“Stories Matter:”

A Narrative Inquiry Exploring First-Generation University Student Persistence

by

Neil Buddel

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

ADULT EDUCATION

Department of Educational Policy Studies
University of Alberta

Abstract

Though postsecondary participation has increased overall, the rate of participation has risen more sharply for middle-class students compared with working-class students (Knighton & Mirza, 2002). Especially pronounced is Krahn's (2009) finding that children from families where at least one parent completed university are almost three times more likely to complete university, compared with children who come from families where parents did not complete university. While the extant quantitative literature provides a clear mapping of the terrain concerning the underrepresentation of first-generation students in universities, little is understood of their actual experiences in university (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005).

This dissertation explores the experiences of four female students who are attending Pillar University[1], a world-renowned institution in Southern Ontario. They are all first-generation students as defined by Pillar University; however, Kayla and Katrina's parents both completed university outside of Canada. Further, all the women are from immigrant families (Kayla, Katrina, and Dani are first-generation immigrants, having been born outside of Canada, while Marina, having been born in Canada, is a second-generation immigrant), which also features prominently in their experiences.

Although the majority of the qualitative research concerning first-generation students is in the *narrative research* (Clandinin, 2013) tradition, the responses (not stories) have been used to elucidate themes across participants and have been void of context, thereby positing structures that apply to groups as a whole. In order to deeply explore the experiences of the participants, *narrative inquiry* was chosen as the most appropriate methodology because it is a way of understanding experience when experience is seen as narrative composition (Clandinin, 2013).

[1] A pseudonym to maintain participant anonymity.

Intersected with the narrative inquiry, Bourdieuan (1984) tools of habitus, capital, field, and practice were also employed in order to explore sociality, temporality, and place with a particular attention to social class. Altogether, the inquiry was poised to deeply qualitatively explore the following question: **for first-generation students, how do the stories of their lives have a formative relationship with their habitus (i.e., the dispositions, beliefs, and values that constitute their worldview) and, if so, how do their lived and told stories shape their university experiences towards persistence?** In short, the stories of their lives, particularly those during childhood: (a) served as *conditions of existence* (shaping the habitus), (b) shaped a resilience-oriented habitus, and (c) projected storied futures for them as university students.

Interestingly, salient similar experiences across the participants' narrative accounts surfaced during analysis; these seven r*esonant narrative threads* (Clandinin, 2013) suggest that, consistent with Bourdieu's work, people within given social classes develop similar class-based perspectives resulting from similar conditions. These resonant threads also evoke critique of the dominant neoliberal paradigm and valuing merit towards a social Darwinian "survival of the fittest" concerning university access and persistence, which I refer to as the *meritocratic narrative*. Their resonant threads highlight that the transition into and through university is not always a rational cost-benefit analysis where a student elects to attend, achieves requisite grades, and then chooses an institution based on acceptances. The resonant threads vividly illustrate the temporal nature of experience such that family, cultural, and self-stories of their lives, and particularly during childhood, were formative in the development of imagined future storied identities for the participants as university students. The meritocratic narrative is only a partial story. The idea that stories of our lives shape a person's dispositions and can create imagined future storied identities, what I have termed the *storied-futures narrative*, is another lens through

which university underrepresentation can and should be viewed. Such a lens attends to how futures identities are storied during childhood (through family and self narratives) to the extent that some youth see some futures – university attendance for example – as a natural progression, while others do not. Examination through storied-futures narrative may contain answers for mitigating social reproduction tied to parental education and enhancing generational mobility. The problem is a social class issue and the solutions – building resilience and introducing future storied possibilities – seem to reside within the entire education system and childhood in particular.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Neil Buddel. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from (a) the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Digging deeper: Exploring first-generation university students' experiences narratively", No. PRO00034313, November 2, 2012, and (b) the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Digging deeper: Exploring first-generation university students' experiences narratively", No. 28323, December 5, 2012.

This thesis contains Neil Buddel's own narrative interwoven throughout the publication as a means to introduce himself to readers and transition to relevant scholarship. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

Acknowledgements

I've learned that it takes dedicated supervisors who provide quality challenge and support in order to have a meaningful and rigorous doctoral learning experience. Drs. Donna Chovanec Jean Clandinin, and Randy Wimmer provided the perfect mix, thereby providing me a fantastic and memorable learning experience, and significantly shaped the quality of this work. Indeed, as notable scholars in their areas, I felt extremely fortunate for the content knowledge, suggestions, and critiques; they clearly invested significant time and energy in my learning experience – which I am eternally grateful for. In addition, Randy Wimmer, as my primary supervisor, guided this journey in ways that exemplify what a true academic should be like (making me the envy of many other doctoral students I talk with).

Other very supportive and important people along the way include Dr. Tricia Seifert, who took time to guide me through the ethics process and substantively contributed to the design of the methods. To the additional members of the examining committee, Drs. Andre Grace, Robin Everall, Jennifer Kelly, and Michelle Pidgeon for the challenging questions, support, and ideas that will continue to serve as great "mind candy" moving forward.

To all the people that I've worked with at the University of Alberta, University of Guelph, University of Toronto, and Centennial College who have helped along the way from providing advice and encouragement to "getting down and dirty" with editing...thank you for all that you did. To all elementary and high school teachers who identified and nourished abilities and interests so help me envision and realize this future story for myself.

To the participants, Dani, Marina, Katrina, and Kayla, who made the experience not only educational, but thoroughly enjoyable; thank you for taking the time to participate and for

sharing your journeys with me. I hope you learned from and enjoyed the experience at least half as much as I did.

Lastly, to my family. To my partner in life, David Newman, who played various roles from cheerleader and champion to editor providing intelligent critique and even housekeeper at times! His calm demeanor and fun approach has made the journey enjoyable. To my parents, Mel and Shirley Buddel, sister Rachel Buddel, and nephew Harley Buddel who will likely never read this in its entirety, but who were significant forces during my formative years, shaping my aspirations, desires, and self-concept; without them being who they are, I would never have envisioned a storied future as a university student and possessed the determination to complete.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One: Why Should we Care About First-Generation Students?

Deliberations

It was one of those swelteringly hot days in July; so hot and humid that just standing out in the sun without any exertion resulted in excessive and uncomfortable sweating. I was 10 and had to deliver the Oshawa Times newspaper for the regular paperboy, Matthew, as he was on vacation. Because it was summer holidays, my mom and sister also joined me. We went through the route and encountered barking dogs, angry customers (who did not receive the Canadian Tire flyer from the previous week), and little shade. Needless to say, the hour or so that it probably took to deliver the papers felt like an eternity of excruciating labour with minimal reward or satisfaction. I hated it.

Once we returned home, my mom, sister, and I got some lemonade and went outside to sit in a shaded area of our yard, which was much cooler than our un-air-conditioned house. I remember still sweating and being uncomfortable, with bees buzzing around my dad's flowers and our lemonade, but we stayed outside. I remember complaining about the paper route and how I never wanted to do that again. Though I could tell my mom agreed, she also said, "you need to work hard in life to earn money to live." She shared stories about how hard my dad worked, having to fight for overtime whenever he could. He had to fight for overtime because things were not very equitable where he worked; the supervisor would offer overtime shifts to other staff and often leave dad out. This was always very surprising and hurtful to mom and dad as the supervisor, Pat, was a family friend and my parents were appointed guardians to his two daughters, Sharon and Charlene. I remember being angry at these situations, imagining at that young age that I wanted to be in a more senior role with more authority so that I would not be treated badly and could treat others in an equitable way.

The conversation turned to talk of school. My parents greatly valued education and succeeding academically (very often sitting down and taking our spelling or quizzing us on history), so we talked about what high school would be like. It was at that moment when I realized that I didn't know what life looked like beyond high school, so I asked. My mom said that some people go to college or university, but most start working in order to live (and shared stories about cousins who had jobs with the Canadian Automobile Association and Nissan). Choosing something that was not required for success in life – postsecondary education – seemed very foreign to me and I remember feeling considerable fear about the concept of going to college or university. I asked if I had to go to college or university, and my mom replied, "no, you don't need college or university to work and you can stay here at home as long as you need to."

Years later, I remembered that conversation as I was sitting in my high school guidance office exploring universities. I had no idea what to do, where to go, or why I was going, but the crowd that I hung around in high school was going to university, so it seemed to be what I should do. Mr. Mistoffelees, the music teacher, entered, sat beside me, and asked me where I was applying. Having been to McMaster (and knowing that a close friend was going there), I shared that McMaster, Guelph, and Waterloo were my first three choices, but that I was paying extra to apply to York University and Western as I wasn't sure if I would get in (I secretly also wanted to apply to the University of Toronto, but felt that it was for "true" university students). He said that I was crazy to spend the extra money as institutions wanted students like me: students who had high grades and were very involved in student life. I didn't believe him, so I "forked out" the extra cash and applied to all five universities.

The Field of University Education

The current neoliberal and increasingly global milieu has significantly shaped our conceptualizations of the contemporary university. No longer are universities institutions where learning is pursued for its own sake; instead, they are increasingly regarded by governments and citizens for their utility in conferring credentials for success in a competitive global knowledge economy. Angus (2009) reviewed the evolution of western universities, offering a critical analysis of their plight within our larger socio-political context. He argued that, through jettisoning core functions in response to market demands of a neoliberal and global context, universities are no longer agents of enlightenment, but have become corporate entities "succumbing to the demands of society" (Angus, p. 59). Though critiquing the core function of universities is outside my scope, neoliberalism and globalization are significant contextual forces affecting student participation in higher education and will be discussed briefly.

The current manifestation of neoliberalism incorporates classical economic liberal ideology, where individual competition and a self-regulating market are seen as key ingredients for healthy function (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Intersected with the concept of the global knowledge economy, the role of the state is to ensure that citizens are equipped with knowledge for both individual and state prosperity; consequently, training and research functions of universities are increasingly viewed as strategic tools in government policy (Slaughter, 1998). This ideology, concomitant with the evolution of universities into mass-education institutions, represents higher education as "an input-output system, which can be reduced to an economic production function" (Olssen & Peters, p. 324), boasting a promising future for those who have the skill to succeed. In concert with this pulse of change, employers are increasingly requiring specific credentials for workforce participation: "The number of jobs for those with a post-

secondary certificate increased by 1.83 million [in 1997], while total employment for those who didn't finish high school dropped by 962,000" (Fleras, 2005, p. 266). Our society has embraced credentials, trusting that such codification of formal education represents an individual as more capable than one without a credential. It is, therefore, not surprising to see an increase in the number of institutions offering degree programs.

Though the quality of degree programs significantly varies (indeed, we may not be able to accurately describe all degrees in the same manner), the reality is that a degree, in its broadest conception, is revered in society for representing a "guaranteed" pathway to success. Financially speaking, this appears true as, on average, Canadians with a university degree earned $61,823, whereas those with a college degree earned $41,825 and those with a high-school diploma earned $36,278 (Fleras, 2005). A recent report of household incomes from the Ministry of Industry (2013) concludes that high-income Canadians tend to be highly educated, with 24.1% of those with a university degree being in the top 10% income group (the top 10% make at least $80,400, with an average income of $134,900).

Canadians want degrees. Analyzing data from Statistics Canada, Fleras illustrated increased university participation from the 18-25 year-old cohort: enrolment in 1994 was 30%, compared to seven percent in 1963 and three percent in 1939. Furthermore, Fleras illustrated that by 2001, 15.4%of the population over 15 years had earned a degree, compared with 1.9% in 1951. We are attuned to the utility of degrees, evidenced through increased participation at universities and other degree-granting institutions.

Notwithstanding the critiques presented by Angus (2009), one can appreciate the pursuit of degrees as a means to remain competitive in our current context. From the perspective of late modernity or the risk society, it is argued that citizens will mobilize resources to invest in

opportunities – university degrees for example – because the investment will produce increased economic capacity to facilitate a better life; that is, "individuals engage reflexively with their social environment and take strategic risks as they make important life-course decisions" (Lehmann, 2009, p. 632). Furthermore, it is argued that historical barriers associated with identities related to class, gender, and ethnicity "have become less deterministic and that, correspondingly, an increasing range of alternative courses of action have opened up for individuals" (Lehmann, 2004, p. 380). However, this assertion requires closer scrutiny.

Who are First-Generation Students?

University degree completion rates in Canada vary significantly based on social class: a significant number of studies demonstrate that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (sometimes referred to as middle- to upper-class) are more likely than students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (sometimes referred to as working-class) to earn a university degree (Allen, 2003; Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Finnie, Lascelles, & Sweetman, 2005; Knighton & Mirza, 2002). It is becoming increasingly clear that family background and not tuition fees (within the current policy context) affects who attends university (Finnie, Lascelles, & Sweetman, 2005). Brennan and Naidoo (2008) illustrated that increased university capacity at multiple European institutions did not correspond to enhanced access for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds: "In most countries recent increases in higher education participation rates among young people from lower socio-economic groups have been less than the overall rate of increase" (p. 292). Similarly, using data from the Higher Education Council for England (HECFE), Longden (2004) demonstrated that, when university capacity increased from 1940 to present day, participation increased significantly only among students from more

privileged backgrounds. Unfortunately, a plethora of studies demonstrate that the same phenomenon exists in Canada.

Knighton (2002), through an examination of the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, found that postsecondary participation for Canadian youth aged 18 to 21 was affected by family background; specifically, 88% of youth with university-educated parents pursued postsecondary education, compared with 68% whose parents were college-educated and 52% whose parents had a high school diploma or less. Similarly, Barr-Telford, Cartwright, Prasil, and Simmons (2003), using the Postsecondary Education Participation Survey data, highlighted that 67% of Canadians aged 18 to 24 pursue postsecondary education when it is perceived as expected by their parents, compared with 34% of youth whose parents do not expect postsecondary participation; a finding that also reflected parental educational levels, with more educated parents expecting that their children would pursue postsecondary education. In addition, as family earning increased, so did the likelihood of postsecondary attendance. For example, 83% of students aged 18 to 24, whose families earned $80,000 or more, pursued postsecondary education, whereas just over 50% of youth from families earning less than $55,000 attended postsecondary education (Barr-Telford et al., 2003). Bar-Telford et al. also found that 70% of youth whose parents had some form of postsecondary education completed their education, compared with 57% of youth whose parents did not have some form of postsecondary education. Consequently, Knighton concluded that "parents' education and household income [remain] strong determinants of postsecondary participation" (p. 31).

