

SOCIALLY SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES: COMMUNICATION WHILE FACING UPWARD & DOWNWARD SOCIAL MOBILITY



2019 Presidential Speaker Series

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EckerdCollege
on FLORIDA'S GULF COAST

KU THE UNIVERSITY OF
KANSAS

SOCIAL CLASS



SOCIAL CLASS



SOCIAL CLASS



SOCIAL CLASS



AUDIENCE POLL #1

Visit:

<http://etc.ch/AwHL>



WHEN YOU THINK OF SOCIAL CLASS WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MOST?

- a) Money and compensation**
- b) Status and power**
- c) Haves and the have nots**
- d) Labor (White & Blue Collar)**
- e) American Dream**

AUDIENCE POLL #2

Visit:

<http://etc.ch/AwHL>



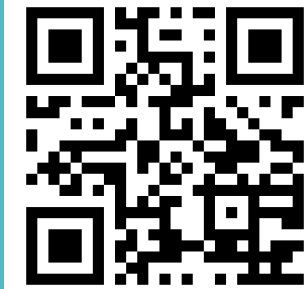
WHAT SOCIAL CLASS DID YOU GROW UP IN?

- a) Poverty
- b) Working Class
- c) Middle Class
- d) Upper Class
- e) I have no idea

AUDIENCE POLL #3

Visit:

<http://etc.ch/AwHL>



WHAT SOCIAL CLASS ARE YOU NOW?

- a) Poverty
- b) Working Class
- c) Middle Class
- d) Upper Class
- e) I have no idea



DANGER

**RISK OF FALLING
OUT OF THE
MIDDLE CLASS**



DOWNWARD MOBILITY

“You get in a hole, it’s like quicksand”

A grounded theory analysis of social support amid
materially bounded decision-making processes

JOURNAL OF APPLIED COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Angela N. Gist-Mackey, Ph.D.
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SECRET SHAME: FINANCIAL INSTABILITY



