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Phenomenological Experiences of First-Generation Working-Class Students Entering University: Motivational Factors and Teacher Influences

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PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION

WORKING-CLASS STUDENTS ENTERING UNIVERSITY: MOTIVATIONAL

FACTORS AND TEACHER INFLUENCES

By

Kayla Franco

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

Discrimination in education over the last few decades has been apparent in the form of racial, gender, and even intergenerational prejudice. Educational inequities also exist for marginalized students of the first-generation working-class trying to access and successfully navigate post-secondary studies. In addition, they may face several additional challenges that include lack of proper academic foundation, minimal support from family, friends and teachers, and financial hardships (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). This research is an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) that investigates the lived experiences of first-generation working-class students at a university in southern Ontario by investigating the key factors that influence their decision to pursue a post-secondary program while highlighting their post-secondary school educational experiences. Literature suggests that these factors can include personal (self) motivation, family support, and teacher influence. These findings will give more insight into the educational experiences of first-generation working-class university students and how post-secondary institutions can mitigate the barriers to access and support first-generation working-class students when they enroll in higher education institution.

Keywords: first-generation, working-class, post-secondary education, higher education, teachers, motivational factors, parental support, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

DEDICATION

      I dedicate this thesis to every first-generation working-class student who is defying odds, breaking down barriers, and overcoming hardship by accessing and achieving a post-secondary education. Your hard work, dedication, and resilience will allow you to achieve all your dreams.

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For all the members of the educational team, always remember that you are teaching kids not just the curriculum. You have the ability to be a champion for your students. Never forget that and always be a CHAMPION for your students.

"Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be"

~ Rita Pierson, Motivational Speaker, Educator

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS

GCEP	Global Community Engagement Project
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
PD	Professional Development
VMEC	Vulnerability and Marginalization in Education Conference
PLS	Professional Learning Series
REB	Research Ethics Board
SES	Socioeconomic Status
GA	Graduate Assistant
TA	Teaching Assistant
OSAP	Ontario Support Assistance Program
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
IT	Information Technology

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Though access to post-secondary education has increased over the last decade, inequitable opportunities in achieving a post-secondary education are still the reality for many first-generation working-class students (Engle, 2007). This realization creates a need and a concern for "widening participation" and at the same time reducing the perception of the elitism of post-secondary education (Reay et al., 2010, p. 107).

Initially, I became interested in mitigating the negative educational effects for marginalized populations in my involvement in a service-learning course during my pre-service teacher education program at the University of Windsor. The course, *Vulnerability, Marginalization and Education,* offered a gateway to learning and exploring marginalization and vulnerability in education through the organizing of various initiatives. These initiatives included service-learning projects in the Global Community Engagement Program (GCEP) and the introduction of a professional development (PD) opportunity the Vulnerability and Marginalization in Education Conference (VMEC) for fellow teacher candidates. From these projects, I learned how to manage negative educational experiences for students by initiating a collaborative, team approach through fundraising, and networking with groups and individuals.

As a Masters' student, I assisted teacher candidates in a consultative role, planning the VMEC by utilizing the proven structure and ideas from the previous year. The conference was an enlightening experience in my growth as an educator and it sparked a further interest for me to investigate educational drawbacks for disadvantaged

populations. This is particularly significant to me since by literature definition, I am a first-generation working-class student. Throughout my graduate courses and with the support of my advisor, I have cultivated a deeper passion for further investigating the factors that affect first-generation working-class students in pursuit of post-secondary education as well as reducing the barriers for future marginalized students.

Background of the Problem

It is unfortunate that the journey to a post-secondary education is not equitable or fair for all students. A first-generation working-class student faces numerous additional barriers to education not only when it comes to access, but also success in post-secondary programs. On average, they have lower reading scores, higher grade failures, higher drop-out rates, and even poorer employment opportunities (Clandfield et al., 2014; Curtis et al., 1992; Engle, 2007). Numerous discriminations exist in the education system and according to Curtis, Livingstone and Smaller, the authors of the book, *Stacking the Deck: The Streaming of Working-Class Kids in Ontario Schools (1992)*, the educational system has discriminated against students solely based on their social class. In the sequel, *Restacking the Deck: The Streaming by Class, Race and Gender in Ontario Schools (2014)* the authors outlined research which found that working-class students have "fared much worse" than their counterparts in the middle and upper classes (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 15).

Post-secondary education is seen as one of the most vital paths in leading individuals to social advancement and economic security for their future (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). For this study, post-secondary education refers to a four-year degree at a university. First-generation working-class students are at a definite disadvantage to their

counterparts when it comes to earning a post-secondary education. They face additional challenges from poor educational preparation, limited finances, and lack of support from family members and friends (Engle, 2007). These are significant challenges for a young person's university aspirations. Getting to university or college is a huge step, but is a mere first step. Completing a post-secondary program of study is also impacted by the underlying factors described above.

Lack of access to higher education is most often analyzed through the lens of race, gender, and socio-economic status. Intergenerational analyses are much less common but are now becoming more common in the general literature about access to higher education. There is growing academic interest in exploring first-generation working-class students access to, and success in post-secondary studies. By exploring the factors that affect first-generation working-class students in accessing and navigating post-secondary studies, strategies can be developed to remove inequities for this group of students and specifically to increase access to, and success in, post-secondary studies.

In terms of the gaps in the research, there is limited information regarding the role/influence of secondary teachers on first-generation working-class students' decision to pursue post-secondary education. There is also limited research on the role that post-secondary education plays in better supporting first-generation working-class students in accessing and successfully achieving a post-secondary degree. Lastly, most of the research to my knowledge was conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom which have different higher education systems than Canada and Ontario. This place the need to conduct more research on Ontario education systems for increasing accessibility of post-secondary education for first-generation working-class students.

Research Statement

First-generation working-class students are at the forefront of educational discrimination based on social class and intergenerational biases that put little emphasis on higher education. The pursuit of higher educational learning is a great opportunity to quickly break down the barriers to social mobility and stop the intergenerational cycle of low socioeconomic status (SES). As a result, post-secondary access and success can be increased through the suggestions based on the perspectives of first-generation working-class students built on the importance of motivational (self), familial, and teacher support. Through the guidance and development of these suggestions, future first-generation working-class students can be motivated to be the first in their families to attend and successfully achieve a post-secondary education.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigates the key factors that influence first-generation working-class students in Windsor-Essex County to pursue post-secondary education. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) explored the roles and influences of personal (self) motivation, school factors, and family aspects. The identification of implications for designing strategies to inspire this marginalized group to pursue post-secondary education was a key component of the study. The goal was to develop strategies to better support first-generation working-class students in their journey to pursue post-secondary education with successful outcomes based on the lived experiences and perspectives of my student participants who self-identified as first-generation and working-class.

Research Questions

The study was guided by these qualitative research questions:

Guiding Question One: What are the key factors (reasons) that influence first-generation working-class students in Windsor-Essex County to pursue post-secondary education?

  a) What is the role of personal (self) motivation as an influence in pursuing post-secondary education for first-generation working-class students?

  b) What is the role of families' motivation/support/encouragement as an influence in first-generation working-class students pursuing post-secondary education?

  c) What is the role of teachers/guidance counsellors/schools in the influencing of first-generation working-class students to pursue post-secondary education?

Guiding Question Two: Based on the perspectives of first-generation working-class students, what are the strategies that can be used to influence and support the enrolment and success of first-generation working-class students in post-secondary education?

In this study, family involvement is conceptualized as anyone from the participant's family who had a direct impact or influence on their decision to purse post-secondary education. It is not limited to the immediate family but rather based on the individual's familial supports. Additionally, teachers/guidance counsellors/schools refer to anyone within the school environment (e.g, teachers, educational assistants etc.) who is viewed as instrumental in the participant's decision to pursue post-secondary education.

Theoretical Framework

This study will be discussed within the theoretical framework of social capital theory. Social capital theory in the context of education is seen in the work of Bourdieu

(1986), Coleman (1998), and Putnam (2000). Social capital in its simplest form is a

sociological concept that comprises networks that exist between and within relationships

(Schuller & Theisens, 2010). Social capital theory refers to "the value of a relationship

with another person that provides support and assistance in a given social situation," thus

focusing on the importance of fostering social relationships and networking (Rubio et al.,

2017, p. 5).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) believed that the amount of social capital a person has is

based on the number of networks of connection as well as the size of capital accumulated

by each. He described social capital as a cluster of concepts that includes economic,

social, and cultural capital. He regarded economic capital as money and property, social

capital as connections such as family, friends, or others, and cultural capital as

educational achievement and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986)

demonstrated social capital theory as providing a clear understanding of the importance

of the concepts of social support and relationships. This is definitely true in post-

secondary studies for such marginalized groups as first-generation working-class students

whose social support dimension of social capital is sporadic as opposed to non-first-

generation students whose social capital of post-secondary preparation comes

continuously from family members. Thus, the lack of post-secondary preparation forces

first-generation working-class students to find other support systems. These other support

systems can come in different forms such as extended family, peers, educators, and

community stakeholders. In this way, these disadvantaged students can be provided with

the necessary assistance and guidance to adjust to post-secondary education (Rubio et al.,

2017).

James Coleman (1998) was renowned for his influential article "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," which advocated the use of social behaviours to overcome economic crisis. He emphasized that family and environment were the two greatest providers of social capital (Acar, 2011). He acknowledged that "social capital in both family and community plays a significant role in the creation of human capital in the society's younger generations" (Acar, 2011, p. 457). Coleman addressed the importance of supportive relationships which help students to adapt and transition through unfamiliar environments and experiences. Therefore, social support is seen as the key element for assisting first-generation working-class students through the transition and adaptation through post-secondary education (Sy et al., 2011).

Robert Putnam (2000) another theorist believed that social capital comes in different types: bridging and bonding. Bridging social capital refers to relationships with weak connections because of different beliefs that typically would divide them, but their communication continues to function. Bridging social capital is considered higher on a social scale when individuals in a social network tend to be of heterogenous beliefs and have a greater range of information. Bonding social capital refers to relationships with stronger connections such as family and friends where homogenous beliefs tend to exist, and the shared information tends to be of an identical viewpoint. Resources that tend to be accrued from close encounters are usually personal like emotional support or financial favours (Wohn et al., 2013). Likewise, in post-secondary education bonding social capital refers to the social support received that becomes "an important predictor of students' adjustment and persistence" (Wohn et al., 2013, p. 428).

Social capital is often used as a tool to analyze educational outcomes as it refers to different results in the use of different types of resources and support within one's social network. Social capital theory was the theoretical framework used in this study as it takes account not only the resources that first-generation working-class students have, but also the resources available through their social relationships and networks (Wohn et al., 2013). Social capital theory believes that "networks of relationships can help students manage an unfamiliar environment by providing them with relevant information, guidance and emotional support" (Moshetti & Hudley, 2015, p. 235).

"Social capital in the form of social support can aid working-class first-generation students in coping with unfamiliar college environments while achieving academically" (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015, p. 237). Students who are more involved in networks and relationships are more connected in post-secondary education and are less likely to "disconnect" (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015, p. 237). Social capital investments have brought proven benefits to marginalized students including higher achievement on tests, higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates, higher college enrollment, and greater involvement in school and community organizations (Acar, 2011, p. 460).

First-generation working-class students generally require more support than their peers. They usually have difficulty finding assistance and support in post-secondary education due to the lack of social capital which would allow for a network of relationships in a new and unfamiliar environment. As a result, the increasing of social capital is of the utmost importance for these students in post-secondary education. This makes social capital a positive overall asset for student performance, educational

aspirations, commitment, and resiliency at post-secondary institutions (Moschetti &
Hudley, 2015).

The employment of social capital theory as a framework for first-generation
working-class students' pursuit of post-secondary education brought into focus the
importance of social supports through networks of relationships in the formation of social
capital.

Significance of the Study

This study offers insights, suggestions, and initiatives about first-generation
working-class students as well as the barriers and challenges they face in the pursuit of
post-secondary education. The study may be especially important for first-generation
working-class students who aspire to attend post-secondary education by giving them
hope and encouragement that they are capable of not only just accessing, but being
successful in higher education. In addition, it provides a blueprint on how they can be
successful in accessing a post-secondary degree. The study could also be important for
the families of first-generation working-class students by showing them the importance
of supporting and encouraging their children to continue education, if they desire. This
support is vital to increase the social capital of first-generation working-class students
and allowing for more equitable opportunities in higher education. Furthermore, this
study highlights ways that families can support them in navigating and adjusting to
higher education.

The study provides a window into the issues of intergenerational social class
influences on education for current and future teachers as well as other members of the
educational team to better understand the impact and importance of their jobs as an

educators and role models, leaders, advocates, and support persons for their students. Within the study, the influence of the teachers was investigated on their role and impact on their student's future academics. Different strategies were developed for implementing motivational tools to promote and inspire first-generation working-class students to pursue higher education.

The study has significance for the education system by providing insights on how members of the educational team might better meet the needs of this particular group of vulnerable and marginalized students. The study adds to the current body of academic research about first-generation post-secondary students and their lived experiences accessing and navigating post-secondary education. It provides insights about these experiences that can inform stakeholder decision-makers about imperative support initiatives and proactive interventions that can be developed for this disadvantaged group of students.

The purpose of the present study is to increase the accessibility of post-secondary education through providing more suggestions and strategies that will ensure equal opportunities and equal support available for all social classes and disadvantaged minorities. This purpose will be based on the perspectives of the participants who are first-generation working-class students who have gone through the process of accessing and navigating through post-secondary education. Through understanding more about the factors that affect first-generation working-class students in the pursuit of post-secondary education, additional supports will be created to further break down barriers that still exist. These suggestions offered in this thesis are based on the lived experiences of first-generation university students and are thus invaluable.

Locating Myself in the Study

When I was choosing a research topic, I looked at my educational, personal, and professional experiences in education. My social, cultural, and personal identity as a working class, white, heterosexual, female student shaped my approach to this study.

By literature definition, I located myself in this study as a first-generation working-class student who was given the opportunity to attend two post-secondary programs. Currently, I am working on my third degree in post-secondary studies. I have always considered myself very fortunate coming from a working-class family and being able to attend a post-secondary institution, let alone having the support and opportunity to be in a graduate program. I was born to two teenage parents who decided to jump into the workforce to provide for our family. As far as post-secondary education was concerned, it was never a question of if I was going to attend but, rather when and where I would attend university. My parents always viewed education as being very important by stressing the necessity to get good grades and always reading books to me every night. I view myself as being extremely lucky to have such supportive parents who inspired me to be myself and encouraged me in my educational studies. In addition to my parents, my grandma and papa, both retired teachers, consistently motivated and inspired me to pursue a career in education.

During the second year of my Bachelor of Education, I was given the opportunity to plan and implement a professional learning series (PLS) for my fellow teacher candidates in the Faculty of Education. The VMEC presented workshops and presentations from local educational experts and community organizations who worked with vulnerable and marginalized students. In organizing the conference, I was able to

learn more about students who are from marginalized populations and network with professionals. I became very passionate about these students and found it engaging and exciting in helping to meet their needs. Eventually, this is what inspired me to select this particular topic for my research.

Philosophical Assumptions

In research, philosophy is the "use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 16). Though philosophical ideas are hidden in research, they play a big role in the influence on the practice of research. There are four main philosophical assumptions that are used in qualitative research: ontology which equates to the nature of reality: epistemology which equates to how researchers know what they know: rhetorical which equates to the language and writing approach: and axiology which equates to the values of the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In terms of ontology, I believe that reality is based on the perspectives and the experiences of individuals. This reality is based heavily on those who are more well-off in society in terms of social class, power, and privilege. As a result, I used words, phrases, quotes, and themes to show the different perspectives and multiple realities that are present in my participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In terms of epistemology, I believe that reality is co-constructed through the lived experiences of participants and myself as the researcher. I believe that through interactions, open-ended questions, and conversations with participants, the distance between myself as the researcher and what is being researched can be significantly reduced. As a result, the subjective evidence in the form of quotes from the participants was relied on to justify the knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In terms of the rhetorical language, I believe in the importance of being immersed in the research personally; thus, I used the first-person pronouns, telling stories, using metaphors, and personal experiences of the participants. In terms of axiology, I believe that by being immersed in the research, I as the researcher can have an influence on the study. Therefore, this emphasizes the importance of locating myself in the study by outlining my biases, values, and background to reduce the effect of my influence. In terms of methodology, I inductively analyzed my data to interpret the meaning and emergent themes that are shaped by my own values and experiences. I started by analyzing the details before moving towards more generalizations regarding the research. As a researcher, I need to be sure that I am personally involved in the research while protecting the privacy of my participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

I believe in a social constructivist point of view, and therefore take it on as a worldview as an approach to qualitative research. Social constructivists believe that people strive to understand the world around them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). There are three assumptions to social constructivism: (1) reality, in which individuals construct their own meanings through engaging with the world they are interpreting; (2) knowledge, through which individuals make sense of their world built on their own social, cultural, and historical perspectives; and (3) learning, a social process where meaning is made sense of through the interactions with other individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Orey, 2010). I sought to understand the world in the way individuals interact in their life, specifically looking at the lived experiences of my participants. As an individual, I made sense of these interactions and put their perspectives into meanings, which may vary between individuals. As a researcher, I used these meanings to

understand their experiences. I used open-ended questioning which elicits more authentic and deep interactions with the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). My views, biases, and background play important roles in how I shape my interpretations of my participants' experiences. My job in the study is to interpret and make sense of the meanings that my participants have about the world and their experiences. As the researcher, my inquiries allow me to generate meaning from the data collected from the participants' lived experiences.

Limitations and Delimitations

In terms of limitations, a main limitation is social desirability. This is when the participants give the answers or responses that they think you are looking for with the idea that people want to please other people. As a result, if social desirability occurs, it could change the responses of the participants from sharing their actual experiences instead to what they believe that I as the researcher am looking for. By keeping the questions open-ended, broad, and generalized the participants were able to reflect and share their personal experiences without me as the researcher altering the direction of the responses. Secondly, as the source of data is interviews, the information is analyzed and viewed through the perspectives of the individuals. Thus, these perspectives and views may vary between participants as will the interpretations. This could cause the data to be interpreted differently based on a different researcher's biases, values, and personal experiences. Thirdly, the study is using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA); participants were not observed in their natural environment, but rather based on personal accounts of their lived experiences. Thus, the data collection was based on the participants own recollection of the experiences and their own understanding of the

situation. Lastly, there is the possibility of the participants not clearly articulating their ideas or perspectives. This comes from the idea that "not all people are equally articulate and perspective" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 188). The clarity with which participants articulate and explain their experiences can influence the analyses and interpretations of the data. Thus, if the participants explain their experiences clearly and in detail, it allows for a rich source of data to interpret. On the other hand, if the participant are not as articulate, it could make it more difficult for the researcher to interpret the data.