Family class background (specifically pertaining to income and education) has a particularly significant impact on whether an individual not only postsecondary education in general, but also university specifically. According to Fleras (2005), in 1998 wealthy Canadians

were 2.5 times more likely than the poorest quarter to attend university. This is highlighted recently by Corak, Lipps, and Zhao (2003) who, through an analysis of Canadian studies examining family background and postsecondary participation, concluded "children from higher income families are more likely to attend university" (p. 13). Knighton (2002) provided further evidence for this correlation. In examining four income quartiles (less than $30,000; $30,000 to $49,999; $50,000 to $66,999, and $67,000 and higher), Knighton found that youth whose parents were in the highest income quartile were more than twice as likely to pursue university than youth with parents in the lowest income quartile. In addition, 49% of youth with university-educated parents chose university compared with 17% of youth whose parents had a high school diploma or less. Finnie (2005), through an examination of the 1999 data from Statistics Canada, found that youth are over three times more likely to pursue university when both parents are university-educated, compared with youth whose parents have a high school diploma or less. As a result, we have an established system of higher education that continually reproduces economic and social benefits for students from higher socioeconomic class backgrounds. This is a social concern that should be explored more rigorously: the perpetual exclusion of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds from higher education leaves them with "fewer opportunities for meaningful participation in an economic system that increasingly requires post-secondary credentials for access to well-paying jobs" (Whitehead, 2006, p. 103).

Although social class matters, it is rarely discussed in the scholarship concerning university student participation (Aries & Seider, 2005; Lehmann, 2007). Fleras (2005) defined class as "persons with similar family backgrounds with respect to wealth, power, and prestige. More specifically, classes are defined as groups of individuals who share a common relationship to scarce and valued resources" (p. 41). Grabb (2009) explained that: class (a) exists as

conceptual categories of people and not as sets of people; (b) divisions are founded on deeply-embedded narratives and dispositions (comprised of values and beliefs) and not simply a function of strata, which include income, education, and occupation; (c) exists because of granted societal rights to own and exclude others from owning – property and educational credentials for example; (d) is most recognized as an economically-based construct, and (e) systems are complex.

Though postsecondary participation has increased overall, the rate of participation has risen more sharply for students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds compared with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Knighton & Mirza, 2002). In the chapter titled, C*hoose Your Parents Carefully: Social Class, Post-Secondary Education, and Occupational Outcomes*, Krahn (2009) presented data suggesting that Canadian middle-class youth are better poised for success. Specifically, Krahn summarized that middle-class youth: (a) perform better in high-school; (b) are more likely to participate in high-school academic streams; (c) value post-secondary education; (d) have higher educational and occupational aspirations; (e) have earned an array of post-secondary credentials, and (f) are more likely to be in managerial or professional positions that parallel expectations in high-school. Especially pronounced is Krahn's finding that children from families where at least one parent completed university are almost three times more likely to complete university (56%), compared with children who come from families where parents did not complete university (21%). This pattern of participation led Lehmann (2009) to conclude, "social class remains the most stubborn and persistent factor affecting educational attainment in Canada" (p. 632).

Our belief and trust in the concept of meritocracy requires examination in the context of these class-based patterns. Taylor (1994) critiqued the functionalist perspective of late

modernity by highlighting society's general acceptance of the meritocratic myth where credentials are "earned by those who have the necessary talent and personal drive to successfully compete" (p. 40) within "a meritocratic selection process by means of formal education" (p. 44). Taylor further argued that "in virtually no Western industrialized society has formal education become an instrument by which disadvantaged and impoverished groups can achieve a substantially greater degree of social and economic equality" (p. 47). Indeed this social-Darwinian "survival of the fittest" philosophy, that relegates any type of underrepresentation to lack of ability and ignores historical barriers, perpetuates the myth of meritocracy. This phenomenon is especially pronounced for first-generation students, who are the first in their families to attend university (Andres, Adamuti-Trache, Yoon, Pidgeon, & Thomsen, 2007; Knighton, 2002; Krahn, 2009; Lambert, Zeman, Allen, & Bussiere, 2004; Parkin & Baldwin, 2009; Tinto, 2007). First-generation students are not only less likely to persist to degree completion, but are also less engaged with the academic and social aspects of the university experience and, consequently, do not experience the same psychosocial and cognitive development reported by non-first-generation students (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Summarized by Ziemniak (2010), first-generation students are *less* likely to: (a) be encouraged to attend postsecondary; (b) understand postsecondary processes and costs; (c) be in academic-level or university-positioned streams in high-school; (d) go to graduate school; (e) live in residence, and (f) persist to graduation. Similarly, first-generation students are *more* likely to: (a) come from low socioeconomic backgrounds; (b) be a member of an ethnic minority; (c) possess lower educational aspirations; (d) prefer and succeed at community colleges; (e) work off-campus, and (f) leave postsecondary before graduation. In

comparison to students whose families have a history of university attendance, these overall trends are striking and disconcerting.

First-generation status is an interesting construct that intersects with the previous discussion of class. Although first-generation students are usually from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, some may be considered as coming from higher class backgrounds based on the occupation of their parents and household income – though the capital bestowed by a university degree would be absent. The fact that first-generation students are not likely to persist through to degree completion strongly suggests that this facet of socioeconomic class is associated with unique values, attitudes, and beliefs, in addition to unique family and self narratives, when compared with non-first-generation students. These class-based worldviews shape how one interacts with her or his environment as class is "something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, in the very core of your being" (Kuhn, 1995, cited in Lehmann, 2009), which affects social behaviour. Building on Grabb's (2009) explanation that class reflects deeply-embedded and lasting dispositions and is not simply defined by income, education, or occupation, it becomes apparent that an individual's beliefs, values, and dispositions, in addition to cultural, social, family and self narratives, become a rich field for exploration as they are all influenced by class. In such a case, being a first-generation student reflects a certain class-based orientation, in which codes about university culture are embedded. An under-researched perspective in the literature concerns the exploration of how students' class-based worldviews and narratives could be explored as a way of understanding their university experiences. That is, exploring how class-based stories inform behaviours as students without a family history of university attendance interact within a dominant culture comprised of

students with a history of university education. Such an approach strongly resounds with Bourdieu's (1984) work on social class.

Bourdieu's (1984) book, *Distinction*, contains robust conceptualizations of class-based behaviours resulting from an analysis of 1,217 responses to a survey administered in 1963 and 1967-1968. Here, Bourdieu asserted that "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (p. 6): taste divides classes and the resulting divide is considered sacred and used to legitimate social differences. Such tastes are largely implicit and a function of upbringing and education, resulting in a strong tendency towards social reproduction. He bases this on comparisons between working-class and middle/upper-class people, where tacit codes differentiate appreciation of cultural goods. Referencing different perceptions/tastes with music and art, Bourdieu demonstrated that working-class people prefer arts reflective of legitimate (or popular) culture, as they have difficulty seeing the value in more abstract art forms and "expect every image to explicitly perform a function" (p. 5). Conversely, middle- and upper-class people, as a function of their upbringing and education endowing them with different cultural codes, appreciate and recognize the worth of art for its form (versus function). Bourdieu's concepts will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, but here it is important to introduce the concept of *habitus* as a way of exploring the experiences of first-generation university students. Taste and practice within a class-based society requires exploring experience as understood through Bourdieu's construct of habitus:

> It is necessary to reconstruct what has been taken apart, first by way of verification but also in order to rediscover the kernel of truth in the approach characteristic of common-sense knowledge, namely, the intuition of the systematic nature of life-styles and of the whole set which they constitute. To do this, one must return to the practice-unifying and

> practice-generating principle, i.e., class habitus, the internalized form of class condition and of the conditionings it entails. (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 101)

Habitus can be thought of as a mental structure that embodies a person's socio-historical context (e.g., family background, culture, education), while concurrently and tacitly making meaning of social interactions, thereby structuring one's social world. These enduring dispositions guide social interaction and, though malleable, largely reproduce the conditions of their genesis, which includes the stories of our lives.

Habitus is shaped by the social, cultural, family, and self stories of our socio-historical context and, because we live storied lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), stories can serve as portals to understanding habitus and experience. From a Bourdieuian perspective, exploration of the stories of our lives serves to unravel the socio-historical habitus-shaping conditions and provides a deeper understanding of social behaviour – or practice within a given field. As such, a storied lens serves as a powerful way for understanding how a first-generation student's history, context, and interactions intersect as they experience university and make decisions about attendance. Specifically, while parental educational attainment is a strong and appropriate indicator of (or proxy for) social class and predictor of whether a child will pursue university studies (Andres & Krahn, 1999; Lehman, 2007), my research goes deeper to explore how the storied lives and habitus of first-generation students shape their university experiences.

Research Context and Exploration

Concerns with access to university and persistence through degree completion have been identified, reflective of the cycle of social reproduction as a function of parental educational attainment that has existed for a number of years. Without significant change, Canadian society will maintain a system of higher education that continually reproduces advantage for students

from privileged backgrounds; however, theorization of university student persistence has largely ignored social class and habitus as constructs, providing little direction for improving these circumstances (Lehmann, 2007; Tinto, 2007).

Although scholarship in the area of first-generation persistence is indeed growing, there are a plethora of opportunities to further advance our understanding. Bugyi (2008) highlighted that scholars "have not made the link between these behaviors [i.e., practice in the university field] and actual educational success" (p. 2) and suggested that future research needs to explore the nature of behaviours that support persistence for first-generation students. Tinto (2007) and Parkin and Baldwin (2009) asserted that additional examination of persistence as a function of socioeconomic status is needed in the discourse and Lehmann (2007) noted that there is need for additional Canadian studies where socioeconomic class is embraced as an important variable. Further, Lehmann (2009) suggested that future studies should explore this phenomenon with different methodological approaches. This research project is positioned to address voids in the literature by exploring the lived experiences of first-generation university students; indeed, notable student success scholars have critiqued the absence of student experiences in the literature. For example, Pike and Kuh (2005) highlighted that, while we know that first-generation students are less likely to persist to degree completion, "surprisingly little is known about their college experiences and the ways those experiences compare to the experiences of students who have college-educated parents" (p. 276). Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) also highlighted that little is known about first-generation students' university experiences, including their psychosocial and cognitive development during university: they reference only one study from 1996 that explored first-generation students' experiences with, and development resulting from, university attendance. Exploring how first-generation students

experience and benefit from their university experiences, and how such experiences support or hinder persistence, is a ripe area for research. Exploring experience, however, requires an attuned research lens that illuminates the richness of experiences, while also weaving in and contributing to existing scholarship.

Although current research in the *narrative research* tradition has been helpful (Clandinin, 2013), the power of *narrative inquiry* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is better suited to exploring experience and challenging macrosocial constructs or grand narratives (Clandinin & Connelly) in order to significantly alter the cycle of social reproduction that has negatively affected first-generation students (see Chapter Three for a discussion on the terms narrative research and narrative inquiry). Yanow (2000) suggested that policymakers need to scrutinize current approaches and embrace those that incorporate human meaning, including beliefs, values, and feelings. She described the renewed attention to narrative inquiry as a methodology concerned with understanding meaning that has the potential to "persuade readers of the validity and/or veracity of the writing" (Yanow, p. 58). This is where research programs must tread, particularly to appeal to policy makers in provinces like Alberta where the issue has not been recognized. Narrative inquiry as a methodology, with exploration that is concurrently inward and outward, backward and forward and across sociality, temporality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), is poised for elucidating enhanced understandings of the largely unexamined experiences of first-generation university students. As a result, my primary research question is as follows: **for first-generation students, how do the stories of their lives have a formative relationship with their habitus (i.e., the dispositions, beliefs, and values that constitute their worldview) and, if so, how do their lived and told stories shape their university experiences towards persistence?**

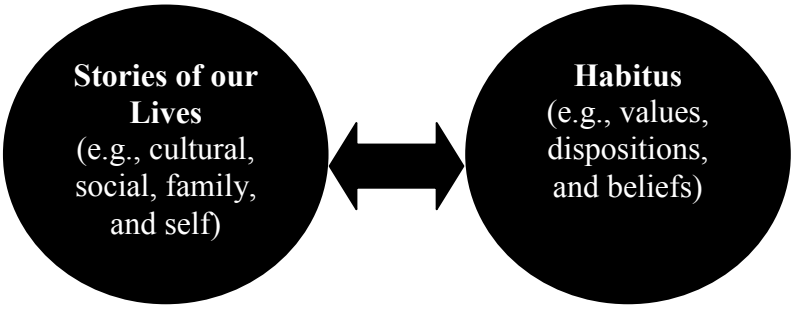
Although the question serves to ground this research, a number of additional questions emerge. I share them here, not as formal secondary research questions, but to espouse questions that arose for me from the literature and contributed to the interview questions illustrated in Appendix 4. For example, how does university experience shape the habitus of first-generation students? How do first-generation students make meaning of their intra- and inter-personal worlds and how does this intersect with their past, present, and future concepts of self? Do first-generation students persist by attending to an experienced habitus dissonance and, if so, how do they manage this dissonance? Is such attending stressful and, if so, how is this experienced and what are the impacts? What aspects of their experiences in the academic and social realms contribute to this dissonance? Conversely, what aspects are experienced as supportive? What aspects of the university field bring the habitus into consciousness and how would first-generation students describe this habitus? From a narrative perspective, what social, cultural, and family stories do first-generation students hear about university prior to attending, and as they attend? What stories do they tell themselves about university (i.e., what are their self narratives)? What experiences during university disrupt their self narratives and how do they experience this disruption? How do students make sense of their experiences as individuals seeking membership in a foreign milieu? How does the institutional context, intersected with the policy context, affect their experiences? What might students share about their experiences through more attentive and long-term researcher-participant relationships? Using the concepts of habitus and narratives (i.e., stories we live and tell) as tools, these wonders will serve as guides to inquiring into the experiences of first-generation university students. Narrative inquiry will enable deeper exploration as "attention shifts to the details – how and why a particular event is storied…or what a narrator accomplishes by developing the story that way, and effects on the

reader or listener" (Riessman, 2008, p. 13), which enables one to make *conceptual inferences* (Riessman) about a group. Although Riessman highlights the capacity of told stories to carry meaning through narration, her point can be extended to lived stories that are then relived and retold (Clandinin, 2013). Such retellings of lived experiences also illuminate understandings of experiences that are possible only through the act of reliving and retelling where meaning is attached to experiences and once disparate events are storied. In short, inquiry plunges into the minutia of individual experience and leads to the development of narrative accounts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), co-constructed between participant and researcher, which provide a glimpse into how participants experience their lives in university – a narrative view of their experiences. It also lends to the possibility of making theoretical propositions or conceptual inferences about first-generation students, while maintaining a person-centred commitment and keeping individual's storied experiences "intact."

