

2014

# EFFECTS OF A SUPPORT SYSTEM ON A FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE GRADUATE'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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EFFECTS OF A SUPPORT SYSTEM ON A FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE  
GRADUATE'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT

by

Matthew Kaufman

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship  
Nova Southeastern University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

2014

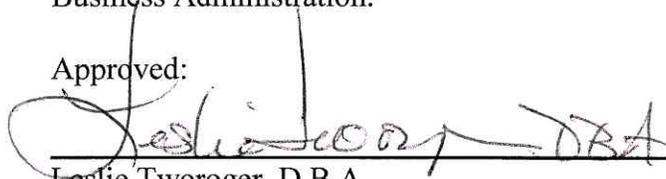
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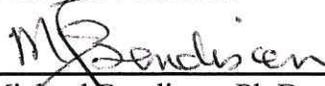
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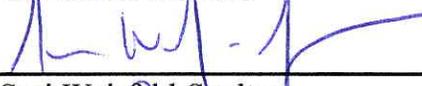
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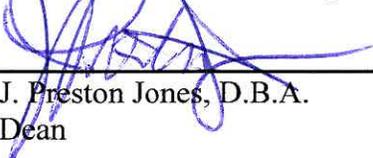
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## CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions or writings of another.

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Matthew Kaufman

## ABSTRACT

Effects of a Support System on a First Generation College Graduate's Career Development

by

Matthew Kaufman

*Purpose:* The purpose of this research is to identify and describe the impact of the support system on the career development of first generation college graduates.

*Research Questions:*

- What comprises the first generation college graduates' support system for each generation (i.e. social network, friends, family and colleagues and mentors)?
- What is the relative importance/influence of each support system component in career development for each generation?

*Design/Methodology/Approach:* There were a total of 21 in-depth interviews with equal number of participants for all three generations (Baby Boomers, X and Y). The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then coded. Further, there are cross case and within case analyses.

*Research Limitations:* No participants were born outside of the range of 1946 to 1990. While women were equally represented during the purposeful sample selection, the research did not delve into gender differences study.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This has been a cathartic life experience. It took several invaluable people to bring this research to life. First, I want to give the highest appreciation to my committee: Professor Leslie Tworoger, Professor Mike Bendixen and Professor Barbara Dastoor. Their patience and support makes them candidates for sainthood.

Thank you to Carolina and Jason for helping me with the technical side of this dissertation. Without the two of you this would never have happened.

Thank you to my Uncle Ted aka “The Professor”. He gave me an outlet and someone to call who could understand the many downs and only one up in this process.

My parents are stubborn folks. I cannot thank them enough for instilling the same senseless behavior in me. As we say in my house - Kaufman’s do not quit.

My brother and sister who were just plain there for me. They never questioned what I was doing, just supported me in every way possible.

My children acted as an indirect incentive. I just could not find the words to tell them that I gave up. In their own way they may have been the largest motivation.

Last but not least is my wife. She knew the right combination of ignoring my whining, chiding me when I talked about quitting and letting me work out my issues vocally when it was clearly irritating her. I finished this because I knew she would be proud of me. I did good, eh love?

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Tables .....	viii
List of Figures .....	ix
 <b>Chapters</b>	
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	1
Research Problem .....	1
Sub Problems .....	1
Background .....	2
Definition of Terms.....	7
Significance.....	10
Delimitations.....	11
Assumptions.....	12
Theory .....	12
Methodology .....	16
Sub Questions .....	19
 <b>2. Literature Review</b> .....	20
Social Networks .....	20
Career Communities .....	26
Mentoring.....	29
Career Decision Making .....	32
Career Success .....	34
Career Research .....	36
Summary .....	40
 <b>3. Research Methodology</b> .....	44
Introduction.....	44
Population and Sampling Method.....	45
Interview Instrument.....	46
Validation and Reliability .....	46
Method of Analysis.....	47
Conclusion .....	48
 <b>4. Data and Findings</b> .....	49

Introduction.....	49
Overview of Co-Researchers .....	50
Research Question 1 .....	50
Baby Boomers.....	50
Generation X.....	56
	Page
<b>Chapters</b>	
Generation Y.....	62
Generational Comparison .....	69
Research Question 2 .....	74
Baby Boomers.....	74
Generation X.....	77
Generation Y.....	80
Generational Comparison .....	82
Conclusion .....	84
<b>5. Conclusions</b> .....	85
Conclusions and Explanations .....	85
Gap in the Research .....	89
Propositions.....	89
Future Research .....	90
Limitations .....	93
Conclusion .....	94
References.....	95
Appendix A.....	102
Appendix B.....	104

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Baby Boomers' Support System Composition .....	54
2. Generation X's Support System Composition .....	59
3. Generation Y's Support System Composition .....	67

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Social Cognitive Career Theory.....	13
2. Developmental Network Typology.....	14
3. Three Ways of Knowing.....	28

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research problem and sub problems. A detailed background is described to explain how and why this research was selected. A portion of this chapter outlines the significance of this research. To better understand the research, a definition of terms is included in this chapter as well as assumptions, delimitations and previous theories pertaining to this study.

*Title:*

Effects of a Support System on a First Generation College Graduate's Career Development

*Purpose:*

The purpose of this research is to identify and describe the impact of the support system on the career development of first generation college graduates.

*The Research Problem:*

“To determine the impact a first generation college graduate's support system has on their career development.”

*Sub Problems:*

The research problem cannot be answered without breaking it down into parts. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), “the sub problems must cover the entire research problem but not extend past the problem” (p.51). The sub problems are:

1. To identify the makeup of the support system;
2. To explain the role the support system plays within career development of the first generation college graduate;
3. To expound the impact of the support system on the career development of the first generation college graduate.

The solutions to these sub problems will give the depth and detail necessary to fully explore the research problem. The makeup of the support network will provide an insight into how different family structures impact a first generation college graduate's (FGCG) career. The composition of the support system may show connections or patterns among participants and create new avenues of research. Once an understanding of how the support framework is defined the next step is determining the support system's role in shaping the individual. Not only will the support system's role and influence be researched but also the FGCG's ability to accept or reject their influence. This portion of the study provides the rich data that a qualitative study can offer.

## **Background**

There has been considerable research done concerning FGCGs' decision to go to college (Reid & Moore, 2008), which college they attend (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991), and what they study based on their background (Martin-Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). The gap in the research is the lack of studies focusing on FGCGs' career after college. It is almost as if the achievement of earning a degree is enough for them; it is, instead, just the beginning. The feeling of flying blind with no one in your family able to

guide you is on a much larger scale than college; they are entering the business world without a net (Higgins, 2001).

Do second and higher generation college graduates have an advantage during their career? This advantage takes the form of a support system that helps a young college graduate acclimate to their new situation more quickly, assist them in avoiding pitfalls where new entrants to the business world normally stumble, and help them find the right path earlier or at all. The basics of how to develop a resume, behave during an interview, negotiate a salary, not to mention how to handle their first job seems mundane to many, but not to FGCGs.

There were a few items that, when combined, became the impetus for the research. To begin, I am an FGCG. As I look back on my career, I wonder about the decisions that I have made. One of the points that kept resurfacing after discussing with my parents was my Mother consistently saying, “We didn’t know any better.” At that point, it became more of a curiosity than anything else. Some questions to FGCG’s with a similar background elicited some of the same history. At that point, curiosity became research. Luckily, my career has worked out but what about everyone else in my situation?

That was a sobering thought. As I discussed the topic with more and more people it seemed that there was no shortage of individuals who fell into this demographic or at least knew someone who did. After a fair amount of reflection it just seemed unnecessarily unfair. To be clear this was not the whining and childlike, “it’s not fair,” but the mature and thoughtful, “that does not make sense, what can we do about it?” My research goal is not simply to complete a dissertation; it is to start a discussion that leads

to action. It is to change the mindset that young people starting out with a disadvantage will figure it out or they were never meant to be successful. I realize the importance of a struggle and how it builds resilience and character. It just seems to me that FGCGs should have the opportunity to show their fortitude.

It was difficult not to wonder if there actually is a connection between career success and being an FGCG. The first thought was to consider where and when a person receives influence regarding their career. If we agree with the Solórzano (1992) study results, it begins in adolescence and teen years with the parents. He performed a study of eighth graders gauging their scholastic and career aspirations and their parents' scholastic and career aspirations for their children. In traditional families, parents or other family members are the earliest influence that shape a young adult's thoughts and beliefs (Solórzano). They are figures that the young person can learn from, and then emulate (Solórzano). In essence, their parents become their first mentors.

Once I came to the conclusion that parents were mentors and combined that thought with FGCGs' possible disadvantages, it led me down a different path. I started questioning parents' mentoring abilities considering they may not have the requisite business knowledge and education. If parents were not capable mentors, then who would stand in their place? At that point, mentors, networks and career communities became the focal points of my study. It became apparent who the leaders were in this field of research. Higgins and Kram (2001) and Kram and Isabella (1985) have been the premier researchers for the seminal studies on mentors. Their work has acted as a foundation for the area of study. In addition to mentoring, Higgins and Kram improve upon the theory of networking.

Parker, Arthur and Inkson (2004) believe that, “with the current unpredictable economy individuals may be expected to assume greater personal responsibility for understanding their own needs, determining their own goals, and managing their own careers” (p. 490). The general career path that most developing executives followed for years has changed; they will need to seek out new avenues to grow and be more nimble as they make decisions that will affect their livelihoods. One of these new avenues is career communities.

Parker et al. (2004) conducted the first study to clearly define career communities and explain the impact they have on an individual’s career. Their study is referenced consistently in the literature on career development. Parker et al. (2004) define career communities as “self organizing member-defined social structures through which individuals draw career support” (p. 498). Career communities are one of the cornerstones of my study and exemplify the support system’s crucial effect on career growth and success.

The next generation of career communities has been developed on the Internet. Sites such as LinkedIn and Xing are in existence to act as a professional networking platform for individuals to present themselves to the business world. The sites act as a haven for people to post their career experiences and accomplishments with no fear of being accused of looking for a new job. Interestingly, the sites have become so large that even the Presidential campaigns were on LinkedIn and all the candidates had a profile.

Gerard (2011) performed some recent research regarding Social Networking Systems (SNS) and how they relate to careers. He went so far as to assign a LinkedIn project to his class at a New England college. He simply required them to put their

profiles on the site and let nature take its course. Many of the students went above and beyond the assignment and joined groups that have similar interests and reached out to executives for career advice (Gerard).

These SNS have become a breeding ground for building a career network. Both LinkedIn and Xing have a broad array of participants on their networks. They range from the very early in their career, such as graduating seniors, to retirees who are consulting. The members are from all four corners of the globe with varying levels of education, work experience, and seniority. The sites have participants from countless industries including show business and non-profits. Gerard (2011) defines SNS with the following, “The professional SNS blends aspects of the personal and job SNSs, providing things such as resume building, education and career networking, the ability to publish and read unique content, write and ask for recommendations, and search for jobs, people, and companies—actions more suited to network and career building” (pg. 4).

Social media is more than just access to a digital community; it is a platform for a person to present themselves as a brand. Vitberg (2010) describes Personal Brand Equity “as the tangible and intangible assets an employee brings to the company and the relationships they have built and maintained” (p. 42). The avenues available to build this brand are through blogging, writing articles and outlets such as Twitter. As the brand grows, it attracts new contacts for their professional network. The person develops a reputation of someone worth hiring and thus new opportunities present themselves. A recent survey by [www.jobvite.com](http://www.jobvite.com), which is a recruiting software firm, found that 72% of companies surveyed will be increasing their use of social media in recruiting going forward (Schuele & Madison, 2010).

Social media can work both ways when it comes to career opportunities. Just as individuals are networking to find new roles, companies are networking to find new employees. Not only should an FGCG be looking to build their personal network but they should be looking to make sure they are visible to a company's network. Leader-Chivée, Hamilton and Cowan (2008) feel that "companies may create talent pools – networks of interested candidates in persistent dialog with the recruiting organization" (p. 41). Social media is only going to increase in usage as it relates to career development.

For the purposes of this research networks, career communities and mentors will be explored through in depth interviews. These conversations will take place with FGCGs' delving into their careers and examining the impact of their support systems had on their success.

### **Definition of Terms**

A career will be defined differently by each subject. It is such a personal process that to try and place a blanket definition for everyone would be defeating the purpose of the study. Each subject will decide if their career is one entire spectrum spanning a series of jobs or made up of a number of mini-careers.

Career communities are a group within a social network that focuses purely on an individual's career. They are the people that an individual seeks out for career advice or looks to emulate their professional behavior. Anyone can be in the career community and people will come and go from this particular segment of a social network as the individual's career progresses. Parker et al. (2004) define career communities as social

structures that provide career support and frequently transcend the boundaries of any single organization.

For the purposes of this research, the participants will be referred to as first generation college graduates or FGCG.

FGCG will be defined as a graduate who neither parent has graduated from a university. Second generation and longer will be defined as a graduate who at least one parent has graduated from a university.

Mentors “provide young adults with career enhancing functions such as sponsorship, coaching, exposure and visibility” (Kram & Isabella, 1985, p. 111). Mentors are an important component of the social network and the support system as a whole. For the following research mentor will be defined as someone who provides life or career guidance for an individual during any point in their life. The previous definitions are a bit outdated and require some modernization.

Social network can be defined in several fashions. For the purpose of this research, a social network is the entire framework of relationships that an individual has in their life at a particular moment in time. The relationships can be personal, professional, strong, weak, familial, unrelated, long standing or short lived. It is like a snapshot of an FGCG’s web of contacts. The network is comprised of three main facets.

Family is usually the first contingent thought of when considering large decisions such as career. In our society today, family is not always a Mother, Father and a sibling. Grandparents raise college graduates as well as Aunts, Uncles and family friends. The social network includes coaches, teachers, religious figures, or some other mentor met along the way. The support system, by way of the social network, will also include all

members of the individual's career community, in addition to colleagues. The last portion of the social network that influences career development is the FGCG's mentors. Janina Latack contributed a chapter in Arthur, Hall and Lawrence's Handbook of Career Theory (1989) describing a social network. She defines a social network as made up family and friends and provides support throughout their career (p.259).

Success is a nebulous term. Each person defines it differently depending on their perspective on life and what is important or valuable to them. For the purposes of this study, success comes in two varieties: objective and subjective. Gunz and Heslin (2005) describe subjective success as "how the individual feels about their work over the course of their career and objective is how the external manifestations are viewed by the rest of the world such as compensation" (p. 106). This study is not about financial success as much as it is about building a foundation of career stability and advancement in any field.

Support system will be used heavily throughout this research. Each individual has a different compilation of people influencing them throughout their life. This is the overarching umbrella of relationships including an FGCG's social network. The support system acts as a sounding board, a giver of advice and comfort. Further in Latack's chapter in Arthur et al.'s Handbook of Career Theory (1989) she explains social support. She describes a social support system that comprises a person's entire social structure and how it acts as emotional, tangible and informational support throughout an individual's career (p. 259).

## **Significance**

The economy has become more unpredictable over the years. The ability to be nimble during career progression is critical. As mentioned above, Parker et al. (2004) feel that individuals may be expected to assume greater personal responsibility for their careers. This responsibility led to research on the use of self-authorship for career decision making. The theory of self-authorship provides a way of understanding the process that people use to make meaning of experiences (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). Careers are simply a compilation of experiences.

This research will enhance the understanding of the career decision making process for the FGCG. The focus will be on FGCGs and how they comprehend the opportunities in front of them based on their support system. Creamer and Laughlin (2005) clearly point out two potential hurdles including the FGCG's need for approval from their support system and their trust of authority. Their points bring up the question, "If their support system lacks the requisite business experience and education, are FGCGs at a disadvantage?" If the college graduate does fixate on the need for approval, they might be inclined to make decisions that their support system can understand. The FGCG may avoid taking a chance on something new or untraditional. An FGCG may also be less inclined to question authority with their limited experience in the business community.

