AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CANADIAN FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AT GRENFELL CAMPUS, MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

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Abstract

This study focuses on the experiences and characteristics of first-generation students, specifically those who enroll in a four-year bachelor level degree program. The purpose of this research is to add to the existing body of knowledge studying the experiences of Canadian first-generation students to acquire in-depth descriptions of first-generation students in an attempt to uncover common themes that may lead to further investigation and academic research. Understanding the experiences and characteristics of first-generation students during critical periods, such as the adjustment to and persistence through higher education settings, has particular implications for first-generation students during their postsecondary years and may be helpful in framing more successful experiences for these learners. Interpretations of findings from the study may lead to greater understandings that will inform and support these students in their attempts to access and experience success in postsecondary education settings.

Keywords: first-generation students; access, adjustment, and persistence in postsecondary education; early intervention strategies; social capital and cultural capital

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Chapter 1 Introduction and Background

First-generation students are those students who are the first in their immediate family to attend a postsecondary education institution (Bui, 2002; Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Warburton et al., 2001). As such, these first-in-the-family postsecondary participants must quickly learn to negotiate and navigate some well-established and deeply entrenched predetermined sociocultural realities. Thayer (2000) asserts that access to higher education has become more attainable in recent years to traditionally underrepresented groups of students, such as first-generation students. While this assertion may be true, educational stakeholders must also be wary of presuming that access to higher education confirms or even implies success in higher education settings. Thayer (2000) cautions, "Even for students from those backgrounds who do enroll in higher education, access is a hollow promise when graduation rates are far below those of students from other backgrounds" (p. 3).

Postsecondary education institutions invest significantly to attract postsecondary participants, but not all participants who access postsecondary education institutions successfully complete programs, in particular, first-generation students. Statistics gathered in the United States are staggering. For example, Pratt et al. (2017) state, "Of the millions of students enrolled in 4-year colleges in the United States, approximately 20% are first-generation college students" (p. 2). More shocking, however, is the fact that "FGCS [first-generation college students] are 71% more likely to leave college in their first year than their non-FGCS counterparts" (Pratt et al., 2017, p. 2). According to Statistics Canada (2017), more than half (54.0%) of Canadians, aged 25 to 64 had either college or university qualifications. In other words, almost half of Canadians, aged 25 to 64, are not tertiary educated, which would also mean that their children (assuming they have, or will have, children who attempt access to postsecondary education),

would be considered first-generation students. Hayes (2015) explains that an exact number of first-generation students is difficult to pinpoint in Canada because not all first-generation students identify themselves as such, but the projected number of first-generation students in Canada represents up to one-third of all students at some Canadian universities. These figures suggest efforts are needed not only to attract first-generation postsecondary participants to postsecondary education institutions, but also to retain those first-generation students who successfully enroll. Postsecondary education institutions, and educational researchers, need to pay specific and close attention to the reasons why first-generation students in particular leave. A lack of current research shows investigations into what may be done to help frame successful experiences for first-generation participants who do enroll, and ways to help them adjust and persist through postsecondary education, are needed.

Statement of the Problem

There is a clearly defined and demonstrated need for further research regarding first-generation postsecondary students (Allan, 2016; Birani & Lehmann, 2013; Bui, 2002; Engle, 2007; Grayson, 2011; Ishitani, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2013; Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1988; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Stephens et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Warburton et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2013). The qualitative approach taken in this project allowed for rich personal descriptions of Canadian, first-generation students' experiences and characteristics, specifically in a rural setting in Newfoundland and Labrador. Such information may be used to support and enhance the academic success of first-generation students and increase retention rates among these students. Furthermore, understanding the experiences and characteristics of first-generation students during critical periods, such as the adjustment to and persistence through higher education

settings, has particular implications for first-generation students during their postsecondary years, which may be helpful in framing successful experiences for these learners.

Purpose

A focus on the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students, specifically those at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland enrolled in a four-year bachelor level degree program, will add to the existing body of knowledge concerning Canadian first-generation students. The purpose of the study is to acquire in-depth descriptions of first-generation students in an attempt to uncover common themes that may lead to further investigation and academic research.

My interest in the topic stems from the fact that I was a Canadian, first-generation student. As a result, this label was, and is, of relevance to me – and was especially so during the completion of my four-year bachelor level degree. I am particularly interested in exploring the postsecondary experiences and characteristics of Canadian, first-generation students and, specifically, experiences in adjusting to and persisting through postsecondary education. Increased understanding of these experiences and characteristics has particular implications for first-generation students during their postsecondary years and may be helpful in framing more successful experiences for these learners. Furthermore, interpretations of findings from the study may lead to greater understandings of the phenomena to inform and support these students in their attempts to access and experience success in postsecondary education settings.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. What can be learned through exploring the experiences and characteristics of
    Canadian first-generation students pursuing a four-year bachelor level degree at
    Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland?

2. What are the experiences and characteristics of the Canadian first-generation students
    who participated in the study?

3. How might an increased understanding of first-generation students' postsecondary
    experiences and characteristics be informed and enhanced by research of this nature?

Significance of the Study

In addition to Thayer (2000), Engle and Tinto (2008) caution that while it is tempting to
assume progress in access to higher education has reduced disparities in college enrollment and
completion, large gaps persist in terms of access to, and success in, higher education. This is
particularly relevant for low-income, minority, and first-generation students. Accordingly, these
students are at a distinct disadvantage in overcoming barriers in accessing postsecondary
education. Further to acknowledging challenges that may be experienced in accessing
postsecondary education, the research literature confirms that students from low-income,
minority, and first-generation backgrounds who successfully enroll in postsecondary education
institutions have difficulty remaining enrolled and attaining a degree (Allan, 2016; D'Amico &
Dika, 2013; Engle, 2007; Finnie et al., 2005; Grayson, 1997; Whitehead & Wright, 2017).

While several previous studies (Bui, 2002; Engle, 2007; Finnie et al., 2005; Grayson,
1997; Thayer, 2000; Warburton et al., 2001) investigate access to postsecondary education and
success in postsecondary situations among first-generation students, more recent studies
(D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Ketrevich & Aruguete, 2017; Pratt et al., 2017; Stephens et al., 2015)
report that challenges continue to exist with access to and success in postsecondary situations for

first-generation students. Further, a close review of the literature reveals and confirms the importance of documenting the experiences and outcomes of first-generation students, and also points to a lack of description-rich qualitative research (Hébert, 2018; Hinz, 2016; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015) for this group. Quantitative studies exist (Jury et al., 2015; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Museus et al., 2017; Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Tibbetts et al., 2016; Vuong et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2013) detailing first-generation students' levels of postsecondary retention rates, success rates, persistence, perceptions, behaviours, attitudes, characteristics, and demographics. However, there are very few qualitative studies that offer in-depth analyses of these students' experiences (Cushman, 2007; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Pascarella et al., 2004; Wang, 2014; Warburton et al., 2001; Whitehead & Wright, 2017). Finally, what is known about first-generation students is largely situated in American research. For example, Spiegler and Bednarek (2013) state, "Most of the research has been carried out in the USA, more often than elsewhere with a quantitative design focus" (p. 329). In addition, few studies on first-generation students have been carried out in Canada, and more often than not employ a quantitative research design (Childs et al., 2014; Finnie et al. 2005; Finnie et al., 2014; Finnie et al., 2016; Grayson, 2011). A Canadian in-depth analysis of first-generation students has potential to make a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge on this topic. Research of this nature has considerable potential to add to available literature examining effective intervention strategies that (a) support first-generation students and (b) promote resilience and success for this group of postsecondary participants.

Conceptual Framework

Several strands of education, identity, and critical theory underscore my theoretical approach to this inquiry and provide a conceptual framework to explore discursive and dialogical

experiences and representations of Self (Freire, 1974/2013) in higher education settings. To explore specific and particular experiences and characteristics of my participants, I draw on Dewey (1938/2015) and his constructivist approach to education through experience, as well as Vygotsky (1997) who adds a sociocultural frame to development within the cognitive domain. Furthermore, humanism (Bruner, 1986; Rogers, 1969) and the cognitive and psychosocial (Erikson, 1963) authenticities of my participants are explored in sociocultural contexts found within higher education situations. Finally, to discuss and describe phenomena that emerged from analysis of the data collected, such as the experiences and characteristics of first-generation students, postmodern critical theory and Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital were employed as analytical catalysts to interpret the findings of my phenomenological study.

The philosophical underpinnings and educational theories presented frame my study in an attempt to mitigate a crisis of representation arising from uncertainty about adequately describing social reality (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). My own worldview situates my research to explore the experiences and characteristics of my participants, and their respective experiences and characteristics, through discursive and dialogical representations of Self (Freire, 1974/2013) in higher education settings. Sociocultural constructs in higher education settings are not only cognitively and psychosocially formative, but also they inform first-generation students' experiences and characteristics in higher education settings. Postmodern critical theory (Freire, 1974/2013; Giroux, 1992; Horkheimer, 1982; Van Maanen, 1995) addresses the relationships of power and influence between individuals and institutions, which underscores the socially and culturally (Bourdieu, 1986) constructed authenticities and identities of Canadian, first-generation students and informs their experiences and characteristics in my study.

Viewing my research through a critical lens allows for the exploration of oppressive forces and pressures that play a role in the formation of the particular experiences, characteristics, and identities of my participants, the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of knowledge, and the progress of cognitive and psychosocial development within particular sociocultural contexts. Postmodern critical theory and Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital will provide a language of critique, hope, and possibility (Giroux, 1992) applicable to critically examine the authenticities and realities explored in my research.

Summary of Methodology

The present phenomenological study is an interpretative, exploratory, qualitative research project. As such, I have selected Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is "a recently developed and rapidly growing approach to qualitative inquiry" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). While it is best known in psychology, "IPA is increasingly being picked up by those working in cognate disciplines in the human, social and health sciences" (p. 1). IPA is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences, which is consistent with the epistemological position of my research questions and useful in describing the ontological and axiological authenticities and realities of my participants. IPA provides a plural vision of thinking that mitigates the crisis of representation in describing social reality (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). Because my research explores the experiences and characteristics of Canadian, first-generation students, IPA as methodology presents a natural fit for this type of study.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are limitations associated with this study. One limitation is that the study only focuses on one campus of one university in Canada. There are of course many universities within

Canada with many different contextual nuances. The participants in my study are Canadian first-generation students; however, my participants are not representative of all Canadian first-generation students, nor was it my intention to suggest generalizability. The research aimed to explore and characterize the essence of my participants at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. One delimitation is that the study included the experiences of four participants. To study the phenomena in depth, the participant group for this research was designed to be in the vicinity of four to six participants in order to capture in greater detail the specific and particular experiences of this group of students. Future replication of the study with new groups of participants may also add to greater understandings of the findings reported here.

<div align="center">**Definition of Terms**</div>

First-generation Student

Peralta and Klonowski (2017) draw particular attention to the notion that inconsistencies appear throughout the literature concerning this group of students and "suggest defining the term *first-generation college student* [(emphasis in original)] as an individual who is pursuing a higher education degree and whose parents or guardians do not have a postsecondary degree" (p. 635). For the purposes of my study, and because I follow first-generation Canadian participants' experiences and characteristics pursuing a 4-year bachelor level degree at one Canadian degree granting institution, I have dropped the *college* (or American reference) and term this group of students as first-generation students while holding the same definition for this group of postsecondary participants.

American College and Canadian University

For purposes here, a Canadian university implies a higher education degree-granting academic institution, such as Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland (e.g., the

site selected for the study). In the United States, the term "college" may also be used to refer to a higher education degree-granting academic institution; however, in Canada the term "college" denotes an institution that usually has a specific emphasis, such as vocational, technical or pre-collegiate education. In Canada, the terms "university" and "college" are not synonymous. References that include the American term "college" may be included within parenthetical citations in order to remain consistent and accurate with APA 7th edition guidelines; otherwise, the Canadian use of the term "university" is adopted throughout.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This literature review draws from studies that explore the topic of first-generation students to gain a better understanding of the experiences and characteristics of first-generation students. First-generation students are at a distinct disadvantage in overcoming barriers in accessing and pursuing postsecondary education (Allan, 2016; Birani & Lehmann, 2013; D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Engle, 2007; Finnie et al., 2005; Grayson, 1997; Stephens et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Wang, 2014; Whitehead & Wright, 2017). Furthermore, Engle and Tinto (2008) caution that while it is tempting to assume progress in access to higher education has erased disparities in college enrollment and completion, large gaps persist in terms of access to and success in higher education, particularly for low-income, minority, and first-generation students. The following literature review supports the assertion that students from these backgrounds who successfully enroll in postsecondary education continue to experience difficulties remaining enrolled and attaining a degree.

Description and Critique of Scholarly Literature

Scholarly research concerning first-generation students has increasingly turned its attention to identifying facets and intervention programs that target retention of this group of postsecondary participants. Atherton (2014) summarizes three main areas of research topics regarding first-generation students, including "(a) demographics and preparation for college, (b) transition to college, and (c) attainment and persistence" (p. 824). Furthermore, Pratt et al. (2017) state there are generally three main tracks of research on retention of first-generation students. The first general area of research examines demographic characteristics of first-generation students related to high school preparation and postsecondary selection processes (Pratt et al., 2017). The second area of research focuses on added challenges faced by first-generation

students in high school to postsecondary transition, and the third area of research examines motivation and persistence toward degree completion (Pratt et al., 2017). To gain a better overview of each of these main areas of research that target first-generation students, specifically with respect to understanding personal experiences and cognitive and psychosocial characteristics of this group of students, this literature review is presented using these three main areas of research for review. In addition, a fourth area of research regarding this group of postsecondary participants is reviewed and focuses on the types of intervention strategies and programs suggested to aid first-generation students to persist and to succeed in postsecondary settings.

First-generation Students' Demographics and Preparation for Higher Education in Framing Successful Postsecondary Experiences

Available scholarly academic research provides a clear and thorough overview of the demographic characteristics of first-generation students and the challenges they face to access and to prepare for higher education experiences. For example, the United States Department of Education (2005) indicates their research generated a large body of knowledge about students who are the first members of their families to attend college. The results demonstrate that such students are at a distinct disadvantage in accessing postsecondary education. Even those who overcome the barriers and do enroll have difficulty remaining enrolled and attaining a degree. The report indicates that compared with students whose parents or guardians attended college, first-generation students consistently remain at a disadvantage after entering postsecondary education: they complete fewer credits, take fewer academic courses, earn lower grades, require more remedial assistance, and are more likely to withdraw from or repeat courses they attempt. As a result, the likelihood of attaining a bachelor's degree is lower for first-generation students

compared to their peers whose parents or guardians attended college. While the report is largely descriptive in nature, it does provide a statistical analysis of first-generation college student demographics in terms of course taking experiences among first-generation students after entering postsecondary education and specifically investigates what first-generation students study, how well they perform, and whether that performance differs from their peers whose parents or guardians attended postsecondary. The description is helpful in framing a conceptual understanding of who first-generation students are and what they are doing upon entering postsecondary education.

Reasons for Pursuing Postsecondary Education

Bui (2002) demonstrates that first-generation college students are "more likely to be ethnic minority students, to come from a lower socioeconomic background, to speak a language other than English at home, and to score lower on the SAT than are the other students" (p. 6). According to Bui (2002), these demonstrated demographic differences not only describe first-generation postsecondary participants, but also reflect first-generation students' reasons for pursuing higher education. For example, first-generation students include reasons such as pursuing higher education to help out their families to be a higher priority as compared to non-first-generation students. Furthermore, there are significant differences noted in first-generation students' first-year experiences in comparison to other students. First-generation students express greater fear of failing in college, worry more about financial aid, and feel they have to put more time into studying. While many first-generation students wish to pursue and to achieve a postsecondary education, there are many challenges that negatively impact their decision to access and to persist in postsecondary education contexts.

Educational Support

Moschetti and Hudley (2015) examine how white, working-class, first-generation community college students manage to integrate themselves, both socially and academically into college, and explain that incoming first-generation students are at a disadvantage when compared to their non-first-generation peers. The study clarifies that not all first-generation college students are from low socio economic status backgrounds and not all low socio economic status students are first-generation but that students who possess both characteristics face additional social and academic barriers based on first-generation status (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Furthermore, the study suggests because working-class, first-generation college students have limited instrumental knowledge, they are often unaware of the importance of networking to establish relationships and locate resources and that the importance of forming these relationships to obtain knowledge is further augmented since parents and guardians of these students are often unable to provide this form of educational support. The study suggests that establishing relationships can provide beneficial emotional support, encouragement, guidance and information about personal or academic decisions, and additional assistance with coursework. For example, participants in the study indicate "an absence of educational support from their parents and that financial need often required them to work extended hours and spend less time on campus" (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015, pp. 246-247) demonstrating that both socio economic status and first-generation student status confound and compound challenges faced by these students. Moschetti and Hudley conclude that white, working-class, first-generation college students do not form important relationships on campus and tend to believe it is their individual responsibility to make it through college but that strategic social networking and forming important relationships could alleviate some transitional challenges for these students. In other words, the combined lack of social and familial support towards first-generation students'

educational experiences create additional challenges for these students but that increasing social capital as a form of educational support could help to alleviate these barriers.

Pascarella et al. (2004) indicate that level of parental postsecondary education has a significant influence on the academic selectivity of the institution a student attends, the nature of the academic and non-academic experiences one has during college, and, to a modest extent, the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes of college. Level of parental postsecondary education is among the reasons cited that influence levels of educational support for first-generation students in shaping decisions and experiences regarding postsecondary education and feelings of being prepared or underprepared for postsecondary education. When compared to their classmates whose parents or guardians are college graduates, first-generation students are significantly disadvantaged in important dimensions of the college experience (Pascarella et al., 2004). For example, the study indicates the most extensive net differences in comparing academic and non-academic experiences exist between first-generation students and students whose parents or guardians both have a bachelor's degree or higher, while students whose parents or guardians have a moderate level of postsecondary education are generally quite similar to those of their first-generation classmates; however, the study indicates that by the end of the second year of postsecondary education, first-generation students may be sufficiently resilient that deficits in their college experience do not necessarily translate into parallel disadvantages in outcomes (Pascarella et al., 2004). This means that first-generation students who persist tend to derive the same general benefits from college than other students. The researchers also indicate there are marked differences between first-generation and other college students in the influence of specific academic and non-academic experiences on the outcomes of college. Pascarella et al. indicate that cumulative credit hours completed, hours studied, science, engineering,

mathematics, and technical courses taken (compared to arts and humanities courses taken),

college grades, computer use, and hours worked are statistically significant when comparing

first-generation students to non-first-generation students. Even more notable is that the study

indicates significant net differences between first-generation and other college students in the

academic and non-academic experiences of college even in the presence of controls for cognitive

development, parental income, secondary school grades, ethnicity, and sex (Pascarella et al.,

2004). The study is similar to one conducted by Reid and Moore (2008) who explore the

perceptions and attitudes that first-generation, urban college students have of their preparation

for postsecondary education. Both studies suggest lack of support from families contribute to

first-generation students' feelings of being underprepared for postsecondary education. For

example, Reid and Moore report two broad themes from the data including preparation, which

helped with college success and skills lacking for college success. The findings suggest the

importance of early planning for postsecondary education, working hard in school, reading for

pleasure, developing good study and time management skills early in the educational process,

and striving for excellence. The study notes that entry into postsecondary education and the

postsecondary educational process, including that planning and preparation among first-

generation students and others, begins well before entry into postsecondary education. Given the

suggested lack of preparedness of first-generation students and lack of support from their

families, the study suggests it is imperative that these students and their families who lack

postsecondary educational experiences and outcomes capitalize on social networking and form

relationships with teachers, administrators, school counsellors, and postsecondary educators to

help frame successful transitions for first-generation students. The social capital derived from

such experiences would help to prepare first-generation students for higher educational

experiences and alleviate some of the suggested transitional barriers that these students face upon entry into postsecondary environments.

D'Allegro and Kerns (2010) report that the success of first-generation students is different from non-first-generation students with respect to pre-college, college, and student success indicators. D'Allegro and Kerns (2010) indicate that first-generation students perform significantly more poorly than non-first-generation students and state that "students whose either parent or guardian(s) have no college credentials perform more poorly than those students whose either parent or guardian(s) have some college experience" (p. 311). Atherton (2014) supports this notion and elaborates "first-generation student status affects self-assessment of academic preparedness in the same way it affects traditional measures of academic preparedness" (p. 824). Atherton explains that the results of the study both confirm and question the literature surrounding academic preparation of first-generation college students. Atherton (2014) reports that although lower academic preparedness suggested in the form of reviewing standardized test scores, grade point average, and type of course work completed in high school of first-generation students supports previous literature, "the lack of differences for the subjective measures seems to confound both conventional thinking and some of the literature" (p. 828). This means that subjective measures such as the lack of educational support in the form of "social capital transmitted from family and friends contributes the lack of awareness to the extent that lower standardized scores and GPA might affect their academic outcomes" (Atherton, 2014, p. 828). This suggests that first-generation students may underestimate or entirely miss the importance of understanding the connection between academic performance measures and subjective measures such as feelings of preparedness for postsecondary education as well as how important social capital may be in terms of helping first-generation students feel prepared for and succeed in

postsecondary education contexts. Lack of social capital contributes to first-generation students' feelings of being underprepared and is suggested to further confound the reasons that first-generation students feel frustrated in transitioning to and in trying to persist and succeed in postsecondary contexts. The report concludes with the suggestion that the negative effects of social capital on first-generation students are a key issue that needs to be addressed by colleges to ensure first-generation students' success. Similarly, Padgett et al. (2012) report the extent to which cognitive and psychosocial outcomes affect first-generation students. The study first focuses on four cognitive outcomes including (1) a student's desire to seek and engage in purposeful cognitive activities, (2) a student's positive attitude toward literacy, (3) a student's ability to think critically, and (4) moral development and character. The study then focuses on two psychosocial outcomes including (1) a student's intercultural effectiveness dimension, and (2) six dimensions of psychological well-being (positive evaluations of oneself, personal sense of continued growth and development, belief in a purposeful and meaningful life, positive relations with others, capacity to effectively manage one's life and surrounding world, and autonomy) (Padgett et al., 2012). Findings suggest that even minimal college experience on the part of one or more parent or guardian is significantly beneficial to first-generation students' experiences in postsecondary contexts supporting the notion that the cumulative impact of intergenerational educational benefits may accrue to college students whose parents or guardians are college educated. Padgett et al. (2012) report, "Students whose parent(s) attended a college or university but did not receive a bachelor's degree were more likely to score higher across all significant cognitive and psychosocial outcomes compared to first-generation students" (p. 259). Like Atherton (2014), Padgett et al. (2012) argue findings that reinforce sociological theory and conclude that even minimal or non-degree-obtaining college experiences by one or more parent

or guardian are beneficial to first-generation students. Minimal college experiences by parents or guardians may create enough of an understanding of the value and importance of a college education that parents and guardians can transmit their knowledge in the form of educational support through resources such as personal experiences. This finding is significant because it suggests parents and guardians who have limited postsecondary experiences can still be supportive of first-generation students in terms of preparation for postsecondary situations and perhaps success in postsecondary contexts.

Social and Cultural Capital

According to Harker et al. (1990), "For Bourdieu, capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange, and the term is extended 'to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as *rare* (emphasis in original) and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation'" (p. 13). The definition of capital is very wide and may include "material things (which can have symbolic value), as well as 'untouchable' but culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority (referred to as symbolic capital), along with cultural capital (defined as culturally-valued taste and consumption patterns)" (Harker et al., 1990, p. 13). Whether discussing social, cultural, symbolic, economic, and linguistic or other forms of capital, the key facet is in understanding the system of exchange necessary to facilitate and achieve such transactions. Scholarly research on first-generation students, for example, suggests that the transfer or exchange of such forms of capital is a source of concern and contention in framing successful experiences for these (and other) postsecondary participants. In light of these assertions, quantative, as well as qualitative, Canadian research focuses on peer relationships and bonding that help frame successful experiences for first-generation students. The consensus among researchers cited is that belongingness and participation in postsecondary

social and cultural activities contribute to positive and successful postsecondary experiences. For example, Grayson (1997) explores academic achievement by comparing GPAs of first-generation students with non-first-generation students at York University in Toronto and measuring academic and social involvement types of activities. Academic involvement categories examine students' GPAs on variables including number of out-of-class contacts with faculty and staff, number of non-required academic activities such as attending guest lectures, and frequency of weekly class/tutorial/lab attendance and library visits. Social involvement categories examine students' GPAs on variables including number of clubs and/or organizations that students frequented, number of cultural activities participated in, number of hours spent on campus each week, number of times campus services were used, number of new friends made, hours per week spent with new friends, number of monthly visits to campus pubs, and participation in sports and exercise activities. In terms of academic and social involvement in postsecondary activities, the study reports that "in general, higher levels of involvement in various activities are associated with higher marks" (Grayson, 1997, p. 673). The interesting finding is that first-generation students are somewhat less likely to be involved in social activities and club involvement activities, which may negatively impact academic achievement among this group of postsecondary participants (Grayson, 1997). Birani and Lehmann (2013) share that little is known about the intersection of first-generation status and ethnicity in Canada and critically examine the academic and non-academic experiences of a set of ethnic-minority students in postsecondary institutions. Birani and Lehmann explore how bonding social capital created through close ethnic social networks such as family and ethnic campus clubs help first-generation students by providing them with comfort and consolation during a period of potential heightened habitus dislocation. Like Grayson, Birani and Lehmann suggest that first-generation

students who do not form these social bonds are at a significant disadvantage. Lambert et al. (2004) explain that parental educational attainment has a greater impact on university participation than on college participation and also suggest that both parental educational attainment and parental values towards postsecondary education are related to postsecondary participation in general. This means that parents and guardians who place higher value on education also appear to influence youths' participation in postsecondary education. Lambert et al. (2004) report, "More than twice as many youth whose parents thought postsecondary education was important went on to college or university compared to those whose parents thought postsecondary education was not important" (p. 10). More notable, however, is the fact that those students who are more socially engaged, meaning those students who participate more in both academic life and social life in high school, are more likely to participate in postsecondary education. Measures of school engagement including participation in academic life (number of hours spent on homework, schoolwork performed, impressions concerning the value of education), and social life (sense of belonging, being able to count on the support of friends, ease in making friends) demonstrate that youth who participate in postsecondary education are more likely to report a high level of academic engagement and social engagement in high school (Lambert et al., 2004). These findings suggest that positive academic and social types of activities are important in terms of who participates in postsecondary education. Furthermore, Lehmann (2007) reports that first-generation students are more likely to leave university early and that the reasons for leaving are centered on class-cultural discontinuities such as feelings associated with not fitting in and not being able to relate to other students. The paper suggests that social background plays an important role in how students experience university and ultimately how they form dispositions to either persist or drop out and that

integration at university is bound by socio-cultural variables. For example, Lehmann (2007) reports, "The first-generation students were more likely to leave university very early, in some cases within the first two months of enrollment. They were also more likely to leave university despite solid academic performance" (p. 105). Lehmann explains that the experiences of most first-generation students in this study support the notion of habitus as an open system of dispositions, but one that tends to ultimately reinforce itself. In other words, the participants in this study who made the decision to study at university present a break from their perceived social-structural confines through participation in higher education only to realize further feelings of not fitting in that serve to reinforce their perception of habitus resulting in a heightened sense of dislocation (i.e., dropping out). Grayson (2011) also argues that scholars have overlooked the problems of first-generation students and that efforts to involve first-generation students in various university activities contribute to their educational success. These examples of Canadian research direct attention to specific demographic factors pertinent to Canadian first-generation students and highlight demographic differences as a precursor to predicting preparedness for postsecondary education settings as well as persistence and success in postsecondary contexts. First-generation student status impacts feelings of belongingness in postsecondary contexts, or lack thereof, and that sense of belongingness can impact preparation for and success in postsecondary contexts.

Researchers such as Finnie et al. (2005) affirm that higher parental education tends to result in higher education levels in children suggesting that these demographic differences account for persistence and success in postsecondary environments. Likewise, Frenette (2005) also reports that Canadian research on university access suggests that parental education is perhaps the most important predictor of university enrolment. Finnie et al. (2014) address how

the background characteristics of Canadian youth are related to participation in postsecondary education in Canada. Their research affirms "youth whose parents have higher levels of education are more likely to go to PSE," (pp. 17-18) and "are more likely to choose university over college" (p. 18). The report also indicates that family income is significant and that "22 percent [of PSE aspirants] claim that finances are at least one barrier to their entering PSE" (p. 18). The results show that family income and parental education are important determinants of attending postsecondary education and "suggests that citing financial barriers is more than simply a sign of low levels of family resources" (p. 19). The researchers conclude the actual cost of a postsecondary education and the perceived value in achieving a postsecondary education may be significant deterrents for Canadian youth, yielding a "very important differentiation, with important policy implications" (p. 19). In addition, Childs et al. (2014) state, "More specifically, our results point instead to a range of cultural factors or, more broadly put, a full array of family characteristics, behaviours, and attitudes which appear to be strongly related to a child going on to PSE" (p. 22). The report indicates that cultural capital may be more significant in determining who participates in postsecondary education than financial resources. The report concludes that "removing financial barriers to PSE are likely to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for fully addressing issues of access to PSE" (p. 22). Researchers, such as Finnie et al. (2016) and Childs et al. (2014), suggest the challenge "becomes one of finding out how PSE access opportunities can be improved when cultural influences appear to be so important" (p. 22). Research, such as those empirical resources cited here, indicate not only are financial barriers significant determinants regarding Canadian youth who participate in postsecondary education, but also that cultural influences impact postsecondary education participation rates.

First-generation Students' Transition to Postsecondary Education and the Added Challenges They Face

  There is a significant amount of scholarly research that describes first-generation students' difficulties in transitioning to postsecondary education compared to non-first-generation students. The research suggests that first-generation students face additional barriers and challenges related to that transition. For example, in terms of parents' or guardians' levels of postsecondary education and its influence on first-generation students, more recent research suggests that struggles continue to persist in postsecondary for first-generation students.

Parents' and Guardians' Level of Education

  Engle (2007) suggests that a college education is considered the key to achieving economic success and social mobility and that even though access to higher education has expanded dramatically in recent years, students whose parents or guardians did not go to college remain at a distinct disadvantage. Engle explains that first-generation college students face a number of challenges that negatively affect the college-going chances of students whose parents or guardians did not complete any education beyond high school, including lower levels of academic preparation, lower educational aspirations, less encouragement and support to attend college particularly from parents or guardians, less knowledge about the college application process, and fewer resources to pay for college. In combination, these factors reduce the chances that first-generation students will participate in postsecondary education at all, and that these factors, for those who do participate, can ultimately affect their chances of earning a degree. Pike and Kuh (2005) report that while several powerful autobiographical accounts provide compelling portraits of the experiences of first-generation college students, only a handful of studies have systematically examined the experiences of first-generation students. In the Pike and Kuh (2005)

study, there are indications that a disproportionately low number of first-generation students succeed in college, and while first-generation college students are less likely to persist and graduate, little is known about their college experiences and the ways those experiences compare to the experiences of students who have college-educated parents or guardians. Pike and Kuh report that first-generation students are less engaged overall and less likely to successfully integrate diverse college experiences, they perceive the college environment as less supportive, and report making less progress in their learning and intellectual development. What's notable in this study, however, is that Pike and Kuh claim that females, minority students, students who plan to pursue an advanced degree, and students living in campus residence halls tend to be more engaged overall resulting in greater gains in their learning and intellectual development. These researchers address gaps in the literature by examining the college experiences of first-generation and second-generation students to see how their experiences affect learning and intellectual development. Pike and Kuh (2005) use the term second-generation students to refer to students whose parents or guardians earned at least one baccalaureate degree. Research suggests that first-generation students must face and overcome challenges in postsecondary situations that second-generations students do not face, and that these challenges negatively impact first-generation students' ability to persist and succeed in postsecondary contexts. While it is not impossible to overcome the barriers associated with first-generation student status, these postsecondary participants face significant challenges that other students do not.

D'Amico and Dika (2013) reveal that the primary potential barrier to the success of first-generation students is that of first-generation student status. For example, Wilbur and Roscigno (2016) consider and claim that first-generation student status characteristics such as college-specific experiences and ongoing family stressors play a significant role in college completion.