In terms of delimitations, as this is a qualitative research study, the sample size was small. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a sample size of 3-10 participants is ideal for a phenomenological study. A small sample size allowed for the participants to share their experiences in detail with the researcher and for an in-depth analysis of their experiences. This was a delimitation as the sample size is small, making it difficult to generalize the results to the rest of the first-generation working-class students who were not participants in the study. This places the emphasis on further studies to explore the experiences of first-generation working-class students in a post-secondary setting.

COVID-19 Pandemic

In March of 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic was declared which created additional barriers for conducting my research. In my research, it created a need to find a different, creative ways to recruit participants for my study. I was very fortunate that through email, I received a high interest rate in my study. Thus, this allowed me to recruit the desired number of participants for my study. If I had not been able to recruit enough participants, I was going to use an anonymous social media group page such as Facebook to find participants that were eligible and willing to participate in my study. The COVID-

19 Pandemic also slightly changed the manner my research was conducted which is discussed further in chapter 3, the methodology of the study. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions to ensure the safety of my participants, all one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted using an online platform, Microsoft Teams.

Additionally, in the scope of this study the global pandemic also created an unknown limitation for me as the researcher. My research participants selection criteria were any self-identifying first-generation working-class student currently enrolled or graduated from post-secondary institution. This included first-year students who transitioned into higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus have experienced post-secondary education differently from other students who transitioned prior to COVID-19. The students who transitioned during COVID-19 did not embody the full post-secondary education due to virtual classes and not being immersed in the campus life-style. In my study, I had three out of the eight participants who were first-year students who transitioned to higher education during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This may have slightly impacted my study due to the different experiences transitioning into higher education. However, the motivators discussed (personal/self, parental, and teacher) that influenced them to pursue post-secondary education were very similar for all the participants in the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review examines and expands on research about first-generation working-class students and the motivational factors of self, family, and school towards the pursuit of post-secondary education. The main themes included are: (1) First-Generation Working-Class Students; (2) Discrimination in Education; (3) Post-Secondary Education; (4) Factors that Affect Access to Post-Secondary Education; (5) Factors that Affect Success in Post-Secondary Education; (6) Support Systems; (7) Parental Support; and (8) Teacher Influence.

First-Generation Working-Class Students

First-generation working-class students are a distinct group of students who have been prone to negative educational effects. First-generation is defined as students who are the first in their immediate family to attend higher education and whose parents did not attend or complete post-secondary education (Clandfield et al., 2014; Engle, 2007; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Gofen, 2007; Irlbeck et al., 2014; Rubio et al., 2017). Working-class is generally defined as "those in service worker and industrial worker households, as well [as] other marginalized workers" (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 11). First-generation working-class students have been commonly referred in literature as "barrier breakers" (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014, p. 46) because they must overcome barriers such as: lack of academic preparation, financial hardships, lack of knowledge of post-secondary, and limited support through the adjustment process (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Engle, 2007; Gofen, 2007; Rubio et al., 2017). In addition, as there is no role model who has been through the post-secondary experience, they must overcome the lack

of precedence in their family to navigate the new environment of post-secondary education (Rubio et al., 2017). Though post-secondary enrolment rates of first-generation working-class students have increased to one in six (15.9%) of students enrolled in the United States, but there are still barriers to overcome for a more equal opportunity to achieving a post-secondary education (Irlbeck et al., 2014).

Demographically, first-generation working-class students are commonly from ethnic minorities, from lower SES backgrounds, have greater family commitment and responsibility, and have lower high school averages/GPAs as compared to non-first-generation students peers (Engle, 2007). In addition, they generally have lower career aspirations and when they attend post-secondary education, take longer to complete a degree (Sy et al., 2011). They are more likely to come from single parent households, have dependent children, work jobs off campus to provide financial support, and spend less time studying due to time constraints (Coffman, 2011; Soria, & Stebleton, 2013). First-generation working-class students' self-perception is that they achieve lower academically, tend to have more obstacles to overcome in order to attend post-secondary education, and generally have less math and science knowledge (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Additionally, there is a gender difference in the perception of attaining higher education between males and females. Literature suggests that there are more female first-generation working-class students that tend to pursue post-secondary education and usually they will experience higher levels of stress than male first-generation working-class students in higher education (Sy et al., 2011).

With these demographic characteristics, there are also characteristics associated with enrolment. First-generation working-class students are more likely to delay in

attending post-secondary education, to enroll in a two-year college programs rather than four-year university programs, live off campus, take classes part time while working full time, and need for extra time to complete assignments. The combination of both these characteristics – demographic and enrolment create even more barriers for first-generation working-class students to break down (Engle, 2007; Irlbeck et al., 2014).

Working class students are seen as being "deficient, high-risk and problematic" (Crozier & Reay, 2011, p. 145). Reay et al. (2010) conducted research in the United Kingdom that found there is a major concern for marginalized populations such as first-generation working-class students in terms of their ability to access post-secondary studies. They investigated the perceptions of higher education of their participants -- 27 first-generation working-class students from four post-secondary institutions. They found that accessibility to higher education was typically viewed by their respondents as being only for the privileged. As a result, even when first-generation working-class students have all the prerequisites, they are still less likely to pursue higher education. The participants explained their experiences as either 'fitting in' with the privileged and elite or 'standing out' as different. Of those 27 working-class students, only a few could tell success stories of their experiences in post-secondary studies (Reay et al., 2010).

First-generation working-class students experience "psychological strain" as they adapt and adjust to a new environment. As this is a new experience not only for them but also their parents, it can cause negative psychological effects (Sy et al., 2011, p. 385). These students are less likely to share their feelings of stress or being overwhelmed as opposed to their elite peers. This causes a higher level of stress as disclosing such feelings usually helps to reduce stress (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2013).

In addition to higher stress levels, they struggle with the social engagement and integration with their peers in post-secondary education. Soria and Stebleton (2013) found that first-generation working-class students could not connect and relate with peers who did not share their own background and experiences. Consequently, they experienced a lower sense of belonging, felt unwelcomed on campus, and engaged less with their peers (Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

Social class differences in post-secondary institutions are also evident between students and faculty. First-generation working-class students have reported "feeling invisible in the eyes of peers and university personnel" (Soria & Bultmann, 2014, p. 52). In addition, they felt that their counterparts were unaware of the issues they faced coming from a working-class family, but yet stereotypical views of the disadvantaged group were placed upon them (Soria & Bultmann, 2014). This induced them to feel "alienated, marginalized and isolated in higher education" (Soria & Bultmann, 2014, p. 52).

"Educational mobility leads to social mobility" for first-generation working-class students which can aid in breaking the intergenerational cycle (Gofen, 2007, p. 1). In order for the intergenerational circle to break, this marginalized group has to overcome more barriers and hardships than their counterparts by attaining a post-secondary education.

Discrimination in Education

"Whether or not serious economic reforms occur in the foreseeable future, serious educational discrimination against working-class kids in Ontario persists and there is evidence that it is probably *increasing again*" (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 22). Clandfield et al. authors of the book, *Restacking the Deck: The Streaming by Class, Race and*

Gender in Ontario Schools (2014) outlined the data on discrimination which indicates that first-generation working-class students have "fared much worse" than their middle and upper-class student counterparts (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 15). The authors stated that the education system has discriminated against first-generation working-class students not only based on their race and gender, but also stereotypes about social classes. As a result, social class becomes an important discriminator in determining the access and attendance rates in post-secondary studies (Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

Discrimination in higher education is composed of many different factors that include first-generation status. This marginalized group of students has indicated that they have encountered discrimination that results from the acceptance of clothing brands or style, religious views, political views, gender orientation, background including ethnicity and nationality, disabilities, age, and IQ levels (Annalakshmi & Venkatesan, 2018). The combination of first-generation status and social class often influences educational outcomes more strongly than race or gender (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Class differences can be more noticeable among working-class students in higher education since classes are mostly composed of middle- and upper-class students. This places responsibility squarely on the educational institutions to devise strategies on how to overcome the effects of students' social class on their post-secondary experiences (Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

As "University is now widely seen as the preferred path to a successful life in this country," this places an importance on the ability to access and attain a post-secondary degree (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 9). This group of disadvantaged students want to attain higher economic and social well-being than their parents (Coffman, 2011). First-

generation working-class parents' education is a critical predictor for post-secondary aspirations and success rates (Sy et al., 2011). Research on social mobility has shown that there is a strong correlation between the SES of a working-class parents and the SES of their children. The inquiry concludes that a majority of low SES parents will pass on low SES to their children, coming from the idea that children from low SES families face additional hardships in achieving social mobility. Thus, the breaking of the intergenerational cycle by attaining a post-secondary degree becomes very difficult (Gofen, 2007). As a result, there is an inequality between social classes and their degree completion rates, which causes an additional discrimination for first-generation working-class students (Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

Post-Secondary Education

A higher importance is now placed on achieving a post-secondary education as opposed to a few decades ago. At one time, the norm for job and financial security was attaining a secondary school diploma. Now, a post-secondary degree or certification is the new norm. The benefits of post-secondary education are correlated to financial, social, and psychological benefits for first-generation working-class students and society. Individuals aged 25-34 with a post-secondary degree earn about 40 percent more than individuals in the same age cohort with only a secondary school diploma (Wohn et al., 2013).

In recent years, enrolment rates have increased for first-generation working-class students in post-secondary institutions. However, these students are still facing negative educational effects and barriers which affect their access to post-secondary education (Irlbeck et al., 2014). During secondary education, these marginalized students tended to

have higher rates of drop out and limited post-secondary aspirations (Aronson, 2008).

Aronson (2008) describes accessing post-secondary education as "… a funnel that filters out disadvantaged students at each stage in the educational process" (Aronson, 2008, p. 44). Building on Dougherty's (1987) funnel metaphor, Aronson applies the concept to students interested in post-secondary education. The funnel at the widest portion represents those students who are considering attending a post-secondary institution. As the funnel narrows, students must meet educational demands for post-secondary studies such as applying for acceptance, taking prerequisite courses, requesting financial aid, insisting support, and so on. The students who do not meet these educational demands, are filtered out and the funnel narrows even further to a point representing the remainder, those who hope to attend and complete post-secondary education (Aronson, 2008). Viewing the post-secondary education process as a funnel that filters out disadvantaged students at different levels, allows educational barriers to be recognized, necessary changes to occur and post-secondary education to be more accessible (Aronson, 2008).

Blackwell and Pinder (2014) sought to understand the motivational factors so students can change their family histories through attaining higher education. Their findings indicated three conditions as motivating factors to pursue post-secondary education: (a) passion and love for reading early in life, (b) feeling of individuality and being different from their siblings, and (c) wanting more for themselves in life. The first condition, passion and love for reading is instilled in first-generation working-class students as adolescents through the support and encouragement of their parents which was noted in all three of Blackwell and Pinder's participants. The second condition was experienced by all three participants again as they distinguished themselves or felt as if

they were different from their siblings. The third condition was identified by "each participant's overwhelming sense of determination to have a better life than the one they experienced as children" (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014, p. 51). The driving forces in this study came from both the participant's own personal determination and commitment to bettering their life and the support of their parents through developing a desire for reading.

Factors that Affect ACCESS to Post-Secondary Education

There are several factors that affect the ability to access post-secondary education for first-generation working-class students. These factors can include financial hardships, lower levels of academic preparation, and availability of informational resources (Engle, 2007; Jenkins et al., 2013).

Rubio et al. (2017), through a quantitative study, examined the adversities faced by first-generation working-class students in higher education. Their research supported the hypothesis that these students faced many hardships in attaining financial assistance. Tuition was reported by 70% of the participants as a common financial difficulty (Rubio et al., 2017). Moschetti and Hudley (2015) found that 14 out of the 20 (70%) first-generation working-class student participants in their study worked off campus to help maintain themselves with varying hours but at least 20 per week (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Financial hardships form one of the biggest obstacles faced by all students attending post-secondary education. Previously, payment for post-secondary education was viewed as the responsibility of parents. For disadvantaged students, whose parental income cannot provide for a post-secondary education, the responsibility falls onto them. With tuition increasing every year, additional stress and difficulties result for students

who pay their own way (Irlbeck et al., 2014). "Financial difficulty is one of the issues first-generation students encounter as a lack of financial support and subsequent load indebtedness may affect change of college success" (Rubio et al., 2017, p. 6). The increase of government financial aid has assisted marginalized populations like first-generation working-class students and increased the likelihood of them pursing post-secondary education. However, the loan debt unfortunately can be overwhelming, causing some students to not complete a degree or accumulate debt that they cannot afford to repay (Irlbeck, 2014).

Rubio et al. (2017) also found a concern as 40% of first-generation working-class students felt like they had limited preparation for post-secondary academics that includes taking prerequisite courses (Rubio et al., 2017). According to Coffman (2011) and Soria and Stebleton (2013), the majority of these marginalized students are not prepared with proper course choices, time management skills, and study habits (Coffman, 2011; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). In addition, most of these students have lower levels of self-confidence in their academic skills and preparedness for post-secondary education (Costello, 2016; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). Consequently, academic unpreparedness will further inhibit their willingness to participate in class, ask questions, or seek assistance from professors (Soria & Stebleton, 2013). As a result, some first-generation working-class students will struggle more academically in higher education than their peers.

Approximately 35% of the first-generation working-class student participants in Rubio et al. (2017) indicated that there was a lack of communication about the availability of financial aid (Rubio et al., 2017). Wohn et al. (2013) stated that the post-secondary prospectuses are not distributed equally within the school community which

can be a frustration and even a discouragement for disadvantaged students who are trying to access informational resources. Informational resources communicate the process of financial aid and other post-secondary supports that are available to all students. Gathering informational resources is exceedingly more challenging for these students whose parents have no knowledge of the resources available. This can include critical deadlines for financial aid or scholarships which could help financially assist paying for post-secondary education and alleviate unneeded stress for first-generation working-class students. Wohn et al. (2013) found that first-generation students were more likely than non-first-generation students to use social media as a means to network to provide informational support. Their findings indicated the importance of institutions using social media accounts to alleviate the stress and increasing self-efficacy of marginalized populations applying for higher education (Wohn et al., 2013).

Factors that Affect SUCCESS in Post-secondary Education

"First generation low-income students were nearly four times more likely to leave higher education after the first year than non-first-generation students" (Soria & Stebleton, 2013, p. 8). Research has stated that there are a number of factors that affect the success of first-generation working-class students in post-secondary studies that included transition to a post-secondary lifestyle, adaptation to the demand of higher education, social integration on campus, cultural adaptation, and psychological factors.

The transition process to a post-secondary lifestyle can be overwhelming academically, socially, and culturally for first-generation working-class students (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004). This unfamiliar experience brings new situations that many of these disadvantaged students are not prepared to handle. In these

situations, parental support can help to alleviate the stress associated with the transition to post-secondary studies (Sy et al., 2011). Moschetti and Hudley (2015) studied the social relationships between professors and faculty staff and first-generation working-class students in higher education through a qualitative study. Their results indicated that support from the educational institution was lacking as 80% of the first-generation working-class student participants felt that the transition from high school to post-secondary education was exceptionally challenging (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

First-generation working-class students do not have the same sense of belonging as non-first-generation students. As a result, this can lead to mental health concerns as the students can be feeling more stressed, depressed, overwhelmed and/or troubled (Costello, 2016). Soria and Bultmann (2014) quantitively studied the experiences of first-generation working-class students in post-secondary education. Their results indicated that their participants reported a lower sense of belonging on campus. They felt the environment itself was less welcoming, and thus were less involved socially on campus than their middle- and upper-class counterparts (Soria & Bultmann, 2014). As these disadvantaged students enter an environment unknown to them, they do not recognize the importance of networking, developing relationships, and utilizing the resources and supports available to them. "These relationships and [supports] can provide beneficial emotional support, encouragement, guidance and information about personal or academic decisions, and additional assistance with coursework" (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015, p. 236).

The students' academic preparedness for post-secondary studies requires adapting to the demands of the academic world. Generally, first-generation working-class students are less prepared than their counterparts (Engle, 2007; Rubio et al., 2017; Soria &

Stebleton, 2013). Soria and Stebleton (2013) examined the academic hurdles faced by first-generation working-class students in higher education. Their findings indicated that these students must overcome more obstacles than their counterparts. These obstacles include having a job, tending to family obligations, having perceptions of having lower English and Math skills, having insufficient study habits, and feelings of depressive symptoms (Soria & Stebleton, 2013). First-generation working-class students often lack study habits and time management skills as well as the confidence and self-efficacy of their own ability. They are less likely to attend classes regularly, spend the necessary time studying, and use on-campus support services (Engle, 2007; Irlbeck et al., 2014). These findings are supported by Moschetti and Hudley (2015) where first-generation working-class students acknowledged their low academic results due to lack of self-effort, time-management, and procrastination. In addition, they experienced difficulty understanding the expectations of faculty and the use of academic vocabulary, which led to issues with understanding and completing assignments (Costello, 2016). These disadvantaged students tend to struggle with the administrative demands such as choosing the right program/major/minor, meeting with advisors/faculty, registering for classes, and financial support (Irlbeck et al., 2014).

Social integration refers to the interactions with their peers and professors. First-generation working-class students are less likely to communicate and meet with their professors and other students. These students miss important opportunities on creating relationships, friendships, and partaking in extracurricular activities on campus (Engle, 2007; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Moschetti and Hudley (2015) found parents of first-generation students did not recognize the importance of academic and social networking

in post-secondary education, and as a result they did not encourage their children to immerse themselves socially and academically on campus (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). They are also more likely to live off-campus and take classes part time to accommodate working schedules as well as their studies (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). This removes them from adapting and networking on campus. According to Terenzini and his fellow researchers (1994), "first-generation students tend to delay participation in extracurricular activities and campus life until they feel they have 'their academic lives under control'" (Engle, 2007, p. 34). However, as recent research has found, first-generation working-class students gain more when they are more socially involved with campus life, faculty, and other students (Engle, 2007; Irlbeck et al., 2014).

Cultural adaptation indicates the student's ability to adjust to the new culture of post-secondary education. For some students it has been described as a 'cultural shock' as they are unprepared for post-secondary lifestyle, from the unfamiliar environment, the lack of post-secondary knowledge, and the limited support (Engle, 2007; Gofen, 2007). First-generation working-class students often experience a different cultural adjustment than non-first-generation students as they are introduced to a new environment with unfamiliar cultural norms and expectations (Irlbeck et al., 2014). This 'cultural gap' often leads to their underachievement and academic struggles as opposed to their peers (Costello, 2016).