After reading this research, the hope is it will prompt questions from several areas including: questions from the FGCGs themselves, questions from business executives, questions from University Presidents and questions from corporations as a whole. Hopefully, readers will consider the impact of unfulfilled careers due to the lack of

guidance. It will give the reader pause and a chance to consider their personal support system or the people's around them. The ultimate goal is to open up the discussion and call attention to FGCGs so that additional development can be provided if needed. The ideal end result would be programs to make mentors readily available to anyone. There is no shortage of experienced members of the business world. They only need a conduit or organization pairing them up with an FGCG.

At the end of all of this, there is the hope to break a cycle perpetuated simply by a lack of available information. We cannot change the fact that someone is an FGCG. We can change the resources accessible to everyone and remove the gap of knowledge that exists today. Considering the sheer amount of information at everyone's fingertips today, it would seem logical that providing an avenue of support to a group clearly deficient in an important area should exist. The alternative is potentially losing years off of someone's finite career and foregoing their productivity or opportunity to help others.

### **Delimitations**

The research focuses on FGCGs, but will obviously not cover the entire population. The sample will only include individuals between the ages of 25 and 65 years of age. The goal is to find participants who have had a similar career experience. Twenge (2010) performed a recent study showing that Generation X, Generation Y, and even Baby Boomers show similar attitudes regarding commitment and retention.

The research will not include individuals outside the United States. While it would be very interesting to consider how foreign FGCGs navigate their careers, it would

be too large for the scope of this study. In addition, the cultural differences would force the research to compare completely different perspectives and thus dilute the findings.

The research will not include graduates of Junior Colleges or Technical Schools. While a very commendable achievement, these careers would be in a dramatically different business arena. The goal of the research is to seek trends of individuals having a similar experience. The career paths would be so dissimilar that it would confuse the results.

The research will include both men and women as equally as possible. The depth of the study will not include differences in gender as that subject would need extensive study. Gender study, while fascinating, would be better served in future research.

The study will not include interviews of Second Generation College Graduates to compare their experiences with FGCGs.

### **Assumptions**

1. There is a correlation between an FGCG's career progression and their support system.
2. This correlation can be determined through a thorough interview process.
3. The information gathered for each interview will be different. This will alter the interview questions making each subject's questions unique.

### **Theory**

As of late, the study of careers has grown into a specialty with the ability to conduct research in several directions. In the case of this research, there is a need for

more of a social context considering this study is focused on a phenomenology.

According to Lent, Hackett and Brown (1994) “social cognitive career theory examines how career interests mature, how career choices are developed, and how these choices are turned into action” (p.83). This is accomplished through three tenets: self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals. Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) describe self efficacy as “the beliefs people have about their ability to successfully complete the steps required for a given task” (p. 93).

Here is an illustration of the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT):

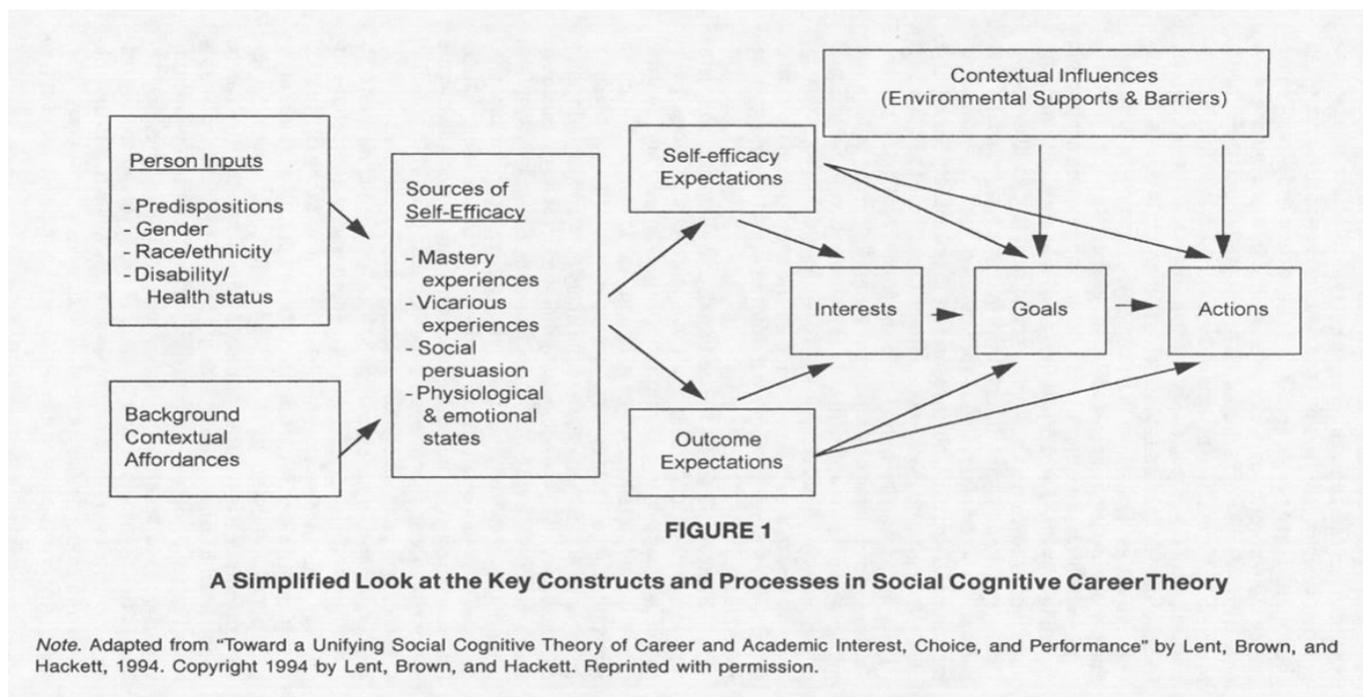


Figure 1: Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994, p. 93)

It would be remiss to not include Bandura’s (1996) social cognitive theory. It is one of the building blocks of the SCCT. In social cognitive theory, people must develop skills in regulating the motivational, affective and social determinants of their intellectual functioning as well as the cognitive aspects. It begins early in life through repeated practice, modeling and feedback from significant people, children are thought to

gradually develop skills, adopt personal standards, and be capable of estimating their abilities and the outcomes of their efforts (Palladino-Schultheiss, 2008).

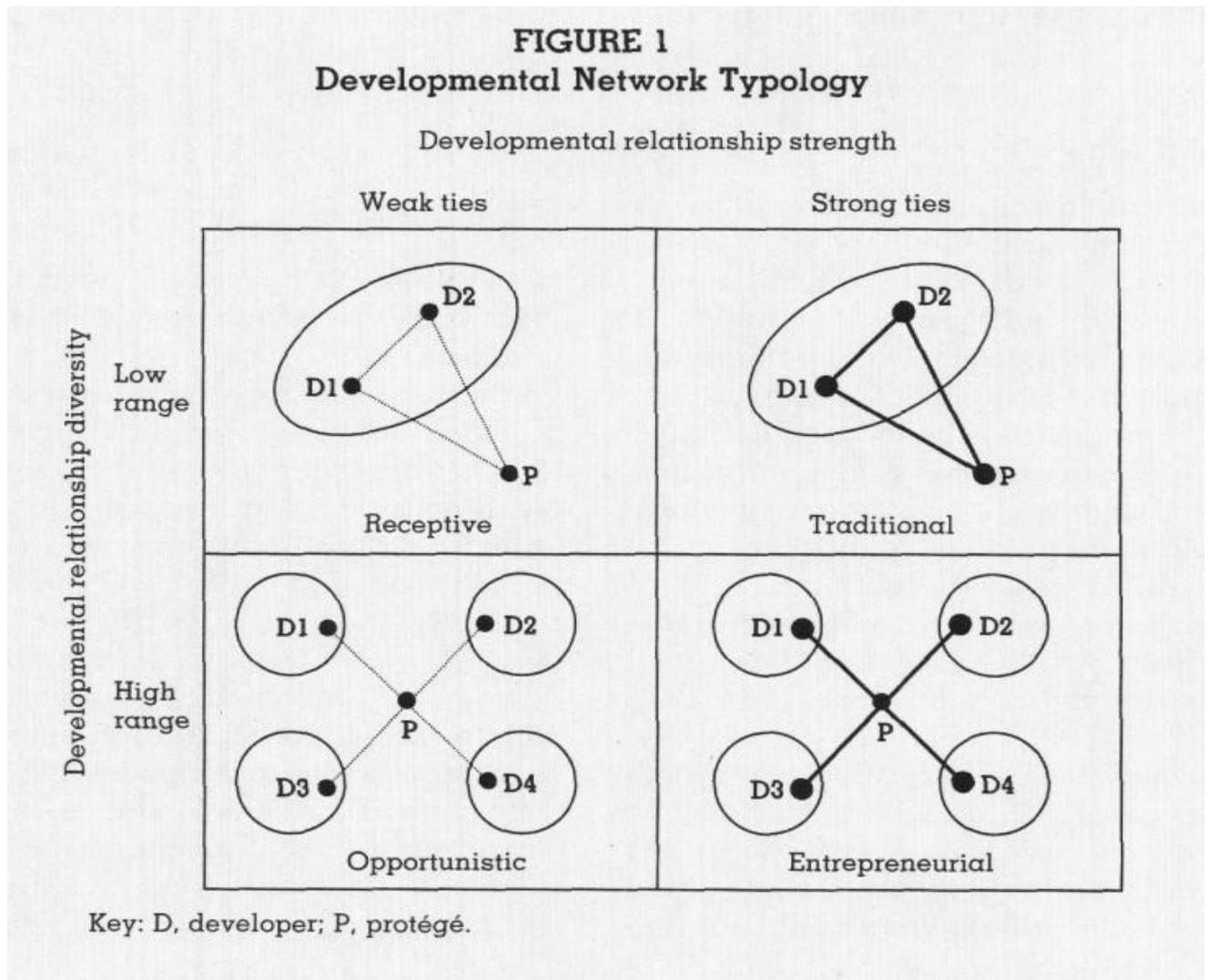


Figure 2: Developmental Network Typology (Higgins and Kram, 2001, p. 270)

Higgins and Kram (2001) developed what they refer to as a Developmental Network Typology. It is a table of sorts detailing the four levels of tie strength and network diversity. They define tie strength as “the level of emotional affect, reciprocity, and frequency of communication in a relationship” (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p.269).

Their logic is based on the expectation that reciprocity implies commitment to the other person and frequency of communication signifies an investment of time in developing a rapport. The researchers use the following definition for “network diversity: (1) range, the number of different social systems the relationships stem from, and (2) density, the extent to which the people in a network know and/or are connected to one another” (Higgins & Kram, p. 268).

The ideal scenario according to Higgins and Kram (2001) is to be in an entrepreneurial development network. This is when an individual seeks a wide range of relationships with strong ties. The wide range permits the person to get different perspectives when confronted with decisions. The strong ties imply that the people in the network are emotionally invested in the advice given. With the proper introspection the typology can supply a snapshot of where an FGCG currently sits within their network. It can give them a roadmap on next steps to continue their career evolution.

Barnes (1954), Granovetter (1973) and Milgram (1967) brought Social Network Theory to the world. Ibarra and Andrews (1993) were the first to apply it to employees and business in general. Katherine Kram was the first to apply Social Network Theory to mentoring. Kram’s articles in 1985 and 2001 are landmark studies referenced in the majority of mentoring research today. Mentoring theory will be explored heavily in this research.

Social Network Theory has become a major contributor to the concept of career communities. Parker et al. (2004) described a “relational approach to careers where patterns of interdependent relations are interpreted through the roles that individuals

play” (p. 491). A career community will act as a descriptor to the network typology and define the players involved in the FGCG’s career progression. Social Network Theory will be instrumental in this study as it is the basis for two of the major points of this research.

## **Methodology**

The data compiled for this study is qualitative. Creswell (2007) describes the result of qualitative research as “the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, as it extends the literature or signals the call for action” (p. 37). The researcher needs to have in-depth conversations and interviews which provide detail and allow the participants to expound openly about their careers and how their support system or lack thereof influenced their path.

The interviews of 21 FGCGs used consistent questions but allowed for the conversation to take different courses. All the encounters will be recorded and transcribed. The researcher analyzed the results looking for trends or commonalities. The differences and the outliers were also studied and noted throughout the research to show the variety of effects a support system can have on an FGCG’s career. The goal is to bring out both the reality of the participants’ career choices and their perception of them as well.

Creswell (2007) recommends an approach to data analysis that is somewhat applicable for this research; he suggests a style that would work for a phenomenological study. Since this particular research is more of a general qualitative study, the researcher

will use a variation of Creswell's analysis. To start, the researcher first brackets their personal experiences so that the focus of the study will be on the participants (Creswell). This will help reduce bias and give the reader some context of how this research came about. Next, the researcher takes note of significant statements that the participants discuss and group the statements into meaning units (Creswell). The researcher uses these meaning units in addition to key words and phrases to find common themes within the interviews. The researcher then presents a compilation of the meaning units and common themes to show any connection or lack thereof between participants.

The sampling in this particular research needs to be purposeful. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that random sampling can reduce the logic and coherence to sawdust. Creswell (2007) describes purposeful sampling as "selecting individuals for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 126). The 21 participants are selected so they have different perspectives. They will include males and females, current students, recent graduates and graduates from over 10 years ago. This will give a wide spectrum of experiences from various viewpoints.

Creswell (2007) recommends criterion sampling for qualitative research involving an experience shared by several individuals. In addition, multiple-case sampling would be appropriate for this research. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that by "looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases a researcher can strengthen the precision, validity and stability of their findings" (p. 10). All of the participants have the same starting point as an FGCG and they will provide their own unique perspective to add texture and depth to the results.

As Miles and Huberman (1994) describe, the process should be iterative. Each interview should start the same and incorporate a similar framework of questions. Since each subject has different experiences, there will be certain variations in the order of the questions and allowance for going off on tangents to give a complete answer. The goal of the interview is to understand the essence of participants' careers and their personal feelings. These interviews will ask participants to candidly assess their career to this point, discuss their family and ponder the choices they have made.

The compilation of data gathered during 21 interviews is sizeable. The analysis of this data is critical to gleaning the perspective of the participants. The data is broken down and then pieced together in a coherent fashion for the reader. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe "three concurrent flows of activity within qualitative data analysis: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification" (p. 11).

Throughout the responses from 21 interviews there is the need to focus and highlight certain aspects of the data. To present the findings in an efficient manner it is necessary for the researcher to comb through the data while limiting redundancies and pulling together themes. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the best way to pull together themes is to start with coding. The codes will allow the researcher to separate pieces of data and analyze them in categories. This process allows for trends in the responses to emerge so the researcher can compare the participants' experiences.

Miles and Huberman (1994) go on to say that, "You know what you display" (p.11). The reader is provided with a graphic depicting the data in a way that makes it easier to comprehend. Lastly, the goal of the data analysis is to draw some conclusions from the findings and to then verify these conclusions. "The meanings emerging from

the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their ‘confirmability’ – that is, their validity” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11).

### **Sub Questions**

1. Did the FGCG grow up in a traditional family model?
2. Is the FGCG still close with their family?
3. Is there a current or past mentor of any kind (teacher, coach, religious leader, friend of family, etc)?
4. Has the FGCG been able to form a career community?
5. Does the FGCG consult with the career community while making career related decisions?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter coordinates prior research conducted on career development for FGCGs. It focuses on seven categories in particular; the areas of research are as follows: social networks and social network theory, career communities, career decision making, defining career success, mentoring and modern career research and theory. Each of these categories act as a header in the Literature Review.

#### **Social Networks**

In a small island off of Norway, social network research began. “People have a common interest in the maintenance of existing social relations” (Barnes, 1954, p.322). This study was performed over 50 years ago and surprisingly the findings still resonate today. For example, Barnes defines a network as a “social field that is not fixed for new ties are continually being formed and old links are being broken” (p.315). The term “ties” surfaces several times throughout the present research.

