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# Perceived Stress Among First-Generation African American College Males

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of perceived stress among first-generation male African American college students attending 4-year colleges. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. Using data from semi-structured interviews with eight first-generation male African American college students, eight themes emerged. The themes were: enactive mastery, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, physiological arousal, college preparation, employment, and stress. First-generation male African American college students experience perceived stress while completing college. The findings indicate that first-generation male African American college students who experienced stress were employed to support their families while being enrolled in college full time. Online or in person, they were unable to access campus wellness resources. Although previous research has referred to first-generation students as not persisting academically at a rate similar to their counterparts, second-generation college students, these factors were not identified in the undergraduates in this study. Recommendations for first-generation male African American college students experiencing stress while completing their undergraduate degrees include engaging in self-care and getting access to health and wellness on campus.

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Arleen Hogan

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By

Krystal C. Johnson

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Sr. Remigia Kushner

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Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher College

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## **Dedication**

I would like to thank God. Without God, I would not have had the will power, the energy, or the endurance to achieve any of this. Thank you for walking with me every step of the way and never leaving my side.

I would like to acknowledge my Chair, Sr. Remigia Kushner, and my Committee Member, Dr. Arlene Hogan. Thank you for your time, your support, and your belief in me, without you both, this would not have been possible.

I would like to thank my mother, Cheyrisse Hill. I am a strong Black woman because you made me a strong Black woman. To my grandfather, Rayman Hill, this opportunity would not be possible if I did not have an intelligent, supportive person as you in my life. To my cousin, Shalinda Thibodeaux. Thank you for supporting me, believing in me, and walking with me every step of the way. Shalinda, you changed my life without trying, and I don't think I could ever express how much you mean to me.

To my uncle, Jermaine Hill, I thank you for everything that you have done for me; I thank you for your support, your love, and your belief in me. Thank you for being the father figure I needed. To my brother, Chrisshaun Hill, I appreciate everything that you've done for me and continue to do for me. To my cousin Keisha Hill, thank you for paving the way and for creating the path of greatness. You are amazing, and I thank you.

To my best friends Tanisha Beckford, Valene Rajoon, Victoria Rois, and Vincent Boulware. Thank you for being my support system, my personal cheerleaders, my guardian angels. I cannot thank you all enough.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Krystal C. Johnson serves as an Admissions Specialist at Columbia University. Ms. Johnson attended Mercy College and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Communications, specializing in Journalism in 2015. She received her Master of Arts degree in English Literature from Mercy College in 2017.

Ms. Johnson enrolled in the Ed.D. program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in the spring of 2017 at their New Rochelle, NY site. She pursued her research on the perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students under the direction of Sr. Remigia Kushner and Dr. Arlene Hogan and received the Ed.D. degree in 2019.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of perceived stress among first-generation male African American college students attending 4-year colleges. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. Using data from semi-structured interviews with eight first-generation male African American college students, eight themes emerged. The themes were: enactive mastery, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, physiological arousal, college preparation, employment, and stress. First-generation male African American college students experience perceived stress while completing college. The findings indicate that first-generation male African American college students who experienced stress were employed to support their families while being enrolled in college full time. Online or in person, they were unable to access campus wellness resources. Although previous research has referred to first-generation students as not persisting academically at a rate similar to their counterparts, second-generation college students, these factors were not identified in the undergraduates in this study. Recommendations for first-generation male African American college students experiencing stress while completing their undergraduate degrees include engaging in self-care and getting access to health and wellness on campus.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background**

The numbers of racial and ethnic student groups attending colleges and universities has increased, supporting similar increases in minority first-generation college students; however, these minority first-generation college students also experience the highest levels of stress (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Opidee, 2015). For many first-generation students pursuing higher education, the social and cultural norms of the academic institution can conflict with their own norms, hindering their progress. Prior research has asserted that most college undergraduate students experience academic stress and negative emotional reactions (Misra, McKean, West, & Russo, 2000). In particular, these experiences of stress more commonly affect first-generation college students (Misra et al., 2000).

First-generation students (i.e., students whose parents never attended college) graduate at lower rates than students who represent the second, third, or fourth generation in their families to attend college (Bui, 2002). First-generation students differ from their peers in ways that reduce the likelihood that they will attend and persist to degree completion (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students are more likely to be older, minority, and female; they tend to have dependent children; and they often come from low socioeconomic homes, with parents who did not obtain a college degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). These characteristics are independently associated with lower rates of college attendance and degree attainment (Engle & Tinto, 2008). As of 2015, 30% of

college students were the first in their family to attend college, and 24% (or 4.5 million) were both first-generation and low-income students (Opidee, 2015). In a University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) study, 42% of the students, who had parents who attended college, graduated within 4-years, compared to only 27% of first-generation students who graduated in the same time frame (Bui, 2002). First-generation college students are typically defined as those whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree, while second-generation students have at least one parent with a bachelor's degree (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). The parent of the participants utilized in this study did not earn a bachelor's degree. The number of first-generation university students in the United States has steadily increased (Engle & Tinto, 2008), comprising about 21% of the student population (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, & Tran, 2010).

### **Problem Statement**

According to Tinto (1987), first-generation college students are less likely to complete a bachelor's degree in 4 years. This population of students has a high attrition rate, and they are four times more likely to drop out of college after their first year at a 4-year college. According to Millet and Kevelson (2018), in 2017, first-generation college students made up 52% of the population enrolled in 2- or 4-year institutions. This population increased from 21% to 52% in less than 9 years. First-generation college students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds generally do not have prior knowledge regarding higher education.

A lack of focus on postsecondary degree completion has consequences—for individual students—and for the future of the country. If students are not completing their undergraduate degrees and dropping out of college, finding a permanent career is less

likely than for a student who persists and graduates (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). If first-generation college students are unable to persist to graduation, the earning potential for this population will decrease, and homelessness and bankruptcy may increase within the United States. Colleges are a pipeline for employment in educating doctors, nurses, and emergency responders.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

To contribute to the body of knowledge about the effects of stress among first-generation college students, Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory was used to guide this study. According to psychologist Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief regarding his or her capability to exercise influence over events that affect that person's life. Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory arose from the framework of social cognitive theory (Bandura, Jeffrey, & Wright, 1974) that claimed people learn from observing others.

The self-efficacy theory suggests that students are motivated to persist when they believe their actions could produce favorable results (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) suggested that there are four sources of self-efficacy: (a) experience or enactive attainment, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal persuasion or social persuasion, and (d) physiological states. Enactive attainment or mastery experience is based upon the level of perceived, achieved success. As success increases, so does self-efficacy; the same is true that when success decreases, self-efficacy lowers.

According to Schunk and DiBenedetto (2016), factors that affect the levels of performance are the difficulty of the task, the amount of effort a person expends doing the task, the amount of external aid a person receives for the task, the circumstances

under which a person performs the task, and the temporal pattern of the person's successes and failures. The vicarious experience outlined in the social cognitive model is another way of strengthening self-efficacy (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). When individuals see someone with similar traits to theirs who succeeds, their self-efficacy level increases because they believe they can accomplish the same level of success (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Likewise, when a person fails despite extreme efforts, the individual's self-efficacy levels decrease; the same effect occurs when someone the individual admires, fails (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016).

Bandura (1997) also claimed that if individuals see a model that they do not identify with, success or failure has no effect on their self-efficacy level. Verbal or social persuasion is widely used to persuade others that they possess the capabilities to achieve a specific task or goal (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Although verbal or social persuasion can be limited in sustaining a long-term self-efficacy level, such persuasion can contribute to success if the desired goal is within reasonable boundaries (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Factors that impact the effectiveness of persuasive experiences include: (a) who the authors of self-efficacy are, (b) the authors' credibility, and (c) how knowledgeable the authors are about the nature of the activity (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). The last source of self-efficacy is one's psychological state.

Bandura (1997) believed that people rely partly on their physical or emotional state when judging their own capabilities. People interpret stress, reactions, and tensions, which may be moments of vulnerability and poor performance. Mood can also affect peoples' judgment about their efficacy. Just as a positive mood can increase self-efficacy, a sorrowful mood can lower it (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Bandura (1997) asserted

that self-efficacy creates the infrastructure for human motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment. It is important for people to believe that their actions can result in a favorable outcome; otherwise, there will be little to no incentive for individuals to persist in times of difficulty (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Researchers have posited that self-efficacy serves as an important role in motivation; a higher level of self-efficacy results in a higher level of motivation (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). This current study used the various factors associated with self-efficacy to examine the perceived stress of first-generation African American male college students.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experience of perceived stress among first-generation African American male college students. Perceived stress comprises feelings or thoughts about how much stress an individual is under at a given point in time or over a given period of time (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1994). Perceived stress has been shown to stem from stressful life events, family conflicts and social problems. It can cause physical and mental illness, and perceived stress can be measured with the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1994).

Given the body of research indicating that first-generation college students do not persist to graduation at rates similar to their second-generation counterparts, this study is significant. The findings will add to the body of knowledge through understanding the experiences of stress as a potential contributing factor to first-generation college students' failure to persist to graduation.