In their study, college-specific experiences include indicators of non-academic hours worked per week, reason for working in college, involvement in high impact extracurricular activities such as participating in a research project with faculty outside of course or program requirements, study abroad trips, and projects as part of regular coursework. Ongoing family stressors include how important it is to the student to live close to home during college and the number of stressful life events that have occurred during college such as parents divorcing, a parent or guardian losing a job, a parent or guardian who died, a respondent's illness or disability, a family member who became seriously ill or disabled, or a respondent who was the victim of a violent crime. Wilbur and Roscigno assert that first-generation students are more likely to be working while in college, living at home, and experiencing personal and family-related stressful events during the college years, which also significantly decrease the odds of graduating from college. These examples demonstrate factors that are related to parents' or guardians' levels of education and are suggested to be significant barriers toward persistence and success. Wilbur and Roscigno (2016) state, "These confounding and contemporaneous disadvantages are quite detrimental to college completion" (p. 9). Furthermore, Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) also report that "first-generation students struggling to maintain family ties perhaps face the toughest journey, especially when educators encourage them to demonstrate that they have made meaning of new knowledge and concepts" (p. 40). For example, Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) report "making meaning requires students to engage in critical dialogue, but many first-generation students are denied this opportunity at home" (p. 40) creating additional challenges for these students and suggesting that habitus dislocation may be beneficial in framing successful experiences for these learners. Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) explain that critical dialogue such as conversations around the kitchen table about college may end up leaving the student with feelings of disappointment

and resentment. In exploring this concept, Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) explain that groups who share the cultural values of an institution feel an immediate sense of belonging because they possess the cultural capital of the dominant groups; however, "deficient cultural capital explains problems of students who come from different backgrounds in which they did not accumulate the cultural capital needed to integrate or assimilate into the college setting" (p. 41). Further, Wang (2012) notes "[first-generation college] students experienced some challenges as mentors' messages about college and family led them in competing and often opposing directions" (p. 351), which also suggests discontinuities exist at intersections that are faced by first-generation students that may not necessarily be experienced by non-first-generation counterparts. Sy et al. (2011) also state "parental emotional support and parent informational support were significantly lower among first-generation students as compared to continuing-generation students" (p. 391). Sy et al. (2011) employ the term continuing-generation students to refer to those individuals for whom at least one parent attended college. The difficulty faced by parents and guardians of first-generation students in communicating emotional and informational support and in relating to their child's college experiences compared to parents or guardians of continuing-generation students who understand first-hand what their child is experiencing may also contribute to challenges for these students transitioning to postsecondary education.

Socio Economic Status, Classism, and Social Integration

Wilbur and Roscigno (2016) confirm that studies of first-generation college students are scarce, despite the inequalities they face in college enrollment and completion. Furthermore, the first-generation disadvantage persists even when socio economic status (SES) is accounted for. Wilbur and Rosigno (2016) state, "Those of low socioeconomic and first-generation status are surely at the greatest disadvantage, but even as SES increases, the first-generation disadvantage

is not eliminated" (p. 9). Similarly, Allan (2016) reports that perceptions of classism may explain links between social class, first-generation college student status, and academic and well-being outcomes. Allan claims being from a lower social class background and being a first-generation student are associated with more frequent perceptions of classism and lower life satisfaction and academic satisfaction.

Social integration also appears to be a resounding factor troubling first-generation students' transition to postsecondary education. Bryan and Simmons (2009) examine the role that family and other levels of influence play in the postsecondary educational success of first-generation students. Bryan and Simmons explain that first-generation participants feel close ties to both their communities and families and cite struggles in maintaining family and community relationships while attending college in a separate community. Bryan and Simmons report that first-generation participants do not always fully assimilate into the college environment. First-generation participants' attitudes towards assimilation and integration is reported to be specific and issue driven allowing them to switch back and forth between their home and university cultures (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). This means that for these first-generation students, their families aspired to fulfil significant roles in their decision-making processes. However, Bryan and Simmons (2009) report that "the majority of participants discussed the effort involved in learning and understanding the complexities of college life without having anyone at home who 'understood' these complexities" (p. 404). Most of the students expressed anxiety and sadness about their loss of connection with their family because of the family's lack of knowledge (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). Once more, research suggests that first-generation students experience significant intersectional discontinuities that create additional challenges for them with respect to their transition to postsecondary education. Similarly, Garza and Fullerton (2018)

also argue the notion that "more first-generation students than non-first-generation students acknowledge the importance of living at home while going to school" (p. 164). First-generation students admit that living closer to home was a deciding factor in their choice of university; however, the study reveals that "first-generation students improve their odds of earning a bachelor's degree if they enroll in postsecondary schools located at increased distances from their permanent residence" (Garza & Fullerton, 2018, p. 176). Further, Garza and Fullerton (2018) conclude that "increased distances between home and college may help students minimize obstacles that hinder their ability to achieve the levels of social, academic, and cultural integration in the postsecondary environment that translate into academic success" (p. 176). The results of the study support the notion that factors hindering student persistence have more to do with social, environmental, or personal circumstances than with academic ability. Likewise, Atherton (2014) suggests that lack of social capital transmitted from family and friends contributes the lack of awareness to the extent that lower standardized scores and GPA might affect their academic outcomes. The suggestion is that social and environmental factors confound challenges faced by first-generation students that may not necessarily be directly related to academic ability but that may negatively impact academic success. Atherton (2014) suggests, "The inability to understand this connection combined with lack of academic preparation can lead to frustration and difficulty succeeding in initial college courses" (p. 828). Frustration and lack of success contribute to overall difficulties in transitioning to college and ultimately to negative retention and attainment outcomes for first-generation students, which may be more closely related to a lack of social capital than to academic ability. Atherton concludes that first-generation student preparedness is a key issue that needs to be addressed by colleges to ensure first-generation students' success.

According to Wilkins (2014), both black and first-generation white men report "having positive social experiences in high school. However, while white first-generation college students were able to transport their identity strategies to college, the transition to college complicated integration and identities for black men" (p. 172). Wilkins explains that social mobility through higher education involves more than academic success and that academic success in higher education requires students to find a way to fit in, make friends, and gain the social and cultural capital needed to support academic success. Wilkins argues the question that should be asked is not whether differently situated students achieve social integration but how it happens and that understanding more about how differently situated students achieve social integration would support students challenged with transitional difficulties. Wilkins (2014) argues that "identities and identity transitions matter for academic success, social integration, and personal well-being" (p. 185). For example, Wilkins explains that white first-generation men experience fewer difficulties transitioning from high school to college in terms of negotiating high school identity strategies for college identity experiences and that black first-generation men report experiencing more difficult situations navigating social and cultural constructs. Accordingly, identity strategies are contextually constrained and facilitated by intersectional identity locations, and educational experiences matter for how differently situated students construct pathways to adulthood (Wilkins, 2014). Harper (2012) discusses black student success in higher education and directs specific attention to the transition to college while at the same time framing a response to how differently situated students achieve social integration. For example, Harper reports some black students entered higher education through summer bridge programs, which allowed them to take introductory courses, become acquainted with resources, and get acclimated to predominately white environments. According to Harper, participants

claimed that the bridge programs made large institutions feel smaller and easier to navigate. What is most notable, however, is that the bridge programs allowed participants to socially integrate themselves within the new environments responding to how differently situated students achieve social integration. What is more is that the bridge programs "allowed newcomers to interact with faculty and administrators, as well as older same-race students who served as peer mentors" (Harper, 2012, p. 12). Harper explains that the peer mentors provided newcomers with navigational insights and resources, powerful information networks, and engagement opportunities on campus all of which helped the achievers to succeed. The common theme among researchers cited is that minority student populations on postsecondary campuses such as first-generation students and black students experience intersectional discontinuities that create significant compounding and confounding challenges that are not traditionally associated with non-first-generation students or white students, specifically with respect to their transition to postsecondary education. In addition, strategies such as bridging programs and peer mentors demonstrate how social integration happens in postsecondary contexts for minority populations of postsecondary participants. These types of strategies may also benefit first-generation students.

Gray et al. (2017) also study first-generation college students' social interactions on and off campus but focus attention on microaggressions to learn how inequality is experienced, enacted, and perpetuated through daily interactions. Microaggressions are "everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostility, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely on their marginalized group membership" (Gray et al., 2017, p. 2). The study explains that microaggressions undertaken by higher social class members to protect their own status trigger

identity struggles for first-generation students through othering. Gray et al. (2017) define

othering as "a form of collective identity work in which those with higher status create

definitions that identify other groups as inferior and sustain those definitions in social

interactions" (p. 17). For example, the study reports a case where two black females taking a

women's study course were placed in a group together to work on a course assignment by a

white professor who felt the females could work together with a common identity. Both females

reported feeling the grouping to be inappropriate because of their class-based differences. The

female student feeling superior in social class insisted she alone complete the assignment

illustrating a class-based microaggression ultimately collapsing each student's sense of identity.

Gray et al. explain that identity threats and their attendant costs negatively impact college

success and perpetuate inequality for stigmatized groups; however, what is notable is that many

students demonstrate resilience in their responses to identity threats. Gray et al. (2017) report that

first-generation students, for example, use typology and identity work behaviours "to combat

microaggressions and to expiate identity threats and their emotional toll" (p. 17). First-generation

students employ behaviours such as "mining core identity strength, passing (via dodging and

code switching), and developing peer support networks" (Gray et al., 2017, p. 17) to combat

identity threats imposed by others through othering. Similarly, Jehangir et al. (2012) also explore

the extent to which participants in a multicultural learning community in the first year of college

impacts the development of intrapersonal self-authorship for first-generation college students.

Jehangir et al. (2012) discuss how students' reflection on specific experiences and critical

moments precipitate participation in the learning community and impact intrapersonal self-

authorship development. Within the intrapersonal dimension, Jehangir et al. (2012) report, "first-

generation students in the crossroads phase demonstrated a growing awareness of their strengths

and weaknesses as learners and individuals and the recognition of voice as a powerful tool for self and others" (p. 279). Jehangir et al. also report that many students participating at this phase in the learning community would demonstrate their ways of coping with the dissonance by showing emotions including anger, frustration, and confusion. What is interesting is that over time, these students were able to give meaning to those emotions, which facilitated movement from the crossroads phase toward self-authorship (Jehangir et al., 2012). First-generation students who participate in meaning making about their identity based on deconstructing personal experiences in the context of knowledge and regularly practice self-reflection to inform choices eventually lead themselves to opportunities for multicultural engagement and that with time, first-generation students' life choices and actions can reflect congruence among their multiple identities (Jehangir et al., 2012).

Adjustment to Postsecondary

Wilbur and Roscigno (2016) state, "College-specific experiences (i.e., involvement in extracurricular activities) and particularly high impact curricular activities (i.e., study abroad, research with a faculty member) have quite a strong impact on the likelihood of graduating" (p. 9). However, first-generation students are uniquely and significantly less likely to be involved in extracurricular and high impact activities and are more likely to work longer non-academic hours for pay, live at home, and experience personal and family-related stressful events (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Likewise, Gibbons et al. (2016) explore the perceived barriers and supports to college adjustment for first-generation students and discuss how first-generation students prepare for and succeed in postsecondary education. For example, Gibbons et al. (2016) report the complexities first-generation students face in adjusting to college such as "self, academic adjustment, balance, and self-care" (p. 15). Participants in the study report self growth (gaining

independence and developing a personal and professional identity), academic adjustments (managing expectations, meeting deadlines, and seeking assistance to succeed in coursework), balance (feeling torn between visiting home and focusing on school), and self-care (having healthy sleep patterns, properly managing money, and maintaining physical health) as factors relating to and contributing to overall adjustment to and satisfaction with college (Gibbons et al., 2016). Participants describe initial difficulty and eventual satisfaction related to increased functioning in these areas. The study suggests the need to prepare students going into college and to support students during college to successfully navigate these adjustments for first-generation students. Additional complexities and difficulties are experienced by first-generation participants in adjusting to college including managing time, meeting deadlines, balancing multiple responsibilities, learning how to study effectively, balancing home and school responsibilities, negotiating difficulties associated with explaining college life to their non-college educated families, and developing their own unique identity as a result of being in college (Gibbons et al., 2016). However, in terms of negotiating these barriers and using supports to overcome these challenges, participants in the study explain that while family could provide emotional and tangible support mechanisms to alleviate these burdens, family lacked the ability to provide concrete information on college-going (Gibbons et al., 2016). As a result, first-generation students preparing to go to college "felt unprepared for the many changes facing them and uniformed [*sic*] that college would be so different that [*sic*] high school had been for them" (Gibbons et al., 2016, p. 16).

A more holistic picture of challenges faced by first-generation students is beginning to emerge and is documented in a significant number of research reports that describe first-generation students' difficulties in transitioning to postsecondary education. Compared to non-

first-generation students, first-generation students not only face additional barriers and challenges related to transitions to postsecondary education, but also that these transitions appear to be in direct correlation with their first-generation characteristics impacting their transitions to postsecondary settings and affecting their postsecondary experiences. These are significant findings that point to the challenges first-generation students experience related to persistence and degree completion based on first-generation student status and parents' or guardians' level of education.

First-generation Students' Persistence and Degree Attainment in Postsecondary Contexts

Museus et al. (2017) report that low rates of student persistence and degree completion are a major concern of colleges and universities across the United States. Furthermore, Museus et al. (2017) state that "of all incoming students enrolled at four-year institutions in 2005, less than 60% completed their bachelor's degree within six years" (p. 187). While Museus et al. do not specifically investigate first-generation students, as their study reports on ethnic minority populations as disadvantaged participants of postsecondary campuses, it may be safe to deduce that first-generation students are included within these minority populations as several studies indicate that many first-generation students make up ethnic minority subgroups on postsecondary campuses. For example, Gibbons and Borders (2010) report first-generation students contain more minorities, Havlik et al. (2017) indicate themes emerging in their data including a sense of otherness according to students' race, ethnicity, and first-generation and socio economic statuses, and Jehangir et al. (2012) discuss the browning of America that includes not only students of colour but also women, multilingual students, low-income participants, immigrants, and first-generation students. As many ethnic minority populations on campus are also first-generation students, these research findings may also be helpful in suggesting beneficial frameworks for

first-generation students. Museus et al. (2017) report on the importance of analyzing the relationship between institutional environments and students' outcomes as well as on "the importance of examining the types of campus environments that have a *positive* [(emphasis in original)] influence on college students' experiences and outcomes" (p. 208). These suggestions may be practical and useful assertions for first-generation students' academic persistence and success toward degree completion as well.

Experiences and outcomes of first-generation students are demonstrated in the literature as significant factors that need to be addressed in order to analyze this group of learners. Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) examine the postsecondary experiences and outcomes of first-generation students relative to their peers. Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin sought to complete an overview of the demographic, aspirational, and enrollment characteristics of first-generation and non-first-generation students to compare the persistence and attainment rates of the two groups. In comparison to their non-first-generation peers, first-generation students are more likely to be older, have lower incomes, be married, and have dependents than non-first-generation peers. Furthermore, Warburton et al. (2001) report that parents' or guardians' levels of education are associated with rates of students' retention and persistence in college even when controlling for measures of academic preparedness. Warburton et al. report a relationship between parents' or guardians' education level and the likelihood that students would undertake a more rigorous high school curriculum and, consequently, enroll, perform well, and persist in four-year postsecondary institutions. Warburton et al. also report that first-generation status has a negative association with students' academic preparation and persistence. For example, parents' or guardians' level of education are found to be associated with rates of students' retention and persistence in college, even when controlling for measures of academic preparedness such as

rigor of secondary curriculum and college entrance examination scores. Ishitani (2006) echoes these findings through investigation of attrition and degree completion behaviour of first-generation college students. Ishitani (2006) states that "although substantial benefits associated with postsecondary education exist, certain groups of individuals are less likely to attend and graduate from American institutions of higher education and enjoy these benefits" (p. 862). The report states that rates of educational attainment vary across racial groups of students and first-generation students. Based on these findings, Ishitani suggests that first-generation students are at the highest risk of departure during the second year, followed by the first year, and that these students are also 51% less likely to graduate within four years than students with college-educated parents or guardians.

Intervention Strategies and Programs that Help Frame Successful Transitions and Experiences for First-generation Students

There is significant overlap in defining first-generation characteristics, reporting challenges this group of students face, and that combined, these factors discourage degree attainment and even persistence in postsecondary participation for this group of students. Several reports discuss and encourage intervention strategies and programs geared to facilitate successful transitions for first-generation students. The consensus among researchers cited is that arming first-generation students with strategies that help them to overcome such difficulties that discourage persistence and degree attainment is beneficial. For example, Demetriou et al. (2017) examine "the lived experiences of students to explore how developmental situations in college are experienced by the people who participate in them" (p. 32). The findings of this study take account of the activities, roles, and relationships of successful students and provide insight into how students can meet their potential in college environments. Successful first-generation

college students actively engage in coursework, participate in undergraduate research, travel abroad, participate in student organizations, and engage in community service, they take on roles such as undergraduate, researcher, and employee, and they form important academic, peer, and employment relationships, each of which contributes to forming positive and successful experiences for first-generation students. Demetriou et al. (2017) describe positive experiences and outcomes of first-generation students regarding how "optimal academic functioning has provided a snapshot of flourishing students who are fulfilled, accomplished, and learning" (p. 33). Furthermore, Demetriou et al. (2017) argue "describing optimal functioning is important because students will not flourish if [they] simply cure pathology and eliminate behavioral and emotional problems; rather, flourishing requires building and capitalizing on human strengths and capacities" (p. 33). In other words, *cure-all* or *one-size-fits-all* approaches in finding solutions to the challenges facing first-generation and other minority students is not sufficient enough; for students to truly grow, develop, and flourish, conversations and exchanges need to encourage optimal functioning of these students within higher education contexts.

Activities, Roles, and Relationships as Support Systems

Stephens et al. (2015) report that brief interventions can benefit disadvantaged students. Similarly, Williams et al. (2013) explain that a lack of belongingness may lead to lower academic achievement, school dropouts, and less school involvement among first-generation college students. Jenkins et al. (2013) agree that first-generation students who report less social support from family and friends, more single-event traumatic stress, less life satisfaction, and marginally more depression symptomatology are less likely to succeed academically. Accordingly, Katrevich and Aruguete (2017) conclude that low academic and social integration of students may be used as a barometer indicating the need for intervention programs that

provide positive and supportive relationships to first-generation students as mechanisms that provide assistance for success in postsecondary educational institutions. In response to these findings, Wang (2014) explores student-teacher interaction, student-teacher relationship formation and development, and the ways in which student-teacher interaction and relationships facilitate support and persistence for first-generation students during the transition to college. Wang suggests that teachers play a pivotal role in helping facilitate first-generation students' academic and social integration. Student-teacher relationships, and in particular, interpersonal student-teacher relationships, are seen to help first-generation students overcome the challenges they face.

Garriott and Nisle (2018) examine links between stress and academic outcomes among first-generation college students and conditional indirect effects of stress on perceived academic goal progress for first- and continuing-generation students. Garriott and Nisle suggest that institutions can provide interpersonal and relational supports as a means to alleviate conditional effects of stress for first-generation students. Interpersonal and relational support mechanisms may be a particularly important variable in terms of overcoming the link between stress and perceived academic goal progress for first-generation students. Garriott and Nisle (2018) explain that "access to supports such as helpful teachers, mentors, tutoring services, as well as a sense there are others 'like them' on campus may explain why stress is negatively associated with perceived academic goal progress in this student group" (p. 445). Similarly, Means and Pyne (2017) discuss the importance of perceptions of support systems, such as interpersonal and social forms of support, for first-generation students. Means and Pyne suggest that student organizations can support students' sense of belonging and integration into higher education, specifically social identity-based student organizations, social identity-based centers on campus,

faculty members, and learning centers. Means and Pyne indicate that first-generation students find these support structures made them feel like they mattered and that these structures are a critical component to feeling a sense of belonging. Means and Pyne explain that helpful support structures include faculty having positive attitudes and the willingness to scaffold student learning, student affairs educators and advisors willing to provide support to students, and institutional need-based scholarship programs that allow students to develop positive relationships with peers when they feel isolated or invisible in other places on campus. Likewise, Melzer and Grant (2016) indicate that there are social support needs and dispositional issues that impact academic outcomes in first-generation student populations and that these needs can be addressed through administrative support for increased emphasis on career counselling and greater social and emotional supports through mentoring programs. Career counselling and guidance can address belief distortion, improve goal setting, and facilitate better decision making, and that it is also important to involve professors in incorporating specific classroom strategies to improve self-efficacy (Melzer & Grant, 2016). Strategies that help to improve self-efficacy may include activities such as completing a learning style inventory so the underprepared students can examine their strengths as well as weaknesses or providing mentoring opportunities for students (Melzer & Grant, 2016).

Institutional Support Systems

Research also points to the importance of institutional support systems that encourage first-generation students' academic persistence and success. For example, Palbusa and Gauvain (2017) examine parent to student communication about postsecondary experiences and suggest improved communication systems could contribute to overall postsecondary persistence and success. Palbusa and Gauvain (2017) report minimal differences in how frequently non-first-

generation and first-generation students spoke with their parents or guardians about college, but that "non-first-generation students found these conversations more helpful and of higher quality than first-generation students, and higher quality was related to higher first-year GPAs for these students" (p. 110). Palbusa and Gauvain share that non-first-generation college students are more likely to view their parents or guardians as instrumental, rather than emotional, resources about college; however, parents and guardians of first-generation students are not altogether despondent as first-generation students may still benefit from their parents' and guardians' emotional support while they prepare for college. These findings support the need for institutional support systems for first-generation students because support systems, and specifically meaningful conversations about postsecondary education and educational experiences, are lacking at home.

Clauss-Ehlers and Wibrowski (2007) share that if educators and psychologists gain greater understanding of the processes that promote resilience in youth, they will be in a better position to support strengths and coping. Educational resilience is one line of inquiry that refers to "students who despite economic, cultural, and social barriers still succeed at high levels" (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007, p. 574). The implication is that educators need to explore not only how first-generation students perform during and after college, but also what can be done while students actively engage in the educational process, which includes intervention strategies such as involving students as mentors and encouraging student interaction and dialogue (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007). These types of activities seem to encourage resilience in youth and support strengths and coping mechanisms that frame successful educational experiences for these students. Furthermore, Clauss-Ehlers and Wibrowski claim that students with more social support and a greater sense of self-efficacy are better able to cope with stress. However,

consideration of how programmatic and other forms of institutional support efforts that promote social support, resilience, and ethnic identity that can have a positive impact on the experiences of first- and second-generation college students is missing from the literature. Clauss-Ehlers and Wibrowski report that social and cultural capital are most notable forms of support, but that different varieties of help must be distinguished in order to understand what is helpful about some forms of social contact. For example, the study reveals that counsellors, program administrators, and faculty significantly contribute to an increase in sense of social support, while support from family and friends does not (Clauss-Ehlers & Wibrowski, 2007). The study suggests that more research be undertaken to uncover what is helpful from positive forms of support and how to implement them. Consistent with this research, Hébert (2018) reports that resilience informs understandings of high-achieving, low-income students and that multiple protective factors positively influence academic success among first-generation students including "internal locus of control, above average cognitive ability, strong work ethic, self-confidence, supportive teachers, effective use of support systems, high parental expectations, religious involvement, and engagement in extracurricular activities" (p. 106). In other words, highly effective means of support are reportedly institutional in nature rather than familial or peer related further highlighting the importance of institutional support structures for first-generation students.

Havlik et al. (2017) sought to illuminate the experiences of one successful first-generation college student population persisting in a private predominately white institution to explore and better understand these experiences and to glean understanding of the challenges as well as any strengths that allowed the successful participants to overcome such challenges. Havlik et al. (2017) premise their research on the fact that "FGCS often lack the social and

cultural capital of their non-FG peers and thus are less informed during the college search and selection process, as well as less adept at academic and extra-curricular decision-making while attending college" (p. 2). Havlik et al. discuss that a main finding reflects students' experiences of feeling othered due to peer and faculty responses to their first-generation, racial and ethnic, and socio economic statuses and that first-generation participants cited sources of motivation and strength in overcoming these challenges, such as ascribing a greater purpose to completing their schooling in order to achieve something better for themselves, their families, or their communities. Havlik et al. also report first-generation college students draw upon personal strengths of perseverance, pride in personal identities, and the ability to seek out and obtain support from individuals around them to better navigate the college-going process. To alleviate these challenges, Havlik et al. suggest that institutional supports, such as those in the form of retention professionals, can work to ensure that first-generation students have relational networks that support rather than hinder these students. Another important motivational characteristic that potentially could benefit postsecondary participants feeling othered, such as first-generation students, includes the Pygmalion effect. The Pygmalion effect refers to the notion that "people do better when more is expected of them" (Boser et al., 2014, p. 1). The report indicates that college-preparation programs that support higher expectations of high school students are significant predictors of college graduation rates. The theory may be applied to first-generation students as well who feel othered when interacting within predominantly traditional spaces, such as higher education spaces. Such institutional support structures facilitate student engagement and motivation that also foster connections to campus environments and encourage peer-to-peer, faculty, and administrator relationships, which encourage student success and persistence.

Similarly, Hinz (2016) examines the experiences of a group of first-generation, working-class college students. Hinz suggests first-generation students may be divided into those who still identify with the working class and those who identify with a middle class or higher. What is notable is that those who identify with the working class and those who identify with a middle class or higher do not choose loyalty to just one class while rejecting the other. In other words, there appears to be a sense of fluidity among first-generation students' sense of identity formation during this critical juncture. As such, and consistent with Havlik et al. (2017), Hinz concludes that the right coursework, role models, and peer support can generate a more positive experience with respect to class transitions during this time. Institutional support mechanisms combat challenges traditionally faced by first-generation students that can alleviate persistence and resilience barriers, such as difficulties in negotiating class-loyalty transitions, and can create positive experiences for first-generation students.

Schademan and Thompson (2016) also focus on two central aspects of faculty and student experiences including beliefs about first-generation, low-income students' levels of college readiness and the pedagogies and practices that enable instructors to serve as cultural agents for their students. Schademan and Thompson (2016) also find that faculty can have a major impact on student experiences and that "the role faculty play in affirming students' cultural identities and helping them to navigate the academic demands of the classroom is also critical" (pp. 195-196). In these instances, faculty could again introduce pedagogies that support the Pygmalion effect into classrooms that proliferate motivational characteristics of first-generation students. Finally, Tibbetts et al. (2016) affirm that their research advances understandings of values affirmation and the potential for improving the performance of first-generation students with values affirmation interventions. Tibbetts et al. (2016) define values

affirmation as "affirming core personal values to establish a perception of self-integrity and self-worth that, in turn, alleviates stress and helps students address challenges" (p. 636). Tibbetts et al. (2016) report that values affirmation interventions "can induce long-term benefits for students' academic performance" (p. 655). In other words, institutional supports such as supportive pedagogies and practices that encourage applications such as values affirmation interventions and that support positive motivational attitudes inside classrooms may also be beneficial to first-generation students.

Limitations in the Existing Research

There is a clearly defined and demonstrated need for further research regarding first-generation postsecondary participants (Allan, 2016; Birani & Lehmann, 2013; Bui, 2002; Engle, 2007; Grayson, 2011; Ishitani, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2013; Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1988; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Stephens et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Warburton et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2013). A review of the literature reveals and confirms the importance of documenting the experiences and outcomes of first-generation students, and points to a lack of description-rich qualitative research for this group. Quantitative studies exist detailing first-generation students' levels of postsecondary retention rates, success rates, persistence, perceptions, behaviours, attitudes, characteristics, and demographics; however, there are few qualitative studies that offer in-depth analyses of these students' experiences (Cushman, 2007; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Pascarella et al., 2004; Wang, 2014; Warburton et al., 2001; Whitehead & Wright, 2017). Additionally, what is known about first-generation students is largely situated in American research. Spiegler and Bednarek (2013) state, "Most of the research has been carried out in the USA, more often than elsewhere with a quantitative design focus" (p. 329). Furthermore, few studies on first-

generation students have been carried out in Canada, and more often than not employ a quantitative research design (Childs et al., 2014; Finnie et al. 2005; Finnie et al., 2014; Finnie et al., 2016; Grayson, 2011). A Canadian in-depth analysis of first-generation students has potential to make a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge on this topic and the potential to fill such gaps in the literature that would include effective intervention strategies that support first-generation students and promote resilience and success for this group of postsecondary participants.

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed has set a foundation to understand who first-generation students are and what challenges exist for them. First-generation students' demographics and characteristics have been shown to negatively impact their postsecondary experiences in terms of the unique set of challenges they face from preparation for postsecondary education, transition to postsecondary education, and in persisting through postsecondary education to earn a degree. Chapter Three will outline the methodology used to guide a study exploring the experiences and characteristics of four Canadian first-generation students attending a small liberal arts university campus in a rural setting in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Chapter 3 Methodology and Methods

The overarching goal of this study was to explore the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students, specifically those pursuing a four-year bachelor level degree program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. In response to identified gaps in recent literature, my study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. What can be learned through exploring the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students pursuing a four-year bachelor level degree at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland?

2. What are the experiences and characteristics of the Canadian first-generation students who participated in the study?

3. How might an increased understanding of first-generation students' postsecondary experiences and characteristics be informed and enhanced by research of this nature?

IPA as Methodology

As my research questions were exploratory in nature, I chose a qualitative approach to designing this research. Purposefully, I chose to conduct interpretative, exploratory, qualitative research. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, or IPA, is "a recently developed and rapidly growing approach to qualitative inquiry" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). While it is best known in psychology, "IPA is increasingly being picked up by those working in cognate disciplines in the human, social and health sciences" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). Specifically, IPA is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences, which is entirely consistent with the epistemological position of my research questions and therefore useful in describing the ontological and axiological identities of my participants.

A Brief History of IPA: Three Dimensions to Inquiry

IPA is an approach to experiential and interpretative qualitative research informed by phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. According to Smith et al. (2009), "When people are engaged with 'an experience' of something major in their lives, they begin to reflect on the significance of what is happening and IPA research aims to engage with these reflections" (p. 3). The phenomenology of IPA explores these lived experiences, while hermeneutics offers an interpretative undertaking of the meanings created. Idiography, or single case analysis, allows researchers to view each participant uniquely and particularly before comparing or generalizing among or against any others. Finlay (2009) states, "phenomenologists explicitly seek out idiographic meanings in an attempt to understand the individual, which may or may not offer general insights" (p. 9). In addition, Shinebourne (2011) explains, "Smith drew on theoretical ideas from phenomenology, hermeneutics, and on an engagement with subjective experience and personal accounts" (p. 17). Shinebourne maintains that IPA is concerned with exploring human lived experience and the meanings, which people attribute to their experiences as phenomenology requires the uncovering of meanings concealed by the phenomenon's mode of appearing. Furthermore, Shinebourne (2011) states, "IPA is also interpretative in recognizing the role of the researcher in making sense of the experience of participants" (p. 20) maintaining the position that the process of interpretation is dynamic and iterative. IPA therefore engages the concept of the hermeneutic circle in an interplay between parts and whole and between the interpreter and the object of interpretation. Idiography constitutes the third underpinning of IPA, which "aims for an in-depth focus on the particular and commitment to a detailed finely-tuned analysis, not possible in nomothetic research studies which focus on aggregated data" (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 22). These three fundamental elements of IPA combine to make IPA an

intuitive choice for my study because the approach directly and explicitly relates to the epistemological positioning of my research questions. Researchers familiar with IPA are "able to produce more consistent, sophisticated and nuanced analyses" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 5) because of its combined, pluralistic ideology. Furthermore, IPA focuses on the human predicament with a particular focus on people engaging with the world and is characterized as an approach concerned with "the systematic examination of the experiential" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 5). Each of these features is distinctive in describing a methodological approach consistent and congruent with my inquiry.

Why IPA? An Epistemological Position

IPA provides a plural vision of thinking that mitigates the crisis of representation in describing social reality (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Because my research explored the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students, IPA as methodology was a natural fit for this type of study. IPA models the person as a sense-making creature; it is interested in exploring participants' meaning- or sense-making of experience, as it becomes an experience, and can be said to represent the experience itself (Smith et al., 2009). The IPA methodology defined here not only attends to how I carried out my study, but aligns very well epistemologically with my research questions. As my study was heavily situated in exploring the meaning- and sense-making experiences of my participants and in exploring the psychological (cognitive and psychosocial) characteristics of my participants, it made a relevant methodology for my study. IPA as methodology fits very neatly within research areas such as "social and educational psychology" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 4) because a key component of IPA is described as experience in the real world. Because the epistemology of my research questions focused on exploring the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students,

IPA was also a logical and practical fit for my study as the topic is very closely tied to social and educational psychology being applied to real world experience. Furthermore, "The aims set by IPA researchers tend to focus upon people's *experiences* and/or *understandings* of particular phenomena" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 46, emphasis in original). These aims reflect what my research set out to accomplish and further support why I selected IPA as an appropriate methodology for my study.

Reflecting on Personal Experience: A Reconceptualized Position

Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) state that critical research is "suspicious of any model of interpretation that claims to reveal the final truth" (p. 289). IPA recognizes the intricacies of the hermeneutic circle and the double-hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2009), when a researcher is engaging in interpretative sense-making of the experiences thus making sense of the participant who is making sense of a particular phenomenon. Critical theorists and researchers must understand that "the formation of hegemony cannot be separated from the production of ideology" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 283). In other words, if hegemony is the larger effort of the powerful then ideological hegemony involves cultural forms, meanings, rituals, and representations that produce consent to the status quo and individuals' particular places within it. Personal experience is so deeply entrenched within sociocultural realities, researchers must consciously and deliberately untangle experience, culture, and society in order to understand and then re-present meaningful personal experiences. IPA as methodology permits researchers to accomplish this goal through iterative and recursive interpretative research practices. The narratives re-presented in my research could have emerged differently within a different set of contexts, a different set of situations, or in different sociocultural conditions. However, IPA

enabled me as researcher to re-present these personal narrative experiences with specificity and particularity.