According to Granovetter (1973), the strength of ties is “a linear combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy and the reciprocal services that characterize the tie” (p. 1361). Each relationship or tie has a different level of strength. Higgins and Kram (2001) developed a model to represent tie strength. Their definition is rather similar to Granovetter’s. They do provide further detail, though, describing the

reciprocity as a sign of commitment to each other and the amount of time as an investment in building the relationship.

In addition to the strength of ties, there is also literature regarding the weakness of ties. Granovetter (1973) states that “those to whom we are weakly tied are more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive” (p. 1371). Weak ties provide value to the individual indirectly. Ironically, Granovetter continues to describe weak ties in the context of finding a new job. He feels that the weak ties are the relationships that allow for this mobility opportunity. In many cases the relationship that brings a new opportunity to an individual is from a weak tie. Granovetter’s last suggestion on this topic is “that maintenance of weak ties may well be the most important consequence of meetings and conventions” (p. 1373).

Still, there are other studies that do focus on the core network and laud the importance of those traditional relationships. Cummings and Higgins (2006) strongly suggest that members of a network who have been with the individual “through thick and thin” (p. 40) are stronger than the developmental relationships that come and go. According to the study, the inner core and outer core play different roles within the network. The inner core provides psychosocial support and the outer core provides the career support (Cummings & Higgins).

Higgins and Kram (2001) delve further into tie strength when they use the term to define developmental networks. The definition they provide is “the set of people a protégé names as taking an active interest in and action to advance the protégé’s career by providing developmental assistance” (p. 267). They go on to say that the

developmental network is not the protégé's entire social network; it is just the contacts that are involved with the career development at that particular time.

It is not only the strength or weakness of the ties that defines the network. According to Higgins and Kram (2001) the diversity of the ties promotes limited redundancy of information within the network and provides a conduit into a previously unknown source. The study of diversity in work relationships as it relates to career originated with Kram and Isabella (1985). They performed several interviews regarding the relationships of 15 employees at a corporation. The result was the defining of three levels of relationships – information peer, collegial peer and a special peer (Kram & Isabella). Each provides a different type of support.

Higgins (2001) also adds some perspective to the importance of diversity. According to her research, having a broad array of relationships within an individual's network exposes that person to more than just new career opportunities. The relationships outside the core network expand the individual's line of thinking and prompt the person to consider a career change in the first place (Higgins, 2001). This exposure to new information becomes the impetus of career advancement. The results of the study show that the participants selected family as the largest portion of their network at 34% (Higgins, 2001).

As it relates to the present research, Higgins (2001) states that having “two family members in a network are more likely to provide similar or redundant information and perspectives” (p. 598). This speaks to the range of the network which refers to the diversity of information available in the network. The same challenge applies with the density of the network. Higgins (2001) also states that the density is the extent to which

members of the network know each. The closer the members are, the more likely they are to provide similar information and perspectives. Lastly, Higgins (2001) continues her research into diversity a step further by explaining that greater confidence will affect the amount of career opportunities and the individual's willingness to explore them. A more diverse psychosocial network promotes confidence to overcome obstacles. One of her final comments was, "it is possible that early career decision makers restrict, in some way, their advice networks to those who say what they want them to say, providing a false sense of confidence" (p. 613).

Higgins and Thomas (2001) expanded on Kram and Isabella's (1985) work on networks. The term constellation describes developmental relationships from a myriad of sources including family, friends, peers, subordinates and bosses. Higgins and Thomas (2001) performed the first longitudinal study of how primary as well as developmental relationships affect long term career outcomes. The study challenged the traditional mindset that the primary mentor relationship is the individual's immediate boss or within their family.

In addition to the primary relationship, Higgins and Thomas (2001) also explore the entire developmental relationship network. They delve into the career impact of these relationships and also the psychosocial impact these people have on the individual. While career functions include sponsorship, exposure, visibility, coaching and challenging assignments, the psychosocial impact focuses more on role modeling, acceptance, counseling and friendship (Higgins & Thomas). The results of the study were somewhat counterintuitive. It turns out that having more extraorganizational relationships within a developmental network has a positive impact on career growth and

the developmental relationships had more of an impact on the individual than the primary relationship or mentor (Higgins & Thomas).

Higgins (2000) performed a separate study researching the careers of several emerging attorneys. She explored 12 law firms and compiled responses from a 138 participants. She found that in addition to the importance of developmental relationships, the amount of people who fit into that category had a positive impact on an attorney's career (Higgins, 2000). The term she used often, and not so coincidentally the title of the article, was "the more the merrier" (Higgins, 2000). Lastly, she found that some members of the network brought neither career impact nor psychosocial impact but still positively affected the individual. She referred to them as friends (Higgins, 2000).

Ibarra (1995) uses the term expressive network when discussing friends in her seminal social network theory article. She noted that due to the increased interaction, similar characteristics and affiliations there was a stronger chance of influence or conformity. The proximity of the friends would have a stronger impact than the instrumental relationships on an individual's career perceptions. The centrality or the location within the network is more critical in the instrumental network. The individual benefits from the access to a broad range of information and resources (Ibarra).

Higgins, Dobrow and Chandler (2008) drilled down deeper into developmental relationships early in an individual's career. They felt that the relationships built in business school or MBA programs would impact the graduates' careers. The researchers used a quote from Podolny (2001) to illustrate their thoughts, "social networks are not just pipes of information, resources and access; they may also provide a 'prism' to see through one's world" (p. 209). The study showed that mentoring does occur from

relationships that come from the same demographic as the individual and can be both positive and negative (Higgins et al., 2008).

Higgins, Dobrow and Roloff (2010) studied the correlation between optimism and the developmental relationship network. Throughout an individual's career there will be changes within the network. The researchers show that optimism, particularly early in the career can lead to success. They believe, as shown by their hypotheses that psychosocial support and career support early in the career will lead to the individual having greater optimism (Higgins et al., 2010). Considering all the changes an individual faces early in their career, having optimism allows them to look positively at the future. The researchers go on to say, "the psychosocial support will provide individuals with the emotional support necessary to refrain from adopting a pessimistic attributional style as they encounter inevitable stressors of young adulthood" (Higgins et al. 2010, p. 13).

Dobrow and Higgins (2005) examined developmental networks in conjunction with professional identity awareness. The researchers attempted to determine if there is a correlation between the two over a five year period. They clearly state their research problem as "developmental networks may provide a key means by which people can explore their possible selves and construct their professional identities" (p. 569). Their hypothesis supposes that if the network density is low, that most of the network does not know each other, than the likelihood is higher that the individual will have greater clarity of their professional identity (Dobrow & Higgins).

Bandura (1996) brought the Social Network Theory along with the Social Cognitive Theory to the forefront. Both theories are instrumental for an individual's self efficacy. Social networks provide social support which in turn increases the likelihood of

self-efficacy (Bandura). Social Cognitive Theory suggests that individuals need self regulatory skills to grow emotionally and intellectually. Bandura goes on to state that, “Efficacious self-regulators gain knowledge, skills and intrinsic interests; poor self-regulators do not achieve much progress in self-development” (p.7).

Fast forward to today and social networking has become high tech. Leader-Chivée et al. (2008) suggest that large corporations are using social networking websites to connect large workforces to one another. Facebook, LinkedIn and intranet social networks have given corporations a way to recruit and retain valuable employees. Gerard (2011) describes in detail the benefits of LinkedIn and how it provides an avenue to connect people within the company for mentoring purposes. LinkedIn also gives individuals a relatively instant network that can provide information and resources to solve problems or offer new employment opportunities.

Social Network Theory has been studied and questioned since Barnes (1954) first set foot on that island. After several researchers have dissected it and provided several perspectives on the theory, the concept can be boiled down into one question. “How does an individual’s social network affect their career development?”

### **Career Communities**

Parker et al. (2004) define career communities as, “self organizing, member defined social structures through which individuals draw career support” (p.489). They go on to describe the career community in greater depth:

“Consider, for example, the social, ethnic, and gender categories to which workers belong, the occupations with which workers identify, the education they

undertake, the industries in which they gather experience, the homes and families in which they live, and the churches, voluntary societies, and leisure groups in which they participate. All of these may influence career behavior” (p. 490).

The authors feel that career communities have been evolving as of late due to the emergence of a new economy in which an individual has to take more responsibility for their own career.

Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi (1995) introduced the idea of an intelligent enterprise or career. They describe the process in developing an intelligent career with three steps: knowing why, knowing how and knowing whom. They later named it the intelligent career theory. Parker et al. (2004) believe that the intelligent career is an overall pattern that underlies career behavior. The connection with career communities is through the interlinking of the above three steps. Knowing why is related to motivation and this dictates the decisions an individual makes in their career. Knowing how describes skills and lessons learned through experience that drive these decisions. Knowing who addresses the career community as it forms and then changes due to the decisions made brought on by the newly gained experience (Parker et al., 2004). It is a cycle that is constantly evolving as a career progresses.

Inkson and Arthur (2001) provide examples depicting the impact of ‘knowing why,’ ‘knowing whom’ and ‘knowing how.’ The authors describe a person who has an early understanding of what he wants to do in life or as they characterize it, ‘knowing why’ (Inkson & Arthur). This early career decision led to him to learn as much as possible about this area or ‘knowing how.’ His ‘knowing why’ and ‘knowing how’ eventually led to a reputation and a network of professionals in his area of interest,

otherwise known as ‘knowing whom.’ Inkson and Arthur developed a model to describe the connection between knowing how, knowing why and knowing whom and it is shown below (Figure 3).

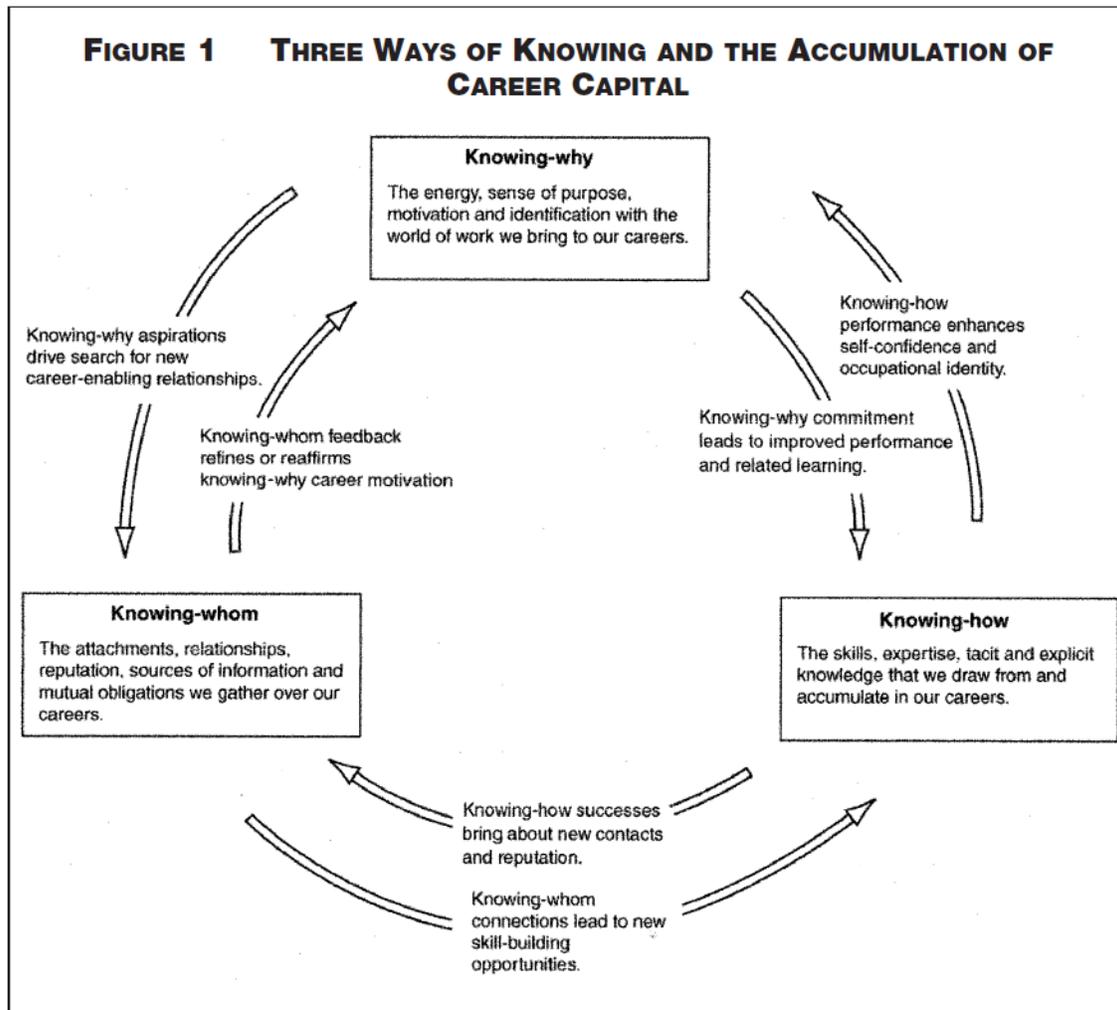


Figure 3: Three Ways of Knowing (Inkson & Arthur, 2001, p.52)

Inter-subjectivity, subjective career and sensemaking are all interrelated components of career communities. Parker et al. (2004) describe inter-subjectivity as a sharing of experiences between people and is directly related to the psychosocial support described by Higgins and Kram (2001). Subjective careers are all about an individual's experiences and the career community allows them to share these experiences.

Sensemaking is a novel term that describes the role career communities play in not only support, but also providing “specific opportunities for each individual to map the careers terrain, and to interpret it in relation to his or her own career path-finding” (Parker et al., 2004, p.497).

While the Social Network Theory is more of an all encompassing web of social interactions, the career community focuses purely on the individuals that affect a person’s career. The question needing to be answered to advance the research is:

“What is the impact of the career community on an individual’s career development?”

## **Mentoring**

Whitely, Dougherty and Dreher (1991) performed a study which showed that mentors from higher socioeconomic origins were of more benefit to protégés of higher socioeconomic backgrounds due to their commonality. Individuals from lower economic backgrounds benefitted more from psychosocial support particularly early in their career, but the results show that the lower socioeconomic individuals received fewer promotions. Whitely et al. saw the correlation between how someone grew up economically and their disadvantages during their career or as they put it “Mentoring practices may be a form of socialization in business organizations that is particularly sensitive to early family socialization” (p. 348).

Kram and Isabella (1985) wrote the seminal mentoring article. They were the first to look at traditional mentoring and suggest “that a wider range of developmental relationships exists” (p. 111). They went on to propose that peer relationships provide

some of the same critical functions as mentors. After a substantial number of interviews they determined that peer do provide career enhancing support. The main difference between traditional mentors and peer relationships is the concept of mutuality (Kram & Isabella). Mutuality allows both people in the relationship to be both the giver and receiver of support.

A combination of levels of peers can make up a mentoring network of sorts. Kram and Isabella (1985) name these levels informational, collegial and special. Informational is a person that exchanges information and is helpful when something specific is needed. Collegial is more of a personal relationship where they provided career support and some form of friendship. Special peers are trusted implicitly and normally have a longer relationship than the other peers. They provide candid feedback and emotional support to enhance each other's careers and lives.

The other side of their study focuses on stages of an individual's career and what type of relationships they need during that time. Kram and Isabella (1985) determined that traditional mentors were critical early in a career and peer relationships were critical in all stages of a career. In the first or establishment phase, an individual needs someone to show them the ropes and how to actually do their job.

Higgins and Kram (2001) believe that there is no set definition for mentoring and that it is simply fact that there are several forms of mentoring today. They describe how the business world has changed and how difficult it is to have just one traditional mentor who may be relocated, reassigned or released. One point they stress is that an individual who is looking for career guidance will receive objective career advice and individuals looking to completely develop as a person seek and find psychosocial career advice

(Higgins & Kram). Furthermore, if the individual has entrepreneurial developmental networks (strong ties and a high range of diverse ties) then they will be more likely to change jobs (Higgins & Kram).

