Institutional Generativity or Reproduction of Privilege? How Campus Context and Parental Involvement Affects Legacy Students

Jarrett B. Warshaw Richard B. Henne-Ochoa, Joseph L. Murray[*]

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[*] **Institution:** Florida Atlantic University, Bucknell University

Abstract

This study focuses on undergraduate legacy students, who have family-alumni ties to their institution. We draw on the ecological systems framework and human development theories to interpret interview data on legacy students' perspectives of self, family, and institution. Our analysis revealed (1) nuanced experiences of separation-individuation; (2) deeply embedded family influences that constrained yet empowered formations of identity and life-direction; and (3) campus-centered dynamics that encouraged the extension of lives of privilege. These themes suggest that interactions among students, families, and institution may be more unstructured and indirect than what prior literature shows. They indicate as well the generative qualities of campus and family that may limit student development and undergird broader patterns of social inequality. We discuss implications for policy, practice, and research.

Introduction

In recent years, the relationship between college students and their families has gained increasing attention among student affairs researchers and practitioners. "Parental involvement," as developed in the research literature, explains parents' engagement in "academics and co-curricular activities [and] expressed interest in the day-to-day well-being of college students" (Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009, p. 328). Family-student interactions may heighten in frequency and intensity when parents cover the escalating costs of college, are graduates themselves, embrace societal attitudes about attentive parenting, and adopt communications technology (Harper, Sax, & Wolf, 2012; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Growing evidence suggests parental involvement can affect students' academic outcomes, sociopolitical awareness, co-curricular activities, and peer-relationships (e.g., Lloyd, Dean, & Cooper, 2009; Sax & Wartman, 2010). Some students may deepen family contact during transitions into adulthood (Arnett, 2015), but roles of institutions and educational contexts in these dynamics remain unclear.

Legacy students comprise an undergraduate population whose experiences may especially shed light on the intersection of family and institution in the lives of undergraduates. "Legacies" are students who have family-alumni ties to their institutions (Golden, 2006), such that they can utilize privilege—accrued cultural, social, and economic capital—for admission (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Espenshade, Chung, & Walling, 2004; Hurwitz, 2011). To examine the student development of legacy students may illuminate formal and informal, unstructured manifestations of parental involvement and contribute to understandings of institutional roles in perpetuating broader patterns of social inequality.

For example, legacy students at elite institutions are typically from high socioeconomic status (SES) families and seek to attend the "right" college to maintain privilege (McDonough, 1997). They benefit as well from institutional policies and practices that may extend further their societal advantage (Karabel, 2005). Legacy students may gain admissions because they could be more likely to enroll than other candidates, allowing institutions to decrease

acceptance rates, improve yield, and enhance prestige (Hossler, Bontrager, & Associates, 2015). They may fit within—and sustain—organizational traditions, culture, and historical uniqueness (Howell & Turner, 2004). Preferential admission for legacies may also increase an important revenue stream of parent-alumni donations (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Such considerations may explain why as many as 25% of undergraduates are legacies at some elite institutions (Golden, 2006).

A growing body of literature raises concerns about learning and development for legacy students (Massey & Mooney, 2007; Martin, 2012; Martin & Spenner, 2009), but knowledge gaps remain for student affairs researchers and practitioners. It is unclear how family-institution relationships affect these students in college and especially as they form their life goals and directions. In this paper, our aim is thus two-fold: we seek to extend understandings of parental involvement's impact on college student development for legacy students (Sax & Wartman, 2010) and, more generally, of how generative aspects of institutions and families, nurturing and supporting students in their campus experiences, reproduces privilege (Renn & Arnold, 2003).

Legacy Students and Elite Institutions in Context

Roots of Preferential Admissions

The privileged status of legacy applicants to U.S. colleges and universities has roots in the early 1900s. A time of intensifying socio-economic competition nationally, this era saw elite institutions such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale drawn into broad inter-group struggles (Karabel, 2005). Their use of non-academic criteria, including family-alumni relations, in admissions served to stratify students and families (Gutiérrez & Unzueta, 2013).

Favoring legacy students, institutions accessed financial resources of elite populations (Karabel, 2005). White, Protestant, and wealthy students and families gained educational and societal advantage, as did elite institutions. Marginalized

populations—students of color, students from low-SES backgrounds, first-generation college students, and Jewish students—faced barriers to college access and social mobility (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 2006).

By the second half of the 20th Century, access and equity in higher education entered into political and legal arenas. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s shifted institutional policies and practices. In response to U.S. Supreme Court rulings, affirmative action in admissions transitioned from correcting past racial injustices to celebrating the educational value of diversity (e.g., Gurin et al., 2004).