In addition to helping first-generation college students, the findings from this study can support increased knowledge and understanding among leaders in higher education of stress-related factors that affect this population and how these students manage stress. Specifically, through this study, the researcher hoped to better understand the perceived stress of first-generation college students, who remain four times more likely to drop out after their first year of school at a 4-year college (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of perceived stress among first-generation male African American college students with its potential to reduce persistence to graduation at the same rates as second-generation college students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe first-generation male African American college students' experiences of stress to understand the effects that stress might have and how they coped with that stress.

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. Do first-generation male African American college students experience perceived stress?
2. What is the source of first-generation male African American college students' levels of perceived stress?
3. How do first-generation male African American college students cope with the stress they experience?
4. Does being a part of a fraternity offer support that helps first-generation male African American college students cope with perceived stress?

## **Significance of the Study**

Researchers Engle and Tinto (2008) examined the reasons why first-generation college students failed to persist to graduation at 4-year institutions at similar or higher rates than their second-generation counterparts. Engle and Tinto (2008) believed that first-generation college students were less likely to persist to graduation because they lacked support from family and exposure to college before their first year. This qualitative, phenomenological design explored the participants' lived experiences of perceived stress. It is significant because there is a body of research that states that first-generation college students are less likely to persist to graduation than second-generation college students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation college students at 4-year institutions are four times more likely than second-generation college students to drop out after their first year (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation college students make up 52% of the population. The second-generation college students are more likely to persist due to the pre-exposure they receive of college from their parents (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012).

Unlike research that highlights the barriers and roadblocks to the success of first-generation college students at 4-year institutions, this study focused on understanding the lived experience of perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students and to identify if perceived stress was a barrier in this population not persisting to graduation. In doing so, this study described the perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students who were a part of a fraternity and who were on track to graduate within 6 years, which is the general benchmark for college completion of enrollment into college (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). This researcher's study was

conducted to increase the body of knowledge relating to first-generation male African American college students who experienced perceived stress while completing a bachelor's degree and to identify if perceived stress is a barrier that prevents this population from persisting to graduation.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*African American* – individuals who identify themselves as African American, not African, Caribbean, Caribbean American, and /or Hispanic.

*Employment* – the condition in which a person has paid work (Adams, Meyers, & Beidas, 2016)

*First-Generation College Students* – individuals whose parents did not earn a bachelor's degree (Bui, 2002).

*Perceived Stress* – the feelings or thoughts about how much stress an individual is under at a given point in time or over a given period of time. For this study, perceived stress was measured by the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1994). Perceived stress has been shown to stem from stressful life events, family conflicts and social problems. Perceived stress can cause physical and mental illness (Cohen et al., 1994).

*Persistence to Graduation* – the percentage of students who graduate from college. For this study, persistence to graduation was measured by students who graduate from college within the 6-year time frame.

*Lived Experience* – a representation of the experiences and choices of a given person and the knowledge they gained from these experiences and choices (Van Manen, 2016).

*Non-First-Generation College Student* – individuals whose parents (one or more) have obtained a bachelor's degree.

*Socioeconomic Status* – a combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation.

*Success* – the accomplishment of a goal (Petty, 2014). For the purpose of this study, success was measured by the persistence of first-generation African American college male students.

## **Chapter Summary**

In 2015, 2.3 million more students were enrolled in institutions of higher education than in 2003 (Morrow & Ackerman, 2012). However, retention and graduation rates have remained relatively low while enrollment has increased (Morrow & Ackerman, 2012). Former President Barack Obama's administration aimed to increase college enrollment and to close the achievement gap for minority students, but persistence and college completion rates have remained low (Olson & Riordan, 2012).

The remainder of this work is organized into four chapters. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature that examined areas relating to perceived stress amongst first-generation male African American college students. Chapter 3 presents the methodology employed for this study, a general perspective, the research context, the research participants, the instruments used in data collection, and the procedures for data collection and analysis. The findings of this study are presented in Chapter 4, which includes the major findings, the responded to research questions, and a summary of the findings. The final chapter,

Chapter 5, highlights the implications of the findings, the limitations of the study, and the researcher's recommendations for practice and future studies.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

Although college participation rates for first-generation college students have increased (Opidee, 2015), there is a larger gap between college enrollment and degree attainment for this population than there is for their second-generation counterparts (Bui 2002; Engle & Tinto, 2008). The focus of this research was to understand the perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students who were a part of a fraternity. Themes of self-efficacy, in terms of perceived stress and persistence, were used to guide the research to understand the role of stress and the factors that may reduce that stress among first-generation male African American college students as it relates to retention. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the factors that contributed to first-generation male African American college students' levels of stress. This study also was conducted to understand the perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students and how they coped with that stress while completing their undergraduate degree.

### **First-Generation College Student's Stress Factors**

While the numbers of racial/ethnic student groups attending colleges and universities has increased, minority first-generation college students experience the highest levels of stress (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012; Opidee, 2015). For many first-generation students pursuing higher education, the social and cultural norms of the academic institution can conflict with the students' own social and cultural norms, and that conflict can hinder their progress.

First-generation college students are typically defined as those whose parents have not earned bachelor's degrees, while second-generation students have at least one parent with a bachelor's degree (Stebleton & Soria, 2012). The number of first-generation university students in the United States has steadily increased (Engle & Tinto, 2008), comprising about 52% of the student population (Millett & Kevelson, 2018).

### **Sources of Stress**

According to Adams et al. (2016), financial strain directly impacts first- and second-generation college students' psychological symptoms and academic and social integration through perceived stress. The researchers theorized that the constructs of interest (i.e., perceived stress, psychological symptoms, and academic and social integration) are all related to one another. Possible direct and indirect effects (e.g., increased perceived stress levels) of financial strain on a student's academic and social integration levels have been seldom studied, and, to date, students have not been studied using a mediational model. Adams et al. (2016) indicated that past studies have established a strong correlational relationship between financial strain and psychological symptoms in undergraduate students; a solid understanding of the potential mediating mechanisms for this relationship has not yet been established. Therefore, the mechanism through which financial strain impacts poor outcomes is especially important to understand, because early identification may be the best way to prevent negative ramifications, potentially boosting the capacity for first-generation college students to improve their academic performance and enhance their mental health and well-being.

Conefrey (2018) utilized a cross-sectional survey methodology, with a sample of university undergraduates, to examine the relationships among financial strain, perceived

stress, psychological symptoms, and academic and social integration at college. Two primary hypotheses were tested: (a) perceived stress was expected to mediate the relationship between financial strain and psychological symptoms, and (b) perceived stress was expected to mediate the relationship between financial strain and academic and social integration. Both models included first- and second-generation status as a covariate (an independent variable).

The findings offered by Conefrey (2018) represent new information that can inform intervention programs to improve psychological and academic outcomes in college students through programming that directly addresses both financial strain and perceived stress. Conefrey (2018) revealed that first-generation college students are less likely to persist if they experience perceived stress. Conefrey also stated that there have been various strategies created to cope with financial strain in postsecondary education settings (e.g., student support services, McNair Scholars Program, TRiO programming, Upward Bound) as well as efforts to make financial aid more available. Conefrey (2018) expressed that financial strain is also a leading factor for why first-generation college students drop out of college compared to their second-generation counterparts. Student support services and the McNair Scholars Program seek to improve graduation rates for these populations and to prepare low-income and/or first-generation students for advanced graduate study. These programs provide low-income and/or first-generation students with the opportunity to participate in 4- to 6-week-long summer programs that prepare students for their transition into college. The goal of the summer programs is to improve academic skills. Other programs offered include academic, career, and financial aid counseling; direct financial assistance in the form of scholarships; and peer

assistance, cultural events, workshops, and instructional courses (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

### **Negative Impact of Stress**

Adams et al. (2016) stated that perceived stress has a negative impact on students' well-being, specifically their mental health. According to Adams et al. (2016), financial strain and its ramifications (e.g., insufficient food, shelter, heat, inability to pay bills) are critical factors in the negative psychosocial outcomes, such as stress and depression, in students. The researchers concluded that financial strain and perceived stress are related to difficulty with academic and social integration, because students who experience financial strain may be less likely to engage in campus activities. Increased perceived stress may also exacerbate the existing difficulties with academic and social integration faced by low-income and/or first-generation students. Given that past studies indicate the importance of perceived stress on low-income and/or first-generation students' outcomes, testing the theory that perceived stress may be the primary mediating mechanism between financial strain, psychological symptomatology, and academic and social integration was of critical importance (Checkoway, 2018).

### **Persistence**

According to Hagedorn (2005), persistence is defined as a student completing a postsecondary degree within a 6-year time frame. Researchers have studied many variations of persistence pertaining to postsecondary education, such as comparing first generation to second generation in terms of persistence toward degree attainment (Attinasi, 1989; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, 1983; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolf, 1986; Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2000; Williamson & Creamer, 1988).