Higgins et al. (2008) subscribe to self-efficacy theory (Lent et al., 1994) and believe that self-efficacy, confidence in their ability to achieve goals, is critical to career development. They propose that early career support from an individual's developmental network will increase their self-efficacy. The study examined social comparison theory as it relates to peer relationships from an elite graduate school (Higgins et al., 2008). Interestingly, they found that there was a negative correlation between perceptions of career success and career support from peer relationships that were classmates at an elite graduate school. This result describes a negative process of social comparison (Higgins et al., 2008).

Higgins (2000) hypothesized that the more developmental relationships or mentors a person has, the more that person is provided with career support. In turn, she believed that with all of this career support the individual will have greater job satisfaction. The results were different than Higgins (2000) expected. She proposed that for an individual to have a higher work satisfaction it is "the more, the merrier" when it comes to mentoring relationships. It turns out that only one developmental relationship was necessary provided that person gave a significant amount of psychosocial career support (Higgins, 2000).

A recent study addressed the psychological terms of optimism. Higgins et al. (2010) set out to determine what relationship there is between optimism and developmental networks or mentors. The authors' feeling was that optimism will

increase an individual's work satisfaction and the likelihood they will succeed in their current role. The authors hypothesizes that both career and psychosocial support introduced early in a person's career would increase the individual's optimism, particularly over a period of time (Higgins et al., 2010). The results show that all of these items increase optimism except for career support when it was looked at individually. The study provides a new perspective from the mainstream literature as Higgins et al. (2010) explore and explain the timing and changing nature of career and psychosocial support.

This section discusses the relevance of mentoring. From the several articles mentioned, it is clear that mentoring is a heavily researched topic as it relates to career development and social networking. The question attempting to be answered in this research is, "How does mentoring affect career development and/or career success?"

### **Career Decision Making**

Higgins (2001) wrote that a change in one's career "may yield a sense of renewal and personal growth, or, alternatively a sense of inconsistency and even confusion regarding one's goals and work values" (p. 595). Not only do the range and the density of the network promote career change directly, the new perspectives from having such a diverse network expands the horizons and changes the individual's thoughts and values (Higgins, 2001). This line of thinking leads to career alternatives, and the more choices available the more likely an individual will change jobs.

At the end of her study, Higgins (2001) found some interesting results. It appears that the type of advice and relationships produced a different effect on an individual's

career change mindset. The range of relationships had a direct impact and a positive correlation with career change while density of relationships did not. In fact, the prevailing thought within career theory was that confidence would be positively tied to career change and the results showed the opposite (Higgins, 2001). Apparently, the psychosocial support that breeds security and confidence is not as relevant when it comes to changing careers.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) researched the concept of career trajectory as it relates to career change. They discuss that it is somewhat of a mathematical equation where a person can identify the starting point, angle and velocity so they should be able to calculate the ending point and intermediate points throughout time. This point highlights the importance of where someone starts in their career.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) also go on to explain turning points as epiphanies or changes in an individual's career. These turning points are normally preceded and/or followed by a routine of sorts. Some of the routines are "confirmatory meaning they reinforce a career decision or contradictory where the change undermines the original decision and the person becomes dissatisfied" (p. 40). They complete the model with a socializing, dislocating and evolutionary routine. "Socializing which confirms an identity not previously desired, dislocating which is when a person lives with an identity they do not like and evolutionary where the individual outgrows the initial identity" (p.40).

Sullivan and Arthur (2006) wrote an article to explain Arthur and Rousseau's book "The Boundaryless Career." Their intention is to explain the difference between physical mobility (objective career) and psychological mobility (subjective career). In addition to defining the two terms, the main point of the book is to show how interrelated

and interdependent the two aspects are as it relates to career change (Sullivan & Arthur, (2006). The authors developed a model similar to the strength of ties model from Higgins and Kram (2001), shown earlier. There are four quadrants showing the relationship of psychological mobility and physical mobility. This interdependence circles back to the “three ways of knowing” for the intelligent career theory (Arthur et al, 1995). Sullivan and Arthur believe that career competencies reflect the ‘three ways of knowing’ and that individuals with greater career competencies will have more opportunities for psychological and physical mobility.

Career decision making is the result of the social networking and the career communities. The question for this particular research is:

“How does a social network or a career community impact an individual’s career decision making?”

### **Career Success**

Career success is an outcome of a person’s career experiences (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005). They go on to define it as “the accomplishment of desirable work related outcomes at any point in a person’s work experiences over time” (p. 179). Arthur et al. (2005) also discuss the importance of looking through both a subjective career success lens and objective careers success lens simultaneously. The two perspectives are interdependent. They point to Zabusky and Barley’s (1996) descriptors ‘career achievement and career advancement’ as a way to view someone’s career while considering both subjective and objective success. Heslin (2005) goes a step further and breaks down whether someone’s work life is a calling, a career or a job. He proposes in

his research that someone with a calling, meaning they work for personal fulfillment, uses subjective criteria to determine success while individuals who have more of a career, those concerned with advancement and pay, or a job, those focused purely on financial incentives, use objective success criteria.

In addition to providing a definition of career success Arthur et al. (2005) performed a meta-study of sorts. They studied 68 articles over a ten year period between 1992 and 2002 specifically focused on career success and the interaction between subjective and objective careers. They came to the conclusion that only half of the recent research in this area sees subjective careers as impactful on objective success. The majority of the articles suggested that objective success, income and promotion were clear definitions of overall success. The authors state more than once that with the changes in the economy today coupled with the changing individual attitudes trending towards subjective careers that more research would be necessary (Arthur et al.).

Heslin (2005) questions the validity of the traditional objective career success parameters. Using today's cultural standards, high salaries and promotions are not enough on their own to warrant success. The author goes on to describe the pitfalls of confusing career satisfaction with career success. Heslin writes that "although job satisfaction may contribute to subjective career success, they are conceptually constructs that are not necessarily related" (p. 117). He uses Social Comparison Theory to show that people will compare themselves to others when they lack the objective information to determine their own success. Lastly, the determination that someone believes in a linear or non linear career has a potential impact on how they view their success. Heslin proposes that someone with a linear career, which is when someone is a corporate

climber, they are more focused on objective career success measurements and the non linear careerists are more interested in subjective career success.

Heslin (2005) explains that self-referent is when the individual sets the level of success and other-referent is when the individual compares their level of success to others. Some examples of other referent sources are friends, family, coworkers and peers in the same industry. Ironically, one of the articles Heslin quotes states that “what we think our families think can determine how satisfied we are with our career” (Gattiker & Larwood, 1988, p.572).

Career success is the result of career decision making. For the current research, the question that will be studied is:

“What impact does an individual’s support system have on their career success?”

### **Career Research**

Arthur (2008) is one of the leading authorities on modern career theory. He describes a “a greater respect for individual agency in determining one’s own life and career direction, and in building a support system to pursue that direction” (p. 171). This echoes Higgins et al.’s (2010) opinion about how the responsibility of career development has transitioned from the employer to the employee. Arthur (2008) believes that career research needs to be interdisciplinary and include any and all fields of study if it advances career theory. Higgins et al. (2010) agrees and specifically highlights the combination of psychological capital with social capital (networks) with their study on optimism.

Higgins et al. (2010) call attention to the interdependence between individuals' careers and their environments – including, but not limited to their existing developmental networks. Arthur and Kerr (2001) follow the same line of thinking as they suggest that while a person changes their job eight times on average in a career, the individual does not start from scratch each time. They bring all their acquired experience to the new position and company and then the new location becomes the beneficiary of the combined old and new knowledge and skills.

Arthur and Kerr (2001) also propagate the career capital theory. They believe that a person's career is not unlike any investment they will make in their life. They recommend taking some calculated risk and put the time into building relationships. Korotov, Khapova and Arthur (2011) describe investing in a career using the three ways of knowing in the "Intelligent Career" – 'knowing whom,' 'knowing why' and 'knowing how.' The term they use to define this investment is career entrepreneurship. The authors felt that all three of the knowing's were interdependent. The article's parting thought is, "turbulent times and unstable economic situations, in which old rules of accepted behavior cease to function and new rules have yet to settle in, provide particular opportunities for career entrepreneurship" (p. 132).

Parker and Arthur (2009) specifically discuss a certain relationship in the three ways of knowing. They state, "The Knowing-whom to Knowing-why links are grounded in traditional sociological theories that connect social circumstances such as social class, parental circumstances, ethnicity and gender to individual expectations and adaptation" (p. 296). The authors feel that the developmental relationships (whom) will impact the motivation (why) for certain career decisions.

Throughout the research for the present study, the impact of generation has been questioned. The Theory of Generations states that individuals born and reared in the same historical era are shaped by common formative experiences and therefore develop a unique identity (Mannheim, 1952). Twenge (2010) compiled all the cross sectional studies on generational analyses relating to work attitudes and challenged their results. She believes that time lag studies are more telling and reliable. Generation X (born 1965-1981) and Generation Y (born after 1982) are the two generations she explored. She found that intrinsically both generations feel the same about the importance of “meaning” in their work and extrinsically they have both increased considerably in their pursuit of money and promotions from the Boomer stage (born 1946-1965) (Twenge). Generation Y is normally more satisfied with their jobs than Generation X, but more open to looking at better opportunities than the older generation. There has been a steady increase in individualism over the generations and the Generation Y wants to be able to contribute immediately; the downside bring that they have a higher sense of self or narcissism (Twenge).

Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng and Kuron (2012) bring additional in depth research regarding generational differences. They suggest that “it may be society has entered an era of prolonged career exploration, as young workers take a longer period of time to complete their education, explore job opportunities, and settle down in their careers” (p.350). This explains why their study found that Generation Y members changed jobs more often early in their career than other Generations. To add further detail, Westerman and Yamamura (2007) found that Generation X and Y were significantly more focused on goal fit than Baby Boomers. In essence, if the Generation X or Y member did not feel

that their goals were aligned with the company's or their job's goals they were much more likely to leave than the Baby Boomers.

Tams and Arthur (2010) attempted to further explain the impact of Arthur and Rousseau's "The Boundaryless Career." The book, written in 1996, has opened the door for a new way of viewing careers. The premise is that the traditional career and the dependency on the internal corporation no longer hold true. Today's individuals look outside the company for validation, take career opportunities outside of their current industry, avoid traditional corporate reporting structures, construct their career around family commitments and break free from structural constraints (Tams & Arthur). The "Boundaryless Career" theory is an attempt to grasp the rapid change in the economy today. The authors sum it up eloquently:

"It is impossible to anticipate how careers will change in the years to come. Challenges such as systemic risk in global financial markets, changes in the provision of social services, and the depletion of natural resources increase the vulnerability of careers that are embedded within established modes of economic production. Yet, they also create opportunities for careers associated with social innovation" (p. 642).

As noted in the above section, career research has been studied extensively and there is so much more to explore. There are multiple questions being asked on the careers topic. One such query applies to this particular study, "How has current career research impacted an individual's career development?" In other words, recent studies have developed theories that may have changed the way individuals approach their

career. These articles and studies have identified potential new schools of thought in an area that had been following the same research for many years.

## **Summary**

The literature review describes several articles that are considered to be seminal (Bandura, 1996; Barnes, 1954; Kram & Isabella, 1985) and still resonate today. The articles provide insight into support systems by delving into social networks, mentors, career communities, career decision making, career success and modern career research. The goal was to demonstrate the line of research being followed in order to answer the following research question:

“What impact does a First Generation College Graduate’s support system have on their career development?”

While there is limited directly related literature for this specific topic, there is ample indirect research available to bring some clarity to the question.

Social networks, as described and defined by Granovetter (1973) and Higgins and Kram (2001), exemplifies the alternatives available for receiving career help from several sources. The goal was to describe the options outside of family that could assist in navigating career pitfalls. An individual coming into their working years can look to non traditional avenues for support. Most importantly, as Higgins and Thomas (2001) show the network morphs several times so if the support system currently in place is not working there is no need to simply accept it.

Parker et al. (2004) wrote the career communities article of a lifetime. In addition to what social networks bring to someone’s support system, the career community

focuses purely on their career. It describes ways to develop relationships for the sole purpose of career development. They make it clear that while family is normally a part of most individual's career communities, it is not necessary. This point alone gives a person the freedom to consider people in their life as sources of information that they would not have pursued due to family respect or obligation.

Higgins (2001) found that career support is more impactful when making career decisions. Interestingly the psychosocial support provided by family and friends is not correlated with career choices. Heslin (2005) discusses the influence other-referent sources for defining career success. In the article, Heslin quotes Gattiker and Larwood (1988), "what we think our families think can determine how satisfied we are with our career" (p. 572). This point projects the family's definition of success onto the individual. Lastly, Creamer and Laughlin (2005) surveyed over 40 female college students and all of them listed their parents and family as the most influential when it came to career choices. Their research also showed that the female college students who majored in more technical fields had stronger support from their parents than those in other majors.

Mentoring can appear in several forms at different times in someone's life. It can shape an individual's view of themselves and their career. Whitely et al. (1991) saw the correlation between how someone grew up economically and their disadvantages during their career or as they put it "Mentoring practices may be a form of socialization in business organizations that is particularly sensitive to early family socialization" (p. 348). This finding is indicative of the mentoring required for someone who has not had the appropriate amount growing up. Higgins et al. (2008) proposed that self-efficacy is

critical for making career decisions and having strong self efficacy, described as confidence, comes from early career support. Higgins (2000) felt that after studying the amount of mentoring necessary to be successful that one strong member of a network providing a significant amount of support can influence a person's work satisfaction.

Modern career research points consistently at the Boundaryless Career built by Arthur and Rousseau and discussed in many articles (Arthur, 2008; Higgins et al., 2010). The central point is the understanding of 'knowing whom,' 'knowing why' and 'knowing how' as well as how they are all interdependent. This group of 'Knowing's' is called the Intelligent Career. Korotov et al. (2011) feel that with the turbulent economic times upon us that a new way of making career decisions develops. The traditional path is becoming obsolete for those looking to have an active career entrepreneurship.

The generational differences in career development show adjustments being made for today's culture and increased pace. Ironically, Lyons et al. (2012) concluded that Gen Y members are prolonging their career choice and doing more soul searching than generations before. Twenge (2012) suggests that while there are substantial variations of approaches to a career there are still similarities within all three generations. Baby Boomers today are open to changing jobs as are Generation X and Generation Y members; they just have different motivating factors.

Each of the areas in the present study suggests that a new paradigm has developed in career development. The research questions that will be addressed in this study are:

“What comprises the FGCG's support system for each generation (i.e. social network, friends, family and colleagues and mentors)?”

“What is the relative importance/influence of each support system component in career development for each generation?”

FGCGs, by definition, are new to this process so while much of the literature suggests that family is an influence on career decisions it also shows how complicated this journey is to navigate. The researchers make it clear that the more diversity or range in the network the better it is for the individual personally and professionally. The upshot is that family is a major part of the career development process whether it is positive or negative for the person.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology carried out for this research. There will be an explanation of why qualitative research methods were chosen over quantitative methods. The population and sampling will be discussed along with validation. The interview instrument will be described and finally the style in which the data will be conveyed.

#### **Introduction**

Silverman (2001) raises methodological issues about whether interview responses are to be treated as giving direct access to ‘experience,’ or as actively constructed ‘narratives’ involving activities which themselves demand analysis. The interviews involved with this particular research could certainly fall into either of the two camps of experience or narrative. The interviews are designed to illuminate participants’ perception and interpretation of their careers as it relates to their being an FGCG.

For this type of research, a qualitative approach gave the greater opportunity to unearth more than just surface data. The point of the study is to ask questions like “How come?” and “Why?” which cannot be answered quantitatively on a Likert scale. The other reason for choosing a qualitative research method is to generate a hypothesis versus

testing one. The hope is to advance the research and since there is no hypothesis to be found relating exactly to the careers of FGCGs, it makes sense to develop my own.