Further, based on the work of David Carr, my approach is grounded in a conceptual assumption that *the stories we live by have a reciprocal formative relationship with our habitus (disposition, values, beliefs, and attitudes), which, in turn, shape behaviours in our social world*. Indeed, as a structured structure that structures (Bourdieu, 1984), the habitus also shapes what stories are heard and how they are interpreted, thus also filtering the shaping of its own structure. Carr (1986) explained that all our stories begin before birth: our families, cultures, and society are comprised of stories that we are born into. Carr continued further to say that "human existence is to be understood as a matter of assuming and acting out the parts determined by the already existing repertoire of roles, finding oneself caught up in already ongoing stories – including one's own life story" (p. 84). Here Carr highlighted an important point: we are born into stories that shape our self-narrative, which also, on a deeper level, shapes our habitus and

concepts of our place in society (see Chapter Three for a fuller discussion of the intersection of habitus and narrative). My understanding of this relationship is presented in Figure 1 (Conceptual Positioning of Stories of our Lives and Habitus), illustrating how the stories of our lives (e.g., cultural, familial, institutional, linguistic, and self-narratives) have a formative relationship with the habitus.

Figure 1: Conceptual Positioning of Stories of our Lives and Habitus



Stories shape the habitus, which then, in turn, structures how the social world is experienced – including how meaning is interpreted from stories.

The research question presented above is not only important to me as a first-generation student myself, but also as a practitioner in the area of student affairs and services with approximately 15 years of experience. Though I initially saw my career path within formal education as a teacher, I became intrigued by the informal and non-formal educational milieu of residence halls during my time on student staff from 1998 through to convocation in 2001 in Ontario. This experience was the impetus to my professional career, which began at the University of Alberta in 2001 in the Department of Residence Services (then Housing and Food Services) as a Residence Coordinator. I moved to be Director of Student Services in the Faculty of Law in 2005 and then back to Residence Services in 2007 as Associate Director Residence

Life. In 2012, I moved to Toronto and assumed the role of Associate Director Residence Life at the University of Guelph. In early 2014, I was provided with the opportunity to slightly alter my career path by leading the Career Education team as the Assistant Director Career Education at the University of Toronto – a role that enabled me to draw heavily from theoretical constructs from this research. In summer 2014, I was presented with the opportunity to assume the position of Dean of Students at Centennial College – an institution with approximately 50% first-generation students and a significant immigrant population. I am currently employed in this position (while adding the final finessing to this dissertation) and am eager to explore how this research can be put into practice.

It is because of my experiences within the Alberta and Ontario contexts that I chose to explore the stories of experiences of first generation students and my research will be conducted at the Pillar University (a pseudonym for the purpose of maintaining participant anonymity). Because participant identification and recruitment will rely on how Pillar University administratively defines a first-generation student, the definition of a first-generation student for my research purposes is *a student whose parent(s) and/or guardian(s) did not complete postsecondary education in Canada*[2]. This is consistent with current research in this area, which has focussed on the educational level of parents/guardians and has largely ignored the impact of: (a) parents or guardians completing postsecondary education outside of Canada; (b) grandparents completing postsecondary education, and (c) siblings who are completing or have attended postsecondary.

[2] Interestingly, most institutions in Ontario define a first-generation student as one whose parent(s)/guardian(s) did not complete postsecondary education anytime or anywhere, which is consistent with the Ontario Student Assistance Program. Varying definitions are indeed an issue as will be discussed in Chapter 6chapter six, particularly related to capital.

The introduction in Chapter One (*Why Should We Care About First-Generation Students?*) was concerned with demonstrating the social concern of under-representation for first-generation students in universities and that such patterns of participation have roots in our class-based social structures. Specifically, that university culture is representative of more privileged perspectives that tacitly exclude first-generation students. Chapter Two (*Unique University Experiences*) explores the phenomenon further through an extensive literature review: Bourdieu's theorization of class-based behaviours is presented and first-generation student underrepresentation is discussed, drawing particular attention to theorization that they experience university as a largely foreign environment with different codes than they are accustomed to. This chapter also contains an exploration of the governmental policies and university programs in Alberta and Ontario in order to appreciate the extent to which the social concern is understood and attended to. Chapter Three (*Narrative Inquiry and Habitus*) discusses narrative inquiry as an appropriate methodology for exploring how first-generation students experience university, including a more detailed discussion of habitus, the narrative nature of experience, and how narrative inquiry is positioned conceptually at the borderlands of critical theory and post-structuralism. A full overview of methods (including recruitment and interview questions) is also presented in this chapter. The field texts (data in narrative inquiry), co-composed with participants, are shaped into *narrative accounts* (Clandinin, 2013) and are presented in Chapter Four (*Journeys Towards University*). Chapter Five (*Resonant Narrative Threads*) explores resonant narrative threads that surfaced in each individual narrative account and that resonated across all four narrative accounts. The narrative threads that emerged in Chapter Five are discussed in Chapter Six (*Putting the Pieces Together*) within the existing scholarship. Chapter

Seven (*Reflections and Wonderings*) presents final thoughts and reflections on the issue of first-generation underrepresentation, putting forward conceptual inferences for future research.

Chapter Two: Unique University Experiences

Bourdieuian Framework

The field of higher education operates within a complex web of interactions, which include government, industry, other educational sectors, and citizens, to name just a few. With respect to peoples, identities are vastly rich and complex (encompassing intersections of race, gender, sexuality, history, context, and class), giving rise to the important and necessary challenge for social systems to ensure participation in the social fabric – to ensure equitable opportunities for engaged citizenship for all peoples. This chapter provides immersion into the scholarship concerned with social class, with a focus on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose conceptual framework serves to illuminate class-based patterns of behaviours. Further, governmental policies are examined from a social class lens to explore the extent that they facilitate or hinder equal opportunities and outcomes for underrepresented populations. In short, university attendance as a function of social class is explored within the context of governmental policies, particularly how they relate to first-generation students.

With university attendance, a class-based cycle of participation and reproduction has existed for a number of years. Here it is necessary to underscore the importance of attending to access and persistence as unique facets of underrepresentation as they embody the ideals of equal opportunity and equal outcomes, respectively:

> Equal opportunity focuses on the rights of individuals to be free from discrimination when competing for the good things in life. It operates on the principle that true equality can only come about when everyone is treated equally regardless of gender or race. By contrast, equal outcomes concentrate on the rights of historically disadvantaged groups to

> a fair and equitable share of scarce resources. True equality arises when differences and disadvantage are acknowledged as a basis for divvying up the goods. (Fleras, 2005, p. 65)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, taste distinguishes classes and is largely reproductive, being a function of education and upbringing. Perceptions towards university education are no different and underpin decisions concerning both application and enrolment. Specifically, being a first-generation student means that certain cultural codes shape worldviews concerning university participation and, thus, these experiences are a rich source for understanding. A Bourdieuian approach is appropriate for exploring the phenomenon of first-generation student underrepresentation and the goal of achieving participation equity; his framework attends to cycles of privilege and reproduction, with the goal of improving circumstances.

Discussions of social class have been greatly enriched through the contributions of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose theorization of class-based practice is made easily accessible through his development of key concepts, which provide a framework for analysis and have the potential to resonate with diverse audiences. Bourdieu's (1984) conceptualization of social class is appropriate for examining university student persistence as his theorizing is aimed at "providing a more accurate and detailed vision of social interaction" (Horvat, 2001, p. 197). Indeed, researchers who have explored the phenomenon at an experiential level (Lehmann, 2007; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009) have found that first-generation students experience university in qualitatively unique ways (when compared with non-first-generation students) in a manner congruent with Bourdieu's theorization of class. Specifically, Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *social reproduction* enables us to examine the repeated patterns of privilege that have plagued first-generation students by drawing attention to *practice*; that is, individual action at the intersection of one's habitus and *capital* in a given *field*. These constructs, formulaically

depicted by Bourdieu as "[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice" (p. 101), are a hallmark of his framework.

Habitus refers to learned dispositions, which include beliefs, attitudes, and values, based on an individual's family background (Berger, 2000; Horvat, 2001). Bourdieu (1971) elaborated that habitus is a "system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, function at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (p. 83). Habitus represents a tacit perspective of the world that individuals with similar lifestyles share: an unconscious understanding of the "rules" of social interaction (Horvat, 2001). Capital has many forms, but all are symbolic (non-material) forms of power in a given field: (a) Money and other monetary resources are referred to as *economic capital*; (b) *social capital* refers to the social networks where one has influence, and (c) *cultural capital* encompasses many facets, which include knowledge about highly valued social artefacts, mannerisms and practices associated with the "upper-class," and credentials. Horvat (2001) defined the concept of field "as the embodiment of the rules of the *game* [italics added] as well as the site wherein the struggle to own or control these rules takes place" (p. 213). Within each field there are the dominant and the dominated who behave or practice (a function of their habitus and capital) in a manner to advance their current status. The important assumption underpinning Bourdieu's theory is that practice is mediated by symbolic power, which is inherent and masked in social interactions, perpetuating social hierarchy.

The field of higher education is entrenched with class-based struggles for first-generation students, evidenced by the literature and statistical evidence demonstrating that university access and persistence behaviours can be differentiated by class; that is, practice in the field of higher education is largely rooted in a student's habitus and capital. This phenomenon is problematic

and unjust for first-generation students: “The problem is particularly acute for first generation students, most lacking in cultural capital, who experience the greatest degree of inadequacy, inferiority, and intimidation” (Aries & Seider, 2005, p. 440). The concept of habitus and the salience of narrative inquiry as a methodology will be discussed further in Chapter Three to illustrate the appropriateness of such a methodology to explore experience.

The University “Choice” Process

The secondary school experiences of first-generation students indicate an orientation that is largely associated with their first-generation status and corresponding habitus. For example, Lehmann (2004) found that a student’s placement in either the academic-track or apprenticeship programs in high school was strongly correlated with family background, as those with university-educated parents were more likely in the academic-stream. It is no surprise that many scholars conclude that family background, particularly parental educational level, is a strong predictor of success in secondary school and postsecondary (particularly university) attendance (Knighton, 2002; Lehmann, 2004; Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001; Rinnie, 2005; Vryonides, 2007). In a recent study of prospective college students in the United States, Gibbons and Borders (2010) found similar patterns concerning parental educational level; specifically, that prospective students who were the first from their family to attend postsecondary education indicated lower self-efficacy expectations, when compared with non-first-generation students, and also experienced a litany of barriers including finances, lack of college-educated role models, lack of preparation, and lack of desire. Further, when examining the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, Knighton (2002) found that 88% of Canadian youth with university-educated parents attended a postsecondary institution, compared with 68% whose parents were college-educated and 52% whose parents had a high school diploma or less.

These class-based correlations are especially pronounced when examining university participation, as children of university-educated parents are more likely to obtain a university degree. In Canada, Knighton (2002), using data from the 1998 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, examined postsecondary participation as a function of parental educational attainment and income level and found that youth whose parents had higher educational attainment were more likely to pursue postsecondary education. Most relevant to our discussion is that higher parental educational attainment was associated with children choosing university over college, which indicates practice as a function of social class.

When considering data concerning first-generation students and university choice-making processes, Reay, Davies, David, and Ball (2001) summarized that the process is both emotional and material for working-class students: "For them choice-making seemed to be, in part, a process of psychological self-exclusion in which traditional universities are often discounted" (p. 863) and that "despite increasing numbers of working-class students…their experiences of the [university] choice process are qualitatively different to that of their more privileged middle-class counterparts" (p. 871). With such strong and persistent correlational evidence, one must wonder about the extent that "choice" truly exists for (or is perceived by) first-generation students; however, through a Bourdieuian lens theorization about these patterns is possible.

The field of formal education is theorized to favour the capital and habitus of society's dominant, which would be middle- and upper-class families, as it is an institution of the dominant; therefore, as Grenfell and James (1998) asserted, pedagogy is an instrument of socialization instead of instruction. Academic performance and socialization into academic- compared with applied-streams are seen as reflective of a family's habitus and capital. Middle- and upper-class students are able to perform well because of their intimate familiarity with the

content and, because of family capital, are able to access better schools to support their performance (Krahn, 2009). Consequently, these students are well positioned for university attendance and view university attendance not as a choice, but as a rite of passage. Conversely, students from working-class backgrounds experience a disconnect or dissonance with the educational system resulting from their habitus; consequently, they are likely to be in applied versus university-poised academic-streams in high school. The choice to attend university, for these working-class students is assessed in terms of whether employment opportunities are worth the risk.