Specificity and Particularity: From Partisanship to Polyvocality

Gergen and Gergen (2000) report that conflicts arise over matters of political partisanship. These instances have the potential to uncover opportunities for expanding qualitative methodology. Gergen and Gergen (2000) report, "There is a pervasive tendency for scholars – at least in their public writings – to presume coherence of self" (p. 1037). This claim was of particular relevance to my research. While I have stated I am a Canadian first-generation student, it was not my intention to presume all Canadian first-generation students' experiences or characteristics were similar to my own. In fact, I carefully selected IPA as methodology to usurp this very issue. IPA, being pluralistic in its vision, attends to the specific and particular experiences of each participant. In my attempts to overcome partisanship, my aim was to introduce a sense of polyvocality that not only favours multiple representations of voices among my participants, but also showcases that "a liberal socialist conception of citizenship 'allows for the multiplicity of identities that constitute an individual'" (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1037). Polyvocality combined with multiplicity of identities within individuals, allows for more thorough representations of not only a group of individuals sharing common characteristics, but also the self as being multiplistic. In other words, while Canadian first-generation students have common experiences and characteristics that differentiate them from others, it does not suggest that all Canadian first-generation students share the same experiences and characteristics; rather, being characterized as a Canadian first-generation student is but one mutable nuance that merely contributes to the understanding of the whole individual.

Politics of Coherence and Representation: Beyond Empiricism

Schwandt (2000) suggests, "The qualitative inquiry movement is built on a profound concern with understanding what other human beings are doing or saying" (p. 200) and further suggests that all qualitative inquirers who have made the interpretive turn share a set of commitments. Those commitments should reflect a highly critical sense of scientism. Qualitative researchers hold that the cognitive requirements involved in understanding others "cannot be met through the use of foundationalist epistemological assumptions characteristic of logical empiricism" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 201). Qualitative researchers face a political conundrum when interpreting and re-presenting what constitutes real and perceived cognitive and physical behaviours of actual people in real situations; IPA invites considerations of reality and identity. My study was informed by re-presenting lived authenticities and identities, thus further advancing the idea that we construct knowledge, reflection, and action within specific and particular contexts, places, and times. Writing up re-presentations of others' lived experiences is political and requires methodology, such as IPA, that accurately recognizes multiple tensions and coherently re-presents those experiences.

Research Methods

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that "research design describes a flexible set of guidelines" (p. 22) that researchers employ to move from paradigm to the empirical world. A strategy of inquiry, Denzin and Lincoln explain, comprises a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that put paradigms of inquiry into motion and connect the researcher to specific methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials. Moving between the two, from paradigm to the empirical world, is qualitative inquiry's pendulum (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000) that is constantly in motion.

Methods: A Means for Data Collection

Research design is flexible rather than concrete, emergent rather than predetermined, and responsive rather than rigid. There is no one way to collect data; rather, it is up to the researcher to determine which tools are best suited to generate rich data. For example, Angrosino and Mays de Pérez (2000) discuss rethinking observation and state that choice of methods "is, rather, 'ecological' in the sense that a change in one aspect of behaviour has ramifications throughout the entire system of which that behaviour is a part" (p. 696). In other words, rather than rely on one means to gather data, such as observation or interviewing alone, I have chosen to gather data in multiple ways (i.e., semi-structured interviewing, a focus group session, and a photo elicitation exercise). My intent was to encourage the surfacing of as many intricacies and nuances as possible for exploration and interpretation. To extend Angrosino and Mays de Pérez's metaphor that technology manifests change in an otherwise stable ecology of data collection, so too does the addition of multiple currents in gathering data; multiple methods does not imply an addition or subtraction from any one form or method, but aims to stimulate a symbiotic relationship amongst data gathering methods and tools that encourage rich discussion and dialogue for exploration. With the same care that I selected IPA as an appropriate methodological approach, I selected semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and photo elicitation as methods to gather and collect data for the current study. Palmer et al. (2010) share that there are good reasons underlying IPA's preference for in-depth individual interviews stating that "IPA is best suited to forms of data collection which invite participants to articulate stories, thoughts, and feelings about their experiences of a target phenomenon" (p. 100). The individual interview "suits the approach's idiographic commitments" (Palmer et al., 2010, p. 100) for one person's understandings to be explored in detail. Palmer et al. (2010) also share that "focus groups may be less obviously suitable for IPA researchers because they offer a considerably more complex

interactional environment" (p. 100); however, focus groups may very well be attractive to the

IPA researcher because they allow multiple voices to be heard at one sitting. For example,

Palmer et al. (2010) explain, "There are also situations in which a researcher may want to engage

with a naturally occurring group (such as a team, family, friendship group, or support group) *as a*

group [emphasis in original] and from an experiential perspective" (p. 100). For example, "a

group discussion may elicit *more* [emphasis in original] experiential reflection than a one-to-one

interview" (Palmer et al., 2010, p. 100). Bates et al. (2017) further state that with the current,

widespread use and availability of visual technology and imagery, photo elicitation has immense

promise as an innovative tool in research methodology. Bates et al. (2017) explain, "By allowing

the introduction of participant-driven photographs, or other visual stimuli, the researcher

attempts to understand the experiences (including emotions, feelings, ideas) of the participants,

rather than imposing their own framework or perception of a topic" (p. 5). Using participant-

driven photos, for example, researchers can introduce new dimensions to the inquiry that may

not have been previously thought about by the researcher. As an activity, for example,

participants can capture still images of phenomena related to their everyday experiences, which

can promote and stimulate dialogue in a follow-up interview setting. Bates et al. explain that by

using photo elicitation within interviews, the researcher gains a phenomenological sense of what

the content of the photos means to the participants allowing them to share and define issues or

concerns they have. Each of these three methods for gathering and collecting data is further

explained in this section.

Semi-structured Interviews

According to Seidman (2013), "Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process.

When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of

consciousness" (p. 7). Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987). It is a process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on these details, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them (Seidman, 2013). Interviews allow researchers to better reach and understand "social abstractions" (Ferrarotti, 1981) directly from persons living and feeling them.

I was especially interested in capturing discursive and dialogic re-presentations of my participants' lived experiences and how they made sense of those experiences. Therefore, interviewing as a data collection tool provided one such means to help facilitate focused conversations that provided voice to the authenticities and realities I aimed to capture in my research. Qualitative researchers aim to provide detailed descriptions of individuals and events in their natural settings. The semi-structured interview provided a stage for my participants to communicate their experiences through focused dialogue in an environment that encouraged discursive and descriptive conversation; Weiss (1994) reports that interviewing has usually been thought of as a key factor in qualitative research design. In addition, Kvale (1996) articulates that many concepts qualitative researchers pursue are not often directly observable; therefore, interviewing is one of the most effective methods for attaining and exploring phenomena. Interviewing can broaden the scope of investigated phenomena as it is a more naturalistic and less structured data collection tool. One type of interview is the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews are interactive and allow researchers to solicit clear responses from participants. Researchers can probe into emerging topics for further discussion and clarification. I selected and used semi-structured interviews because they allowed "depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 88). Semi-structured interviews provided a flexibility that

allowed me to engage with my participants and to remain open and spontaneous to shifts in conversation as re-presentations of their lived experiences unfolded.

Focus Groups

Focus groups allow multiple voices to be heard in one setting. These conversations are exploratory, participant-led, unstructured, and open-ended (Wilkinson, 2003) producing rich data of the shared lived experiences among participants and the similarities and differences apparent among and between those participants' experiences. Further, even though Wilkinson describes focus groups as participant-led and unstructured (as a form of focus group sessions), I prepared a set of open-ended questions and probes to spur conversation, reflection, and dialogue. In principle, focus groups can provide the occasion and the stimulus for participants to articulate normally unarticulated normative assumptions. For example, Bloor et al. (2002) explain:

> The [focus] group is a socially legitimated occasion for participants to engage in retrospective introspection to attempt collectively to tease out previously taken for granted assumptions. This teasing out may only be partial (with many areas of ambiguity or opacity remaining) and it may be disputatious (as limits are encountered to shared meanings), but it may yield up much rich data on group norms. (p. 6)

Bloor et al. caution that problems may occur with focus group data (such as ambiguity in interpretation of group norms). That said, they emphasize focus groups should be a sociological method of choice since focus groups provide concentrated and detailed information on an area of group life, which is only occasionally, briefly and allusively, available to the researcher.

The semi-structured interviews with each of my participants elicited experiential narratives and individual accounts of personal experience; however, I wished to provide my participants with the opportunity to openly discuss and share their personal experiences with one

another. The sharing of information and experience first provided an opportunity for my participants to openly discuss similarities and differences of personal experience with one another, and second, the sharing of personal information and experience then provided an opportunity for further reflection and the opportunity for responsive dialogue. The focus group provided an invaluable platform that yielded rich, descriptive, and reflective dialogue that also allowed participants to respond to one another's experiences as topics were discussed. These discussions led to and encouraged deeper exploration, reflection, and responses not only to their own experiences, but also to others' experiences, which unearthed valuable data for my research.

Photo Elicitation

Visual materials are often narrative in form (Harper, 2000). Photo elicitation is a very simple variation on the theme of open-ended interviewing. For example, Harper explains visual materials, such as photos, may be employed as a method to gather data to expand the idea of empirical data in single images to a sequence of photos to introduce the concept of visual narrative. Photos may be used as first-person accounts and as cultural stories that unfold through space and time. The process helps the participant convey his or her thoughts and feelings to the researcher about the images that are directly linked to a significant aspect of experience that may lead to a more in-depth interview experience. Visual materials in the form of photos document participants' day-to-day experiences and provide useful visual reports to actively stimulate conversation, dialogue, reflection, and response.

The use of disposable, single-use cameras to capture still images representing visual narratives to spur conversation during the interview process (also known as photo-interviewing) is another common technique utilized in qualitative research to raise the voices of research participants (Allen 2012; Close, 2007; Harper, 2002; Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007; Packard, 2008).

Further to documenting the use of disposable, single-use cameras in photo-interviewing, Allen carefully examines ethical considerations surrounding the use of photos taken by participants for use in the photo-interview. Allen underscores that individuals have a right to privacy in both private and public spaces and cautions that, while it may be legal to take photographs in public places, it may not necessarily be ethical. Allen also suggests that participants need to understand and identify contexts in which consent is needed and that the safety of participants must be considered as photographs produced can cause embarrassment among those photographed.

To mitigate the ethical considerations surrounding the use of visual imagery in the form of photos in my research, I provided my participants with disposable, single-use cameras in an effort to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants; disposable, single-use cameras reduce the risks associated with any potential embarrassment among participants should the photos be viewed by a third party (other than researcher and participant). Disposable, single-use cameras also alleviated the risk that photos could be distributed to third parties. Once the cameras were returned to me, no other person had access to the photos captured on the disposable, single-use device. In other words, I decided not to ask participants to use their own mobile devices or other personal digital devices for photographing purposes in an effort to control the distribution of photos to any third party thereby reducing the risk of potential embarrassment while protecting privacy and confidentiality of participants. In addition, participants were asked not to take photos of any person or people. Participants were informed that photos including people would not be used and would be destroyed. Photos were only shared with the participant who took them, not with other participants in the study and were not shared during the focus group session.

In terms of procedure, I distributed the disposable, single-use cameras to participants during the first interview, collected the numerically labelled cameras during the focus group meeting, and had the photos printed and ready for discussion during follow up interviews. I also incurred all costs associated with purchasing the cameras and printing the photos.

<div align="center">**Research Design**</div>

Study Approval

Approval for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Board of Nipissing University (NUREB) on April 13th, 2018 and from Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland's Research Ethics Board (GC-REB) on April 16th, 2018 (Appendix A).

Site Selection

Participants for my research study were selected from Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. With approximately 1,400 students, Grenfell Campus, located in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador, is a campus of Memorial University offering undergraduate degree programs in arts, science, business, education, fine arts, nursing and environment and sustainability, and graduate degree programs in arts and science (Grenfell Campus, 2019). Corner Brook is characterized as having all the amenities of a lager center while maintaining the charm of a small town. For the purposes of my study, I describe Grenfell Campus as a small, predominately white, liberal arts university campus located in a rural setting on the west coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. I chose Grenfell Campus as a site at which to conduct the current study because it was conveniently located near my home. In addition, the phenomena being investigated was highly likely to be present at this location.

Participant Selection

Participants were recruited from Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland due to its close geographical relation to my home and for convenience purposes. Students from Grenfell Campus were selected using purposeful or purposive sampling (Silverman, 2000). Purposive sampling is precisely what the name suggests; members are selected with a purpose to represent a location or type in relation to a key criterion. In my study, members were chosen according to criteria, i.e., based on their geographical location, for convenience purposes, and their conformity to the definition of Canadian first-generation student. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), purposive sampling has two principal aims: The first is to ensure that key constituencies of relevance to the subject matter are covered (i.e., conformity to the definition of Canadian first-generation student); and, the second is to ensure that some diversity is included so that the impact of the characteristic concerned can be explored. To address the first concern, members were selected based on their conformity to the definition. Even though my individual participants represented a homogeneous sample in this respect (meaning each of my participants was a Canadian first-generation student), I was mindful of Ritchie and Lewis' caution it is important to ensure *some diversity.* To address this second concern, inclusion criteria were specified and selected participants reflected a general balance among gender, age, socio economic status, and study status. In addition, IPA also suggests that homogeneous samples work best for this type of methodology (Smith et al., 2009).

Once I received ethical clearance from NUREB and GC-REB, I identified and contacted an informant at Grenfell Campus to be a gate-keeper (Smith et al., 2009). My gate-keeper, the Dean of the School of Arts and Social Science at Grenfell Campus, helped with the recruitment process to reach a participant pool from which I selected my participants. I sent an email (Appendix B) to the Dean requesting assistance in the recruitment process and outlining the

details of my proposed research study. As gate-keeper, the Dean forwarded a recruitment email (Appendix C) to undergraduate students at Grenfell Campus on my behalf inviting students to contact me directly if they were interested in participating in my research study.

At the beginning of the study, I planned to select four to six participants, which I believed would be manageable for a study of this size. A manageable participant pool allowed for two in-depth interviews and one focus group session. Interested students who responded to me directly from the Dean's recruitment email and who expressed an interest to participate in the study were invited via email (Appendix D) to complete a student selection questionnaire (SSQ) (Appendix E). A total of eight students (four male and four female) responded to the initial recruitment email sent to all undergraduate students at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland and indicated an interest to participate in the research study. I emailed each of the eight students in separate emails requesting that they each complete and return the SSQ for qualifying purposes. The email invitation and SSQ contained a detailed set of instructions, information regarding why this information was being collected, and a statement with respect to the privacy and confidentiality of the information collected, to inform how the information collected would be treated and used in the selection process. Subsequently, four students (one male and three female) returned the SSQ meeting the criteria for the study. In order to meet the selection criteria for the study, students had to have Canadian citizenship, satisfy the definition of first-generation student, be enrolled as a full-time student at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and be working towards the completion of a four-year bachelor level degree program. These four students were sent a formal invitation via email (Appendix F) to participate in the research study, which contained an attached Participant Information Letter (PIL) and Informed Consent document (Appendix G) for their review. The four students (three

male and one female) who were not selected to participate in the study received an email

thanking them for their interest to participate in the study and offering an explanation as to why

they were not selected. One student declined to participate after receiving the student selection

questionnaire, one was leaving the province permanently (and subsequently the university, no

longer working toward a four-year bachelor level degree program), and two were part-time

students (full-time study status was required for participation).

The PIL and Informed Consent document was first provided to the four selected students

in electronic format. Students were invited to respond to the email with a convenient time to

schedule the first interview and to review the attached PIL and Informed Consent document prior

to the first scheduled interview. The PIL and Informed Consent document described the nature

and purpose of the research, clarified definitions, informed risks associated with participation in

the study, explained confidentiality (use of pseudonyms, not anonymity), and detailed ethical

considerations (including the right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any time). During the

first interview, participants were provided with a hard copy of the PIL and Informed Consent

document. I reviewed the PIL and Informed Consent with each participant face-to-face, asked if

clarification was needed in any part of the letter, and asked if participants had any questions with

respect to the letter, the study in general, or any other questions. Each participant signed the PIL

and Informed Consent document. I witnessed and signed each document before beginning any

data collection, and provided participants with a hard copy of the PIL and Informed Consent

document.

Data Collection

I employed a three-step process to gather rich data to construct thick description (Geertz,

1973). First, the four students invited and subsequently selected to take part in the study each

participated in an open-ended, semi-structured, double-recorded, in-person interview (Appendix

H). Each of these four interviews lasted approximately one hour to one hour and a half. At the

beginning of each interview, I provided one hard copy of the PIL and Informed Consent to the

participant, reviewed the document with them, asked and responded to any questions, and

gathered signatures. I also witnessed the signing of the PIL and Informed Consent documents

with my own signature. The recordings were transcribed by me as soon as possible following

each of the interviews. After transcribing each interview, I emailed a copy of the transcript to the

respective participant for member checking. In addition, at the end of the first interview with

each participant, I provided a numerically labelled disposable, single-use camera with a set of

directions and instructions for the photo elicitation portion of data gathering. Participants were

invited to complete this portion of the study and asked to provide a mutually agreed upon

timeframe for completion of the photo elicitation exercise. Participants were asked to return the

disposable, single-use cameras to me at the beginning of the focus group. Further, the purpose

for the photos and what would happen to the photos after the cameras were returned to me were

explained to, and reviewed with, participants in the PIL and Informed Consent document.

Next, participants were invited to participate in a semi-structured, double-recorded focus

group session that lasted approximately an hour and a half (Appendix I). All four participants

were willing to participate in the focus group session; however, only three were able to

participate. One participant was away from campus for a period of four months (Spring semester,

from May 2018 to August 2018) and therefore did not participate in the focus group session with

the other three participants. I did, however, request permission from the participant absent from

the focus group session if I could ask the focus group questions in the final interview and she

agreed. Finally, three participants returned the disposable, single-use cameras at the beginning of

the focus group as planned. The fourth camera was collected from the remaining participant at a mutually agreed upon place and time. Following the completion of the focus group session and collection of the single-use, disposable cameras, I transcribed the focus group recording, sent the photos for printing, and emailed a copy of the transcript to each of the focus group participants for member checking.

Finally, and once the photos had been printed, I emailed each of the participants to request a mutually convenient time to schedule the second open-ended, semi-structured, double-recorded interview (Appendix J). I brought the printed, alphanumerically labelled photos with me to the final interview for review and discussion. The printed photos were intended to represent the concept of a visual narrative, and were employed as a means for further discussion, dialogue, and reflection. Participants were asked to review and discuss the photos and were asked a final set of open-ended questions. The recordings were transcribed by me following each of the interviews, and a copy of the transcript emailed to the respective participants for member checking.

The three data gathering methods described were selected and utilized to solicit rich and thick description regarding the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students for analysis and interpretation of this phenomenon, as it related specifically to my research and stated research questions.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis as an independent qualitative descriptive approach is described as a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In the current study, thematic analysis was incorporated as a qualitative descriptive and analytical method that helped facilitate data analysis procedures. Vaismoradi et al. describe

thematic analysis as a method of descriptively coding and analytically examining narrative materials by breaking text into small units of content and submitting them to descriptive and analytical treatment. Following transcription of the interviews, the focus group session and printing of the photos, I employed constant comparative analysis methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to analyze and synthesize the data into thematic units. To remain consistent with IPA's methodology, data analysis was conducted in an iterative and inductive cycle (Smith et al., 2009) that proceeded by drawing on "close, line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns, and understandings of each participant" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79) and "the identification of emergent patterns (i.e., themes) within this experiential material, emphasizing both convergence and divergence, commonality and nuance, usually first for single cases, and then subsequently across multiple cases" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). IPA describes a six step process to analyze data: (1) reading and re-reading the original data, (2) initial noting exploring semantic content and language use on an exploratory level, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving to the next case and repeating the process, and (6) looking for patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2009).

I followed IPA's data analysis recommendations to identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) within and across the data. I used NVIVO software to safeguard, organize, and facilitate an accurate and transparent data analysis process. First, I read and re-read all nine transcripts (four transcripts from each participant's interview one, the transcript from the focus group session, and the remaining four transcripts from each participant's interview two). The reading and re-reading of transcripts allowed me to immerse myself back into the data "to begin the process of entering the participant's world" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 82). Second, I took each transcript, one at a time, and I began initial noting of the material that allowed me to explore

semantic content and language use on an exploratory level. The second phase of analysis

described here as initial noting allowed me to begin to identify specific ways by which the

participant described or reported his or her narrative. I first noted descriptive comments

including key words, phrases, and explanations that the participant used to report his or her

narrative. I also noted some paralinguistic features of the data including laughter, pausing, and

sighing. Finally, I noted conceptual comments that allowed me to shift my focus from the

explicit claims of the participant towards an overarching understanding of the matters being

addressed. For example, when participants described friendships or the importance of friendship-

making at university, I noted *the importance of having a sense of belongingness*. Third, I

developed an initial set of emergent themes and subthemes, as they emerged one-by-one and

transcript-by-transcript. I mapped interrelationships, connections and patterns from my

exploratory notes. These were hand-written notes that I physically wrote on each printed

transcript. Next, I created a word document that listed the set of emergent themes and subthemes,

and then arranged discrete chunks of transcript into these themes and subthemes and placed that

text in a word document. Fourth, I searched for connections across the emergent themes. I

employed *abstraction* as a means of "identifying patterns between emergent themes and

developing a sense of what can be called a 'super-ordinate' theme" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 96).

The abstraction process involved the re-organizing and shifting of themes to create overarching

or super-ordinate themes. In other words, like themes were grouped or clustered together to

create discrete groupings of themes beneath a larger super-ordinate theme (in a similar manner

that subthemes were grouped and ordered beneath themes). The larger-order process of grouping

themes beneath super-ordinate themes allowed me to better organize the presentation of the data

analyzed. Fifth, I repeated the above-noted process for each transcript, following IPA's case-by-

case analysis method. At this point in the analysis, I had nine word documents corresponding to each of the nine transcripts that presented thematically organized data. Finally, or step six in the process, I looked for patterns across cases (i.e., across transcripts). This time, I mapped interrelationships, connections and patterns across cases to produce a synthesized set of super-ordinate themes, themes, and in some cases subthemes across the data set. I created a final word document and began grouping or clustering data into one final synthesized word document that I used to report the study's findings. The data analysis procedures outlined in IPA's data analysis methodology allowed description, analysis, and synthesis of my data for reporting (Chapter Four) that were later used for interpretation (Chapter Five). These procedures aligned with IPA's "iterative" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28) and comparative methodology in order to address the three guiding research questions.

Trustworthiness

Many critics of qualitative research are reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research designs. However, frameworks for ensuring research integrity and rigour in interpretative research have existed for many years. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest qualitative researchers should adapt measures to ensure trustworthiness of interpretative research paradigms including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. According to Shenton (2004), qualitative researchers can address concerns of credibility through demonstrating that a true picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny is being presented.

To address credibility in my research project, I aimed for triangulation of several research methods (i.e., semi-structured interviews, a focus group session, and the use of photo elicitation). The use of different methods in concert compensated for individual limitations and exploited respective benefits ensuring integrity and rigour in my interpretative research design. To allow

transferability, Shenton suggests qualitative researchers provide sufficient detail of the context of the research for a reader to be able to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to other settings. To address transferability in my research project, I clearly articulated the boundaries associated within the realms of my research project. For example, the boundaries of my research study include the context of my study in terms of where it took place (i.e., a rural setting in Newfoundland and Labrador), an explanation and description of my participants, and a full explanation of data collection methods and methodology. These boundaries, or contexts, explain to readers how well (or not) my study would be transferable to another context, environment, or situation. According to Shenton, meeting dependability criteria is difficult in qualitative work. Therefore, to address dependability in my research study, I fully explained my research design and implementation and detailed my data gathering methods and methodology to allow readers and other researchers to understand the context of my study; this also has relevance in the event another researcher or group of researchers decide to replicate the study.

Finally, to achieve confirmability, Shenton (2004) states that researchers must take steps to demonstrate that findings emerge from the data and not their own predispositions. To address confirmability in my research, I, to the best of my ability, accurately, responsibly, and truthfully re-presented the experiences and ideas of my participants. Triangulation (multiple methods of data gathering), member checking (participant review of data collected) and peer review (objective third party review by my research committee) were all employed to alleviate and reduce the effect of researcher bias. These four practices (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) aligned to ensure trustworthiness of my research and research design to accurately and truthfully re-present the multiple perspectives and many representations

that highlight the particular and specific nature of the lived experiences of the participants in my research.

Ethical Considerations: Mitigating the Risks

According to Johnson and Christensen (2014), "Research ethics are a guiding set of principles developed to assist researchers in conducting ethical studies" (p. 127). As qualitative researchers, we are guests in the private spaces of participants' lives (Stake, 2000). Furthermore, Merriam (2009) suggests that the two primary areas where ethical concerns or dilemmas are likely to surface are in the data collection process and in reporting the findings of the study.

The current study and its design, including the selected methods and procedures to gather rich data for meaningful description, were mindful of ethical considerations. For example, participants in the study were informed of the nature and purpose of the study and provided a Participant Information Letter (PIL) and Informed Consent document, given time to review this document, and provided the opportunity to ask questions and to seek clarification about the study prior to the commencement of any research data collection procedure, interview, or data collection method. Participants were informed of the right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any time, and were also briefed on the nature of confidentiality and privacy regarding the study. The letter also explained that pseudonyms would be used to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants and that anonymity could not be granted as I would be conducting the interviews and would therefore know the identity of each participant. In addition, each participant who agreed to participate in the focus group session also knew the identity of each of the other participants present during the focus group session. These details were outlined in the PIL and Informed Consent document. In addition, I reminded participants at the beginning of the

focus group session about the importance of privacy and confidentiality and the sensitivity of such practices.

To address a balance of power, should participants have viewed the researcher as an authoritative entity, I took special care to enact IPA's methodological principles that the goal of conducting research is *with* rather than *on* participants in the study. In addition, participants were informed and protected from mental and physical harm. Participants were provided with information in order to access emergency mental health care and trained mental health care professionals if they became anxious or upset as a result of participating in the study, as outlined in the PIL and Informed Consent document.

The proposed research posed minimal risk to participants and considered foreseeable risks, potential benefits, and ethical implications. In fact, participating in the research may have empowered participants with a greater understanding of the phenomenon of being a Canadian first-generation student. The benefits associated with understanding this phenomenon helped to mitigate risks involved with participating in the research study. In addition, the methods I chose should have helped to mitigate participants' sense of powerlessness. For example, the selected methods allowed participants to control conversation, dialogue, and reflection. As researcher, I strived to be a worthy witness (Seidman, 2013) of participants' lived experiences and honour the dignity of their stories. In an effort to endorse these ethical considerations, with respect to representation of research findings, I enacted my moral obligation to accurately re-present narratives that reflect and embrace the multiplicity of voices that emerged (Tedlock, 2000). As researcher, I have an obligation to attend to participants' voices, value and respect participants needs, and promote social justice through responsible re-presentation. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest, "The evaluator becomes the conduit through which such voices can be heard" (p.

23). IPA's methodology and the methods I selected to gather data in my research project helped mitigate important ethical considerations respecting the re-presentation of participants' voices. By reaching backward and inward, meaning was situated in the context of personal experience, which affirms and disentangles participants' ways of knowing that strengthens participants' authenticities and realities. The iterative and reciprocal processes employed provided a platform in efforts to empower each participant to author his or her own story.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed and rationalized the methodology selected to conduct this research and the methods employed to collect and gather rich data for thick and meaningful description. The purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. I chose a qualitative research approach to explore my topic and to respond to my research questions. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as methodology because it is concerned with specificity and particularity and allowed me to respond to the epistemological nature of my research questions. Data for the study were collected through two in-person semi-structured interviews, a focus group session, and through photos taken and collected from participants in the study. Data collected from the study were analysed in a constant comparison style to organize thematic codes, and procedures were employed to ensure trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) of the research. Ethical considerations were employed to safeguard participants, to protect privacy and confidentiality, and to ensure highest ethical standards throughout the course of the study. Chapter Four will present the data collected in the current study and will organize that data into specific themes that emerged from the data collected.

Chapter 4 Findings

The purpose of the current study was to explore the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students, specifically those pursuing a four-year bachelor level degree at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Through two semi-structured one-on-one interviews, a focus group session, and a photo elicitation exercise, this chapter re-presents the unique personal narratives of four students. The findings describe the experiences and characteristics of those Canadian first-generation students who participated in the study. Data collection was guided by the following three research questions:

1. What can be learned through exploring the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students pursuing a four-year bachelor level degree at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland?

2. What are the experiences and characteristics of the Canadian first-generation students who participated in the study?

3. How might an increased understanding of first-generation students' postsecondary experiences and characteristics be informed and enhanced by research of this nature?

The data collected and analyzed from each of the three data collection methods (i.e., two semi-structured one-on-one interviews, the focus group session, and the photo elicitation exercise) have been synthesized thematically and are reported in this chapter. The first set of one-on-one interviews allowed the researcher to get to know each of the participants and to establish rapport with the participants. Each participant was encouraged to discuss and describe his or her postsecondary experiences and his or her respective individual identities and characteristics. The focus group session encouraged participants collectively and collaboratively to discuss and describe (a) their postsecondary selection processes, (b) their preparation

activities, processes, and procedures that helped them to prepare for postsecondary, (c) their expectations for postsecondary, and (d) their postsecondary enrollment processes. The second set of one-on-one interviews allowed participants to discuss and describe their personal photos from the photo elicitation exercise and to provide reflections and dialogue in response to the study in general. The printed photos were used in the final one-on-one interview as a means to spur conversation and probe deeper into the daily lived experiences of the participants. In order to protect privacy and confidentiality of the participants, the printed photos are not shown in the write up of the dissertation.

The chapter presents seven main (or super-ordinate) themes that emerged from the data collected in the current study: (a) characteristics of the four student participants, (b) their family histories, (c) factors that influenced their respective decisions to pursue a postsecondary education, (d) advice for future first-generation students, (e) identity intersections and helpful personality characteristics, (f) experiences with postsecondary education, and (g) reflections on pursuing a postsecondary education. Each of the seven main (or super-ordinate) themes is further organized into themes and, in some cases, subthemes that recurred across the data. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Characteristics of the Four Student Participants

Sarah, Jade, Roger and Claire participated in the current study. A brief profile of each of these four first-generation students is provided below. The participant profiles were created from information collected in the student selection questionnaires, each of the one-on-one interviews, and the focus group session. Findings from the data collected in the study will unfold throughout the chapter to form descriptions of their narratives.

Sarah

Sarah is a white, nineteen-year-old first-year university student attending Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. At the time I interviewed her, she had just finished her first year of study. She is a full-time student, intends to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree in four years, and works part time outside the university. At the time I interviewed Sarah, she had not declared a major or minor. She had lived in residence for her first two semesters of university, but she had recently moved into a shared accommodation off campus with friends that she made during her first year of study. Sarah's studies are funded by the government of Newfoundland and Labrador under a provincial funding program for children who were under foster care during high school years. Sarah indicated that although her studies are funded, she must also work part time to support herself with living expenses. She does not have other means of financial support from family, for example. Sarah estimated that her family's total household income is less than $25,000. She explained that her single mother does not work and was unable to care for her and her half-siblings or provide financial support in any way as her mother had suffered a stroke brought on from excessive drug use and addiction. Sarah does not communicate regularly with her father and has never known her father's side of the family.

Jade

Jade is a white, nineteen-year-old second-year university student attending Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. At the time I interviewed her, she had just started her second year of studies. She is a full-time student, intends to complete a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in four years, and lives in residence. Jade's studies are not funded. She primarily relies on student loans to survive. Jade also estimated that her family's total household income is less than $25,000. Jade's single mother is the primary provider in her family and "over the years" has worked "from job to job" in hotels in Alberta. Her father maintains his unskilled

work "in the lumber mill." Jade's parents are no longer together. While Jade maintains communication and close familial relationships with her mother and siblings, she does not communicate regularly with her father. Jade also revealed that, while both of her parents support her decision to attend university, only her mother supports her choice of degree. Jade decided to move to Newfoundland and to leave her family behind in Alberta to pursue a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland because the cost of education was more affordable.