Psychological factors that affect first-generation working-class students' ability to be successful in higher education include family achievement guilt and imposter syndrome. Family achievement guilt, which is seen in the family dynamics was noted in the work by Piorkowski (1983) after observing a pattern of anxiety. This anxiety was

directly related to feelings of guilt, isolation, and frustration. She compared this pattern of anxiety to survivor guilt. Survivor guilt is associated with shame or regret having survived a traumatic situation where others were lost. Piorkowski noted a similar phenomenon that existed with students who displayed similar responses to the idea that they were fleeing poverty by attending higher education. The guilt caused low SES individuals to have difficulty applying themselves academically and thus being successful. The guilt experienced was associated with feelings of abandonment, feelings of shame trying to succeed further academically than their families and the belief that discussing higher education with their family is viewed as being disrespectful or narcissistic (Campbell & Narayan, 2017; Piorkowski, 1983). This has been further developed by Covarrubuis et al. (2015) who characterized it as an experience of guilt or shame that makes students feel "uncomfortable for having more higher education opportunities and college success than their family members" (Covarrubuis et al., 2015, p. 2032). First-generation working-class students will more commonly experience it over their counterparts as "family achievement guilt is characterized by the uncomfortable feeling of having surpassed or abandoned their families" (Campbell & Narayan, 2017, p. 48).

Imposter syndrome which in seen in the peer dynamics refers to a sense of dissociation from those around them, essentially not fitting in and, an inability to accept and realize the successes and achievements (Campbell & Narayan, 2017; Stebleton & Soria, 2012). With an importance placed on adapting to the academic setting and finding a sense of belonging, a first-generation working-class student with imposter syndrome can experience additional hardships. Havlik et al.'s (2010) findings indicated that first-

generation working-class students have a "sense of otherness or outsider status" in addition to their first-generation status (Havlik et al., 2020, p. 126).

Support Systems

Social support is seen as a key element in assisting first-generation working-class students to adapt and to transition to post-secondary education (Sy et al., 2011). Generally, these students commonly lack the support systems because their parents have not attended or achieved degrees at the post-secondary level (Rubio et al., 2017). Those students who "developed a strong social network, including both the family members and school personnel that assisted them in accessing in post-secondary education" (Coffman, 2011, p. 86) were more successful academically in higher education. Most first-generation working-class students lack a collective sense of belonging and networking which resulted in less social support. This emphasizes the need that social support needs to expand for all first-generation working-class students (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). Though post-secondary institutions have developed programs and services to assist disadvantaged populations, they still have lower rates of degree completion than their peers (Rubio et al., 2017).

Jenkins et al. (2013) compared undergraduate first-generation students with non-first-generation students in terms of social support, posttraumatic stress, depressive symptoms, and overall life satisfaction. In this quantitative study, a series of questionnaires and scales were used. As the researchers expected, first-generation students experienced less social support from friends and family and reduced satisfaction with their own life but more posttraumatic stress than non-first-generation students. Unexpected by the researchers, first-generation students did not report significantly more

depressive symptoms than non-first-generation students, but both populations had fairly high scores. A gender difference was observed with these results for first-generation students as women had significantly higher statistical values than men on all categories studied (Jenkins et al., 2013). This study indicated that first-generation working-class students lack the necessary support systems needed to ensure success in post-secondary education.

Through in-depth interviews, Irlbeck et al. (2014) studied the motivational factors for nine first-generation students in the pursuit of a post-secondary education. The findings indicated that their motivational factors of encouragement included parents, family, teachers, and self. It also concluded that the supports that were vital to their success emanated from parents, financial status, friends, and advisors/professors. Overall, all nine participants were satisfied with their experiences in post-secondary education (Irlbeck et al., 2014). This study showed the importance of support systems in motivating and continually supporting marginalized students during their journey of higher education.

Parental Support

Parental support and influence on first-generation working-class students have a positive effect on their ability to complete a post-secondary degree. Strong encouragement and support from parents, regardless of the parents' own educational attainment, was found to be the most important predictor of success for these students' pursuit of higher education (Engle, 2007). This was also evident in Blackwell and Pinder's (2014) study as all three first-generation working-class female student participants indicated a motivational factor to pursue post-secondary education came

from "parental support [which] was a strong influence" (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014, p. 52). The participants discussed in detail the influence from the family life from visiting local libraries to visiting colleges campuses to promote the importance of higher education (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).

Gofen (2007) enlisted 50 first-generation working-class students in higher education to participate in semi-structured, in-depth interviews to understand how students were able to break the intergenerational cycle. The findings indicated that social mobility resulted from their own upbringing and family lifestyle. All of the participants attributed their family or one of their family members to be the key to success but interestingly, not one participant brought up an individual from the school system such as teachers or counsellors. Also, studies of "family resilience" have indicated low SES students such as those from first-generation working-class backgrounds have to overcome social obstacles to achieve upward social mobility. The "family resilience" approach emphasizes the capabilities of students from low SES that can rise above the adversities and hardships through their own resilience. Low SES families with limited resources are able to build a better future than their own for their children, demonstrating the importance of nonmaterial resources. The nonmaterial resources included the family's habits, traditions, beliefs, routines, and priorities (Gofen, 2007). As a result, resilient students who have overcome educational inequalities have been discovered to have "clear cut expectations, shared core values and shared routines" from their families (Gofen, 2007, p. 5).

Parents who have attended post-secondary institutions tend to be more familiar with the higher education system and can help their children with the necessary

processes. Parents of first-generation working-class students often lack the support and understanding of the educational system and processes, which constitutes a significant gap for these students. These hardships include the process of preparing for post-secondary, selection of current courses, application for post-secondary studies, and access of financial support (Engle, 2007; Gofen, 2007). Sy et al. (2011) compared parental support and stress of higher education on first-generation and non-first-generation students. Their findings indicated that parents of first-generation students were provided less emotional and informational support to their children. However, the findings indicated no significant difference in stress between first-generation and non-first-generation students, although the results implied that first-generation students' stress was reduced when they had some emotional support from their parents (Sy et al., 2011). Sy et al. (2011) concluded that various forms of parental support can help to improve academic aspirations and outcomes for all students attending post-secondary studies regardless of their own education (Sy et al., 2011).

Moschetti and Hudley (2015) found that 18 out of 20 (90%) first-generation working-class student participants were provided with encouragement and some sort of financial support from their parents. This was despite the fact that these parents were unable to provide support directly related to the post-secondary experience as they are unfamiliar with it, having not attended themselves. Participants also mentioned their parents instilling high levels of self-belief and self-confidence in their abilities which was beneficial to their academic achievement (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). This places the importance on parents to be actively involved through their child's academic endeavours through providing the necessary support, regardless of their own education. Parents who

are involved in their child's academic life are more likely to understand the education system, allowing for more opportunities to provide support to their children (Wohn et al., 2013).

Parental involvement in the post-secondary process increases the students' chances of attending a post-secondary institute (Engle, 2007). Though parents cannot directly provide support related to course planning and study habits, they can provide emotional support as this was correlated with reducing the students overall stress in post-secondary education (Sy et al., 2011).

Teacher Influence

Student aspirations to pursue post-secondary education are greatly affected by both encouragement and support from important people in their lives which include teachers and counsellors (Engle, 2007). In situations where parents cannot provide the necessary support, teachers can step in to "fill in the parental gap" by being a mentor and/or role model of encouragement to first-generation working-class students to continue their education (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014, p. 55). Research has also reported that higher levels of encouragement for post-secondary studies from high school staff members is positively correlated with higher academic performance (Engle, 2007).

Webb and Thomas (2015) discussed solutions for narrowing the achievement gap allowing education to be more equitable. The achievement gap is "the inequalities in academic performance between groups of students that includes socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity and gender" (Webb & Thomas, 2015, p. 1). A factor that contributes to the achievement gap are preconceived perceptions of students based on the different criteria listed above. This prejudicial perception of a student can have an impact on the teacher's

expectations of a student's ability. Also, the teacher's feelings and expectations of the student can impact their ability in the classroom. Disadvantaged students who felt like their teacher disregarded their ability to learn, limited their choices and opportunities, and failed to develop a relationship stopped trying and become disinterested within the classroom (Webb & Thomas, 2015).

A factor that narrowed the achievement gap was creating relationships that respect ethnicity and culture with equitable expectations. A study of African American students found that when the teacher believed in their students and had high, achievable expectations, the students achieved higher academically. It was observed that when teachers formed strong bonds, that students showed an increase in engagement and self-esteem (Webb & Thomas, 2015). This indicated teachers can have a positive or negative effect on the students and their academic performance. Teachers who form strong positive relationships with their students are more likely to be able to inspire and support them. These relationships with their teachers can influence the students' own perception of their ability and increase their interest in their current and future academic endeavours.

"Teachers can be role models who can inspire students to attend college. Specifically, minority K-12 students need to see college graduates that look like themselves" (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014, p. 55). These authors studied the motivational factors of first-generation minority college students. Their findings indicated that teacher influence can play an important role in supporting minority students. In addition to filling in the 'parental gap', two participants discussed being "most influenced by [their] teacher" who left "lasting impressions on [them] throughout [their] middle school years" (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014, p. 53). The importance of mentorship from teachers through

their encouragement and support in an education context was repeatedly mentioned in the literature. Teachers can encourage academic success, provide opportunities, assist with financial opportunities, and encourage them in the pursuit of post-secondary education in the forms of peer advising, tutoring, and mentoring (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Irlbeck et al., 2014).

"Developing relationships with faculty and other university personnel may be especially beneficial for first-generation [working-class] students as those people can provide the necessary information, perspective, values and socialization" (Irlbeck et al., 2014, p. 155). Teacher influence can come from current professors and faculty during post-secondary studies (Irlbeck et al., 2014). Students who interact with their professors are more likely to achieve more desirable results in the class. Costello (2016) conducted a case study on a first-generation nursing student's experience. An important factor for the success of the participant was the support from the faculty and professors who assisted her with not only the academics but also in addressing her parents' concerns with the importance of post-secondary education (Costello, 2016). However, many first-generation working-class students may have limited exchanges with their instructors and rarely ask questions in class or participate in class discussions (Costello, 2016). This study places an important responsibility on the faculty and higher education to have supports and programs available as Moschetti and Hudley's (2015) findings indicated that the institutional support provided to first-generation working-class students is lacking. According to 80% of their participants (18 out of 20), the institutions they attended provided poor communication, confusing procedures and the supports offered were difficult to access (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

"Students who perceive their academics advisors to be supportive have a stronger sense of belonging and more positive perceptions of themselves as successful students" (Costello, 2016). Advisors were deemed to be one of the most important on-campus supports for the success of first-generation working-class students (Soria & Bultmann, 2014). Advisors and counsellors play an important role for marginalized students as they outline the importance of completing a post-secondary degree such as job opportunities and personal accomplishment (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). The implementation of bridge programs for first-generation working-class students can help to create a more welcoming climate through connections with advisors in the first year to assist with supporting and mentoring through the duration of their studies. This was specifically noted at bigger institutions where connecting and interacting with faculty may be more difficult (Soria & Bultmann, 2014).

"Good teachers make lasting imprints on student achievement for several years" (Webb & Thomas, 2015, p. 5). The influence of the teacher who accentuates successful academics and encourages students to pursue a post-secondary education plays a vital supporting and mentoring role for first-generation working-class students. Teachers have this ability to make a difference for these marginalized students by developing relationships, providing resources for students and families, and acting as an everyday role model.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As an educator, I am interested in the factors that affect first-generation working-class students in their pursuit of post-secondary education. For this study, I looked at the lived experiences of current students or graduates from post-secondary education. These lived experiences focused on the key motivational factors of the personal (self), family and teachers/guidance counselors/schools that helped in supporting and influencing the decision for each participant to pursue post-secondary education.

In this study, I used the qualitative research methods through oral feedback which is an emergent design that focuses on the participant's perspective. Qualitative research is concerned with the participants making meaning out of the topic rather than I as the researcher. There are other basic characteristics of qualitative research that make it uniquely beneficial for this research. Primarily, the researcher is a key component and actively involved in collecting the data through products/documents, observations, and conversations. Secondly, there are multiple sources of data from interviews, observations, or documents rather than using just one data source. The use of open-ended conversations allows the participants to share their ideas without predetermined scales or established answers. The researcher then will use these multiple sources of data to analyze through coding and will organize them into themes. Finally, the researcher is totally immersed in the research by reflecting on how their role in the study brings out the personal backgrounds and experiences that will shape their interpretations of the main themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

My Role as the Researcher

As a researcher, I explicitly stated my own reflexivity on my biases, values, and personal traits in areas as socioeconomic status, gender, culture, and history that shape my interpretations of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). My role was to ask prompting questions to elicit conversations from the first-generation working-class students about the influences and the motivational factors in pursuing a post-secondary education. Through these questions, I took an observational role to document and collect the data on each topic from the participants. After the data was collected, I examined for all relevant and recurring themes by analyzing the data. In this way, I described the phenomenon in terms of the experiences from the viewpoint of the participants. It is important for the environment to be non-threatening and the participants to feel comfortable and safe when sharing their personal experiences. I wanted to be sure that I was not being intrusive or making them uncomfortable as they share their personal experiences with spontaneity.

Research Framework

Table 1: Summary of Research Framework for this Study

Philosophy	Phenomenological
Ontology	Social Constructivism
Epistemology	Interpretative (hermeneutics)
Methodology	Qualitative
Approach	Inductive
Research Design	Single Case Perspective of First-Generation Working-Class Students

Method	Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Research Design

The design of the study was an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which is an approach to qualitative research that involves using the participant's lived experience to understand a given phenomenon. Phenomenology entails a philosophical approach: "it involves a detailed examination of the participant's life- world; it attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53).

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin stated, "IPA is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). It consists of active participation from the researcher as they try to get an "insider perspective" as termed by Conrad (1987) into the participant's view (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53). The interpretative process takes into account both the participants trying to make sense of their lived world as well as the researcher trying to make sense of the participants which is known as a two-stage interpretation of a double hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). The IPA foundation is built upon three theoretical principals: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology, the first major theoretical foundation, "is the philosophical approach to the study of experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 11). It allows a researcher to use plenitude of sources of ideas to examine and explore the lived experience. Husserl (1927) was one of the first philosophers interested in understanding how individuals can

understand their own experience of a given phenomenon by identifying the vital qualities of the experience. The area of phenomenology was extended upon by other philosophers that include Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. Through IPA research, "our attempts to understand other people's relationships to the words are necessarily *interpretative* and will focus upon their attempts to make *meanings* out of their activities, and to the things happening to them" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21).

Hermeneutics, the second major theoretical foundation is "the theory of interpretation" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 24). Heidegger, a German philosopher, explicitly and significantly discussed phenomenology as an interpretative operation. Schleiermacher and Gadamer built upon Heidegger's belief by explaining how a phenomenon occurs by making sense of it through the relationships between "fore-understanding and the new phenomenon being attended to" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). Only through the interpretative process can researchers make sense of the participant's world. The 'hermeneutic circle' comes from "the idea that we always understand or interpret out of some presuppositions" (Grondin, 2017, p. 1). Using the hermeneutic circle allows first an understanding of all parts before an understanding of the whole can be obtained and vice versa. Heidegger describes the hermeneutic circle as "this constant and ongoing process of trial and error, where one always strives to develop the right anticipations which have to be 'borne out by the things themselves'" (Grondin, 2017, p. 13). At its simplest, the hermeneutic circle can be illustrated using the idea of the part and the whole in the context of a research study where the part equates to one interview with a participant and the whole equates to the entire research study. Upon entering to the 'hermeneutic circle', a researcher's thinking can move back and forth as opposed to a

linear fashion, in order to explore different perspectives and ways to interpret the data (Smith et al., 2009).

Idiography, the last major theoretical foundation, focuses on the particular. An IPA for a single case study or small sample is a given phenomenon for each participant. It is important that each case is treated singularly and analyzed to understand each unique case before comparing across cases. IPA is committed to understanding the participant first and then the general phenomenon with "situation participants in their particular contexts, exploring their personal perspectives and starting with detailed examinations of each case before moving to more general claims" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 32).

Using IPA for this research study allowed for a small sample size to investigate multiple and relatively homogeneous participants who have experienced the same phenomenon. IPA researchers "are concerned with where ordinary everyday experience becomes 'an experience' of importance as the person reflects on the significance of what has happened and engages in considerable 'hot cognition' in trying to make sense of it" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 33). Through IPA, I as the researcher examined and understood the perspectives of my participants and their experiences in pursuing a post-secondary education.

Selection Criteria and Recruitment

Participant selection occurred through purposeful sampling based on the participants self-identifying as first-generation working-class students based on a literature definition provided to them. First-generation was defined as, at the time of enrolment, the participants are the first in their immediate family (parents and siblings) to attend post-secondary education. Working-class referring to coming from "those in

service worker and industrial worker households, as well [as] other marginalized

workers" (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 11).

This study sought to understand the experiences based on the same phenomenon.

Once I received approval from the University of Windsor's REB to conduct research (see

Appendix C), the participants were drawn from the population of first-generation

working-class students who are currently completing a degree or have recently graduated

from the University of Windsor. There was a small group of eight students who

participated in the study, three male and five female participants. All participants were

over the age of 18 and were asked to answer general questions about themselves

including gender, age, ethnicity, background, and year in post-secondary education to

further understand the demographics of first-generation working-class students.

Recruitment of the participants was completed through University of Windsor emails (see

Appendix D). An email was sent to the Faculties and/or Departments at the University of

Windsor that was then dispersed to the students with an attached poster outlining the

research (see Appendix E). An incentive in the form of an e-gift card was provided for

participants who participated in the study for their time and willingness to participate.

Data Collection

Data collection was used to understand first-generation working-class students'

motivational factors in pursuing a post-secondary education. Participants were asked to

review the informed consent (Appendix F) and give verbal consent and then given time to

ask additional questions. The purpose of the study was stated before the interviews

began.

The data was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the participants. Because of the COVID-19 protocols and safety measures, the interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams. The interviews were conducted at a time convenient for each of the participants. The interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken to be further analyzed. There was a list of pre-determined interview questions used as a guide (see Appendix B). The interviews were conducted using open-ended questions which allowed participants to respond thoroughly and in-depth. "The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life settings" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 56). After the interviews, participants were encouraged to email if they would like to add anything they may have forgotten during their interviews. They were reminded that they would be receiving a transcription of their email via email and could also add to the transcription once they received it.

The interviews allowed the participants to divulge personal, historical information of their experiences while allowing the researcher to have control over the direction of the questioning. The interviews allowed the participants to explain their experiences when it was not possible to directly observe them in a given scenario. However, there were limitations to using interviews as a source of data collection, as interviews provides indirect information through the viewpoint of the participant and removes the naturalistic setting component.