Three themes emerged from the Herndon and Hirt (2004) study: pre-college, early-college, and later-college influences. The findings indicate that academic success is prompted by family support via financial, social, and emotional means when pertaining to pre-college influences. It was also cited by participants that they were taught by family members not to be intimidated (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). During the discussion of early college experiences, the subjects spoke about how maintaining close relationships with their family members and religion helped ease the feelings of isolation while dealing with the difficulties of performing academically at their institution. In the discussion of later college influences, the participants referred to the importance of success in terms of being a role model and mentor to future generations as well as making their parents proud.

Herndon and Hirt (2004) suggested that future studies should consider taking samples from 22 predominantly Black colleges, community colleges, and liberal arts colleges. They also suggested that in relation to the institution type, a quantitative study could be used to look at the three categories in greater detail (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). Although persistence toward college completion has lessened, generally and nationwide, it is more a problem among first-generation college students from low-income and minorities families (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Research has defined first-generation college students as those whose parents did not attend college or did not complete college. They tend to disproportionately belong to the Black and Hispanic heritages, and they are generally depicted as coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Banks-Santilli, 2014; Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Bui, 2002;

Choy, 2001; Ecklund, 2013; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Nuñez, Cuccaro-Alamin, & Carroll, 1998; Petty, 2014). First-generation college students are 48% more likely to delay enrollment into college after high school, compared to their non-first-generation counterparts at 19% (Nuñez et al., 1998). The National Center for Education Statistics data on non-first-generation college students suggests an enrollment rate of 82% compared to first-generation college students whose enrollment rate was 54% (Aud et al., 2011). Furthermore, the report indicated that first-generation college students whose parents did not have a high school diploma had an enrollment rate of 36%. In addition to delayed college enrollment, Horn, Nuñez, and Bobbitt (2000) suggested that first-generation college students were more likely to enroll into community colleges, rather than in 4-year institutions.

The Horn et al. (2000) multivariate analysis revealed that first-generation college student enrollment into 4-year institutions was significantly affected by family income, educational expectations, parental involvement, peer influence, and academic preparation. Furthermore, low-income level contributed to first-generation college students enrolling into college academically underprepared (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Engle & Tinto, 2008).

At the time of their study, Engle and Tinto (2008) stated there were 4.5 million first-generation college students who enrolled in postsecondary education with an estimated 24% pursuing a bachelor's degree. Data from the Engle and Tinto (2008) study and the NCES research (Aud et al., 2011) suggest that first-generation college students from low socioeconomic backgrounds had a 26% chance of leaving college after the first year, in comparison to their second-generation counterparts, who were not first-

generation college students and who were not from low socioeconomic backgrounds and whose likelihood of dropping out was only 7%. Studies also have shown, as suggested by the low graduation rates of first-generation college students, that only 11% of first-generation college students earn a bachelor's degree after 6 years, in contrast to their more advantaged non-first-generation college peers, who earn their bachelor's degree at a rate of 55% (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Petty, 2014; Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014).

**Persistence of first-generation college students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.** There are numerous factors that decrease the chances of bachelor's degree attainment by first-generation college students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Although the research has reported quantitative results of first-generation college students' high retention rates, most research fails to state why first-generation college students drop out of college. First-generation college students are less likely to live on campus, they have a tendency not to be involved in extracurricular activities, and they often perceive the college atmosphere as not supportive (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Furthermore, first-generation college students work more hours than their peers whose parents went to college and earned a degree (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Warburton, Bugarin, Nuñez, & Carroll, 2001).

When compared to their second-generation counterparts, first-generation college students tend to vary greatly in social class, economic status, values, needs, and traditions (Cuyjet, 1997). These factors have considerable influence on the academic and social development of these students as part of their collegiate growth, which is impacted by

social environment, developmental experiences, and personal relationships formed on campus during their first year at college (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

According to Pascarella (1985), degree attainment is associated with both academic and social integration. Academic integration is most important to both White males and females, compared to Black females, who believe that both academic and social integration are equally as important (Pascarella, 1985). Black men in the study asserted that social integration took precedence. It was important to the Black men that they served in some capacity in an organization on campus. Black women had no preference in the type of social integration; however, obtaining a major role in a play for the Black women did indicate positive effects on persistence. It was more important to both White males and females that social integration involved having a personal relationship with faculty members. Although the study by Pascarella (1985) indicates that persistence was affected by student integration, it also highlights that the types of activities and campus involvement that lead to persistence are different and may differ based on race. In addition, the Pascarella (1985) study supported Astin's (1984) student involvement theory, which states that the more a student becomes involved, the more that student succeeds socially and academically.

According to Tinto (1993), students are more likely to persist once they adapt to the culture of the institution, and as such, they become committed to their success. Students who are committed to their success are more likely to interact with their peers and faculty members. These factors are all critical to student academic success (Tinto, 1993). According to Kim and Sax (2009), first-generation college students are less likely to interact with faculty members compared to second-generation college students. Kim

and Sax (2009) posited that interaction with faculty members inside and outside of the classroom could result in higher grades, which can promote motivation toward degree attainment and commitment to a college.

Somers et al. (2000) asserted that first-generation college students are more likely to persist in college if they do not work while pursuing their degrees. First-generation college students' lack of social integration may be linked to the need to work full time, not being able to spend much time on campus, or not being able to participate in campus activities (Somers et al., 2000). Researchers have posited that college integration is important to persistence, and the failure to integrate may result in student departure (Astin, 1975, 1984; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Hossler, Ziskin, Moore, and Wakhungu (2008) explored student persistence through the lens of what factors contribute to a student's decision to stay in college. Several researchers have developed theories on factors that affect persistence, which have been widely used to examine why some college students persist and why others decide to drop out (Astin, 1975; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975).

**The effects of stress on persistence.** Many studies have stated that their limitation was not including first-generation counterparts to differentiate where the gap may be between the academic and social success of these populations. Massey, Mooney, Torres, and Charles (2007) and Bennett and Lutz (2009), for example, at the time of their study, found that immigrant and second-generation Black students were matriculating at higher rates at elite institutions compared to their non-immigrant Black peers. Although these differences sometimes had much to do with their socioeconomic status and achievement differences between the groups (Bennett & Lutz, 2009), other data suggest

this overrepresentation was only partly explained by high achievement in high school (Keller & Tillman, 2008). Further, the Somers, Woodhouse, and Cofer (2004) study found that over 50% of the undergraduate Black students at Harvard University were immigrant or second-generation youth—even though these two populations made up less than 10% of the Black population in the United States at the time of the study. As well, data from an urban, commuter university revealed that second-generation Black freshmen persisted longer at the institution than their non-immigrant Black peers (Jenkins, Harburg, Weissberg, & Donnelly, 2004).

The method used for the study by Audrey, Cordall, Moore, Cohen, and Campbell (2004) was a sample drawn from the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), a census that surveyed students from each of the eight University of California schools. The researchers selected all students who self-identified as a Black, second-generation college students, including Black immigrants. Of the undergraduate students surveyed, 34% were second-generation college students. Participants responded to a core set of items requesting demographic information regarding participation in and satisfaction with campus activities, programs, and services; self-assessment of academic skills; and educational plans and long-term goals (Audrey et al., 2004).

Audrey et al. (2004) revealed that among the female participants, immigrant women's grade point average (GPA) was higher for the two lowest income groups, non-immigrant women's GPA was highest for the two highest income groups, and second-generation women had the highest overall GPA among all women. Conversely, immigrant men's GPA was highest for the two higher income groups, and second-generation men's GPA was highest for the highest income group. Non-immigrant men

had the lowest GPA, overall, regardless of family income. Thus, in the study, student achievement was influenced by family income and moderated by gender, as expected, but the effects of immigration history were also significant (Audrey et al., 2004).

Both the Audrey et al. (2004) and the Jenkins et al. (2004) studies suggest that first- and second-generation college students perform better when family involvement is a factor in their lives. According to the studies, first-generation college students are less likely to be engaged in college, including in the areas of academics and social experiences, which both promote college success. The more students interact with faculty, utilize supportive services, study in groups, and participate in extracurricular activities, the higher their chances of success and the less likely they are to become stressed (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014).

Researchers Engle and Tinto (2008) and Tinto (2004) offered suggestions as to how higher education experts could increase persistence toward degree attainment and lower the levels of stress of first-generation college students at 4-year institutions:

- (a) improve academic preparation for college,
- (b) provide additional financial aid for college,
- (c) increase the transfer student rates to 4-year institutions,
- (d) ease the transition to college,
- (e) encourage engagement on the college campus, and
- (f) promote entry or reentry for youths and working adults.

### **Chapter Summary**

Researchers have used numerous theoretical models, both quantitative and qualitative, but Bandura's (1997) classic model of self-efficacy is widely used because of its longitudinal nature, multiple factors (both academic and social), and relationship to perceived stress. Studies have shown that first-generation college students are at a higher

risk of attrition than their second-generation counterparts (London, 1989; Weis, 1985). First-generation college students are at a greater risk of performing poorly in college compared to their second-generation counterparts. First-generation college students require additional assistance more than their second-generation counterparts because they are not predisposed to postsecondary education and because of the levels of stress they endure. A large percentage of first-generation college students perform poorly academically, or they drop out of college due to the lack of support (Bui, 2002; Engle & Tinto, 2008).