Roger

Roger is a white, twenty-eight-year-old third-year university student attending Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. At the time I interviewed him, he had just completed his third year of studies. He is a full-time student, intends to complete a Bachelor of Arts degree in four years, and lives in residence. Roger has part time work on campus. Roger attended another postsecondary institution before attending Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and also clarified that this was his second attempt at pursuing a degree. He confirmed he is now focused on completing his bachelor's degree. Roger relies on federal and provincial student loans and personal resources to fund his education and living expenses without any financial help from his family. Roger estimated his family's total household income is less than $49,000. Roger's parents both work in the unskilled labour market. Roger maintains close familial connections with his mother, but says he does not have the same close relationship with his father. He reported that his entire immediate family were closer when he was younger but, over the years, those close relationships had broken down. Roger noted he felt his relationship with his father had broken down especially. He also indicated that more recently he did not feel as close to his three siblings. Roger's mother supports his

decision to attend university, but he knows that it is his choice to attend and feels little to no pressure from his parents to pursue a postsecondary education.

Claire

Claire is a white, twenty-six-year-old university student attending Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland pursuing her second bachelor's degree. Claire completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at Grenfell Campus, and is currently pursuing a second. This time, Claire has chosen to pursue a Bachelor of Business Administration. She feels the second bachelor's degree will provide her with job opportunities that she did not have after completing her first degree. Claire relies on federal and provincial student loans to fund her education and living expenses with little financial support from her family. Claire estimated her family's total household income is less than $25,000. Claire lives at home with her single, stay-at-home mother and she does not have a close relationship with her father. Claire has one sister who also attends postsecondary. Claire self-identified a physical disability that she says increases her challenges pursuing a postsecondary education.

Family History

Questions in the interview on the topic of family history provided deeper knowledge of each participant and his or her family background and revealed greater insight into the characteristics and lived experiences of my participants in areas including themes of (a) family relationships, education, and employment history, (b) attitudes towards academic achievement in general, and (c) a general awareness of the term *first-generation student* and the meaningfulness of that status. The information collected and described in this section was derived from the first set of one-on-one interviews with each participant and his or her responses to the semi-structured interview questions.

Family Relationships, Education, and Employment

In her first interview, Sarah reported she didn't know her father's side of the family. She has half-siblings on her father's side of the family, but she does not communicate with them. She met them when she was young, but she doesn't remember the experience. On her mother's side, Sarah reported that she and her siblings each have different fathers, but that they had been raised together. She explained, "We are half-siblings, but we consider ourselves sisters and brothers," and have good relationships with each other. Sarah revealed "when mom had her stroke, which was due to drugs because she was a drug dealer, we got put in foster care and everything was downhill from there." She felt these were significant reasons that explained why her brother and sister probably didn't perceive high school as well as they could have. She explained that her mother had not finished high school until after her older brother had already attended grade school. Sarah said her mother "actually didn't finish her education until my older brother was in grade four. I would have been around six years old, and he suddenly didn't want to go to school one day because she didn't finish school." Sarah's mother eventually returned to school and finished her high school diploma as a single mother of three children. According to Sarah, her mother did not consider the thought of postsecondary and her brother also dropped out of high school. She said, "He's twenty-two now and he's currently going back for his high school education." Sarah reported her younger sister "has it pretty rough too," but is "finally getting on the right track." Sarah indicated, "Everything's kind of looking up for my family at the moment." She explained that she "was always the good kid, so university was expected because I always got good grades in school, and I took advanced courses throughout high school." Sarah believes her academic aptitude might have played into her decision to pursue a postsecondary education.

Jade reported in her first interview that she doesn't have any sort of relationship with her father. Her parents separated when she was two years old, and she decided to live with her mother. Her brother, on the other hand, lived with their father. She discussed that she and her father did maintain a relationship for some time, but that relationship faded as years passed. She explained, "He was not the best of parents, the best of people," and that it was more her choice to start "cutting things off with him." She indicated, "He doesn't support my decision to go into the field that I'm studying. He is very much one of those, my child will be a doctor or a lawyer and nothing less, kind of people." According to Jade, her father does not see a value in the Fine Arts degree she has chosen to pursue, much less understand the significance that the degree might provide for her or how that might contribute to her future success in employment, for example. Jade's father immigrated to Canada from Europe when he was in his early teens. Jade's father and his siblings completed high school in Canada after immigrating, but neither ever "went to any kind of postsecondary." Jade and her mother are very close. Jade said her mother "fully supported my decision to come here. She was all for it, did everything she could to help me get here, even though she didn't really know anything about it." She shared that she is also close with her brother. She said her brother "doesn't understand why I was so *gung ho* to go to university, but he supports it even if he doesn't get it." Jade's mother "actually dropped out of high school in about the seventh grade to help take care of all her siblings," and "none of them had any kind of postsecondary education." She added that she was "one of the few of the fifty or so cousins to take a shot at any kind of university or higher education." Jade included that her brother did complete a four-month apprenticeship program in welding, but that she's "made it the longest."

Roger explained in his first interview that, when he was younger, he was very close to each of his siblings; however, as time went by, Roger felt they began to grow very far apart, speaking to each other about twice each year. Roger described that he and his mother are very close and that she has always been very encouraging of his decisions. On the other hand, Roger shared that he and his father have never really been close. Roger said even through growing up and beyond, his father "was always centered on himself. Even times when I tried to create some sort of relationship there, he was never really interested in that. So, I would say there's not any relationship there at all." Roger indicated that his mother "just worked in a grocery store" her entire life and his father "worked in the paint shop." Roger recalled that his father had briefly considered doing postsecondary, but "for whatever reason" didn't follow through with it. Roger revealed that his mother always tried to push him and his siblings to attend postsecondary because she felt it would lead to a better life for her children; however, Roger explained that he always had the message, "If you don't feel like it's for you, you don't have to do it." Roger's two sisters both attended postsecondary and his brother completed some postsecondary.

Claire lives at home with her stay-at-home mother and shared in her first interview that she and her mother have a very close relationship. Claire's mother completed high school but became pregnant and did not get the opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education. Claire said she only sees her father once or twice a year and does not have a very close relationship with him. She indicated she thinks her father completed high school but wasn't sure and reported that her father did not work when she was young. Claire confirmed that she was the first in her family to attend university and later explained that "a stable job where there'll be health care and health benefits and a pension" were deciding factors for her to pursue a postsecondary education. Claire also revealed that "growing up, they never said go to university," but in grade seven she started

doing well in school and made the decision to consider university. Claire has a sister who also attends university.

Attitudes toward Academic Achievement

There was a general consensus among participants that because their parents had not pursued a postsecondary education, and in some cases had not completed a secondary education, a postsecondary education was not expected of them. Families of my participants were often in support of their children's decisions to attend postsecondary, but none of the participants felt pressured to pursue a postsecondary education or that a postsecondary education was expected. In her interview, Sarah described that her mother was very proud, but "it's the kind of situation where she didn't have it, so she didn't expect it from her children." Sarah didn't feel she had to go to university but stated she was proud she did. Sarah said, "All my mother really expected was high school graduation, and she was super proud of that because I was the first one in our family to do so." Jade explained in her interview that her mother is a very practical person and was supportive of what she would like to achieve; however, Jade indicated her mother "would never push me to go into a degree that I'm not happy in. She just pushes me to do well in whatever I'm in." Roger suggested in his interview that it was hypocritical for his family to encourage a postsecondary education. He felt that because his father hadn't graduated from high school, his father shouldn't have an opinion about his decisions to pursue a higher education. In her interview, Claire indicated that it was her grandmother who encouraged her to pursue a higher education, but not her parents. She said, "My nan helped me a lot with my papers. She would edit them. Sometimes if I sat down with my history book, she'd read articles with me and we'd talk about them." Claire continued, "My grandmother pushed me towards university. My mom supported me, but she didn't force me into it."

During their first interviews, participants also reported their difficulties in sharing postsecondary experiences with close family and friends who did not have similar experiences of their own. Sarah shared that it was difficult explaining the differences between high school and university to her mother. Sarah said, "It's a whole different world to her. I don't even go too deeply into it. I have scattered classes because it's not like high school. Classes can be all over the place and your schedule can be weird." Sarah continued, "She's not used to the idea of lectures compared to classes, and she's not used to the idea of a research paper."

Jade recounted that she hadn't told her father what she was doing because she didn't feel close enough to him to share that information. She said, "When he found out, he was not happy. We haven't talked about it. He's not happy with my choice to leave the province. He's not happy with my choice of degree. But regardless, it's not really his choice." Jade ultimately decided to leave Alberta to pursue her chosen degree in Newfoundland because Grenfell's program was also "crazy affordable." Jade also shared that her mother doesn't really understand "the whole university thing." She said her mother is very supportive of her attending postsecondary, but "a lot of the time, like if I call her, she has no idea what I'm talking about." She continued, "She tries very hard not to be judgemental about it. She grew up very old fashioned. She's got a very particular mindset." Jade shared her mother "tries not to push it on me, but I can tell sometimes when we talk that she doesn't approve necessarily, and she doesn't want me to know that."

Roger felt that his parents also have a hard time relating to some things. He explained that for his parents, "It's sort of broken down into either you did well, or you didn't do well, at least as far as the academics go." He said, "And interestingly enough, they don't see a great amount of value in the extracurricular side of things, which in my opinion holds a lot of value." Roger's parents fear that extracurricular activities detract attention from academic achievement.

Roger described that his parents would question his involvement in extracurricular activities and ask questions such as, "How's this going to factor into your academics?" He recounted his explanation to his parents: "You know, it's very likely I'm going to take a hit on that, but I felt the value I gained in return was more than what I was to get off, you know, the five or ten percent." He indicated his parents did not agree with his rationale and had trouble relating in that sense.

Claire discussed she experienced difficulties sharing experiences with her mother when describing stressful postsecondary experiences. For example, Claire revealed that when she would complain about stress, her mother would respond in ways that made her feel responsible for her stressors rather than supportive of her situation. Claire recounted that her mother said, "You decided to go to university. I didn't tell you to go." Claire explained that during final exam periods, she would have to ask her mother to turn down the volume on the television so she could concentrate on studying. Claire also described that her mother experienced difficulties understanding why it took her so much time to read. According to Claire, her mother couldn't understand why it was difficult for Claire to read one chapter in a textbook in an hour. Claire found herself justifying her time and study habits to her mother. Claire narrated, "She can read a book in a day. She thinks I should be able to read a chapter in one hour, but it's not the same thing." Claire explained for university study, "I have to remember what I'm reading and comprehend. When I told her I hadn't read a full chapter yet, she asked what I'd been doing." Claire said her mother exclaimed, "You're procrastinating!" Claire had to clarify that she needed to read ten pages at a time because it was a textbook and not a novel. Claire experienced these frustrations often with her mother and felt she frequently needed to explain and justify her actions.

Awareness of First-generation Student Status

Participants were generally unaware of the term or label *first-generation student*, but generally had an awareness that he or she would be the first in their families to participate in a postsecondary educational setting. For example, during the first interview Sarah stated, "I don't think of it as an overly big deal." She felt that she had performed well in high school and that level of performance would help her perform well in postsecondary. She didn't think the phenomenon was a significant factor. She said, "Some people have minds for certain things, you know? So, it's not really that big of a deal to me." Sarah added later that "it has never been something I've really considered significant until a little bit into last year when I realized this is an all or nothing thing." She reported her entire family and extended family were following her progress. She exclaimed, "That's insane because none of them have done it and none of them know what's happening."

Jade had similar feelings and shared that being the first in her family to attend university placed "some pressure to do well and go far with it." She indicated that "as much as I know my family is supportive, the idea of what might happen if I don't go anywhere with it or if I don't do anything with it, the way that they'll see it is really stressful." She added that "there's a weird feeling behind it, being the first one. If I am successful, what is that going to look like to them?" She said, "I can't help but wonder. They're all very supportive, but there's been weird talk about it. It feels like resentment from various family members because they couldn't or they didn't, but I'm doing it." Jade worried her participation in postsecondary would "change relationships" with others in her family. Jade confessed her father was not happy with her choice of degree program and that her relationship with her brother was somewhat strained. To accommodate those stressors, Jade revealed, "I've already started changing the way things work for me at home. I try

to make this work the best I can, but it's changed the way we talk to each other because we can't relate." Jade added, "My mom brought it up one night. She said she thinks me and my brother fight so much because he resents that I'm doing what he didn't." Jade rationalized her conclusions and stated:

On one side, I feel a little bit bad, but then on the other side of things, I have to do what I want to do. Circumstances were a little bit different when he was my age with money, but by no means is it good. I've still had to work really, really hard to get to this point and to get the money for tuition. It's not like it was handed to me. So, on one hand I'm like, "Suck it up," because I did this, nobody gave this to me. I did this.

Roger felt a little differently. He didn't seem to feel any pressure being the first to attend postsecondary. He shared, "My mother, while she didn't push me to go, she supported me to do what I wanted; however, if I decided not to, it wasn't a big deal either." Roger explained that a postsecondary education is not for everyone. He said, "I don't feel like it was as much pressure or stress on me as it might have been on other people because the entire way through, it was never made to seem like it was that important."

Claire described that she was not too conscious of the term until after she had other family members question her about her experiences at university. Claire shared that her younger cousin asked for advice about choosing a postsecondary institution and program. Claire said, "I think because me and [my sister] did it, my little cousins are looking at it." Claire explained she's happy to be able to provide support to her family about her experiences attending postsecondary because she didn't have that support. For example, Claire revealed, "My little cousin gets me to help her with her essays, and I'll tell her about scholarships." Claire said she didn't have that support from anyone. She recalled, "When I was growing up, there was no one

to tell me where the scholarships were. I think in the last year of high school, the guidance counsellor pointed out scholarships. That was it." She continued, "I didn't have anyone, but I can help her pick out the best path." Claire wished she could go back and give herself "some pointers." Even though the first-generation student *label* was not obvious to my participants, each explained how the phenomenon impacted them.

<div align="center">**Factors that Influence the Decision to Pursue a Postsecondary Education**</div>

Two themes emerged during the focus group session that appeared to influence participants' decisions to pursue a postsecondary education, such as (a) their own personal expectations, and (b) a desire to experience what a postsecondary education would be like.

Expectations

Sarah reported that she had always excelled as a scholar. She read above her grade level since kindergarten and indicated that because she performed well in earlier years, she believed that was the reason she continued to do so. Sarah described she always planned on pursuing a "university education." She shared during the focus group session that she wanted to be a veterinarian her entire life, but then in grade ten, she "didn't think it was going to be possible." She explained, "I would have to go out of province, and then there's waitlists. I got good grades, but not well enough to the point where I would be confident." Sarah gave up on her dreams of becoming a veterinarian because she lost confidence in her ability to be successful in a postsecondary setting. She rationalized, "I just decided to come here and do an undergraduate and because of advanced math and calculus and physics in grade twelve, I mean, I didn't fail them, but they did kind of put me through the wringer." She finally decided, "I'm going to do a Bachelor of Arts since science was out of the question."

Jade was not present for the focus group session, but during her first interview, she also shared that high school influenced her decision to pursue a postsecondary education. In particular, Jade "had a career counsellor who was a very friendly person." Jade explained, "I spent a lot of time in her office. She helped me go to different open houses for different universities to help me see what university would be like, and I think the different open houses solidified my decision-making."

Claire described that she had always expected herself to pursue a postsecondary education. During the focus group session, she stated, "I need a good paying job so that I can support myself and pay for all my medical equipment." She remembered a student assistant once who cautioned, "University is not for everyone." Claire was not discouraged. She wanted to "at least try," and convinced her mother to help her apply to university. Claire narrated, "The first year was a bit difficult. It wasn't the workload, but the planning. I had to pick the courses. There was a certain amount of core courses I had to do before I could take any electives." She explained, "All my friends whose parents went to university could tell them what to take in their first term. My mother didn't know anything about it." Claire remembered going to the public library to register for courses. She said, "I tried to figure it out on my own." Claire also described that she had a teacher in grade three who remained connected with her and her family. Claire relied on her teacher-friend for advice. Claire's teacher-friend "would take us to talks at the university." She said her friend "was pretty influential" because she encouraged Claire and her sister to "sit in on a psychology class" and that she took them to the library. Claire also shared that she received a fifteen-hundred-dollar scholarship during her first degree, mostly due to her high school grades, which she indicated "helped me see if I worked hard, I could support myself with a good education."

Participants reported various sources of personally influential people outside their immediate families to help their decision-making processes to pursue a postsecondary education; however, all four participants insisted that they ultimately made the decision to attend postsecondary themselves.

The University Experience

Three participants described their desire to have the "university experience." Jade remarked, "I wanted the experience of being a university student. I wanted the knowledge that came with it. Even if I didn't really know what that meant, I was dead set on it." Jade realized that her parents may have indirectly motivated her to pursue a postsecondary education. She recounted in her first interview that:

> For as long as I can remember, my dad has worked at the lumber mill. I grew up in a small town and my dad worked at the lumber mill, and my mom, for almost all my life, worked in hotels under various job titles. I always knew that I wanted something more. I wanted to do something. I wanted to know more, and I wanted to have more opportunities for myself. I didn't want to get stuck like my parents did.

Sarah described this phenomenon as "reverse psychology or something." Sarah was clear that she didn't want to grow up, have three kids, and not graduate from high school on time. She discussed that witnessing her mother and older brother struggle in life also influenced her decision to pursue a postsecondary education.

Roger thought university "was just the thing to do," which led him to enroll "the first time." He recounted in the focus group session that he didn't have an enjoyable experience at all during his first experience with postsecondary. He decided to pause postsecondary, work for a while, and then return later when he felt more prepared. Roger recounted his first experience

with postsecondary as really the first time he had been away from home. He felt a sense of

independence, which he wasn't used to feeling. He shared:

I guess I didn't really know how to handle that. The person I became out there, I

definitely wasn't pleased with, because it was sort of like a caricature of myself just to try

to please others. In the end, I was miserable. The program itself probably would have

been fine, but I think it was more of the social aspect that really drove me down. I just

couldn't handle it at the time. I just came back home after that year.

Whether participants reported people who influenced their decision to attend

postsecondary, or whether the decision to attend postsecondary was self-motivated, each

participant agreed during the focus group session that they hoped the "university experience"

would provide a better and more positive future for them.

Advice for Future First-generation Students

Participants were keen to offer advice to future first-generation students that they derived

from their own personal struggles to plan for and to prepare to attend postsecondary. Two themes

emerged during the focus group session when participants were probed with questions about

university preparation: (a) pre-departure planning, and (b) academic preparation for

postsecondary.

Pre-departure Planning

Participants discussed the challenges associated with pre-departure planning. Sarah was

keen to share, "You can prepare as much as you want. That's good of course, but," she

cautioned, "before I came to university here, I had no idea what the town was like, what the

campus looked like, or where to go. I was lost for so long and it's not even that big here." The

point Sarah made was "no matter how much you prepare, you can't really know until you're in

it." Sarah warned, "You just have to get a grip on it while you're here." She indicated, "There's a lot of information online, but it's scattered. The site is hard to navigate, honestly. Even when you go through all of it, when you get here, you're going to learn so much yourself and from other people." She concluded that new first-generation students should not worry too much though "because everything will be fine."

I asked Jade a similar question in her first interview. She agreed and advised, "Talk to as many people that you can about what it's like because I had nobody close to me that knew anything about university." She said, "When I went into it, I had no idea. I didn't know what I'd have to deal with. I didn't know what hoops I'd have to jump through or how much responsibility I would have right off the bat." She continued, "It's so different from a high school experience that if you don't have a parent to help, it's hard because you really feel like you come into it with no preparation, no ideas whatsoever, and it makes things interesting." Jade added, "Be prepared for the fact that when you call home at night, nobody you're talking to is going to know what any of that means and it's going to be hard for them to relate to you anymore." She went on to explain:

> I've changed so much since coming to university. Nobody at home was prepared for it because they had never gone through it. Going home is kind of like a culture shock. I went home for Christmas and then I went back home this summer and my priorities obviously weren't the same as they had been when I left. It was hard to get anybody to understand that. It was even hard to get my family to understand that. I have to worry about school, especially with the program that I'm in and how intensive and time consuming it is and how life affecting it is.

Jade continued, "Next summer, my brother and his fiancé want to get married at the end of September. They've asked me to be the Maid of Honour." Jade expressed she felt very honoured to be asked to be the Maid of Honour at her brother's wedding, but that she was unsure at the time they asked if she would be able to fulfil the responsibility. Jade experienced resistance from her family when she explained, "There's no theater work in Edmonton that's just for the summer and there's plenty of it out here in Newfoundland." She had to explain to her family, "If I can get a job in Newfoundland for the summer, it's what I have to do. I can't come home to help plan a wedding. This is my career and isn't just me doing acting as a hobby anymore." Jade felt her family didn't understand her concern to make her education a priority as an adult, because, she said, "for them, it all stopped in high school." Sarah and Jade confirmed that the lack of support and understanding from family was challenging.

Academic Preparation

During the focus group session, two participants shared academic preparation and planning advice. Sarah advised that the fact she came from a very small town helped her with her academic preparation for postsecondary. She expressed while others felt high school was "a joke," she did not have the same experience. Sarah explained, "We did a lot of online courses especially in grade twelve. Six out of seven of my courses were online." Sarah felt her online course-taking experiences in high school prepared her for university because of the workload. She stated, "You actually had to put your all into it. I was exhausted every night after all my courses." She added, "I can't imagine thinking high school was a joke and then coming to university and having to go through that difference." Sarah also cautioned other first-generation students to keep an open mindset to the fact that postsecondary requires dedication. She said,

"There's a big gap that usually isn't realized until you've already made a lot of mistakes in your first semester. I know a lot of people that just didn't expect to have to try hard."

Claire advised that first-generation students should "do the bridging program." Memorial University of Newfoundland offers a bridging program for students whose high school grades are just below admission requirements, which allows those students access to a postsecondary education. Claire recommended, "Do [the bridging program] anyway even if your marks are really great" because the program teaches students "how to write research papers and other important skills." Claire said these skills are especially important "when you have no one to help you at home." Claire also directed first-generation students "to find something you like to do. Explore options. When you have no one to talk to about it, you got to figure it out yourself." Claire thought the most difficult tasks were planning. She cautioned, "In university, you can pick all your classes and courses, but then you've got to figure out how to get around in under ten minutes between classes. That's a bit difficult." Like Sarah, Claire informed, "Even if your marks drop in the first term, don't give up. It's just a learning curve." Claire also warned, "Do not compare yourself to your other friends who have doctors for parents. My biggest regret is thinking that I had to do it all really quickly, taking five courses at once. You get burnout. Nobody tells you this."

Participants articulated advice to future first-generation students on topics such as pre-departure planning and academic preparation. Each participant described their experiences through their narratives about planning and preparing for postsecondary. Since there was little they could do to change their respective realities, participants offered advice to future first-generation students to prepare and plan for it.

Identity and Characteristics

While each participant met the criteria of being a Canadian first-generation student and was each actively pursuing a postsecondary education, none of them seemed to consciously identify with the label. After some discussion and reflection, especially later in the first interviews, and during the focus group session and the final interviews, participants began to piece together the significance of the term and how the phenomenon shaped their respective narratives. Subsequently, participants discussed (a) identity intersections, and (b) helpful personality attributes that they believed helped them to be successful postsecondary participants.

Identity Intersections

Participants discussed crossroads and intersections in their respective identities throughout their experiences with postsecondary education. For example, later in her interview, Sarah reflected and described her first year experiences as "certainly a struggle." Sarah expressed she was reminded of the lack of family support when "I brought my best friend in my loaded and packed car full of everything that I had to bring with me." Her experience made her realize that her parents weren't driving her. She exclaimed, "We didn't have a U-Haul. The fact that it was just my tiny little Kia packed to the brim full of just random junk, and my best friend in the passenger seat." She reflected, "Compared to a lot of other students' experiences, I don't know how to feel about it. It's just a thing, I guess." She said, "The fact that it wasn't family, but one of my friends that supported me through moving in, is kind of reflective." Sarah had to rely on herself and support from peers to achieve her goals. This created an identity intersection for her that separated who she was from who she wanted to become.

Jade shared in her first interview that a postsecondary education "means a lot to me personally." Jade discussed this, as follows:

I want to be the one that succeeds and that can do it. I feel a little bit like I have

something to prove. I didn't necessarily grow up in the best home, and I didn't

necessarily grow up with all the stuff. I didn't get everything I wanted or necessarily

everything I needed. There were times it was bare minimum. I grew up with parents who

didn't necessarily have as many life experiences or who didn't have as much education. It

is something to prove that I don't have to be who my parents were or who they thought I

was going to be. I don't have to follow in anybody's footsteps. I can be the first one to do

it, and I can succeed in it. All of what my family has done doesn't matter… I'm looking

at my parents stuck in dead end jobs with nowhere, no higher to go because nobody will

hire them without more education or more this or more that. It was looking at that and

thinking I don't want that. I won't get stuck the way they did. I won't end up miserable. I

want to have options. I want to go out and see things and do things and experience more

and know more.

Jade clearly wanted to create a new identity for herself through participating in postsecondary.

This became clear as Jade explained how she experienced the lack of knowledge from her

mother at the time she prepared to move. Jade said, "I think one thing that was really interesting

was packing and getting ready to go." She explained that there were days when she was trying to

figure out what she'd need to bring with her to university. She expressed how her mother was

"freaking out" because her mother had no idea how to help. Jade recalled "at one point, we were

walking around campus. I could tell she was just crazy out of her element. She just didn't know

what was going on and that it scared her." In that moment, Jade realized, "This was a point in my

life where I couldn't fall back and ask for help. That was really, really crazy. She's always been

there to help. But she can't help me here. That realization was a big one." Jade struggled with these identity intersections and realized she had to write her own story.

Roger had similar feelings. He explained during his first interview, "If I really think about it, it's really a chance to be able to do certain things that my mother's always wanted to be able to do, but that she hasn't had the chance to do." He said, "Being able to have the opportunity to pay back a lot of what she's done for me and give her a chance to achieve some dreams she had that she was never able to fill. That means a lot." For Roger, his identity intersection allowed him to become a person who could provide new opportunities to his family through self-discovery.

Claire shared that being first-generation meant more to her presently than it had before she started university. She felt proud of her success. In her first interview, Claire revealed, "It's something to be proud of when I talk to my little cousins. If I did it, they can do it. I'm a bit prouder than I was." She indicated, "The first gets it the hardest because they got to make it themselves, and then they can make it easier for others. I'm just glad I can now help my little cousins." Claire recalled a story that illustrated how she felt as a first-generation student. She shared:

> I remember when my mother dropped me off. She was confused as to where everything
> was, so we asked for directions. There was a family and the father must have worked at
> Grenfell. My mother went up to him and asked for directions. He said it was by his
> office. He was being technically a professor. He was also being a father and showing his
> children around. Like this kid was talking to his father, and his father was introducing
> him to all the professors, but these professors knew him from before when they used to

come over for dinner. I was starting off from the beginning, not knowing anyone, and he

was starting off knowing everyone, but in a different context.

Like other participants, the experience Claire described defined an identity intersection she

hadn't realized before.

Helpful Personality Characteristics

The participants were also keen to share specific identifying characteristics or attributes

that they considered helpful to their success in postsecondary when probed with questions about

identity and characteristics during the first interview. Sarah revealed, "I'm stubbornly

independent to a gross extent. I'll put myself in danger before I ask for help." She felt her

experience was "individually special," which "in itself was a strength." Sarah felt that

personality and identity define a person. For example, she suggested, "You just have to have

coping mechanisms ingrained in you that can get you through everything that you're not good at.

That's what's most important to be good at, I think."

Jade also pronounced her stubbornness. She revealed, "I'm very stubborn and I think

that's been really helpful in not letting this go." She exclaimed, "I'm here now. I'm not leaving.

I'm not going to quit this degree halfway through. I think just being stubborn was really good."

Jade indicated, "I'm also very vocal and I'm very outgoing. I'll step in and I don't mind helping.

I'm not shy either, which has been really, really helpful in making myself fit in and do well

here." Jade continued, "I'm very outside the box. I'm push the envelope, look at it from a

different angle. I don't mind being the one in charge. I don't mind being the one to take point

and figure things out." Jade felt these qualities were useful for her academically. She admitted,

"Asking for help is difficult, but you learn quickly that you need to swallow your pride and ask

for help a lot in university."

Roger indicated his personality helped him to succeed as well. He revealed, "I get very focused on achieving things. Something I want to see done, I really narrow in on that and get it done, probably to a fault." He explained other personality characteristics too. He discussed, "Being observant is helpful. I do take the time to make sure I take many different perspectives into account. I think that's been very helpful." Roger indicated, "I easily remember things the first time hearing them. I've always been very good at that." He recommended, "It's really important I attend lectures. Being in that environment, looking at the professor and hearing what they're saying, will register in my mind ten times better than if I go over something that has been written." He continued, "As far as group work goes, I'm able to organize and delegate very efficiently and effectively, which I think is a skill that many don't necessarily possess."

Claire also described how her personality helped her to succeed. Claire shared that she "was a bit of an introvert;" however, after a while settling into university, she "joined some groups." Claire observed, "Other people seemed more nervous than me, so then I became more outgoing. I thought if I don't talk, nobody will. That helped me." Claire also added that a counsellor told her she was "very conscientious and a bit of a perfectionist." She felt that was also one of her strengths. She described, "I like to analyse things in different ways. I came really far with my papers and studying. I learned how to study, and now it doesn't take as long."

Responses led each participant to reflect on a positive characteristic they believed helped them become successful postsecondary participants. Each participant shared particular talents, skills and interests. Sarah expressed that "passing school" was a top priority for her. Jade also shared interests that she thought were helpful to her success. For example, she stated that she reads a lot and is interested in popular culture and international affairs. Roger informed that local politics was definitely one of his interests. He conveyed that "keeping up to date on current

affairs" was an interest beneficial to him. Claire shared that her interest in many extracurricular activities benefited her. She said, "I go to the gym for two hours a day. I ski in the winter. We raise money for the food bank." Claire continued, "I read sometimes. I'm on a disability board for the city. We talk about accessibility and inclusion and what barriers need to be reduced. I was also in the *psyc-society*." Claire felt her involvement in activities on and off campus were particularly helpful to her success in postsecondary. Participants expressed personality characteristics, whether psychosocial or cognitive in nature, which helped frame successful experiences for them in postsecondary contexts.

Experiences

In exploring the super-ordinate theme first-generation student experiences in postsecondary contexts, more specific themes began to emerge surrounding (a) the importance of friendships, (b) experiences with faculty and staff, (c) campus services, (d) extracurricular activities, (e) personal changes, and (f) challenges and stressful situations. Participants re-lived their experiences when probed about their respective postsecondary experiences during interviews one and two.

Friendships

A recurring theme throughout discussions with participants was the importance of friendships. Sarah described, "There's something about coming to university. It almost feels like a completely different life all together. You just have this fresh slate with these other people who have the same fresh start." Sarah felt that "being able to bond over being in the same situations and the same setting with the same struggles is very interesting and very important." She said later, "Somehow even the quietest of people make friends. It's just something that happens. People just naturally come together in settings like that, so I think it was very, very important

that I made the group of friends that I made." She continued, "It was nice to get a breath of fresh air and just be my own person coming to a new town where nobody knows me. I get to make my own story." She revealed, "I'm very introverted. It's not that I'm not social. I can be. It's just I get socially exhausted so easily. But here, I got involved with a lot of things like class participation, and other random things at the university." During her second interview, Sarah described several of her photos that demonstrated *the airport lounge* on campus, a wide view snapshot of the Arts and Science building, her apartment, a record player, and a suitcase. Each of these photos illustrated artifacts that could be synonymous with friendship, friendship-making, and socializing.

Jade made several good friendships during her first year and, at the time I interviewed her, she was currently living with them. She described, "I've actually made a few friends based on location, like where all of my mom's family is from, which turned into really good friendships." Jade shared, "One of the biggest things that I was nervous about going to university, especially so far away, was the fact that I wasn't going to know anyone." She indicated, "I didn't know anybody. The fact that I was able to quickly pick out people and then make good connections with them has really, really helped." During her second interview, Jade described several photos that showed her on campus living accommodations, a pool table, meals, and a prank card game. Like Sarah's photos, each of Jade's photos also illustrated artifacts that could be synonymous with the importance of friendship, friendship-making, and socializing. Jade reflected that she found it difficult to leave her family and friends behind in Alberta. She expressed it was very important for her to create new friendships and create a new sense of social identity in her new home. Jade took a picture of the front door of her on campus apartment because she said when she first approached it, she felt the front door represented her new home.

Roger had similar thoughts but added another level of complexity through his narrative. He explained, "When it comes to friendships, many of my close friends have continued to be upper level students because I was a bit older when I started again." He indicated, "I would naturally gravitate towards people who were a bit older than first year students. I found that a bit difficult because I'd make friends and then a year or two later, they'd graduate. So that's been tough."