Walpole (2003) summarized that students with parent(s) and/or guardian(s) with university degrees view university participation as a natural progression, whereas students from families without a tradition of university attendance are more likely to evaluate participation from a cost and potential employment-benefit perspective. Consequently, it is difficult to ignore "the endurable nature of expectations and their firm roots within a classed society" (Andres, Adamuti-Trache, Yoon, Pidgeon, & Thomsen, 2007, p. 154). Indeed, very recent research indicates that non-first-generation students more easily become role experts in universities, resulting from family experiences with higher education (i.e., *habitus consonance*) and knowledge about institutional operations and options (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Vyronides, 2007). First-generation students, however, do enter university, but their experiences are qualitatively unique when compared with their middle- and upper-class peers.

Transitions

The day I was dreading finally arrived. August 31, 1997. I was packing to go to university and wondering why the hell I made that decision. I regretted not listening to my mom who suggested that I live at home and go to Durham College. I should have also listened to my

music teachers and coaches who said that I should continue with music and finish my piano studies. I regretted not listening to any of this advice as I was beginning to physically feel the anxiety of leaving home.

I needed to deal with the anxiety, so when a friend called to go out for a last drink, I did. We went to a pub in Whitby and talked about how great high school was and that things would be quite different now. Then, we saw the breaking news on TV that Princess Diana was in a car accident and was in critical condition. For some reason, I took this as a sign that I shouldn't go to university and so went home, continued watching the news through the night and thought that the next morning would be the same, except for the awful reality of Princess Diana's death.

My parents had to drag my tired body out of bed. I remember my dad packing the car with everything - somehow he always managed to make everything fit perfectly – and we left. We left early, as is my dad's style, which caused me further anxiety. Not only was it the realization that going to university was real, but we might get there too early, before they were ready for me to move into residence!

We drove for what seemed like an eternity: down the 401 to the QEW and then to the 403. Banners were affixed to many of the overhead bridges with slogans from various residence halls: "Whidden, Whidden, Whidden…bash, bash, bash" and "fathers, thank you for your daughters – McKay" (those sorts of sayings were quite common back then, before universities started reframing the first week as welcoming instead of a "froshing" experiences). I was both relieved and disappointed that my residence, Matthews, was not mentioned, and I stressed about not being in the "right" residence or if I had even chosen the "right" university (what was it that I wanted to do again?)! Then the exit finally came, Main Street West, and we took it. The fear was so visceral so that, when we saw the McMaster sign on the hospital, I felt as if I could throw

up! Things then moved fast, and I'm not sure how we pulled up to Matthews, but we did. At the curb were a group of students wearing the same colour soccer shirts, singing, dancing and chanting. My dad asked what kind of craziness this was, and I mentally hid within myself, but then the door opened…"Yes, yes, yes we do, we've got spirit, how 'bout you?!"

Zane took me from the car to get my room keys from the Moulton service desk, asking me questions about where I was from and what I was looking forward to about university life. After the initial extroverted energy-wave that hit when the car door opened, it was nice to have a calming moment and talk with someone who had a very helpful and supportive way about them.

Much of that first day was a blur. I don't remember how my packed belongings made it from the car to my room (I learned after that it was the orientation volunteers and the staff who undertook that incredible chore – something that I later did for first-year students during my time on staff in years two to four of my undergraduate life) or how I unpacked, but it all got done. I remember my mom and dad sitting with me on my bed resting after the ordeal of unpacking in the hot and somewhat stale air of my residence room. We didn't talk, but I think we were all thinking the same thing; that we had always done so much together as a family that it was quite strange to not have my sister there to experience this new chapter with us (she was with her new boyfriend and was in an anti-family headspace – it's ironic that my sister now lives with my parents and doesn't see that changing, ever!).

The time finally came. I didn't want my parents to leave…yet I couldn't wait for them to leave. It's always an interesting tension when you're at the crossroads of the old and the new, where driving forward means that the landscape must change and the familiar view in the forefront becomes secondary to the strange world ahead. Indeed, this was a strange world, not

just for me, but also for my parents and my extended family. I was the first in my family to attend university and, for the first time, realized this.

When my parents left my room, I just sat there and took it all in. The door was closed and my roommate hadn't yet moved in, so the space was all mine…at least for the moment. I remember looking at the door as it was kind of a security blanket that enabled me to be in this new and strange place, but at the same time sheltered me from it. As I stared at the door, I realized it was slowly appearing closer; some inner courage had pulled me towards it. I opened the door.

First Generation Students and Persistence

Lambert, Zeman, Allen, and Bussiere (2004) found that youth who dropped out of university were more likely to be from families with lower levels of education. More recently, Andres, Adamuti-Trache, Yoon, Pidgeon, and Thomsen (2007), through one of the few longitudinal studies in Canada, found that students earning the highest academic credentials were from more privileged backgrounds. Despite these and other correlational studies indicating that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experience significant disadvantages in the educational system, research theorizing the phenomenon and offering insight to improve circumstances has been scant (Krahn, 2009; Parking & Baldwin, 2009; Tinto, 2007; Walpole, 2003). These sentiments are eloquently summarized by Lehmann (2007): "Although we do know that access to university continues to be constrained by social class, we know little about factors contributing to dropping out of university" (p. 89). A few Canadian studies, however, both underscore the observations above and begin theorizing why and how such behaviours occur, notably drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

Utilizing a Bourdieuian framework, Lehmann (2007) conducted 25 interviews with students who chose to leave university without graduating (15 of whom were first-generation students) to explore persistence decisions/experiences and found that social class, as a function of parental education level, played a significant role in departure from university for first-generation students. Specifically, Lehman found that students with university-educated parents left university as a result of academic failure, while first-generation students left for non-academic reasons: "Not 'fitting in', not 'feeling university', and not being able to 'relate to these people' were key reasons for eventually withdrawing from university" (p. 105). Lehmann theorized that these students experienced "a fundamental discontinuity between the values of their working-class habitus and their middle-class goals and destinations" (p. 92) and also significant fear and intimidation having entered a largely foreign milieu where they have no familiarity or reference points. Consequently, working-class students, through the felt conflict between their habitus and that of the institution, chose to leave resulting from not finding an identity-reaffirming space, despite their proven academic ability. Indeed, Lambert, Zeman, Allen, and Bussiere (2004) commented that "lack of fit" was recorded by most first-generation students as the reason for departing from postsecondary studies prior to completion.

Lehman's (2007) theorization of first-generation student departure as a means to ultimately reconcile habitus dissonance is an important and unique way of understanding student departure, which rests "on the assumption of a relatively static habitus, or at least a habitus that ultimately reasserts itself" (p. 106). Viewed from this perspective, habitus dissonance is resolved when a student leaves the institution and finds a place where their habitus experiences consonance with the environment, such as apprenticeship programs, technical schools, universities with more diversity or, as recently seen in the Canadian context, newly established

universities (Statistics Canada, 2007). This aspect of habitus brings a new and important perspective when contrasted to the dominant paradigm concerning student departure presented by Vincent Tinto.

As previously mentioned, Tinto (2007) suggested that more research is needed concerning departure and class difference, but believed that his theory of student departure may still serve as a way to understand the phenomenon; that is, students who do not integrate into the informal and formal realms of the academic and social fabric of the institution are more likely to depart. Vincent Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure is arguably *the* North American paradigm for understanding student persistence (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). Tinto's theory predicts that the greater students integrate into the formal and informal academic components (e.g., high grade point averages and conversations with faculty members) and social fabrics (e.g., leadership positions and sense of belonging with peers) of the institution, the more likely they will persist to degree completion. Tinto's model of student departure theorizes that students with diverse backgrounds enter higher education with initial goal and institutional commitment levels and, through interactions in the academic and social realms of the institution, commitments are modified: academic integration reinforces goal commitment, whereas social integration reinforces institutional commitment. Increased integration enhances goal and institutional commitments, resulting in persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Tinto's model has provided researchers and student affairs practitioners with a theorized means of viewing student departure; however, many researchers have illustrated significant shortcomings with Tinto's theory, specifically its application for underrepresented students and call for further research that employs qualitative methodologies and foregrounds class as a variable (Berger, 2000; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Longden, 2004; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000;

Zepke & Leach, 2005). These critiques hold true when examining first-generation student persistence as Tinto's concept of integration places significant responsibility on the students and leaves institutional culture largely unexamined, privileging it as a norm that first-generation students must burrow into.

Lehmann's (2007) incorporation of a Bourdieuian analysis illustrates that departure may be quite a different qualitative process for students with a working-class habitus and perhaps more similar to those of Aboriginal students. Marker (2004) found that Aboriginal students in his study desired relevance, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility and left because the institutional habitus (being largely unexamined from an Indigenous epistemology) could not adequately attend to their worldviews, which formed part of their habitus. Marker specifically critiqued constructs of retention premised on integration, highlighting that Indigenous students were searching for *more*. A similar disconnection is evident between first-generation students who struggle with the habitus dissonance they experience in universities, resulting in their eventual departure.

First-generation students who persist through university also experience habitus dissonance; however, the few studies investigating this phenomenon suggest that instead of attempting to resolve their habitus dissonance by seeking habitus consonance, these students "manage the dissonance." In essence, being aware of their difference enables them to adapt and exist in both the working-class and middle-class worlds, though this is not without its challenges and strains.

When discussing the difference they experienced, most first-generation students shared that the awareness of being different from their working-class family and friends began very early in life and included: (a) experiences related to family struggles to sustain a comfortable

lifestyle (and resulting parental suggestions that education holds the key for improvement); (b) placement in academic-streams in high school, and (c) teachers who recognized and supported their academic potential (Lehmann, 2009). Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009) also noted how students with a working-class habitus describe their early school experiences as being like a "fish out of water" when compared with other working-class students. These students appear to have developed a sense of versatility, strong self-reflexive disposition, and desire for mobility that formed part of their habitus very early in life, though it is unclear how this occurred. As Bryan and Simmons (2009) describe, the working-class students always felt different from those in their immediate community, which may help us understand their experiences in university.

Aries and Seider (2005) found that working-class students in their study coped with the dissonance between their working-class habitus and the middle- to upper-class habitus of the university by compartmentalizing "different parts of the self, keeping them separate but allowing them to co-exist" (p. 435) so that they could "fit in" both at home and with academic life; a conclusion shared in Bryan and Simmons' (2009) study of first-generation Appalachian college students. Not only did these students manage their working-class image, but they also mimicked the behaviours, language, and dress of the higher-class students. Similar research demonstrates how students with a working-class habitus minimize their working-class identities with respect to language, interests, and attire (Granfield, 1991), while also priding themselves on values such as strong work-ethic, higher maturity, and increased independence that they associate with a working-class persona (Lehmann, 2009). Kaufman (2003) described this process as one of *social transformation*, where working-class students strive to incorporate a middle-class persona and described it as follows: "Social transformation is the converse of social reproduction [where] the focus of inquiry is the process through which individuals *alter* the ascribed social-class

position of their parents into a different social-class position for themselves" (p. 482). Kaufman further suggested that working-class students utilize strategies such as *associational embracement*, where one attempts to integrate into the desired class; *associational distancing*, where one creates a separation with individuals and practices of their associated class; and *presentation of self*, where one attempts to mimic the social codes of the desired class. This social chameleon behaviour, as described by Kaufman, is integral to social transformation as reciprocal membership, where one is validated by desired others, is pivotal. Transformation of habitus is possible (Lehmann, 2009), and indeed, energies can be directed to conforming (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009), but will likely entail ongoing attending as one balances both a working- and middle-class habitus: "Dispositions of self-scrutiny and self-improvement – almost 'a constant fashioning and re-fashioning of the self' but one that still retains key valued aspects of a working-class self" (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, p. 1103).

Image management, however, has been associated with costs. For example, Granfield (1991) found that working-class students experience significant levels of guilt as they feel a sense of their developing privilege compared to their home context. Reay (2005, cited in Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009) also illustrated that "when habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, the resulting disjunctures can generate not only change and transformation, but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity, and uncertainty" (p. 1105). Possibly similar to the experiences of gay men in managing their homosexual identity (Buddel, 2011), this aspect of the first-generation experience is likely to mirror facets of *minority stress* and requires further qualitative study.

A modest array of the literature concerning first-generation persistence in university has been presented. Noteworthy, however, is that the research contributing to our current

understandings has been built through qualitative methods with the researcher(s) relying on one or two interviews of average length in order to understand experience and generalize themes across the group. These methods have contributed to our overall understanding, but are conceptually situated such that understanding experience deeply is not possible (see the section titled, Conceptual Positioning of Narrative Inquiry as Methodology in Chapter Three). Therefore, an opportunity exists to engage in deeper inquiry that can contribute to substantiating current theorizing, moderating it, or lending to alternative theorizations. Given that current understanding is premised on the construct of first-generation habitus and that first-generation students experience university qualitatively differently, a richer opportunity for understanding exists through narrative inquiry. Such an approach attends to the storied experiences of first-generation students (through the lens of sociality and temporality within particular places) to explore how the stories of their lives shape their transition into, through, and out of university (Clandinin, 2013).

As will be evident in the following section that evaluates government policies concerning access and persistence, enhanced understanding is necessary as the issue and solutions associated with first-generation underrepresentation is addressed quite differently between provinces.