As they adapt to their contemporary political and economic environments, many institutions have merged admissions and financial aid operations into divisions of "enrollment management" that target resources and allocate spaces for first-year students (Hossler et al., 2015). The approach could be leveraged to help institutions market to broad student populations and enhance diversity and student-institution fit on campus, but its goals of broadening access and equity and maximizing tuition and fee revenue and academic prestige are difficult to balance in practice. While some low-SES students have benefited from enrollment management to access and afford elite higher education, they remain underrepresented in the sector (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). Such an observation suggests that, if unchecked, institutional preferences to attract high-ability, high-SES students, whose enrollment can boost campuses' financial resources and academic profile, can constrain the pursuits of and degrees of progress toward access and equity.

Institutional Policies in Practice

Social equity through higher education remains elusive. A few institutions have graduated the majority of leaders across professional fields (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 2006). Yet graduates' successes may reflect more on students themselves than on elite institutions (Hearn, 1990). Even so, institutions likely have some effect on the social mobility of students (e.g., Karabel, 2005; Gutiérrez & Unzueta, 2013). Historically, about one-third of academically talented, high-SES students enroll at elite

institutions. The small, exclusive group suggests institutions as facilitating rather than outright reproducing inequity (Hearn, 1990).

Within the current context, legacy privilege constitutes a form of affirmative action (Bowen & Bok, 1998). Yet legacy preferences can work against campus goals of increasing racial and socioeconomic diversity (e.g., Howell & Turner, 2004). Nationally, access to postsecondary education across racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups has broadened over time, but barriers to the most elite institutions remain for students of color (Posselt et al., 2012) and students from low-SES backgrounds (Hearn, 2013; Hearn & Rosinger, 2014).

Admissions benefits for legacy students reflect some stratifying mechanisms of elite institutions. For example, Bowen and Bok (1998) found that among high-ability applicants to selective colleges and universities, the legacy student admission rate (60%) was twice as high as the admission rate for non-legacy candidates (24%) and comparable to the acceptance rate for students of color (70%) . Subsequent research suggests that, over time, some elite institutions have decreased the magnitude of benefits for students of color in favor of other affirmative-action groups, such as athletes (Espenshade et al., 2004). Legacy status has continued to carry particular influence for students with direct parent-alumni connections and, even for candidates with lower-academic abilities, factors favorably into admission decisions (Hurwitz, 2011).

Legacy Students on Campus

When students attend elite institutions as legacies, their learning and development has been uneven. They may outperform athletes and minority students academically (Massey & Mooney, 2007), but compared to other students from high-SES backgrounds, some report lower academic self-confidence and are less likely to pursue careers in professions such as medicine and engineering (Martin & Spenner, 2009).

Indeed, campus networks may constrain legacy students. Social ties can "provide privileged access to resources [but] also restrict

individual freedoms" that deviate from group norms (Portes, 1998, p. 21). Students from high SES groups often devote considerable time to social activities, increasing their satisfaction with college (Martin, 2012). For legacy students, campus experiences may perpetuate—and extend—elite networks, and these social relations can both empower them, making them feel at "home," and restrict their scope of engagement.

These dynamics suggest conflicting purposes and student-related outcomes associated with elite institutions. On one hand, families and institutions may cultivate generativity for students and in turn extend stewardship of the institution itself from one generation to the next. As Erikson (1968) defined it, generativity focuses on "establishing and guiding the next generation" (p. 291) and occurs by way of parenting, productivity, and creativity, which inform a deepening of care. At the campus-level, generativity may be infused in leadership development (Komives et al., 2006), mentoring (Hastings et al., 2015), and the college environment as a whole (Hills, 2013). On the other hand, institutional policies and practices may constrain developmental outcomes for legacy students by encouraging emulation of family and thus cycles of privilege. In this way, institutions may reinforce broader patterns of social inequality even as they also aim to support and nurture healthy college student development.

Our Study

While there is interest in legacy students among educational researchers, we rarely hear from such students themselves. Related work on parental involvement has emphasized survey responses (Harper et al., 2012; Wolf et al., 2009) and institutional perspectives (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Voices of students may shed new light on effects of family-institution relationships and help us understand institutional roles in promoting generativity and reproducing privilege. We seek to understand legacy students' perspectives of family and institution, asking:

1. How do legacy students view themselves in relation to family and institution?

2. What are the influences of family on legacy students' perspectives?

3. What are the influences of institutional environment on legacy students' perspectives?

Conceptual Framework

To conceptualize how campus context and parental involvement affect legacy students, we draw on human development theories, including Bronfenbrenner's (1995) ecological systems framework, which accounts for external influences on adolescents. Renn and Arnold (2003) extend this conceptualization to higher education, reframing the five systems that can affect college students as: *microsystems* (peer groups, classes, residence halls, jobs); *mesosystems* (interactions of microsystems); *exosystems* (family, institutions, governments); *macrosystems* (generational events, social forces, culture); and the *chronosystem* (time). Whereas our study is concerned with the influences of family and institutional environment on legacy students' perspectives, this framework helps us locate legacy students within sub-environments where personal transformation may occur.