Roger felt disadvantaged by his age. These re-presentations were evident in Roger's photos as well. During his second interview, Roger described several photos including a small boardroom, common areas on campus for students, a ping-pong table, and the campus' community garden. These photos also illustrated artifacts that could be synonymous with the importance of friendship, friendship-making, and socializing; however, Roger also had three other significant photos. One was taken of a quiet, and perhaps hidden, grassy area on campus, another was taken near the memorial site on campus, and another taken of an isolated and rather large boulder away from the campus' garden, away from people, and away from otherwise social areas of campus. Roger described that these were places he would frequent when he needed time to "reflect" or when he felt the need to "disconnect." These photos might re-present Roger's feelings of disconnection or dissociation from others younger than Roger on campus.

Claire recommended a friendship-making strategy. She suggested, "We tried our best to make our schedules match up. If we needed to take a certain course, we'd do it together because it would be easier, and then we could have lunch together." Each participant expressed the importance of making friends, connections, and networking. During Claire's second interview, she described her photos that included a photo of a lecture theatre, the campus bar, the cafeteria, a common study area for students in the library, and her bedroom. These photos also illustrated artifacts that could be synonymous with the importance of friendship, friendship-making, and

socializing. Claire explained that friendships were important to her and narrated how those friendships, especially those that positively influenced her academic performance, were essential to her success in postsecondary contexts.

Sarah reported, "You have to understand yourself before you can understand what it means to be a student. You need to get yourself in a mindset before you can try to adjust to other people's mindsets." She warned, "Everything is not going to be the same. Everybody has different experiences. Everybody is coming into university with different experiences, so you can't expect it to be just like someone else's story." Sarah stated, "Coming here and meeting everybody else happened very organically. They certainly are my support group, for sure." Sarah felt that it was very important to have somebody to rely on. Jade advised students should make connections as soon as possible. She recommended, "I think the most important part is getting out and meeting other people." She theorized, "You need to carve yourself out a spot and figure out who you are apart from who your family is and what they did and who they knew." She advised, "This is you building who you know, and it's completely different, and it's difficult, and it's terrifying, but it's really, really important." Roger suggested, "The most important thing is it is okay to fail at things." He joked, "I've been doing that most of my whole life." He continued, "Pick yourself back up. Once you decide you're going to get serious, you're already doing it." Roger recommended, "Get involved in extracurricular activities, whether that's student politics or clubs, societies. It provides a valuable experience that you won't get with just your academics." He thought, "It gives you more chances to meet more people, have more relationships with peers and new faculty. I think that's a very important part of the university experience." Claire also advised, "I said I would try to talk to someone. One day I did and then the next day she sat next to me. That was the first time somebody sat next to me." She continued,

"We became good friends and we relied on each other a lot. I would say that was one of my favourite moments. She's one of my highlights of university." Participants were clear during each of the first and second interviews that personal friendships, making connections, and networking were key factors that contributed to achieving success in postsecondary settings. These findings were also re-presented in participants' visual narratives as depicted in photos taken for the photo elicitation exercise. When probed, participants described the significance of social capital, belongingness and associated activities that were depicted in the representative photographs.

Faculty and Staff

Participants narrated experiences with faculty and staff when asked about experiences with faculty and staff in the first interview. Sarah shared, "Everyone's been very kind. It was nice to come to a place that isn't completely alienating in a sense. If anything comes up, you just go to a professor." She revealed, "You can have a random chat with them in their office." Sarah explained how she would visit professors about academic concerns but end up discussing other matters. She said, "It was just nice to have friendly staff." Sarah admitted she didn't take advantage of student services. She felt it was "a personal thing." She acknowledged, "I probably should have used student services, especially earlier on when I had no idea what was going on." Instead, Sarah confessed, "My student services came from other students who had an idea of what was going on. Any questions that I did have about anything, my professors answered for me. I didn't have much interaction with student services." She enlightened, "I went to other people about the concerns or questions I had. Professors helped me a lot compared to actually seeking out an academic advisor like I should have." Sarah revealed that she is still trying to get a feel for what she wants to do and is still taking whichever courses interest her. She preferred

talking to somebody who had "experience" rather than seeking advice from student services because "it's just more *office-y*."

Jade described relationships with faculty and staff in her first interview as well. She indicated, "One thing that I appreciate about university as compared to high school faculty and staff is I find it's a better relationship, especially where I'm in a program with such small classes and such a small community of people." She appreciated, "There's always a door open and no question is a stupid question." Jade credited her professors as a great source of help. She valued, "Professors aren't just interested in helping you through your academic life. They also want to make sure that you're succeeding in your personal life and they genuinely want to help and want to see you do well." She shared, "It's only been my first year, but there's already three or four that I know if I were to go knock on their office doors, they'd have no problem letting me in and sitting down and talking about it." She added, "It's the same thing with students in comparison to high school." Jade felt in high school, students were there because they had to be there, and "everybody was miserable." She felt university was different. She continued, "When you come to university, we're all here because we want to be here, and we're all enrolled in this particular class because it's what we want to do." She esteemed, "There's no person sitting in the back row taking everyone down because they'd rather be anywhere else. We're all like-minded. We're all working towards the same goal, which I really, really appreciate."

Roger shared one particularly negative experience. He recalled:

There was a class I was taking when I did not get along with that professor particularly. That's back when I was doing the business program. There was a certain case study we were looking at and this professor took exception to my answer. I still remember the words that he said. He looked at me, in front of the class, and he called me "a capitalist

pig!" That was very memorable; however, aside from that, I haven't had any negative memorable moments.

Roger also shared positive memories with faculty. For example, he announced, "I had one professor in particular who I have been working very closely with and at this point I would consider him something of a mentor." He stated, "I've worked a lot with faculty and for the most part I would say I've had very good experiences. Everyone wants to get things done and work towards a common goal. It's been very pleasant."

Claire, on the other hand, described her fears. Claire revealed, "I remember when I first went to university. I was so scared to talk to the professors because they seemed so intelligent." She feared, "When I went to their offices, I felt like I had nothing to say that would seem intelligent." Claire recalled:

I remember having to ask my professor a question once. I panicked for forty-five minutes to think of a way to word it. We were reading an article that I couldn't understand. I didn't want to sound stupid, but I didn't get what the article was about. He said, "It was a difficult article, and it's a good thing you came to me. Most people would just sit in class and not do anything." I found talking to faculty very nice here. I think it's because it's a small campus, so you get to know people. But I remember being very nervous talking to professors and even classmates.

Participants recounted memorable experiences with faculty and staff on campus and noted that these experiences were an invaluable part of their postsecondary experiences.

Campus Services

Participants also shared the importance of campus services when questioned about such services during the first interview. Sarah reported, "I'm stubbornly independent, so I didn't really

take up student services at all. Most of the guidance that I did get was through friends and professors, especially. Professors have been very helpful." Sarah acknowledged she was less interested to avail of other campus services. She appreciated that "it was really cool of [professors] to take that little bit of time to set any of your questions straight and relieve you of that burden even though they have a lot of work to do." She said, "That was especially important to me." Sarah felt it was interesting to come to university with people sharing the same mindset and the same outlook on education.

In her interview, Jade praised, "Health services on campus is fantastic, especially where I don't have a lot of coverage. It's really helpful to have that around." She explained, "I didn't have to use the food bank, but I had to help a friend get into it." She added, "There's also an emergency student loan that Grenfell Campus does if you're seriously hurting for cash. It's $500.00." Jade revered, "That was crazy helpful in first year. I burned through savings faster than I should have. That was a crazy helpful cushion to keep everything all right until the next batch of loans came in."

Roger described, "I used to take advantage of student instructor sessions" and "group study sessions." He recounted he would approach professors with questions, which "helped wrap my mind around ways that questions were asked and ways to answer them." Claire shared in her interview that she also took advantage of student instructor sessions, explaining, "I did the peer tutoring. I signed up for it even though my marks were pretty good, just to have someone that knew what it would be like, so they could advise me." Claire also suggested visiting the librarian. She said, "I asked for help doing a research paper" because "I didn't know where to get any information." Claire felt very nervous because she had to admit she did not understand what she was doing and that she needed help.

Jade also recommended campus-counselling services. She said, "I did try out the counsellor on campus a couple of times last semester." Like Jade, Claire shared her experiences talking to the campus counsellor about stresses she experienced while attending postsecondary. Claire recalled:

I went to the counsellor a couple times to talk about stress. The counsellor said, "I think you have perfectionism." In the beginning, it felt like if I didn't get a 90, I was failing. It took me a while to realize I should ask for help before I needed it. I'd say going to the counsellor was one of the best coping mechanisms just to talk about stuff. It was nice to talk to someone. If you tell your mother you're stressed, she'd say she was stressed too. But a counsellor has to ask, "Why are you stressed?" Or, "I can understand that." She's not trying to have the *who is the most stressed?* battle.

On the whole, participants' experiences with campus services were positive. They each shared their hesitations in seeking help but that afterwards, they felt relieved.

Extracurricular Activities

Participants explained the importance of making connections through taking part in extracurricular activities when asked about involvement in extracurricular activities during the first interview. Sarah revealed that she participated in a few movie nights and that she lived in a residence chalet on campus during her first year of study. She communicated that living in residence at the university was a great way to meet people because there are frequently planned events happening. Sarah also discussed, "It's so easy to kill time just hanging around the university, especially if you have time between classes. You can go to the library. You can go to the atrium. You can go eat food at the Grove." Jade explained, "Last year, I helped out a lot with the student union and a couple different caucuses on campus like the women's caucus and the

queer caucus." Jade had been invited to a conference in St. John's with the student union about leadership skills at the beginning of her first year. She recommended, "It's been really nice helping out with various organizations around campus and being able to carve myself out a spot and figure out where I fit in on campus and as a university student." She noted, "It has set a good foundation for coming back here because now I've already established that I'm involved with those things." Jade suggested the extracurricular activities "helped with the networking" by facilitating opportunities to "find people from outside the university and outside my program, which is nice because my program is so tight knit and so exclusive, it's hard to branch out and to make relationships outside of it." Jade felt making connections and networking were important and the extracurricular activities helped her to achieve that. Claire shared, "Me and my sister started a club that helps the SPCA. We would also have movie nights and bake sales. If you're at Grenfell, there's a million bake sales going on at once." She said she also participated in activities with Oxfam, the Lion's club, the disability caucus, and Bell Let's Talk. She discussed that "the extracurricular activities were one of the best. I'm not sure if it was a bigger university what they'd be like, but you at least get to make friends outside of your discipline." Like Jade, Claire suggested, "Sometimes, when you're in a discipline, you see the same people over and over, but if you do extracurricular activities, you see people from other disciplines that you wouldn't necessarily talk to because they're in their own building." She explained that joining clubs or participating in extracurricular activities allowed her to meet other people. Each of the participants described their involvement in extracurricular activities during interview one. Upon analysis across the data, it appeared that participants agreed that on and off campus activities facilitated networking, connections, and friendships, which they thought were essential to persisting in postsecondary contexts.

Personal Changes

Participants also described their experiences with personal growth and personal changes when probed during their respective interviews. For example, later in her interview, Sarah discussed that university has changed her "in the sense of growth as a person." Most importantly, she expressed, "It's the fact that I know what this is like now. I know I've had a university experience when nobody that I previously knew before this experience did." She liked that fact that "if my niece decides to go to university, I can help her prepare. Give my advice. It changed me in the sense that I'm more knowledgeable for sure." Jade also shared, "I think I'm starting to figure out who I am as a person better." She recalled:

> I decided early in my first year that my philosophy was going to be *don't say no to anything the first time*. In doing that, I've been able to figure out more about who I am outside of small town, rural, nowhere, Alberta. I've been able to figure out where I want to go with my life and what kind of person I want to be when I get out of university. Before I was very head down, go with the flow, just get out of it, do what you need to do to finish and get everything done and let everything be. In the last year or so, it's been more apparent that I don't want to do things that way. I'd rather trust my instincts more and trust my voice a little bit more now, which is really helpful and it's a lot of learning who I am and a lot of learning that taking risks is okay. This might end in disaster, but it's worth taking the shot. It's been one risky decision after another trying to get somewhere.

Roger also suggested, "I feel like I've become much more serious. I can think of a time three or four years ago when I didn't take anything seriously. I feel like I've really started to look at the bigger picture." He explained he definitely attributed that to being exposed to more ideas and

new ways of thinking that he hadn't thought about before. He shared, "It's been very eye opening." Claire suggested her experiences made her more confident. She shared, "I'm more outgoing to talk to people. I joined clubs. When I was in high school, if I didn't know anyone, I would rarely go to the events or the afterschool things." She experienced these sorts of changes and explained:

> Now I'm just joining if it seems like a fun time. It's easier to make friends now and I feel more confident. I never imagined before I started university all the things I would have accomplished like going to conferences, getting to class on my own, planning my classes, going to extracurricular activities, or just sitting in the library looking for books. I'm proud that I managed to survive in this environment pretty much on my own, which is something that I didn't do in high school. It's all about me now, so I feel more mature and more accomplished.

Participants experienced personal growth and attributed those changes to the experiences they gained by participating in a postsecondary education.

Challenges and Stressful Situations

Participants were keen to share their specific challenges and stressful situations at postsecondary. Participants were asked during interview one to describe significant challenges they faced with respect to their postsecondary experiences as well as what they considered personal sources of stress. Sarah discussed her feelings of isolation. She stated, "Nobody else in my family has really done school. None of my role models did what I'm doing. If I have something that is bothering me, I have to find some other way to get through it." Again, she reiterated the importance of friendships. Sarah reported, "Having nobody kind of sucked for a little while. I mean you can't expect to make friends right off the bat. Again, I didn't have

anybody to fall back on. I was kind of just here." Sarah described that she made very close friendships with a group she met in her history class. She continued, "It was very, very important that I met people and I didn't realize that when I first started that everything would get much less stressful just by having other people to communicate that with." During Jade's interview, she wondered whether part of it was not knowing what to expect. She said, "Not having anybody with the same experience to kind of nudge you along or give you any kind of direction" was difficult at times.

During Sarah's interview, she also alluded that time management and planning were sources of academic stress. For example, Sarah added she felt a major source of stress for her was "the studies mostly." She continued, "I'm used to the workload, but that doesn't mean that it's not stressful." She explained, "When you have a bunch of assignments due on the same week, the studies themselves are a big source of stress." Jade also referenced time management as challenging and stressful during her interview. She stated, "My program is crazy intensive. That's definitely a major source of stress." She professed, "Not only is it academic heavy, but also we have a class from 7:00 PM until 11:00 PM, Monday to Thursday." She proclaimed, "Other faculties get the evenings for homework and for decompressing and for personal things, we just don't. So that's really, really difficult. Finding time is getting harder." She concluded, "You underestimate just how difficult it's going to be and how time consuming it's going to be." Jade moved across the country to Newfoundland. She described that part of her decision to move here was to be closer to her family in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Jade thought she would have time to visit her family. Jade continued to explain how time consuming her studies are for her. She considered, "My mom and I are crazy close, but sometimes I realize I haven't talked to my mom in a week. I'll call her, and I'll apologize, but I think that has been one of the hardest

parts." She added, "The lack of being able to keep up with my family has been really difficult to figure out and balance it all", revealing, "My mom, a few years ago, in 2015, was diagnosed with cancer. She's good now, in remission and everything, but she's older and she's had health issues." Jade continued, "It's always a stress being so far away and not knowing what's going on with her. Being so far away and not being able to do anything for my family really weighs on you sometimes."

Roger also admitted during his interview that "time management" was a challenge for him. He acknowledged, "Between trying to do a full course load and then trying to do my job, it's been very challenging." He confessed, "Sometimes just motivating myself to do work" was a challenge. He shared, "I guess I never really learned that skill set, so trying to pick it up and condition myself along the way has been challenging." Roger suggested a form of his time management stress was "putting off papers to the last minute." He supposed, "It's strange because I don't feel like a stressful person at all. I don't feel stressed often, if at all. For me, the problem is the opposite. I'm not stressed enough, which I feel has challenges of its own." Roger explained that his social life suffered as a result of postsecondary dedication. He admitted, "My social life is not what it used to be. I remember when I would be out three, four, or five times a week. I can't do that anymore. I'm trying to put more time into my academic work." He considered, "That's been a bit of a transition, and not always successful." He imagined, "I feel like any challenges I faced on the academic side have really been my own making, like not being able to motivate myself and not being able to manage my time well enough." He reflected, "I go back to those two things a lot because they've just been such reoccurring themes for my life."

Claire also recognized during her interview that "planning" was a challenge. She continued, "There was no one to ask for help. I could ask my mother, but she would only tell me

to go ask someone else. She didn't know. As for planning, there's a lot of planning." She asserted, "You've got to pick the right courses to do. You need to know where to get your textbooks and how to get to class. I didn't know anything." She proclaimed, "Trying to find your classes, and just trying to deal with the stress. I suppose if my mother went to university, she would know that it was stressful, and understand." Claire theorized, "I'd say if you don't have any previous experience with university, you could think it's hard in some ways, and not realize it's hard in other ways." For example, Claire suggested, "You think it is hard writing papers. It's not really hard writing papers, it is hard finding the time to research for the papers." She attributed that challenge to planning. She indicated, "There's a lot more planning that goes in. A lot of people think it is just smarts, and you've got to memorize it, but really you're just planning it out." She advised, "If you plan enough time, you got enough time to get an A. But if you don't plan, you'll just get a C or a D. That's one of the challenges. Nobody told you about the planning." Claire concluded that "planning for university" had been helpful. She said, "Planning out when you're going to read, and when you're going to start writing your paper, and trying to find all your resources" helps to alleviate stress. While she acknowledged, "It's a lot of planning," she agreed that the planning was most helpful.

Sarah indicated that money and finances were a big source of stress for her. She felt financial insecurity negatively affected how much attention she could devote to her academics. She expressed, "I work full time now for summer. When I go back to school, I plan on staying in the apartment that I'm in. I have to make sure that I have enough money for bills and rent and stuff like that." Sarah feared that she would "probably have to take less courses so I have more time to work. I mean just trying to get around all that stuff. It's expensive. Even though my education is paid for, everything else isn't." She cautioned, "Time is money. Your time is

valuable and having to spend so much time on my studies means that I cannot spend it on other things that would help make my life so much more comfortable." Sarah shared, "The adversity of basically every other university student still applies to me, even though, years from now, I will not have the same adversity of having to pay back my student loans. But right now, financially, I'm struggling."

Financial insecurity was a serious topic for all participants. Discussions surrounding financial hardship resonated in each interview, from each participant, and during the focus group session. For example, one of Sarah's main sources of stress explored financial insecurity. Sarah described she found it frustrating that her university peers could ask their parents for financial support, but that she did not have that sense of security. Sarah indicated, "When they're hard up for money, they can ask their mom or dad to send them money. I don't have that. I have nothing to fall back on." Sarah felt a pressure to be more responsible as a result. She expressed, "It's not that scary because I'm a responsible person, but it still sucks." Sarah explained, "Things like my education are paid for because I'm a foster child. I don't have any student loans, but if I were to get a student loan like everybody else, I would actually have more money to use." She said, "I'm still poor even though I'm not going to have to pay off student loans." She added, "I also have to work because I have things like my phone bill, and I have a car, so I have car insurance and gas. I have to pay for food and stuff like that." Sarah voiced that for her it's non-negotiable that she needs to work and go to school at the same time. Sarah thought, "It's made me more independent, but the independence kind of sucks too. It is definitely double-edged." Sarah later reflected that working part time was "actually not so bad." She said that she makes pizza and that she really likes pizza. She explained, "I think that actually helped me out a lot compared to if I were to work in a clothing store or something. When I close, I get to bring home pizza slices. I

can survive off those." Sarah concluded though that financial stress was a significant challenge for her.

Jade also feared financial insecurity. She stated, "Not knowing moneywise has been really, really difficult. Obviously, I looked up tuition rates and so on, but not actually knowing, not having any way of knowing… has been a struggle and still is." She continued to explain that even a year later in her studies, it continued to be difficult. She revealed, "My mom is the sole provider parentally. She doesn't have any kind of higher education, so it's harder for her to get a better paying job. Funneling money in to my degree is even harder." For Jade, money management was a significant challenge. Roger concluded his discussions of stress with reservations about finances. He credited, "For the most part, I've managed to get by without taking on too much financial debt. I saved up a lot of money during my time working, so I've been able to rely on that a lot." However, he revealed, "That's run out now, so that could be a future challenge." Claire also said financial insecurity was a challenge. She indicated, "My parents didn't have much money. I got funded through Advanced Education and Skills for students with disabilities." She reflected, "I think that was one of the challenges. If your parents went to university, chances are they put money away for you to go to university. That's what most of my friends' parents did." Participants described personal challenges and sources of stress when probed during interview one that led to the discussion of topics including feelings of isolation, feelings of pressure surrounding time management and planning, and feelings associated with managing financial insecurity.

Particular and specific personal narratives began to unfold throughout the data collection process. Participants recounted their postsecondary experiences through personal narratives of their lived experiences during each of the interviews and during the focus group session.

Participants verbally described, and in some cases visually narrated, the significance of making friendships, experiences with faculty and staff, campus services, and participation in extracurricular activities. In addition, participants described personal changes that they felt were significant since attending postsecondary and what they felt were challenging circumstances or stressful situations while attending postsecondary education.

Reflections on Pursuing a Postsecondary Education

Considering the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students in the current study, all four participants shared reflections and stories surrounding (a) the decision-making factors that led them to pursue a postsecondary education, (b) the search and application processes involved, (c) their transitions from high school to postsecondary, (d) their course selection and planning processes, (e) their personal expectations of the postsecondary experience, (f) success strategies that they considered helped them persist in postsecondary contexts, and (g) future goals and plans after graduation. Data reported in this section were primarily derived from interview one and the focus group session.

Decision-making Factors

Participants shared their reflections on their decision-making influences during the focus group session that led them to pursue a postsecondary education. Sarah reflected, "I always thought about it, so I always knew, but I guess in grade twelve I had to think about what I was actually going to do, and that was tough." She acknowledged, "I planned on engineering and then I changed my mind because math sucks. Then I chose psychology. I just ended up taking courses I liked. That's what I plan on doing again in September, taking random courses." Jade expressed during her first interview, "When it started getting to be something that was brought up, I knew that it was something that I wanted to do. It's always been part of my future." Jade

wanted to be able to give herself more opportunities. In his first interview, Roger described, "I really had two jumping in points to my postsecondary career." He shared, "I don't really consider the first time me making the decision to go. I really got pushed into it." Roger felt he needed time for personal growth. He reapplied later when he felt he was ready to be serious about pursuing a postsecondary education. Claire claimed, "Grade seven was when I thought I might go to university; however, I'd say around grade ten when we talked about careers, I realized that you needed university to do anything. Having high school doesn't get you anywhere." During the focus group session, Sarah agreed with Claire and described, "It was mostly the feeling that you needed it. Security. That seems to be it. I thought I was prepared. I was as prepared as I could be, but I wasn't very prepared." Sarah explained, "I came here a few days early and that is what helped me out because that helped me get on my feet." In addition, she said, "I stayed in residence too the last two semesters, so the fact that I could get settled in and figure out where I was, where everything else was really helped."

In her first interview, Jade confessed, "It was something that I always knew I wanted, but the more that I looked into it, what university life was like and what people said coming out of it solidified my decision." However, she stressed, "Figuring out where to enroll and what to enroll in was a much different story." She thought, "Talking to friends and different teaching staff in my high school about their university experiences and about what they got out of it really did solidify the fact that that was what I wanted for myself." Jade shared, "Balancing a high school schedule was crazy and then preparing my life to move here. I pretty much packed up my entire life in the trunk of my car and drove here last summer." Jade's mother accompanied her on the drive from Alberta to Newfoundland; however, she worried that returning home during academic breaks would be unlikely. She explained, "It was hard figuring out what I would need for myself

and then mentally preparing too. I had to leave my family for a year." She recalled, "When I left last summer, I didn't know if I'd be home for Christmas or even in the summer. I don't again this year. That's a lot of mental preparation." Jade admitted, "I don't think I actually managed to prepare for that part. I genuinely don't think so. I think I just kind of did it." She continued, "It was difficult to prepare, and I don't think I really came into it fully prepared. I just didn't know how to prepare for it."

Like Sarah, Roger expressed, "I just felt like I was going to need a university degree." Roger discussed cost to be a decision-making factor. He said, "One of the biggest factors was probably the cost. I don't have that much money put away. I've got some, but not a great amount." Roger added that he knew he wouldn't be able to rely on his parents or family for any sort of financial support to help. He continued, "Really I just think the extent of any preparation I did was talking to people who I knew were going here." Claire also admitted, "I went to university because it provided some consistency." Cost and location were important factors for Claire. She stated, "It was the closest university to where I live." She added, "And cost."

Search and Application Process

Participants also discussed the search and application processes involved in accessing a postsecondary education during the focus group session as well. Sarah shared, "I had no idea what to do. We hardly had a guidance counsellor. I didn't really have that extra help." She supposed, "Again, I'm super stubborn. I didn't reach out for it either. I definitely should have. I just tried to bear it on my own." Sarah noted, "Eventually my foster sister came home in April from her semester. She helped me do it all. It was hard because I didn't know what to do and I didn't know what courses to take." Sarah advised, "Unless you talk to an academic advisor, you have no idea what's going on. There are some parallels between high school and university, but

it's not linear so it was difficult." Sarah also shared that finding student accommodations was difficult. She claimed, "I didn't know who to contact. It's confusing. I was here for the first month before I actually knew what the registrar was, and what the difference was between the little booths and the little student office." She indicated, "I still don't know what half of all that's for, so I just talked to people I knew."

Jade acknowledged in her first interview that her search and application process was difficult too. She shared, "There's a lot of places in Alberta that offer theater programs and the University of Alberta was kind of the first one that I thought of because it's well known for its theater program." However, she revealed, "I pretty much immediately ruled it out based on tuition prices. It's a very expensive university." Jade wasn't concerned about location. She indicated, "I knew that location wasn't really a factor, so I went to the career counsellor at my high school. She gave me a list of all of the schools that matched my criteria." She confessed, "It didn't take very long for me to rule out in-province because nothing in-province had what I was looking for. I also wanted to get out for a little while. I wanted to be independent." She explained, "I started looking into Grenfell and realized it was crazy affordable. It was a long sit down talk with my mom about Newfoundland and that it's really far away. But having family in Nova Scotia helped influence the decision."

During the focus group session, Roger indicated that he compared several postsecondary institutions in his search and application process. He considered "a decently large slate between this province, UPEI, Dal, UBC, UNBC, Thompson Rivers, University of Saskatchewan, Winnipeg, and some others." He shared, "I did go through a decent list of ones I was looking at and narrowed it down based on price point and my particular interests and seeing what I could get the most value out of." He explained, "When I was actually doing the enrollment process, I

just looked it up by myself." He revealed, "I was actually mandated to meet with academic counselling because I had been out of the postsecondary system for so long. They wanted to get me in and discuss everything with me." He explained he applied to several universities before deciding on Grenfell.

Claire also shared her experience during the focus group session. She recalled, "I barely saw the guidance counsellor. I looked on the website, printed off the application, and filled it out. If I needed help, I went to my friend who was in university." She stated, "After a while, I started to get the hang of it, but no one really told me how to do an application, and I didn't really look at any other schools besides Grenfell because Grenfell was close." Claire indicated, "It just hits you all at once, trying to figure it out and making sure you're registered on time." Claire shared her concerns with the registrar's office. She reported:

> The door is always shut [to the registrar's office]. If it was open, then I might go in once in a while. But if it's shut, you feel like no one should go in there. That's just for other people. If they had opened the door, I would have gone in. It made me feel like a bit of an outsider because I don't know very many people here.

Like the others, Claire also felt alone in the search and application process, not knowing who to turn to or where to seek guidance for assistance in the search and application processes.

Transition from High School to Postsecondary

Participants narrated their reflections on the transition from high school to postsecondary. Sarah revealed during the focus group session, "I really needed a break from math because I did advanced math, calculus, physics, chemistry, and biology in high school. I finished three science courses, but grade twelve itself exhausted me." She stated, "The online courses had giant workloads and you had to work so hard to keep your grades up. In university, it's a little less

important to get nineties compared to just passing the course." Sarah's perception was, "If you pass the course, that's all you need. In high school, you need good grades." She indicated, "I did pass as an honour's student, but it also took a lot out of me. I'm glad that I decided on Arts. I think that helped a lot because I'm more rounded." In addition, she shared, "At the same time, that is what I'm geared towards, like English, history, and stuff like that. That was a big relief. I could finally relax a little bit. It's a lot of reading and a lot of writing." She explained, "I feel like I was a little more prepared just because of my high school experience compared to a lot of other people." She continued, "I've met so many people here. They all said their high school felt like a joke compared to university and how much work they put into their courses." She reported, "I mean a lot of people in their first semester struggle and then do less courses in the next semester or adjust in some sort of way." Sarah felt she already had adjusted to the level of independence needed for university because of her "unique" high school experience. She claimed, "I didn't have any adjustments to make throughout university."

Jade explained in her first interview, "I'm one of the few people that didn't take a gap year from my graduating class. I graduated in May of 2017, and in September of 2017 I was here on campus." Jade shared she felt, "It is a huge change to jump from high school to university and one of the biggest things that I've noticed is all the things that high school teachers tell you about university that aren't relevant at all." She stated, "The teaching style is so much different and the relationship with professors and other students is so radically different." Jade acknowledged she felt the transition was really difficult, especially due to the move. She revealed, "Newfoundland is so different from home. It was kind of transplanting myself into a completely different life, which was crazy, and it made things difficult, especially for the first month or so." Jade

considered, "University so far has been an amazing experience. I'm glad I did it, and I'm a better person so far for doing it."

Roger shared, "I was always someone who honestly couldn't wait to leave [high school]. My experiences in the school system were not always good, so it was really exciting to go." However, he acknowledged, "I was supposed to graduate in 2008, but I lost focus, stopped taking things seriously. I just had a real lack of motivation. I ended up failing my grade twelve math." He reasoned, "I could have left it at that. I still could have graduated, but I was adamant that I wanted to graduate with an academic status in case I did want to go to university." He shared, "When I went to postsecondary that first time, I was still in that high school mindset. I just didn't study for things. I actually ended up failing all my courses and failing out at the end of the year." He considered, "I would say it was pretty tough for me. Part of me thinks it's because I never had good study habits." He recalled, "One of the most frequent pieces of feedback I ever received from teachers was, you know, brilliant mind but doesn't try, and that included my study habits, which continued into postsecondary." Roger believed, "It wasn't until I came back this time that I started taking things seriously. I needed time to get into the mindset that this is my life. It's serious. It's time to sit down and actually do something."

Claire shared her experiences. She stated, "I had a tough time. I needed to evaluate where I was in my program, if I even wanted to stay in that program or just leave Grenfell." She contended, "I decided to stay because my sister suggested I do more psychology and less business." Claire recalled, "I remember in the beginning, I was really stressed out. I think it was freedom in some ways and draw backs in another." She stressed, "I had freedom. I could decide where I wanted to go, but then I also had to figure it out myself. I had more responsibility. If was late to class, it was because of me." She explained making friends helped with the transition. She

referenced, "I got to make more friends than I did in all my years in public school." She

continued, "People talk to you more… I never expected that." Claire advised, "There's going to

be a transition period where you're going to feel really stressed out and like you're not doing

anything." However, she exclaimed, "In the end, you'll figure it out." Claire suggested first-

generation students should take advantage of campus services to alleviate transition stressors.

She recommended, "Rely on student services like the tutoring and the writing support." She

advised there was more to transitioning from high school to postsecondary than academic

transitioning. She suggested students should avail of campus services to help.

Course Selection and Planning

Participants described frustrating experiences with course selection and planning in their

first interviews and again during the focus group session. Sarah claimed, "I've been everywhere

because I think what people don't tell you when you're going into university is that you have no

idea what's going to happen yet." Sarah shared:

> You can read a million descriptions of a certain course, of a certain study, of a certain
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> job, and when you get to university, you won't actually know until you're in those
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> courses, what they mean and what they are, and how much you like them.

Sarah thought psychology "seemed pretty cool." She thought, "If I'm going to choose a major, I

might as well choose psychology. Then I did other courses." She considered, "You don't actually

know until you take the courses." Sarah explained:

> I really liked sociology. I thought this was very funny because I did so much science and
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> math throughout high school. Honestly, I think that was just because I've always been
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> good at the Arts. The other ones gave me a little bit more stress. They're focused on so
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> heavily. I'm not sure why, but for some reason, math and science are very focused on in

high school compared to English. If you suck at English or even visual arts, or music arts, that kind of stuff, nobody really cares. But if you can't do math or science, all of a sudden, you're stupid.

Jade revealed, "The program that I'm in is very, very specific. Grenfell's a little bit different from other theater programs across the country in being more academic driven." Jade stated, for example, "In this semester alone, I have to take two English classes, a history class, plus my acting class and then production in the evenings. It's heavy." Roger suggested one strategy to alleviate frustrations. Roger suggested, "I try to keep an open mind. I try to hear as many different perspectives as possible before I make a decision on anything." Claire discussed her selection and planning process as well. However, she revealed, "The most significant was when I branched off from my degree, like when I had to do electives. Certain ones I could pick." She commented, "I did witchcraft, and it wasn't about learning about magic. It was about the history of who got persecuted as witches." For her, that course-taking experience was significant. She reflected, "In the end, that seemed most significant because it taught me to have facts. It wasn't an easy course, and there was a lot of reading at night." However, she revealed, "I think that really pushed me to be a better academic." Claire remarked the course taught her not to judge people based on "what you see" because the course demonstrated errors in judgement within society.