At the time of the study, Tinto (1975) reported that first-generation college students had higher attrition rates than second-generation college students. Similarly, Miller (2007) pointed to numerous studies that demonstrated the importance of early college experiences and the effects (both long term and short term) of those experiences; yet, little research has closely examined first-generation college students' levels of stress compared to their second-generation counterparts. Although this current study's goal was not to attempt to aid the national problem, it will inform stakeholders of a potential change to affect the percentage of first-generation college students' levels of stress and to understand how stress pertains to first-generation college students' high attrition rate.

Research on first-generation college students can be targeted at three areas: pre-college characteristics and behaviors; transition to 4-year universities; and outcomes such as first-generation students compared to their peers or first-generation students having weaknesses with respect to their basic knowledge about university education from the standpoint of costs and the application process (Warburton et al., 2001). Warburton et al. (2001) suggested that institutions should provide resources for program development and

incentives for program participation for first-generation students. This current research was planned to be differentiated from others' topic by understanding the perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students.

Garriott and Nisle (2018) posited that timely counseling services that are appropriate for the stresses faced by first- and second-generation college students might reduce attrition and improve student performance. This study examined the perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students. Previous studies have examined academic stressors and social support in the first-generation college student population (Garriott & Nisle, 2018), but stress reactions and life satisfaction are less often evaluated. This researcher found no studies examining the perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students. Academic reasons for student attrition have received more attention than have nonacademic stressors (Garriott & Nisle, 2018). Both perceived stress and reduced life satisfaction might contribute to attrition, and, if so, typical contributing factors would be important for counselors to appraise in their initial assessments (Garriott & Nisle, 2018).

Chapter 3 presents the methodology employed for this study, a general perspective, the research context, the research participants, the instruments used in data collection, and the procedures for data collection and analysis.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **General Perspective**

To gain a better understanding of how stress affects first-generation male African American college students, this study used a qualitative, phenomenological design to explore the participants' lived experiences of stress. Data were collected from a sample of first-generation male African American college students who were members of a fraternity. According to Creswell (2013),

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of the research problem addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry; the collection of data in the natural setting sensitive to the people and places under the study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns of themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature of a call for change. (p. 44)

For these reasons, a qualitative phenomenological study was used to understand the perceived stress experienced by first-generation male African American college students.

## **Research Context**

The research was conducted during the summer of 2019, with first-generation male African American college students who were attending 4-year universities throughout New York City. According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015), during the 2014-2015 academic years, degrees were awarded to 1.8 million students. At public 4-year institutions, degrees were awarded to 168,582 Blacks, 1,132,973 Whites, 825,004 males, and 1,072,058 females. At private institutions, degrees were awarded to 100,183 Blacks, 609,529 Whites, 432,382 males, and 622,388 females.

To gather data within the allotted time for this study, the participants were recruited through a national Greek letter organization (NGLO). The researcher utilized a third party, the state director of the chosen Greek organization, to distribute a flyer to potential participants (Appendix A). The researcher invited first-generation male African American college students from the NGLO throughout New York City.

## **Research Participants**

The participants in the study were undergraduate, first-generation male African American college students who met the following criteria: (a) self-identified as being first-generation, (b) male undergraduate college student attending a 4-year college, and (c) belonging to the NGLO fraternity.

Upon receipt of approval from St. John Fisher College (SJFC) Institutional Review Board (IRB), the flyer was emailed to the NGLO listserv of undergraduate male college students attending a 4-year college (143 students total), inviting them to participate in this research study (Appendix B).

Once the NGLO member contacts were made with the researcher ( $N = 42$ ), the researcher emailed the consent form (Appendix C) for the respondents to read, sign, and return to the researcher. Once the researcher received the signed consent forms, the researcher emailed to 10 total participants the Participant Stress Score (PSS) instrument (Appendix D). The researcher identified the eligible participants by asking them if they were the first in their immediate family to attend college. Then the researcher created a random list, selected a random starting point, and then selected each  $n^{\text{th}}$  person on the list. To ensure that there was a minimum of at least 8-12 participants, those whose numbers were not selected were kept on a separate list to draw from, should anyone decline an interview or remove themselves throughout the duration of the study. Creswell (2014) recommended that a group comprising 8-12 individuals should be identified to participate in a phenomenological study. The researcher attempted to draw from the NGLO list again, however, the participants did not reach out to the researcher in time to make the cutoff date. The selected participants did not receive compensation for their participation.

### **Instruments Used in Data Collection**

The main tool for data collection for this study was a one-on-one interview with semi-structured interview questions. A scaled questionnaire, the PSS was used to collect data specifically for the purpose of serving as a selection tool. The purpose of the PSS was to evaluate and understand the scoring of the participants' perceived stress.

**Scaling tool: The PSS.** The PSS is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress (Cohen et al., 1994). The PSS provided the interview questions to determine the participants' level of perceived stress. The PSS measured the degree to which life situations were appraised as stressful. Items were

designed to show how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded the respondents found their lives. The scale also included several direct queries about the participants existing levels of experienced stress.

The PSS was designed for use in community samples with at least a junior high school education (Cohen et al., 1994). The items are easy to understand, and the response alternatives are simple to grasp. The highest possible scoring on the PSS is 40. According to Cohen et al. (1994), the norms for the male PSS score is 12.1 out of 40, compared to women who generally score 13.7 out of 40. The mean PSS score of individuals within the age group of 18-29 was 14.2 out of 40 compared to this researcher's average participant mean of 20.1 out of 40. Moreover, the questions were of a general nature and were relatively free of content specific to any subpopulation group. Examples of the questions asked are: In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"? In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? The questions in the PSS ask about feelings and thoughts during the previous month. In each case, the respondents were asked how often they experienced perceived stress (Cohen et al., 1994).

**Interviews.** Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study. According to Given (2008), the "semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions" (p. 23). This structure allowed the researcher to capture first-generation male African American college students' lived-stress experiences. The researcher assigned a pseudonym to each participant to be used throughout the study to protect all participants' identity. The semi-structured interview protocol was informed by

the researcher's theoretical framework and literature review to address a broad range of questions relating to the students' lived-stress coping mechanisms and support systems. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by REV.com. The eight participant interviews (Appendix E) were conducted over a month during the spring of 2019.

### **Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis**

The goal of the study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students. The researcher sought to hear, in the participants' own words, what factors contributed to their perceived stress. The researcher employed in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews as the conduit to reaching the desired outcome. To conduct the study, the researcher primarily collected data in the form of interviews, using sections from the PSS, to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students. The PSS served to collect the demographic statistics that determined all the participants in the study experienced perceived stress.

The interviews employed in this study allowed the researcher to explore, in depth, the lived experiences of perceived stress among this sample of the population. The participants were able to articulate, in detail, their personal experiences of perceived stress. Analysis of the interviews led to meaning-making, which was reported in the form of descriptive accounts of each person's experience, and they were grouped into themes that cut across all of the participants in the study (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher analyzed the data in different stages, beginning with reading the transcripts multiple times while highlighting phrases in the same color to indicate general

themes that were emerging. Next, the researcher began to code the emerging themes. For the coding process, a code is simply “a short word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 4).

Using the research questions, theoretical framework, and literature review as a starting point, the researcher identified a set of coding categories in the interviews related to Bandura’s (1977) theoretical framework that reflected the factors identified as important for understanding the lived experience of perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students. The researcher developed a codebook that included the code, definition, and examples from the participants’ interviews. The codebook is stored electronically, and it is password protected. The interviews were transcribed by REV.com. The results were arranged and are presented in tables.

The content of the transcripts was read, analyzed, and coded by the researcher. Coding was completed in three cycles. The first cycle used in vivo and a priori codes. In vivo codes are derived directly from the voice of the participants (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo coding for interview transcripts serve as a method for attuning to the participants’ perspective and actions (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo software was used to create auto codes based on the interview transcripts from the participants. Examples of in vivo codes that emerged were words such as *my choice*, *in-class experience*, and *feeling supported*. These codes spoke to the participants’ lived experiences and perceptions of college.

A priori codes were also employed in the first cycle of coding to categorize and analyze the qualitative, narrative data (Saldaña, 2016). A priori coding is the generation of a list of codes that harmonized the study’s conceptual framework and provided an

analysis that correlated directly to the research questions (Saldaña, 2016). The a priori codes were drawn from the research that was related to the first-generation male African American college students' perceived stress and supported the research questions.