For example, *macrosystems* encompass generational and societal attitudes that tighten family-student relations. *Exosystems*—family and institution—may reflect these broad orientations, shaping how legacy students perceive themselves in relation to parents and school. Families could leverage institutions for group interests in social status (McDonough, 1997). Negotiating family-institution influences may affect campus-level experiences (*microsystems* and *mesosystems*), where legacy students could utilize institutional context to extend family standing. While helpful, such a conceptualization does not fully account for the growth and developmental processes that often occur *within* college students.

We draw on human development theories that illuminate the formation of identity and life direction. Adolescents often encounter the crisis of *identity vs. role confusion* (Erikson, 1968). Confronted with multiple ways of being, they can explore possibilities and vary in their degree of commitments to each (e.g., Marcia, 1966; Waterman, 1999). For example, legacy students may experiment within various domains of campus life (e.g., academics, co-curricula, career development, etc.) in efforts to

integrate their academic, co-curricular, therapeutic, and vocational dimensions of education into identity and purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

College students may, of course, vary in their expressions and experiences of identity based on demographic and generational characteristics. Some empirical evidence shows that women tend to work toward independence through their relationships with peers, mentors, and family (Josselson, 1987, 1996; Sax, 2008). While race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status can have profound impacts, generational characteristics can also influence how students relate to one another, to family, and to institutions (Lloyd et al., 2009). The transition of Millennials into adulthood is often protracted, extending an entwinement of students and families (Arnett, 2015).

The process of identity development suggests four specific concepts. First, *separation-individuation* accounts for how individuals form identities in relation to family (Josselson, 1987, 1996). Second, the *internal working model* addresses attachment to primary caregivers as influential in relations with others (Bowlby, 1969). Third, *introjection* underscores psychological processes of "taking in a part of the parent as part of the self" to minimize "vulnerability" (Josselson, 1987, p. 18). Finally, the relative fit of *family and educational dynamics* can influence student psychosocial outcomes (e.g., Adams, Ryan, & Keating, 2000).

Together, our guiding concepts address the contexts in which student development unfolds (research question one). More specifically, they can account for ways in which college students interact with both their environments (e.g., family influences, social forces, generational characteristics, etc.[research question two]) and sub-environments (e.g., classes, residence halls, peer groups, etc. [research question three]). In this way, our conceptual framework suggests the context-dependent nature of students' perspectives and the ways in which family and institution may shape student development and privilege.

Research Design

Our study focuses on individual legacy students at an elite, private co-educational university. We have designed our research as a qualitative interview study that relies on methods by which to learn from participants through long, focused conversations (deMarrais, 2004; Roulston, 2010). To this end, we have used in-depth interviewing and member-checking for accuracy—and authenticity—in the interpretation of each student's perspective. Member-checking entails asking interview participants for feedback to clarify the interpretation and analysis of interview responses (Merriam, 2009). Our empirical aim centers on assaying students' perspectives of family and institution that may, when resituated with our guiding theories, enrich student affairs policy and practice (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

Our study does not portray people in "real time" as they live their daily lives, yet it offers an opportunity to ask students to reflect on and articulate their experiences. This research on legacy students may not generalize across the population and to all institutions; however, it lends itself to extrapolations to other conditions (see Patton, 2015, p. 713). In turn, we draw on our guiding theories to illuminate students' perspectives and suggest possible institutional responses for and beyond our study-site.

Sampling

We purposively selected our institutional site (Creswell, 1998). An elite, private co-educational institution in the Mid-Atlantic region demonstrated characteristics that fit within the literature on legacy students at exclusive, prestigious institutions (Golden, 2006; Karabel, 2005; Martin & Spenner, 2009) and had prominent campus traditions for alumni and legacies. Table 1 presents an institutional profile, showing strong admissions selectivity, endowment wealth, and an enrollment management division.

TABLE 1. Selected Institutional Characteristics

Founding	19th Century
Enrollment Management Division Formed	Early 2000s
Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Enrollment	4,000
Admissions Acceptance Rate	<35%
Median SAT (1600 point scale)	1300
Comprehensive Fee (Tuition + Room & Board)	$55,000
Endowment	$600 mil
Number of Alumni	60,000

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics and institutional websites.