As the researcher, it was important that I ensured that my own presence did not bias the responses of the participants. Finally, as the participants were telling their own

experiences to me, it was important to note that the participants perspectives would vary, and their ideas may not always be articulated clearly.

Participants

All participants were self-identified as first-generation working-class students who were currently attending or had graduated from the same university in Southwestern Ontario. Participants had different levels of higher education ranging from first year students to graduate students to graduates of post-secondary studies. Participants varied in gender and age with three male participants and five female participants from the ages of 18 to 31 years old. I believe that it is important to protect the privacy of the participants. To ensure anonymity in my research, I used pseudonyms for each of my participants that do include any distinguishing features or identifiers.

Participant A: Joey was in his second year of post-secondary education in the Biomedical Sciences program.

Participant B: Monica was in her fourth year of post-secondary education, completing a Bachelors of Biological Science with a minor in Information Technology (IT).

Participant C: Chandler was in his third year of post-secondary education in the Computer Science program.

Participant D: Emily was in her first year of post-secondary education in the Biomedical Sciences program.

Participant E: Janice was in her first year of post-secondary education in the Forensic Science program specializing in Biology.

Participant F: Ross was in graduate studies. He was in his 3rd year of a PhD

program in Civil Engineering. He completed his undergraduate degree in Engineering, both at the same Southwestern university.

 Participant G: Phoebe was in her first year of post-secondary education in the Honours Biochemistry program.

 Participant H: Rachel had just graduated from a Doctor of Chiropractic Program in Florida, United States. She attended the Southwestern Ontario university for her undergraduate degree in Human Kinetics/Kinesiology.

Data Analysis

 The data analysis was conducted inductively - focusing on winnowing through the data to identify emergent, reoccurring themes and ideas from the participants. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed directly following the interviews. The transcriptions of the interviews were sent back to the participants to member check for validity and credibility. This procedure allowed the participants to add in anything that they missed, or anything misinterpreted.

 Although there is no one way to analyze data in IPA, as a beginner researcher, I used the framework by Smith et al. (2009) outlined below in Table 2.

Table 2: Steps for analysis in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009, p. 82-101).

Step #1: Reading and re-reading transcriptions
Step #2: Initial noting/comments
Step #3: Developing emergent themes
Step #4: Searching for connections across emergent themes
Step #5: Moving to the next case
Step #6: Looking for patterns across cases

Ethical Considerations

When conducting any type of research, it was important to consider the ethical responsibilities associated with the study. In applying to the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Windsor, their obligation is to assess the potential risk to the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to the Tri-Council Policy Statement, there are three core principles to be respected when conducting a research study: Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). The ethics approval for this research is found in Appendix C.

For this study, the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of the participants were an important concern that needed to be considered. Participants were asked to provide verbal informed consent before each point in the data collection. They were emailed the consent forms that include the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks, compensation, and protection of identity. Throughout the process, it was important for the participants to be informed that their participation was voluntary, and they could refuse to participate and withdraw from the study at any point. They were asked to review and give informed verbal informed consent throughout their participation in the study. Once the research was conducted, the participants are assigned pseudonyms and no other identifying characteristics were used. All transcriptions were sent back to the participants for member checking with contact information for me as the researcher to clarify if there

was anything that they would like to add or clarify. The participants acknowledged through a confirmation email when they were pleased with their interview transcript.

Lastly, the information throughout the duration of the research study that includes collection, use, dissemination, holding, and disposing was safeguarded. The data collected was only used in this study and held securely in a box with no personal identifiers or characteristics. It was locked away with the researcher when not in use. Once the study was completed, the information was shredded and safely disposed.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the key factors that motivate first-generation working-class students to pursue a post-secondary education. Through an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the roles and influences of personal motivation, school factors, and family aspects were further investigated. Upon reviewing the literature to determine what other researchers have found, I believe that this study has uniquely supported and built upon existing knowledge for first-generation working-class student who were aspired to attend higher education. The goal of the study is that the results of the study will hopefully assist the Ontario education system in better supporting and encouraging this marginalized group to attend and successfully achieve a post-secondary degree.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANAYLSIS

In conducting this study, I investigated the perspectives of first-generation working-class students to develop a deeper understanding of the motivational factors and influences that play a critical role in their decision to pursue post-secondary education. In this chapter, descriptions and narratives are provided by the participants through direct quotations and interpretative commentary. Each of the eight first-generation working-class students offered their own experience about their continuing journey to achieve a post-secondary education.

Before beginning the semi-structured interviews on Microsoft Teams, each of the participants reviewed the Letter of Consent and gave verbal consent to participate in the research study. Then, participants were asked preliminary questions with intent of giving some background information on the demographics of each of the first-generation working-class students. The questions were worded in an open-ended manner to allow the participants to answer in their own words. These preliminary questions included, "What gender do you identify with?", "What ethnicity are you?", "How old are you?", "What year of post-secondary education are you currently enrolled in?", and "What program are you currently studying or have graduated from?". The participants' answers are outlined below in Table 3.

Table 3: Preliminary Questions: Demographics of Participants

Participants (n = 8)		
	Number	**Percent**
Gender		
Male	3	37.5
Female	5	62.5
Ethnicity		
White	4	50
Pakistani	1	12.5
Black/White/Métis	1	12.5
White/Syrian	1	12.5
Middle East	1	12.5
Age		
18-20	4	50
21-25	2	25
26-30	1	12.5
>31	1	12.5
Year of Post-Secondary Education		
1st year	3	37.5
2nd year	1	12.5
3rd year	1	12.5
4th year	1	12.5
Graduate	2	25

Program of Student/Graduate from		
Biomedical Science	2	25
Civil Engineering	1	12.5
Science (Biology, Human Kinetics, Forensic Science, Biochemistry)	4	50
Computer Science	1	12.5

Each participant shared different experiences. In order to gain a better insight into the first-generation working-class student's experiences on pursuing post-secondary education, guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews followed that focused on obtaining additional information on: (1) the impact of personal motivators; (2) the importance of parental support; (3) the role of the teacher as an influence; and (4) how can first-generation working-class students be better influenced and supported in the pursuit of higher education.

The following themes were drawn from applying IPA analysis: (1) The Role of Parents; (2) Influence of the Education Team; (3) Access of Information; (4) Adjusting to the Post-Secondary Environment; and (5) Financial Burden of Higher Education. These themes were discussed in detail through participant's excerpts and interpretative commentary.

Theme 1: Role of Parents

Parental role is viewed as one of the most influential and significant factors for supporting and encouraging a first-generation working-class student. Parents play an important role by supporting their children in the pursuit of a post-secondary education

but also providing willingness to navigating alongside their children about the complexities of entering higher education. As a result, parents of first-generation working-class students are viewed as having the biggest impact on the ability of first-generation working-class students to not only access, but also be successful in post-secondary education (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Engle, 2007).

Coleman (1988) conducted research on the role and responsibility of the family to integrate norms that will advance their children's success in life. He discovered that family and environment are the two main sources of social capital. This places an importance on parents of first-generation working-class students to assist through personal involvement and investment that enhances their children's academic and life success. Coleman emphasized the importance of clear family structure, norms and expectations, parental involvement, and parent to child interactions as being indicators of social capital (Dika & Singh, 2002). Coleman's findings are consistent with the literature and the interviews conducted in this study that indicate the importance of the parental role for a first-generation working-class student in accessing and being successful in post-secondary studies. Participants were asked the following questions for more insight into the vital role of the parent, "Based on your own experiences, what are your parent's view of post-secondary education?", and "How were your parents able to support your through your post-secondary education?".

Wood and Breyer (2017) proposed eight perceptions of student success in higher education which essentially are the motivators behind attending post-secondary education. Interestingly, it mentioned both the role of parents in the context of "meeting the expectations of families – parental pride" and future goals, "the prospect of future

employment and a stable future" (Wood & Breyer, 2017, p. 9). Phoebe, one of my research participants, acknowledged that during her schooling years, her parents set her up for success in post-secondary education by ensuring that parental pride and developing future goals would be her main focus as discussed in Wood and Breyer's (2017) research. Phoebe's parents felt they needed to ensure that their daughter attaining a post-secondary education was her main concern by encouraging her to continue in overcoming the struggles and barriers that existed. Literature suggests that attaining a post-secondary education is vital to social advancement and economic security (Wohn et al., 2013). Her parents wanted a successful future for Phoebe by motivating her early in her schooling to attend higher education.

> For them, it's the only reason, thing you should be focusing on. To them it's a lifeboat. They know first-hand what it feels like to not have an education and what it feels like to exist in a society where you are uneducated and you're on the bottom end of the pyramid. For them it's their main focus, and a lot of their time spent in this country has been to ensure that we can pursue our own education in the best way possible, so for them it's super important, probably one of the most important things.

Parental support was interestingly not always directed at just attaining a post-secondary education. The support from parents was there to encourage the students to pursue a future in a path that was deemed right for them. Rachel, another of the research participants, felt like this was the case for her, as her parents viewed post-secondary education as an important key to open all the doors of opportunities, but this may not be

the path for everyone. She felt that her parents were supportive of whatever path she chose and whatever direction that she wanted to go in her life.

> I think that my parents, I think that it's important, again they don't think it's absolutely everything and they support people who choose other paths. For not being able to pursue that, they got careers without a post-secondary and secondary education they also think that it's important for like a lot of the people of today to get that just because of the job opportunities that you can get because of your education level.

The bottom line is that parents always want the best for their children even if this means not attaining a post-secondary education. Joey also experienced this when he was looking to pursue a post-secondary education and his parents wanted him to reach his full potential whether that was attaining a post-secondary education or pursuing another option. The support that he received pushed him to desire a post-secondary education which he deemed was the right path for him.

> My parents, they definitely did not force me but pushed me in that direction
>
> because neither of them went so they wanted me to go and do the best that I can.

Though first-generation working-class parents cannot provide the same kinds of support as parents who have attended post-secondary education, they do try to provide other forms of support. For example, first-generation working-class parents try to provide assistance by limiting their child's responsibilities at home or reducing the number of hours worked at a part-time job as in Chandler's experiences. His parents felt that attending post-secondary education was a remarkable accomplishment and that it should be the only goal that he should be focusing on to ensure a bright future. Since his parents

associated attending post-secondary education with earning a higher level of income, they viewed Chandler's decision to pursue higher education as an important step to improve his economic advancement and mobility.

> I think they think that it's impressive they have always given me a really easy time. For example, not having to do chores at home or work as many hours as my siblings, and they think I will think I will make more money that the other people in my family.

First-generation working-class parents have been observed to offer emotional support to their children as they maneuver through the possibilities of the post-secondary environment. When some emotional support to Monica's success in higher education became essential, it was also counterproductive at times. She felt that her parents could not give her the emotional support that she needed since they did not understand the demands of post-secondary education. They also did not understand the additional barriers and struggles that she had to overcome in a post-secondary setting as a first-generation working-class student. These requirements can be extremely frustrating for any student in higher education as they are trying their best to achieve in overcoming all the barriers on the path. The parents of specifically first-generation working-class students cannot relate or understand the stressors and barriers that their children are working through to achieve a post-secondary degree.

> My mother, she encourages and pushes it [higher education], but she has never experienced post-secondary education herself, and when she sees that I'm stressed or anxious, instead of encouraging me to continue she will say "oh why don't you just stop and relax and stuff". I feel like my mother does not understand the

situation as much but my father he encourages and pushes it, and he thinks it's

really great. Like I said they are all very proud that I am doing this but it's just my

mother kind of, she thinks she is helping me by saying oh you should relax and

take an easy, take a year off but in the meantime, in my mind I had goals and

motives that I hope to accomplish within in specific time frame and often hearing

that is not really encouraging.

Rachel's experiences underscored the frustrations of feeling alone and trying to give an

explanation about issues to someone who has never experienced post-secondary

education before. She felt that her parents could not relate to her struggles which was

discouraging and frustrating because she was aware of other parents who had attended

post-secondary education who were able to assist and support their children in the

difficulties of higher education. Parents who had attended post-secondary education were

able to understand the mechanics and administer advice to their children. Whereas Rachel

and her parents were adapting and adjusting to the changes and unfamiliar environment

for the first time together through her undergraduate degree.

I could see their [non-first-generation students] parents being able to relate to

them a lot more and to help them through the process and give them tips, where

you know both me or myself and my parents were kind of trying to navigate

through the four years of my Bachelor's degree together.

Some first-generation working-class parents live vicariously through the experiences of

their children who are attending post-secondary education. This was evident as Emily

was seen as her parent's "biggest accomplishment" while attending higher education. Her

parents immigrated and struggled as they adjusted to a new location and career. They felt

that she would be able to fulfil their dreams as well as her own by achieving a post-secondary education. Emily and her parents together were on their path through higher education. All of them could not have been prouder of her accomplishment.

> For my parents, like they struggled so much coming to this country and not having anything, not knowing anything and I feel like I can be like their biggest accomplishment by going to post-secondary school and like fulfilling the dreams that they couldn't have.

Additionally, Emily's parents felt that there was a sense of pride associated with attaining a post-secondary education. Both of their children were now in post-secondary education and as a result they felt very proud and honoured to share this with their friends and family. Her parents viewed post-secondary education as an extremely respectable and impressive achievement that they had not experienced for themselves.

> They think it's a really big accomplishment. They also think that it's a really big deal - my brother, he's also now in the University A in business so them saying both of their kids are in University is like a huge accomplishment for them. A sense of pride and dignity for them so I feel like that's their biggest thing.

Even though Chandler was supported and encouraged in post-secondary education, he felt that his parents would never be able to understand the necessity and high demands of a post-secondary education due to their lack of an educational background or comprehension of the need for a higher education. None of his siblings had attended post-secondary education, his attendance was his parents' first exposure to post-secondary environment. This made it difficult for his parents to understand the importance of higher education and the demands placed upon him while attending. This caused Chandler to

undertake his academic journey alone and sometimes even unsupported due to their lack of knowledge and understanding.

> They are extremely uneducated, and I don't think have ever or will ever put in the effort to understand a system like that. They think it is a path to more money, but it is only for the smartest of kids, I have three siblings and all three did not attend – two younger, one older - and the older one went straight into the workforce from high school cause he did not like school, and the younger 2 also have no plans for post-secondary education.

Together first-generation working-class students and their parents need to learn to adjust to the roadblocks that will occur in succeeding in post-secondary education. For first-generation working-class parents who are commonly unfamiliar with the environment in higher education, they have the ability to provide the necessary emotional support, encouragement, and requirements needed for their child to pursue a post-secondary education. Regardless of a parents' education, they have a tremendous impact on their child's pursuit and ultimately their success in higher education. All the participants in the study credited their parents in some form for their success in being able to attend post-secondary studies.

Theme 2: Influence of the Education Team

In the context of this study, the education team refers to anyone in the education field that has a direct impact upon a student and their learning that includes, but not limited to teachers, counsellors, professors, and administrative staff. The educational team can play a critical role in students' aspirations, especially for vulnerable and marginalized students such as first-generation working-class students. Sometimes a first-

generation working-class student may not have the support needed from a parent/guardian. A member of the education team such as a teacher can take on the role as a motivator or mentor to provide the necessary support and encouragement (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).

Social capital theory addresses the importance of networks of relationships that can assist students in adapting to a new environment by providing them with information, direction, and support. Social class and first-generation college enrollment are described as indicators of educational outcome as well as being the most noticeable predictors of gaining social capital in higher education (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). This places an importance on first-generation working-class students to create and develop relationships with the educational team. Members of the educational team can then be a source of social capital by creating and fostering relationships to aid in providing encouragement, information, and guidance (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

To introduce the topic of the influence of the education team, I asked the participants, "How did your secondary teachers and the education system play a role in your choice to pursue post-secondary education?", "How did higher education support you in your journey in post-secondary education", "Do you feel like your secondary education prepared you for your experiences in post-secondary education?", and "Was there anyone or anything that could have been done to support your decision to pursue post-secondary that was not done?". With these guiding questions, the first-generation working-class students began to share their encounters with the members of the education team along their academic journey.

Some of the participants shared that they lacked the motivation and confidence to see potential and ability in themselves to pursue post-secondary education. For example, Monica's secondary guidance counsellors and teachers encouraged and inspired her to pursue higher education. She doubted her own ability to be successful in any subject area she was insecure about. She credits the support of her secondary guidance counsellors and teachers as being a big motivational factor and reason for her decision to attempt higher education. Her guidance counsellors and teachers were able to step in as mentors and role models that she could tap into for advice and self-assurance. Their valued opinions and trusted confidence in her yielded a successful outcome. This correlated with the motivators proposed by Wood and Breyer (2017): "The realisation that effort and hard work achieve outcomes—self-efficacy, persistence, confidence, and resilience" (Wood & Breyer, 2017, p. 9). Monica's teachers and counsellors helped her to realize that she was capable of attending and being successful in higher education. As a result, she realized the potential she had and became more confident of her ability.

> In high school, like I said a big part of my decision involved my guidance counsellors and teachers in high school. They all encouraged me to pursue [higher education] because it was something that was so important in my life back then. They knew I had the good grades. I was kind of not confident with going into biology so whenever I would tell them oh maybe I should do something else, but they would always tell me "oh no you should just do it, you did good in high school why not, just continue and see where it takes you". They definitely had a big, they were a big motivational factor that played in my life back in then, and it is a big reason why I ended up accepting my offer to the University A.

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One of the biggest concerns for all students who are entering post-secondary education is preparation. Are they well-enough prepared to navigate the new unfamiliar environment? This is specifically true for first-generation working-class students. As for Emily she heard time and time again about the substantially larger workload that higher education would be. The idea of attending post-secondary education became very daunting and scary to her. She remembered a number of times, even before she entered higher education, that different people from the educational team would comment on the significant differences that existed between higher education and secondary school. This created a negative connation towards higher education. This caused her to be even more nervous and concerned for her own ability to adapt and adjust to higher education.

> A lot of my [secondary] teachers always told us how much more time consuming, how much more like dense University work [is]. There's just a lot of it and there's a lot of different aspects like labs and papers and like I didn't know any of that.

So looking back, Emily did not realize that her secondary teachers did such a substantial job preparing for her transition into higher education. Their approach of using a different learning style and class dynamics in secondary school made it easier for her to adapt and be successful in the higher levels of learning. Being immersed in the new learning style that was similar to the methodology of higher education resulted in a smoother transference to the independent learning approach of post-secondary studies.

> My teachers in grade 12, they really opened my eyes. They formatted their classes in a University sense that we would know how it would feel like and we thought it was hard then, but now we're actually in it and thriving. I'm not regretting it. I just

feel like teachers try to make us fit in as much as they could in that setting so

that's how I feel like my teachers and my high school help me with that.