### **Population and Sampling Method**

The population selected for this study is college educated individuals who have navigated, or are currently navigating through their career. They range from the ages of 25 and 65 and are based here in the United States. This is intentionally a broad based assortment of participants. The thought process behind the population is to provide a diverse set of individuals who still have a common theme.

The population was pulled from a database of 300. They were each sent an email explaining the research and the interest in FGCGs. They were asked simply if they are the first in their family to graduate college. Those who followed up with an affirmative answer were provided with more details on the process and were sent a request for an interview. Participants were emailed an informed request form. Once that document was signed and executed, the interview was scheduled.

For this research, purposeful sampling is the most logical choice in order to cultivate rich and textured data. Creswell (2007) defines purposeful sampling as selecting individuals for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem in the study. In the examination of the impact a support group has on an FGCG's career, it is necessary to delve into detail with willing participants that have an interest in reflecting on their past and assessing their current career status. This study has a sample size of 21 in order to provide a variety of backgrounds, careers and stories.

### **Interview Instrument**

Interviews gleaned the majority of data gathered in this research. The same questions were asked of each participant, as shown in Appendix A. Questions are open ended, so there is latitude built into the instrument to allow for individuality within the participants' stories. The script was followed so the order of questions was the same for each participant. Creswell (2007) recommends using questions that "are a narrowing of the central question and subquestions in the research study" (p. 133). There were different follow up questions for each participant, depending on their answers.

Interviews were performed in person and were recorded. In some cases, a follow up call was necessary to clarify an answer. Interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes per participant. Participants were allowed to end the interview at any time.

### **Validation and Reliability**

Since interview questions are open ended, it is somewhat difficult to address validation. It is impossible to predict how each participant responds, so validation of interview data is challenging. Angen (2000) focuses more on substantive validation, suggesting that research should provide some practical answers to questions, raise new possibilities, open up new questions and stimulate new dialogue. Each of these items is a goal of this research.

Silverman (2001) warns that when people's activities are tape recorded and transcribed, the reliability of the interpretation of transcripts may be gravely weakened by a failure to transcribe apparently trivial, but often crucial, pauses and overlaps (p.222).

The present study accounts for every word uttered by the participant and also makes note of any laughter or other type of descriptive noise besides words. These responses, while not true verbiage, do help in painting a richer picture of the person's career and their feelings about it.

### **Methods of Analysis**

Each of the 21 interview transcripts are detailed descriptions of the participant's perception of their career and the impact their support system had on said career. In essence, these interviews are to be treated as miniature cases. With that in mind, cross-case analysis and within case analysis were ideal tools to breaking down the data. In using both strategies, the researcher identified trends and recurring themes throughout the transcripts. Within case provides for a deep dive into each interview identifying patterns and trends. Cross-case analysis takes the research a step further to show common threads between the participants, giving more validity to the research.

Coding is the first step in breaking down and analyzing data from an interview. Since the researcher in this case has experienced a career as an FGCG, it is important to be aware of epoché or bracketing. This is when an investigator sets aside his experience, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective of the experience under examination (Creswell, 2007). When coding the data, it is critical for the researcher not to project his own feelings or interpretations of the interview results.

“Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69). Considering there were 21 interviews worth of data, a large amount of information was analyze. Each

interview asked the same questions of people from a similar life experience. There is therefore the likelihood that a pattern in the responses between participants will emerge.

The next step in the analyses process is the display of the findings. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the argument of their entire book on data analysis as, “You know what you display” (p.91). The display in this case would be best described as a hybrid of time-ordered matrix and effects matrix. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe time ordered has columns arranged by time period in sequence so that you can see when particular phenomena occurred. This type of display allows the researcher to see the order of events that led to the participant’s career development. The effects matrix is applicable here because its focus is outcomes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using both matrices allows the researcher to correlate the timeline of certain relationships or decisions with certain outcomes affecting the participant’s career.

## **Conclusion**

The research methodology proposed provides an in-depth look into the participants’ experience and compares their perception to others in the study. The pattern coding identifies any common themes and the display presents the data in a legible and credible fashion. The goal is to derive the participants’ interpretation of their career and how their support system has affected them.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA AND FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will provide a compilation of the data collected from the interviews. It will break down the results allowing for a detailed description of the research outcomes. Direct quotes from the conversations will be used to convey the feelings of the co-researchers adding depth as the research questions are answered. These quotes will be used for a within case analysis. There will also be a cross case analysis when the interviews are compared generation to generation.

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact an FGCG's support system has on their career development. The 21 interviews explored the perspectives of the participants as they looked introspectively back on their lives and careers in particular. The line of questioning was similar for each interview. There was some latitude given due to individual responses. The goal of each meeting was to answer the two research questions:

1. What comprises the FGCG's support system?
2. What is the relative importance/influence of each support system component in career development for each generation?

## **Overview of Co-Researchers**

The 21 participants were broken down into three groups based on the year they were born. There are seven Baby Boomers, seven Generation X's and seven Generation Y's. The gender breakdown is as follows:

Generation Y – 4 male and 3 female

Generation X – 4 male and 3 female

Baby Boomers – 5 male and 2 female

All were interviewed in-person to physically see their reactions. This way, the interviewer could note pauses, changes of expression, sarcasm and moments of emotion. Some of the meetings touched on personal areas that made the participant reflect on their life.

## **Research Question 1**

### **Baby Boomers**

What comprises the First Generation College Graduates' support system?

The Baby Boomer Generation came from an era of pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. The career influencers here were almost more internal than external. They all seemed to carve their education and career out on their own to an extent. B1 described his home life as, "We didn't see dad a lot at first because he worked second shift, so when we got home from school, dad was on his way to work, and we saw him basically on the weekends—that's the only time we saw dad for many years, until he finally got a job on first shift."

B1 credited his maternal grandparents as having a key role in his upbringing and shaping his career goals. This was his initial support system. As he moved along in his career he found a mentor, “There was one guy who was really special. His name was Al S. and he was a very large member of the community in Defiance, Ohio, which is a very small town where we lived and that’s where the office was where we worked and Al was just great. He helped me quite a bit, mentoring me in the sales department. He was a consummate salesperson and he helped me quite a bit.”

B4 continued along this trend stating, “Well, my parents really weren’t all that supportive of me. They were supportive in the sense that they knew that I wanted to go to college, but when it came time to pay for dental school, and kind of find my way in the world, they had nothing to do with it.” He was fortunate to have an uncle take an interest in him and loan him money. He also fell into a relationship with a mentor/guardian angel. He tells the story this way:

And the story that I like to tell about it is, I met this guy, this patient of mine—it’s not this great, big story, but it’s a true story—so I meet this patient and his name is Morris, and Morris was an old guy who comes in and he’s got a toothache and I take care of the guy, and he’s asking me during this early appointment whether or not I owned the practice, and I told him I worked for this dentist. And the old guy, Morris, told me that if I ever want to open up my own practice, he would help me. But if you looked at the guy, he didn’t have two nickels to rub together—at least I didn’t think so. So fast forward two and a half years later, I was getting ready to buy my first dental practice, and as it turns out, three days before the closing, the bank called me up and said that they weren’t going to loan me the money because there was too much unsecured collateral. My parents, by the way, would not cosign the loan. So, out of the blue, that night, that guy Morris called up and he said, “for some reason, I think I need to call you tonight. And I mean it’s crazy story, but a true story, and I said, ‘Morris, I need to borrow money.’ And he goes, ‘how much do you need?’ And I said, ‘I need 75,000 dollars.’ And he was great—‘come to my factory and I’ll loan you the money.’ And that’s how I got into business. And what that old guy told me when he loaned me the money, when he loaned me the money, because I asked him what the terms were-- he said “The terms are that I want you to work harder than you ever have in your entire life and I want you to come by my house, and I’m going

to teach you what I know about business.” He goes, “that’s what I want to do.” And that’s how the whole thing kind of got started. So, between my uncle and this old guy, Morris—that’s kind of who framed who I am.

Incidentally, B4 is incredibly successful as a worldwide businessman in addition to being a top flight dentist. His business partners are some of the most well known financiers in the world.

B2 had a less than traditional support group as well. He explained it as, “So, from a primary support perspective, the person that comes to mind first is my mother. She was a single parent, raising two kids, from 11 years old, my age, on. My father had left the family. So she had been, for the most part, the primary influence in my life in regards to support, both emotionally, financially, and for the most part, spiritually.” B2 developed a thriving business for the last twenty years and has created a mutual business relationship with someone who acts his support system today, “I do have one other person who I bounce business ideas off; he’s also an entrepreneur, he runs in the VC world, and he’s also a JD on top of being a BS/MS/MBA guy. He has started up a number of companies. He is about my age, and we bounce ideas off of each other in regards to more so from a business perspective and we sit on each other’s informal board, if you will.” I should mention the other person he refers to is his wife. She is his “moral compass in life and business” so that certainly adds some influence on his decisions.

B6 had the most traumatic upbringing of the group. “We were abandoned by our family. Before I was 17, I had moved 21 times”. His father left them very early in his life and his mother did not finish 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She was an alcoholic and they lived in the ghetto as he describes it of New Jersey. He had every reason to fail. Surprisingly for all her troubles his mother kept him in school and somehow enrolled him in a private

Catholic school. After a time his father came back into the picture and helped him after her graduated college. B6 then developed one of the deeper mentoring networks seen in this research. He listed chess coaches, teachers, multiple managers and executives. Today he is a rather successful businessman with two brilliant well educated daughters and on a few occasions the first African American to achieve senior managerial levels at a major corporation.

B5 credits her then boyfriend and now spouse as her entire support system. She had dropped out of school and while he was finishing his degree he strongly suggested she go back to her studies. At this point after a strong career as an actuary she is no longer working. She did not have mentors during her career, choosing instead to gather her own information and make career decisions on her own occasionally consulting her spouse. B6 and B7 also mention their spouse as somewhat of a sounding board and support system for their life and career. B7 specifically stated, “And when you talk about a support system, I would say to you that my family did not talk about going to college at all—zero.” Surprisingly her older brother went on to get a PhD. She is now running a major charitable organization and credits her spouse with suggesting she take the role. She has over the years opened herself up to a mentor. A Board Member who was also a CFO of a corporation gave her the confidence to learn how to build a budget and tackle financial spreadsheets.

#### *Answer to the research question*

The seven interviews for the Baby Boomers covered the topic of their support system both early in their life and during their career. Table 1 depicts their descriptions:

Support System composition	Early Life	Mid Career
Parents	7	0
Spouses	N/A	5
Siblings	1	1
Extended Family	2	1
Mentors	0	5
Friends/Workmates	0	3
Teachers	2	0

*Table 1: Baby Boomers' Support System Composition*

The fact that “Parents” is mentioned by all of the co-researchers when discussing their early support system and none of them for their career, is telling. All co-researchers said that their parents did not take any part in their career choices and they did not consult with them after graduation. None of them have harsh words for their parents, only acceptance or understanding. B5 and B7’s parents in particular were present but very hands off. B7 stated that her parents “never told her what to do” and B5’s “just kind of listened,” but never offered advice or encouragement. Ironically B2’s mother was in a similar industry to him, but he opened his own firm without even discussing it with her. As an aside, he did wind up hiring her.

Family surfaced several times throughout the interviews, but not to the degree that it was pervasive as one might think. Five of the seven co-researchers glowingly discussed their spouse as being integral parts of their career. After the spouses though, the numbers drop off considerably. Only one of the co-researchers mentioned a sibling in passing for their early life and one during their career. B5 and B7 followed in an older brother’s

footsteps to go to college, but it ended there for career advice. Two co-researchers mentioned extended family for their early support system, and only one for their mid-career support system. B1 said “my maternal grandparents were heavily in our lives” and B2 described an uncle “who spent time with me during the summers and gave great advice”. B4 was heavily complimentary of his uncle’s help and support in school and getting his career started.

Mentors came up several times while discussing mid-career support systems. Five of the seven co-researchers, particularly B4 and B6, gave glowing accounts of how instrumental their mentors were in their life. With none of the Baby Boomers turning to their parents once their careers started, it stands to reason that they would look for guidance externally. B6 was very proactive in seeking out relationships and named several individuals that were mentors during his career. None of the seven mentioned any form of mentor early in their life.

Three of the seven felt inclined to mention their friends/workmates as part of their support system. B2 describes one friend as “someone he bounces all his business ideas off of.” B6 loves the people he worked with and clearly feels strongly about those relationships. B7 turned to her workmates regularly as she lacked confidence in the beginning of her time at the non profit organization and they were very supportive. Coincidentally both B6 and B7 credited their teachers for being a part of their support system earlier in life. None of the co-researchers mentioned teachers, coaches, religious figures but both B2 and B7 brought up other outside influences. B2 felt that following Tony Robbins’ principles were helpful in his career and reading up on famous leaders and sports figures. B7 also turned to books to gain advice on leadership and her career.

## **Generation X**

What comprises the First Generation College Graduates' support system?

This first research question was how all of the interviews began after basic pleasantries. After defining the term for the co-researchers, they were all able to describe their original and mid-career support systems. They all provided a description, whether loosely or in great detail, of the constituents in their support system.

One of the consistent themes about their original support systems was the presence of their parents. One example is co-researcher X4 who said, "So my mom has always been a very powerful force in my life and emphasized education." His mother had passed away recently so he conveyed a significant amount of emotion as he discussed her role in his life and career. Their parents set up a home environment that more than just encouraged education. X5 explains, "Immediately, it comes down to Mom and Dad—there was no alternative for us growing up—it was almost mandated that we would be given a college education to sort of change their pattern—they never finished school". X7 echoed that sentiment, "My parents were a little unusual in that they didn't give me a lot of very specific, direct guidance in how to do things, but going to college was not an option—that was just the way it was."

Interestingly, there was only one out of 21 interviews that did not include her parents as part of their support system at any time. This co-researcher spoke about her mother quite a bit, but only in terms of her being a presence without much impact. Her mother was scared of anything new and tried to project this fear on to her children. X2 pushed her boundaries and while feeling guilty about leaving her family to start her

career, she realized this was the only way for her to grow. X2 described her first career choice this way,

“So I was in Orlando and then at that time, I found a job in Tampa. It was close enough, but not too close. Not as close as I wanted it to be or my family wanted it to be, so I packed up my bags and I went on my own and I moved to Tampa. I wasn’t getting—I got the support that I wanted, but I wasn’t getting the optimistic view that I wanted—not yet. I had to prove myself, like, ‘hey, I’m going to be okay,’ before I was able to fully get her consensus.”

I followed up the question regarding their original support system and asked them to compare it to their most recent support system. Not one of the seven in Generation X included their parents in their current support system. X1 is currently the President of the local chapter of a National Charity. He describes one of the most important members of his support system as:

“So, for example, there’s an attorney that worked with me at that very first law firm that I worked for. He was also the person who introduced to me the charitable organization, and he’s a person that I go to with regularity for advice and counsel on a host of things, mostly related to the charitable organization, and he was one of the people I went and reached out to and talked to because he’s one of the few people who knew me as an attorney and also knew me in terms of my involvement with the charitable organization.”

He had his own law firm for 12 years. He was the Chairman of the Board for the charity. The President passed away unexpectedly and he decided to fill her shoes. This was a colossal life decision for him to leave his practice and do something completely new.

To take it one step further, none of the seven mentioned their immediate original family at all as part of their current career support system. Two co-researchers did credit their spouse as the person they discuss all career moves with. X2 and X4 in particular named their spouse as the reason they are successful. X4 describes his spouse as, “My wife has been great. I’m very fortunate that she’s very intelligent and has a good handle

on me and what I think I want to do—sometimes better than I have a handle on myself.” He went on to explain that there were times in their marriage when she made significantly more money than him and kept encouraging him to be entrepreneurial. Incidentally, he has gone on to become very successful.