Notes: Numbers rounded for confidentiality. FTE enrollment was derived by adding one-third of the number of part-time students to the total number of full-time students and taking the median for consecutive years from fall 2001 to 2011. Admissions acceptance rate was the median for consecutive years from 2001-2002 to 2011-2012. Median SAT was the math and verbal score for admitted students averaged over consecutive years from 2001-2002 to 2011-2012. Endowment was the median (in 2011 dollars, adjusted using HEPI) for consecutive years from 2002 to 2011. Comprehensive fee was dollar amount, before tuition discounting, for 2011-2012.

We identified prospective participants who were acquaintances of one of the researchers and had at least one parent graduate from the institution. The initial rapport and trust among participants and researcher, and the further building of the researcher-researched relationship throughout the study, fits within the aim of our qualitative interview study to "generate the kind of conversation that is intimate and self-revealing" (Roulston, 2010, p. 56). Our research requires a note of caution about sample selection, as we include in our study students who are actively willing to speak about their experiences and, in light of their engagement in the research, may differ from other legacy students on campus in the articulation of their perspectives (Jones et al., 2006). We did not work directly with administrative offices in order to maintain confidentiality of participants on a rather small campus and to limit any bias such officials could introduce in their recommendations or lists of potential students with whom to speak.

Each student was invited by e-mail to participate in an individual, face-to-face interview. Five white, middle-class undergraduate women consented to participate. Table 2 presents their biographical sketches.

TABLE 2. Research Participants: Biographical Sketches

Participant	Class Year	Home State	Alumni Lineage	Major	Campus Involvement	Career Plans
"Haley"	Sopho-more	CT	Father; older sister; younger sister applied to institution	Psychology, Philosophy (minor)	Sorority, club sports, admissions tour guide, community service	Clinical or Research Psychologist, specializing in children and childhood development
"Kate"	First-year	PA	Father	Neuroscience, Pre-Medicine	Research assistant (Psychology), admissions office assistant, will rush for sorority sophomore year	Medical doctor/surgeon
"Margaret"	Sopho-more	NY	Father; younger sister enrolled in incoming first-year class	Education, History, & Theatre	Sorority, residential life activities	School teacher
"Natalie"	Senior	OH	Father; paternal uncle	Civil & Environmental Engineering	Sorority, admissions office assistant, studied abroad junior year	Associate, Environmental Consulting Firm
"Taylor"	First-year	RI	Mother; maternal grandmother; maternal uncle	Political Science	Community service, performing arts club, will rush for sorority sophomore year	Government/public administration

Notes: Biographical data compiled from interviews. Participants reflected the mostly regional geographic representation of students on campus. University policy precluded first-year students from joining the Greek system, making Kate and Taylor eligible their sophomore years.

Generating Data

Each participant met with the lead author for an interview in a relatively neutral site on campus in spring 2010. Questions covered topics such as deciding to attend the institution, navigating academics, pursuing co-curricular activities, forming social relationships, developing career plans, and being legacies on campus. The interviews were semi-structured, ran for an average of 90 minutes, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

We utilized three rounds of member-checks: First, we e-mailed each participant her respective transcript to review. Second, we e-mailed each participant a document with her quotations and data interpretations as an intermediary step toward writing a full research paper. Finally, we e-mailed each participant a copy of the research report. None of the participants excised data or withdrew, and our research team, comprised of one staff and two faculty members (without supervisory relations to the participants), conferred throughout the study.

Analyzing Data

Data analysis followed an emergent process (Creswell, 1998). We compared transcripts to identify and match empirical patterns. For instance, when one participant discussed her alumnus father's influence on her applying to the institution, we searched for additional references within her transcript and across other participants' transcripts to assess variation.

To generate conceptual categories and themes, we followed a three-part model drawn from the methodological literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This process entailed *open-coding* for general themes (e.g., "separation-individuation"); *axial coding* for refining broad themes into categories (e.g., "deciding to apply," "choosing to attend," "selecting a major," "forming friendships"); and *selective coding* for narrative threads (e.g., "roles of family in college choice and experience").

Categories and Themes

Inductive data analysis led to three conceptual categories with supporting themes (Table 3). *Paradox of Influence and Identity*

underscored separation-individuation. *Family Teaching and Learning* highlighted family influences on legacy students. *University-Environmental Context* illuminated interplays of institution, family, and legacy students, dynamics that are empowering and constraining to students who largely seem to recreate family privilege.

TABLE 3.