SECRET SHAME: FINANCIAL INSTABILITY



Decision Making

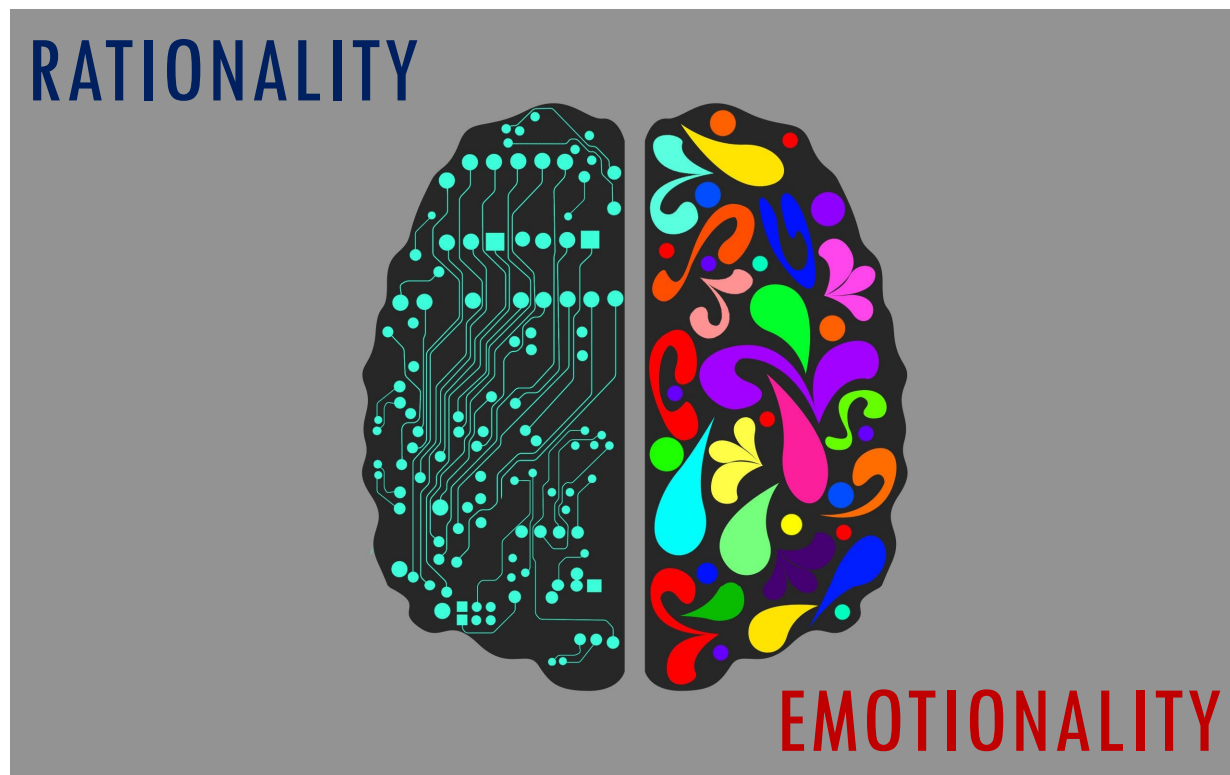


DECISION MAKING

RATIONALITY



DECISION MAKING



DECISION MAKING: MATERIAL RESOURCES



SOCIAL SUPPORT

We provide a
HAND UP,
NOT A
handout.



PURPOSE

Better understand decision making of those in financial instability:

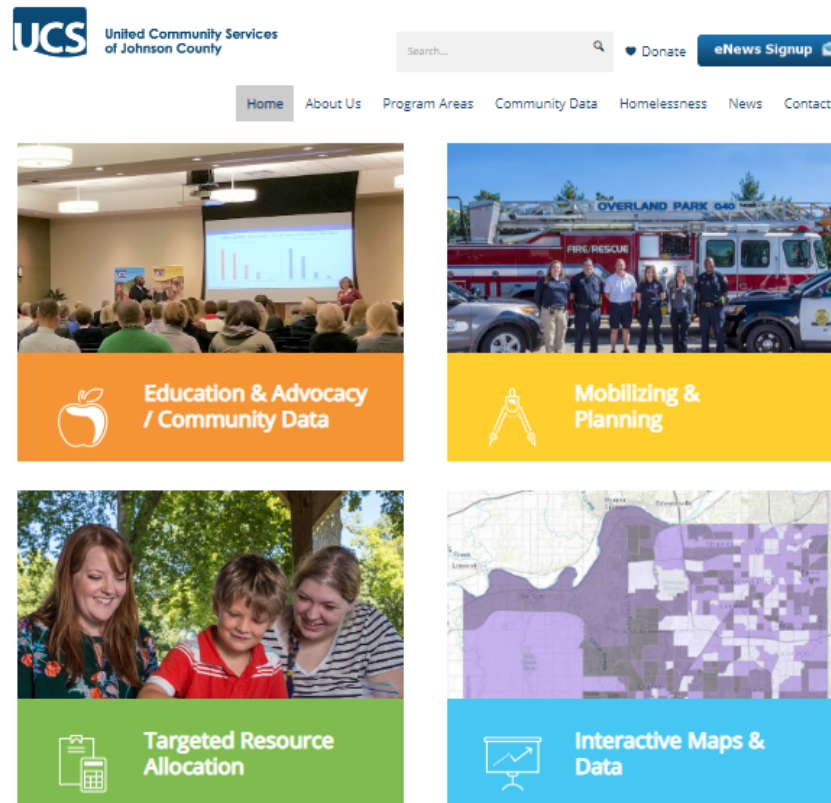
- Situation
- Type of social support
- Constraints
- Stigma and stereotypes

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does social support manifest in the decision-making processes of those who are financially unstable?