Personal Expectations

Participants shared their personal expectations of postsecondary. Sarah noted in her interview, "Time management took a little while to get used to. I did struggle with it a little bit. Everything seemed really big and now I realize that it's not." She observed, "You make friends and there are parties every now and again. Some people party every night. I don't know how

they do that. I don't know if they pass or not." She shared, "For me, it was people. It was nice to

see more than three people at once, especially because we have international students too." Sarah

immediately noticed a more diverse population of people on campus than at home in high school.

She exclaimed, "I definitely noticed right off the bat that I was correct in going. The movies

aren't accurate." She remarked, "It was a lot less than I'd imagined, but also more than I'd

imagined in a really weird way." She indicated, "Classes were not as difficult as I'd been led to

believe they would be. The work was as hard as I'd been told it was going to be." And to her

surprise, she mentioned, "I had been led to believe that profs would be crazy difficult to deal

with, but I found profs here at Grenfell generally are really forthcoming and really good for just

being able to accommodate things that you need." Sarah also relayed that "living in residence is

way more relaxed than I thought it was going to be. It's just better than what I had imagined for

sure."

Like Sarah, Jade also shared in her interview that she imagined university would be like

what she had seen in movies. For example, Jade commented, "It's funny because all you really

have to go off is crap that you see in movies." She continued, "There was a really significant part

of my brain that thought I was going into a movie." Jade observed, "None of that is legitimate at

all, but I couldn't help that comparison." She expressed, "I knew it would be intense and super

different, but it's definitely not at all what I thought I was going into." Jade confessed, "It's been

crazy. I thought I had mentally prepared myself, but I really didn't. I didn't have anything to base

it off." She shared, "I talked to friends, but all the friends that I talked to had gone to places like

U of A where you've got things like sororities that don't exist here and stuff like that." She

noted, "All the information I had been given was not really accurate to where I was going so

preparing was not well done." She also explained, "I noticed I'm not the only one with an

opinion." Jade was surprised to have been exposed to more viewpoints and perspectives, which she commented, "really helped to develop my thoughts on any range of subject matter." Roger added, "I expected it to be more difficult than it is. I am pretty awful at managing my time most days." For example, he claimed, "There have been instances when I wouldn't write a paper until the day it was due." However, he admitted, "I could definitely make it a lot easier on myself by doing things a week ahead of time instead of a couple of hours."

Claire also figured university would be like films she had seen. For example, she imagined, "I thought we'd be reading things like in *Legally Blonde*. I thought it would be all reading… and you wouldn't be able to talk to your professors because they'd be too busy, and they wouldn't want to talk to you." Claire also shared, "When I got here, I didn't realize time management would be such a big deal." She remarked, "The first month feels like you're doing nothing, and you probably aren't, and then the next two months you realize you should have been doing something."

Success Strategies

Given the variety of challenges that faced my participants, each found meaningful methods to help them succeed in postsecondary. They shared several success strategies during the focus group session that they felt helped them persist. Sarah explained, "I'm used to heavy workloads and putting in work. I realized coming in that it wasn't going to be easy. It's not going to be a breeze." However, she found, "It's not specifically difficult. Time management is very important. Even just the mindset is very important. Just understanding that you have to put work into it." She continued, "It's not just going to come easy. That's what got me through. I didn't know what education was supposed to feel like."

Jade also advised first-generation students should "spend a lot of time with career counsellors." She found, "One thing that's been really weird was not knowing about money and not knowing how student loans work." She revealed, "I've taken out quite a few student loans, and I still don't know how all of that works come the end of my degree to pay them back." Jade suggested, "It's been a lot of juggling jobs and trying to find odd jobs here and there to make a little bit of extra grocery money." She continued, "It's just been a lot of trying to network with other people and asking for help. It's a lot of reaching out to people outside my family to network with friends and peers." She said she felt her biggest success was "making it this far as intact as I am." She indicated, "First year was crazy difficult not knowing what to expect going into it and not knowing where I was headed." She felt making it through first year and keeping her "grades up fairly well" and "keeping relationships and everything was a balancing act." She found juggling school, relationships, and the distance from home difficult to balance. She admitted, "I think my biggest success so far has just been making it all work together." She commented, "I'm only going into my second year, so I really have barely scratched the surface of what all this is, and I know there's definitely more challenges to come."

Roger shared a strategy that helped him balance his work commitments and his academic commitments. He suggested, "For me, when I was leaving work, I had to leave work at work. I would go home, I would not open emails, and I wouldn't reply to messages relating to work unless it was something urgent." He also shared that he felt his biggest success was "identifying the area that I'm interested in." He remarked, "That might not be something that people look at and think success. For me, I spent so long drifting along. I had no idea of what I wanted to do." He shared, "When I was actually able to sit down and identify that, I thought that was big for me

because it gave me a sense of direction and purpose." He exclaimed, "I actually knew what I was doing for once. It was nice."

Claire noted, "I learned that the learning center could be my best friend." She recounted, "I found it really hard to sit down for fifty minutes, then all of a sudden, it'd be over, then go to another class." She found peer tutors to be very helpful. She explained, "I used to get peer tutors so they could go over the information with me. It was difficult, but they were free." She revealed, "The writing instructor became my best friend too." Claire explained, "I noticed a lot of my friends said they didn't have time to go to the learning center," but she warned, "I'd say try to make time because once you befriend them, they teach you. They have programs like student success strategies where they go over study strategies and note taking strategies." Claire found those services very helpful toward her success. Claire added, "University seems like a bunch of little stuff put together, but when you put it together, it makes the big thing." She found that relying on the learning center, student services, and counselling were most helpful to her. She also advised first-generation students should "join some clubs" and "find people that are just like you." She discussed that making friends during class time was difficult, but that new students should "try to make friends" and then "it will be a breeze." Claire shared, "It sounds cheesy, but making friends was something that made it easier. I never imagined being invited to someone's dormitory to work on things together." She concluded, "It seemed really stressful talking to professors, but talking to them and not panicking was a big success for me." Participants shared their experiences with postsecondary and the strategies they discovered along the way that helped them persist in postsecondary contexts.

Future Goals and Plans after Graduation

Participants appeared apprehensive to discuss their future goals and plans after graduation. Sarah confided during her interview, "Right now I'm just taking courses until I figure out what's going on." She remarked, "I really don't want to stay in Newfoundland because opportunities are limited here." Jade also described in her interview, "I want to get into acting full time as a career and who knows where the work is going to be. I don't really have a set place in mind. I want to wait and see where the opportunities are." She imagined, "The plan is eventually to just get solid enough in my career that I'm comfortable. I don't need a crazy amount of money. I just want to not have to worry and eventually start a family. That's the end goal." Roger shared in his interview, "One of the things I'm looking at is definitely masters' programs. That's one avenue. Whether that's here or not, it's hard to say." Claire stressed in her interview, "I want to get a job. I have a summer job now, but it's just eight weeks as a clerk. But maybe once I pay off this student loan, maybe do my master's online or something. Anything seems possible now."

Participants shared their narratives that explored personal characteristics and experiences with postsecondary education. Through discussions about decision-making factors, search and application processes, transitions from high school to postsecondary, and course selection and planning for postsecondary, participants re-lived and re-presented their stories through reflection, discussion, and dialogue. They also shared personal expectations and success strategies that they believed helped them persist in postsecondary contexts and situations, but were apprehensive to discuss future goals and plans after graduation.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed and summarized the data collected in the current study and organized that data into specific themes that emerged from analysis of the data collected. The

purpose of the research study was to explore the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. The data reported and described in each of the themes resulted from analysis and synthesis of data gathered in order to address the three guiding research questions. Chapter Five will interpret and discuss the data and present interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5 Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the current study was to explore the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students, specifically those pursuing a four-year bachelor level degree at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. This chapter will provide a brief summary of the key findings derived from the data collected, discuss the findings by responding to the three research questions, offer implications of the research findings, and recommend suggested avenues for future research.

A Brief Summary of Key Findings and Themes

Chapter Four presented seven main themes that emerged from the data collected: (a) an introduction to the four student participants, (b) their family histories, (c) factors that influenced their respective decisions to pursue a postsecondary education, (d) advice for future first-generation students, (e) identity intersections and helpful personality characteristics, (f) experiences with postsecondary education, and (g) reflections on pursuing a postsecondary education. Grounded in these seven themes, six key findings will be discussed in this chapter to respond to the three research questions: (a) the importance of social capital, (b) the importance of cultural capital, (c) experiences in postsecondary educational contexts, (d) identity characteristics, intersections, and intersectionalities highlighting specific and particular characteristics of first-generation students, (e) implications of lack of family support, and (f) importance of institutional support.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

The discussions and interpretations that follow are an analysis of the narratives presented from four Canadian first-generation students' lived experiences, which respond to the three research questions guiding the current study.

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Responding to Research Question One

What can be learned through exploring the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students pursuing a four-year bachelor level degree at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland?

Of paramount significance, the importance of social and cultural capital was found to be helpful when discussing first-generation students through exploring the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students pursuing a four-year bachelor level degree at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

The Importance of Social Capital

One salient finding that emerged from analysis across the data was participants' emphasis on the significance of established friendships (i.e., relationships that were made prior to arriving on campus that could be useful or beneficial on campus), the importance of friendship-making (i.e., making new friendships on or after arriving on campus that could be useful or beneficial on campus), and networking (i.e., accumulated social benefits of establishing connections on campus) throughout participants' respective adjustments in higher education settings. Discussion of the importance of social capital is divided into three key subsections as follows: (a) importance of social support from peers, (b) importance of social support from the institution, and (c) importance of social support from family. Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory supports findings from the current study in that social capital is paramount to first-generation students navigating sociocultural constructs in accessing, adjusting to, and persisting in postsecondary environments. Bourdieu (1986) states, "Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to

membership in a group" (p. 248). Further, several strands of educational research concerned with the study of first-generation students (Jenkins et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2018; Stephens et al., 2012) also employ Bourdieu's description of social capital to underscore the importance of social bonding, networking and belongingness as imperative to understanding important conceptual frameworks regarding first-generation students' involvement in postsecondary education. Bourdieu's social capital theory and those strands of educational research that demonstrate social bonding, networking and belongingness are imperative forms of social capital for first-generation students support the following discussion.

Importance of Social Support from Peers. Jade revealed complexities regarding the adjustment to postsecondary education and the importance of social integration with respect to adjusting. Jade experienced disinclinations with respect to pursuing a postsecondary education even before she arrived on campus. Jade shared, "One of the biggest things that I was nervous about going to university, especially so far away, was the fact that I wasn't going to know anyone." Jade consciously realized, even before arriving on campus, the importance of social support during the adjustment period. Jade's reservations concerning a lack of social capital reinforced negative feelings associated with a general sense of being underprepared. The finding supported research, such as Moschetti and Hudley (2015), who suggest, "Students arrived on campus underprepared and lacked the social capital that could have aided them" (p. 243). In other words, social capital forms of support, such as an orientation program, for example, that could have paired Jade with a knowledgeable peer, might have reduced Jade's feelings of anxiety in arriving to campus for the first time.

Moschetti and Hudley (2015), however, further report a finding inconsistent with the current study that "first-generation students … seemed to overlook the value of developing social

networks on campus and, instead, repeatedly stated that their current progress and future success was solely limited to personal characteristics" (p. 244). For Sarah, "Being able to bond over being in the same situations and the same setting with the same struggles is very interesting and very important." Sarah seemed to be aware that other students were also experiencing postsecondary education for the first time, whether the others were first-generation students or not. She explained, "There's something about coming to university. … You just have this fresh slate with these other people who have the same fresh start." Sarah did not question whether the "other people" were characteristically similar or different; rather, she felt all first-year students were experiencing postsecondary education for the first time, and that the experience of "this fresh slate" provided "the same fresh start" for everyone. Though Sarah's positive attitude likely helped with respect to her adjustment to postsecondary education, she might have been naïve to assume that what she experienced arriving at university for the first time was equal in comparison to what "other people" experienced arriving at university for the first time. She added, "Somehow even the quietest of people make friends. It's just something that happens. People just naturally come together in settings like that, so I think it was very, very important that I made the group of friends that I made." What was significant was the fact that Sarah realized and valued the importance of social capital during this critical juncture, again, an inconsistent finding from what Moschetti and Hudley (2015) report. Sarah recognized the importance and value of social support, and she sought to find the support she needed. What was more significant was the fact that Sarah indicated these forms of social support occur "naturally." She did not indicate that institutional support mechanisms were in place to facilitate social interaction among peers; rather, she suggested that her friendship-making occurred "naturally."

Jade further supported the notion that there existed a general lack of institutional support mechanisms to foster development of social capital among students. While neither Sarah nor Jade directly stated there was a general lack of institutional support in this area, they both indirectly pointed out the fact by suggesting they felt individually responsible to seek out and find social support from peers. Jade indicated, "I didn't know anybody. The fact that I was able to quickly pick out people and then make good connections with them has really, really helped." Jade's use of the first-person personal pronoun indicated her personal obligation "to pick out people and then make good connections with them." That Jade carried the burden to "pick out people" to befriend, further points to formal types of institutional support mechanisms that might have alleviated the negative feelings associated with the absence of social support for Jade when she arrived on campus. These findings highlight not only the importance of early interventions that foster social capital during the adjustment period for first-generation students, but also that academic institutions could help alleviate negative feelings associated with "not knowing anyone" and facilitate environments that reduce that sense of individual responsibility to establish helpful forms of social support. Sarah's and Jade's narratives further supported such claims as those of Schwartz et al. (2018) who report, "Social capital (i.e., the information, support, and resources available to an individual through connections and networks of relationships) plays a critical role in academic attainment and success" (pp. 166-167). Schwartz et al. (2018) maintain that social capital has been shown to be positively associated with adjusting to postsecondary education; however, during the transition to college, "Students' access to social capital can diminish as previously strong connections from high school and from their home communities begin to weaken, particularly for low-income, minority, and first-generation college students" (p. 167). Katrevich and Aruguete (2017) also maintain, "First-

generation students may quickly feel marginalized" (p. 42) through experiences such as feelings

associated with a general lack of belongingness on campus, and perhaps to a greater extent

feelings associated with habitus dislocation (Garza & Fullerton, 2018). Both Sarah and Jade

experienced habitus dislocations and negative feelings associated with experiencing an absence

of social support through leaving the familiarity of home behind. Both the current study and the

literature confirm the negative impacts associated with the absence of social support during

postsecondary adjustment periods, and maintain that academic institutions could better support

first-generation students by encouraging environments that foster social support through early

interventions. For example, Sarah and Jade might have benefited from an early intervention such

as meeting with a faculty member or an academic counsellor that could have more positively

influenced their adjustments to the university.

Importance of Social Support from the Institution. Like Jade, even before Sarah

arrived on campus for the first time, she described her feelings associated with not knowing

where to find support. She reported she felt "isolated" until she integrated into the new

environment. Sarah described her difficulties figuring out where to find support to help mitigate

her feelings of isolation, and shared, "I had no idea what to do. We hardly had a guidance

counsellor [in high school]. I didn't really have that extra help." Sarah's feelings of isolation

stemmed from the fact that she felt underprepared for postsecondary education. The fact that she

indicated she "hardly had a guidance counsellor" reified the fact that she felt underprepared for

postsecondary education, and as a result, felt "isolated" when she first arrived on campus.

Sarah's limited access to these forms of support, such as limited access to a guidance counsellor

during high school, appeared to be another reason she felt underprepared for postsecondary

education. Had Sarah had "that extra help" in the form of access to support mechanisms, such as

a guidance counsellor during high school, she might have experienced an easier adjustment period.

After arriving at university, Sarah's negative associations with feeling underprepared meant that she did not feel comfortable seeking help from formal measures of institutional support, such as seeking help from student services. Sarah admitted she did not take advantage of campus services provided through student affairs offices and staff. She felt her unwillingness to seek formal forms of institutional support was "a personal thing." She did not realize that her negative feelings associated with seeking formal forms of institutional support were rooted in the fact she felt underprepared. Later, Sarah reflected and acknowledged, "I probably should have used student services, especially earlier on when I had no idea what was going on." Sarah identified a lack of understanding of postsecondary processes and procedures in place to facilitate such challenges in adjusting to postsecondary education, which likely stemmed from the fact that she was underprepared for postsecondary education in this respect; instead, Sarah sought help from her peers. Sarah confessed, "I didn't have much interaction with student services. … My student services came from other students who had an idea of what was going on." Sarah pointed out a need for social support "from other students" likely due to her reluctance to seek out institutional forms of support. When Sarah explained, "I'm super stubborn. I didn't reach out for it [support] either," perhaps what she meant was that she really did not feel comfortable reaching out for support because that might reveal to others her sense of underpreparedness, or perhaps she simply did not know where to find the formal forms of institutional support on campus that she required. She admitted, "I definitely should have [reached out]. I just tried to bear it on my own." Sarah's approach "to bear it" and "not reach out" is consistent with literature that suggests first-generation students "may be less likely to

seek out help" (Schwartz et al., 2018, p. 168) including "lower use of on-campus support services and lower disclosure of potential challenges related to the college experience" (Schwartz et al., 2018, p. 168). Sarah's experience is consistent with Schwartz et al. (2008) in the sense that first-generation students are less likely to avail themselves of on campus support mechanisms and less likely to disclose challenges associated with adjusting to postsecondary settings. Sarah's experience further supports Schwartz et al.'s (2018) suggestion that "Finding ways to bolster social capital may be an effective strategy for increasing first-generation college students' college persistence" (p. 168).

Sarah's solution to her conundrum was to seek out informal means of support "from other students" and eventually from her foster sister. Sarah explained, "Eventually my foster sister came home in April from her semester. She helped me do it all." Again, Sarah's narrative surfaced feelings of being underprepared. She exclaimed, "It was hard because I didn't know what to do, and I didn't know what courses to take." Sarah felt that she had nowhere else to turn. She knew that she needed help, but she did not know where to find it. She relied on informal means of support from those who had experienced university prior to her. These supports should have come from formal forms of institutional support; however, Sarah did not know where to find them and did not feel comfortable seeking them. Later Sarah reflected, "Unless you talk to an academic advisor, you have no idea what's going on." She verified her sense of confusion with respect to her adjustment to postsecondary education when she stated, "There are some parallels between high school and university, but it's not linear so it was difficult." Sarah relied on the knowledge she had acquired from high school to support her transition to university. Unfortunately, Sarah's transition "was difficult." Sarah's narrative supports the notion that increased forms of institutional supports through capitalizing on formal structures, like talking to

an academic advisor, might have alleviated these problems for her. Further, Sarah's experiences support notions that on campus networks like those interactions with faculty and staff can be very valuable forms of social capital for first-generation students. Sarah's experiences maintain that "supportive interactions with faculty both in and outside of the classroom contribute to students' retention, academic success, and general well-being" (Schwartz et al., 2018, p. 167). Sarah's reluctance to seek formal measures of institutional support to help her academic planning combined with the fact that she relied on informal means of social support from her foster sister highlight the importance of early intervention measures. Sarah would have benefited from early intervention mechanisms, in the form of formal institutional forms of social support, such as seeking advice from faculty, staff, and academic advisors after arriving on campus. Instead, Sarah preferred to seek help from less formal means of social support, perhaps because she did not know where else to find it and that she was reluctant to do so.

Claire described her experiences adjusting to postsecondary education as well; however, Claire indicated that not knowing where to find support was not the only problem she encountered. Claire's experience with the registrar's office found, "Institutional support was typically lacking" (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015, p. 243). Claire shared:

> The door is always shut [to the registrar's office]. If it was open, then I might go in once in a while. But if it's shut, you feel like no one should go in there. That's just for other people. If they had opened the door, I would have gone in. It made me feel like a bit of an outsider because I don't know very many people here.

Claire interpreted that closed office doors meant she should not avail of the services provided behind them. She felt that the services provided by the registrar's office were "for other people," perhaps more deserving of the services than she. The closed doors made Claire feel

uncomfortable to seek out formal support. Claire's interpretation that "no one should go in there" meant she did not feel welcome or comfortable to seek out the formal institutional support she needed. Institutions need to be aware of the implications of implied messages, such as what a closed office door might signify, especially to students like first-generation students who may be sensitive to these (perhaps unintentional) implied messages that project very real consequences.

Sarah shared that "finding student accommodations was difficult." She did not know whom to contact, much less, where such a person (or persons) might be located. Perhaps Sarah wondered if such a service even existed. Sarah explained, "I didn't know who to contact. It was confusing. I was here for the first month before I actually knew what the registrar was, and what the difference was between the little booths and the little student office." She indicated, "I still don't know what half of all that's for, so I just talked to people I knew." Even though Sarah had successfully completed her first year of study by the time I interviewed her, she still had serious questions and concerns regarding institutional support, and more specifically, where and how to access it. Sarah continued to rely on social support from her peers to replace institutional forms of support that she needed in order to adjust to and persist in postsecondary education.

Claire described her reluctance to seek out formal measures of social support, consistent with Ketrevich and Aruguete (2017), who suggest, "First-generation students are getting little social support on campus and show reluctance to engage with faculty members" (p. 42). Claire remembered feeling "very nervous talking to professors and even classmates" at the university because they "seemed so intelligent." Claire was afraid she would appear academically inferior to them. Claire remembered having to ask her professor a question once. She recalled, "I panicked for forty-five minutes to think of a way to word it. We were reading an article that I couldn't understand. I didn't want to sound stupid, but I didn't get what the article was about."

Claire's anxiety suggested a serious form of reluctance to seek help that resulted in her hesitating to ask for academic support from faculty. That she "didn't want to sound stupid" prevented her from asking for the help she required. Perhaps Claire recognized that faculty could be a useful form of social capital to support her academic progress. However, the fact that she was hesitant to ask for help exposed a critical concern "that first-generation students are less likely to initiate contact with faculty and have less frequent interactions with faculty both in and outside of the classroom" (Schwartz et al., 2018, p. 168). Claire was surprised when the faculty member praised her for seeking help and appreciated her interest in the subject matter. Claire was relieved with her positive encounter with the faculty member, which helped alleviate her feelings of anxiety. Claire's experience supported several strands of research concerned with social capital that discuss faculty support as instrumental and a means where academic institutions can intervene to help support first-generation students during the adjustment period. Wang (2014), for example, notes, "Student-teacher relationships, particularly interpersonal student-teacher relationships, can help FG students overcome the challenges they may face as they take stock and take charge of their transition to college" (p. 78). Although she was reluctant to do so, Claire sought help from faculty, which alleviated some of her anxieties.

Sarah also revealed positive experiences meeting faculty members. Sarah explained, "Everyone's been very kind. … If anything comes up, you just go to a professor." Sarah described her experiences having "a random chat" with faculty. Sarah shared how she would seek academic support from her professors during office hours but then end up discussing other non-academic matters. Wang (2014) explains first-generation students "often look to teachers as a primary source of help with solving both course-related and personal problems" (p. 78). Sarah's experience seeking social support in the form of guidance from her professors reified the

importance of this form of social capital. Sarah remarked, "Professors helped me a lot compared to actually seeking out an academic advisor like I should have." She concluded, "It was just nice to have friendly staff." Like Sarah, Jade also valued conversations she had with her professors. For example, Jade explained, "Professors aren't just interested in helping you through your academic life. They also want to make sure that you're succeeding in your personal life and they genuinely want to help and want to see you do well."

In addition to forms of social support from faculty, Claire noted positive experiences with social capital forms of support that she received from the learning center and peer tutoring services. Claire explained, "I learned that the learning center could be my best friend." Claire meant that the social support she received from the learning center helped her adjust academically to postsecondary education. Claire's experience maintained that institutional initiatives (like the learning center on campus that provided programs teaching success strategies including effective study habits and note taking skills) were important forms of social capital for her because they helped her frame successful and positive academic adjustments to postsecondary education. Claire found those services very helpful with her transition to and success in university. Claire said she also found peer tutors to be very helpful forms of social capital that further helped her positively adjust to postsecondary education. Claire theorized, "University seems like a bunch of little stuff put together, but when you put it together, it makes the big thing." In other words, Claire meant seemingly small adjustments could positively influence persistence in postsecondary settings. She advised that first-generation students should "join some clubs" and "find people that are just like you." She also explained that making friends during class time was difficult, but that new students should "try to find ways to make friends." Claire unwittingly described that social capital helps adjustment to and persistence in

postsecondary education. Claire shared, "It sounds cheesy, but making friends was something that made it easier." For Claire, both institutional and peer supports were forms of social capital that helped facilitate positive postsecondary experiences for her. Consistent with Claire's experiences, Wang (2014) supports the idea that teachers should not only provide specific advice on how to succeed in their classes, but also connect first-generation students with other on campus resources designed to help first-generation students succeed, such as being sure to connect students like Claire with the learning center and peer tutoring services.

Importance of Social Support from Family. Several participants discussed frustrations experienced when explaining to their families the reasons why they wanted to pursue a postsecondary education. Participants expressed that their families did not expect them to pursue a postsecondary education, which might help to explain why they experienced a general lack of social support from family during the transition to university. For example, Sarah reported, "All my mother really expected was high school graduation, and she was super proud of that because I was the first one in our family to do so." Sarah experienced a general lack of social support from her mother during this critical juncture. Her mother "expected" high school graduation, but did not anticipate or expect Sarah's participation in postsecondary education. However, Roger felt he was generally well supported by his family; he especially felt a general sense of support from his mother. In addition, he interpreted his family's general lack of expectation to pursue a higher education positively. Roger indicated, "If I had parents who went through that [postsecondary education], I feel like maybe there would be more pressure on me to get that done." Roger felt relieved because the lack of expectation to pursue a postsecondary education from his family provided him "the freedom to fail." Roger interpreted this "freedom" positively because he did not feel "pressure" to pursue a higher education. Other challenges he encountered

included relaying postsecondary experiences to his family, which he framed as a general absence of social support from his family. Roger reported, "They have a hard time relating to some things because for them, it's broken down into either you did well or you didn't do well, at least as far as the academics go." Roger emphasised his decision to participate in higher education extended far beyond academic performance. He valued not only academic success but also many other benefits he felt higher education could provide, such as participating in extracurricular activities, community service, and formative relationships. He said, "having those sorts of interests are an integral part of what I'm doing here at the university … and having it all mesh together like that has really helped drive me to make sure I'm really doing the best at it." Although Roger expressed a very positive attitude toward higher education, he experienced a general lack of social support from his family when he tried to communicate that for him the value of a formal education extended far beyond academic performance. Moschetti and Hudley (2015) support Roger's experiences that "parents of first-generation students apparently did not realize the importance of academic and social networks in college. Consequently, they did not encourage students to integrate socially or intellectually into the life of the institution" (p. 245). Roger's challenges communicating important nuances of participating in higher education, such as the importance of integrating fully into the life of the university, left him feeling frustrated or perhaps misunderstood.

Jade also shared that her mother "doesn't really understand the whole university thing." She explained that, while her mother is supportive of her participation in postsecondary education, "a lot of the time … she has no idea what I'm talking about." Jade's comments appeared to reflect Bryan and Simmons' (2009) claim that the majority of their participants also "discussed the effort involved in learning and understanding the complexities of college life

without having anyone at home who 'understood' these complexities" (p. 404). Jade shared her mother "tries not to push her mindset on me, but I can tell sometimes when we talk that she doesn't approve necessarily, and she doesn't want me to know that." Jade's narrative further augmented the importance of institutional support mechanisms during periods of adjustment to postsecondary education for first-generation students who may not necessarily be receiving forms of social support needed from family during these critical junctures. Like Moschetti and Hudley (2015) who claim "participants reported that their parents often provided support by asserting a strong belief in the student and the personal confidence that the student could make it through" (p. 245), Jade explained that her mother "was very supportive of it [a postsecondary education]" and often encouraged her in this way. However, Jade felt that her mother "doesn't get it" and that she (her mother) lacked an overall understanding of deeper complexities surrounding what it means to pursue a higher education.

The Importance of Cultural Capital

The second salient finding that emerged from analysis across the data was participants' struggles navigating cultural and class-based contexts in higher education settings. Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital theory supports the current study in the sense that cultural capital theory helps to unpack participants' experiences with cultural and class-based discontinuities they describe in accessing, adjusting to, and persisting through higher education settings. The idea of cultural capital (i.e., assets that provide social mobility), may be in the form of embodied assets (e.g., personality, speech, skills), objectified assets (e.g., clothes, pictures, art), or institutionalized assets (e.g., educational credentials) (Bourdieu, 1986). These forms of assets accumulate as *cultural capital,* which stratify class advantage or disadvantage relative to the amount of accumulated cultural capital in one's possession. Bourdieu's cultural capital theory

helps to discuss the challenges described by the first-generation students who participated in this study. Bourdieu (1986) defines, "The notion of cultural capital … made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes" (p. 243). Several strands of educational research concerned with the study of first-generation students in the context of exploring cultural capital implications (Lehmann, 2007; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016) employ Bourdieu's description of cultural capital to underscore cultural and class-specific types of consequences that affect first-generation students' involvement in postsecondary education. For example, Wilbur and Roscigno (2016) explain, "Sociological research has revealed all too well the role of familial disadvantage in the intergenerational transmission of inequality, usually through educational access and achievement" (p. 1). Bourdieu's cultural capital theory and those strands of educational research that demonstrate cultural and class-specific types of implications "relative to the reification of class advantage and disadvantage" (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016, p. 1) that affect first-generation students' involvement in postsecondary education support the following discussion.

Several participants presented cultural and class-specific challenges related to struggles in communicating with their families after they arrived on campus. For example, Jade began, "I had nobody close to me that knew anything about university." Even at the onset of Jade's narrative, she was adamant to point out that she had "nobody close" that could relate to her new experiences. She described, "When I went into it [postsecondary education], I had no idea. I didn't know what I'd have to deal with. I didn't know what hoops I'd have to jump through or how much responsibility I would have right off the bat." Jade's emphasis here focused on her feelings that she "didn't know" what to expect or how to prepare for her experiences at university. She created a backdrop that began to describe cultural and class-based discontinuities

she experienced after she arrived on campus. Jade's mother lacked cultural capital (e.g., educational credentials or experiences) that could have helped Jade experience an easier adjustment to university. Jade continued, "If you don't have a parent to help, it's hard because you really feel like you come into it [postsecondary education] with no preparation." Jade realized very early in her postsecondary career that she needed "a parent to help." She realized that her mother's lack of a postsecondary education, or at least her mother's lack of the experience of higher education, exposed a class-specific challenge relative to Jade's class disadvantage identified through intergenerational transmission of inequality, in Jade's case with respect to educational access and achievement of her family. Jade's class-specific disadvantage exposed a lack of accumulated cultural capital that contributed to her feeling underprepared for university.

Even before arriving to campus, Jade experienced a cultural and class-specific discontinuity. Because Jade's mother did not experience a postsecondary education, Jade experienced a very serious cultural and class-specific disadvantage in navigating postsecondary education for the first time. Jade elaborated, "Be prepared for the fact that when you call home at night, nobody you're talking to is going to know what any of that means and it's going to be hard for them to relate to you anymore." Jade revealed that even after settling in to university and after some time had passed, her feelings associated with a lack of accumulated cultural capital and her class-specific disadvantages did not fade. The fact Jade felt "nobody you're talking to is going to know what any of that means" verified Jade's ongoing struggles navigating cultural and class-specific incoherence. She continued:

> Going home is kind of like a culture shock. Nobody at home was prepared for it [her
>
> return] because they had never gone through it [university]. I went home for Christmas

and then I went back home this summer and my priorities obviously weren't the same as they had been when I left. It was hard to get anybody to understand that. It was even hard to get my family to understand that.

For Jade, cultural and class-specific discontinuities continued well beyond the onset of her adjustment to university, through her entire first year of studies, and perhaps beyond. The "culture shock" Jade described occurred even into and during summer, after she returned home from successfully completing her first year of studies at university. Jade revealed her "priorities," presumably her focus to persist with her postsecondary education, were difficult for her family to understand. The fact that these types of experiences continued for Jade for more than a year stress the significance of cultural capital, and more importantly, the lack of coherence experienced in cultural and class-specific types of dispositions, among first-generation students experiencing postsecondary education for the first time. According to Lehmann (2007), "We need to interpret social background as playing an important role in how students experience university and ultimately how they form dispositions to either persist or drop out" (p. 105). Lehmann (2007) claims first-generation students form these dispositions (i.e., to either persist or drop out) despite positive academic performance, and that "we can interpret these decisions to drop out as ways to resolve and reconcile fundamental discontinuities between the habitus of their social roots and the need to acquire a new habitus for success at university" (p. 106). Finnie et al. (2005) also state, "Family background appears to have an enduring effect on the determination of who goes on to post-secondary participation, even among what appear to be equally qualified, and perhaps even equally motivated young people" (p. 22). In other words, despite Jade's positive academic performance, demonstrated through her motivation to persist beyond year one in her program of study, navigating cultural and class-specific discontinuities

continued to present significant challenges for her and mark the significance of the dispositions

experienced by first-generation students' lack of cultural capital and associated class-specific

disadvantages.