The second cycle of coding was done using selective coding. Selective coding allowed the researcher to find the primary theme of the research (Saldaña, 2016). In this phase of coding, all categories and concepts were systematically integrated around the core category that suggested a theoretical explanation for the phenomenon.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter explained the methods of the qualitative study that explored the lived experiences of perceived stress among first-generation male African American college students belonging to a fraternity. The goal of this study was to fill the gap in the literature by providing the students' perspectives based on their lived experiences of perceived stress while completing their bachelor's degree at a 4-year college. The study results may provide information to institutions on how to increase retention and how to better serve this population.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

The researcher explored the experiences of perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students, their perceptions of what caused that stress, and how they managed that stress. The goal was to learn whether perceived stress is a potential cause of the low rate of graduation of first-generation male African American college students.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. Do first-generation male African American college students experience perceived stress?
2. What is the source of first-generation male African American college students' levels of perceived stress?
3. How do first-generation male African American college students cope with the stress they experience?
4. Does being a part of a fraternity offer extra support that helps first-generation male African American students cope with perceived stress?

Statements from the interviews were used to capture the lived experiences of the participants and provide major themes that surfaced during the interviews.

## **Data Analysis and Findings**

**Participants.** The total number of respondents who completed the PSS instrument was 43 (*N*). All 43 respondents agreed to be a part of the study. Of the 43 respondents, 10 fit the criteria of the study by being first-generation male African American college students who were attending a 4-year institution and who belonged to a fraternity. The researcher made contact, either by phone or email, with all 10 respondents for an interview. Out of the 10 selected, two potential participants failed to reply to a request for an interview. The researcher attempted to utilize the list she kept of the participants, if needed; however, the participants did not respond to the researcher in time to make the cutoff date.

**Questionnaire data.** Significant to this study is the understanding of the demographic background of the participants. A PSS (Cohen et al., 1994) was used to collect demographic data and serve as a selection tool. The results of the questionnaire provided the researcher with insight and background information that aligned with specific research questions; however, this research was a phenomenological study aimed at presenting a textual visualization of the first-generation male African American college student experience. No quantitative analysis was performed. The interview data supports the research surrounding first-generation male African American college students.

All of the participants were African American males between the ages of 18 and 22, and they all were employed part time while attending school (one participant had two part-time jobs). They differed in their PSS scores. Table 4.1 lists the score of each participant out of a possible score of 40.

Table 4.1

*Participant Stress Score Out of 40 on the PSS*

Participant	PSS Score
FGCS 1	29
FGCS 2	25
FGCS 3	16
FGCS 4	30
FGCS 5	24
FGCS 6	19
FGCS 7	28
FGCS 8	34

**Interview data.** The primary method for data collection were semi-structured interviews. The in-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight first-generation male African American college students who were purposefully selected from the pool of candidates who met the selection criteria. The researcher began by recording with two devices to capture the voices of the first-generation male African American college students. The recorded interviews were then sent to REV.com for transcription.

The researcher then analyzed and reviewed each transcript line by line and put them into a codebook. Again, keeping the theoretical framework in mind, the researcher used the four sources of Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory to identify the type of participant stress: enactive mastery (performance outcomes), vicarious experience (self-modeling), verbal persuasion (verbal encouragement), and physiological arousal (emotional state). The key phrases were grouped to align with the research questions. The responses from the interviews were coded into themes and categories. While coding the

transcribed interviews, it became apparent that after the seventh interview, the researcher had reached saturation, and at this time, the researcher decided to end their interviews. Common themes immediately began to present themselves as the researcher began the coding process.

First-generation college student 4 (FGCS 4, PSS = 30) stated that it was nearly impossible to navigate his school's website. When asked if there were resources/stakeholders on campus that he could utilize for assistance pertaining to perceived stress, his response was that he did not know. FGCS7 (PSS = 28) expressed that in order to utilize the college's health and wellness center, appointments must be made online; however, it was very hard to utilize the college's website. FGCS 3 (PSS = 16) stated that he utilized wellness assistance through his fraternity; he stated that he never thought to utilize campus resources and would continue to utilize the resources available to him through his fraternity.

Referring to Bandura (1977), the researcher related each factor to one of four sources from the local model. The students' year in college and ranking within the fraternity related to the enactive mastery source; college preparation related to the vicarious experience source; motivation and home environment related to the verbal persuasion source; and perceived stress related to the physiological arousal source. Bandura (1977) stated that for a person to have a high performance in education, he or she must excel within all four sources.

Table 4.2

*Eight Themes Connected to Categories from Coding*

Theme	Frequency	Category	Frequency
Enactive Mastery		Fraternity	38
Black Student Union	12		
		Classes	22
Homework	12		
Finals	8		
Vicarious Experience		College	8
		First-Generation	5
		Transfer Student	4
Verbal Persuasion		Motivation	9
		First in Family	3
		Life Choices	8
Physiological Arousal		Lack of Energy	3
		Anger with Self	4
		Stress	39
College Preparation		Family Support	13
		Overall Preparation	11
Employment		Work	17
		Job	12
Stress		Upset	32
		Overwhelmed	17
		Frustrated	4
		Sad	3
Coping		Video Games	33
		Parties	14
		Family	12

**Themes.** The eight themes elicited by the interviews were enactive mastery, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, physiological arousal, college preparation, employment, stress, and coping.

*Enactive mastery.* The first major factor was to determine how well the participants were doing in school in order to understand how the participants were able to persist while dealing with perceived stress. For the participants to be selected for this study, they had to belong to a fraternity. For the participants to belong to a fraternity, they had to meet academic standards according to their school's satisfactory guideline. When asked how the participants contributed to the organization that they were a part of, all were members of the Black Student Union within their colleges, and they were all on track to graduate with a bachelor's degree. Although the participants were members of the Black Student Union, they stated that their fraternity offered more resources and support to them.

*Vicarious experience.* The second major factor that surfaced was the lack of college preparation. The participants spoke about their lack of preparation regarding preparing for college. The participants each stated that they had to prepare themselves mentally and financially before attending college. None of the participants were a part of a college readiness program prior to attending their freshman year of college. All participants stated that they just *knew* they needed to go to college to better themselves, so they prepared on their own before starting their first semester. FGCS 8 (PSS = 34) stated that his way of coping with stress was to play video games and isolate himself. He stated that in order to cope with his perceived stress, playing video games allowed him to escape into a different reality and forget his issues for a time. When asked if he utilized campus resources, he stated that his college website was very difficult to navigate and that he had not been able to schedule a session with his college wellness center.

*Verbal persuasion.* The participants also discussed that they were not encouraged or motivated by anyone to attend college. FGCS 1 (PSS = 29) stated that his older cousin attended college, however, he did not graduate. FGCS 1 stated that hearing the stories and seeing the pictures of his older cousin while attending college motivated him to want to do the same. Although his cousin did not obtain a college degree, he was the only person who had entered college within his immediate family.

*Physiological arousal.* The researcher asked all participants the following question and quickly noticed a common theme within their response. The question was, Throughout an average week, do you experience any type of stress? If so, how often? All respondents stated that they experienced perceived stress. Out of the eight participants interviewed, three stated that they experienced high levels of stress on and off campus due to their hectic schedules. These three participants also scored the highest on the PSS scale. All participants were employed (not in a work-study program) and they commuted to work before, and sometimes after, classes during the week and weekends. Two of the participants stated that they were unaware of what stress was until they started college. After further questions were asked, these two participants said that they experienced high levels of stress due to being unprepared financially and not knowing what to expect before starting college. FGCS 7 (PSS = 28) stated that he barely experienced perceived stress because he had a big support system outside of his fraternity. FGCS 7 (PSS = 28) also stated that although he was the only person in his immediate family to attend college, his family was very supportive of his academic choices.

*College preparation.* College preparation was a common theme discovered during the interviewing process of this study. All participants stated that they did not physically,

mentally, or financially prepare for college. None of the participants attended a college readiness program or were a part of any college preparedness program within their institutions. All participants stated that they self-prepared for college without any guidance or prior knowledge of how to prepare for college. FGCS 4 (PSS = 30) stated that being the first in his family to attend college helped him motivate himself to want to attend and finish. FGCSW 4 also stated that he felt that if he dropped out of college, he would disappoint his family. His way of coping with stress was to play video games and to try to find activities to forget his perceived stress. FGCS 1 stated that his coping mechanisms were not healthy, however, the coping mechanisms helped him deal with his perceived stress while completing college.

*Employment.* Employment was another common theme that was discovered during the interviewing process of this study. All participants were employed at the time of their interviews, through external jobs (not work-study opportunities). All participants stated during their interviews that they were working in order to help their families generate additional income for their households. All participants stated that they worked because *they had to*. All participants stated that working and taking courses full time had not contributed to their perceived stress, because they had learned to cope with working and going to school throughout their college experience. FGCS 5 (PSS = 24) worked two part-time jobs while taking courses full time. The participant stated that he was also a part of a student body union at his university. FGCS 5 (PSS = 24) at the time of his interview, worked a demanding job that helped him provide for himself and his family financially. FGCS 5 (PSS= 24) stated that in order for him to cope with stress, he had to be surrounded by individuals who also experienced stress. He believed that by being

surrounded by individuals who also experienced stress, he was able to speak about his issues to them. When asked if he utilized campus resources for wellness support, he stated that it was challenging navigating the campus website, so he did not utilize campus support.

