Factors Influencing First-Generation Students' Ability to Obtain a Doctoral Degree in Clinical Psychology: An Intersectional Approach

4th Annual First-Generation Symposium
Rowan University

Presenters: Lauren Wallace, BA, Ebru Yucel, MA, Juliana D'Onofrio, MA, & Jim A. Haugh Ph.D.
Objectives for today:

- Who is a first-generation student?
- First-generation students in psychology
- Two intersectional models
- Review of key studies
- Recommendations for field
- Road to a doctoral degree in psychology
- Panel → Questions/Discussions
Who is a first-generation student?

“A student whose parents have not completed a degree, or completed a degree in another country, or whose parents may have a degree but the student has limited preparation or resources in their immediate family or support network” (RU, First Generation Task Force)

- First-generation students:
  - ...*aspire* for graduate education but are *less likely to obtain* compared to non-first-generation peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008).
First-Generation Students in Psychology...

- Psychology is a common major (generally)
- \( N=3,936 \) earned a doctoral degree in psychology (NCSES, 2020)
  - 72% identified as female & 29% identified as male
  - 64% had BA in psychology compared to other academic discipline

"Going to college is uncharted territory" (Trejo, 2016)

- First-gen students and non-first-gen students make decisions differently
  - Unemployment rates, average wages, & occupational concentration
  - An emphasis might be placed on labor rewards (financial)
## First-Generation Students in Psychology

### Educational attainment of doctorate recipients’ parents, by sex, citizenship status, ethnicity, race, and broad field of study: 2019

(Number and percent distribution)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic characteristic and field</th>
<th>Total (number)</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>High school or less</th>
<th>Some college</th>
<th>Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>Master’s degree</th>
<th>Professional degree</th>
<th>Research doctoral degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All doctorate recipients</td>
<td>47,821</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s education</td>
<td>47,821</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s education</td>
<td>48,232</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NCES, 2020)
Two Intersectional Models

ADDRESSING model (Hays, 1996; 2008)

- Age/Generation
- Disability Status (developmental)
- Disability Status (acquired)
- Religion and Spiritual Orientation
- Ethnicity
- Socioeconomic status
- Sexual Orientation
- Indigenous heritage
- National Origin
- Gender

RESPECTFUL model (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1997; 2001)

- Religious/spiritual identity
- Economic class background
- Sexual identity
- Psychological maturity
- Ethnic/racial identity
- Chronological/developmental challenges
- Various forms of trauma and threats to well-being
- Family background and history
- Unique physical characteristics
- Location of residence and language differences
Review of Key Studies - King (2017)

● The Cultural Mismatch Theory
  ○ “Individual performance is contingent on whether people experience a match or a mismatch between their own cultural norms and the norms that are institutionalized in a given setting”
  ○ The theory claims:
    ■ 1) American university culture reflects pervasive middle-class norms of independence
    ■ 2) Impact of focus on independence depends on the students' cultural frameworks
    ■ 3) A cultural match or mismatch affects students' performance by influencing students' perception of the setting and tasks required of them
Review of Key Studies - King (2017)

- Results suggest that messages of independence/self-reliance create sense of isolation from:
  - Family
  - Peers
  - Faculty
  - Psychological distress for the individual

- “Thus, when the norms of doctoral institutions reflect the people within it, the potential for a severe mismatch between first-generation students' models of self is more likely, and perhaps creates a starker contrast and greater impact than that which is observed at the undergraduate level.”
Review of Key Studies (Banks-Santilli, 2014)

Breakaway Guilt - Defined as “the possible shame first-generation students experience when they risk a real or perceived betrayal by the family”

- Might occur when late adolescents separate from their families to establish adult identities
  - Possible “break” or discontinuation of what is familiar
- Some decide to keep identities separate (college versus home) without fully belonging in either
- Insecure self when breaking away from family
- Additional pressure to succeed
Review of Key Studies (Gardner & Holley, 2011)

● Highlights the experiences of 20 first-generation doctoral students across several academic disciplines

● **Breaking the Chain** → overcoming obstacles
  ○ Assistance from guidance counselor than parents

● **Knowing the Rules** → felt “in the dark” about how to navigate systems

● **Living in Two Worlds** → upbringing vs. higher education
  ○ Parents’ and families’ academic expectations
  ○ Language and communication
  ○ Not belonging

● **Seeking Support** → external & internal; financial support
Recommendations for Our Field

● **Psychology as a Profession & Practice** class! (internally; other universities should follow our lead)

● **Outreach programs/seminars** to first-generation students (earlier the better)
  ○ What kinds of advice or information did you receive?
  ○ How has this helped you at Rowan University?
  ○ Strengthening pipeline to higher degrees in psychology

● **Advocacy & Education**
  ○ Research or clinical experiences
  ○ Ph.D. or Psy.D distinction in NSF survey
Road to Doctoral Degree in Psychology

“You need to be aware of this game before you start playing it to make sure this is a game you want to play. Once you get to a certain level there is no backing out.” (Gardner & Holley, 2011, p. 83)

Some Key Points

1. Making “insider knowledge” more accessible
2. Moving from “what have I done” to what competencies do I have
3. Getting to students early
4. Transparency--is this really for you?
Our Personal Experiences
Discussion Prompts

- Did you have a mentor or advisor during your undergraduate career and if so, how valuable was this mentorship?
  - Did having a mentor assist you when applying to doctoral programs in psychology?
- Applying to doctoral programs can be expensive. How did you navigate this potential barrier? (or) What kind of barriers have you had to overcome to get where you are?
- How did you communicate your educational aspirations to your family and friends who did not attend college?
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References


Rowan University First Generation Task Force (n.a.) Glossary Terms. [https://sites.rowan.edu/studentaffairs/initiatives/firstgen/resources/glossary.html](https://sites.rowan.edu/studentaffairs/initiatives/firstgen/resources/glossary.html)