Furthermore, Emily credited her teachers for going above and beyond by introducing new

concepts and skills that would ensure that she was prepared sufficiently for material that

would be taught in higher education. This helped to bridge her solid foundation from

secondary school as she was more prepared for the information that was being taught to

facilitate and extend her learning in post-secondary education.

My chemistry teacher, in secondary school she did extra work with us. She taught

us like two to three extra things. She taught it very well very thoroughly. When I

come into Chemistry, I already knew everything you know so they were very

thorough with their work. I feel like that was how my chemistry teacher for

example she did like the best she could, and she really prepared us for this.

Phoebe strongly believed that her secondary education was critical in the process of

preparing her for higher education. She believed that high school helped prepare for her

experiences in higher education by emphasizing the importance of getting involved in

school activities. This would become vital to aiding in her ability to build up her

networking and social capital as she entered higher education.

I would say for me high school was just preparing yourself for university in every

shape, way, and form like whether it was from joining a club or extra curriculars,

it was all for you to like, build up your resume and application for university.

Specifically, the high school that she attended played a critical role in Phoebe's success.

Acar (2011) discussed the impact and influence of teachers as being able to provide

social capital through connections, interactions, and resources. Phoebe discussed coming

from a rough neighbourhood where the aspirations of a higher education were very low. She felt her high school from the school culture, environment, and especially the community helped to foster her desires and abilities to pursue post-secondary education. This set the stage for Phoebe to contemplate higher education in her future.

> I lived in the west end of town, kind of near downtown, it was not really a good climate growing up with the kids around me that I grew up with weren't that great and there wasn't a high rate of student going to high school let alone pursing post-secondary education. I ended up going to [school one] for high school. It end up playing more of a role in me going to university like the climate, environment and definitely the people, the teachers, and counsellors. I was in the enriched program which is structured and designed essentially for students who want to pursue higher education like in grade 11, I was taking university level courses and I was in the AP stream so from 15-16 years old I already knew what I was planning for, so I would say high school definitely set the decision in stone to go to university.

Joey related how his secondary teachers were more than willing to help him through the process of applying and selecting post-secondary institutions. He felt due to the smaller class sizes, he was able to build a connection and relationship with his teachers in secondary education. This advantage allowed him to have personal conversations about his future which helped him to better understand post-secondary education. His secondary teachers from all departments were eager to help in explaining and sharing their knowledge and experiences about each of their own different post-secondary institutions. These positive experiences were credited by Joey in assisting him to learn

about more multiple institutions as well as being more prepared for transitioning to higher education.

> I would say more than not they helped me prepare cause they all went to different colleges and universities so I could ask they anything about college/universities. It didn't matter which teacher either, I could ask a science or an English teacher or history teacher, they didn't know about medicine school and all the programs in science, but they could tell me what a major and a minor is, what a thesis is, what graduate school is – all that stuff. And they were very friendly more because I see them more on a regular basis and they were the type of teachers that you have them once in grade 9 and you have them in 11 and 12. Instead of the professor talking to 200 kids, they were talking to 20 kids, and you could build more of a connection with them and talk with them. I would say the teachers overall had a positive experience because they taught me about post-secondary more.

Many of the participants also talked about the impact and the influence of members of the higher education team that includes professors, counsellors, teaching assistants (TAs) and graduate assistants (GAs). Rachel discussed how helpful the post-secondary education team from the professors to GAs to TAs were throughout her undergraduate degree. She mentioned about the feeling of the family atmosphere that existed in the faculty that was demonstrated by their unceasing dedication and commitment to helping her achieve her goals in higher education. She describes this as being a big factor in her success in post-secondary studies. It is important in higher education to get to know your professors, GAs, and TAs and interact with them whenever possible. Forming these vital

relationships and thus increasing your social capital can be very helpful in navigating and thriving throughout post-secondary education.

> My program was definitely difficult. I found that you had to really work hard for
> higher grades, but the professors were always there: they were always extremely,
> extremely helpful. From their office hours, the Master students [GAs] or the
> teaching assistants [TAs] in class. They were also extremely helpful if you had a
> goal in mind, or what kind of grade you wanted in a class and you expressed and
> you showed that you were willing to work for that. The professors, GAs, and TAs,
> they did whatever they could to help you achieve that goal. It [the faculty] was a
> pretty close-knit community so I found like that played a huge factor in the
> success of completing the program in attaining the goals that we as students set
> out for ourselves.

Emily experienced similar support from the Dean of the Faculty of the programs that had accepted her. She was accepted into all of the programs that she applied to in the Faculty, but was unsure which program was meant for her and her future. She emailed the Faculty Dean asking if he could provide some direction and was delightfully shocked by his support; they collaboratively decided on the correct path for her. The one-on-one support really helped her make a life altering decision by ensuring that she was in the correct program and resulted in a positive experience and success in continuation of her higher education.

> They [the higher education team] actually did help me a lot because I was having
> kind of an issue with choosing my program because I got into all of my programs,
> and I didn't know which one to choose. I actually emailed the Dean [of the

faculty] and he helped me out through the entire process. I know, he has 1000

students he talks to every single day like he really took out this time and help me

with you know picking this program for me. I feel like they [the higher education

team] can be very one-on-one. I feel definitely my Dean really helped me with my

experience and success.

Emily also credits the administrative staff at the University she attended for providing

necessary information promptly to help guide the process of entering post-secondary

education. This helped to alleviate a great deal of stress and confusion for her in an

unfamiliar school environment. The administrative staff support resulted in the sending

out of emails with important information and directions that allowed her a smoother

transition from secondary school to higher education.

There were a lot of support. We would always get emails [with] a bunch of

information that would help us and guide us. It would help us through like going

through the [local university] site, the bookstore, and all of that. I feel like we

didn't just like jump right in and they actually helped us with giving us all these

instructions and information. That really helped with the transition from high

school to University so you're not completely alone going through this process.

Unfortunately, support and encouragement were not always positive. Rachel experienced

both sides, the positive and the negative. She had some secondary school teachers who

believed that she was not capable of achieving her aspirations and dreams. Rachel turned

that negativity into a motivation as a challenge to prove that she could. This is consistent

with some of the research that indicates that some first-generation working-class students

felt that members of the educational team did not provide social capital which was

important for their ability to succeed in higher education (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

She also talked about some teachers who were supportive of her dreams as they did

provide assistance to guide her.

> Well high school was a little different for me. I played hockey and I didn't really
>
> care a whole lot about school and homework but at the same time I knew what I
>
> wanted to do for a career. Some teachers did not believe in me at all or that I was
>
> able to pursue post-secondary education. They did not think that I would be able
>
> to get into the program let alone complete it and get to where I am today so, that
>
> was almost a motivating factor in the sense that it made me want to prove them
>
> wrong. There were other teachers who were really supportive in the sense that you
>
> know they encourage your hopes and dreams, and they did whatever they could to
>
> help you get into that program to get me to like the end result of my dream career.

Every education team tries their best to provide the necessary support to students,

although sometimes they may not have the proper information needed. Janice felt that her

guidance counsellors did the best that they could with the available information. She felt

that her guidance counsellors fulfilled the parental role with encouragement and support.

However, she felt that her guidance counsellor's limited understanding of the various

programs in higher education made it difficult to support her on picking the correct

programs and institutions. She felt very restricted in program selection based on the

support provided from the lack of knowledge of her guidance counsellor.

> They [guidance counsellors] step into like that parental role where they are very
>
> motivating and like they try to set out that pathway for you. I will say though, I
>
> found my guidance in high school, wasn't like the clearest because I think that

their level of understanding of what University is a bit like is not as widespread.

For example, if you like science, the answer is nursing like oh then go into

nursing that's what you wanna do. When I was in high school, I did not know

about my program, I did not know Forensics was a program. I think my high

school guidance did not open up ideas and what I could do in post-secondary was

quite limited.

Rachel recalled several times that she talked with her guidance counsellor regarding her

future scholastic plans. She felt that even though the guidance counsellor was

knowledgeable in her job, she may have had a bigger workload of students that was not

achievable. She talked about this one person being in charge of helping an entire

graduating class to find the right programs and schools for all of them. Choosing a higher

education program can be an individualistic process where the guiding individual need to

be able to tailor the choices to the student's choices and preferences. Thus, they need to

be well-rounded and knowledgeable about all the programs and institutions available to

them.

She [guidance counsellor] was helpful. I just think it was one person and you had

I don't even remember how many people were in my graduating class, so I just

think that the retrospective of the ratio of the amount of students pursuing post-

secondary education to the amount of guidance counselors that we actually had

like the proportion was off, but I do believe that that person was knowledgeable. I

just think it's almost overwhelming on both sides because you think about it

taxing for that guidance counselor to deal and to try and remember and to try and

even personalize information for each student when you have 100 plus students to
go through.

Monica had the complete opposite experience with her guidance counsellor. She felt that
she had a difficult time in choosing a program due to the sheer volume of information
presented to her. Her guidance counsellor gave her so many options for different post-
secondary programs that it made it so stressful and overwhelming trying to decide which
one to choose. With the guidance counsellor being the only reliable and trustworthy
source of information, it made it difficult for her to make an informed educated decision
with the amount of information presented.

> I think my guidance counsellors did give me the information they knew back then,
> so they did help a little bit, but I did feel like they swayed my opinion a lot
> sometimes. They would give me more options, it's good but it made me feel so
> overwhelmed by the information. They did help, definitely, they were the only
> source of information I had. I think I made the right decision now looking back
> but it just happened to be very overwhelming and stressful because of the position
> I was in back then.

Most of the participants were inspired by members of the education team from secondary
school and high education, but Ross was an exception. Ross talked about the inspiration
that stemmed from his elementary school teacher which stayed with him throughout his
educational years. He credited his success in education to his grade five teacher and the
words of wisdom that have stuck with him to this day. Educators at all levels today must
realize the way that they act and what they say in and out of the classroom can have a

profound and lasting impact on students, especially first-generation working-class students who generally have a need for a role model to look up to.

> All inspiration from my teachers only come from one of them, and he was my fifth elementary grade school teacher. That's it, none of them has that, as much as he had and has in my life to pursue my goals and be hard worker and diligently work on what I want to learn. He always said, "you are whole student – you are very strong, you can learn what you want but you need to learn kindly".

In the educational field no matter what role or position occupy, you have the ability to make a difference that can be life-changing for a student. From the above noted experiences, a number of different members of the educational team from all divisions (elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education) became considerably involved with and impacted first-generation working-class students. This involvement can help to inspire, support, or motivate first-generation working-class students to continue their academic journey and pursue higher education programs. It is important that members of the educational team are able to be positive and encouraging as role models so that disadvantaged groups such as first-generation working-class students can locate, interact, and aspire within academia.

Theme 3: Access of Information

The importance of being able to obtain information is described by the participants as a key factor in the ability for first-generation working-class students to not only access but also achieve success in higher education. Information includes the resources and supports available to disadvantaged students to assist them in accessing higher education. As they navigate through the new, unknown environment, they need

prompt access to critical information to help alleviate stress and anxiety associated with the journey through higher education. First-generation working-class students do not usually have prior knowledge or a parent to guide them towards the correct path, so it is crucial to get assistance to steer them in the proper direction through quick access of the necessary information for higher education.

Perna (2015) discussed the importance of information being available particularly for first-generation working-class students to assist them in accessing post-secondary education. "Low-income and first-generation students especially need guidance with the many steps that promote college entry, including preparing for and taking college admissions exams, searching for colleges and universities that are well-suited to their goals and interests, visiting college campuses, and submitting college admission applications" (Perna, 2015, p. 6). Having access to many different resources for higher education helps to alleviate the confusion, stress, and frustration associated with assessing higher education. Marginalized groups need this information to help make informed decisions and ensure that they are properly prepared for the next steps in their educational endeavours.

Bourdieu (1986) referred to capital as clusters of concepts that includes economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. Cultural capital equates to forms of knowledge, educational credential, and skills (Bourdieu, 1986). This is especially important for first-generation working-class students as Bourdieu discussed the social inequity regarding cultural capital that was caused by the levels of people's possession. Thus, privileged upper-class groups possess larger amounts of capital resources like information and knowledge (Liou & Chang, 2008). This is a serious issue as

disadvantaged students experience more difficulty accessing cultural capital, which is vital to accessing higher education.

Horvat (2003) built upon this idea that middle-class parents are more aware of available resources for education from institutions than their counterparts from the lower classes. Middle- and upper-class parents generally understand the education system better, make relationships within the school organization, and are more knowledgeable about accessing resources. Thus, monetary and informational resources are more easily accessible to middle- and upper-classes. Additionally, those who control the monetary and informational resources are usually also from the middle- and upper-classes (Liou & Chang, 2008). First-generation working-class student parents are already unfamiliar with the higher education processes and lack the cultural capital. This places a huge importance on the ability to readily access the necessary resources. Also, this could account to why there is such an achievement gap for first-generation working-class students in comparison to their counterparts since they lack the same cultural capital in supporting academic success throughout their journey in education.

Participants were asked "Did you find there were supports and resources available to support you as a first-generation working-class student in post-secondary studies?", "Do you feel you had any additional barriers/hardships in post-secondary studies as a first-generation working-class student compared to your counterparts (upper- and middle-class students)?", and "From your own experience, is there anything you would change that would have better prepared you for post-secondary education?". First-generation working-class student participants shared their experiences regarding the accessibility of information.

Monica felt that there were a lot of resources available to her regarding higher education, but she had a difficult time finding resources that were specific to her needs. In particular, one thing which is a big concern for most first-generation working-class students is the availability of financial aid resources. She noticed that many universities offered financial aid, but she could not find out her eligibility for specific scholarships and she did not have timely access to the knowledge of the monetary allotment necessary to cover post-secondary education costs. As a result, she did not know how much she would need to budget for out-of-pockets costs to attend. Consequently, for a first-generation working-class student whose cost of higher education is already a concern, this resulted in adding more stress to an already extremely stressful situation. In addition, Monica was concerned about obtaining a part-time job to assist in the costs of higher education. This time spent working may take away from crucial time needed for studying. For a first-generation working-class student, it is hard to find the necessary balance of work and higher education studies with the constant worry of the finances associated with higher education.

> I remember it being a very stressful period of time. There were a lot of resources but there weren't a lot of resources tailored to like specific things I was looking for. For example, one big thing that was a huge deciding factor on entering university was the financial burden. My family wouldn't be able to afford my university, so whenever I got a brochure or a pamphlet from a university, they would say that there are financial aid opportunities, but I wanted to know more. Whenever I reached out to schools, they couldn't give me enough information because I was not a student yet. It was always just so hard to find out information,

I remember like crying because I couldn't find the information out and just

knowing that I needed to have a job. It was a foreign idea to me, it didn't know I

would have to balance school and a job at the same time. I later found out that I

was eligible for scholarships which helped me out a lot, but in the beginning when

I was trying to get the information; it was really hard to find.

First-generation working-class students commonly rely on helping each other out through

the stressful processes as they navigate higher education. This was evident for Chandler

who did not use the available resources, but rather relied on other first-generation

working-class students around him who were going through the same experiences.

I thought the process was painful and difficult like the application process was

confusing. I think I could do it now but that's because I have the experience. I

don't remember relying on any resources, only other students going through the

same process.

Joey had a similar experience to other students when looking for information to help him

through the process of accessing higher education. He would ask his friends and their

parents for guidance and details for information about the university they attended. He

would specifically ask questions regarding the quality of higher education degrees and

general information about their post-secondary studies. Without their assistance, he felt

that he was very restricted in his ability to access information about post-secondary

studies. Joey relied heavily on their expertise of higher education from their own

experiences.

They [friends and parents of friends] would be the ones I would go to, to ask

about what university was cause I didn't know so I ask them, and they would tell

me where they went and which degrees they got, and you know advice for people going to university. They kind of helped me through that cause I could really only ask google answers and google is very limited and bias so it's kind of hard to find answers.

Ross had a similar experience where he also asked friends and their parents about their familiarity with higher education. This allowed him to gain the necessary information to be better prepared by becoming more acquainted with higher education and their expectations.

> I have some friends their parents are engineer or educated people, so they have been a source to ask them questions.

Joey relied on a number of different methods to self-educate himself through questioning and investigating to gain a working knowledge about higher education. In the same manner as Chandler and Ross, he questioned his friends' parents about their experiences. Furthermore, he accessed lots of beneficial information from perusing the booklets and pamphlets that he gathered at the university open houses.

> In high school, a lot of my friends they have parents that went to university. For example, my one friend has parents who have Engineering degrees from University B, and he is going for engineering at University B so in high school I would ask him, "Hey how does university work". He would explain it cause his parents taught him and so I relied on a lot on the university fair, the booklets and pamphlets and I also relied a lot on the people that didn't have university experience but knew people who did so I would rely on to ask information.

Chandler felt that he lacked guidance and the interaction of other role models in the pursuit of post-secondary education. He indicated this lack of support caused struggles he encountered by not being able to correlate the availability of options in higher education to the types of jobs that he could expect from achieving that degree. It is imperative that resource personnel are available to provide a full overview of available options and the relationships that exist between the options and types of jobs available upon achieving that degree.

> I think there should be more education on the different options available, if you were to ask someone who is pursing one area of study, "what jobs another area of study could lead to". For example, psychology, what jobs a psychology student get from a computer science student or the other way around they wouldn't know. I don't think either could answer the question very well cause we don't know our options and we are discovering the jobs options as we go, so a better resource that better explains all the options you have and what type of job.

Monica discussed the importance of utilizing different methods of reaching out to students that are commonly used by her generation, particularly social media. This was noted in the literature review from Wohn et al. (2013). The research stated that first-generation working-class students were more likely than non-first-generation students to use social media as a means to network for informational support and social media also was used to help alleviate stress and anxiety regarding higher education. She found social media for the institution to be a great resource to reach out for help as it provided supplemental supports on a platform that she was comfortable using.

I assumed there were a lot of people in the same boat as me so definitely reaching

out and talking to people, even going on social media to learn more have really

helped me.

A monumental concern for any first-generation working-class student is the financial

burden that is associated with attending higher education. Rachel discussed how it could

have been beneficial to be informed about the possibilities of scholarship opportunities

earlier in her journey in looking at commencing a post-secondary education.

My mind automatically goes to scholarships and you know any University they

always have a ton of scholarships to give out, but it took me until about third year

to kind of figure out so how to apply to that system. I went to school for a lot of

years so financially obviously school is expensive. Kind of learning about the

scholarship opportunities earlier like first and second year and how to apply to

them, that could have been beneficial for me.