*Stress.* Stress was another theme, and it was the purpose of this study. All participants in this study experienced lived experienced perceived stress while completing their undergraduate degree. All participants' stress was ranked (score out of 40). All participants stated that they were living with perceived stress and that their perceived stress stemmed from different factors. Out of the eight participants, three (FGCSs 4,6, & 8) stated that their stress stemmed from their personal lives. When asked if school was a major factor that contributed to their stress, their response was no. FGCS 3 (PSS= 16) stated that he experienced stress mainly off campus. FGCS 3 (PSS = 16) also expressed that fitness helped him cope with stress. He described his daily schedule as working out before and after classes and work. FGCS 3 (PSS = 16) stated that by working out, he was able to manage his stress, and he did not experience high levels of stress (anxiety, panic attacks, etc.). FGCS 3 also ranked at the lowest stress score.

Out of the eight participants, two (FGCSs 1 & 8, PSS = 29 and PSS = 34, respectively) stated that their stress stemmed from their work/school balance. When asked to describe their typical day, the two participants stated that their average day consisted of making it to several classes and work on time as well as being present for fraternity meetings and/or conferences. Out of the eight participants, three (FGCSs 2, 3, & 7, PSS = 25, PSS = 16, and PSS = 28, respectively) stated that they experienced

extremely high levels of stress during finals. All the participants in this study stated that they experienced high levels of stress; however, no participant utilized their school's health and wellness center.

*Coping.* Coping was another theme discovered in this study. All the participants had unique ways of coping with their perceived stress. FGCS 1 (PSS = 29) stated that his way of coping with stress was to surround himself with his fraternity brothers, play video games, and to drink and smoke. FGCS 1 (PSS = 29) stated that by surrounding himself with his brothers, he was surrounded by individuals who understood his stressors and who could identify with them, and they experienced similar stress. FGCS 6 (PSS = 19) stated that his way of coping with stress was to address it head on. FGCS 6 (PSS = 19) stated that for him to maintain academic standing and balance work, he had to start projects, homework, and required assignments ahead of time to reduce the amount of stress he would subject himself to. Unlike all other seven participants, FGCS 6 (PSS = 19) stated that his perceived stress was manageable, and it did not affect his coursework because he lived according to a schedule and addressed his stressors before they began to feel uncontrollable.

### **Findings by Research Question**

The following themes were reported by the participants and were included in the analysis and discussion as they pertained to each of the three research questions. Significant quotes from the graduates were used to provide further analysis.

**Research Question 1.** *Do first-generation male African American college students experience perceived stress?* Through the semi-structured interviews, the researcher found that the participants in this study experienced perceived stress. All the

participants' stress was scored using the PSS; however, all of the participants' scoring was different, but all participants did, indeed, experience perceived stress.

**Research Question 2.** *What is the source of first-generation male African American college students' levels of perceived stress?* Through the semi-structured interviews, regarding both their personal and campus lives, half of the participants ( $n = 4$ ) stated that campus life did not contribute a great deal to their perceived stress. The participants stated that their perceived stress was triggered by their work and personal lives.

**Research Question 3.** *How do first-generation male African American college students cope with the stress they experience?* Through the semi-structured interviews, the researcher found that all the participants coped with stress by indulging in substance abuse and utilizing the benefits of escaping into a virtual reality by playing video games. All participants also utilized other coping mechanisms; however, the main theme for coping was video games.

**Research Question 4.** *Does being a part of a fraternity offer support that helps first-generation male African American college students cope with perceived stress?* Through the semi-structured interviews, the researcher determined that the interviewed participants experienced perceived stress. However, the participants were offered external coping services and support through their fraternity. These participants were offered employment and networking opportunities due to their established relationship with their fraternity.

## **Summary of Results**

Chapter 4 presented the analysis and findings based on the research questions that guided this qualitative, phenomenological study. It presented the data gathered by the researcher in conducting semi-structured, one-on-one, in-depth interviews with eight first-generation college male students who were part of a fraternity.

The participants provided personal, meaningful, and detailed descriptions of their experiences, not only as a student belonging to a fraternity but as the first in their family to attend college as a first-generation student. The researcher characterized common themes into eight major categories, and the eight first-generation college students gave personal accounts of their experience living with stress. Each first-generation college student's story was unique to his experiences, even though there were commonalities among them. The researcher mapped the four sources of Bandura (1977) to the eight categories to enrich the reader's experience, allowing the reader to share in the lived experiences of the first-generation male African American college students.

Chapter 5 presents the major findings, the implications of the findings that speak to previous research findings, the limitations of the study, the recommendations for future research, and the conclusions that were reached.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This chapter discusses the implications of the findings of the research. It then identifies the limitations of this study, and it gives recommendations for further research. Last, this chapter summarizes the research and provides a conclusion.

### **Introduction**

Using a phenomenological approach, this research was conducted to understand the lived experience of the perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students. To that end, the purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of perceived stress, based on interviews with first-generation male African American fraternity college students. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory was explored to examine the first-generation male African American college student's lived experience of perceived stress. Factors such as stress, employment, self-preparation, and family support were discovered through semi-structured interviews with the participants. This study aims to help first-generation male African American college students cope with perceived stress by highlighting the perceived stress of first-generation college students and the ways in which they cope with stress in hopes of increasing institutional knowledge of factors that are keeping first-generation college students from persisting. The barriers and challenges first-generation college students face are known to decrease their persistence to graduate, but minimal research has been done exploring the reasons why first-generation college students are unable to adjust to, and cope with, college (Conley & Hamlin, 2009; Ishitani, 2006;

Murphy & Hicks, 2006). The barriers and challenges faced by first-generation students are known to increase their levels of perceived stress, but minimal research has been done to explore the reasons why some first-generation students perceive they are able to overcome these obstacles and complete degree programs (Conley & Hamlin, 2009; Ishitani, 2006; Murphy & Hicks, 2006).

The research in this study detailed the lived experiences of these participants and explored their perceived stress through narration. This study also illuminated the limitations faced by first-generation male African American college students as they persisted through their college experience. The experienced perceived stress rates of first-generation college students are areas of interest and concern for these institutions. The study's findings increase the knowledge of the factors that contribute to the perceived stress of first-generation college students. Engle and Tinto's (2008) research relating to first-generation college students, conducted over the last several decades, supported the fact that first-generation college students are often faced with challenges, such as having to work, a lack of family support, and having children. These can challenge their ability to focus on school, as they are the first in their families to attend college (Bui, 2002). Furthermore, despite the representation of first-generation college students in higher education, these students are still experiencing lived perceived stress while persisting through their college experience (Aud et al., 2011).

With this knowledge, the researcher decided it was best to conduct a qualitative, phenomenological study to showcase the voices of this population and understand the barriers they face that caused them to experience perceived stress.

The theory used to define this study is Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy beliefs are an important aspect of human motivation and behavior as well as they influence the actions that can affect one's life. Bandura (1995) explained that self-efficacy "refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). More simply, self-efficacy is what an individual believes he or she can accomplish using his or her skills under certain circumstances (Edwards, Rand, Lopez, & Snyder, 2007). Self-efficacy has been thought to be a task-specific version of self-esteem (Lunenburg, 2011).

This research used semi-structured interview questions based on the literature introduced in Chapter 2. The results of the study provided answers to the research questions introduced in Chapter 1:

1. Do first-generation male African American college students experience perceived stress?
2. What is the source of first-generation male African American college student's perceived stress?
3. How do first-generation male African American college students cope with perceived stress?
4. Does being a part of a fraternity offer support to first-generation male African American students cope with perceived stress?

The findings include the emergence of four themes from Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and four themes from the participants' interviews. These themes include

enactive mastery (performance outcomes), vicarious experience (self-modeling), verbal persuasion (verbal encouragement), physiological arousal (emotional state) (Bandura, 1977), college preparation, employment, stress, and coping.

### **Implications of Findings**

First, the study examined the perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students. The examination presented a broad range of definitions that were as varied as the participants.

**Implication of major finding 1.** The participants in this study were all first-generation male African American college students. All of the participants, at the time of the interviews, were working part time to support themselves and their families. The participants stated during their interviews that they worked because they had to. The researcher found that the participants were providing financial assistance to their families although they resided on campus. The average stress, combined with the financial responsibility of taking care of themselves and their family members, contributed to their perceived stress.

**Implication of major finding 2.** The participants in this study all experienced perceived stress. The participants were asked to complete the PSS to help the researcher understand the intensity of their perceived stress. All participants also stated that they were unaware of how to navigate their college websites to access the resources of the college health and wellness center. The researcher asked the participants if they were able to access these resources in person to which the participants stated appointments must be made online.

**Implications of unexpected findings.** Directly related to Research Question 3, all the participants stated that their way of coping with stress was to indulge in substance abuse. The participants stated that by escaping reality momentarily allowed them to not worry about the factors that caused them stress. The researcher found that the participants utilized unhealthy coping mechanisms to cope with perceived stress, therefore they were unable to adapt to college life because they were constantly battling perceived stress.