First-Generation Students and the Canadian Policy Context

The Canadian policy context concerning first-generation student participation at university is diverse. What follows is an examination of some postsecondary governmental policies with respect to first-generation student participation, exploring the extent to which their underrepresentation (concerning both access and persistence) is articulated as a social concern and therefore a policy problem requiring action[3]. Further, institutional practices are examined to

[3] The Ontario and Alberta contexts were chosen for two reasons. First, being a graduate student in Alberta where the social concern is not articulated, I wanted to illustrate a contrast with a province (Ontario) where first-generation

elucidate the extent to which institutions have responded to the social concern and whether institutional responses are related to government policy or simply from a moral need to facilitate participation equity. This exploration facilitates appreciation of the context affecting first-generation student underrepresentation, enabling stronger understanding of the political context within which my research is situated. Understanding this milieu requires exploring an array of questions. To what extent is this recognized as a problem? To what extent have governments responded to this social issue through policy? To what extent have universities responded to this issue and to what extent has this been a result of government policy? How have universities responded and what kind of approaches do they employ? Are such programs beneficial? The answers to these questions provide significant insight into the extent that governments and institutions are responding to an ongoing and somewhat ill-attended social concern. More importantly, however, the answers contribute to an inquiry framework that can facilitate deeper understanding of the experiences of first-generation students, with the potential of improving circumstances for these students by illuminating facets of social reproduction.

The Canadian higher education policy context is complex: governance is legislated to provinces with little national coordination; increased application of business models places value on commercial research endeavours; transfer articulation agreements between institutions do not (yet) easily support participation needs, particularly inter-provincially; and academic freedom is increasingly challenged to favour output with market application (Angus, 2009; Jensen & Andrews, 2002). Further, universities appear to be at "arm's length" from government, though the real dynamic consists of conflicting and interwoven governmental-institutional relationships shaped by a neoliberal and global milieu. Within this macro-context, the *new public*

---

student underrepresentation receives considerable attention. Secondly, during my candidacy, my partner and I were in a liminal space with respect to career searches in Ontario, so it also made sense to explore the Ontario context in the eventuality that my research would be conducted there (which it was).

management ideology (requiring open processes and systems of accountability [Pal, 2010]), also shapes state-university operations, resulting in institutions often succumbing to government directives in order to survive[4]. Globalization and neoliberalism are distinct constructs and, while the distinction between these two ubiquitous forces might seem axiomatic, their differential impact on the Canadian system of higher education is both predictable and surprising. This will be evident once government policies and institutional practices are presented below, but it is worthwhile to highlight some examples for reflection. From a neoliberal perspective, one can see how governments have encouraged increased postsecondary attendance by increasing choice and competition through the expansion of degree-granting institutions, and further communicating the importance of education for citizen success in the knowledge-economy. Unfortunately, given our system of postsecondary coordination in Canada (see Allen [2003] for a review), the provinces have been positioned for competition against each other to provide the best system of postsecondary education and attract the best students. Utilizing Bourdieu's concept of field, Schmaus and Wimmer (2013) discussed "the dualism of government policy that forces postsecondary institutions to compete in the market on the one hand, and legislation that decrees what the market will be [including increased collaboration] on the other hand" (p. 93). They discussed complexities of the postsecondary education field, by dissecting it into subfields of political, bureaucratic, student/citizen/institution, economic power, and global education policy, illustrating how each play into competition to reproduce power and privilege.

Some notable examples of power struggles in the field include former Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach's February 18, 2011 letter to the Honourable Greg Weadick, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. The letter communicates contractual direction to establish an Alberta with the: (a) strongest fiscal resources among all provinces; (b) most innovative and

[4] See the Mandate Letters sent to institutions in Alberta from the Government of Alberta for examples.

competitive system in North America; (c) best performing health care system in Canada, and (d) most advanced infrastructure in North America (Stelmach, 2011). Similarly, the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities in Ontario, in its recent report (Government of Ontario, 2011), articulated a vision to "have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world in order to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life" (p. 2). These examples of governmental mandates are indeed consistent with the neoliberal ideology of a market-driven society, where competition and choice are paramount; however, notably absent is a vision of a collaborative system of postsecondary education that equips all Canadians for success in a globalized context. Unlike the European response to global competition by enhancing institutional coordination through the Bologna Process, albeit not without its problems (see Pechar [2007] for a review), Canada continues to maintain a very decentralized approach to higher education with each province competing to be the best and addressing important issues disparately, if at all.

Further shaping this landscape is the evolution of universities from elitist institutions to open and accessible enterprises for all who demonstrate desire and ability (Fleras, 2005). Indeed, citizens are attuned to the importance of postsecondary education, particularly a university degree, and attendance has increased significantly. Fleras demonstrated how university participation from the 18-25 year-old cohort increased steadily over the past seven decades (however, recall the information earlier noting increases are predominantly from middle-class groups). Fleras also illustrated the marked difference in 2000 earnings as Canadians with a university degree earned $61,823 on average compared to those without a high-school diploma who earned $36,278. The result is that citizens expect that governments will enhance access to postsecondary education, particularly university, to equip them with skills to succeed in our

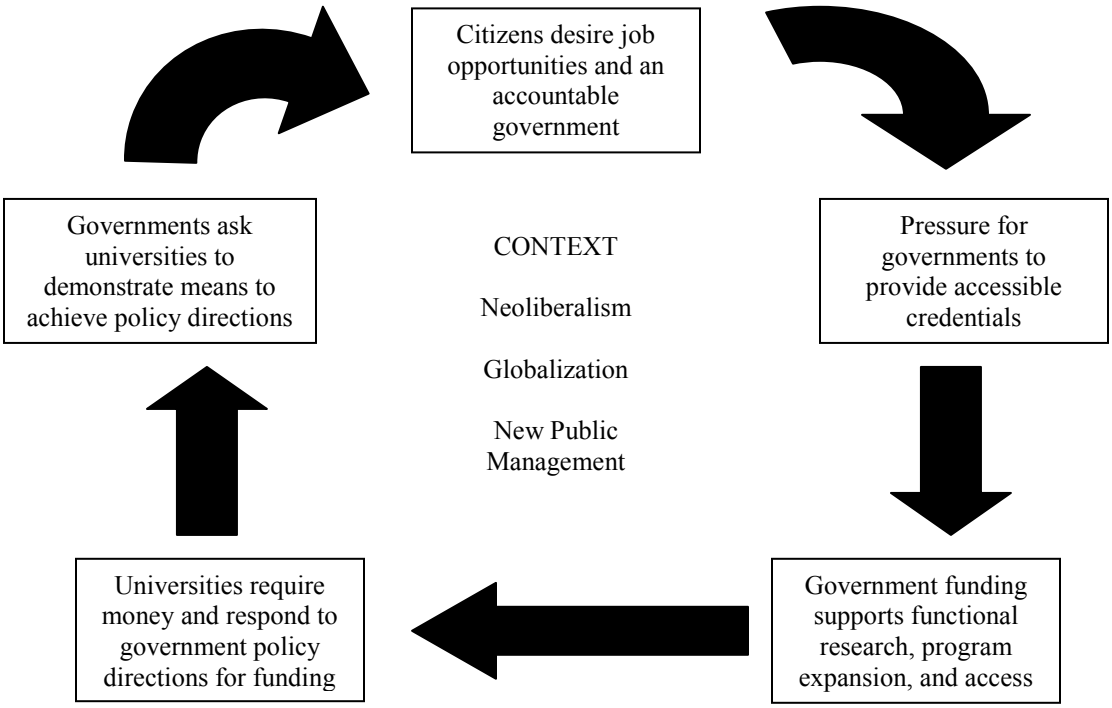
knowledge economy. This has been largely accomplished through increased financial aid, expanded program offerings, distance delivery, and recognition of prior learning.

As citizens look to government for enhanced program access to be competitive in our market-driven economy, universities also look to governments. Here, a powerful context becomes noticeable as both citizens and governments see universities as largely utilitarian corporations: citizens see university degrees as lucrative credentials while governments value universities as training centres and functional-knowledge producers. This dynamic creates an interesting conundrum for universities; while they struggle to attract fiscal resources to fund core operations (that is, research and teaching) *and* maintain a position as non-elitist entities, they must embrace many funding agencies as they cannot survive on tuition alone.

Such corporatist models and accountability expectations compromise core educational purposes of higher education, where questions are pursued for social enlightenment (Angus, 2009), but appear as the only option within the existing state funding regime (Figure 2). The only way to break this cycle is for governments to value universities for their holistic societal contributions, thus providing space for academic freedom *and* funding accordingly. Alternatively, universities could pursue their core philosophical traditions and enjoy unrestricted academic freedom through sole student funding; however, such a practice would result in exorbitant tuition structures, thus limiting access and reverting back to an even more marked system of elitist higher education. This is a central issue for discussion and has existed in the discourse for numerous years (Barnett, 1988; Russell, 1993). My reason for presenting this information is to illustrate an intricate and complex context that shapes university-state relations; specifically, to illustrate the interwoven dynamic of funding and policy that shapes university functions and, sometimes, causes universities to compromise focus and rigor in order to maintain

and, ideally, increase funding (see Allen [2003] and Angus [2009] for a more elaborate discussion). With respect to access and persistence for first-generation students, this translates into universities embracing policy directions that are, arguably, sometimes ill-informed as they appear to be the current "flavour-of-the-month" funding source.

Figure 2: Context of State-University Relationships



Policy Analysis. Access to university and persistence through to degree completion for first-generation students are concerning issues because participation from this group is considerably lower, when compared with students from families with a history of university attendance, thus perpetuating a cycle of advantage and disadvantage (Allen, 2003; Krahn, 2009). However, the solutions are left largely to the provinces to address through policy and they have done so to varying degrees. For example, though Statistics Canada (see Barr-Telford, Cartwright, Prasil, & Shimmons, 2003) has published considerable data highlighting the issue of

first-generation student persistence, governments and institutions have responded very differently, if at all.

Though my research occurred in Ontario, I present the Alberta policy arena for two reasons. First, having spent 10 years living in Alberta during the formative part of my career development, my perspective of higher education is largely grounded in this context, making it an important background for understanding my research. Secondly, Alberta and Ontario regard the issue of first-generation student participation in higher education very differently and such a comparison could lead to positive policy changes to improve circumstances for first-generation students in Canada.

According to Pal (2010), every policy has three key elements: a *problem definition*, where the nature and scope of the issue are articulated*; goals* that articulate an ideal changed state and directly address the problem; and *means* to address the issue, consisting of policy instruments and key agents for implementation. Further, Pal described policy analysis as a method of inquiry to create, assess, and communicate information in order to improve policy. Reflecting the nature of the corporatist-symbiotic relationship between governments and universities, the comparison below concurrently evaluates both provincial policy and university programs in Alberta and Ontario, particularly attending to how both respond to the social concern of first-generation student underrepresentation in universities. In the comparison, it will be clear that the policy problem definition, goals, and means are articulated very differently between the two provinces.

Alberta. The "Affordability Framework for Postsecondary Education," issued by the Government of Alberta's (2006) Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology, communicates a vision to establish a world-class system of education that promotes access for all

Albertans (note the implied inter-provincial competition). This framework further establishes policy goals as follows: (a) higher awareness of opportunities; (b) increased participation and educational attainment; (c) increasing financial support for living expenses; (d) enhanced ability to repay debt; (e) predictable and stable tuition fees, and (f) enhanced simplicity for financial aid.

Consistent with the affordability framework, the "Campus Alberta Planning Framework: Profiling Alberta's Advanced Education System" (Government of Alberta, 2010) presents key challenges and opportunities within Campus Alberta[5], such as enhancing access to key programs (that is, trades and technology; health sciences; business; and physical, natural, and applied sciences), meeting labour market demands, facilitating student mobility in Alberta, and increasing postsecondary participation. Summarized, the government articulates several key policy goals, which includes increased postsecondary participation from underrepresented groups. This goal specifically refers to increasing participation for Albertans who live with a disability, have low literacy skills, identify as Aboriginal, reside in rural areas, and are socioeconomically disadvantaged. One might initially be excited by such a finding as first-generation students are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged; however, further examination of the text equates socioeconomic disadvantage with minimal financial resources: "Living in low-income circumstances may hinder a child's ability to perform well in school, limit educational attainment, and reduce the ability or willingness to participate in postsecondary education" (Government of Alberta, p. 24). Although students living in low-income situations indeed experience socioeconomic disadvantage and may be first-generation students, the issue of concern, that of first-generation student access and persistence through to degree completion, is absent from Alberta's policy context. This is concerning given the data from Statistics Canada

[5] Campus Alberta's mandate is to increase collaboration and coordination among the publicly funded postsecondary institutions in order to increase access, transitions, and pathways for learners: http://eae.alberta.ca/post-secondary/campusalberta.aspx.

and other sources (discussed earlier), illustrating that it is not solely income, but parental educational attainment that should serve to define the problem. This leads me to believe that the issue of socioeconomic disadvantage and university participation is not well understood in the Alberta government, hence, the policy problem is defined inappropriately and institutional programs to improve circumstances are non-existent (for example, Fort McMurray has a population with high incomes, but low postsecondary educational attainment).

A quick Google search, combining the terms *Alberta* and *first-generation students*, unfortunately yields nothing (with the notable exception of the Transition to University: Residence Network program that I initiated at the University of Alberta in Fall 2011). This should not be surprising, however, based on how the problem is defined in policy. Recall that though the Government of Alberta desires to increase access for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, the problem is defined in terms of financial resources. Arguably, with the current financial context, institutions are unable to channel more financial resources to enhance access without increased financial support from governments. When examining the University of Alberta's (2009) "Institutional Access Plan" (a response to the Government's 2009 "Access Planning Framework" document), we see that additional financial resources are not identified as a means to increase access. We further see no mention at all of attending to the underrepresentation of first-generation students, which is again not surprising as it is not articulated in policy. Overall, Alberta's policy problem definition, goals, and means do not adequately address the problem of first-generation student underrepresentation.

Ontario. Ontario's policy climate is very different from Alberta and I could not locate a publication that established a policy framework similar to the Campus Alberta Planning Framework. However, in the publication section of the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and

Universities in Ontario, I did find a discussion paper titled, "Future Goals for Ontario Colleges and Universities" (Government of Ontario, 1996). In this document, accessibility is noted as an objective that should guide policy development, with key focus areas being: (a) availability of spaces and programs; (b) applicant qualifications; (c) affordability, and (d) geographic location of program offerings. I found it ironic and concerning that Ontario did not have a guiding policy document and that the next closest thing, the discussion paper, is outdated.