Janice felt that she was not enlightened about the scholarships that existed at post-

secondary education beyond the first year which could have been used to alleviate the

stress of tuition costs. She felt that this information was not readily available or easy to

find. She emphasized the importance of being informed each academic year of the

scholarships that were available. The financial burden for marginalized populations will

be discussed further in Theme 5.

I don't think that it is like told that all these scholarships exist. People like first-

generation students don't understand that the entry first year scholarship will (a)

you might not continue it based on grades but, (b) there's like other financial aid

throughout [the university]. I think that's a big thing, my first year scholarships

like are going to end soon. That payment for second year is going to be different

for sure, it's going to go from I didn't pay anything to I would have this amount

now. I know like if resources were there and more organized, that applying for

scholarships while you're just in University would be easier. Just being a

University student now I know that they are [scholarships] out there so I think

financial aid like being more informed about financial aid throughout University

not just based upon first year.

When first-generation working-class students and their families are working their way

through post-secondary education for the first time together, it is important that they are

provided with the proper information to help ease the process of successfully accessing

and achieving a post-secondary education. This information can include details pertaining

to the application process, different scholarships available, financial assistance, campus

tours, programs offered, and so on. This information can make a major difference in the

ability of these students to be able to access higher education and in attaining a post-

secondary degree.

Theme 4: Adjusting to the Post-Secondary Environment

All students transitioning to higher education tend to encounter some difficulties

that involve both academic and personal challenges. According to Wasylkiw (2016),

previous academic performance/cognitive ability and individual differences are the two

biggest predictors of a successful transition. "High school academic performance is a

consistent predictor of academic success in university" (Wasylkiw, 2016, p. 29). As well

the literature describes motivation as one of the strongest individual differences. The

research has stated that demographic factors such as SES can have an impact on students

being adequately prepared and smoothly transitioned (Wasylkiw, 2016). The transitioning to higher education for all students can be a stressful and scary change to endure on top of the workload increase and educational format. This is especially given the importance placed on previous academic performance and personal motivation. As a result, first-generation working-class students who often come from lower SES families will often times struggle to overcome additional challenges which can directly impact their ability to not only enroll but, thrive in post-secondary education.

"First-generation college students typically need greater assistance than their more affluent peers to make a successful transition to college, yet these students may have difficulty locating assistance once they arrive at college because they lack the social capital that would give them a network in the new environment" (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015, p. 236-237). Due to the limited social capital that these students have, it can be extremely difficult for them to become integrated and immersed into the higher education culture and climate in addition to making relationships with student peers and professors. For marginalized populations, this creates a difficult transition into post-secondary education as was noted in the literature and interviews.

In exploring the issue adjusting and transitioning to the post-secondary environment, I asked my participants "Do you feel like your secondary education prepared you for your experiences in post-secondary education?", "How was the transition process from high school to higher education?", and "Did you find there were supports and resources available to support you as a first-generation working-class student in post-secondary studies?". With these questions, each first-generation working-class student independently began to explain their experiences of transitioning and

adapting to the acquisition of higher education. Rachel discussed in detail in her interview the different struggles that she encountered as she was exposed to post-secondary studies. The primary struggle that she faced was financial. This struggle will be examined further in the next theme.

> Again, financially struggles, my family would be considered a working-class family and we had our own personal [financial] struggles. Financially getting the funds to go to school and I stayed in residence my first year.

Rachel for the first time would be living on her own and also had to also adapt to a new living situation. Both of her parents did not understand as they her moved in how she would handle living alone while juggling post-secondary studies. Her parents had never experienced this type of independence that was embodied with higher education. She felt very alone as she was going through the transition process.

> Moving away from home for the first time was also another difficult thing transitioning and my parents they never like well when they moved away from home., they moved in with each other. They never went away to school or anything like that so going into like a foreign land essentially by yourself not knowing anyone was also a huge transition and struggle. Again, you're just kind of you don't really have anyone to guide you or at least I didn't have anyone to guide me in my family or my immediate family. Not knowing anybody, and trying to kind of figuring out how to transition from secondary to post-secondary was definitely a struggle.

Janice explained her transitions in education that she had to endure as "jumps". Her educational jumps occurred between elementary and secondary school and then between

secondary school and post-secondary school. Janice expressed that the second jump was the one that she was not expecting or prepared for. She further explained how the workload and the structure of university was a big mountain that she had to overcome in the jump.

> I would say individually in courses, yes like was I prepared going into my University biology? Yes, 100% but mentally no. I think that that jump, we all talk about jumps in education the jump from elementary to high school jump from high school to post-secondary. The jump from high school to post-secondary was definitely a jump I was not expecting as much. I think the workload and the way that the University was run was way different.

First-generation working-class students need to be able to access and be informed on the mechanics of higher education. As demonstrated above, the 'jump' from high school to post-secondary education can be a huge mountain for many students who are not prepared to climb the mountain. In Emily's case, she described the transition from high school to post-secondary education and the navigation through higher education as the hardest climb. This was due to the lack of necessary knowledge to fully understand post-secondary studies which was caused by her misunderstandings of the structure of higher education as it was conveyed to her through her education team (i.e., professors, TAs, GAs), the format of courses (midterms, exams), and the overall workload expectations. Emily shared and described the biggest transition as the independence that she gained where, "every man [was] for themselves" in the journey of post-secondary education.

> It's just the way the classes are set up and how sometimes like there's so many different like figures like TAs and professors like I didn't know TAs are so

involved in your work. It's kind of hard for me to like to know like oh who's this person, who's that person, who do I need to talk to. You're a lot more independent in like University because you have to do everything yourself. No matter what you do you have to learn it yourself like teachers would like to coddle us in high school but when you come here is like every man for themselves. I feel like that was like the biggest transition I had. Also, the workload is very different it's structured very different in University. I'm in science, we have labs, tests, midterms - like there's so many exams like some are cumulative exams which we don't have in like high school so is very different. It's crazy to me to be like, oh I just had a midterm, now another midterm 2 weeks so that was one of the biggest transition like shell shock things in that my experience.

Joey had a similar experience to Emily when it came to being informed and understanding how the university operated. He felt that his counterparts who received guidance had a better understanding of the higher education routines and were able to plan better for their post-secondary studies than he was with his limited knowledge and grasp of the educational system.

A lot of people knew how it worked the whole system, they were prepping for 3rd and 4th year getting all their courses ready, so it matched up good, and I was just sitting here having no idea what's going on past this year.

There were a number of different aspects associated with higher education that Joey struggled to comprehend. As a result, Joey found the various exams in higher education to be very different from the traditional high school exams he was accustomed to. He

acknowledged that he had not attained a proper understanding for adequate planning or preparation for his studies and failed to adapt to different educational requirements.

> They could have prepared us better because when you hear the word "exam", I think of high school exams at the end of the year and it's going to have all the knowledge from the year – the exams were very different depending on the class.

Additionally, Joey's only exposure to guidance on higher education was what he had seen in media presentations. So naturally, he assumed higher education would be very similar to what he saw presented in the media. But soon it was apparent to him that he was not prepared for the different aspects of higher education. He illustrated this by talking about his struggles with classes associated with labs as he had never been exposed to them before. He felt that adapting to his new environment in higher education was a wake-up call to how unprepared he was for his new experiences.

> I didn't know how labs worked, and that's hard cause you have to prep for the lab the day before, make sure you have all of your stuff ready, be in the time frame which is usually 3 hours which is tight, they should tell you about how the environment should work. When I first sat [down in class], the only experience I had was tv and movies and I would see the kids sitting in the little desk watching the professor talk and raising their hand so I thought that must be what is it like, they aren't going to exaggerate it. That's kind of how it is like but at the same time it is very different depending on the class, and you are not ready for it and I just think they should lay it out in front and be like this is how it is.

Joey repeatedly related the importance of all students knowing and understanding the format and procedures that would be encountered in higher education. He emphasized

that Faculties should demonstrate what is to be expected which would result in a smoother educational transition. He felt very strongly that he was one of those individuals who were ill prepared with no remedial solution available for his lack of readiness. As a result, he was adamant that higher learning institutions should make sure that all undergraduates are totally informed and working out of the same playbook.

> I think the university should have a 2-hour lecture to watch a professor just to see like this is an example of a lecture that you will be tuning into. I think the university should have explained labs better, the number 1 thing they should have done, they should explain how it works, the whole system, they should explain how major and minors work because yes it's arbitrary to explain to kids that already know but if there are one-hundreds kids, ninety-nine people out of the hundred people know but that one doesn't, and it's kind of good to just refresh it, so everyone know so you are helping him and refreshing it for everyone else which I don't see as a negative thing but a positive.

Literature suggests many first-generation working-class students are unprepared academically with the necessary skills to aid in their success in higher education (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Rubio et al., 2017; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). This was the case for most of my first-generation working-class participants, but not for Janice. She talked about being an independent learner, and how that benefitted her advancement into higher education, which allowed for a smoother transition for her. She did talk about how she was fortunate that she was an independent learner because she was concerned that those individuals who were not as self-independent and self-motivated as she could get a rude awakening in their transition to higher education. She acknowledged that without these skills, her

success and experiences in post-secondary studies would have been significantly different. For many first-generation working-class students, who are not independent learners it can make for a difficult transition to higher education.

> In University, they are so busy they are not going to individually email. I just work that well I'm more independent. I think for people who are not so much like that like who need that extra guidance that jump would have probably been not the nicest thing for them. If they're not good at time management or organized they wouldn't have that professor telling them "oh this assignment is due, or you have this quiz" so I think that's like what's not taught when you make this jump. You're on your own, not in a bad way but like in a good way whereas you need to build those skills. I think if I didn't like to do that in high school, if I didn't prepare myself and make sure I'm on my own time that I don't have any teacher coming out to me. I think then if I wasn't like that like I would have been hit with University little bit harder like I think that bridge [between high school and higher education] would have been not as easy.

Joey talked in detail about the difficulty in "making connections" with other students in higher education. It was difficult for him to connect with other students as a first-generation working-class student because he felt he had less in common with his peers. He felt that he was looked down upon by his upper- and middle class peers.

> I struggled more with not making friends but holding connections cause it's when you talk to someone who explains their dad's a millionaire or they have a 95% average, it's not me that doesn't want to befriend them cause I do want to be friends with these people. They look at me and ask, "what do your parents do?"

and I'm honest with them and they are like "oh okay", and then I'm like well

there goes another person I could have been friends with.

For Joey, there was another social aspect of higher education that also needed to be navigated thoroughly besides the need to adapt to the new environment. He felt that this difficulty in "holding connections" was due in great part to the class discrimination that was evident in higher education amongst the different social classes. He noted the tremendous struggles he encountered when trying to foster relationships with his peers in education.

You don't realize when you go to university, there is obviously discrimination based on gender, race but also big class discrimination. I would say it may be the biggest discrimination cause you look at someone, you know nothing about them but as soon as you tell them your story, they drop you like it's nothing. That was definitely a big factor like my class quote-on-quote, people didn't acknowledge me or care to talk to me cause they were having fun with their all their friends that were like them.

The transition to higher education through adaption and navigation can be very difficult for any student but especially for a first-generation working-class student who lacks familial role models to guide them through the new environment. This new environment entails many different obstacles to overcome such as the campus environment, campus climate, student-to-student relationships, substantially bigger workload, and the format of higher education. It is important that the transition from high school to post-secondary education be as smooth as possible not only to alleviate numerous stressors, but to help students better adjust to the different learning outcomes of higher education.

Theme 5: Financial Burden of Higher Education

One of the biggest challenges and concerns for first-generation working-class students is how to afford the fixed costs of post-secondary tuition and the variable costs of education. These students often come from low SES families that expect their child to find a way to earn money to help pay for higher education as they do have the financial means to support them (LaPeer, 2020). First-generation working-class students discussed the financial hardships that they had to overcome to attend higher education and, in some situations, find employment to stay enrolled throughout their degree.

Economic capital refers to property, money and other assets acquired. According to Bourdieu (1986), the privileged groups such as upper- and middle-class students have access to higher amounts of economic capital as opposed to working- and lower-class students. The privileged groups strive to continue to stay at the top of the social pyramid by allowing those who are privileged to stay privileged and those who fall below continue to stay at a disadvantage to their counterparts (Liou & Chang, 2008).

Participants were asked sequentially, "Did you find there were supports and resources available to support you as a first-generation working-class student in post-secondary studies?", and "Do you feel you had any additional barriers/hardships in post-secondary studies as first-generation working-class student than compared to your counterparts (upper- and middle-class students)?". Monica viewed higher education as an investment for her future. She saw the value regardless of it being costly and its importance in that obtaining a post-secondary education will pay dividends in the end. She discussed also having to balance both post-secondary studies and working a part time job to afford her tuition and other costs.

Ever since I've started, I really have viewed it as an investment into my future, it's obviously very costly journey. It's been a very important experience in my life. I find cause I have been able to balance school and working part-time, and seeing the world in that perspective, to fund my own education. It's been really rewarding so far, I really enjoyed the experience but yeah like I said it's an investment.

Though the cost of higher education is initially so substantial, many students attend with the goal of future social advancement and financial compensation. For Ross, post-secondary education was a costly experience, but he felt it was a necessary and compelling step for success in his future career.

I want to be honest, it's not just about science or getting more knowledge maybe financial goals is the main part of me pursing post-secondary education.

Janice discussed what she called the "big issue" or the extremely high cost of post-secondary tuition. These high costs of tuition are an additional barrier for disadvantaged populations such as first-generation working-class students to access and complete a post-secondary degree. These students are being asked to make life altering decisions about completing secondary education at 17-18 years of age. These students are expected to be prepared to handle the cost of not only tuition, but the other compulsory costs of post-secondary studies.

I think that's a big thing a big issue too like why tuition is still this crazy I think that's the huge thing and I know that's very like a controversial topic.

First-generation working-class students are usually responsible for paying for their own post-secondary studies. This may require finding multiple jobs, which usually takes them

away from their ability to focus on their studies. Monica discussed this struggle as she faced the hardships of trying to fund her post-secondary education. She had to work two jobs and took on multiple loans to make ends meet. She explained that having the two jobs caused her to lose her entrance scholarship in first year and that made it much harder to access enough money to attend school. Monica explained in detail the detrimental effect this had on her grades and deemed it to be the "biggest struggle" that she had to overcome while attending post-secondary education.

> At one point, I had to work two jobs, and I had to take a loan, and I had OSAP. In my first year, my grades were not good enough to maintain my scholarship, so I lost my scholarships, and it was something I was really depending on to help me out with paying my way. I ended up having to work two jobs which was even worse for my grades so, I was not able to focus on my work. That was that the biggest struggle trying to work two jobs with school.

Likewise, as with Monica, Phoebe also experienced the struggles of being responsible for her own post-secondary tuition. Phoebe fought to overcome her financial barriers to higher education by working several jobs throughout the year and in the summer. This caused her to feel that she was struggling in her courses on top of her financial obstacles. She also grappled with the acceptance that many of her middle- and upper-class peers were not going through the same challenges of financial support that she did. She mentioned the Ontario School Assistance Program (OSAP) to which she is greatly appreciative to have that as partial support to assist, realizing the bottom line is that OSAP is a loan. Phoebe remarked that at the end of her post-secondary education regardless of if she is able to find a job in her field, the money that OSAP loaned her will

be due to be paid back. This results in an additional stressor for first-generation working-class students as OSAP is only a temporary solution to the financial barriers of higher education.

> One of the main things that comes to mind is like I'm paying for my tuition by myself and so I work like the past 2 summers as a camp counsellor and then like I got to work like 3 jobs during the year so I could pay it. I know for a fact that most of my peers don't struggle with that because they're getting most of their help from their parents or like OSAP. OSAP is helping me too but look at the end of the day the loan money that I'm paying is coming from me. The other thing is I'm so struggling in math, and I feel like I'm having a hard time taking care of my financial needs especially with COVID-19 but it's really hard to find a job now I got laid off. Struggling financially and now struggling in some of my courses.

Rachel discussed the struggles associated with attaining financial support and overcoming her own personal financial struggles. She talked not only about paying for the tuition itself, but all the other costs associated with higher education such as living and residency costs. The fixed expenditure does not consider the additional financial responsibilities such as paying for their living arrangements, groceries, or a meal plan. It also does not include parking for your vehicle, textbooks, school supplies, and technological supplies that are necessary to be successful in higher education. She also discussed her biggest disadvantage of OSAP. OSAP takes into account your parents' income until you are four-years out of high school, regardless of whether your parents are willing or capable of contributing to your finances for post-secondary studies. OSAP assumes that parents of students will be supporting their children financially based solely

on their income. Rachel's parents were not able to support her financially which made the OSAP program not very helpful in financially supporting her at this point in her academic career.

> Again, financially struggles, my family had our own personal struggles. Financially getting the funds to go to school and I stayed in residence my first year. The OSAP application they take into account your parents' income so even though my parents' income was okay that wasn't money that I had for school so getting the grants and the loans that I needed was a little bit tougher for the first few years so that was definitely something difficult that I had to work out in transitioning to higher education.

Emily discussed the additional hardships that are correlated with the financial struggles of higher education. She aspired to attend a post-secondary institution outside of her hometown. Due to the additional costs from tuition such as residency, food, textbooks, parking, and so on, it seemed not to be feasible for her to attend a post-secondary intuition outside of her hometown. She felt very overwhelmed in comparison to her counterparts who did not have to overcome these same financial barriers that she had in accessing higher education.

> I feel like for me it was kind of a struggle because I wanted to go to like a school like out of my city like what do you call like I wanted to go to University B or University A. I was trying to apply there but because first of all it would be way too expensive for me and I couldn't afford like the living expenses. The expenses I guess that would be my biggest barrier for not being able to go to another school

or middle class or upper middle class would be able to do like easily because you know they have the money.

Emily shared in detail the various aspects of education costs that students acquire in higher education. The high costs of post-secondary education and OSAP loans made her feel that education would be a serious struggle for herself as a first-generation working-class student. She suggested that there should be accommodations available for students who need extra assistance on top of OSAP. She used the example of the importance of a laptop when you are completing an undergraduate degree. She felt strongly the need to have the monetary funds available to her to purchase a laptop and complete her heavy course workload. Emily views this as a financial barrier for first-generation working-class students, thus creating an obstacle for their ability to learn and effectively complete course material. She argued that this type of accommodation such as providing funds for a laptop is the responsibility of the institutions to provide to its marginalized students such as working-class to allow for a level playing field.

> We spend so much money on our education and it's expensive. It is expensive even with student loans, OSAP is very expensive. They should have like programs that are only for working-class people because they have already many other like struggles and things like that in their lives that they have to worry about. I feel like an education and a way to use that education like suppose like having a laptop shouldn't be an issue should be something that you have to struggle to get. If an entire family has one laptop, it's so very hard for working-class to use it because you need like access to a laptop like almost 12-13 hours a

day for undergrads. I feel like there should be accommodations like that for

working-class from the university's perspective.