PARTNERSHIP: UNITED COMMUNITY SERVICES



QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

- 25 Participants in 5 Focus Groups
- Average length 97.6 minutes

Focus Group Locations

- Food Pantry
- House Arrest Facility (2)
- Workforce Training Center
- Coffee shop



INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Age

- 18-72 years
- Average: 37 years

Gender

- 17 Women
- 8 Men

Race/Ethnicity

- 16 Caucasian/White
- 7 Black/African American
- 1 Hispanic
- 1 Asian

Education

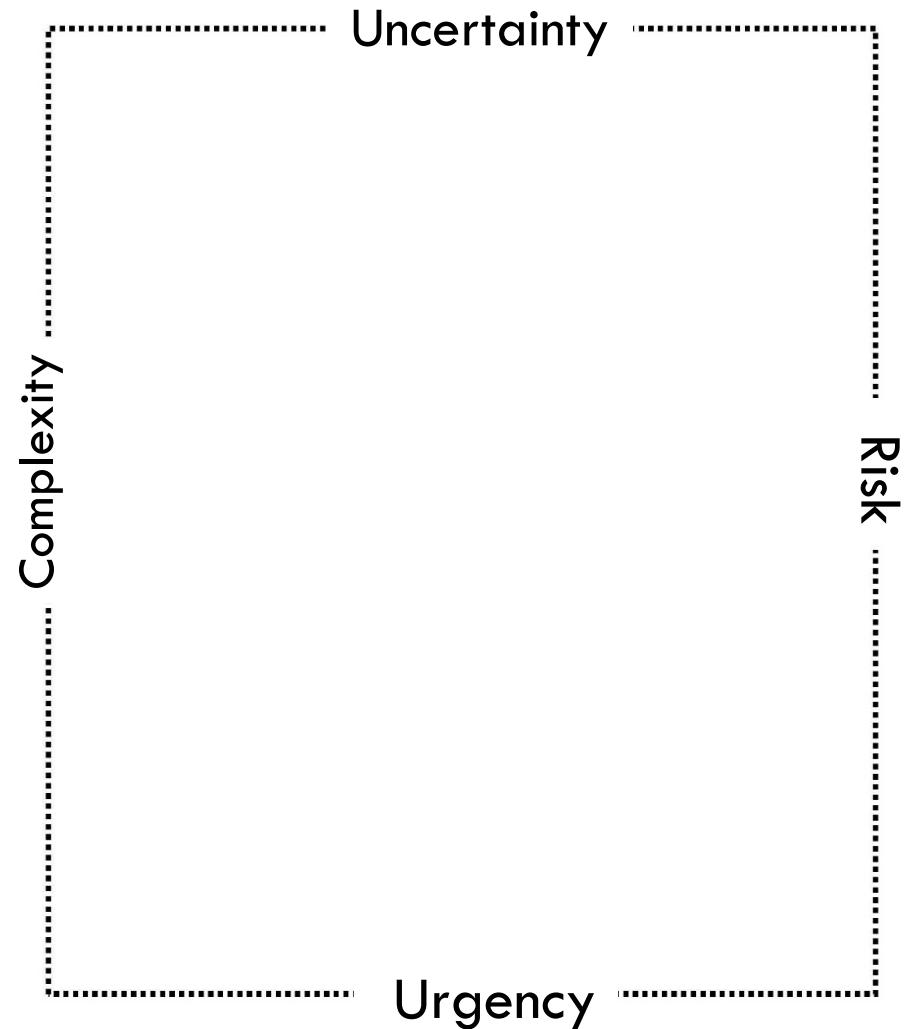
- 1 Masters
- 4 Bachelors
- 3 Associates
- 5 Some College
- 5 Diploma/GED
- 7 Some High School