That said, a 2011 report published by the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities articulates that transforming the postsecondary system for success in the innovation economy is a core priority (Government of Ontario, 2011). When examining details of the annual report further, transformation of the system translates into expanding the system (by adding an additional 20,000 spaces) and injecting $81 million to expand and modernize the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to provide greater financial aid. Facilitating access is largely associated with expanding the number of spaces and increasing financial aid as we saw in Alberta's context. Further reading of the document, however, brings us to a section titled, "Greater Access and Improved Quality," which highlights that $55 million was spent in 2009-2010 to help Aboriginal, francophone, first-generation, and students with disabilities attend and succeed in postsecondary education. The funding generally targeted financial aid and student support programs. Concerning first-generation students, the report specifically states that funding supported "programs delivered at 35 colleges and universities to advertise and encourage more first-generation students to pursue further education" (Government of Ontario, p. 22). To explore the issue of first-generation underrepresentation further, I did a Google search with the terms *first-generation students* and *Ontario* and found a news release from August 30, 2006 titled, "McGuinty Government Invests In Opportunities for First Generation Students in

2005/06" (Government of Ontario, 2006). Indeed, it appears that the Province of Ontario is attending to first-generation underrepresentation in its fullest sense (that is, both access and persistence) as the news release discusses barriers such as insufficient information, lack of role models, reduced expectations, and low confidence, which are prevalent in the literature (Krahn, 2009).

Overall, the Ontario government invested nearly $10 million from 2005 to 2007 towards projects in colleges, universities, and community organizations to better attend to the needs of first-generation students through providing role-models for students, programs that help students choose postsecondary education while in high school, information resources, open houses at postsecondary institutions, outreach to remote and rural communities, and research (Government of Ontario, 2007). Further, the brief indicated that the McGuinty government was investing an additional $27 million to help first-generation students over three years (from 2007 to 2010), with an additional $3 million invested into the Ontario First Generation Student Bursaries (Government of Ontario). The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities' 2013-2014 annual report confirms that support continues to the present: $22.8 mission was invested in programs such as orientation, peer support, and academic workshops help more than 22,880 first-generation students succeed in the postsecondary system, with an additional $3 million invested in bursaries to support over 2,000 first generation students (Government of Ontario, 2014). In February 2006, the Ontario government also established an advisory committee on first-generation students to advise the Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities on barriers to access; however, as of July 2014 a final report has not been made public.

Policy Discussion and Program Review. The issue of first-generation underrepresentation is prominently identified in Ontario when compared with Alberta, where the

concern has focussed on students from low-income families (which is arguably a different problem altogether). Though the issue is identified in Ontario, there are apparent gaps in understanding, likely resulting from the dearth of research in the area of first-generation student persistence. Before this is explored, I first present a framework for thinking about problems and solutions that was presented to me in a class with J. Kachur (personal communication, January 2010). He outlined four ways of identifying and solving problems as a framework (or perhaps more of a caveat) for those working with policy problem identification and solutions: a *successful outcome* is one where the right problem is identified and, through good analysis, the right solution is developed; a *missed opportunity* is defined as identifying the right problem, but developing the wrong answer; being *out to lunch* is having identified the wrong problem and the wrong answer; and *deluded optimism* is defined as having the right answer to the wrong problem. This framework is important as the goal state that Pal (2010) articulated is dependent upon a well-defined problem and appropriately-related means.

Though the policy problem appears to be well defined in Ontario as the underrepresentation of first-generation students is identified, it is the construct of access, not persistence through to degree completion that dominates the text. The Ontario government has indicated a desire to increase the number of first-generation students and has allocated significant resources to facilitate access through increased financial aid and outreach programs, which are important. Constructs of economic, social, and cultural capital intersect with habitus and result in practice in a given field. Provincial policy focuses very exclusively on economic capital, which is only part of the issue: the research is still scant concerning access from a habitus or worldview perspective (notwithstanding the contributions from Lehmann, though such perspectives do not appear prominent in the provincial policy forums) and I wonder about the

effectiveness of increased financial aid to facilitate access. I am also very hesitant about the effectiveness of outreach programs that are not informed by how first-generation students experience the choice process. Simply put, the methods articulated in policy may be ineffective in achieving desired outcomes given that the literature available to properly define the policy problem has not attended to the experiences of first-generation students. Further, though Ontario noted that funding targeted advertising and encouraging first-generation to pursue postsecondary, only three universities appeared to have such programs (see Appendix 1: First-Generation Initiatives at Canadian Universities). If this is indeed true, I remain concerned about middle-class social reproduction, as the minimal programming (or outreach) would mean that universities are not seeking to recruit first-generation students to the same extent as colleges. Furthermore, if choosing university is a function of habitus, the solutions (i.e., policy means) need to be targeted earlier and should not rest with university recruitment initiatives, which are largely income- and reputation-oriented.

The idea of persistence through to degree completion has a tendency of being relegated to the background by issues of access. However, the support from the Ontario government for improving circumstances for these students is commendable and has likely spawned the array of newly established programs (i.e., the policy means) directed at supporting first-generation student persistence through to degree completion[6]. The list of programs in Ontario, presented in Appendix 1, is an attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the types of initiatives institutions have created to support first-generation student persistence (one caveat, however, is that institutions may not report or adequately represent their programs online). Evident from the

[6] As an aside, I recently approached a colleague at a major Ontario institution to partner with me on a presentation at a conference on first-generation student persistence. He noted that the environment concerning first-generation students was so political that each institution was competing to have the *best* programs and it would look bad, from his perspective, to present on such a topic with a partner institution. Ironically, no one else is presenting on this issue other than me.

list is that institutions have established very different types of approaches, which range from simply having a website guiding first-generation students to resources, to having a first-generation student advisor and cohort programs for workshops. Assessing the ability of programs to support persistence to degree completion is difficult as assessment information was not readily available for these programs. When examining the structure of the programs, it is interesting to note that most take the approach of connecting first-generation students to workshops and resources. Further, because funding is provided through grants (i.e., not part of institutional base funding), program administrators are constantly wondering about their ability to plan and recruit staff following grant completion. Again, while this is *something*, I wonder about how they approach aspects of *habitus dissonance*, which is consistent with a Bourdieuian theorization of departure. Together, access and persistence are aspects of university participation that affect underrepresentation, which Corak, Lipps, and Zhao (2003) argue are important issues to be addressed in Canada through policy.

The issue of persistence through to degree completion, or facilitating equal outcomes, is difficult to address because the scholarship has not deeply explored the relationship between university experiences and departure decisions for first-generation students. Though the issue of underrepresentation is identified in the Ontario context, the means to change circumstances are currently ill-informed as most understanding is generated through our risk-society or late modernity perspective, where we assume that first-generation students have the ability (which they do) and choice. That is, when they balance the benefits and risks of university attendance, they will choose university because they have the merit to succeed and simply need financial aid, given the financially disadvantaged position of their families, coupled with a myriad of support services to help them integrate into the academic and social realms of university life.

Furthermore, from this perspective, equal outcomes can be ignored because underrepresentation has, at least conceptually, been addressed by facilitating "equal opportunities" and introducing support programs to complement existing ability; departure is then seen as an individual's failure to integrate.

In order to effectively address the problem and not risk being "out to lunch," we need to understand the situation differently. We need to start understanding the experiences of first-generation students through a different paradigm, one that is concerned with their beliefs and values systems – their worldviews.

A Fish Out of Water…Kinda

Once I opened the door, I saw people flying about (residence move-in has an orderly chaos to it that I now appreciate and help manage). I'm not sure how long I stood there, but then someone in one of those identifiable soccer jerseys came up to me and asked if I needed anything. "Oh my god," I remember thinking to myself, "say something cool, say something smart; you're in the big leagues now," so I asked how one eats around here. She responded, "like everyone else Neil, just put the food in your mouth, chew, and swallow." I was at university for under 24 hours and had already asked my first stupid question! She laughed at her joke, so I also laughed at her joke and my humiliation and joined her and the others she was with for the journey to the Commons food court.

Her name was Robin and with her were two other first-year students, Robyn and Jeff. Robin grew to become a good friend and, after a year, Jeff did as well as he began dating Pam with whom I was very close. There were many people who became significant parts of my first-year experience (Stephanie, Mark, Jenny, Madeline, Katie, and Pam), whom I'm still very close with. If it were not for the close connections and experiences I had with these individuals, I do

not believe I would have had any reason to stay. In fact, when confronted with the option to leave, I almost did!

In October of 1997, a few of us were in Mark and Kasim's room when there was a fire alarm. We exited the residence and met in West Quad as we were supposed to. Kasim was a varsity wrestler and started talking about his training regime and an upcoming competition that he was going to. I was very cocky back then and told Kasim that I did not think wrestling was a sport and that he was wasting his time and should join a real sports team (even as I look back on this, I wonder why I, being so out of shape, made such a comment and was not instead motivated to become more active). He challenged me to a wrestling match and I accepted. It was, and continues to be, one of the stupidest things I have ever done.

In less than a nanosecond I was on the ground. Not only was I on the ground, but I could not get up (yes, I became a medic-alert commercial)!! Someone was smart enough to call campus police and I was escorted to the hospital as something was not right. After waiting forever, a nurse finally came, escorted me to the back, and asked me to lie down on my stomach. I did with great pain. She then thought that I may have dislocated my shoulder, so suggested that I hang my right arm over the bed as it would likely pop back in place. I told her that it was not my shoulder and likely my collarbone, but she insisted that I follow her instructions. I did, let out a yelp as tears ran down my face, only to hear her say it was likely that my collarbone was broken.

Just then a drunk Kristin and Mike-the-Nurse came into where I was and asked what happened and how I was doing (I do not know how they knew that I was in the hospital and where to find me). Kristin also tripped and knocked over an IV contraption. It made me laugh (and hurt) and was exactly what I needed at that moment. They stayed with me until the doctor

came and the X-rays were done and took me back to residence, where I called my parents and asked them to come get me. They came the next morning as they only lived two hours away.

Going back to the familiar surroundings of home was both good and bad. It was a great place to relax, but it also had this power tempting me to return to the more "normal" path of non-university life, where I could have been a restaurant manager. This was a very bad temptation because, at that time, university was also giving me signals that I did not belong. My marks in biology were poor and I had yet to pass a quiz in chemistry (it likely did not help that I had not opened any of my books, thinking that most of the material was simply a review of what was my Ontario Academic Credit year). My mom was also suggesting that university was not working and that I should come back home.

In the end, the combination of being determined to complete what I had started and, more importantly, wanting to return to my residence community enabled me to break free of the comfortable and return to the adventure. Looking back, I am very happy that I did!

Chapter Three: Narrative Inquiry and Habitus

Understanding First Generation Students Narratively

The problem of first-generation persistence to degree completion is quantitatively clear and the qualitative research indicates that university is experienced differently by different groups of students. Though past research has employed a Bourdieuian framework to various extents for understanding first-generation persistence, it focuses primarily on the construct of capital. Furthermore, when the habitus construct is utilized it is explored through qualitative research where a small number of interviews are utilized, students reflect and comment on their past experiences, and the researcher elucidates generalizations across the group. My research contributes significantly to the scholarship by focussing on Bourdieu's concept of habitus (including how it intersects with forms of capital) through a methodology that is absent in this area of qualitative scholarship and more attuned to eliciting deeper understandings of experiences: the majority of existing research is conducted within post-positivist, poststructuralist, or critical theory paradigms (for a more elaborate discussion, see the section in this chapter discussing the conceptual positioning of narrative inquiry as a methodology). The observation that most qualitative research in this area is concerned with generalization versus deep exploration of experience is consistent with Polkinghorne's (1995) suggestion that there are two types of narrative research, *analysis of narratives* (the paradigmatic approach where narratives are collected and generalizations about the groups are formed) and *narrative analysis* (where the value and meaning a participant ascribes to experience are shared as a powerful vehicle for understanding experiences and where generalizations and practical application are not desired outcomes). In an interview with Clandinin and Murphy (2007), Polkinghorne elaborated further on the distinction between analysis of narratives and narrative analysis: "You have

stories, and then you try to analyze them by coming up with common themes…and I sort of thought that's what qualitative research is doing. And the difference was the narrative analysis which was looking at an individual life or portion of the life and the final result was a story…a description of the life movement of a particular person" (p. 634). It is worthwhile to note that Polkinghorne initially used the term narrative analysis as synonymous with narrative inquiry and, indeed, regarded narrative analysis as the intimate study of human experience, which is the methodological focus of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). Over time, however, researchers have blended application of the terms narrative analysis, analysis of narratives, and narrative inquiry (and even the terms narrative and narrative research more generally) without consideration of their philosophical commitments: "Narrative inquiry and *narrative research* [italics added] have become terms that are frequently used almost interchangeably in the research literature, without a distinction of the different ontological and epistemological traditions underlying narrative research approaches" (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 574). In an attempt to delineate terms and bring clarity to the use of narrative in social research, Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) revisited the philosophical underpinnings of the terms. These prominent narrative scholars further emphasized that the methodological orientation of narrative inquiry is where "experience is viewed narratively and necessitates considerations of relational knowing and being, attention to the artistry of and within experience, and sensitivity to the overlapping stories that bring people together in research relationships" (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, p. 574). The distinction between the terms narrative research and narrative inquiry is pivotal for the purposes of this study because it is the latter that is the methodology that provides for deep exploration of experience – an approach that is absent in the larger student experience scholarship.