### **Limitations**

This study included eight participants who fit the selective participation criteria. All the participants in this study were male, attending college in New York City, and belonged to a fraternity. This shows that more variability is needed to examine whether gender influences how a first-generation college student experiences perceived stress and the meaning of that experience. The lack of female African American participants may have limited the ability to identify common themes, as well as the female perspective of being a first-generation female African American college student who experiences perceived stress.

The participants in this study self-identified as African American. The narrowness of race may have limited the ability to capture the experience of perceived stress among other races of first-generation college students living with perceived stress. Although the number of participants in a study does not lessen the importance of the findings, it is important to note that the lack of female participants in the study, and the lack of diversity represented, may have limited the study to express the experiences of first-generation college students as a whole. Although the researcher originally wanted to use male and female first-generation college students from different colleges, due to the

sensitive nature of this study, the institutions the researcher initially wanted to utilize decided not to participate in this study. The majority of the first-generation male African American college students who participated lived in one state and were referred by their peers as participants in this study, and they all attended the same institution. The findings from this study did not include of all states throughout the United States, which may have presented different perspectives given the different geographic locations.

Further limitations included not having students who were not student leaders or who were not heavily involved in Greek life. The participants in this study all had some level of involvement within their fraternity, whether as a member of the student government or president of their Greek chapter. There was a lack of participants who did not have a leadership role.

Another limitation included employment. All the participants in this study were employed part time through non-work-study employment. The participants stated that work study opportunities were very limited at their colleges, and they were not granted to every student. Gaining the lived experience of perceived stress from the participants who were either unemployed or employed through work-study would have given the researcher a different perspective of the perceived stress this population may have experienced.

### **Recommendations**

This study demonstrated that first-generation male African American college students experienced perceived stress throughout their college involvement. Attending college can be daunting, especially for those without support. All the interviewed participants expressed that it was challenging to navigate their college website to seek

wellness assistance. The researcher recommends that colleges create a user-friendly college website and offer other platforms to highlight the health and wellness department(s) on campus.

The researcher recommends that future studies utilize the Perceived Stress Scale for all Greek organizations. The researcher found that the participants in this study experienced high levels of perceived stress. By administering the PSS to all members of Greek organizations, future research would show if being a member of a Greek organization offers coping strategies for Greek members.

Another recommendation related to participants is access to college-readiness courses while in high school. All the participants in this study stated that they had no prior preparation to college besides preparing themselves. The researcher recommends that all colleges provide preparation courses for all first-year students. Programs currently exist, such as the Accelerated Study in Associate Program (ASAP) and Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP). The City University of New York's ASAP helps students earn associate degrees within 3 years by providing a range of financial, academic, and personal supports including comprehensive and personalized advisement, career counseling, tutoring, waivers for tuition and mandatory fees, MTA MetroCards, and additional financial assistance to defray the cost of textbooks (Strumbos, Linderman, & Hicks, 2018). Furthermore, ASAP and HEOP were created to help financially low-income students persist through their college experience, by providing additional grant funding and assistance with textbooks and transportation. All first-generation college students are still at a disadvantage with navigating through their college experience without the necessary knowledge, assistance, or guidance.

Also recommended is further work-study opportunities for first-generation college students. All the participants in this study were employed through non-work-study jobs and all the participants stated that their perceived stress stemmed from trying to keep up with work/life balance, maintaining satisfactory academic progress, and fulfilling their employment requirements. If first-generation college students were offered leverage to choose work-study positions, the need for external employment would decrease. Work-study employment helps students balance their academic and work life while earning income.

The participants in this study spoke about not feeling included at their institution. Many felt that there was a lack of awareness and knowledge surrounding first-generation, low-income students. Colleges without an office of diversity and inclusion should work to create one. Offices of diversity commit to providing leadership, guidance, and resources to students, faculty, and staff to create a more diverse and inclusive institution. Recognizing that this commitment requires the college to be more inclusive, knowledgeable, and accepting of diversity can result in, and sustain, a dramatically rich campus climate and culture that deepens the intellectual environment. College institutions are responsible for addressing inclusivity and diversity matters that impact the academic experience of the faculty, staff, and students. Colleges should partner with professional minority organizations and historically Black universities.

## **Conclusion**

The number of racial and ethnic students attending colleges and universities has increased, resulting in increases in minority first-generation college students (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Opidee, 2015). However, these first-generation minority college students

also experience high levels of stress. For many first-generation students pursuing higher education, the social and cultural norms of the academic institution can conflict with their own social and cultural norms, hindering their progress. Prior research has asserted that most college undergraduate students experience academic stress and negative emotional reactions (Misra et al., 2000). These experiences of stress more commonly affect first-generation college students.

First-generation students (i.e., students whose parents never attended college) are graduating at lower rates than students who represent the second, third, or fourth generations in their families to attend college (Bui, 2002). First-generation students differ from their peers in ways that reduce the likelihood that they will attend and persist to degree completion (Engle & Tinto, 2008). First-generation students are more likely to be older, minority, and female; they tend to have dependent children; and they often come from low socioeconomic homes with parents who did not obtain a college degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). These characteristics are independently associated with lower rates of college attendance and degree attainment (Engle & Tinto, 2008). As of 2015, 30% of college students were the first in their families to attend college, and 24% (or 4.5 million) were both first-generation and low-income students (Opidee, 2015). In a UCLA study, 42% of students, whose parents attended college, graduated within 4 years, compared to only 27% of first-generation students who graduated in the same time frame (Bui, 2002).

This study has demonstrated that first-generation college male African American students experience high levels of perceived stress and are not able to access their college campuses' websites for the proper assistance. Of all 43 perceived stress scales collected for this study, the average PSS score was 20 out of 40, highlighting that first-generation

male African American college students experience high levels of perceived stress. Although Bennett and Lutz (2009) suggested that first-generation students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and do not persist at rates similar to their counterparts, this study revealed that first-generation male African American college students are a part of campus life, belong to organizations outside of college life, and are working while attending college full time. Nonetheless, they are still experiencing perceived stress. This study revealed that first-generation male African American college students are preparing themselves for college without having any proper knowledge of the college experience. This study also revealed that first-generation male African American college students are isolating themselves from campus resources because they are unable to navigate the campus and/or campus health and wellness websites. Furthermore, the first-generation college students in this study reported adjusting well academically because they were able to utilize their fraternity brothers' help. As stated in the limitations, the researcher wonders if this is true for all first-generation college students who do not belong to a fraternity or sorority.

In addition, the participants in this study reported overcoming obstacles and coping with perceived stress in unhealthy ways. Some participants stated that it felt healthy for them to isolate themselves from society during test-taking times to deal with their stress alone. FGCS 4 (PSS = 30) stated that it was helpful for him to immerse himself in partying where there would be alcohol. By partying, the participant stated that it was easier for him to not think about the stressful events in his life.

This study substantiated many of the findings of the research on first-generation college students as reviewed in Chapter 2. The findings also challenged some ideas posed

by researchers about first-generation college students. Instead of exploring the reasons students do not persist at rates similar to their counterparts, this study examined the factors that led to first-generation male African American college students' perceived stress. The first-generation male African American college students in this study revealed that being a member of a particular fraternity helped them cope with stress. By being part of the fraternity, the participants stated that they were more likely to be social and persist through their college experience (students must make academic standing in order to be a member of a fraternity).

Most of the results in this study were supported by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and revealed that, to be successful, first-generation college students need support, guidance, and a welcoming environment that is accepting of all ethnicities. Understanding and meeting the needs of first-generation students is important to their academic success. The themes that emerged from this study were enactive mastery, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, physiological arousal, college preparation, employment, stress, and coping. Additionally, the participants in this study were personally aware of their own abilities, which allowed them to be successful in persisting through their college experience. As first-generation male African American college students continue to be underrepresented in postsecondary education and degree completion (Bennett & Lutz, 2009), it is important to understand not only their academic and social experiences in college, but also the factors that led to the stress that could cause them not to persist.

This study adds value and depth to the existing body of research on first-generation college students. First, the emphasis on first-generation male African

American college students belonging to a fraternity differentiates this study from those on minority students and first-generation college students, as a whole, and allows for a greater understanding of this specific population and their experiences. Second, by focusing on first-generation college male African American students who belonged to a fraternity allowed an exploration of the perceived stress of those participants who had additional external support and who were still experiencing difficulty persisting to graduation.

Last, this study helps to provide a reflective moment for the first-generation male African American college student participants to share their experience and how it affected them overall. College adjustment, by most explanations, seems to fall into the primary area of academic integration. Academic integration involves the student's classroom experience, coursework, GPA, enrollment status, and adhering to the academic standards of an institution. The participants in this study shared stories of needing extra mental support because they were not as prepared as their peers.