The financial burden of higher education is at times overwhelming for most students

aspiring or attending post-secondary studies. For first-generation working-class students

who are usually responsible for their own payment of higher education, it can be a huge

obstacle to persevere. In some cases, these students take on multiple jobs to afford each

semester even though there are programs such as OSAP that exist to assist with paying

for higher education. Many first-generation working-class students also become

concerned with paying back the loans and the interest. This again can add to the stresses

if they cannot find a job before they graduate in their area of study.

Social capital in its broadest forms refers to three main forms: (1) resources; (2)

relationships; (3) impact of resources on relationships (Dika & Singh, 2002; Liou &

Chang, 2008). For a first-generation working-class student, it is critical that they strive to

gain social capital in each of the following forms through economic, social, and cultural

capital to ensure academic and overall success. Social capital theory considers not only

the resources these students have but also resources available through their social

relationships and networks (Wohn et al., 2013). Based on the interviews conducted and

the extant literature, first-generation working-class students must overcome much

different obstacles and hardships than the general higher education population in order to

accumulate economic, social, and cultural capital.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the value placed on post-secondary education and the importance of ensuring equitable access for all populations, including vulnerable and marginalized groups such as first-generation working-class students. Clandfield et al. (2014) claims that "University completion may now be seen as the main class divider of life chances that secondary school graduation used to be" (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 20). This further supports the literature in the importance of ensuring higher education is accessible and achievable for these students through positive parental encouragement, with support the educational team, and by social capital in the forms of economic, social, and cultural (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

In this research study, each of the eight participants who were all first-generation working-class students shared their personal stories of challenges and triumphs in their quest to access higher education. Along the way, the participants expressed their experiences and hardships with me that they had to overcome and reflected on the importance of these experiences for future first-generation working-class students. Through their diverse experiences, all of these participants agreed on the importance of achieving a post-secondary education and the need for making education more equitable through different intervention strategies.

As a researcher, using IPA allowed me to understand and explore the lived experiences of each of the participants in the study. I gained a rich and comprehensive account of their experiences as I analyzed the data which allowed me a deeper and encompassing understanding. The shift from being a descriptive to an interpretative

researcher allowed me to organize the data into common themes that were based on the experiences of the participants. Five themes that emerged from the data were: (1) The Role of Parents; (2) Influence of the Education Team; (3) Access of Information; (4) Adjusting to the Post-Secondary Environment; and (5) Financial Burden of Higher Education. These reoccurring themes in the interviews with my participants provided meaningful information on their accessibility of higher education.

In this chapter, I synthesized the answers to the key questions that guided the research, provide recommendations, and make suggestions for future studies regarding first-generation working-class students. The key research questions were:

1) What are the key factors (reasons) that influence first-generation working-class students in Windsor-Essex County to pursue post-secondary education?

Sub Questions:

a.) What is the role of personal (self) motivation as an influence in pursuing post-secondary education for first-generation working-class students?

b.) What is the role of families' motivation/support/encouragement as an influence in first-generation working-class students pursuing post-secondary education?

c.) What is the role of teachers/guidance counsellors/schools in the influencing of first-generation working-class students to pursue post-secondary education?

2) Based on the perspectives of first-generation working-class students, what are the strategies that can be used to influence and support the enrolment and success of first-generation working-class students in post-secondary education?

First Guiding Research Question

What are the key factors (reasons) that influence first-generation working-class students in Windsor-Essex County to pursue post-secondary education?

After my initial recruitment email was sent out, I received a high response rate which gave me the impression that first-generation working-class students are interested in sharing their experiences on accessing post-secondary education. In the interview discussions, participants spoke in detail about their own key reasons and factors that influenced them to attend post-secondary education. "Why did you pursue post-secondary education?" was the first guiding question I asked. As this was a personal question for my participants regarding their own experiences, I got a variety of responses. The three main influential factors shared by the participants included: (1) parental support and expectation; (2) teacher role and influence; and (3) personal motivators.

The participants acknowledged the influence of their parents' expectation or hope for them pursing a post-secondary education. All of the first-generation working-class students affirmed the ongoing emotional support and encouragement they received from their parents throughout their academic endeavours. Literature supports parental support being positive and alleviating stress for marginalized students in their transition to higher education (Sy et al., 2011). Also, many participants voiced the influential role of their teachers in supporting their decision to pursue post-secondary education. In some situations, teachers stepped in to be a mentor to these students to help them access higher

education based on their own post-secondary problem solving. According to Webb and Thomas (2015), creating strong bonds with disadvantaged students increases their engagement in academics and their overall self-esteem. The participants shared the importance of the teachers' knowledge and experiences on helping them to make decisions that their parents could not help with.

They felt comfortable talking about their own personal motivation that influenced them to pursue higher education. These motivators varied on an individualized basis. Some reflected about desiring an occupation that required a post-secondary education and others indicated a desire to pursue a specific field of interest. One participant even revealed that the negative impact of her teachers compelled her to work to disprove their prognosis about her not having the ability to attend higher education. Others mentioned that they had always wanted to attend higher education to ensure a life of success for themselves, even if they were unsure of their future plans. This is supported in the literature as a post-secondary education is viewed as a means to social advancement and economic security (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Wohn et al., 2013).

Key factors as outlined in the literature can have an impact on a first-generation working-class student pursing higher education. The factors of parental support, teacher involvement and personal motivators can lead to determining the ability of a first-generation working-class students to access higher education (Irlbeck et al., 2014). However, not all of these key factors play a role for each first-generation working-class student: some relied more heavily on factors based on their own personal situation. In this research, every participant discussed at least one of the three motivators as being instrumental in their ability to pursue post-secondary studies.

It became very clear throughout my experiences interacting with first-generation working-class students that the barriers, obstacles, and hardships that they must overcome to access and be successful in their years of higher education are still present. However, it is evident that the three factors of importance are parental support and expectation, teacher role and influence, and personal motivators for accessibility and success in higher education.

First Sub-Research Question

What is the role of personal (self) motivation as an influence in pursuing post-secondary education for first-generation working-class students?

Personal (self) motivation is a powerful and important tool. Self-motivation pushes individuals to drive to persevere in the face of hardships and obstacles to reach their goals. Many of the participants in the study communicated the importance of breaking down barriers that exist for them. The role of personal (self) motivation for first-generation working-class students was evident for: (1) building self-worth; (2) selfish motivators; (3) personal expectations; and (4) motivation from negative experiences.

In the study, one participant emphasized the importance of attending higher education as an indication of self-worth. He felt it was important to prove to others as well as himself that he was capable of overcoming barriers to achieve a post-secondary education. He found himself constantly comparing his own abilities to his counterparts. He was compelled to prove to himself that he was able, even as a first-generation working-class student, to achieve a post-secondary education. Similarly, another participant described her biggest motivator as selfishness as she wanted to be the first in her family to attain a post-secondary education. She contemplated how proud her family

would be and how rewarding it would become. Many participants shared their selfish motivators as wanting an occupation that required a post-secondary education or their interest in a particular field of higher education as driving them to pursue higher education. They felt this was selfish to desire such an expensive "luxury" that no one else in their immediate family had been able to pursue.

Goal setting was a critical skill used to motivate another participant. She explained the importance of her setting goals and achieving them. Her motivation instilled personal expectations of herself. As a result, her ambition became to attend and be successful in post-secondary education. The literature supports personal motivators as contributing to the success of first-generation working-class students accessing higher education. According to Moschetti and Hudley, eight of their 20 participants (40%) credited personal motivators compared to family and teacher/institution influence. Lastly, personal motivators were found as motivation coming from a negative experience for another participant. Many of her teachers did not believe in her ability, which she used as her motivation to prove them wrong. To prove her teachers totally wrong, she motivated herself to attend higher education.

Many of these personal motivators were supported in the literature as studied by Blackwell and Pinder (2014) who explored the motivational factors of first-generation working-class students attaining higher education. Their findings indicated three conditions as self-motivating factors to pursue post-secondary education: (a) passion and love for reading early in life, (b) feeling of individuality and being different from their siblings, and (c) wanting more for themselves in life. Personal (self) motivation proved in my research to be an effective influencer for first-generation working-class students. This

was evident in a variety of participants from self-worth to proving motivation about one's abilities. Many participants had their own personal or self-motivator that pushed them to be competent in accessing high education.

Second Sub-Research Question

What is the role of families' motivation/support/encouragement as an influence in first-generation working-class students pursuing post-secondary education?

Most participants viewed family motivation/support/encouragement as a vital ingredient to their ability to access higher education. These participants related repeatedly how their parents played a significant role by their support and encouragement in their decision to consider the prospect and continuation of the pursuit of higher education. The role played by families and parents of first-generation working-class students was described as the following by the participants: (1) promoting/placing importance on higher education; (2) providing emotional support; and (3) alleviating stress/providing encouragement.

Many participants related the importance placed since a young age on higher education by their parents and families. The parents of first-generation working-class students understood the reality of not possessing a post-secondary education, so they emphasized the significance and the benefits of achieving a post-secondary degree to their children. Some of the participants parents equated educational advancement with social advancement and economic growth. This positive outlook of higher education by parents had a lasting impact on many of the first-generation working-class students. Many of the participants accepted the same pride, dignity, and accomplishment that their parents associated with attending higher education. Some of the parents encouraged their

children to pursue a path whether in higher education or in alternative direction that was deemed right for them.

Parents and families of first-generation working-class students cannot usually provide the financial and informational support of higher education. However, they were able to provide emotional support to aid in the navigation of a post-secondary education. Most of the participants agreed through the sharing of their experiences that they were emotionally supported by their parents and families throughout their academic journeys. This importance is supported in the literature as first-year, first-generation working-class students who received more emotional support from their families had higher GPAs, were prepared more, and thrived with resiliency into their second year of post-secondary education (Roksa & Kinsley, 2018). On the contrary, some participants discussed the difficulty that their parents, who had never experienced higher education, had in trying to support them through post-secondary education.

Additionally, parental support played an important role in providing encouragement as well as alleviating stress for first-generation working-class students in the pursuit of higher education. The literature suggests that there is a correlation between the provision of encouragement and support and the management of stressors in higher education for first-generation working-class students (Chao, 2012; Sy et al., 2011). This correlation was also associated with an improvement in overall well-being of the first-generation working-class student (Chao, 2012). In my study, some participants felt they were more capable and resilient to overcome the hardships in higher education when provided with encouragement which assisted in decreasing the stress, anxiety, and undesired feelings towards higher education.

Family motivation and encouragement provided by their parents was discussed by all participants as being a motivator in their decision to pursue higher education. Participants disclosed repetitiously the roles played by family and parents as being the placement of importance on higher education, the provision of emotional support, and encouragement that assisted to alleviate stress.

Third Sub-Research Question

What is the role of teachers/guidance counsellors/schools in the influencing of first-generation working-class students to pursue post-secondary education?

Teacher/guidance counsellors/schools were commonly mentioned by many of the participants in the study. The participants described their influences and support as both positive and negative based on each individual experience. The participants described the role of teachers/guidance counsellors/schools as the following: (1) being a mentor; (2) providing guidance through informational support; and (3) instilling confidence.

Many of the participants found teachers/guidance counsellors as being someone that they, as first-generation working-class students, can look to for guidance and even strive to emulate their success while furthering themselves in academia. "Teachers can be role models who can inspire students to attend college. Specifically, minority K-12 students need to see college graduates that look like themselves" (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014, p. 55). This placed professional responsibility on members of the secondary educational team to convey the potential influence and impact that they can have on marginalized groups through mentorship. This mentorship can evidently play an important role on a first-generation working-class student's decision to pursue post-secondary education.

Another important role that teachers and guidance counsellors commonly demonstrate for first-generation working-class students is providing guidance through informational support. Many participants stated that their teachers and guidance counsellors were critical sources of information about many aspects of post-secondary studies. Irlbeck et al. (2014) found that many first-generation working-class students relied heavily on their secondary teachers to aid and guide them in making decisions regarding higher education. Participants in the study outlined the importance and value placed on informational support they received from teachers and guidance counsellors. Teachers would commonly share their own experiences about higher education at the institutions that they attended. Guidance counsellors were able to share their knowledge of higher education in terms of programs and universities that they could attend. Some participants did mention that the process with the guidance counsellor was totally overwhelming at times due to the sheer number of programs and universities available and at times the number of secondary students inundating the guidance counsellor. As a result, some first-generation working-class students felt they lacked enough one-on-one time with the guidance counsellor to make informed decisions about post-secondary education.

Teachers, guidance counsellors and schools were credited for their ability to instill confidence by many of their first-generation working-class students. This confidence correlated positively with the student's own perceived ability to be successful in higher education. Through their support and encouragement first-generation working-class students were inspired and more confident about their own abilities to be successful. Many of the participants discussed the importance of someone believing in them and

their abilities which they commonly received from members of the secondary school community.

Teacher/guidance counsellors/schools perform several important roles for supporting and influencing first-generation working-class students. The roles were described by the participants as being a mentor, a provider of informational support and a confidence instiller.

Second Guiding Research Question

Based on the perspectives of first-generation working-class students, what are the strategies that can be used to influence and support the enrolment and success of first-generation working-class students in post-secondary education?

The participants shared their own personal lived experiences and struggles that they had to overcome in the pursuit of a post-secondary education. They discussed in great detail their biggest motivators, which are personal (self), parental support, and teacher influence, and the hardest barriers, which are lack of monetary funds and informational resources they had to overcome to access higher education. During their journey, they learned more about themselves and the procedures/processes of post-secondary education. Based on their perspectives, five strategies were shared to influence and support other first-generation working-class students in the pursuit of attaining a post-secondary degree. These five strategies are: (1) accumulate a diverse support system; (2) network in higher education; (3) provide accommodations for first-generation working-class students; (4) familiarize yourself with post-secondary education; and (5) develop stress managing techniques.

The importance of accumulating a diverse support system is to guide and encourage a first-generation working-class student throughout post-secondary education. Many participants stated the importance of their support systems – informational and emotional. Participants shared their emotional support, which usually came from their family's encouragement and their informational support which usually came from their teachers, guidance counsellors, and school community. The importance of the various support systems for a first-generation working-class student is supported in the literature as each group offers different insight, experiences, and guidance (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Chao, 2012; Irlbeck et al., 2014; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Sy et al., 2011). As evident in the research and the literature, it is important to have access to both types of support, informational and emotional as both are essential in successfully accessing higher education.

The importance of "getting involved" and networking in higher education were strategies evident in the participants' perspectives. Participants discussed the need to get involved within the institution by joining clubs and groups. They also emphasized getting to know other students and professors at the institution. It was highlighted by my participants that first-generation working-class students need to not only make connections but "hold connections" with individuals throughout their journey in higher education. Literature suggests that first-generation working-class students are less involved on campus than their middle- and upper-class counterparts (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Soria & Bultmann, 2014). This would also assist first-generation working-class students in gaining more social capital by creating relationships that would provide support and assistance to them throughout higher education.

Creating accommodations for first-generation working-class students was suggested as an equalizer in the pursuit of post-secondary education. Participants thought that the use of intake surveys would aid in identifying the educational needs of first-generation working-class students. These intake surveys would then be used to provide assistance for first-generation working-class students in higher education. In this study, the accommodations discussed included financial accommodations and materials that would ensure students had access to such aids as textbooks and devices. To my knowledge, there is no literature that discusses accommodations for first-generation working-class students. With many financial burdens of higher education, every expense can make a difference when you are solely responsible for the monetary costs of higher education (Irlbeck et al., 2014). This makes it imperative for first-generation working-class students and the institutions to find methods of reducing these accommodation costs by possibly selling used textbooks or promoting discounts for laptops for university students such as Apple Education Pricing.

Participants acknowledged their own shortcomings in their own familiarization with higher education. A recurring suggestion for future first-generation working-class students was that prior to advancing to post-secondary studies more analysis and familiarization of "how the university works" should be developed. Many of the participants reflected about not understanding the structures of their programs and procedures in higher education. Literature supports that first-generation working-class students in their first year of post-secondary education lack understanding of the course expectations and the institution itself (Campbell & Narayan, 2017). By responding to

these concerns and suggestions prior to entering post-secondary education, a great deal of stress would be alleviated, and a smoother transition would ensue.

Managing of stress was talked about by the participants as a need to build and refine techniques that work best for future first-generation working-class students to use in higher education. Post-secondary education for any student is a stressful endeavour that involves work, pressure, and a cost of tens of thousands of dollars. Literature acknowledges that both first-generation working-class students and their counterparts in higher education will exhibit stress that results from living on their own for possibly the first time, adjusting to the rigors of post-secondary classes, networking with peers and faculty members, and managing their time effectively. Along the way, first-generation working-class students will face additional stressors that may involve working at a part-time job, family pressures, and additional financial concerns (Garriott & Nisle, 2017). As a solution, participants emphasized the importance of building and refining methods that can aid future first-generation working-class students in easing unavoidable stresses associated with higher education.

The five strategies suggested as solutions were based on the perspectives and experiences of the eight first-generation working-class student participants that could influence and support future first-generation working-class students to pursue post-secondary studies. These strategies are: (1) accumulate a diverse support system; (2) network in higher education; (3) provide accommodations for first-generation working-class students; (4) familiarize yourself with post-secondary education; and (5) develop stress managing techniques.

Recommendations

Based on all the first-generation working-class students' perspectives and literature review, I suggest the following recommendations.

Mentorship Programs. It is clear from both literature and interviews with the participants that it is important to create and foster relationships in higher education. Relationships with other students in the upper years of post-secondary studies can particularly assist in guiding and advising first-generation working-class students through their post-secondary studies. In order to foster these vital relationships, I suggest that upper year first-generation working-class students could serve as mentors to the first-generation working-class students. Literature suggests, "Low-SES, first-generation White students may also face unique obstacles accessing social networks because few college campuses devote programming specifically to this population" (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015, p. 239). Offering mentorship programs to first-generation working-class students could aid in offering a means of building social capital through networking and developing relationship with other students. Demetriou et al. (2017) stressed the importance of mentorship relationships for first-generation working-class students in higher education. They emphasized and highlighted the significance of mentor relationships with faculty members as well as peers (Demetriou et al., 2017). The mentorship programs within their faculty allowed the mentors to be familiar not only with the program, but also the background of the mentee. In the end, first-generation working-class students must also be encouraged to seek out and discover the presence of mentorship programs at their institution.