Six of the seven co-researchers in Generation X included coworkers in their current support system. This group was both peers and executives with more senior roles than their own. None of the seven mentioned anyone at work who worked for them or was less experienced. X6 described her relationship with workmates as, “generally there are two people that I turn to that I’ve had in my network in work for 15 years or so. And I’ve worked for both of them and it’s just—they know me, they know my personality, they know my skills, and I just turn to them for advice.” X5 used his support system not just for career decisions but for business decisions in general:

Today, when I make substantial business decisions, I have a few colleagues that are in the exact same field, same industry, same business, that I respect and I will often run something by them before I make a decisions, whether it’s a new purchase of a vehicle or equipment or computers—with those types of things—if I’m going to expand my business and open up new locations, I’ll often confer with them as well, just to get some feedback. There’s a handful of them—maybe two or three that I particularly respect for different reasons.

Just to keep it interesting, there were some individuals outside of the norm included in the Generation X support systems. X7 credited a law professor that took an interest in his career:

When I got to law school, there was a professor named Professor Brown that I had in my first year that I would say out of any teacher or person, had the most influence on my career because he really taught me. When you get to law school, you just think you’re going to walk in and start writing laws on the board and say, “this is the law,” but it’s far from it, and he really gave me insight on what law school was about, what being a lawyer was about, and for the first two years after

I graduated, I would often go back and go visit him and tell him what's going on and if I needed legal advice or career advice, that's who I would go to.

X3 credits no one in her support system today. She feels that she makes her own decisions and does not let anyone else influence her. She has a reason why she trusts herself above all else as she explains, "my parents gave me no money or anything like that to help me through school because they were the type where, when I was pregnant, they were like, 'okay, you're an adult now. See ya.' So I had to do it all on my own." She became a mother at 18 and had to depend on herself to get through college and build a career as a single mom.

*Answer to the research question*

Generation X co-researchers provided interesting insight into their own career paths. Table 2 provides a numerical depiction of the way they define their support system.

Support System Composition	Early life	Mid career
Parents	6	0
Spouses	N/A	2
Siblings	2	1
Extended Family	2	0
Mentors	0	6
Friends/Workmates	5	6
Teachers	1	1

*Table 2: Generation X's Support System Composition*

The interviews with the Generation X co-researchers gave clear descriptions of their support system both early in life and during their career. Six of the seven credited their parents for putting them on the path to becoming FGCGs. It should be mentioned that the credit in two of the interviews was somewhat half-hearted. X6 had a “dysfunctional family” as she put it. X3 had one that turned their back on her when she became pregnant at 18 years old. Still, they felt their parents were there for them in some respect early on in their life. The other four co-researchers spoke glowingly about their parents and as X5 put it they were “everything.” All that said none of the seven listed them as part of their career support system at this point. None of them involved their parents in any of their career decisions.

X1 was grateful to his older siblings who had graduated ahead of him. They set an example for him to follow. X6 decided to go back to college when her sister enrolled. Only one of the co-researchers included their siblings in their current career support system. X1 sat down with his older brothers and sisters when he was leaving his law firm and going to run a non-profit organization. None of the others included them in their career support system even though many of them had siblings.

Mentors were prevalent during these conversations. Six of the seven co-researchers believed that mentors were instrumental in their career decisions. X1 did say something worth noting. He felt that it was important not to label these people as mentors. It would put unnecessary pressure on the person and the relationship. It was a tacit understanding, but never made plain during conversation. X4 had two different mentors. Interestingly one was his boss and the other was his wife’s boss. X7 had the

only mentor who was a teacher. X3 was the only person that did not feel she had a mentor. She came across determined and that she made her own way in her career.

One of the more surprising areas was the number of co-researchers who described their friends and their family as being an early part of their career support system. It could be attributed to the time being that going to college was becoming more prevalent and many families were encouraging education. With the explosion of education from the Baby Boomers, it appears that it filtered down to the next generation quickly. X1 and X4 grew up without means, so seeing their friends' families have a "more stable lifestyle" and "larger homes" helped them see the correlation between education and success. X5 and X7 grew up better-off and they said all of their friends were planning on college so even though their parents did not graduate, most of the people they knew had parents who had finished with a degree.

To continue with the friends and co-workers, six of the seven co-researchers felt strongly about the relationships with their co-workers and friends and appreciated their help in regards to career direction. X3 felt that all of her promotions or lateral moves were related to friends she has at the bank. X5 has built up a successful business and turns to people he has grown within the industry and uses them as sounding boards. X7 defines his circle of attorneys as a close knit group that helps each other with their careers.

Extended family was not credited often. Two of the seven co-researchers mentioned some involvement early in their life. X2 had cousins working on becoming an FGCG at the same time as her so that helped her stay on task and finish. X4 was grateful to a successful Uncle who took an interest in him. The man was not a college graduate,

but did understand the value of education and all that it could bring. None mentioned extended family in regards to their career support system.

Only two out of seven co-researchers mentioned their spouses. X2 described her husband in passing as someone she runs decisions by to get his thoughts. X4 was different though. He could not say enough about how instrumental his wife has been in his career. As an aside, X3 had to be reminded about her husband at the end of the interview and as she has exhibited throughout the conversation she did not credit anyone else with her career success. In addition to spouses, only two co-researchers mentioned teachers at all. X2 gave credit to teachers seeing something in her early on and pushing her towards a degree. X7 though felt strongly about a law professor who not only taught him the reality of the law profession but also how “to be an attorney.”

### **Generation Y**

What comprises the First Generation College Graduates’ support system?

All of the Generation Y co-researchers credited their parents as being a major part of their initial career support system. Interestingly, five of the seven came from a broken home. They discussed their mothers and fathers separately and all of them mentioned extended family assisting in their early development. The only anomaly was Y1; he was raised by his paternal grandparents and consistently referred to them as his parents.

Y1 described his support system as his “parent, an uncle who had some college education and an older gentleman he met while in college.” The story, as he tells it is:

“A man named Murray G., who I met during the second to last semester of college, who is actually basically a friend, but turned into something much more than that during right period of my life. He turned into a mentor. Murray was a guy who, because I was a finance major in college, brought me into the world and

introduced me to a guy who taught me how to do stock, trend analysis, and really brought me into my financial world, and then it was kind of a series of steps after that that led me to do work in Central America and then that was an opportunity where I leveraged what I had known from the financial side, but when I was in Central America, it opened me up to other skills that I hadn't had before, which then enabled me to, once my Central America bit ended, be able to open up my own company, and work internationally in Colombia. And then after that it was a series of events that just brought me back to the United States and then here I am. He pushed understanding where you're trying to go, and understood connecting the dots on your personal growth, and also what to do and what not to do. He used himself as an example of what he has done and what he has made mistakes on. ”

His current support system consists of a woman he met who is career focused and showed him how to maximize his situation and be ambitious. Outside of her, he makes most business decisions on his own. His parents are in the hair salon business and they have very little understanding of the career he currently has.

Y2 has benefitted from having two bosses who saw something in her and helped direct her career. Her first manager noticed her ability in computers. She explains,

“I mean, I got my BS in psychology and it wasn't working... I mean there were really no jobs as a psychologist. So he gave me a job and he realized that I was really good with computers so he told me that instead of pursuing psychobiology, which is what I was doing then, he would give me the option to become director of IT, obviously with higher pay and this and that. So I took the option and I was like “I'm already good at computers, I already like doing it, I already learned how to do websites and other stuff, so why not?”

This changed her life. She had not considered the fact that her natural understanding of computers was a career avenue. Her second and current boss has opened her up to more than just coding and basic IT. He gave her full responsibility on social media. Another area she just had a feel for and she has taken over all of his business ventures and continuing to flourish.

Y3 listed her mother in her original support system. Her father was out of the picture early. She has an older sister and brother in law who have helped raise her. Her sister encouraged the attorney she was working for to hire Y3 and she has been there ever since. She originally studied criminal justice because that was her interest. Her brother in law is a police detective so was able to give her some insight on careers in that area.

The way she describes her career situation:

“Well the person I turned to the most, just because it was a common grounds, was my brother-in-law because he’s a detective so he understands more about the criminal justice field and the legal stuff and legal terms. He would help me— Once I was in college, he was my support system, because he can help me a little bit more and help me understand, so I turned to him, Mostly just because of the attorney, Dan—he’s just so supportive of me, and it’s just so much interest that I have in my job. I love my job; I love going in there and helping people, but I don’t see myself sitting behind that desk the rest of my life, so I feel like I can do a little bit more, I can see a little bit more, or I can put my hands on it a little bit more, and not just sit there. It’s not sickening, because I love it, but I would like to do a little bit more sometimes.”

As it turns out, the attorney has encouraged her to enroll in law school. She starts next fall.

Y4 was a high school dropout. His parents are divorced and he split time with them. When he dropped out his mother insisted he live with his father. As luck would have it the owner of a restaurant offered to him full time if he promised to complete his GED. He tells the story this way:

“And every summer throughout high school, I worked in a restaurant down here as a cook and the day that I dropped out and moved down, I went to see my old boss and I told him. And he said, “I have no problem hiring you back full-time, but get your GED first.” So part of me thinks that if he wouldn’t have done that, then there’s a possibility I wouldn’t be where I am today, so I always kind of give him credit for that.”

At this point, he is his own support system and feels that he acts as a mentor for some of his friends as he is a bit older than some of the attorneys in his class. He finished undergrad and went on to law school. He already has a job lined up upon passing the Bar exam. He found it on his own through basic networking.

Y5 was the only college athlete of the 21 co-researchers. He had different choices to make regarding which scholarship to take, where to transfer and what to do after his knee injury. Considering he had some professional potential these decisions were career minded. His father, an uncle, a close friend of the family and his position coach (he was a kicker on the football team) became his support system. He describes his relationships as:

Mr. Becker has helped a lot. I've known him since I was 10. And then my one uncle has also helped a lot. He still calls me three or four times a week just asking me if I need anything—"how is it going? How is this?" And then when I made more relationships and I went to New Mexico State, my special teams coach there, who actually just left—he's looking for another job—he now texts me everyday. And he knows I'm coaching here now and he said, "if you ever need anything like game films, plays, everything, just feel free to call me and I will email you something tomorrow."

Y5 is the special teams coach at a Division II college and enrolled in graduate school. He had a few offers so he sat down with his support system to make his choice based on opportunity, education and the coaching staff.

Y6 has had a somewhat dramatic life to this point. Her mother was always pushing education on her, but there was also physical abuse. Her step-father tried hard to keep a semblance of normalcy at home and attempted to keep her on the right path. Her biological father was in jail for drug trafficking until her late teens. She was married

throughout her undergraduate studies and then moved with her husband to Puerto Rico.

Here is where she met her mentor. As she describes it:

When I started personal training, I met my very first client, who worked as an attorney, and I'm friends with her to this day. She became a really big figure in my life and she mentored me and I would always tell her how I always wanted to go to law school and that I was definitely planning on still doing it and she encouraged me to go to the law school there in Puerto Rico, but my Spanish wasn't fluent enough for me to be comfortable to go school

Then came an opportunity for them to move back to the States and although her now ex-husband recommended she stay in personal training, she wanted to become an attorney. Her biological father is heavily involved in her life now and she bounces everything off of him. He knows very little about her career, but is immensely supportive.

Not to be outdone, Y7's family trained racehorses; he was mucking out stalls since he was a kid. His parents lived half the year up north, so he stayed with his Grandmother. His support system developed when he interned for a local politician. As this gentleman's career kept rising, he brought Y7 with him. "He was a state representative at the time and I was just going to college and he offered me an internship and I started working with him and he has been a mentor, a friend, a confidant. Everything that I do, I pretty much run through him first, just to be sure, and so that's what's been the majority of my support system up until now." Y7 just became one of the youngest people ever to win an election and is a local politician currently. He is also planning on attending law school next year.

The Generation Y group all have had some adversity to overcome. They discussed it openly and were proud of their achievements. Several of them seemed to have a bit of a chip on their shoulder. Y2, Y3, Y4 and Y6 all mention specifically about

“wanting it more than the kids who have had their parents help them” and they would appreciate their opportunities more than kids of college graduates who would expect jobs to come their way. They all had permanent jobs for more than two years or jobs in hand upon passing the bar exam.

*Answer to the research question*

Generation Y co-researchers described their support system in a somewhat narrow way. Table 3 provides some detail on their perspectives.

Support System Composition	Early life	Mid career
Parents	6	4
Spouses	N/A	0
Siblings	2	2
Extended Family	2	1
Mentors	0	6
Friends/Workmates	0	2
Teachers	0	0

*Table 3: Generation Y’s Support System Composition*

There is a certain logic to Generation Y being more likely to include their parents as part of their support system both early in life and today. Although six out of seven of the Gen Y co-researchers described their parents as the main part of their early support system in Table 3, the seventh could also be included. Y1 was raised by his grandparents and refers to them as his mother and father. Interestingly, four of the seven co-

researchers include their parents in their career support system today. Y5, who is a college football special teams coach, discusses all decisions with his father. Y6 consults her father mostly because he provides moral support. She is “daddy’s little girl” at times and “tells him everything” in her life. To clarify, Generation Y is obviously younger so their version of “mid-career” would be in their mid 20’s. This would explain why their parents were still somewhat involved in their career. It is just too early for them to “cut the apron strings.”

No Generation Y co-researcher was married. Y6 is divorced and did mention her ex-husband as being involved at some point with career decisions but he never encouraged her to go to law school. She did that all on her own. The co-researchers did mention their siblings. Y3 had no father so she relied on her brother and sister to help their mother, thus opening the door for her to go to college. Y4 has an older step sister who went to medical school, which gave him the idea to consider college after he dropped out of high school. Y3 still turns to her sister and brother in law about her career since she is in the legal field and he is a police detective.

Mentors were discussed often throughout six of the seven interviews. Considering five of the seven grew up in broken homes they were looking for some form of adult guidance when they graduated. Y1 would “not be where I am today if not for Murray.” Y2 transitioned from a psychology degree to running an IT department because her boss saw something in her and changed her life. Y7 was the youngest person ever to run for office in his area and it was because some person already in office took him under his wing. While Y5 included his father in all his decisions he also found a mentor early in life and uses him to break down career decisions and figure out what is best for Y5 in the

long and short run. Y6 met a female attorney when she was a personal trainer, later becoming her mentor and steered her towards law school.

Only two of the co-researchers mentioned friends/co-workers. Y5 stays in close touch with his former football coach and they exchange ideas and job leads daily. Y7 has made several close friends while in office and now has a circle of folks that advise him whenever he needs. Disappointingly, not one of the co-researchers mentioned teachers in their early life or their career support system. They seemed to like school well enough, but not to the point where they thought a teacher had a specific impact.

### **Generational Comparison**

Each generation had their own trends and themes. With that said, there were some similarities and some clear differences that may be based on a function of when they were born. There are three areas that all three generations have in common. All 21 subjects counted their parents in some fashion as a part of their early support system. Even though more than a few were less than complimentary, they still acknowledged that their parents helped steer them towards an education. On the flip side, 18 of the 21 co-researchers made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that their parents were not part of their career support system. Lastly, 17 of the 21 co-researchers have someone they consider a mentor that assists them with their career development.

In each of the 21 conversations, all of them answered the question, “Who was in your original support group that put you on a path towards education?” with “my parents.” There were some that said it grudgingly, like X3, and some that said it half-

heartedly, like B7. Still, the majority were grateful and kind when speaking about their relationship with their parents early in the co-researchers' lives.

Several of them made a point of saying that they intentionally did not go to their parents while making career decisions later in life. The three who mentioned their parents as having a place in their adult support system were all from Generation Y. Considering that is the youngest group of co-researchers, it is not surprising that some of them still feel that parent/child attachment. Y6 and Y3 came from broken homes. In Y3's case she had no father, so her mother was her world. Although her mother has no understanding of being an attorney or law school in general Y3 still includes her in career decisions. Y6 has a unique relationship with her biological father. Since he has been released from prison she has been building a bond with him. He is there for "moral support" as she calls it and does not make suggestions or judgments on her decisions. Y5 is the only co-researcher out of 21 that genuinely seeks his father's advice on his career choices.