Despite their lack of preparedness, the participants in this study showed resilience, and they were able to overcome many academic obstacles to be successful. Their drive and determination to overcome their perceived stress highlights their ability to perform as well as their second-generation counterparts. The participants spoke about lack of support and how they used self-motivation to push themselves throughout their time at their institutions. Social integration has a broader scope and includes overall attachments and a sense of belonging to the institution, in general, with social adaptation, extracurricular involvements, overall well-being, faculty, staff, and peer interaction (Aud et al., 2011). Ultimately, this study looked to find ways to understand and explain the

perceived stress of first-generation male African American college students in the hope that colleges and universities would implement programs to help first-generation college students to successfully overcome perceived stress.

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## Appendix A

### Flyer

Are you a member of a Fraternity?  
Are you a First-Generation college student?  
Are you experiencing stress?  
Research Participants Wanted.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of stress based on interviews with first-generation male fraternity college students.

Your participation in this study could provide you with an opportunity to share your story in a safe space. Additionally, your participation could provide college administrators with information on how to better support students like you and assist community organizations with their advocacy efforts on behalf of students who experience perceived stress, like you.

The researcher is looking for participants who are a part of a fraternity who identify as male.

The researcher is looking for participants who are currently enrolled as a full-time student attending a four-year university

Your personal information will be kept confidential. No personal information will be used during the publication of this study.

There will be a single one-on-one interview session for 60 minutes to 90 minutes via zoom or skype.

Krystal C Johnson, Doctoral Student at St. John Fisher College, and Admissions Specialist at Columbia University, is conducting the study.

If you are interested in participating or have questions, please contact her at \_\_\_\_\_@SJFC.edu

## Appendix B

### St. John Fisher College Invitation to Participate in Study

Hello Student,

I am a student in a doctoral program at St. John Fisher College (SJFC) and that this research is part of my dissertation. This study was reviewed and approved by the SJFC Institutional Review Board (IRB). Here are some interesting facts regarding my research. There has been a significant increase in enrollment rate of first-generation college students like yourselves at 4-year institutions. First-generation college students are defined as students whose parents did not attend college. Research indicates that first-generation college students are four times more likely to drop out of college after their first year in comparison to their counterparts. The purpose of this study is to determine if first -generation male college students experience stress and if so where does it come from.

Participants for the study will be conveniently selected from those who response to the invitation; therefore, your participation may not be needed. In this study, participants will be asked to voluntarily participate in a semi-structured interview protocol video conference or telephone using 14 open-ended questions. The length of the interview is approximately 60-90 minutes and is audio recorded.

All information collected in this study will remain confidential. To maintain the utmost confidentiality of each participant in this study, no data will be released identifying participants or the institution they are attending. All research will be conducted with the highest ethical standards for confidentiality. All data will be in the researcher's possession; physical files will be locked file cabinet and computer files will be stored in a password protected zip file. All data will be kept for three years. Thereafter, physical files will be destroyed by shredding and all computer files will be deleted.

I would like to thank you in advance for considering my request and I am hopeful that you will participate in this study so that your feelings on this important topic as individuals can be known. If you have further questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at \_\_\_\_\_ or by email at \_\_\_\_\_@sjfc.edu\_\_\_\_\_.

Best Regards,  
Krystal C. Johnson  
Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix C

### St. John Fisher College Informed Consent to Participate in Research

**Title of Study:** A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of First- Generation College Male Students a part of a Fraternity Experiencing Perceived stress  
**Researcher:** Krystal C. Johnson  
**Dissertation Chair:** Sr. Remigia Kushner  
**Committee Member:** Dr. Arlene Hogan

**Introduction:** You are being asked to participate in a study being conducted by Krystal C. Johnson for a doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Sr. Remigia Kushner of the Ed. D. in Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College (SJFC). This study was reviewed and approved by the SJFC Institutional Review Board (IRB). You are being asked to participate in this study because you responded to an electronic flyer emailed to you stating that you are a first-generation college student who also experiences stress. Please read the form carefully and feel free to ask any questions that you may have before deciding whether you will like to be considered to participate in the study.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenology study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of stress for first-generation male African American college students.

**Study Procedures:** In this study, you will be asked to voluntarily participate in a semi-structured interview protocol video conference or telephone using 14 open-ended questions. The length of the interview is approximately 60-90 minutes and will be audio recorded.

**Approval of Study:** This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Risks and Benefits:** The risks associated with this study are minimal and would be no more than you would face in your ordinary day-to-day life. As a participant in this study, you have a right to request receipt of a copy of the summary of findings from this study, upon completion of the dissertation. With your consent, the interview will be digitally, audio recorded. The audio recordings will be transcribed by the researcher or by a transcription service.

**Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy of subjects:** In the written dissertation, a pseudonym will be used in place of your first name. The institution where you are employed will be generally described by type, size, and geographical location. Your information may be shared with appropriate governmental authorities ONLY if you or someone else is in danger, or if we are required to do so by law.

**Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy of data collected:** All digital audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews will be maintained using a private, locked, and password-protected file and password-protected computer stored securely in the private home of the principal researcher. Electronic files will include assigned identity codes and pseudonyms; they will not include actual names or any information that could personally identify or connect participants to this study. Other materials, including notes or paper files related to data collection and analysis will be stored securely in unmarked boxes, locked inside a cabinet in the private home of the principal researcher. Only the researcher will have access to electronic or paper records. The digitally recorded audio data will be kept by this researcher for a period of three years following publication of the dissertation. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for three years after publication. All paper records will be crosscut shredded and professionally delivered for incineration. Electronic records will be cleared, purged, and destroyed from the hard drive and all devices such that restoring data is not possible.

All digital audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews will be maintained using a private, locked, and password-protected file and password-protected computer stored securely in the private home of the principal researcher. Electronic files will include assigned identity codes and pseudonyms; they will not include actual names or any information that could personally identify or connect participants to this study. Other materials, including notes or paper files related to data collection and analysis, will be stored securely in unmarked boxes, locked inside a cabinet in the private home of the principal researcher. Only the researcher will have access to electronic or paper records. The digitally recorded audio data will be kept by this researcher for a period of five years following publication of the dissertation. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for five years after publication. All paper records will be cross-cut shredded and professionally delivered for incineration. Electronic records will be cleared, purged, and destroyed from the hard drive and all devices such that restoring data is not possible

**Your rights:** As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have received a copy of this form, read the above, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

\_\_\_\_\_

Print

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Sign

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

This study serves as a requirement to obtain a doctoral degree (Education in Executive Leadership) at St. John Fisher College. This research will be published as a doctoral dissertation. It will be disseminated through the St. John Fisher College Library and accessible through the St. John Fisher College webpage.

If you have further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher, Krystal C. Johnson at \_\_\_\_\_ or by e-mail at \_\_\_\_\_@sjfc.edu. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the \_\_\_\_\_ International Chaplain \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_

Concerns or complaints about this study may also be addressed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Avenue, Rochester, New York 14618, by e-mail at IRB@sjfc.edu.

XXXXXXXX

XXXXXX

## Appendix D

### Perceived Stress Scale

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate by circling how often you felt or thought a certain way.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender (Circle): M F Other \_\_\_\_\_

0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? 0 1 2 3 4
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? 0 1 2 3 4
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”? 0 1 2 3 4
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? 0 1 2 3 4
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way? 0 1 2 3 4
6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? 0 1 2 3 4
7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? 0 1 2 3 4
8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things? 0 1 2 3 4
9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control? 0 1 2 3 4
10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? 0 1 2 3 4

info@mindgarden.com www.mindgarden.com References The PSS Scale is reprinted with permission of the American Sociological Association, from Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., and Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24, 386-396. Cohen, S. and Williamson, G. Perceived Stress in a Probability Sample of the United States. Spacapan, S. and Oskamp, S. (Eds.) *The Social Psychology of Health*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988.

## **Appendix E**

### Interview Questions

#### **Qualitative Interview Guide**

##### **RQ 1. Does Campus life trigger Perceived Stress for first-generation college student?**

1. What college are you currently attending?
2. Can you tell me about yourself, your current major and why you decided to attend this college?
3. How has your experience been at the college so far?
4. Are you currently a part of any organizations on campus ? If so can you describe your involvement within the organization?
5. What and/or who motivated you to attend college?
6. Describe how you prepared yourself for college.
7. In your own words, and being as detailed as possible, how would you describe your average day on campus?

##### **RQ2. Do first-generation college student's experience perceived stress?**

1. Throughout an average week do you experience any type of stress? and if so how often?
2. Does stress affect you while on campus, off campus and/ or both?

##### **RQ 3. How do first-generation college students cope with stress?**

1. In your own words, and being as detailed as possible, how do you cope with stress?
2. Are there any resources and or stakeholders that you utilize on campus when stressed?
3. Can you describe, and being as detailed as possible a stressful time on campus and how you were able to cope with this stress?

**RQ4. Does experienced Perceived Stress affect first-generation college student persistence?**

1. Has stress affected your ability to complete your coursework and if so how?
2. Is there any additional information you would like to share regarding your ability or inability to cope with stress?