Academic Preparation Course. A commonality amongst the first-generation working-class student participants in this study was their agreement on the significance and value in offering an academic preparatory course that would assist in their transition to higher education. The course would offer key skills and strategies essential to the transition as well as success in higher education. Many participants mentioned the skills and strategies that needed to be developed that included time management, organization, preparation for tests, writing papers, communication, problem solving, and collaboration with others. This course would be most beneficial if offered and delivered in the first year of post-secondary studies to provide assistance for first-generation working-class students throughout their whole academics. Literature states that first-generation working-class students are commonly lacking the necessary skills and strategies in academic preparation that will assist them in post-secondary studies (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Coffman, 2011; Engle, 2007; Gofen, 2007; Irlbeck et al., 2017; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). Providing an academic preparatory course would enhance and refine the necessary academic skills and strategies and help to better prepare and break down barriers for first-generation working-class students in post-secondary studies.

Intake Surveys to Identify First-Generation Working-Class Students. Many of the participants indicated that they felt unnoticed and unseen by their peers and professors. Participants disclosed the difficulty they had getting assistance and having their needs met. Subsequently, participants suggested the need to be recognized as first-generation working-class student prior to starting higher education. Literature emphasizes that building relationships and fostering networks between first-generation working-class students and faculty members are limited (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Moschetti & Hudley,

2015; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). A suggestion was made that upon being accepted into higher education, a diversity survey should be completed to identify all first-generation working-class students. This intake survey would be used to assist the institution in reaching out and providing support to different racialized and marginalized groups such as first-generation working-class students throughout their whole journey in higher education. The intake survey would be similar to a survey to partner up roommates. From intake surveys, an understanding of first-generation working-class students would assist in identifying and helping to meet their needs throughout academia.

Suggestions for Future Research

I recommend that future research look to understand the role of each of the motivators discussed in the research (personal/self-motivators, parental support sand teacher influence) on the success of first-generation working-class students in higher education. The research conducted in this study focused only on first-generation working-class students' ability to access post-secondary studies as most of the participants are still tending to post-secondary education. By furthering the expansion of this current research, a greater understanding would be achieved of the ability to access and equally the success of first-generation working-class students in higher education. As well, the importance and significance on each of the motivators (personal/self, parental support, and teacher influence) in the pursuit of higher education could be evaluated to further understand first-generation working-class students' academic experiences.

Additional research could offer tremendous benefits in the understanding of the structures and standards of practice in universities. Today, the high importance placed on the necessity of a post-secondary education creates a burden on educational facilities and

teachers while also at the same time requiring them to provide support and encouragement to disadvantaged populations such as first-generation working-class students. Generally, the institution offers guidance and support for those disadvantaged students who ask for intervention. However, with the number of applications increasing future research will likely demand even more supports and disadvantaged group programs within the institution, which will result in a need for more structures and standards of practice in universities and specifically for first-generation working-class students. This is why we will need to provide more evidential research on how first-generation working-class students can be better supported and resourced in successfully meeting their needs for success in higher education.

Research should be conducted to give a bird's-eye view of the experiences of first-generation working-class students throughout post-secondary education. A longitudinal study of first-generation working-class students that follows them throughout their transition from secondary education until graduation from post-secondary education could offer insight into their experiences, supports available and barriers faced for first-generation working-class students. This study would allow a detailed account of the real-time experiences from start to finish associated with a first-generation working-class student accessing and being successful in higher education. The current study was conducted based on the lived experiences of the participants where a longitudinal study in real-time could provide rich accounts of their post-secondary education as well as comparative component of their years of study in higher education.

Although this study did not focus on or analyze the gender or racial differences of the first-generation working-class student participants, it was evident in the literature that

these differences cause additional barriers on top of social class inequalities. "Within any given race and gender group, those from professional families are significantly more likely to receive university offers than those from working-class families, specifically from unskilled clerical worker families" (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 19). Thus, race and gender might impact the first-generation student experiences. The literature supports this idea of gender differences as seen in Sy et al. (2011), who found that females are more likely than males to attend post-secondary education. This was further supported in Clandfield et al. (2014) claiming females are more likely to receive admission offers than males. The gender difference is also apparent in terms of support as found in Moschetti and Hudley (2008) who researched social capital through institutional support and found that females are more likely to seek out social and information support than their male counterparts. The literature also supports race differences as seen in Clandfield et al. (2014) who state that a difference exists between the racialized groups with secondary completion in addition to the social class differences. This creates a need to conduct additional research on the role of gender and race for first-generation working-class students as factors for accessing and being successful in post-secondary education.

The final recommendation is to conduct imperative research pertaining to first-generation working-class students in higher education. It is important to conduct not only more qualitative research, but also quantitative research. There was limited quantitative research conducted on first-generation working-class students which can provide statistical data on their success rates and comparisons to their counterparts. It can also provide statistical data on the gender and racial differences among first-generation working-class students. My research indicates that first-generation working-class students

are still working to break down many barriers and overcome hardships in their pursuit of

higher education in the twenty-first century. It is important to continue to explore and

expand the research, to obtain a greater understanding of the needs and supports required

for first-generation working-class students for success in academia.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

First-generation working-class students are one of many vulnerable and marginalized populations in education. For these students to access and be successful in higher education, they must overcome additional barriers and hardships than their counterparts, the middle- and upper-class students. First-generation is defined as students who are first in their family to attend higher education, whose parents or older siblings did not attend or complete post-secondary education (Clandfield et al., 2014; Engle, 2007; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Gofen, 2007; Irlbeck et al., 2014; Rubio et al., 2017). Working-class is generally defined as "those in service worker and industrial worker households, as well [as] other marginalized workers" (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 11).

The aim of this study was to present and interpret the perspectives of first-generation working-class students who reflected upon the lived experiences in their pursuit of higher education. Particular attention was given to exploring the impact and influence of three motivators, personal (self) motivation, parental support, and teacher/guidance counsellor/school influence in the pursuit of post-secondary studies. Thus, based on the perspectives and experiences of these students, strategies have been devised that can support and influence future first-generation working-class students on their journey to higher education. Current literature on first-generation working-class students stresses the importance of the contribution of parental/family support, teacher/guidance counsellors support, and the impact of the higher educational team on the overall success of these students while in higher education (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Irlbeck et al., 2014; Rubio et al., 2017).

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The literature review outlined key research pertaining to the demographics of first-generation working-class students, the significance of higher education, factors that affect access to higher education, factors that affect success in higher education, and support systems -- specifically, parental support and teacher influence. This study particularly addressed the gaps in the literature regarding the accessibility of post-secondary education for first-generation working-class students in Southwestern Ontario. Much of the research conducted was in the United States and the United Kingdom which have totally different higher education systems than Canada and Ontario. I conducted a qualitative study to understand the topic and identify recommendations for future research. In my study, the participants consisted of eight self-identified first-generation working-class students who were currently in or graduated from the same Southwestern Ontario higher education institution.

Social capital theory was used as a foundation for this research in order to understand the resources and networks available to first-generation working-class students and suggest strategies that can be implemented to increase social capital and accessibility of higher education. In the study, participants discussed the importance of availability of resources (e.g., financial, informational) and the necessity to network and utilize supportive relationships throughout their academic perspectives. The exploration of first-generation working-class students provided insight into the motivators in the pursuit of higher education as well as suggesting strategies for future students in their journey into higher education. This study allowed participants an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences, share their knowledge about post-secondary education, and

contribute to the accessibility of higher education for future first-generation working-class students.

This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) delves into the rich lived experiences of first-generation working-class students in their pursuit of achieving a post-secondary education. Through one-to-one in-depth interviews, this qualitative research investigated each of the eight participants as they shared their own journey in attaining post-secondary studies. Through IPA analysis, five themes emerged from the data: (1) The Role of Parents; (2) Influence of the Education Team; (3) Access of Information; (4) Adjusting to the Post-Secondary Environment; and (5) Financial Burden of Higher Education.

The study contributes to our understanding of the accessibility of higher education for vulnerable and marginalized populations such as first-generation working-class students. The hope from the study is that first-generation working-class students become much more knowledgeable about how post-secondary education will influence many to continue their academic journey into higher education. In addition, the hope of the study is to manifest the positive impact of families of first-generation working-class students, members of the educational team and the education system as a whole for first-generation working-class students accessing and pursing a post-secondary education. Ultimately, the hope is that the findings and recommendations of this study will increase the accessibility of post-secondary education for all social classes and disadvantaged minorities by ensuring and providing more assistance, tools, and equal opportunities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Definition of Key Terms

First-Generation Student. First-generation student is defined as a student who are the first in their immediate family to attend higher education and whose parents did not attend or complete post-secondary education (Clandfield et al., 2014; Engle, 2007; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Gofen, 2007; Irlbeck et al., 2014; Rubio et al., 2017).

Working-Class Student. Working-class student is generally defined as a student whose family is "in service worker and industrial worker households, as well [as] other marginalized workers" (Clandfield et al., 2014, p. 11).

Post-Secondary Education. Post-secondary education is the highest level of educational attainment, following the completion of secondary (high school) education. It can include apprenticeships, trades, certifications, or diplomas at different institutions, including universities, colleges, trades, or vocational schools. For this study conducted, it referred to a four-year degree at an university.

Higher Education. Another word used in place of post-secondary education throughout the research.

Undergraduate student. A student in post-secondary education who is working towards earning their first certificate, degree, or diploma.

Graduate student. A student in post-secondary education who is now enrolled in another degree that had general requirements that has been earned in the undergraduate degree.

Discrimination. Discrimination is the differential treatment of people based on groups that they belong to (Salkind & Rasmussen, 2008).

Educational Inequality. Educational inequality is the unequal distribution of resources related to education including but not limited to academic resources, financial resources, technological resources.

Marginalized Populations. Marginalized populations refer to groups of individuals that are denied opportunities to participate within society (National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, 2013).

Vulnerable Populations. Vulnerable populations refer to groups of individuals that have an increased chance to experience adverse effects due to inequitable treatment (National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, 2013).

The Education Team. The education team refers to anyone in the education field who has a direct impact upon a student and their learning that includes but is not limited to teachers, counsellors, professors, and administrative staff.

Appendix B: Interview Questions Guide

<u>Demographic Questions:</u>

1. Which gender do you identify with?

2. What ethnicity are you?

3. How old are you?

4. What year of post-secondary education are you in?

5. What program are you currently enrolled in or did you graduate from?

<u>Guiding Questions:</u>

1. How do you view post-secondary education?

2. Why did you pursue post-secondary education?'

3. What would you describe as the 'driving force' or motivation to pursue post-secondary education?

4. Is there are particular reason you chose to pursue the specific program you are enrolled in/graduated from?

5. Based on your own experiences, what are your parents' view of post-secondary education?

6. How did your secondary teachers and education system play a role in your choice to pursue post-secondary education?

7. How did your post-secondary professors help you access and navigate through higher education?

8. Do you feel like your secondary education prepared you for your experiences in post-secondary education?

9. Was there anyone or anything that could have been done to support your decision to pursue post-secondary that was not done?

10. Did you find there were supports and resources available to support you as a first-generation working-class student in post-secondary studies?

11. How was the transition process from high school to higher education?

12. Do you feel you had any additional barriers/hardships in post-secondary studies as a first-generation working-class student over your counterparts (upper- and middle-class students)?

13. From your own experience, is there anything you would change that would have better prepared you for post-secondary education?

14. What (strategies) would you suggest implementing to make a more positive post-secondary experience for future first-generation working-class students?

15. Do you have any additional comments or information you would like to add?

Appendix C: Ethics Approval

Today's Date: October 22, 2020

Principal Investigator: Ms. Kayla Paige Franco

REB Number: 38532

Research Project Title: REB# 20-178: "Phenomenological Experiences of First-Generation Working-Class Students Entering University: Motivational Factors and Teacher Influences"

Clearance Date: October 22, 2020

Project End Date: April 01, 2021

_____

This is to inform you that the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board (REB), which is organized and operated according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the University of Windsor Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants, has granted approval to your research project. This approval is valid for one year after the clearance date noted above.

An annual Progress Report must be submitted for renewal of the project. The REB may ask for monitoring information at some time during the project's approval period. A Final Report must be submitted at the end of the project to close the file.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. Approval for modifications to an ongoing study can be requested using a Request to Revise Form. Investigators must also report promptly to the REB:

a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting the conduct of the

study;

b) all adverse and unexpected events that occur to participants;

c) new information that may affect the risks to the participants or the conduct of the

study.

Forms for submissions, notifications, or changes are available on the REB

website: www.uwindsor.ca/reb. If your data are going to be used for another project, it is

necessary to submit a secondary use of data application to the REB.

Appendix D: Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Kayla Franco, I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education. I recently emailed you regarding forwarding my information about a study that I will be conducting. I am researching the lived experience of first-generation working-class students regarding their post-secondary experience (access and success).

With COVID-19 and online remote learning occurring, it is difficult to recruit participants. I have received a few confirmations regarding forwarding my information. If possible, if you could forward me email to any undergraduate and undergraduate students within your departments/faculty it would be much appreciated.

I have attached the poster to this email to give you more information about the study. I am including an incentive to students in the form of an e-gift card for their time and willingness to participate.

Thank you so much,

Kayla Franco

Appendix E: Research Poster

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

Are you a first-generation working-class student currently or graduated from post-secondary studies at the University of Windsor?

You may be eligible to participants in a research study about your experiences related to attending post-secondary education

What does the study involve?

- One 45-60 minutes in-depth one-on-one interview with the lead researcher (Kayla Franco) on your experiences on attending post-secondary education particularly focusing on personal (self) factors, teacher/school influence and parental support

- Consent to audio recording of the one-on-one interviews

- Must self-identify as a first-generation working-class student which is someone who comes from a working-class family and their parents or older siblings did not attend post-secondary education

All participants will receive a $20 Amazon gift card after completing the interview for their time and willingness to participate!

For more information, please contact Kayla Franco by email at francok@uwindsor.ca

This research has been cleared by the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board

Appendix F: Letter of Consent to Participate in Research

Title of Study: Phenomenological Experiences of First-Generation Working-Class

Students Entering University: Motivational Factors and Teacher Influences

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Kayla Franco**, from the **Faculty of Education** at the University of Windsor under the supervision of **Dr. Clinton Beckford**. The results of this study will be used for Kayla Franco's thesis work.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact Kayla Franco by email or Dr. Beckford by phone or email.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the key factors that influence first-generation working-class students in Windsor-Essex County to pursue post-secondary education. The study based on the lived experiences will explore the roles and influences of personal (self) motivation, school factors, and family aspects from the point of view of first-generation working-class students. The study will further investigate strategies to promote and support first-generation working-class students to pursue as well as during their journey in post-secondary education. Participants must self-identify as a first-generation working-class student. A first-generation working-class student is someone who comes from a working-class family and their parents did not attend post-secondary education.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1) Partake in a one-on-one in-depth interview with the researcher (Kayla Franco) on your experiences in post-secondary education particularly looking at personal (self) factors, teacher influence and parental supports. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes in length at a time convenient for you. The interviews will be audio-recorded and take place on Microsoft Teams due to COVID-19.

2) Consent to the audio taping of interviews. Audio recording will be used during the interview to ensure data is accurate during the transcription phase. This is a voluntary procedure and you are free to withdraw responses at any time by requesting that the taping be stopped. To withdraw, you must give verbal or written consent to the lead researcher, Kayla Franco. Your name will not be disclosed, and that taping will be kept confidential and securely stored by file number.

Upon completing the interviews, the audio recordings will be transcribed. The transcriptions will be sent back to the participant to member check. The process of member checking allows the participants to amend their responses to clarifying their answer. The participants will be asked to respond to email with the corrections if needed or a confirmation statement that they are satisfied with their responses. If there is no

response from the participant after two weeks, an additionally email will be sent. The PI cannot move forward with the transcripts until the participants have member checked or sent a confirmation statement. The use of read receipt on the email will help the PI to know if the participants have opened the email.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There is no intention on the part of the researcher to include any psychological or social risk to the participant. The interview is done on a volunteer basis and will be audio recorded. Due to the nature of the interviews, participants may feel uncomfortable when sharing their experiences. Therefore, participants will have the right to not respond or answer any questions they are not comfortable with. In addition, all transcriptions will be sent back for member check after interviews and transcriptions to ensure reliability and validity of the interviews. To eliminate social risks, you will be given a pseudonym in order for your name not be disclosed. There will be no personal identifiers disclosed in the study findings. As I am graduate assistant currently and have attended the University of Windsor as a student for several years, I will acknowledge any dual/multiple relationships and reassure the participants that any past relationships will not have any bearing on the research study. All data pertaining to the study will be safe guarded in a private, personal location. The information that you provide will remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone besides Kayla Franco and Dr. Clinton Beckford.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This study will expand on research on first-generation working-class students and their experiences in postsecondary education. The data from the interviews will give further insight on the supports and key influencers for first-generation working-class students. It will allow a better understanding on what institutions, teachers, parents, and first-generation working-class students can do to ensure that postsecondary education is successful and rewarding. This will allow the enrolment and accessibility of postsecondary education to become more equitable for all students as well as ensuring that they are receiving the necessary supports and tools to be successful. Although there are no direct benefits expected to the participants, it will provide you with the opportunity to reflect on your experience with post-secondary education.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants will receive a $20.00 e-gift card from Amazon as compensation for your time and willingness to contribute to this research. Compensation for the participants will be given once the commencement of the interviews are finished through email as an e-gift card. If the participants withdrawal after the interviews, they will previously be given the gift card for their participation regardless for their time. If participants withdrawal before the interviews, they will not receive the gift card as it is compensation for their time to do the interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used for reporting and your name and the school that you belong to will only be available to the lead researcher (Kayla Franco) and Dr. Clinton Beckford. However, it is possible that a person who is strongly familiar with Windsor, Ontario may be able to recognize the participants of the study. The report will be written in a manner that will minimalize this outcome. Audio recordings of the interviews will remain in a secure location in which only the researcher has access. Responses will be destroyed after January 1, 2021.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Consent for the study will be attained verbally before the study commences. The study is completely voluntary for all participants. You have the choice to refrain from answering any questions in the interview. Participants have the right to withdraw and amend their responses, without consequence, two weeks after transcription is sent to them by email. Participants will respond by sending back any changes, as well as signing the transcription. After this point, you no longer have the opportunity to withdraw from the study. Data analysis will be conducted after all interviews have been completed.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

A summary of the findings and any post-study information will be made available via internet.

Web address: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/.

Date when results are available: September 1, 2021

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: The Office of Research Ethics, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX, ext. XXXX; e-mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Kayla Franco

PLACE OF BIRTH: Windsor, Ontario, Canada

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1994

EDUCATION: Sandwich Secondary School, Windsor,
                               Ontario
                               Ontario Secondary School Diploma
                               (OSSD), Windsor, Ontario, 2012

                               University of Windsor, Bachelor of Human
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                               University of Windsor, Bachelor of
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