FINDINGS

Context of Making Decisions in Financial Instability

- Uncertainty
- Urgency
- Complexity
- Risk



CONTEXT OF DECISION MAKING

“I’m dealing with a situation right now with utilities because I’m not working....I’ve been in and out the hospital like two, three times since this last Thursday when they released me. Um, we had a disconnect [utility notice] ‘cause like I said my husband is disabled, so I don’t have an income, so his income has to take care of the rent, the lights, the water, at the time [a] car. And my car repairs, I have to get another engine, so I don’t have that money so we without transportation. The money that we need to get to point A to point B we have to catch a cab or we have to walk, or catch the bus when it’s convenient. So, that’s a lot. And so, I called [a social welfare organization] and said, “Well can I get some help on my utility bill?” [They said] “You have to call back on Thursday...” “I have a disconnect [due before then].” “Well you just have to tell [the utility company]” and this sucks because they don’t make any more arrangements....When you call these agencies they’re not compassionate and that really just...You know...you get in a hole, it’s like quicksand. You’re hitting rock bottom....What [are] we going to do about lights because I can’t afford to lose my housing. I have to have my insulin. It has to be refrigerated. I’m in a no-win situation.”

Ms. Mama, 48-year-old unemployed, former bank teller

LACKING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Ms. Mama: A quiet room....there's only so much that you can divulge because people will judge you and try to fix your situation when clearly you can't fix my situation. If you're in a position to **help me, don't talk about me, help me**....I've asked family and what not. My little sister, she's in a position to do it but like she says, **she's not the ATM**.

Stephanie: Wow, that's harsh.

Sunshine: **That's how my family is.**

Miss Mama: She's not the ATM.... **I just don't bother to ask, I just deal with it...**

