is a wealth of research on the impact of mentorship on college students, including women and first-generation students, though not necessarily for students who hold both identities. We assert that mentorship is particularly important for first-generation women students' development because of these intersecting identities. Relationships that are authentic, empowering, personally close, and mutually engaging are most beneficial for the development of first-generation women students especially in terms of self-efficacy and belonging. Mentorships that do not exhibit these qualities may serve a purpose but are overall not as beneficial.

For first-generation students, mentors often play a key role during their transition and throughout their time in college by providing "insider" information or navigational capital that students cannot necessarily receive from adults in their families (Plaskett, Bali, Nakkula, & Harris, 2018; Yosso, 2005). This information sharing, called "instrumentality" by Plaskett et al. (2018, p. 47), is most beneficial to first generation students when given in the context of a close, mutually beneficial relationship. For women students specifically, the relational aspects of mentoring are thought to be a critical factor for successful mentor relationships (Liang, Tracey, Taylor, & Williams, 2002). Qualities of relationships that theorists consider to be "growth-fostering" include mutual engagement, authenticity, and empowerment (Liang et al., 2002).

Additionally, we acknowledge the many forms that mentor relationships can take. The level of formality, the origin, or the difference or lack thereof in power or positionality of mentor and mentee are important factors, and we wish to honor that each kind of mentor relationship can have a different impact on students. We explore relationships that are more formal and with members of faculty, staff, or someone who has a clearly differentiated positionality at the college or in the community, as well as intentional relationships with peers that a student looks up to. Lastly, we acknowledge that this categorization establishes a false dichotomy, and that many of these relationships fall outside or between the types of mentorship we have identified as relevant.

### Relationships with Mentors

Supportive and individualized relationships with faculty have been associated with

enhanced learning for college students (Kuh, 2008). For first-generation students, not only do these relationships lead to enhanced learning, but also to feelings of self-efficacy. Demetriou et al.'s study of 16 "successful" first-generation college students (half of whom were women) describes that relationships with faculty (especially those connected to research) had an impact on how first-generation students perceive themselves and their abilities to succeed as researchers (2017). Similarly, in Youngblood-Giles' study of 8 low-income first-generation college women, each of the students she interviews cites a relationship with a mentor that is developmentally beneficial (2018). Each student identifies a relationship with a teacher, instructor, or other faculty member that provided them with necessary knowledge but went above and beyond information-sharing. For instance, one student described her relationships with faculty members that began simply by attending office hours but developed into genuine relationships that resulted in her ability to participate in long-term research, and thus a shift in her self-perception where she began to view herself as a scholar (Youngblood-Giles, 2018).

### Relationships with Peer Mentors

Peer mentor relationships are also significant for the development of first-generation women students. Social Learning Theory asserts learning vicariously through others can promote an individual's self-efficacy (Newman & Newman, 2016). For first-generation women who do not have family members with which they can compare themselves in the context of attending college, having peer mentors who have gone through or are going through the same experience is integral, especially in the context of an academic program (Plaskett et al., 2018), as it allows students to see someone their age that they respect being successful (Demetriou et al., 2017). Similar to mentor relationships with faculty or staff, peer mentorships are longer lasting and meaningful when mentors don't "just help [mentees] meet their immediate needs, but also bond with them personally" (Plaskett et al., 2018, p. 48). Thus, though providing mentees with information and helping them navigate systems on campus is important, the ability to relate and make connections remains significant for peer mentor relationships.

Finally, having peers as mentors also removes much of the stigma that can potentially be associated with asking for help from others (Plaskett et al., 2018), especially faculty or staff that have some level of power over students, whether formally or informally. Peer mentors have the benefit and challenge of balancing between being a mentor and a friend (Plaskett et al., 2018).

### **Practical Application for Student Affairs Educators**

For student affairs educators, this theory could be used in a variety of ways. We present two different strategies to employ this theory as a framework for colleges including developing more inclusive first-generation programs and creating and assessing mentoring initiatives that serve first-generation women students.