Category	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5
I. Paradox of Influence and Identity	Applying to and Enrolling at the University	Language and Ambivalence of Being "Legacies"	Family Impact on Academic Majors and Career Plans	Exploratory Behaviors: Finding Their Way in College	Recreating yet Separating from Family Experiences
II. Family Teaching and Learning	Expressions of Family-based Cognitive Processes	Family Dynamics in Socialization Patterns of Legacies	Keepers of Institutional and Family History and Memory	Legacy Emulation of Parenting Styles across Contexts	Generativity: Having Families of Their Own
III. University-Environmental Context	Stereotypes of Legacies on Campus	Triggers of Legacy Identity Awareness	University Culture and Climate	Legacies as Cross-Generational Connectors	Integration of Self and Undergraduate Experience

Legacy Students' Perspectives: Categories and Themes

Paradox of Influence and Identity

Legacy students in our study both identified with and distanced themselves from family. In *Applying to and Enrolling at the University*, participants acknowledged but minimized influences of alumni parents. Margaret's father directed her toward the university, visiting campus with her, but "didn't really influence me at all," she said. Taylor did not want to attend the university, since her mother, maternal uncle, and maternal grandmother were all alumni, yet family-institution ties made the school "less scary or shocking," she said.

Conflicting perspectives were especially pronounced in *Language and Ambivalence of Being "Legacies."* Research participants resisted formal categorizations of family-institution ties. Haley viewed herself as not just another member of her family to attend the university: "I didn't want that whole stigma of being another 'James' [pseudonym] or whatever," she said. Describing herself as "relatively normal" and similar to "any other college student," Margaret deemphasized any uniqueness of relations between her, her alumnus father, and the institution.

Family Impact on Academic Majors and Career Plans underscored a pattern at odds with forging independent identities. Participants' accounts suggested alignment with influences from parents. Taylor articulated a predominant perspective among legacy students in our study: she did not want to "copy" her mother by studying the same major (and attending the same university) as her, but acknowledged how "in a lot of ways I have followed her."

When legacy students in our study sought separation from families, they entwined themselves with peers—and professors. *Exploratory Behaviors: Finding Their Way in College* accentuated this paradox. Haley's friendships gave her confidence, providing courage for her to join a student club that conducted community service in Nicaragua. Margaret's experience with orientation advisors eased her transition and made her feel "at home." For Taylor, sophomores, juniors, and seniors were role models whose academic paths mirrored her own. Friends represented surrogate families, but professors approximated "parents." Natalie perceived faculty as "mentors," she said, "adults [who] aren't students that

you build relationships with." Kate spoke of working with her psychology professor on research: he "gave me a lot of responsibility, which I really liked. It was like me being important."

To balance receiving guidance with knowing "you can do it by yourself," as Taylor said, our research participants were adamant about their independence. Still, *Recreating yet Separating from Family Experiences* suggests how legacy students in our study perceived themselves as recreating aspects of their parents' lives. Haley had "no idea what my dad did when he was here," she said, preferring to do "my own thing" on campus. Several participants felt that their attending the institution was "weird," a sensation that Taylor especially articulated well:

> It's weird knowing that our parents were here, like, our age…interacting at our age, and they were friends, and we weren't even a consideration in their mind…. thinking of them going to parties, going to class, and being friends with each other…it's just weird.

> …it's really weird thinking [that] my mom has all these pictures of her and her friends on the porch of this house, and I looked at them, I was like, "I've been inside that house. I've been in there many times — this is really weird."

Legacy students in our study mostly guarded themselves. "It's great that my dad went here, but I am here for me," Margaret said, "I am not here for him, I am not having his college career."

Family Teaching and Learning

When they identified with family, legacy students in our study suggested teaching-and-learning dynamics. In *Expressions of Family-based Cognitive Processes*, legacy students spoke of patterns of thought learned from their parents. Kate and her alumnus father were "level-headed… I don't make unrealistic or lofty plans or whatever…like my Dad." Margaret and her alumnus father "think exactly alike" on their "brain-frequency":

> He kind of wants me to see his thought process, and it's kind of both a *teaching* experience as well as just actually being a parent by not only doing what he's doing but explaining what he's doing, so that way I can *learn* from it in a way. (Emphasis added)

Taylor adopted problem-solving strategies from her alumna

mother, helping her in class.

Legacy students in our study learned from families how to form peer relationships, reflected in *Family Dynamics in Socialization Patterns of Legacies.* Haley discussed sibling-like friendships with other legacy and non-legacy students on campus: "[We're] really close through going through the same experiences." As adults Taylor and her friends might "live in a cul-de-sac," she said, "and all of our families will be in the cul-de-sac; we're just going to have morning walks with coffee and our dogs." Alumni parents influenced pursuits of long-lasting friendships. Kate and Natalie each described enduring connections that their alumni fathers had developed in college. Margaret captured well a guiding influence that "kind of just snaps into my head, 'Oh, I got that from Dad.'"