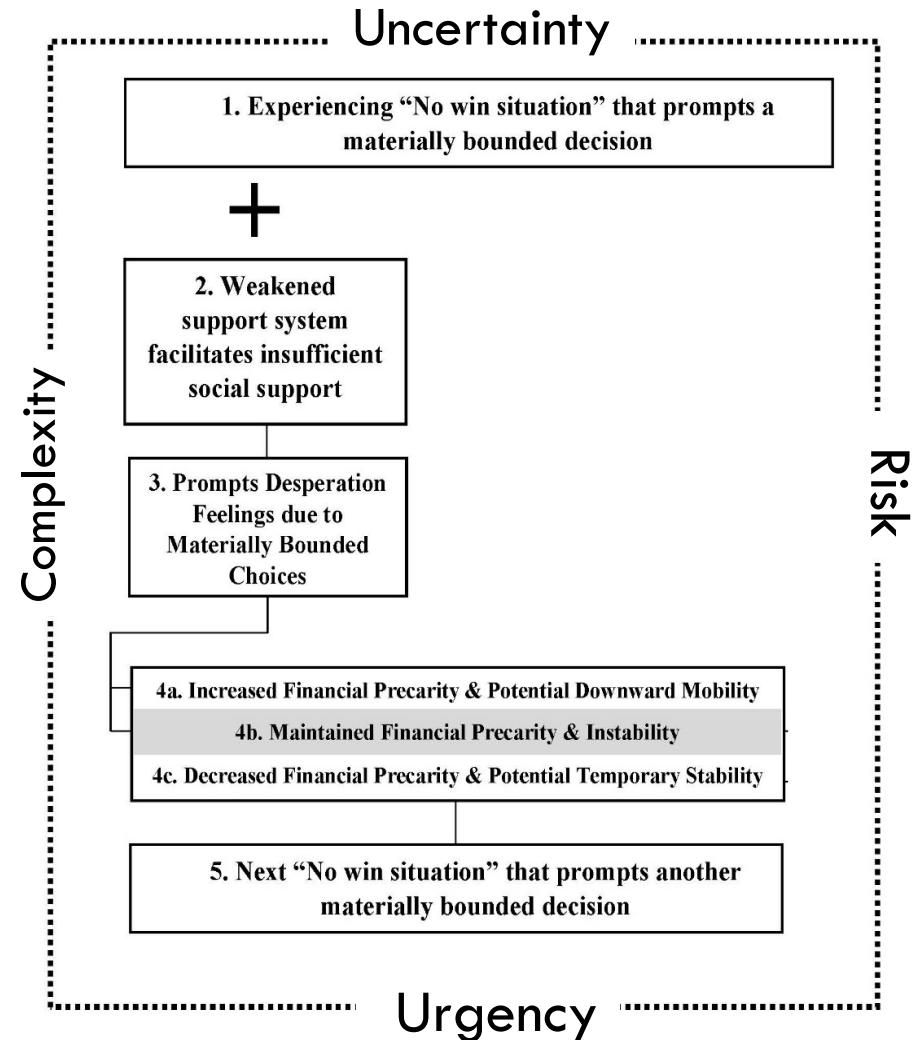
DECISION MAKING WITHOUT SUPPORT

“I actually took a huge pay cut.... I was at seventeen dollars an hour. My pay right now is eleven fifty. I took a huge, huge pay cut. The hours were different, but [my previous job at] the warehouse was killing me. I had cysts in my joints, in my hands, from the boxes. I lost forty pounds, I was really unhealthy. I was doing nothing but sleeping.

-Sunshine, 30 year-old personal retail banker, single mother of two

FINDINGS

Model: Decision Making in Financial Instability Without Social Support



DECISION MAKING WITH SUPPORT

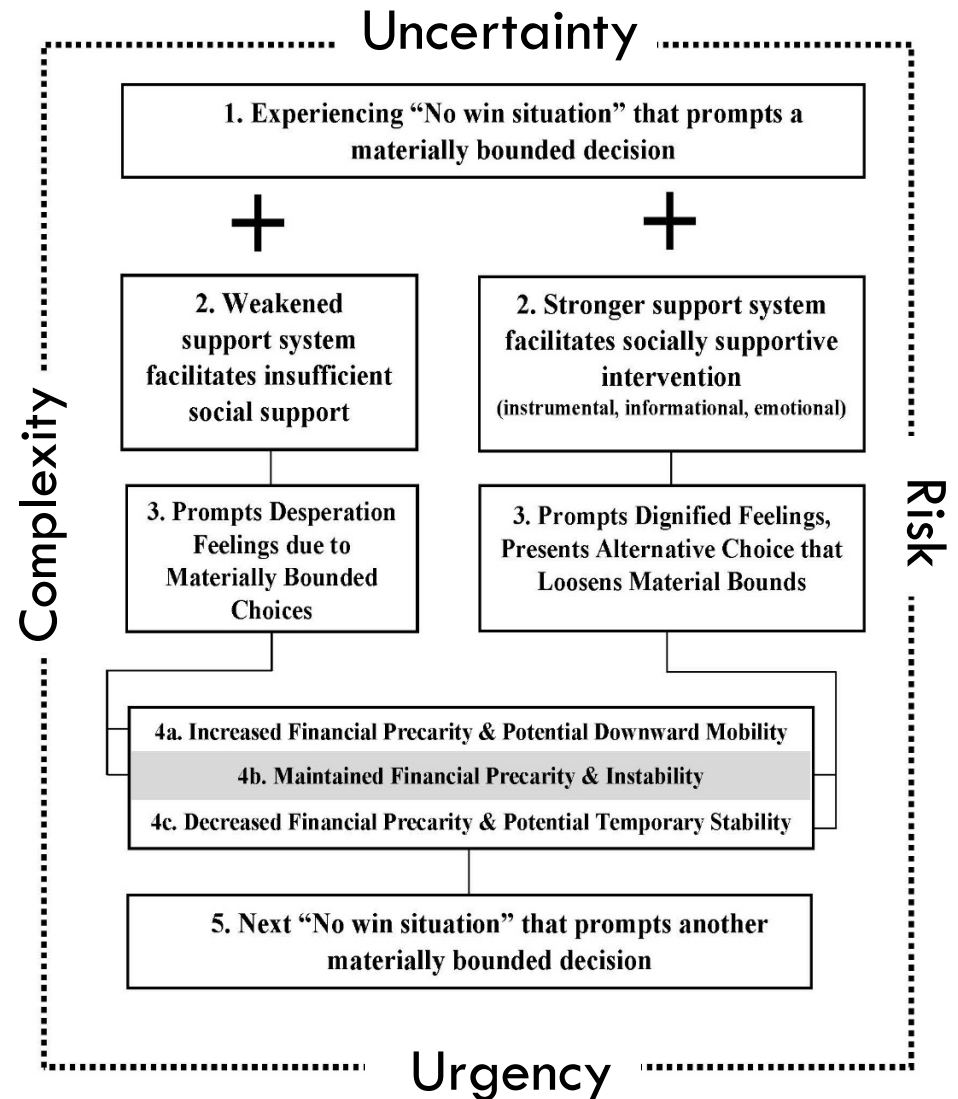
I ended up **homeless**. Where I was kicked out, and I told my boss, you might want to replace me pretty quick. I'm gonna be really unreliable here in about—tomorrow. He was like, “[Steve], you work way too hard to be hungry or homeless or anything like that,” so he brought me home with him....I tried to get another [place] as quick as possible and his wife kind of slapped me, said ‘No, you should just stay here. If you can afford to rent the room, rent the room, but get your shit together before you leave, dumbass.’ She was [a] pretty cool little lady. I was pretty shocked. I never thought in a million years that a boss [pause] I’d only been on the job for like 3 weeks...I pretty much told him, ‘I’m quitting.’ He was like, wait, ‘let’s think about this’.....It made me feel like a human being. The reason I lost my place to live was over some bullshit. Me and the old lady [sic] split up, so I was out in the cold....I figured, well, there goes my job, fuck, now what am I gonna do? Need to call the drug dealer now. Then I went in the next day and I was expecting him to tell me to get out now. Instead, he was just like, ‘go to work, we’ll talk about it later.’ At the end of work he was like, ‘Well, are you getting in the truck or not?’ I was like, ‘sweet.’