The responses on why their parents were not a part of their career decisions was answered with some variation of "my parents do not understand what I do" for Generation X and Y. In some cases, this was said with traces of resentment. X3 was clearly not happy that her parents were not supportive when she became pregnant at 18 and the last thing she wanted was their involvement when she became successful. Baby Boomers' parents were more hands off during their generation. The consensus was that once you were out of the house, you were on your own to make decisions. B4 used the term "helicopter parents" for Generation X and Y and the parents in his generation did not hover or interfere. The common thread for all the generations is that they did not

seek any parental guidance due to the lack of confidence in their parents' ability to lend value in their career decisions.

Mentors came in a variety of forms. B1, B6, B7, X2, X4, X5, X6, Y2, Y3, Y5 and Y7 all found their mentors at work. B2 found his externally in books, public speakers and historical figures. B3, B5, X3 and Y4 felt that they had no mentor in their life. X1's mentor is the bridge between his past in the legal world and present running a non-profit organization. This person introduced him to the Board of the charity and the rest is history. X7's mentor is the lone teacher in this equation. His law professor had a profound impact during school and many years after graduation. Y6, B4 and Y1 all found their mentors randomly. All three mentors were older individuals (two gentlemen and one woman) who were successful and wanted to pass down their business knowledge to someone. After chance meetings they built a relationship that lasted for years.

Baby Boomers did not readily seek their mentors except for B6. He was aggressive in approaching people to help him build his career and formed deep, lasting relationships with most of them. The rest formed naturally and casually. They were people in their office or came into their lives and the relationship just evolved with very little effort. Generation X was more direct. They sought mentors out and asked them pointed questions about careers and how to progress. Generation X's wanted to advance their careers quickly and become more successful and saw the mentors as an avenue to increase their career development. B6 would definitely fit in with Generation X in this case.

The Generation Y co-researchers were just looking for guidance. At one point in their life, all of them were lost and had limited, if any, career aspirations. Their mentors

found them in most cases and saw the need for help. The others had some form of potential that the older person felt could be molded into success. In all 6 cases it has paid off. All except Y4 were grateful and receptive to the outside influence. Y4 felt that he makes his own decisions and never needed a mentor.

There were additional similarities between the generations with less mentioned support system members. Siblings were mentioned only by two to three co-researchers per generation. In Baby Boomers, they continued along their trend of not meddling in each others' lives within the family. B7 looked up to her brother who was working towards his Ph.D., but never discussed it with him. Generation X was similar. Only X1 spoke about the strong influence his older brothers and sisters played in his early days. He did consult them when changing careers just to get the perspective from someone who knew him all his life. Generation Y mentioned them slightly more mostly due to dependence on older siblings for those who grew up in a broken home. With no father figure and a mother working multiple jobs, they looked towards older brothers and sisters to help them, as was the case with Y3. Ironically, Y6 was the older sibling attempting to set a good example for her younger siblings. Sadly, it did not take. None of them went to school.

Differences were noticeable in two areas. Generation X mentioned their friends and co-workers being a part of their career support system as often as Generation Y and the Baby Boomers combined. Generation X was the era when recent graduates were more career and money conscious. They wanted to get ahead as quickly and as successfully as possible. Similar to mentors, Generation X co-researchers reached out to build a network of people in their companies, industries or circles of friends that would

help them achieve success. There seemed to be a genuine collaborative and somewhat reciprocal relationship with their support system. Baby Boomers were consistent in their approach of not meddling in each others' affairs. They spoke highly of co-workers and friends, but only B2 and B6 felt that they were a part of their career support system.

X7 discussed how "the attorneys all help each other" when it came to cases or when jobs opened up. X5 surrounds himself with successful people. He just felt at this time in his life he only wants to be around individuals who are as career minded as himself. X2, X3 and X6 credit their friends at work for providing them with leads on openings and passing their names to hiring managers. X4 finds networking to be a key to his success, so he is constantly seeking out new people to learn from and also to offer guidance. Generation Y, on the other hand, was not complimentary of people their age. Y1 and Y2 find their generation to be lacking in communication skills and drive. The majority of Generation Y co-researchers did not respect their age group and had little interest in asking their advice about career decisions.

Another area of interest, due to dissimilarities between generations, was spouses. Baby Boomers spoke quite a bit about their wives and husbands. They credited their spouses with more than just moral support. B2 turns to his wife for every decision. B5's boyfriend then husband helped her start her career and encourage her success. B6 and B7 felt that their spouses are the reason they have been successful in their lives. Even B3, who did not admit to much of any help during his career, did mention that he discussed matters with his wife and they wound up actually working together. The dissimilarity among Generation Y is understandable as, while two were divorced, none are currently married. Two Generation X co-researchers credited their spouses. X4, in particular, was

exceptionally appreciative, but X2 only mentioned her husband in passing. X3 had to be reminded she was married.

## **Research Question 2**

### **Baby Boomers**

What is the relative importance/influence of each support system component in career development for each generation?

Baby Boomer co-researchers all had to seek out a support system. Maybe it is just the era or where they grew up, but many of their parents chose not to be influential in their child's career choices. B1 stated it plainly, "they didn't try to influence any decision I ever made about anything and I thanked them for that—that they didn't interfere with my life one iota after I got out of college." B3 had a similar experience as he describes it, "So our parents didn't say to my brother and I 'well, you should do this, this, and this.' We went to college—that was the thing—we wanted to go to college and then we pursued what we wanted to do." Similarly, B4 and B7 described their parents as uninvolved. B7 has an older sibling with a Ph.D.; her parents never said a word about it or his career. B4 took it one step further. When it was time to open up his first dental practice his parents refused to cosign on the loan. His uncle and another mentor stepped in at the last minute.

Baby Boomer co-researchers sought out mentors throughout their career. B1 found one at his first job that helped him through so many of his years at the company. B2 found one that was a kindred spirit of sorts and they bounce business ideas off of each other before investing. B4 created a relationship with one of his first patients. This man

wound up bankrolling his practice and taught B4 all he knew about business. B6 described numerous mentors he had approached. His mother and father died very early in his career; as a result, he sought guidance from the beginning. His personality is infectious to the point where people just want to help him. Ironically, he was at dinner with one of them the night before we sat down for his interview. Six out of the seven co-researchers in the Baby Boomer group describe their mentors as absolutely critical to their success and as B6 states, “there is no way I am here today without them. “

It was heartwarming to hear them speak about their spouses. The five co-researchers who credited their spouses with their career development said it with a note of pride. B2 finds his wife to be his “moral compass,” in that she asks ethical questions about his business and career decisions that he does not consider. B5 stated that her boyfriend at the time, and later husband, convinced her to finish her education. She said that if it were not for his support and encouragement she “would never be who she is today.” B6 discussed all business and career decisions with his wife. She took care of everything else in their lives so his career could flourish. B7 readily admits that without her husband she “would have never gone to work for the non-profit organization”.

B1 worked for two companies his entire career. He credits the work ethic of his parents and his mentor for his development. His support system gave him the internal drive to be successful and his mentor gave him the external direction to continue growing. B2 received a monumental piece of advice from his mother in regards to turning down a scholarship near home to move away from bad influences and study something he loved. His friend and mentor increased B2’s wealth by providing strong business counsel. Maybe most important of all B2’s wife serves as a reminder to do

business and live his life the “right way” and consider other people when making business decisions. B3 is the only co-researcher to give no credit to a mentor, his spouse, his parents or a friend. He felt that he made all of his own choices.

B4 had the most detailed story in regards to a mentor. This person cosigned B4’s loan for his first dental office, became his business tutor and eventually the best man at his wedding. B4 also had significant moral and financial support from his extended family. His uncle paid B4’s way through part of his schooling and a place to live while studying. B5 has had a successful career in an incredibly difficult field due to the encouragement and influence of her spouse. B6 described a list of teachers and mentors that gave him the tools to have a highly successful career. He credits all of them for their guidance and more importantly to him, their friendship. B7 started her role as a leader of a non-profit organization without some of the prerequisite skills. A mentor coached her through the areas she needed improvement and she developed into a national powerhouse.

*Answer to the research question*

Baby Boomer co-researchers clearly understand the value of their support system. They appreciated the sacrifices made by their parents and acknowledged the time given to them by mentors. They also credited their spouses as being instrumental in their career development. Most importantly, they understood that without their support system, as several of them said, “I would not be where I am today.” It is difficult to differentiate the value provided by their parents, mentors and spouses. The one area that could be clearly delineated is their parents only brought value early in their life; they played no part in the

co-researchers career decisions. Spouses provided a combination of moral support, ethical navigation and career encouragement that is immeasurable.

All that said, those two groups provided more indirect support to the co-researchers' career. Their mentors were focused on career development, advancement and success. Five of the seven co-researchers described in detail how their mentors enhanced their career. Their mentors were able to give them advice based on logic and reason as opposed to love or some form of blind emotion. Mentors were described as having some kindness or affection towards the co-researcher, but were just as quick to call them to carpet if necessary. After hearing themselves describe their mentors, they paused a moment to reflect on that person's impact on their careers. In most cases, co-researcher had not considered how much that person had done for them.

### **Generation X**

What is the relative importance/influence of each support system component in career development for each generation?

Only one out of seven co-researchers in Generation X felt that they make all of their career decisions without some form of a mentor or support system. Ironically, as the interview continued, even the one outlier, X3, admitted that she does change roles based on where her friends go or people who she has worked for in the past. At the least she indirectly has a support system impacting her career choices. The rest all had clear descriptions of who they turn to when looking for career advice.

X1 made an enormous life decision when leaving his successful law practice to become the President of a non-profit organization. He explains:

First, there was just my family: my brothers and my sisters in particular—talking to them about that and what their thoughts were. And that’s probably more than anything just more conversational. I didn’t know that they could shed any big light on it; they didn’t practice law and they’ve never run a non-for-profit.

I have go-to friends that I go to for different things, so I went to a number of those go-to friends to discuss and to get their input and really, in most of my discussions... And the third group of people were people who were professional friends of mine that I had met during the course of my professional life, so you have that professional friends, close family, and then close friends that I’ve been friends with, some of which go back to high school. And the two things that I was trying to solicit from them is to see if, in essence, is there anything I’m not thinking of? Is there anything in this process that I haven’t really given thought to? So that was one aspect of it and then the second aspect of it was related to the first—do they see me as a person that would enjoy happiness with this switch, how they know me? So when they visualize me going into an office and running an office with 30 people and raising the money for a non-for-profit, going back to theoretically working for somebody when I had my own business for 12 years? Those types of things. What was their take on that? But it was my decision, when it was all said and done.

So, for example, there’s an attorney that worked with me at that very first law firm that I worked for. He was also the person who introduced to me the charitable organization and he’s a person that I go to with regularity for advice and counsel on a host of things, mostly related to the charitable organization and he was one of the people I went and reached out to and talked to because he’s one of the few people who knew me as an attorney and also knew me in terms of my involvement with the charitable organization.

X5 also took a career risk and discussed it with someone he trusted. Here is his description of that conversation, “I do have the fortune of having some dear friends’ parents who were also successful in the business world and I try to have that with my colleagues. I use them as a sounding board and to get some ideas out of them. If I had never taken one in particular’s advice, I’d never be in the industry but a minute.” X4 discussed how his wife was the most impactful person in his support system. He goes on to describe her as:

My wife has been great. I’m very fortunate that she’s very intelligent and has a good handle on me and what I think I want to do—sometimes better than I have a

handle on myself. She has always supported my effort and said, “if you think that makes sense, you should do it. I want you to be happy.” So there have been many times where my wife is a practicing lawyer—now she teaches—that she was making more money than me, or most of the money—most of our income, and that’s even before we were married. And so without her support for my career, both financially and spiritually and support-wise, I would not have been able to do what I do because there has been instances where there is no or very little income coming in. And even setting aside the income, some other person would have said, “you’re a lawyer—go be a lawyer” or “go do that. That’s what you’re supposed to be doing.” And she’s never done that. She’s always been like, “okay, if you’ve thought it through, it makes sense to me. Good luck.” So that’s been a pretty amazing support.

X2 and X6 both credited mentors and co-workers at their companies for providing opportunities for them to advance. X6 still has “virtual coffee” with one executive to this day to go over her career and where it is headed. X7 described his law professor as instrumental in teaching him how to be a lawyer. He quoted his professor twenty years later, “Good attorneys do not know everything but they know how to find out everything.”

#### *Answer to the research question*

Six out of the seven co-researchers quickly stated that their parents were instrumental in their early life in regards to their career and education. Only X2 did not mention her parents as she grew up in a broken home with a mother from another country unfamiliar with the business world in the US. The other six unequivocally and somewhat emotionally discussed the value of their parents in getting them early on the path of success with school. X1, X4 and X7 all lost both their parents and X5 recently lost his mother. Throughout their interviews, they referenced their parents’ influence on their

work ethic and drive. They went on to say that in all seven cases, their parents were not involved in any career decisions once they graduated.

To fill the gaps of lost parents or ones that were unable to provide any guidance, Generation X co-researchers sought out mentors. They were aggressive and strategic in their choices and gleaned the information necessary to make the decisions that would generate their career progression. The relationships were somewhat one sided with the co-researcher asking for direction and not giving much in return other than appreciation. Just as critical as mentors, Generation X co-researchers highly valued their friends and co-workers. Six of the seven described their friends and co-workers as being members of their support system and instrumental to their career development. X2, X3 and X6 all stated that they have friends at work who bring opportunities to their attention or mention their names to executives for open roles. X4 believes in networking above all else to be successful. His relationships at work have developed into powerful partnerships that have resulted in considerable financial reward. In the case of Generation X friends and mentors are equally as impactful on an FGCG's career.

### **Generation Y**

What is the relative importance/influence of each support system component in career development for each generation?

Six out of seven Generation Y co-researchers were happy to discuss the mentors in their life. Y4 did not feel he had nor needed one as he had his career progressing on his own. None of them thought of their parents as having the ability to help them make career decisions, so all of the mentors were outside the family. Y1 felt that his mentor,

Murray, “brought me into the world of business introducing me to a guy who taught me stock and trend analysis” which gave him his first job. Y2’s mentors both noticed her love for computers and encouraged her at every turn to better her skills and career prospects.

Y3 is now planning on becoming an attorney because the attorney she works for, whom she consider a mentor, “believes in me.” Y5 has a trio of advisors for his career. He was one of only two co-researchers who at least considered what their father thought, but both admitted that they were not actually suited to realistically help. A parent of his childhood friend has stayed involved in Y5’s career and helped him make the first serious career decision by explaining to him, “now is the not the time in your career to worry about how much you are being paid.” That advice prompted Y5 to take his current role as a graduate student and special teams coach for a prominent college football program.

Y6 credited a female attorney she met while working as a personal trainer who encouraged her to seek better opportunities, and still, to this day, acts as a confidant. She works closely with a successful couple in the physical training business as mentors. They have taken her under their wing and supported her goal to win a national fitness competition.

Y7 spoke considerably and consistently about how much of a profound impact his mentor has had on his brief career. Running for office at such an early age not only prompts self doubt but also doubt from many older individuals who thought that Y7 was not ready. He describes his feelings about his mentor’s impact:

Without him, I would certainly not be in office. I would not have ever had the opportunities that I have. He took probably the biggest chance on me that anybody ever has. Here you’ve got this wet-behind-the-ears, snot-nosed freshman at XYZ University that you don’t owe a darn thing to, and you bring him into

your office, and you say, “hey, I want you to work with me and intern and you can sit in on meetings and talk to constituents.” I’m not there to make the coffee. But that’s probably the biggest thing. I wouldn’t know the people that I know, both in the capitol and here. I wouldn’t be in the position that I’m in if somebody hadn’t taken that chance. And I’ll be very honest with you, I don’t think enough people take that chance with any young person anymore.