Alumni parents, *Keepers of Institutional and Family History and Memory* suggests, "taught" our research participants how to relate to the university. Kate and her alumnus father shared "the same experiences [from] all the special things that we do here," she said. Margaret remembered heroic, legendary people of the campus's past. Taylor felt the university

> has and has not changed very much…there's still that [University] spirit that still exists—my mom would always talk about [that] spirit, and I would just be like, "OK, I don't really know what you're talking about," but I get it now.

Legacy students in our study became symbolic "parents" themselves, *Legacy Emulation of Parenting Styles across Contexts* suggests. Haley gave tours to prospective legacy applicants, sharing her "relatable story." Kate envisioned helping students "on what to do when you get to college." Margaret's younger sister had applied to the institution; she would continue her alumnus father's parenting,

> letting her do her own thing and having input into what she's doing…. Yeah…in a weird way—and I don't want to say that it's "parenting" but it kind of is…because the same values are transferring over, I think, at least on letting her do her own thing, sort of.

Natalie envisioned guiding the next generation of students: "you approach graduation and kind of see this legacy…wanting the students who come after you to do well…I could picture myself

more likely to be coming back and speaking to a class or something like that." Taylor practiced generativity by leading a local Girl Scout troop of "our little sisters, in a way."

Having Families of Their Own revealed perspectives of future lives of marriage and children, though legacy students in our study did not speak of current romantic relationships. Haley contemplated parenting styles from psychology class. Kate might marry a male graduate: "I'm only the second legacy here, but who knows? There could be a ton of us now, especially if I end up marrying someone from here. Like, I can't see the kids not going." Taylor's children were likely to attend the institution for "connections that are deeper [and] more comfortable, I guess."

University-Environmental Context

Legacy students in our study negotiated influences of parents, but also educational context. *Stereotypes of Legacies on Campus* suggests stigmas at the institution. Kate discussed assumptions about preferential admission:

> Being a legacy was awesome until you got here. I didn't realize that…because before at high school, it was like, "Oh, good. You're probably going to get in there then." But then when you get here, we're looked at like athletes — like, "Oh, they only got in because they're a legacy." There's a lot of that.

> …It might up your chances of getting in more, but once you're in, if you rise to it, you obviously were meant to be selected. And everyone is meant to be selected, but you're obviously not here because you're a legacy—you perhaps maybe chose to come here due to legacy influence.

Margaret kept her background somewhat secretive:

> There's your stereotypical [University] legacy. And…there's this running joke that there are kids that are your very spoiled children, that Mommy and Daddy will, like, help you out—they're very, very "babied." And I think people, myself in general, tend to associate that particularly with students who have had a parent who has gone here….So, if anything, I try not to bring it up just because I don't want professors thinking, "Oh, it's some spoiled legacy kid."

Natalie was open about being a legacy. It linked her to professors who, analogous to her family members, were alumni: "[It's] a really eye-opening experience: you see what your degree can give

you, can offer you later in life." Taylor found comfort in student-alumni-institution "connections," which were "cool," she said, "it's been cool."

Events on campus prompted reflections on being legacies, highlighted in *Triggers of Legacy Identity Awareness*. Haley met other legacy students through new student orientation and socializing on campus. Kate considered her legacy status when she met prospective legacy students by way of her campus job. Margaret described classroom experiences in which

> the only time I think about it is if a professor says to me, or if it slips that, "Oh, my Dad did this," or, "Oh, I heard that it didn't used to be like this." "Oh, how did you hear that?" "Oh, well my Dad used to go here." "Oh, your Dad went here…." The conversation immediately changes, I mean not always in a bad way…. But it's always, it's like that you can tell, it's like, "Oh, yeah…."

Natalie did not "think about my dad being here all the time." Yet there were "weird" moments, Taylor said. "It's just very strange," she explained, when at Homecoming her mother reconnected with an alumnus parent whose daughter was Taylor's friend.

As *University Culture and Climate* suggests, participants in our study embraced the institution. Kate found her niche among "exceptionally bright students [who make] you have to work a lot harder to stick out from being average." Margaret "absolutely loves" the school and "could be a student here for the rest of my life…." Natalie and her friends bonded over academics. Taylor had settled into "my little space and my little home."