Although the majority (if not all) of the qualitative research concerning first-generation students is in the narrative research tradition, these responses (not stories) have been used to elucidate themes across participants and have been void of context, thereby positing structures that apply to groups as a whole. Individual stories are subjugated to generalizability, which is contrary to narrative inquiry. These works, while making significant contributions, espouse to be narrative inquiries, but focus on larger macrosocial forces (i.e., ideologies or grand narratives). They ignore the richness of individual experiences and attributes, leading to the *deficit approach* where students are seen as lacking some level of skill or ability that can be rectified through remedial means. As a result, most institutional responses have been to better "equip" first-generation students for success by introducing capacity-building programs. Although this is important, lost are the storied experiences of people, of individuals, that could challenge the structures that continually reproduce this cycle of disadvantage. Indeed, as Marker (2004) noted, substantially more research is needed that critically examines university culture from the perspectives of people with diverse worldviews and experiences. Narrative inquiry possesses such potential.

Before progressing, it is worthwhile to pause and discuss the use of the word *story*. While story is commonly understood as a noun, reflecting an account of something, within narrative inquiry story can also be a verb, reflecting the notion that we live, tell, relive, and retell stories (Clandinin, 2013). When we tell a story of our life, the act of threading together the narrative elements is storying. Further, as we imagine futures for ourselves, we can begin to story (or thread narrative elements together) this imagined future and how it might come to pass. Imagine a musician bringing together musical elements of rhythm, melody, dynamics, timbre, texture, and pitch together to form a piece of music: the act of composition to a musician is

analogous to the act of storying, where narrative elements of sociality, temporality, and place are brought together to both compose stories, and where those same elements are used as a three-dimensional space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to inquire into stories. In the end, the idea of story and storying reflects the ontological commitment of narrative inquiry where experience is regarded as narrative composition (Clandinin, 2013).

Within the existing literature concerning first-generation students, little attention has been given to stories of experiences, including abilities, hopes, and aspirations, which may provide valuable insights into the larger issue of first-generation student underrepresentation at university and even how university cultures may be problematic. Students that do not persist are seen as deficient in some skill or ability and/or unable to integrate: observations that are made legitimate as a function of the meritocratic narrative that accepts university culture as status quo and those that are different as failures. The students do possess ability, which must be evaluated along with the overall university milieu. This is consistent with Marker's (2004) critique that we rarely examine university culture and his urge for more research to "make the familiar strange." With our larger society's desire for quick answers and generalizability, other frameworks are privileged for valuing macrosocietal structures and generalizable themes (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), whereas narrative inquiry takes a micro and richer, and therefore slower, approach towards change; one that might be seen as a more grass-roots perspective. An opportunity exists to probe *deeper* into the experiences of first-generation students, which is particularly important through a Bourdieuian paradigm where attending to habitus requires significant reflection and a trusting and collaborative participant-researcher relationship. That is, attending to the "small stories" or talk-in-interaction (Georgakopoulou, 2007) experiences of first-generation university students offers a powerful means for further theorizing departure behaviour resulting from

habitus dissonance. Given this, narrative inquiry provides an opportunity to contribute to the literature in unique and novel ways.

The discussion highlights that first-generation student departure from university can be theorized as a function of dissonance between their habitus and the dominant culture of the institution; they depart because the institution tacitly excludes these students who do not experience the transition as a normal rite of passage. In addition, the first-generation students who persist also experience struggles resulting from their habitus dissonance, requiring attention to explore unique experiences and worldviews. Indeed, "integration no longer seems synonymous with justice" (Bateson, 2000, p. 226) and current paradigms focussing on integration through a meritocratic narrative should be examined more deeply.

Researchers and practitioners in the field have spent considerable resources facilitating opportunities for students to integrate into the formal and informal realms of the academic and social fabrics of the universities (Tinto, 1993). Working under the dominant meritocratic narrative, we have regarded student engagement activities as facilitating integration, assuming a fairly homogenous identity composition of our student body; a student body where everyone was selected based on their likely chances for succeeding. Instead of viewing student life through the lens of integration, we must seek to understand how students experience university transitions, particularly when the culture is foreign (Marker, 2004), and this entails a deeper and more comprehensive methodological approach than is currently employed in the discourse.

The extant qualitative literature has contributed to our understanding of first-generation student persistence; however, if we want to understand how first-generation students experience university through their unique and diverse worldviews, we need to deeply explore their experiences prior to and during university. Narrative inquiry as a methodology, with exploration

that is concurrently inward and outward, backward and forward and across sociality, temporality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), focuses attention on these unexamined areas and, therefore, is poised for elucidating enhanced understanding by exploring the research question presented in Chapter One.

Narrative Inquiry: Exploring Definition

Narrative inquiry is not simply eliciting verbal responses to researcher questions, but a methodological approach where sociality, temporality, and place are explored. Narrative inquiry is the study of experience when experience is seen as a narrative composition; it is

> A way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Whereas most qualitative research has a tendency to foreground the research literature over the experiences of participants, narrative inquiry foregrounds stories of experience. Narrative inquiry opens a window into the storied lives of people, with the stories interrupting, sustaining, or problematizing the literature to contribute deeper understandings of social significance. Estefan (2008) highlighted notable narrative inquiry scholars and illustrated how narrative methodology positions inquiry at the nexus of the individual and the social, and thus becomes a powerful vehicle for exploring experience and understanding diverse worldviews or the different ways people story their social world. Further, if we accept that some storied ways of knowing could be similar for people with similar experiences (for example, class-based ways of knowing

[Bourdieu, 1981]), resulting in similar behaviours (Lieblich, Tuval-Masiach, & Zilber, 1998), then it is clear how narrative inquiry is not only an appropriate, but *the* appropriate methodology to explore stories of experiences that may serve to elucidate why first-generation students are underrepresented in universities. In addition, exploration at the nexus of the individual and social allows us to "make the familiar strange" and gain insight into the university environment that first-generation students experience, a context that is rarely scrutinized from this perspective (Marker, 2004), with the hope of enlightening others to influence change in this sphere. In an attempt to reorient the scholarly community to the ontological and epistemological foundations of narrative inquiry, Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) elaborated on the commitments of narrative inquiry as follows:

> Narrative inquiry...is the intimate study of an individual's experience over time and in context(s)...From a narrative view of experience, we attend to place, temporality, and sociality within our own life stories and within the experiences of participants. Within this space, each story told and lived is situated and understood within larger cultural, social, familial, and institutional narratives. Narrative inquiry is marked by its emphasis on relational engagement, whereby the understanding and social significance of experience grows out of a relational commitment to a research puzzle. (p. 577)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) articulated that narrative inquiry should proceed within a three-dimension inquiry space created through the constructs of *sociality*, referring to the reciprocal effects of personal and social interaction; *temporality,* or the continual nature of experience, where past, present, and future are examined through present positioning; and *place,* as context or place are experience-shaping forces. Furthermore, Squire (2008) specifically highlighted that an experience-centred, co-constructed, narrative approach, that focuses on social patterns and

salience of story, "may serve useful, even 'improving' functions for people…[and] as a means to delineating and even theorizing under- or unrepresented lives" (p. 59).

Conceptual positioning of narrative inquiry as methodology. Building from epistemology, Crotty (1998) provided a framework for understanding social research, though he noted that this is simply a guide and that such distinctions are not always necessary or evident. Crotty suggested that *epistemology* (the nature of knowledge and belief of how we know what we know) informs *theoretical perspective* (philosophical perspective that provides context for the inquiry), which informs *methodology* (the strategy informing use of methods to obtain desired outcomes), and, in turn, *methods* (techniques used to obtain information). Grounded in a Deweyan theory of experience (Dewey, 1938), which articulates an ontology and epistemology of experience, narrative inquiry is a methodology for exploring personal experience through story (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Methods such as interviews, photos, journals, blogs, art, and field notes (to name but a few methods) are used to deeply explore experience in order to move from the lived and told stories of experience (Riessman, 2008) to the retold stories in research texts. In short, narrative inquiry is oriented towards the "personal in studies of the personal" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 136): it is a methodology that attends to the narrative composition of human experiences, facilitating deeper understandings of experiences towards scholarly contributions to questions of social significance.

Dewey (cited in Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) described experience as reality; it is ontological and "inexpressible not because it is so remote and transcendent, but because it is so immediately engrossing and matter of course" (p. 38). Further, Dewey's ontology of experience is transactional such that "in an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter" (Clandinin & Rosiek, p. 39):

people are changed to various extents through experiences within the social world. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) elaborated that Dewey's ontology of experience is further suited for grounding narrative inquiry because it is pragmatic, such that it is unrepresentable in a single entity (that is, an understanding that any representation of experience is a fragment); continuous, because experience is simultaneously a culmination of one's past, present, future; and bound to the social dimension of life.

Indeed, Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) summarized that "Dewey's criteria of experience, interaction, and continuity enacted in situations provide the grounding for the attention paid in the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to temporality, place, and sociality" (p. 577). Narrative inquiry, as a methodology, honours the reality that storied ways of living and knowing are ubiquitous (Clandinin, 2006): that stories "offer us insights into experiences and resonate in ways that help us to learn and form connections with others" (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 583). Therefore, the concept of narrative inquiry encompasses both the study of experience understood narratively (i.e., the phenomenon under study) and the methodology for its study (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin; Clandinin; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Further, intersecting transactional Deweyan underpinnings with the relational reality of narrative inquiries (where participants' and researchers' storied lives become intertwined to the extent that both leave the inquiry experience changed), narrative inquiry can be conceptualized as *relational-transactional*. While inquirers and participants explore the temporal and social facets of experience within a given place, they are also, to the extent possible within parameters of comfort and timeline in the field, building trust in order to explore important and very personal experiences. Consequently, inquirers are equally attentive to the relational nature of their work and transitions as they: (a) negotiate entry to the field; (b) nourish re-living and re-

telling of stories of experiences, both those that are readily recalled and those left unattended by consciousness, and (c) attend to tensions while exiting the field and moving to depictions of social significance of experiences in the research text.

During my early doctoral work, I was excited to encounter Crotty's (1998) scaffolding of social science research containing an illustration of the movement and relationship of epistemology to theoretical perspective to situate methodology and chosen methods. Although Crotty provided examples within each of the four constructs, the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of narrative inquiry were elusive for me. For example, Crotty posited that social research would have epistemological foundations in objectivism, constructionism, or subjectivism. To fit narrative inquiry into this model, I began to think of constructionism and interpretivism as the epistemological and theoretical perspective underpinnings. Recently, however, Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) brought clarity to my confusion (and the muddling in the field more broadly):

> Narrative inquiry does not proceed from a realist, constructionist, or postmodern position; instead, how we seek to understand and evoke experience arises from within the inquiry...a narrative ontology precedes the emergence of research puzzles and calls forth obligations and commitments. A narrative ontology implies that experiences are continually interactive, resulting in changes in both people and the contexts in which they interact. (p. 576)

The authors illustrate that commitment to viewing experience as narrative composition is foundational and precedes an inquiry. Specifically, they argued that experiences are innately storied and shape how we compose and recompose our lives: "It is through story that people are able to understand, make meaning of, and relate experiences, because story is how people make

sense of their existence" (p. 576) and that it is this ontological stance that informs the epistemological commitment that narrative experience is knowledge for living (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Moving back to Crotty's framework, the ontological and epistemological foundations of narrative inquiry would be based in Dewey's pragmatic ontology of experience – where experience is temporal and social and where experience is how we know what we know.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) elaborated that narrative inquiry is situated within Dewey's pragmatic ontology of experience and "is a quintessentially pragmatic methodology" (p. 42) as it "is not only a valorizing of individuals' experience but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives with which individuals' experiences were constituted" (p. 42). Spector-Mersel (2010) elaborated on narrative epistemology and our roles as inquirers, highlighting that narratives, whether past, present or future, are always rooted in the present; are a culmination of conscious and subconscious events in one's history; and are shaped by interpersonal, social, and cultural contexts. To conceptually position narrative inquiry as a methodology within social paradigms, Clandinin and Rosiek explored spaces and tensions with other major philosophical traditions in the social sciences in order to illuminate its unique and distinct orientation. What follows is a modest overview of how Clandinin and Rosiek position narrative inquiry and its conceptual borderlands with post-positivist, critical theory, and post-structuralist traditions.

Post-positivists begin with epistemological orientations and treat ontology as secondary such that a critical understanding of reality is understood only through empirical falsification. Further, such reality is independent of human experience. Narrative inquiry, conversely, rooted in a pragmatic ontology of experience, is "simultaneously a description of, and intervention into, human experience" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 46), where multiple contexts are perpetually

present. Further, post-positivists value generalizability and look through narratives for common and universal truths. Narrative inquiry, on the other hand, focuses on individuals' experiences as a *bona fide* source of insight into our social world.

A number of readings will assert that narrative inquiry is embedded in post-structuralism, but Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) delved into the conceptual terrain of the social sciences to illustrate narrative inquiry as a different-but-related means of understanding social systems. They described the foundations of poststructuralism, where social constructs (such as identity, race, and gender) can be understood only within (indeed, rely on) a system of macrosocial discourses (they use the analogy that the relationship between a word and an object is arbitrary and enmeshed within a larger system of signs for meaning and stability). Specifically, Clandinin and Rosiek stated that post-structuralists (like post-positivists) share "a primary focus on description of broad patterns in human activity" (p. 64) and "with critical theory scholars a concern that large social processes can condition individual experience so thoroughly that individuals cannot recognize the operation of those processes" (p. 65). Post-structuralists see infinite descriptions of our social world resulting from: (a) a multitude of social discourses that shape our experiences, and (b) varied possibilities for interpretation as skewed by human interests. This sounds like narrative inquiry (indeed, it's how I first understood it); however, while the poststructuralist may listen to stories, they will listen through the story to explore and examine macrosocial influences. Narrative inquirers, conversely, begin "with a pragmatic ontology that treats lived experience as both the beginning and ending points of inquiry" (Clandinin & Rosiek, p. 55). Therefore, while attention is paid to macrosocial forces in a narrative inquiry, they are examined from within the experience of the individual; that is, the individual's experience is the focal point for exploration and knowledge. Clandinin and Rosiek

deeply explored narrative inquiry`s borderland with post-structuralism, including tensions for narrative inquirers to attend to in order to be faithful to narrative inquiry as a methodology.