Roger also experienced difficulties communicating his postsecondary experiences to his

family, which may also be explained though cultural capital theory. He said he felt that his

parents experienced difficulties relating to some aspects of his experiences with postsecondary

education. Roger explained, "They [his parents] don't see a great amount of value in the

extracurricular side of things, which in my opinion holds a lot of value." Roger explained that his

parents feared that extracurricular activities would distract him from achieving academically;

however, Roger felt participation in extracurricular activities was an important and integral

aspect of his postsecondary experiences even at the expense of academic performance. Roger

explained to his parents, "You know, it's very likely I'm going to take a hit on that [academic

performance], but I felt the value I gained in return was more than what I was to get off, you

know, the five or ten percent." Roger remarked that his parents did not agree with his rationale to

participate in extracurricular activities and that they had trouble relating to his postsecondary

experiences in that sense. Roger experienced a cultural and class-specific incoherence when he

tried to justify his involvement in extracurricular activities to his parents. He realized that his

parents' lack of experience with postsecondary education uncovered a cultural-specific challenge

relative to the value Roger associated with respect to his involvement in extracurricular

activities. The cultural and class-based incongruence Roger experienced affirmed a cultural and

class-specific discontinuity for him that contributed to his frustrations communicating his values

to his parents. Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) describe first-generation students' ambivalent

feelings about the social class to which they belonged, such as emotions of status incongruity,

like the emotions Roger experienced trying to relay his values regarding participation in extracurricular activities to his parents. Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) report, "Many felt caught between two cultures to the extent that they could not reconcile both sets of expectations. They experienced a disconnect as a result of the upward mobility, fueled by their education, into a higher social class" (p. 41). Roger was caught between two sets of expectations, namely his own beliefs that were in direct opposition to his parents' beliefs about the value of participation in extracurricular activities, which marked a lack of cultural capital rooted in class-specific disadvantage for him.

Jade recalled feelings of resentment from her family that may also be understood through cultural capital theory. Jade explained, "If I am successful, what is that going to look like to them [her family]. I can't help but wonder." Jade worried if she were "successful" that her success would not only signify her success in pursuing a postsecondary education, but also that her success would symbolize to her family a cultural and class-specific departure. Jade explained, "They're all very supportive, but there's been weird talk about it [participating in postsecondary education]. It feels like resentment from various family members because they couldn't or they didn't, but I'm doing it." Jade worried her participation in higher education would "change relationships" with others in her family. Even after her adjustment to postsecondary education and beyond her first year of studies, Jade continued to experience feelings "like resentment from various family members." Jade felt caught between two cultures to the extent that she described "weird talk" and "resentment" she experienced because of the incoherencies between both sets of expectations. Jade also confessed her father was not happy with her choice of degree program and that her relationship with her brother was somewhat strained. To accommodate those stressors, Jade revealed, "I've already started changing the way things work for me at home. I try

to make this work the best I can, but it's changed the way we talk to each other because we can't relate." Jade's experiences represent accommodations, in the form of "changing the way things work," to reconcile cultural and class-specific discontinuities, such as the discontinuities she experienced relating to her family. Jade concluded, "My mom said she thinks me and my brother fight so much because he resents that I'm doing what he didn't." Jade's participation in postsecondary education represented a departure from her family's culture and class, which surfaced feelings like resentment from her brother. Longwell-Grice et al. (2016) maintain that "for first-generation students (the majority of whom come from working-class and low-income families), the transition to college involves a change in social standing" (p. 41). Fuelled by her participation in higher education, Jade's upward mobility into a higher social class was a coveted result of her participation in university that created a cultural and class-specific incoherence observed between Jade and her brother.

Participants also described desires to have the "university experience," which they believed would provide them with a better future. Jade remarked, "I wanted the experience of being a university student. I wanted the knowledge that came with it. Even if I didn't really know what that meant, I was dead set on it." Jade realized that her parents' lack of cultural capital might have indirectly motivated her to want to pursue a postsecondary education. Jade explained:

> For as long as I can remember, my dad has worked at the lumber mill. I grew up in a
> small town and my dad worked at the lumber mill, and my mom, for almost all my life,
> worked in hotels under various job titles. I always knew that I wanted something more. I
> wanted to do something. I wanted to know more, and I wanted to have more
> opportunities for myself. I didn't want to get stuck like my parents did. All of what my
> family has done doesn't matter. … I'm looking at my parents stuck in dead end jobs with

nowhere, no higher to go because nobody will hire them without more education. I want

to have options. I want to go out and see things and do things and experience more and

know more.

Jade stressed the value she perceived in reaping the benefits of attaining a postsecondary

education. For Jade, a postsecondary education would provide "more opportunities" than were

ever available to her parents. Rondini (2016) suggests, "In this way, parents indirectly reified the

individualistic tenets … on personal action rather than social structure, even as they employed a

more collective, familial interpretation of how hard work would ultimately yield rewards" (p.

113). Jade's reflection of her "parents stuck in dead end jobs" motivated her to want "to know

more" and "to have more." Jade sought to accumulate cultural capital so that she would not "get

stuck" like her parents. Jade's desire to accumulate cultural capital demonstrated a class-specific

departure that, for her, was rooted in observing her parents struggle "because nobody will hire

them without more education." Sarah described this phenomenon as "reverse psychology or

something." Sarah was clear that she "did not want to grow up, have three kids, and not graduate

from high school on time." She discussed how witnessing her mother and older brother struggle

in life influenced her own decision to pursue a postsecondary education. Like Jade, Sarah

desperately sought means to accumulate cultural capital so that she could also separate from her

class-specific background. Both felt the class-specific departure could be accomplished through

participating in higher education by accumulating cultural capital in the form of higher education

credentials. Rondini (2016) explains, first-generation students "frequently reflected on their

parents' struggles and sacrifices as primary sources of motivation and inspiration for their

educational persistence" (p. 113). Jade's parents' dedication to employment, as demonstrated

through Jade's descriptions "for as long as I can remember" and "for almost all my life," may

have been another factor that motivated and inspired her educational persistence in higher education.

According to Wilbur and Roscigno (2016), educational research concerning first-generation students is "an especially relevant yet understudied avenue in the educational inequality and mobility literatures and should be taken seriously alongside broader concerns surrounding social class dynamics and disadvantages" (p. 9). For example, Claire shared that being a first-generation student meant more to her presently than it had before she started university. She relayed an experience of recognizing the significance of how having a parent who participated in postsecondary education might have benefited her, and she also talked about how educational inequality surrounding social class dynamics disadvantaged her. Claire remarked, "The first gets it the hardest because they got to make it themselves, and then they can make it easier for others." Claire meant that participation in higher education could reduce educational inequalities through an accumulation of cultural capital (in the form of higher education credentials), which can help to destabilize class-specific disadvantages. She went on to narrate a story that clearly illustrated her experience with class-specific self-consciousness at the beginning of her journey as a first-generation postsecondary student:

> I remember when my mother dropped me off. She was confused as to where everything was, so we asked for directions. There was a family and the father must have worked at Grenfell. My mother went up to him and asked for directions. … He was also being a father and showing his children around. Like this kid was talking to his father, and his father was introducing him to all the professors, but these professors knew him from before when they used to come over for dinner. I was starting off from the beginning, not knowing anyone, and he was starting off knowing everyone, but in a different context.

Immediately, Claire recognized her family's lack of accumulated cultural capital, which exposed class-based differences between her first experience with postsecondary education and the postsecondary experiences of "this kid." Claire could not rely on her mother to introduce her to faculty or provide a campus tour. She experienced a lack of cultural capital that presented a class-specific disadvantage separating her from other postsecondary participants. In other words, first-generation students do not get the same levels of family support as those students whose parents also attended college (Bryan & Simmons, 2009).

Jade also experienced an awareness of cultural and class-specific forms of self-consciousness. Similar to Claire, Jade explained how she experienced her mother's lack of knowledge. Jade said, "I think one thing that was really interesting was packing and getting ready to go." Jade explained that there were days when she was trying to figure out what she would need to bring with her to university. She expressed how her mother was "freaking out" because she had no idea how to help. Her mother's lack of accumulated cultural capital (presented through her mother's lack of higher education experience) meant that she could not help Jade prepare for participation in postsecondary education. Later, Jade recalled, "At one point, we were walking around campus. I could tell she was just crazy out of her element. She just didn't know what was going on and that it scared her." In that moment, Jade realized, "This was a point in my life where I couldn't fall back and ask for help. That was really, really crazy. She's always been there to help. But she can't help me here. That realization was a big one." Jade's reflection illuminated another class-specific disadvantage for her that exposed further class-specific forms of self-consciousness. Jade's mother lacked cultural capital (i.e., higher education experiences) that might have alleviated challenges Jade experienced adjusting to and persisting through postsecondary education.

Sarah, Jade, Roger, and Claire each presented narratives exposing cultural capital types of deficits confirming that the role of familial disadvantage is significant when describing the intergenerational transmission of inequality, usually through educational access and achievement (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Bourdieu's cultural capital theory and those strands of educational research that demonstrate cultural and class-specific types of implications relative to class-specific types of disadvantages are significant factors negatively affecting first-generation students and their experiences accessing, adjusting to, and persisting through postsecondary education.

Responding to Research Question Two

What are the experiences and characteristics of the Canadian first-generation students who participated in the study?

Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) suggest that the first-generation student term "simultaneously seeks and fails to capture the richness and complexity of students' lives. This point is affirmed by the wide demographic variation within this population" (p. 148). Nguyen and Nguyen mean that the definition of first-generation student implies that parental education alone (i.e., how the term is defined) ignores other dimensions that may also affect this group of postsecondary participants. Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) indicate, "Studies often use the FGS term to lay claim to students' challenges and educational outcomes, ignoring the possibility that other dimensions of their lives and identities may overlap or play a larger role than the FGS status alone" (p. 148). In other words, the experiences and characteristics of each first-generation student can vary to a significant degree even though, as a group, they possess the similar trait of being a first-generation student. The discussion in this section focuses on the specific and particular experiences and characteristics of the four first-generation students, and it is divided

into the following two subsections: (a) experiences in postsecondary contexts, and (b) identity characteristics, intersections, and intersectionalities.

Experiences in Postsecondary Contexts

Experiences of the first-generation students who participated in the study will be discussed here in terms of postsecondary contexts, specifically: (a) pre-departure planning, and (b) adjusting to university.

Pre-departure Planning. Each of the participants described their sense of confusion adjusting to postsecondary education, which is consistent with Gibbons' et al. (2016) claims indicating college adjustment for first-generation students generally was viewed as a complex and complicated process. Sarah, Jade and Claire explained how they each felt underprepared in terms of understanding what "university would be like" once they arrived. The fact that none of them had experienced university before left them wondering and imagining what the experience would be and how to prepare, especially since their parents had not experienced postsecondary education either. For example, Claire commented, "All my friends whose parents went to university could tell them what university was like. My mother didn't know anything about it." Claire, like the others, was also left to wonder and imagine what was to come. Sarah did her best to prepare by searching online to figure things out. She said, "There's a lot of information online, but it's scattered. The site is hard to navigate, honestly. Even when you go through all of it, when you get here, you're going to learn so much yourself and from other people." Sarah tried to remove the uneasiness she experienced imagining what university would be like by searching for answers online; however, she found, "You can prepare as much as you want. That's good of course, but … no matter how much you prepare, you can't really know until you're in it." She explained, "Before I came to university here, I had no idea what the town was like, what the

campus looked like, or where to go. I was lost for so long and it's not even that big here." Sarah was at a loss because she did not have parents as a resource to explain how to prepare for university. Sarah concluded, "You just have to get a grip on it while you're here."

Jade also felt anxious preparing for postsecondary education. Like others in the group, she could not rely on her parents for answers. Instead, Jade suggested, "Talk to as many people that you can about what it's like because I had nobody close to me that knew anything about university." Sarah, Jade and Claire desperately sought answers to clarify their questions about what university would be like and how they could prepare. Jade concluded, "It's been crazy. I thought I had mentally prepared myself, but I really didn't. I didn't have anything to base it off." Despite all of their best efforts, questions remained.

Jade and Claire felt since they really had no idea what to expect upon arrival to university, they thought the experience might be similar to how postsecondary situations are depicted in popular cinematic productions. Jade commented, "It's funny because all you really have to go off is crap that you see in movies." She continued, "There was a really significant part of my brain that thought I was going into a movie." Claire also figured university would be like films she had seen. For example, Claire imagined, "I thought we'd be reading things like in *Legally Blonde*. I thought it would be all reading … and you wouldn't be able to talk to your professors because they'd be too busy, and they wouldn't want to talk to you." Jade observed, "None of that is legitimate at all, but I couldn't help that comparison." She expressed, "I knew it would be intense and super different, but it's definitely not at all what I thought I was going into."

For Sarah, "It was a lot less than I'd imagined, but also more than I'd imagined in a really weird way." She indicated, "Classes were not as difficult as I'd been led to believe they would

be. The work was not as hard as I'd been told it was going to be." And, she mentioned, to her surprise, "I had been led to believe that profs would be crazy difficult to deal with, but I found profs here at Grenfell generally are really forthcoming and really good for just being able to accommodate things that you need." Sarah also said that, "living in residence is way more relaxed than I thought it was going to be. It's just better than what I had imagined for sure." Sarah, Jade, and Claire each experienced anxiety trying to demystify what university would be like and how they could prepare for the unknown. Despite their best efforts searching online, asking questions, and watching films, they were left misled and misinformed with distorted images of the realities they would soon encounter.

Adjusting to University. Roger, Claire and Sarah described significant challenges associated with time management and planning. Roger admitted that "time management" had always been a challenge for him. Claire also explained, "When I got here, I didn't realize time management would be such a big deal." She went on to describe, "The first month feels like you're doing nothing, and you probably aren't, and then the next two months, you realize you should have been doing something." Claire also recognized that "planning" was a challenge, "There was no one to ask for help. I could ask my mother, but she would only tell me to go ask someone else. As for planning, there's a lot of planning." Claire stated, "You think it is hard writing papers. It's not really hard writing papers; it is hard finding the time to research for the papers." Essentially, she attributed "finding the time" as a planning challenge. She learned that planning ahead of time and sticking to a strict schedule remediated time management challenges. Sarah also indicated that time management and planning were sources of academic stress during her adjustment to postsecondary education. Time management and planning challenges were found to be consistent with Gibbons et al. (2016), for example, who note that first-generation

students clearly indicated difficulties with time management and understanding how to study effectively.

First-generation students also identified feeling disconnected from their families and struggled with balancing home and school responsibilities, specifically when discussing the difficulties associated with communicating with their families (Gibbons et al., 2016). This finding was consistent with experiences of participants in the current study. For Sarah, she found it was difficult explaining the differences between high school and university to her mother. Sarah said, "It's a whole different world to her. I don't even go too deeply into it. I have scattered classes because it's not like high school. Classes can be all over the place and your schedule can be weird." She continued, "She's [her mother] not used to the idea of lectures compared to classes, and she's not used to the idea of a research paper." Claire also described difficulties relating her postsecondary experiences to her mother and revealed that, when she would complain about stress, her mother would respond in ways that made Claire feel responsible for her own stressors rather than be supportive of her situation. As an example, Claire remembered her mother saying, "You decided to go to university. I didn't tell you to go." Claire described how, during final exam periods, she would have to ask her mother to turn down the volume on the television so she could concentrate on studying. She also described that her mother experienced difficulties understanding why it took Claire so much time to read. According to Claire, her mother could not understand why it was difficult for her to read one chapter in a textbook in an hour, and Claire found herself constantly justifying her time and study habits to her mother. Both Sarah and Claire's examples illustrated how first-generation students struggled with balancing home and school responsibilities such as communicating their postsecondary experiences to families who could not relate.

Another experience further confounding first-generation students' struggles adjusting to and persisting in postsecondary education was the fact that many had to find additional sources of income while participating in postsecondary education. This is generally consistent with the literature, including Martin (2015) who reports, "Students from low SES backgrounds tend to exert more energy into accruing economic capital, such as through working while in college, than their peers from high SES backgrounds" (p. 284). Both Sarah and Roger discussed their necessity to work to make ends meet. Jade also described her financial struggles. For example, Sarah indicated that money and finances were a big source of stress for her. She felt financial insecurity negatively affected how much attention she could devote to academics. She expressed, "I work full time now for summer. When I go back to school, I plan on staying in the apartment that I'm in. I have to make sure that I have enough money for bills and rent and stuff like that." Sarah feared that she would probably have to take fewer courses to allow herself more time to work. She cautioned, "Time is money. Your time is valuable and having to spend so much time on my studies means that I cannot spend it on other things that would help make my life so much more comfortable." Sarah described a serious dichotomous relationship between work and school: School was her priority, but her financial realities dictated that she work for income, which in turn robbed her of precious time and energy that she could devote to her academics. Sarah's financial adversities confounded additional realities for her. Specifically, she said, "The adversity of basically every other university student still applies to me" and "… right now, financially, I'm struggling." Sarah also described how she found it frustrating that her university peers could ask their parents for financial support, but that she did not have that sense of security. She concluded, "I have nothing to fall back on." Feeling she had "nothing to fall back

on," for Sarah, meant she was solely responsible for her participation in postsecondary education.

Jade also described her financial struggles. She stated, "Not knowing moneywise has been really, really difficult. Obviously, I looked up tuition rates and so on, but not actually knowing, not having any way of knowing … has been a struggle and still is." She revealed, "My mom is the sole provider parentally. She doesn't have any kind of higher education, so it's harder for her to get a better paying job. Funneling money into my degree is even harder." Sarah and Jade both expressed their financial struggles and concerns. They each felt an overwhelming sense of individual financial responsibility, with very little help, if any at all, in terms of financial support from family. Consistent with Martin's (2015) findings, participants "exhibited hard work, self-sufficiency, and financial responsibility, evidenced by their frugal spending habits and their many hours spent working for pay" (p. 284).

The first-generation students who participated in the current study not only emphasized greater work responsibilities, but also they reported an importance of participating in extracurricular activities and the significance of maintaining interactions with peers. However, Moschetti and Hudley (2015) suggest that first-generation students have greater work responsibilities may explain why they also "participate in fewer extracurricular activities, and maintain lower levels of interactions with peers" (p. 246) than other students. While it may be true that participants have greater work responsibilities, participate in fewer extracurricular activities, and maintain lower levels of interactions with peers than their non-first-generation counterparts, these assumptions could not be confirmed due to delimitations that only first-generation students were interviewed. Nevertheless, Roger strongly recommended first-generation students "get involved in extracurricular activities, whether that's student politics,

clubs, or societies. It provides a valuable experience that you won't get with just your academics," and "It gives you more chances to meet more people, have more relationships with peers and new faculty." He evidently felt participation in extracurricular activities was a very important part of the university experience.

Claire also shared that she "joined some groups." In addition, both Sarah and Jade indicated they benefited from taking part in on-campus groups and extracurricular activities. Jade explained, "Last year, I helped out a lot with the student union and a couple different caucuses on campus like the women's caucus and the queer caucus." She went on, "It's been really nice helping out with various organizations around campus." Jade suggested the extracurricular activities "helped with the networking" by facilitating opportunities to "find people from outside the university and outside my program." Sarah also discussed her feelings of isolation, which implied peer interaction to be significant, explaining, "It was very, very important that I met people and I didn't realize that when I first started – that everything would get much less stressful just by having other people to communicate that with."

All four participants confirmed that participation in extracurricular activities was not only beneficial to them, but also that the activities were significant in establishing social networks and maintaining interactions with peers. However, Roger discussed a confounding factor in terms of the significance of maintaining interactions with peers. Roger explained, "When it comes to friendships, many of my close friends have continued to be upper level students because I was a bit older when I started again." He indicated, "I would naturally gravitate towards people who were a bit older than first year students. I found that a bit difficult because I'd make friends and then a year or two later, they'd graduate. So that's been tough." Roger's narrative supported the notion that he felt interactions with peers were significant for him, but he also highlighted

additional confounding challenges he experienced with maintaining interactions with his peers. Extending Moschetti and Hudley's (2015) assertion that first-generation students "maintain lower levels of interactions with peers" (p. 246), it may also be those confounding factors that influence first-generation students' likelihood of maintaining peer interactions (like Roger's age and his tendency to gravitate towards those who were older than first year students). For Roger, the fact that he was "a bit older" meant that his friends would graduate sooner than he would, leaving him behind and in need of establishing new social networks.

Identity Characteristics, Intersections, and Intersectionalities

Identity intersections and intersectionalities highlight specific and particular characteristics of first-generation students and was found to be significant in describing the four students. When discussing parental education and outcomes, a broader view that is more descriptive may be needed to adequately discuss and describe first-generation students' conditions and circumstances, since not all first-generation students are alike. Multiple and nuanced identities exist among unique individuals who possess more than one sense-of-self and who may form nuanced and complex multiple identities that differ from other individuals belonging to the same group, and should therefore be described with specificity and particularity.

Consistent with the literature, Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) suggest that intersectionality captures "the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (p. 148). Even though many first-generation students share common characteristics, inevitable similarities and differences exist that muddy the borderlands wherein we would be able to discuss and describe them.

Of significant importance was the fact that participants were generally unaware of the term or label *first-generation student*, but had an awareness that he or she would be the first in their families to participate in higher education. Claire experienced a very direct confrontation with the fact that she was a first-generation student. Although Claire explained she was unaware of the term, she quickly realized her postsecondary experiences would be much different than those experienced by some of her friends. Claire explained, "All my friends with parents who went to university, they could tell them, you should take this your first term, that way it'll make this easier, but my mother didn't know anything about it." Claire was confronted with an identity intersection that she observed would differentiate her experiences with postsecondary education from her peers' experiences with postsecondary education. Even though she was unaware of the label, Claire was able to identify differences that led her to experience intersections with respect to her identity that differed from those characteristics that defined at least some of her peers.

Sarah described being a first-generation student "has never been something I've really considered significant." Until Sarah realized her entire family and extended family were following her progress, she had not thought about the phenomenon at all. Sarah felt because she had performed well in high school, that level of performance would help her perform well in university. She did not think the phenomenon was a significant factor or that it would affect her participation in postsecondary education. Later, Sarah theorized, "You have to understand yourself before you can understand what it means to be a student." Sarah recognized she was experiencing an identity intersection. In articulating the need "to understand yourself," she implied that she was experiencing something that required figuring out. She felt the need to understand that new aspect about herself before she could then relate to "what it means to be a student." Sarah had been a student most of her life. What she really meant was she needed to

figure out what it meant to be a first-generation student in her new environment. Sarah proclaimed, "Everything is not going to be the same. Everybody has different experiences. Everybody is coming into university with different experiences, so you can't expect it to be just like someone else's story."

Sarah's piecemeal theoretical explanation supported the literature (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018) and was enough to lead her to the conclusion that although she had "different experiences," she would adjust and persist in her new environment. Sarah's explanation, though somewhat self-fulfilling in nature, provided her with the positive outlook she needed to adjust and to persist. Similarly, Jade theorized, "You need to carve yourself out a spot and figure out who you are, apart from who your family is and what they did and who they knew." For Jade, her desire to "figure out" who she was not only implied figuring out what it meant to be a student, and a first-generation student at that, but it also meant dissecting her former sense-of-self (defined by her connection to her family), from her newly constructed identity. Jade not only felt the need to redefine her sense-of-self, she needed to redefine it "apart from" her family. Jade explained, "This is you building who you know, and it's completely different, and it's difficult, and it's terrifying, but it's really, really important" and she concluded, "I would rather trust my instincts more and trust my voice," which she felt to be helpful in "learning who I am."

For Jade, her "instincts" and her "voice" were unique instruments only she possessed that allowed her to be her own person, disparate from her family. Sarah and Jade's narratives confirmed findings reported by researchers such as Havlik et al. (2017) who indicate that first-generation students' "own traits of resiliency, pride in personal identities, and drive for achieving for the sake of family were powerful tools for persisting through their many challenges" (p. 18).

Jade passionately described her own traits of resiliency, pride and drive. For example, Jade exclaimed, "I want to be the one that succeeds. … I feel a little bit like I have something to prove." Jade exuded a strong personal desire to succeed. She informed, "It is something to prove that I don't have to be who my parents were or who they thought I was going to be. … I can be the first one to do it, and I can succeed in it." Perhaps for Jade, her desire "to prove" meant that she needed others in her family to acknowledge her unique identity, which symbolized that sense of being "apart from" (or different from) her family. That Jade was "the first one to do it" and to "succeed in it" provided the proof that she wasn't a representation of her parents or even a representation of the image her parents thought she would be. Jade's redefined sense-of-self reassured for her that she was not "who my parents were or who they thought I was going to be," which, like Sarah, allowed Jade to adjust to and to persist in postsecondary education. Jade experienced these types of conjunctures through participating in postsecondary education. She not only articulated her former sense-of-self, but also voiced that she had already begun to embody new and distinct identities that she felt better aligned with who she truly is and who she wants to be.

Sarah also expressed traits of resiliency, pride, and drive when she described her lack of family support during the physical move to university. Sarah recalled, "I brought my best friend in my loaded and packed car full of everything that I had to bring with me." It was not Sarah's family, but her best friend who helped her move. She reflected, "Compared to a lot of other students' experiences, I don't know how to feel about it. It's just a thing, I guess." She said, "The fact that it wasn't family, but one of my friends that supported me through moving in, is kind of reflective." Sarah was trying to articulate an identity intersection that demonstrated resiliency, pride, and drive. "It's just a thing" was Sarah's less-than-erudite means of expressing her identity

intersection. The narrative involving Sarah's best friend magnified how Sarah's experience was unique "compared to a lot of other students' experiences," and demonstrated Sarah's traits of resiliency, pride, and drive that served to help her adjust to and persist in postsecondary education.

Roger expressed a drive for achieving for the sake of family (Havlik et al., 2017). He explained, "It's really a chance to be able to do certain things that my mother's always wanted to be able to do, but that she hasn't had the chance to do." He continued, "Being able to have the opportunity to pay back a lot of what she's done for me and give her a chance to achieve some dreams she had that she was never able to fill … means a lot." Roger felt a desire to "pay back" his mother in a way that would allow her to realize "some dreams she had" realizing that a postsecondary education would eventually allow him to privilege his mother. Roger's identity intersection occurred at the point when he recognized his redefined sense-of-self could potentially materialize opportunities for him and for his family. Unlike Jade, who reified her sense-of-self through "carving" her sense-of-self "apart from" others in her family, Roger realized his sense-of-self through forming closer family associations. This important finding maintained while first-generation students possess common characteristics, such as being the first in the family to participate in postsecondary education, as individuals, they each realize experiences, like identity intersections, very differently. Sarah, Jade, Roger, and Claire each expressed identity intersections and intersectionalities that were unique or specific to them. While they are all first-generation students, educational researchers must remember while being a first-generation student may be a common trait across this group, each individual has specific and particular characteristics and unique experiences that differentiate one from another.

Responding to Research Question Three

How might an increased understanding of first-generation students' postsecondary experiences and characteristics be informed and enhanced by research of this nature?

The discussion in this section focuses on informing and enhancing understandings of first-generation students' postsecondary experiences and characteristics that help to facilitate first-generation students' abilities to accumulate social capital and that help to reduce burdening cultural and class-specific gaps. In order to alleviate burdens in accessing, adjusting to, and persisting in postsecondary education, stakeholders, such as higher education institutions and education researchers, need to better understand important experiences and characteristics of this group. Creating positive educational and environmental situations that facilitate first-generation students' abilities to accumulate social capital and reduce burdening cultural and class-specific gaps can help to better prepare and serve first-generation students. The discussion is divided into two subsections: (a) implications of lack of family support, and (b) the importance of institutional support.

Implications of Lack of Family Support

Findings suggested first-generation students experience (a) a general lack of parental support participating in higher education, (b) lower expectations from family related to first-generation students' participation in higher education, and (c) a general lack of parental familiarity or understanding about participation in higher education with respect to postsecondary educational contexts. These findings are consistent with Lambert et al. (2004), for example, in that "parents with postsecondary credentials may provide greater levels of parental involvement, increased expectations and attitudes for academic success and increased familiarity with the postsecondary education process and experience" (p. 19).

Three participants indicated a general lack of parental support, especially in terms of *how* to support their children preparing to leave home for university. For example, Sarah shared, "It wasn't family but one of my friends that supported me though moving in is kind of reflective." Sarah indicated that her "best friend" accompanied her when she moved from her hometown to university, which she perceived as a general lack of support from her parents. Sarah believed her experience was "reflective" because her "parents weren't driving." Sarah explained, "Compared to a lot of other students' experiences … I don't know how to feel about it." Sarah observed that her experience moving to university was unlike "other students' experiences." Sarah's experience maintained the finding that there existed a general lack of family support, at least in terms of preparing to move to attend university.

For Jade, her mother accompanied her with the move to university. Jade shared, "Mom came with me to help me move in first day last year." However, Jade continued to explain how the experience scared her mother. Jade revealed, "She [her mother] didn't know what I was going into, which was really interesting for mom to be scared on my behalf." Jade continued, "She [her mother] had no idea what kind of experience I was headed for, so that was a bit of a kick in the gut." Jade's metaphor that she experienced "a kick in the gut" meant that she felt a general lack of support from her family. Jade explained her mother "had no idea … *how* [(emphasis added)] she could help me if she didn't know what I needed." For Jade, her mother was present to provide some social support (perhaps in the form of helpful emotional support, for example); however, her mother lacked cultural forms of capital that might have provided further support she needed in order to facilitate an easier adjustment to university for her. In this respect, Jade experienced a general lack of family support not only as she was preparing to move, but also during her arrival on campus. For Jade, her mother was present to help, but she lacked

necessary knowledge that could have helped Jade prepare better. As a result, Jade experienced a general lack of support from her family in preparing to move to university.

Claire did not have to move to attend university; however, she also experienced a general lack of support from her family. Claire shared, "I was starting off from the beginning not knowing anyone," which made her feel underprepared for postsecondary education. Claire indicated that her "mother didn't know anything about it [postsecondary education]," which also made Claire feel generally unsupported and underprepared for postsecondary education. Jade's and Claire's experiences differed from Sarah's experience in that Jade and Claire had a parent accompany them; however, each maintained a general lack of family support, especially a general lack of family support in terms of *how* family can provide support to their first-generation students. In this way, perhaps a better statement would suggest first-generation students generally experienced family support (i.e., social capital forms of support), but that family lacked knowledge in ways of knowing *how* to support their children (i.e., cultural capital forms of support) in pursuing postsecondary education for the first time.

Each of the four participants also indicated a general lack of financial support from family. Financial insecurity was a serious source of stress for them. Participants perceived financial insecurity to be an additional challenge for them as compared to others on campus. According to Katrevich and Aruguete (2017), "First-generation students' work and family responsibilities can compromise their academic and social integration on campus" (p. 42). These findings were also consistent with the narratives reported in the current study. Katrevich and Aruguete (2017) explain, "The low-income status of many first-generation students may necessitate working full-time jobs, especially when parents are not able to help pay for university tuition" (p. 42). Sarah and Roger both reported the necessity to work to help make ends meet,

which Sarah indicated might mean that she would have to take a lighter course load to accommodate the necessity to work. Jade did not indicate that she had part-time paid work when I interviewed her, but she did note the importance of securing paid summer employment. Jade's necessity to secure paid summer employment to help offset costs of participating in postsecondary education also meant sacrifice. Even though summer employment may not be directly disruptive throughout the academic calendar year, Jade shared that she would likely miss her brother's wedding as a result of her summer employment obligations that required her to save money for school. Jade's circumstances stirred feelings of animosity and resentment from her brother. Jade explained:

> Next summer, my brother and his fiancé want to get married at the end of September and they've asked me to be the Maid of Honour, which is awesome, but there's no theater work in Edmonton that's just for the life of the summer, but there's plenty of it out here in Newfoundland. I had to tell them that if I can get a job in Newfoundland for the summer, it's what I have to do.

> Jade's necessity to work in Newfoundland during the summer to help offset educational costs meant that she could not afford to devote her precious time to "come home to help plan a wedding," which had negative implications for her and her family. Jade indicated these sacrifices were necessary in order for her to persist with her studies. Finally, Claire also reported financial need as a challenge for her. Claire stated, "My parents didn't have much money" and suggested, "If your parents went to university, chances are they put money away for you to go to university." For each of the participants, financial insecurity and lack of financial support from family to help alleviate financial burdens associated with the cost of a higher education demonstrated serious concerns in terms of their participation in higher education.