At home on campus, *Legacies as Cross-Generational Connectors* suggests, research participants in our study linked family members, parents, and friends. Haley was an intermediary between her father and older sister, both alums, and her younger sister who planned to attend the institution in the fall. Kate was "friends with [my dad's] friends' kids." Guiding her younger sister, an incoming first-year student, Margaret practiced her alumnus father's "parenting" that "transferred from my dad to me and then from me to my sister—and again from my dad to my sister." Natalie shared "that experience between generations [of parents and friends] was really neat [and] different than friends…it was more of family." Taylor contemplated how

> those connections are going to be related in the future, because there will be connections obviously, thinking about the possibilities of one of my kids being best friends with someone I don't even know or someone I'm not really acquainted with being best friends with one of their kids, or even someone I'm really good friends with.

Cross-generational connections helped legacy students in our study anchor themselves, deepening their involvement on campus and sense of personal synergy. Outcomes associated with cross-generational ties were articulated in *Integration of Self and Undergraduate Experience*. Haley joined eight student-clubs, which "all fit together [and] all kind of fell into place." Kate's life was ready to "click." Margaret worked to fit together "little puzzle pieces" of life that "when you put them all together…it's just really cool and amazing." Natalie's experiences "fell at the right times" and have "fallen into place for me," she said, seeming a matter of fate. Taylor found it "amazing" that "it would all work out the way it's supposed to."

Implications

Conceptualizing Legacies' Perspectives

Parental involvement has offered a strong explanation for the nature of interactions between college students and their families (Harper et al., 2012; Wolf et al., 2009). Several studies, essays, and reports highlight formal, direct family-student exchanges, such as the method/mode, content, and frequency of contact (Sax & Wartman, 2010; Wartman & Savage, 2008). Our analysis adds to this literature by finding evidence of *unstructured* forms of parental involvement, with participants and family in constant, albeit internal, dialogue that shapes campus experiences.

Legacy students in our study see their families at events such as Homecoming. They talk by phone, e-mail, text, and/or Skype regularly. Typical of all of the students in our study, and Millennials more generally (Arnett, 2015), Taylor said, "[It's] not like excessive or anything, but it's pretty regular." They do not always think about their parents, as Natalie said, but their families' influences were embedded and articulated in separation-individuation and teaching-and-learning relationships. Kate, like the others, self-pressured to emulate her

alumnus father's medical career: "he's always been on and on that there isn't any [pressure], but…I think I create external pressure to put on myself that is imaginary, but I do that with everything."

Our analysis suggests that parental involvement may encompass *introjection*. Legacy students' perspectives underscored internalized aspects of their parents, for "the same values are transferring over," Margaret said. Family influence, guiding social relationships (Bowlby, 1969), may help the women in our study find "*responsive* exchange where both self and other are contained, recognized, empowered, valued, and enriched" (Josselson, 1996, pp. 209–10, emphasis in original). Taylor's words echo what the other participants in our study said: "I want to be my own person, but at the same time, that connection is very important." Parental involvement as introjection can inform identity development, but campus context also has effects.

Many institutions encourage family-student-institution relations (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Our analysis indicates *unstructured interactions* in which students link parents and institution, transmitting across generations and shaping for themselves messages and values. Haley did not know "much about my dad when he went here," yet made meaningful connections to him, her older alumna sister, her younger soon-matriculating sister, and the university.

Family alumni-institution ties may widen college access for select student groups but can also be constraining once those students are on campus. Millennials often experience identity vs. role confusion in the context of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2015), an age of possibilities/optimism in which they tighten family interdependence while considering nearly unlimited ways of living their lives. Family and institution may *delimit* these possibilities, our analysis suggests, with students narrowly focusing on having the "right" college experience at the "right" institution to conform to social class expectations (McDonough, 1997).

Legacy students, our analysis reveals, embrace parents' ways of thinking, relating, and forming life plans. "I'm only the second legacy here," Kate said, "but who knows? There could be a ton

of us now, especially if I end up marrying someone from here." Recall Taylor imagining that she and her friends would "live in a cul-de-sac and all of our families will be in the cul-de-sac [with] morning walks with coffee and our dogs." Together, perspectives suggest that *family and particularly SES may constrain choices that campus context continues to restrict.* Yet legacy students in our study viewed the institution as "home," validating who they are—and will be. "I could be a student here for the rest of my life," Margaret said.

Paradoxically, family and institutional constraints could be empowering. We did not replicate previous quantitative measures of development (Martin & Spenner, 2009; Massey & Mooney, 2007), but legacy students' perspectives suggest acclimation and fit. Resonance between family dynamics and campus context could support integration of self and undergraduate experience (Adams et al., 2000). "It just feels right," Natalie said, "that you're in the right place." Our findings here thus point toward conflicting tensions in the relationship between privilege and college student development. Legacy students in our study are in the "right place" for them, giving them confidence in their decisions and life directions, but may also miss opportunities to expand their range of possibilities for engagement, career, and family and to become autonomous and independent as part of transitions toward adulthood (Arnett, 2015).