First, the hypotheses can be used as a framework for developing family programs that address the intersections of first-generation status and gender. While colleges and universities across the country have begun developing first-generation programs for students and their families, none of them explicitly addressed the role that gender will play for the students along with their first-generation status. Some of the family initiatives that currently exist involve

monthly newsletters for parents, extra orientation sessions to discuss topics that families may not be aware of such as how to fill out FAFSA and paying for college, and website pages with useful resources designed specifically for first-generation students and their families (“First-Generation Families”, 2019; Martina, 2019). However, none of the university websites that we visited for first-generation programs for families and students displayed information exclusively for women (like women’s centers, scholarships, women’s studies courses, or organizations for women). When developing programs, professionals should keep intersectionality and multiple minoritized identities in mind and how first-generation students have identities beyond their education status. While providing them with information and resources related to their first-generation status is the obvious goal for these programs, this does not mean that they are not facing other identity-related concerns.

These hypotheses can also be used to create and evaluate mentoring programs that explicitly or implicitly serve a high population of first-generation women students. It may be of interest to consider our theory throughout the process of establishing a mentor program, such as when making decisions about how mentors are matched with mentees and what kind of requirements, if any, those relationships have. As close mentorship relationships are more impactful compared to less intimate mentorship relationships for the development of first-generation women students, intentionally reaching out and recruiting mentors who are interested in relationships with students that go beyond the typical student-to-faculty or staff relationships is important. Additionally, by understanding that mentorships should be mutually engaging, it may be of interest to recruit mentees based on their interest in a relationship with faculty or staff that goes beyond attending office hours or participating in research.

Further, our hypotheses can be used to evaluate existing mentoring initiatives that serve this population of students. For instance, when gathering feedback, it may be helpful to identify in the data collected whether relationships with mentors possess the identified beneficial qualities. If the relationships possess those qualities and it is correlated with success of the mentorships, it may be indicative of how the program can continue to gain positive momentum; if they do not, our hypotheses may be able to provide a framework for what shifts in structure or outcomes may need to occur in order to best serve first-generation women students.

## **Limitations & Further Research**

We recognize that there are a multitude of intersecting identities beyond gender and education status. Because each student comes to the collegiate environment as more than just an individual with a gender and education history, we want to make clear that this work cannot necessarily be generalized to all first-generation women because of differences in race, sexuality, gender presentation, ability status, age, parental status, and religion. Contextual differences like institution type and location may also have an impact. Further, the fact that we are using the definition of a cis-gender woman, without intentionally including trans-women, or individuals who do not define themselves as women but outwardly present as feminine, narrows the scope for this theory and its ability to represent the relational experiences of all first-generation women. With these differing identities in mind, this work may not be applicable for all first-generation women.

Another limitation is the lack of research that specifically focuses on gender and first-

generation status. Because of this, much of our hypotheses are predicated on assumptions of connection between the narrow body of research that does exist which addresses gender and first-generation status coupled with our own life experiences at this intersection. We implore other scholars to use our hypotheses as a foundation for further studies in the future that can collect data through qualitative and quantitative research to test, learn, and understand the impact of interpersonal relationships to see if data confirms or rejects our presumptions about relational support, or lack thereof, and its impact on first-generation women college students.

In addition to our recommendation to formally collect data, we have provided several recommendations for further inquiry. The first is that scholars in the field should more broadly consider the qualities of different types of relationships. While research exists on what positive or successful relationships look like, the research is scarce when it comes to what negative qualities may be present in some of these relationships. We hypothesized a spectrum for each relationship displaying both positive and negative aspects for each relationship. However, much of the research does not give a good comparison to what qualities may constitute a "negative" relationship. While we understand the desire to focus on how relationships can be positive and successful, we believe it is important to also understand what qualities constitute a negative influence. With this understanding, other scholar-practitioners can employ informed strategies to develop negative relationships, into more positive ones.

## Conclusion

These hypotheses explore familial, peer, and mentor relationships and the varying levels of support they can provide for first-generation women. We also describe the unique nature of each type of relationship, and the different types of support they can provide for the student. We describe the qualities of each relationship and outline what we believe to be the most beneficial for first-generation women students. By doing so, we have begun a conversation on understanding the development and fluidity of these relationships and how they contribute to the development of first-generation women's sense of belonging in the collegiate environment. Based on our own experiences, we feel that this topic should be recognized with a theory to represent and describe the unique experiences of first-generation women. We hope that this work inspires other scholars to continue exploring these relationships and other intersecting identities.

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