- Steve, 30 years old, former auto mechanic

FINDINGS

Model: Decision Making in Financial Instability With and Without Social Support

Materially Bounded Decision Making



CONCLUSIONS

Anyone can have decisions that are uncertain, urgent, complex, or risky

Living in a low-income situation exacerbates these attributes

Having social support shifted the trajectory of decisions creating alternatives that led to temporary stability and being treated with dignity

Without social support participants felt desperate and their decisions either maintained their instability or led to downward mobility

CONCLUSIONS

Participants experienced:

Emotional Support

Informational Support

Instrumental Support

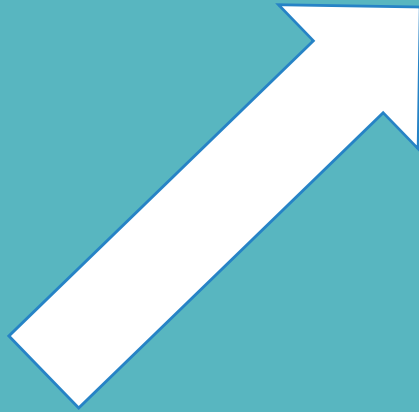
Practical Applications:

Interpersonal Relationships

Organizational Relationships

Community Relationships





UPWARD MOBILITY

“You’re doing great. Keep doing what you’re doing.”
socially supportive communication during
first-generation college students’ socialization

COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

Angela N. Gist-Mackey, Ph.D.
Marissa Wiley, Ph.D.
Joseph Erba, Ph.D.

FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS (FGCS)



AUDIENCE POLL #4

Visit:

<http://etc.ch/AwHL>



ARE YOU A FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure

SOCIAL SUPPORT



LACKING SOCIAL SUPPORT



PURPOSE

Better understand FGCS socially supportive communication:

- Source
- Type of social support
- Function
- Temporality

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do FGCS engage in social support prior to entering college?