Our findings suggest as well conflicting purposes of the university itself. As it seeks to cultivate generativity through structure, policies, and practices (e.g., Komives et al., 2006; Hastings et al., 2015; Hills, 2013), the institution may also reproduce lives of privilege for students like those in our study. The legacy students seek to practice generativity by continuing the cycle of family members who attend and benefit from the institution. Kate "can't see the kids not going to [the university]," and Margaret "would want to give my kids the same." The institution, the analysis suggests, may encourage and nurture lives that perpetuate privilege, and it could be hesitant to break or mitigate that cycle for elite populations (Karabel, 2005).

Connecting Theory to Institutional Policy and Practice

Our analysis suggests implications for student development and institutional policy and practice as situated within the ecological systems framework (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Legacy students' perspectives suggest the importance of *microsystems* that interact to form the *mesosystem*: advising, career counseling, residential living and learning, and co-curricular activities. Family and institutional contexts may constrain legacy students. Working with parents and students in individual and group settings, student affairs practitioners could *expand* their perceived range of possibilities.

As Wartman and Savage (2008) suggest, universities may leverage formal parent programs to convey messages and values about the campus to families who may reinforce them with students. What would happen if elite institutions emphasized to parents their commitments to social justice and equity? In what ways might such an approach, when infused throughout academic and student affairs, foster awareness of privilege and redirect students' generativity toward social benefits rather than personal gain (e.g., living in a cul-de-sac)? Social movements in this arena, such as the "Occupy Wall Street" student protests (Hearn, 2013), suggest the importance of grassroots-level activism and indicate possible directions for institutional responses.

At the *exosystem* (institutional) level, our study may lend some support for preferential admission for legacy students in this analysis. They seemed to thrive, contributing to campus and local communities. But do their experiences justify admission for all legacies? Preferential admission broadly applied to all children of alumni could push elite institutions even farther away from increasing their socioeconomic diversity (Hearn & Rosinger, 2014). Yet these institutions may have too much at stake politically and financially to back down from longstanding policies and practices that favor legacies and alumni (Golden, 2006). Effective use of enrollment management could help to achieve new equilibria in admissions and financial aid to better balance extending privilege for some and fostering social mobility for others.

Building Toward Future Research

Our findings suggest several areas for further research. For example: how long-lasting are the effects of parental involvement and institutional context on legacy students? What is the legacy student experience like in other elite (e.g., public flagship) and less elite institutions? How does being a male legacy student influence masculinity and identity? While legacy students at elite institutions are typically White and from high-SES families, there are exceptions. In what ways do the experiences of legacy students on campus vary by SES and race/ethnicity? That is, what is student development and "privilege" like for legacy students who are from working-class families and/or are students of color? Moreover, how does parental involvement, and thus any potential benefit for legacy students, differ in college by SES background? Finally, which organizational initiatives in elite higher education are associated with narrowing the gaps in access and enrollment? The tensions between generativity and reproduction of privilege may be difficult to resolve, but warrant more extensive research to inform equitable policy and practice.

About the authors:

Jarret B. Warshaw is an Assistant Professor in the Educational Leadership and Research Methodology program at Florida Atlantic University. Richard Henne-Ochoa is an Assistant Professor in the Education program at Bucknell University. Joseph L. Murray is an Associate Professor in the Education Program at Bucknell University, and is the Director of the College Student Personnel Program at Bucknell University.

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They indicate as well the generative qualities of campus and family that may limit student development and undergird broader patterns of social inequality. We discuss implications for policy, practice, and research. Faculty Journal Articles. Title. Generativity or Reproduction of Privilege? How Institution and Family Affect Legacy Students. How Institution and Family Affect Legacy Students." Journal of Student Affairs Inquiry (2017) . This document is currently not available here. The idea that parental involvement engenders students' academic achievement is intuitively appealing to the point that society in general, and educators in particular, have considered PI an important ingredient for the remedy of many ills in education today. In the 1980s and early 1990s, studies were published that suggested the importance of parental involvement in school. In the mid-1990s, the popular press, policy makers, and school administrators actively advocated PI. Legislation was enacted, such as the The influence of parental involvement on a student's academic success should not be underestimated. While brain power, work ethic, and even genetics all play important roles in student achievement, the determining factor comes down to what kind of support system she has at home. Students with two parents operating in supportive roles are 52% more likely to enjoy school and get straight A's than students whose parents are disengaged with what's going on at school. This is especially the case during the earliest years of schooling, in Kindergarten through the 5th grade, when students with active... Before a student enters primary school, her parents have a huge influence on how well she will perform.