Generation Y co-researchers spoke about their parents in their early life as well as their siblings. Some of them still turn to their parents or at least try to include their folks in career decisions. Y6 spoke emotionally about her father being released from prison and becoming her biggest fan and supporter. She was studying for the bar during the interview and said “he is the only person I will answer the phone for this week.” His belief in her built up enough confidence for her to succeed in law school and already land her first job. Y5 feels his father is his biggest supporter and discusses everything in his life with him. Y3 has an interesting relationship with her mother; her goal is to become successful enough so her mom does not have to clean houses any longer.

Maybe because Generation Y is younger they have an emotional attachment to their mentors. They see them as mother or father figures in addition to career developers. The relationships appear reciprocal and mutual as the mentors take a genuine interest in the co-researchers’ lives and successes. This is why mentors are the most important member of Generation Y’s support system.

### **Generational Comparison**

The difference between the three generations does not lie necessarily with who they valued as all three considered mentors critical to their career development. It is more a differentiation in how they valued their support system. Generation Y clearly felt the relationship with their mentor was deeper than just business. They felt that these

people cared about them as individuals and wanted them to succeed as if the co-researchers were their own children. The responses were emotional when telling the stories about what their mentors mean to them. Y2, Y3 and Y6 were all crying when attempting to convey how they felt about their mentors.

Generation X valued their mentor relationships, but saw them as more of a business transaction. They respected their mentors and acknowledged how instrumental they were in the co-researchers' success. With that said, there was not the same emotional attachment as seen with Generation Y; how they felt about their relationship was simply appreciative. X1, X2, X4, X5 and X6 all saw their mentors as peers, describing more of an exchange of business ideas between two individuals. Baby Boomers saw the mentor relationship as a respectful friendship. They spoke more fondly of them than Generation X, but without the emotional attachment of Generation Y.

The other two differentiating factors were spouse and friends/co-workers. Baby Boomers placed significant value on their spouses. B2, B3, B5, B6 and B7 all found their spouses to be integral parts of their career and as being the driving force through today. Generation X showed limited to no inclusion of their spouses outside of X4. Generation Y had no married co-researchers. Still two were divorced and none of the rest mentioned a significant other in their support system.

Generation X placed their value on friends and co-researchers. Networking was a common thread in their interviews. They each made contacts in their respective companies and industries. More importantly, they used these contacts to advance in their careers. The relationships were reciprocal, and co-researchers spoke highly of these individuals. Similar to mentors, personal feelings were rarely discussed. Baby Boomers

and Generation Y barely mentioned their friends or co-workers at all. Baby Boomers felt that there was less sharing of personal information and Generation Y came across as mistrustful of their friends and peers when it came to work.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided insight into data collected from 21 interviews. Co-researchers made it clear that they believed themselves to be at a disadvantage being the first in their families to graduate college. All three generations studied felt that mentors were instrumental in their career development. All three generations felt strongly that their parents were not able or willing to help in their career decisions at any point in time. The largest generational difference was the value placed on friends and co-workers by Generation X; it was substantially higher than what was described by Baby Boomers and Generation Y.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to draw conclusions from the data collected. Explanations are provided to convey the meaning of the research. In this chapter, the gap in the research that prompted the research is also discussed. Considering the nature of qualitative research, there are many questions answered and new ones formulated. Propositions that offer suppositions based on the results of the interviews are generated.

#### **Conclusions and Explanations**

First and foremost, the research problem asks about the impact a support system has on an FGCG's career. Considering the way co-researchers across all three generations described their mentors and the way the married co-researchers credited their spouses, the impact was substantial. Several of the interviews used the words, "I would not be here without them."

In all interviews, co-researchers describe parents that were involved early in their life. At some point, however, their parents ceased to be a career influence. Co-researchers described their parents as being unable or unwilling to comprehend their children's career choices. The frustration, disappointment, and in some cases, resentment was apparent during the interviews. It was the one constant across all co-researchers.

Simply put, when it came to careers the FGCG's just did not see their parents as able or willing to help them succeed. X2, X3 and X6 completely dismissed the notion that their parents could be of some help when making career decisions. Some of the co-researchers had mixed feelings, due to parents from another country, broken homes and unconventional upbringing. They still felt it was respectful to try and include their parents, but in the end the advice given was along the lines of "whatever you think is best" or telling the FGCG to play it safe.

The most noticeable difference from a generational standpoint is that Generation X firmly credited their friends and co-workers. The Baby Boomers and Generation Y minimally acknowledged their peers. Some possible theories are during that era (.com) collaboration was touted around the world. Thomas Friedman's "The World is Flat" had come out and there was a feeling of urgency to climb the success ladder as quickly as possible. Baby Boomers felt that their lives were private, and while having friends at work was fine, they did not turn to them all that often. Generation Y was surprisingly hesitant to ask friends or co-workers for career advice. Either as Y2 puts it, "they are YOLO's (you only live once), so they just want to go out and party or as Y1 says "I think we're in a generation of dilution." Generation Y was not complimentary of their members, which appeared to stem from a lack of trust. Many of them suggested social media as a potential issue because so many of their friends are "out there" and just too much personal information is available. It appears that social transparency may have created somewhat of a paranoia or a lack of trust amongst peers.

Mentors were prevalent throughout most of the interviews overall. While mentors provided different types of support and meant something different to each person, the

common thread was that co-researchers were receptive to external guidance. Mentors clearly are a necessary part of a FGCG's career development. Again and again, throughout the interviews, mentors were discussed with reverence. There were several instances where the co-researcher would stop and reflect silently on the impact their mentor or friend had on their career. The results were rather emotional and most planned to call them after our conversation ended. Hopefully in the future this research will prompt more programs designed to link mentors with FGCGs. Formal programs through the government or non-profits would provide an avenue to ask for direction during turbulent times. Perhaps more importantly, there needs to be a change in mentality in the business world that would make employees more receptive if a peer is seeking mentorship as well as for mentees to feel comfortable approaching others for assistance.

Spouses were highlighted by eight of the eleven co-researchers that were married. Of the three that did not mention them, there were extenuating circumstances. B1 was divorced later in life and then remarried close to his retirement. X3 was fiercely independent after having a child at 18 and was not comfortable acknowledging that anyone had an impact on her career except herself. B4 was the only married co-researcher who discussed his career in tremendous detail, but failed to mention his wife. He appeared to have a wonderful family and loving home. The impression given is that much of his career was established before his marriage. Still, it was surprising considering all of his success in multiple ventures that he did not credit her as the others did. There were decisions made where the spouse was the deciding factor in a major career choice such as B7 going back to a non-profit. This decision changed her life

completely. The marriages were career partnerships and supportive spouses resulted in successful careers or certainly in the minds of the FGCG.

One of the more uplifting conclusions from the research is the co-researchers' eventual success. This was consistent throughout all three generations. Success does not necessarily mean wealth or an executive title in this case. Success comes from career development and fulfillment. Only one of the 21 co-researchers has retired and he had a long and consistent career. The other 20 achieved some modicum of accomplishment in their career. Six of them (B2, B3, B4, X1, X4 and X5) opened their own profitable businesses, four of which are still in operation. B5 and B6 are somewhat on hiatus after having impressive careers in large corporations. B7 is running a large non-profit organization. X2, X3 and X6 have so far had stable and steadily progressive careers at large corporations. X7 is a prominent attorney while Y4 and Y6 have recently graduated law school. To add some symmetry, Y3 is about to begin law school. Y7 is holding a public office at an incredibly young age while Y1 has proven himself capable in a difficult industry. Y2 seems to be the only co-researcher showing signs of career uncertainty.

Considering that many of the co-researchers were eventually successful in some way, it seems almost counterintuitive that 81% of them felt that they were at a career disadvantage. X1 felt that he would "prefer to come from a family where that accomplishment took place thus increasing my odds for success." X6 captures the feeling that was pervasive throughout the interviews when she said, "I definitely think that my career choices were based on the fact that I didn't have my parents' networks to further get me into the door." Most of them were quite happy with their lot in life at this point;

after reflecting on their past, they concluded that while all the challenges made them stronger, they would have preferred the road more traveled.

### **Gap in the Research**

The prevailing research available delves into the decision to go to college for FGCGs, their fields of study, their likelihood of graduating and how long their college experience will take to complete. The gap in the research is what happens to the FGCGs after they graduate. There are no studies asking the questions about their career progression and their assessment of how difficult or easy it was to get to their current point. Certainly, there are no studies that exploring the impact of being an FGCG has on a career.

York-Anderson and Bowman (1991) provided detail into the education of first versus second generation college graduates but stopped there. Parker et al. (2004) introduced career communities and explored the impact of career influencers. The study produced questions that were not being asked but none relating the person being an FGCG. There were multiple studies performed researching generational differences in careers of individuals. Twenge (2010) came the closest while comparing the careers of multiple generations.

### **Propositions**

Throughout this research, there have been some recurring themes. These repeating items have prompted ideas that, after culmination, have resulted in propositions for future consideration. They are:

1. FGCGs from all three generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) feel that second and third generation college graduates have an advantage in accelerated career development.
2. FGCGs from all three generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) have a lesser family career support system than second and third generation college graduates.
3. FGCGs from all three generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) do not normally include their parents in career decisions.
4. FGCGs from all three generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) proactively look outside their family to find mentors.
5. FGCGs from all three generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) make education a priority for their children.
6. FGCGs from all three generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) feel that they overcame an obstacle to be successful in their career due to their limited assistance from their parents. There is a certain sense of pride in beating the odds.
7. Married FGCGs from all three generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y) turn to their spouse when making career decisions.

### **Future Research**

There was a fair amount of personal tragedy or hardship discussed throughout the interviews. Multiple cases of parental indifference, physical abuse, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, divorce and death surfaced in each conversation. These participants overcame

more than just their parents' lack of education. In a sample of 21, it is difficult to determine if these tragedies are signs of a widespread commonality among FGCGs. This is an illustration that qualitative data provides a depth of understanding that cannot be found any other way.

Several of the participants had an epiphany of sorts. Many came to the realization that one event or one person turned their life around. They had not thought of that scenario or that person in that context. Several of those participants became emotional and realized that they had never thanked that person or let them know how successful they had become because of their help. They agreed to reach out to that person and let them know they had made a difference. It was rather moving and unbelievably rewarding to see it dawn on them through their expressions. A qualitative study exploring the impact of just one person on a career would be valuable to perpetuate the importance of mentoring.

All of the participants who are parents discussed how their children will be affected by the fact that they will likely be second generation college graduates. Each of the parents spoke about college funds, supporting their children in school currently, maximizing their early education and making it clear that a college education was not optional. They all felt that their children would have a place to turn to for guidance when their career began. A future study of these same co-researchers dissecting the careers of their children would provide some perspective on the impact of breaking the cycle with education.

Advanced degrees were a topic that surfaced throughout the interviews. Only one (B6) has a Master's degree from the Baby Boomers. In Generation X four out of seven

went on in their education for a masters or law degree. In Generation Y all seven participants have completed or are in the process of completing a Master's or law degree. One potential reason is that a Bachelor's degree is no longer a competitive advantage in the job marketplace. To distinguish themselves, or at minimum, keep up with the competition, Generation Y needs advanced degrees. Further research about the importance of multiple degrees comparing careers by generation would provide an understanding of today's career market.

The next step from this particular research would be to explore careers of people that have grown up in broken homes, different socioeconomic backgrounds, different geographical backgrounds, families that are first generation Americans and individual effects of mothers and fathers on a person's career. The conversations gave some great initial insight into these areas and the results would advance career research.

The subject of gender came up more than a few times in the interviews. Interestingly it was discussed by both sides. The impact of gender on FGCGs' career progression could be the subject of another study. There was also quite a bit of discussion regarding second generation college graduates and assumptions on their careers. Several of the co-researchers felt that there was considerable pressure on second generation college graduates to go to school and succeed quickly in their career. Further study of the advantages or disadvantages of their career development would also be worth exploring.

The implications of this research could extend to societal changes. Universities could and should ask each applicant if their parents have graduated college. If the answer is no, the school could put the student on a track conducive to personal and career

growth. They could provide the tools, support and direction to bring that student to the same place as their schoolmate with executives for parents. The university could offer classes on careers, the business world in general and how to navigate through a career after graduation. To offer this aid as a service along with the career counseling office is not enough. There should be a curriculum available and accessible mentors open to building FGCGs' self-esteem and career awareness. It could be a major selling point for a college.

By the same token, corporations hiring recent graduates could ask the same question. Again, if the answer is no, they can put an FGCG in a program designed for them focused on career education and development. The impact could be substantial considering the acceleration of a high achiever's progression. It would also make the company that much more attractive for FGCGs to want to work there. Given the choice to work for a progressive company developing such programs versus a sink or swim type environment, it would make sense for that an FGCG would lean towards the company looking to build a relationship.

### **Limitations**

There were no participants interviewed that were born prior to 1946 or after 1982. All of the participants except one (Y3) were born and educated in United States, so while some of the participants were first generation Americans there is little to no international component to the research. There were no interviews of second generation college graduates to compare experiences in their careers.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to raise questions regarding the impact of the support system on FGCGs' careers. Results show that there is merit in the research problem and research questions. This is just the beginning and as noted above in the section on future research, there is much room for study. In time, there will hopefully be programs designed to provide guidance to individuals who have no resources at home. From this research, it is clear that FGCGs are proactively looking for help externally.

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## APPENDIX A

## DISCUSSION OUTLINE

1. A support system is a person's overall network of relationships. Within the support system are a few components including family, friends/acquaintances, colleagues, and mentors. Please give some thought to your support system. Please describe it for me.
  
2. How do you think a person feels about their support system and its impact if at all on their career development?  
  
Follow up: How do you think it impacted yours?
  
3. Do you feel that the generation in which a person is born affects the makeup of their support system and their relationship with it?  
  
Follow up: If so, how?
  
4. Probing deeper into the support system in general, the next level of relationships is the social network. This is defined as the contacts (ie friends, family, colleagues and mentors) a person has at one given time like a snapshot. Take a moment to give some thought as to how your social network has evolved. Please describe how your social network has developed into what and who it is today.
  
5. What do you feel is the impact of a social network on a person's career development in regards to the possibility that it does change over time?
  
6. Do you believe that a person's generation influenced the makeup of a social network and their relationship with these individuals?

Follow up: If so, how?

7. It would be helpful to understand your family influence on your career. Please describe your family structure from your early years and then throughout your career.
  
8. What is the importance of mentors in your opinion?  
  
Follow up: Did you in the past and do you currently have mentors?  
  
Follow up: If so, who?
  
9. Do you believe that your generation shapes its choices of mentors, and friends, or in their social network (career communities)?  
  
Follow up: If so, how?
  
10. After all of this discussion, now how do you feel about your support system's effect on your career development?
  
11. Do you feel there is a difference between the careers of first generation college graduates and other college graduates?

## APPENDIX B

## CONSISTENCY MATRIX

Effects of a Support System on a First Generation College Graduate's Career Development
To determine the impact a First Generation's College Graduate's support system has on their career development
To identify the makeup of the support system To explain the role the support system plays within career development of the First Generation College Graduate To expound the impact of the support system on the career development of the First Generation College Graduate

What comprises the FGCG's support system for each generation (ie social network, friends, family and colleagues and mentors)?	Creamer, E. G., & Laughlin, A. (2005). Self-authorship and women's career decision making. <i>Journal of College Student Development</i> , 46(1), 13-27.	Please describe your overall support system.	Coding, Cross Case and Within Case Analyses
What is the relative importance/influence of each support system component in career development for each generation?	Twenge, J. M. (2010). A review of the empirical evidence on generational differences in work attitudes. <i>Journal of Business and Psychology</i> , 25(2), 201-210.	Do you feel that your generation affected the makeup of your support system and your relationship with it? If so, how?	Coding, Cross Case and Within Case Analyses