Participants also experienced low expectations from family related to their participation in higher education. All four participants shared there was little pressure from their parents to pursue postsecondary education at all. For example, both Jade and Claire confirmed their parents "didn't push university on them." Sarah shared, "I didn't have to go to university, but she's [Sarah's mother] proud that I did obviously. But, all she really expected was high school graduation, and she was super proud of that because I was the first one in our family to do so." While Sarah continued to persist with her postsecondary studies, her mother's lack of postsecondary credentials also appeared to support Lambert et al.'s findings (2004) in that Sarah's mother did not expect her to pursue a postsecondary education. For Roger, he indicated, "It [postsecondary education] was never made to seem that important," which demonstrated low expectations for him to pursue a postsecondary education. Roger stated, "If I hadn't been a first-generation student, and if I had parents who went through that, I feel like maybe there would be more pressure on me to get that done. That was never an expectation." Examples shared by participants consistently maintained that the parents of these first-generation students demonstrated low expectations in terms of their participation in postsecondary education.

Participants also experienced little support from family because their families were not familiar with higher education contexts in general. For example, Claire commented, "There was no one to ask for help. I could ask my mother, but she would only tell me to go ask someone else." Claire's revelation supported the notion that her mother could not help support her during the transition to and adjustment in postsecondary education because her mother lacked familiarity with higher education contexts to be able to provide support. Sarah explained, "She's [her mother] not used to the idea of lectures compared to classes, and she's not used to the idea of a research paper." Sarah's experience with her family's lack of familiarity with postsecondary

education not only left her feeling a general lack of support, but also experiencing difficulties associated in communicating and explaining her experiences to her family, further confounding challenges associated with participating in postsecondary education for her. Jade commented, "You need to swallow your pride and ask for help a lot in university." Presumably, Jade suggested first-generation students learn to ask for help "quickly" because they are not getting educational support from family who lack familiarity about postsecondary education.

Importance of Institutional Support

Institutional supports in the form of campus services, such as helpful teachers, mentors, tutoring services, and counselling services, provided necessary structures that helped first-generation students adjust to and persist in higher education settings. Institutional supports allow first-generation students to accumulate social capital and reduce cultural and class-specific gaps that help them adjust to and persist in postsecondary education. According to Garriott and Nisle (2018), "Institutional supports may be a particularly important explanatory variable in terms of the link between stress and perceived academic goal progress for first-generation students" (p. 445). In addition, Garriott and Nisle also suggest that access to supports from helpful teachers, mentors, and tutoring services were important for first-generation students. Furthermore, Fruiht and Chan (2018) indicate that "adolescents who come from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and who have access to less social and cultural capital, benefit more from mentoring relationships than their counterparts with more resources" (p. 392). In other words, not only do institutional supports frame positive academic supports for first-generation students, but also institutional supports further increase social capital and reduce cultural and class-specific gaps for first-generation postsecondary participants.

Sarah, Jade, Roger and Claire shared their experiences maintaining the notion that institutional supports increase social capital and reduce cultural and class-specific discontinuities. As an example, Sarah shared, "Most of the guidance that I did get was through friends and professors, especially. Professors have been very helpful." Sarah's example illustrated she received "guidance" from "friends and professors" that demonstrated social forms of capital that allowed her to adjust to and persist through postsecondary education. While peer forms of social capital may be viewed as a form of institutional support (that Sarah's peers were also postsecondary students), the guidance she received from "professors" was a clear example of institutional forms of social support that were beneficial to her. While Sarah did not state directly the need to acquire a new habitus for success at university, her professors likely helped her acquire a new habitus for success in postsecondary contexts further reducing cultural and class-specific gaps for Sarah, which may have allowed her to feel more comfortable on campus leading to successful adjustments in her new environment. The fact that Sarah persisted through year one also maintained the notion that formal forms of institutional supports (from faculty, for example) support first-generation students' adjustments to and persistence through postsecondary education. Further, Claire and Roger indicated that peer tutors were helpful. Like professors, support from peer tutors demonstrated both social and cultural forms of support that help to facilitate successful academic and non-academic adjustments to and persistence through university. Peer tutors not only allowed Claire and Roger to accumulate social capital in the form of peer support, but also alleviated cultural-specific types of challenges. Peer tutors model behaviours, for example, that can facilitate new cultural-specific habitus required for successful integration into postsecondary educational environments.

Claire suggested the writing center and the learning center were also very helpful. The writing center and the learning center, like peer tutoring programs, presented avenues for Claire to accumulate social and cultural forms of capital. Institutional forms of support that provide both social and cultural forms of support simultaneously may be very helpful forms of support for first-generation students, since the types of supports provided not only increase social support on campus, but also reduce cultural and class-specific types of discontinuities. Finally, Jade recommended campus-counselling services. Both Jade and Claire shared their experiences talking to the campus counsellor about stresses they experienced while attending postsecondary education. Claire explained her experience talking to the campus-counsellor about "stress," and indicated, "Going to the counsellor was one of the best coping mechanisms just to talk about stuff." Consulting a guidance counsellor, for example, is yet another campus support service that has the potential to increase social capital and reduce cultural and class-specific types of discontinuities. Institutional supports, like teachers, mentors, peer tutors, and counsellors were found to be particularly important supports that helped participants adjust to and persist in postsecondary education. Institutional supports provided necessary forms of social capital and perhaps helped to reduce cultural and class-specific burdens. For example, Sarah, Jade, Roger, and Claire informed that teachers, mentors, peer tutors, and counsellors provided social forms of support mechanisms that allowed them to accumulate social capital that eased their adjustments to and persistence through postsecondary education. In addition, they maintained that seeking support from these formal forms of institutional structures not only provided social forms of support, but also that these forms of social support helped reduce cultural and class-specific burdens further supporting their adjustments to and persistence through postsecondary educational environments.

Fruiht and Chan's (2018) research suggests that their study's findings "shed light on the value of and processes by which naturally occurring mentoring relationships support FGC students and their peers" (p. 392). Naturally occurring mentors and the benefits associated with these relationships may be particularly valuable to first-generation students "who may not have other people in their lives supporting their access to and success in college" (Fruiht & Chan, 2018, p. 392). For example, Sarah revealed, "I'm stubbornly independent to a gross extent. I'll put myself in danger before I ask for help," just as Jade also shared she considers herself very stubborn. Jade admitted, "Asking for help is difficult, but you learn quickly that you need to swallow your pride and ask for help a lot in university." Sarah and Jade's stubbornness inhibited their willingness "asking for help," which further confirmed that these first-generation students are reluctant to seek help and advice from institutional forms of support that could help cultivate social forms of support and alleviate cultural and class-specific burdens. Fruiht and Chan (2018) reported, "instead of seeking out help early to improve their less developed skills, they may not recognize their underpreparation until they are faced with the consequences of poor performance and must respond by trying to catch up" (p. 393). Claire's experience was consistent with this finding and she indicated, "The first month feels like you're doing nothing, and you probably aren't, and then the next two months you realize you should have been doing something." Claire might have experienced an easier transition had she sought help from peers or from institutional forms of supports earlier in her first semester. Sarah also acknowledged, "There's a big gap that usually isn't realized until you've already made a lot of mistakes in your first semester. I know a lot of people that just didn't expect to have to try hard." Claire and Sarah's comments supported Fruiht and Chan's claims that first-generation students may not recognize the importance of

seeking out help early to improve less developed skills until faced with the consequences of trying to catch up.

Furthermore, Fruiht and Chan's (2018) research maintains that "these findings speak to the power of naturally occurring mentoring relationships to equalize the social and cultural capital young people garner from their communities and the weight of that capital in predicting long-term academic success" (p. 395). That Jade realized she needed to "learn quickly … to swallow your pride and ask for help" supported the idea that naturally occurring mentoring relationships can be useful to equalize social and cultural forms of capital among first-generation students. In essence, had Sarah and Claire reached out sooner, they might have experienced easier adjustments to university.

Discovering helpful methods to prepare for postsecondary education and to support participants during postsecondary education were also topics addressed by Gist-Mackey et al. (2018) who report that first-generation students "mentioned that their high school teachers and counsellors helped them with the college application process" (p. 67). Jade acknowledged that her postsecondary search and application processes were difficult and that she relied on her high school guidance counsellor to help facilitate these processes for her. Claire also recalled, "When I was growing up, there was no one to tell me where the scholarships were. I think in the last year of high school, the guidance counsellor pointed out scholarships." Roger indicated that he was "mandated to meet with academic counselling" because he had been out of postsecondary education for an extended period. He indicated the experience was helpful to him because he had spent "so long drifting along. I had no idea of what I wanted to do." Once Roger was able to identify what he wanted to achieve, he felt that gave him "a sense of direction and purpose."

In summary, participants who sought guidance from high school teachers and guidance and/or academic counsellors, for example, found the experiences to be beneficial. Experiences revealed that formal measures of institutional supports (from postsecondary forms of institutional support and high school guidance counsellors and teachers) were significant. The findings demonstrated not only the importance of these forms of supports for first-generation students to increase social capital and reduce cultural and class-specific burdens, but also that the types of supports needed confirm the importance of increasing social capital and reducing cultural and class-specific burdens for first-generation postsecondary participants.

Conclusions

Responses to research question one maintained and confirmed that accumulating social forms of capital was important in terms of framing successful experiences for these four Canadian first-generation students, specifically with respect to the importance of social support from peers, the institution, and family. These findings were consistent with the literature, such as Azmitia et al. (2018), for example, who report that first-generation students who successfully adjusted to and persisted in postsecondary education experienced social forms of support from peers, the institution, and family. Research, such as Azmitia et al. (2018) and Williams and Ferrari (2015), report, "Schools should focus on being more accommodating to students who are likely to feel less of a sense of belonging and at risk of struggling to survive in college" (p. 384). Accommodations in the form of social support are important for students who could benefit from assistance maneuvering family as well as work demands while attending college (Williams & Ferrari, 2015). Early intervention programs, such as meeting with a faculty or staff member early or even prior to the start of the academic year to garner support, can help first-generation

students demystify postsecondary education through support programs that aim to increase social capital said to improve the odds of adjusting to and persisting in higher education settings.

The importance of reducing cultural and class-based discontinuities with respect to understanding the importance of cultural capital was also evident in terms of framing successful experiences for these four students. Wilbur and Roscigno (2016) suggest parents should participate in programs that encourage planning for their children's postsecondary education that "enhance cultural capital development in ways that compensate, at least to some extent, for inequalities at home" (p. 9). Interventions that include parents in planning for their children's participation in postsecondary settings could alleviate transitionary struggles for first-generation students (Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Early intervention programs aimed to reduce social and cultural types of impediments might also help to alleviate challenges in adjusting to and persisting in postsecondary contexts, such as those narratives discussed and re-presented here.

In response to research question two, all four first-generation participants' experiences and characteristics highlighted experiences in postsecondary contexts in terms of identity characteristics, intersections, and intersectionalities. Specifically, the participants reported individual and particular challenges with pre-departure planning as critical aspects of adjusting to postsecondary contexts. Stephens et al. (2015) suggest, "Brief interventions do systematically alter how students respond over time to specific situations in the college context," (p. 1564) and maintain, "small changes to their default responses … have great potential to improve their overall comfort in higher education" (p. 1564). Discussion in response to research question two further support the idea that relatively small interventions, such as meeting with a faculty or staff member early or even prior to the start of the academic year to garner support, can have significant and positive long-term impacts on the overall success of first-generation

postsecondary participants. Even relatively small early intervention programs may alleviate adjustment-related challenges like those experienced and re-presented here.

Gibbons et al. (2016) also recommend "offering career counselling and other student support programs *prior to and during* [(emphasis added)] the college-going experience for this population" (p. 20). Participants not only suggested pre-departure planning was troublesome, which indicated support is needed even prior to arriving on campus for the first time, but also that social support networks were imperative to the adjustment to postsecondary education. In addition, cultural and class-specific dislocations were particularly problematic. Relatively small early interventions programs, such as meeting with an academic counsellor prior to arriving on campus (or at least early in the first semester), may be very valuable forms of social and cultural support that could bolster first-generation students' adjustment to and persistence through postsecondary education.

Responses to research question three maintained, and confirmed findings in the literature, that a general lack of family support was a serious problem experienced by these first-generation participants, and that institutional supports helped to address social and cultural forms of deficits affecting adjustment to and persistence in postsecondary educational environments. For example, Gist-Mackey et al. (2018) suggest structural support mechanisms that encourage social support (from teachers, peers, and guidance counsellors) and cultural capital (from partnerships with local universities and in the form of institutional services) aim to reduce challenges specific to first-generation students' adjustment to and persistence in postsecondary contexts. Gist-Mackey et al. (2018) suggest that high schools can form partnerships with local postsecondary institutions, where possible, to provide academic and non-academic forms of support to first-generation students that may help ease adjustment types of challenges for students, like first-

generation students, who may be (or may feel) underprepared for postsecondary education. Both formal and informal approaches to social support mechanisms and measures that reduce cultural and class-specific types of burdens were also found to support first-generation students' adjustment to and persistence through postsecondary education.

The literature on first-generation students and the narratives as re-presented in the discussion support the notion that the most significant effects of adjustment to postsecondary education occurred early in the first year and prior to arriving on campus. Preparing early, understanding personal change, adjusting to increased academic demands, overcoming challenges, and taking advantage of structural forms of social and cultural supports were areas that identified challenges for first-generation students. The discussion of findings presented in this chapter maintain the notion that structural mechanisms in the form of social and cultural capital must be understood and are imperative to adjusting to and persisting through postsecondary education for this group of postsecondary participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

Exploring the experiences and characteristics of four Canadian first-generation students pursuing a four-year bachelor level university degree revealed the importance of structural forms of social and cultural support, and that these forms of support are beneficial to first-generation students. Several general areas of interest were explored regarding the educational adjustment to and persistence in higher education contexts with respect to this particular group of postsecondary participants. The current study, however, did not explore first-generation students' classroom experiences. Classroom experiences might yield further salient information that could benefit this group of postsecondary participants. For example, Castillo-Montoya (2017) indicate, "Few scholars have focused on the impact first-generation college-going status has on students'

classroom experiences" (p. 588). In addition, Williams and Ferrari (2015) explain, "Targeted programs and curriculum along with academic, advising, and mentoring services may be viable sources of support for disadvantaged students who may not be familiar with campus life and occurrences" (p. 384). Research exploring classroom experiences of first-generation students might be worthwhile and beneficial that could potentially help first-generation students adjust to and persist in postsecondary contexts. In addition, research in the area of accessing first-generation students' prior knowledge (Castillo-Montoya, 2017) that make postsecondary experiences more relatable to this group of postsecondary participants may well help alleviate challenges for them including transitions to postsecondary education, persistence in postsecondary education, and contribute to reducing the strain experienced through lack of social capital and discontinuities in cultural and class-specific associations.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a brief summary of the key findings derived from the data collected, discussed the findings by responding to the three research questions, offered implications of the research findings, and recommended suggested avenues for future research. The research conducted confirmed the importance of recognizing the significance of structural forms of social and cultural capital when describing the experiences and characteristics of first-generation students, specifically those who participated in the current study. Cultivating social and cultural forms of capital is paramount in terms of framing successful experiences for first-generation students. Postsecondary educational institutions need to focus on being more accommodating to students who are most likely to feel the effects of reduced forms of social and cultural support at home (1) to reduce burdens for students who are struggling to adjust to and persist through postsecondary educational contexts for the first time, and (2) to improve their

chances for success. Early intervention programs that foster social and cultural forms of capital are most important for this unique group of postsecondary participants. Early intervention programs intended to improve chances for success include formal and informal measures that increase social support and reduce cultural and class-specific burdens. Relatively small interventions, such as meeting with faculty and/or staff early, can have significant and positive long-term impacts on the overall success of first-generation postsecondary participants. Small but effective institutional supports were found to be helpful. The study strongly recommends further research into structural mechanisms that support forms of social and cultural capital as interventions that can better support first-generation students' adjustment to and persistence through postsecondary education.

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Appendix C – Information Letter to Undergraduate Students

Dear Undergraduate Students:

I am writing on behalf of a colleague, Michael Crant, who is conducting a study on Canadian, first-generation students enrolled in a four-year bachelor level degree program at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. A first-generation student is a student whose parents or legal guardians do not have any postsecondary education. The title of the study is, *An Exploration of Canadian First-Generation Students' Experiences and Characteristics at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland*. Michael is conducting this research study to fulfill the requirements for a PhD in Educational Sustainability at Nipissing University, located in North Bay, Ontario. He has selected our institution as the site for his study. I am contacting you because I think you may be an informed participant should you agree to take part in the study.

Michael's research will consist of interviewing a purposive sample of four to six students about their experiences and characteristics as a Canadian, first-generation university student enrolled at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Each of the two interviews will be conducted at Grenfell Campus and take approximately 60-90 minutes each. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed by Michael. Individual names of participants in the study will be disguised by using pseudonyms. In addition, as the researcher, he will provide each student with a disposable camera and ask each student to take some pictures so that these photos can be discussed during an interview. Your participation and any information provided to Michael will be kept private and confidential.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and will have no effect whatsoever on any of your activities here and will not impact your course grades. You may also withdraw from participation in the study at any time without consequence – at which time any data you have provided would also be removed from the study. Your willingness to participate in the research will help those of us who work with Canadian, first-generation university students, and may also benefit you directly by better understanding yourself as a first-generation undergraduate student.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please respond directly to Michael via email by Monday, April 30th, 2018. His email address is ■ He will begin by sending you an email to your Grenfell student email address. The email will contain an attached questionnaire. You will be asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to Michael as an email attachment. The questionnaire will gather preliminary information to begin the study.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Dean, School of Arts and Social Science, Grenfell Campus, Memorial University

Appendix D – Letter to Interested Undergraduate Students

Dear Interested Undergraduate Students:

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in the research project titled, *An Exploration of Canadian First-Generation Students' Experiences and Characteristics at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland*. As noted in the description of the research study attached to the email you received from Dean, School of Arts and Social Science on my behalf, this is a research study examining the experiences and characteristics of Canadian, first-generation university students enrolled at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am conducting this study as a doctoral candidate in the Educational Sustainability program at Nipissing University, located in North Bay, Ontario, to fulfill the requirements of a PhD.

The first step in the study is to complete the short questionnaire attached to this email. Upon receipt of the questionnaire, four to six students will be selected for interview. In addition, I will provide the selected participants with disposable cameras and ask them to take some pictures. These pictures will be discussed later during a face-to-face interview with me.

Interviews will be conducted at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Each of the two interviews will take approximately 60-90 minutes of your time. In addition, each participant will be invited to attend one focus group session that will take approximately 90-120 minutes of your time. The interviews and the focus group session will be audio recorded and later transcribed by me for analysis. A transcript of your audio recorded interview will be sent to you so you may review it for accuracy. All information collected will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Your participation will not affect any of your grades, academic standing, or your role as a student on campus.

A more detailed description of the study and your rights as a research participant will be outlined in a Participant Information Letter (Informed Consent). If you are selected to participate in the study, I will provide you with this information and ask you to review and sign the Informed Consent. You will be provided a copy of the letter for your records. Please note: You will have the opportunity to review the consent letter and address any questions you may have before signing.

If you would like to be considered as a participant for this study, please complete the questionnaire attached to this email and return it to me at ■. The completion and returning of the questionnaire indicate your consent to use this information for selection purposes. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Crant
PhD Candidate, Nipissing University
Attachment 1 – Student Selection Questionnaire (SSQ)

Appendix E – Student Selection Questionnaire (SSQ)

STUDENT SELECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please respond to each question to the best of your ability by selecting the answer that most closely relates to your experience. All information provided in this questionnaire will be kept confidential. By completing and returning this questionnaire to X, you are giving your consent for this information to be used to select participants for the research study.

Gender
(please select one)

M
F
Another Gender Identity
Prefer not to respond

Are you a Canadian citizen?
(please select one)

Yes
No

What is your year of birth? _____

Does your mother or legal guardian have any postsecondary education?
Postsecondary education may include any college/technical or vocational school/training, public or private college, or university education.
(please select one)

Yes
No

Does your father or legal guardian have any postsecondary education?
Postsecondary education may include any college/technical or vocational school/training, public or private college, or university education.
(please select one)

Yes
No

Are you currently enrolled at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland?
(please select one)

    Yes

    No

If yes, what is your enrollment status?
I am enrolled as a full-time student.
(please select one)

    Yes

    No

I am enrolled as a part-time student.
(please select one)

    Yes

    No

Are you working towards completing a four-year, Bachelor level degree?
(please select one)

    Yes

    No

If yes, please specify your degree program.
(please select one)

    Bachelor of Arts

    Bachelor of Business Administration

    Bachelor of Fine Arts

    Bachelor of Nursing

    Bachelor of Resource Management

    Bachelor of Science

    Undecided

    Other

        Please specify: _____

What is your year of study?
(please select one)

    1st year student

    2nd year student

    3rd year student

    4th year student

    Other

        Please specify: _____

Do you live on campus?
(please select one)

    Yes

    No

What is your primary source of funding support to attend university?
(Please select all that apply)
       Student Loan
       Parents
       Scholarship/Grant/Award/Bursary
              Please specify: _____
       Personal Resources
       Employment Insurance
       Workers Compensation
       Other
              Please specify: _____
       Prefer not to respond

Race/Ethnicity
(please select all that apply)
       White/Caucasian
       First Nations
       Inuit
       Innu
       Métis
       Black or African American
       Hispanic or Latino
       Asian
       Other
              Please specify: _____
       Prefer not to respond

Do you identify as a student with a disability?
(please select one)
       Yes
       No
       Prefer not to respond

Which of the following best describes your family income (from all sources)?
(please select one)
       Less than $9 999
       $10 000 to $24 999
       $25 000 to $49 999
       $50 000 to $74 999
       $75 000 to $99 999
       $100 000 to $149 999
       Greater than $150 000
       Prefer not to respond

Would you be willing to participate in two in-person interviews (approximately 60-90 minutes each) on campus?
(please select one)

       Yes
       No

Would you be willing to participate in one focus group session (approximately 90-120 minutes) on campus?
(please select one)

       Yes
       No

FULL NAME: _____
MAILING ADDRESS: _____
PHONE NUMBER: _____
E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

Please save this file and return it as an attachment to ■.

Thank you.

Appendix F – Formal Invitation to Undergraduate Students Selected to Participate in the

Study

Dear Student:

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete the student selection questionnaire concerning my research study exploring the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students enrolled at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

The purpose of this email is to formally invite you to participate in the research study. A description of the study and your rights as a research participant are attached to this email in the form of a Participant Information Letter (PIL). **Please review the PIL carefully.** If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me for clarification. At the time of our first interview, I will also review this document with you and ask you to sign it.

If you are willing to voluntarily participate in the next phase of this research, please email me directly so that we can schedule a time for an in-person interview. My email address is X. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you in advance for your time and interest in participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Michael Crant
PhD Candidate, Nipissing University

Attachment 1 – Participant Information Letter (PIL) and Informed Consent

Appendix G – Participant Information Letter (PIL) and Informed Consent

Project Title   An Exploration of the Experiences and Characteristics of Canadian First-Generation Students at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Researcher   Michael Crant, PhD Candidate
Nipissing University

Faculty Supervisor Susan E. Elliott-Johns, PhD
Nipissing University

You are being invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Michael Crant to fulfil the requirements of a doctoral dissertation in Educational Sustainability through the Schulich School of Education at Nipissing University under the supervision of Dr. Susan E. Elliott-Johns. Should you consent to take part in the study, your participation will take place at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Please read this document carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether or not to participate in the study.

Purpose
I am conducting a research study to learn about the experiences and characteristics of Canadian first-generation students enrolled at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. As a participant in this study, you would be invited to provide information about your experiences as a Canadian first-generation student at this institution.

During onsite visits, I plan to interview each of the four to six Canadian first-generation students twice. I will also invite participants to take part in a focus group session. Finally, I will invite participants to take photos using a disposable camera that will be provided at no cost to you. I will also print these photos at no cost to you. The photos will be related to your postsecondary experiences and used as a focus of discussion during the second in-person interview.

Procedure
You are invited to take part in an initial 60-90 minute audio recorded interview, consisting of open-ended questions related to your experiences and characteristics as a Canadian first-generation student enrolled at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. During this in-person interview, you will be given a disposable camera and a set of instructions. You are invited to take photos about your experiences at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland. You will be given 5-7 days to take photos before the next phase of the study. Next, you will be invited to participate in a 90-120 minute audio recorded focus group session. During this session, all participants will be invited to share and discuss any thoughts, questions, comments, or feelings you may have regarding this topic with the other participants involved in the study. During the focus group session, you will return the disposable camera to me so I may have your photos printed. Finally, you will be invited to participate in a second 60-90 minute audio recorded interview to follow up and discuss your photos. I will have your photos printed and ready for discussion during this final phase of the study. In-person interviews (initial and

follow-up) and the focus group session will take place at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland in a private office or conference room at a mutually agreed upon time. The audio recorded interviews and focus group session will be transcribed by me, the researcher, for data analysis. You will be sent a transcript of your interviews to review for accuracy. You will be invited to review and respond to my email containing the transcripts within two weeks. If I do not hear from you after two weeks, I will assume that the transcripts are accurate and that no further changes are necessary.

The data collected (i.e., the transcripts from your interviews, the transcript from the focus group session, and the printed photographs) will be used for the purposes of completing the research study and doctoral dissertation, professional presentations, any publications derived from the doctoral dissertation, and any subsequent studies carried out by the researcher.

Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation
All data obtained in the study will be securely safeguarded. Personally identifiable information will be removed and pseudonyms will be used to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Interviews will be audio recorded and securely stored on a password protected computer. Photographs will also be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office to which only the researcher has access. All data (i.e., audio recordings and photographs) will be destroyed five years after the conclusion of the project. Regarding your voluntary participation in the focus group session, as others will be present during this phase of the study, your privacy and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed if participants choose to speak outside the context of the research. The need to respect the confidentiality of all participants in the focus group session will be discussed prior to the start of the focus group session.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged in any way to participate. Should you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw your participation or choose not to answer any question at any time without penalty or consequence. Your participation will in no way affect your grades, academic standing, or your role as a student on campus. Finally, photos that feature people will not be included as data in the dissertation, in any professional presentations, or any publications that may result from the research. Photos that include people will be destroyed.

Risks and Benefits of Participating
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. In the event that you become anxious or upset as a result of participating in the study, you may access counselling and psychological services (CPS) at Grenfell Campus. Please call or visit in person on the second floor of the Bennett Wing in the AS Residence to book an appointment with the psychologist or counsellor. CPS is located in Health Services (BW 243) on the 2nd (main) floor of the Bennett Wing, Arts and Science Residence. These services are provided at no cost to you. You may also access emergency mental health care and trained mental health care professionals by calling the Mental Health Crisis Line at 1-███████. The Mental Health Crisis Line is a 24 hour toll free service in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

By participating in this research, you are contributing to the existing body of knowledge surrounding the understanding of Canadian first-generation students' postsecondary experiences and characteristics in Newfoundland and Labrador. You may also benefit from increased awareness and understanding of yourself as a first-generation student through participation in the study. Please understand that there will be no monetary compensation or other form of compensation provided to you for your participation in this research.

Contacts and Questions
Should you have any questions about this study, please contact me at X. My faculty supervisor, Dr. Susan E. Elliott-Johns, may also be reached at ▮.

Statement of Ethical Clearance
This study has been reviewed and has received ethics clearance through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact: Ethics Administrator, Nipissing University, 100 College Drive – F307, North Bay, Ontario P1B 8L7 or email ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

Statement of Consent
Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study.

As a participant in this research project, I clearly understand what I am agreeing to do, that I am free to decline involvement or withdraw from this project at any time, and that steps are being taken to protect my identity. I have read this Consent Form and have had any questions or concerns answered to my satisfaction. I have also been provided with a copy of this letter.

X _____   X _____
Participant's Signature   Date

X _____   X _____
Researcher's Signature   Date

Appendix H – Initial Interview (Interview One) Questions

Welcome statement

- Thank participant. Review the purpose of the study and today's interview.
- Review PIL and obtain signatures. Review the content of the Student Selection Questionnaire before beginning the interview.
- Ask, "Do you have any questions or is there anything I can clarify for you before we begin?"

Get to know participant

1. Describe the length of time you have attended Grenfell Campus, MUN.
2. Discuss your family's history with education and employment (e.g., mom, dad, close relations, influential people).
3. Describe your relationship with your parents or legal guardians and family members.
4. Describe your parents' or legal guardians' attitudes toward academic achievement.
5. Describe your parents' or legal guardians' response to your experiences as a university student.
6. When did you know you were going to university? Was there someone or something that was particularly influential in that decision? Explain.
7. How conscious are you about being the first in your family to attend university? What does that mean to you?
8. Explain if and how being the first in your family to go to university has changed your relationship with your parents, legal guardians or siblings.
9. What advice would you offer other "first in the family" university students *preparing to attend* university?

Postsecondary experiences

1. Describe your transition from high school to postsecondary. Discuss any particular moments that you remember.
2. Describe your experiences with faculty, staff, and students in university. Discuss any particular moments that you remember.
3. Describe the university courses you have taken or are taking. Discuss the ones most significant to you.
4. Explain the biggest challenge you feel you have faced as a first-generation student. Discuss any other challenges you have faced while being in university.
5. How did you overcome this challenge? What strategies did you use to overcome this challenge or any other challenges that you faced in postsecondary?
6. What do you consider your biggest success as a postsecondary student?
7. Explain your experiences with extracurricular activities in university (if any).
8. Tell me about the services you have taken advantage of since you have been a university student (e.g., tutoring, counselling, campus organizations, groups, etc.).

9. Describe what you believe to be important academic or non-academic experiences outside of formal learning (e.g., outside the classroom).
10. Describe your current friendships and significant relationships.
11. Describe your sources of stress at university. Discuss how you are coping.
12. Explain how you feel university has changed you.
13. Describe the factors you believe affected this change or these changes.

Identity and characteristics

1. Explain the first time you became aware of the term *first-generation postsecondary student.*
2. Describe what it means to you to be a first-generation postsecondary student.
3. Describe any experiences you have had when you were reminded of being a first-generation postsecondary student.
4. Describe what you feel are your academic strengths.
5. Discuss the personality characteristics that you believe have helped you achieve academically (or non-academically, if necessary).
6. Discuss your current interests.
7. Discuss your goals or plans for the future (e.g., career, family).
8. What advice would you offer other first-generation postsecondary students *based on your experiences*.

Closing the first interview

- Ask, "Is there anything you would like to discuss before we finish up today?" and/or "Is there anything you would like to add to your comments or clarify from earlier?"

Closing statement

- Thank participant. In a few weeks, I will send you a copy of the interview transcript of this conversation via e-mail and ask you to review it for accuracy.
- Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.
- Provide student with numerically labelled, disposable camera.
- Demonstrate how to use the camera.

Appendix I – Focus Group Interview Questions

Welcome statement

- Thank participants. Preview today's focus group session.
- Review PIL and those items pertaining particularly to the focus group session (i.e., privacy and confidentiality of participants) before beginning the interview.
- Ask, "Do you have any questions or is there anything I can clarify for you before we begin?"

Postsecondary experiences and participant characteristics

1. Discuss when you knew you would pursue a postsecondary education. Discuss what you believe led to that decision.
2. Describe the measures you took to prepare for university. How did you prepare?
3. Discuss your decision to pursue a university education. Why did you decide university?
4. Describe any encouragement you received to attend university. Who encouraged you?
5. Discuss your university search and application experiences.
6. Why did you choose to attend Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland? Were there characteristics of this university that appealed to you in particular?
7. What did you think university would be like?
8. What did you first notice when you got to university?
9. Discuss your experiences with university orientation programs (e.g., orientation day/week).
10. Discuss any scholarships, grants, bursaries, funding, and/or loans that you received when you enrolled here. Did the financial support affect your decision to attend Grenfell/MUN?

Closing the focus group interview

- Ask, "Is there anything you would like to discuss before we finish up today?" and/or "Is there anything you would like to add to your comments or clarify from earlier?"

Closing statement

- Thank participants. In a few weeks, I will send each of you a copy of the focus group transcript via e-mail and ask you to review it for accuracy.
- Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Appendix J – Follow-up Interview (Interview Two) Questions

Welcome statement

- Thank participant. Preview today's interview.
- Review PIL and those items pertaining to the second interview before beginning.
- Ask, "Do you have any questions or is there anything I can clarify for you before we begin?"

Discussion of photos

- The researcher will ask the participant to discuss each of the photos and ask the participant to describe what the photo has captured.
- The researcher will ask the participant to elaborate as necessary.

Closing the follow-up interview

- Ask, "Is there anything you would like to discuss before we finish up today?" and/or "Is there anything you would like to add to your comments or clarify from earlier?"

Closing statement

- Thank participant. In a few weeks, I will send you a copy of the interview transcript of this conversation via e-mail and ask you to review it for accuracy.
- Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.
- Thank participant for participating in the study.