How do FGCS engage in social support during the their first-semester of college?

How, if at all, do FGCS enact the role of providing social support?



QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

- 28 Semi-structured Interviews
- First-Year FGCS
- Average length 70 minutes

Methodology

- Interpretive Approach
- Thematic Analysis



PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender

- 14 Women
- 14 Men

Race/Ethnicity

- 9 Hispanic/Latino/Puerto Rican
- 3 Mexican/Chicano
- 7 Black/African American
- 1 African
- 1 Haitian
- 3 Asian
- 4 Caucasian/White

Academic Major

- 15 STEM
- 7 Business, Marketing, Communication
- 3 Social Sciences
- 2 Liberal Arts
- 1 Sports Management



Seeking and Receiving Social Support

- Traditional and New Media
- Seeking Trusted Sources of Information
- Navigating Finances



BEFORE COLLEGE

Seeking and Receiving Social Support

“I remembered typing in **Google** like, ‘[university] facts,’ and stuff like that. But I think College Board was the main one that I kind of got all my information for. I trusted it because **everyone uses College Board.**” Patricia

“That had to be my **high school advisor.** I am a first-gen student, so I had **absolutely no help from anyone in my family.**” Anthony

“It was such a **hassle** because getting my dad’s information, [pause] he was like, ‘I don’t know, just go ask your aunt.’ I was like, ‘You’re supposed to know your [tax] information.’ It was so difficult trying to get him to give me his information....[My father] didn’t even want me to come....**He wasn’t very supportive the whole time.**”
Amanda

BEFORE COLLEGE

Seeking and Receiving Social Support

- Engaging Peers
- Leaning on Organizational Experts
- Attending to Affirmation



FIRST SEMESTER OF COLLEGE

Seeking and Receiving Social Support

And then my advisor has been really, really helpful...and she's like, 'Yeah. **You're doing great. Keep doing what you're doing.**' - Thomas

When I was talking to my advisor, I was like, "So am I going to have to enroll into English 101 next semester?" He was like, "**No, why would you do that?**" I was like, "Well, isn't it a **yearlong** class?" He's like, "No, it's just a semester class. All your classes are semester classes." I was like, "**Really? I did not know that, but okay.**" James

"I think they all **look at me a little bit differently now.** I know my mom sees me differently and my dad's really proud of me. I called him yesterday after I signed my lease and **he told me he was proud of me, and he's never told me that,** so it was super important for me to know. I was like, "Okay, I'm doing a good job if my dad's proud of me." Catherine

FIRST SEMESTER OF COLLEGE

Providing Social Support

- Giving Back
- Imagining A Different Future



FIRST SEMESTER OF COLLEGE

Providing Social Support

“Mom, you guys need to **start saving**. You don’t understand. It is really expensive,” and once I start talking numbers to **them...it goes right over their head because they can’t comprehend** that it’s so important, but it’s so expensive.” Mary

“I want to **give back to my parents** for all they’ve like done for me and stuff like that...So, I want to do the same for them.” Caroline

“Well, they never went to college, so they have **high expectations** from me that I will uh get a **good job**....So, um, **I will be able to provide for them** since their opportunities are much less than what mine are. So, I think just getting this education and getting the degree will definitely help me, but more than that, help my family.” Jennifer

“When I have a family, wife and kids, **I can really support** them **without having to worry** about what my next job will be. I’ll have a career.” Robert

FIRST SEMESTER OF COLLEGE

CONCLUSION

FGCS as pioneers and brokers

Practical Recommendations

- High School Preparation for Students and Parents
- Phased Mentorship
- Social Media platforms
- Training for university faculty and staff



**Social Class
as Identity**



**Giving Back
Paying it Forward**



**Community
Matters**

TAKE AWAYS & CALL-TO-ACTION

*"The greatness of
a community is most accurately
measured by the compassionate
actions of its members."*

-Coretta Scott King

QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

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