Narrative inquiry is similar to critical theory as it is poised to analyze macrosocial structures and how they serve to exclude people, with the goal of improving circumstances or agency of disempowered peoples. Critical theory is rooted in an ontology that social systems generate ideologies (systems of thought) such that individuals' thoughts and feelings are a product of these systems: "Ordinary individual experience is distorted by ideology and is, therefore, not a trustworthy source of insight about the social challenges we face" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 48). Critical theory, therefore, privileges the macrosocial as the focus of examination, assuming that human experiences are a product of these forces. Although human experience is a valuable source of insight in critical theory (and serves as criticisms of positivist and postpositivist approaches), examination is largely focussed on subjugating forces of the human experience. Conversely, narrative inquiry "privileges individual lived experience as a source of insights useful not only to the person himself or herself, but also to the wider field of social science scholarship generally" (Clandinin & Rosiek, p. 49). Narrative inquirers generally critique critical theorists as follows:

> By pre-emptively dismissing the lived experience of persons as a possible source of insight, [Marxists replace] one totalizing source of external authority – be it church, state, or post-positivist social science – with another. The result is the continued disempowerment of exactly those persons the Marxist-influenced scholars seek to emancipate. (Clandinin & Rosiek, p. 51)

This comparison places my research program at the nexus of critical theory and narrative inquiry; however, there are key ontological differences between the two. Having my study

grounded in a Deweyan pragmatic ontology of experience does not exclude examination of macrosocial forces, but focuses deeply and intensely on *human experience* as a source of insight. Clandinin and Rosiek highlighted that narrative inquirers explore experience in its own right with external critiques flowing from examined experiences and that "it is in collaboratively transforming the narratives within which people live that narrative inquiry seeks to lay the foundations for social change" (Clandinin & Rosiek, p. 50). The latter point is crucial. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) underscored the co-constructed nature of narratives (whether it be the stories we live by [Clandinin & Connelly] or stories that are shared during research), such that both participant and researcher are changed as a result of the inquiry (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly). Therefore, the relational nature of my approach will have an impact (hopefully positive) on the participants and myself – neither party leaves the inquiry unchanged. With respect to the broader impact, my study leans towards examining structures of social reproduction and, therefore, approaches the borderland with critical theory.

In bringing together narrative inquiry and critical (Bourdieu) theoretical perspectives, I have "muddied" the conceptual waters. Crotty (1998) described the contrast that exists between critical and other theoretical perspectives as:

> A contrast between a research that seeks merely to understand and a research that challenges…between a research that reads the situation in terms of interaction and community and a research that reads it in terms of conflict and oppression…between a research that accepts the status quo and a research that seeks to bring about change. (p. 113)

Crotty's words do not capture the conceptual understandings of narrative inquiry, which seeks both to understand and to change the lives of both researchers and participants. Evident from my

discussion above, it is my hope for this research to bring about positive change for first-generation students, both for the research participants and future students as well as for myself, by drawing attention to structures that enable the continued cycle of social reproduction. This means that the literature reviewed and discussed in Chapters One through Three are intended to serve only as a background to understanding context. The analysis that follows in Chapters Five and Six will bring stories of experience to the forefront as sites of inquiry, with structure and literature in the background. That is, the stories will point to the literature as appropriate and will not be used as a demonstration of the literature. As mentioned, this is a novel methodological approach within the first-generation persistence literature: existing research does not explore the experiences of first-generation students and is grounded in other social science paradigms. For my research project to illuminate understandings of first-generation university students' experiences through narrative inquiry, I must place their experiences alongside mine in the relational inquiry as the beginning and ending points of inquiry. Further, while I will journey into the macrosocial discourses (particularly related to social class), it is through honouring individual stories as a source of knowledge that is ultimately and uniquely narrative inquiry. Re-presenting the stories reflects this and, while re-representations were not anticipated in an *a priori* manner as it emerged from the nature of the research, I was exposed to numerous examples (Clandinin, personal communication, January 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) for how to honour individual experience to attend to the previously discussed conceptual tensions. For example, texts with pictures, the use of "signposts" (Estefan, 2009) within stories (used when participant numbers and contact diminished in order to still piece a story together), and story excerpts immediately followed by interpretation and literature reflection (Caine, personal communication, February 2011). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) noted that there are no easy ways

to clearly resolve such tensions between the borderlands of narrative inquiry and other social paradigms, only highlighting that lived and told stories of experience must always be centre-stage in order to avoid draws to reductionist (poststructuralist) or formalistic (critical theory) analyses.

To summarize, we live storied lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in storied landscapes and our stories are lived before they are told (Clandinin, 2006). Further, our experiences are narratively composed and understood through reliving and retelling stories. Narrative inquiry is the study of storied lives, grounded in a Deweyan pragmatic ontology of experience, through a three-dimensional inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place. Narrative inquiry privileges a person's experience above all else; that is, the narrative inquirer grounds themselves within an individual's experiences and explores experiences through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Though inquiries will encounter borderlands with other paradigms, allowing exploration of macrosocial ideologies and grand narratives, the individual's experiences lead inquirers to these places, not vice versa. In this sense, the stories that emerge in the midst of experience are both the phenomenon of experience *and* data for research purposes: "Narrative inquiry...both research methodology and a view of phenomenon, is the intimate study of an individual's experience over time and in context(s)" (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquiry allows for richer understandings of human relations and societal structures that are tentative, fluid, and contextually dependent. Understanding experiences in this manner illustrates the contributions that narrative inquiry can bring to the issue of first-generation persistence in university.

Exploring Habitus Narratively

In an attempt to clarify and operationalize the concept of habitus for research, Reay (2004) thoroughly investigated the habitus construct by presenting its conceptual development and theoretical status, examining its strengths and limitations, and exploring its use as a tool. First, she stated that habitus is not solely composed of an individual's mental attitudes and perceptions, but also embodies the social world: "The habitus is a socialised body…which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world – a field – and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world" (Bourdieu, 1977, cited in Reay, p. 432). Second, the habitus predisposes an individual to certain and unconscious ways of being as a function of his or her social history and, consequently, it has a strong tendency towards reproducing the social conditions that produced it. That said, Reay brought together the objectivistic or deterministic perspective (where the habitus is argued to be predefined and actors play out socially-ascribed roles) with the subjective perspective (where the habitus is malleable) to highlight individual agency. Interactions in an unfamiliar field bring the habitus to conscious awareness, which allows for reflection where one is able to explore "possibilities" and choose actions (i.e., options they perceive based on their social context and history). King (2005) shared an example of the "physical repulsion which humans feel on participating in strange social occasions" (p. 463), where the habitus experiences difference and is thus brought to conscious awareness and subject to analysis and reflection. Third, Reay described habitus as a collective of the social and individual, with "more general notions of habitus at the level of society and more complex, differentiated notions at the level of the individual" (p. 434). Similar to Dewey's concept of *transactionalism*, Reay referenced Bourdieu's assertion that, although interactions superficially appear to be between individuals,

they also involve collective social and historical perspectives at an invisible level. Lastly, the notion of habitus as interplay between past and present is discussed; that is, as a product of early-childhood experiences and family, cultural, and social stories, the habitus is continually reinforced (and sometimes changed) as one transacts with their social world. Overall, Reay described the habitus as:

> A deep, interior, epicentre containing many matrices. These matrices demarcate the extent of choices available to any one individual. Choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds himself/herself in, her external circumstances. However, within Bourdieu's theoretical framework he/she is also circumscribed by an internalized framework that makes some possibilities inconceivable, other improbable and a limited range acceptable. (p. 435)

On the continuum of reproduction and transformation, habitus is prone to replication in familiar social contexts or fields in which it developed, but can be transformed to change behaviour and social trajectory when brought to consciousness.

Pike (2005) reinforced the need to explore habitus within social contexts. He presented an example of a driver who is driving a vehicle and suddenly notices a red light at an intersection. Seeing the red light causes the driver's foot to automatically hit the brakes in order to stop the car; the habitus is engaged for the person to act in an unconscious way. However, Pike noted that the reaction is not simply biological and that understanding such a reaction requires investigation of the social. That is, how did the driver come to understand the meaning of the red light? The red light is a social symbol, underpinning the need to attend to the social and its subjective nature. Consequently, Reay (2004) positioned the habitus as a conceptual tool that needs to be employed fluidly (a comment to critiques that the habitus can only be used as an

empirical tool if it assumed to be deterministic). She described it as "a way of interrogating the data [and not simply used as] an explanation of the data" (p. 440). Understanding behaviour as a function of habitus, then, requires investigation of the individual and the social, place, and temporality. As Bourdieu (1984) summarized, habitus intersects with forms of capital, which produce class-based behaviours:

> Through the economic and social conditions which they presuppose, the different ways of relating to realities and fictions, of believing in fictions and the realities they simulate, with more or less distance and detachment, are very closely linked to the different possible positions in social space and, consequently, bound up with the systems of dispositions (habitus) characteristic of the different classes and class fractions. (p. 6)

Narrative inquiry is well-positioned to explore the university experiences of first-generation students by attending to the habitus construct and unthreading institutional, cultural, family, and self narratives that shape it. However, questions now arise about how habitus and the stories we live and tell intersect.

David Carr (1986) explained that we are born into our storied lives to the extent that family, social, and cultural stories shape who we are and the roles we play. These stories, on a deeper level and as a function of time, shape who we are:

> I do not think that what we call our self or our identity can be adequately considered outside this temporal and therefore historical framework, outside the time of our lives. When we ask of someone who they are, this question generally comes down to a recounting of their passage through time, their autobiography or self-narrative. Already we are talking not merely of temporality as a cosmic phenomenon, or the mere movement

> of bodies, for example, but of a time whose events are precisely the events in a person's life. (Kerby, 1991, p. 15)

The self, cultural, family, and social narratives (to name a few), however, shape our being on a deeper and more tacit level and it is in this conceptual space where the stories we live by encounter the habitus. These stories continually interface with our habitus and shape how we interact with our social world; in turn, our habitus shapes how we story our lives (depicted in Figure 1 in Chapter One). I must provide a caveat that such a connection between stories and habitus was never, to the best of my knowledge, explicated by Bourdieu. Instead, my conceptualization is based on philosophical morsels within narrative inquiry and Bourdieuian scholarship, in addition to the research conducted as part of this dissertation. Because the research findings of this dissertation contribute to my conceptualization, I elaborate more on stories and habitus in Chapter Six. As a precursor, however, a discussion of Kerby's work follows; although he also does not clearly state that stories shape one's habitus, he does leave a trail of "conceptual breadcrumbs" indicating that social conditions of existence shape habitus.

Although there is significant debate on whether the habitus is deterministic or not (and, as stated earlier, for the purposes of this research, the habitus is considered fluid), Kerby (1991) commented on the salience of history (and thereby the stories of our lives) in shaping the habitus:

> The habitus can usefully be seen, to borrow a phrase from Pierre Bourdieu, as 'history turned into nature'; it is a past sedimented into 'structuring structures'. Such habitual dispositions are formative in both mental and emotional life just as they are in the performance of manual skills, and as such they function in what can be called a passive or unconscious manner. (p. 20)

Paramount to my conceptualization of the relationship between stories and habitus, Kerby described that:

> The formation of a habitus, then, is the relatively abiding result of our temporal genesis, the result of acts reinforced by reactivation...and repetition, but also the result of acts and decisions guided and often determined by a constraining social order and *environment* [emphasis added]. One might also say, following Husserl, that one's habitus is the mediatory style of one's contact with the world, and that it generates a cultural world correlated to its structures. The typical style of my being-in-the-world is thus the dynamic equivalent of my habitus, and, as already noted, this habitus is very much the structural basis of my abiding character and also of my identity. (p. 20)

He further articulated that unity between the habitus and the life world is a unity between the self and prevailing environmental and cultural conditions, further emphasizing the socialized nature of the habitus: the habitus encapsulates "values, beliefs, and attitudes, the unity of which must be accounted for by similar *environmental conditions and prevailing cultural conditions* [emphasis added]" (p. 20). In referring to both environmental and cultural conditions, Kerby suggested that the external social world shapes or conditions the habitus; that is, the social world serves as *conditions of existence* (Bourdieu, 1981) that shape the values, attitudes, and beliefs comprising the habitus. A social world that he, within the context of his book titled *Narrative and the Self*, asserted is inherently storied. In short, Kerby suggested that habitus has beginnings before our birth and is shaped by one's social environment. It is the extension of stories (cultural, family, social, self, etc.) as conditions of existence in Bourdieu's framework that is discussed further in Chapter Six.

Carr (1986) proclaimed that we are never more than the co-authors of our lives, which is a reflection of the many stories that we live by and that shape us. Kerby (1991) took this further, stating that our life is "linked through a continuous series of what he [Edmund Husserl] called temporal *protentions* (projections of a future) and *retentions* (consciousness of the immediate past) which give density and cohesion to the ongoing present" (p. 18), which underscores the temporal nature of the self. Drawing on an analogy with music, Kerby illustrated that life is like a musical melody as one cannot appreciate a musical phrase without understanding the context that preceded it and feeling wonder for what happens next. The musical aesthetic is appreciated because of its temporal and elemental coherence. The stories of our lives and habitus, like music, gravitate towards coherence. It is comfortable for the habitus and our idea of self to function within the status quo in which they were produced (towards habitus congruence and narrative coherence, respectively). However, the stories of our lives and habitus can also be disrupted as one enters a space of transition or liminality, where the status quo is absent or altered. It is the liminal or transitional spaces encountered in life that bring one to the precipice of evaluation, where the sense of the world and self are disrupted. Concerning my research, this idea of habitus dissonance and narrative incoherence (with respect to subjective and objective conditions[7], respectively) illuminates the need to understand experiences of first-generation students differently as they journey into such a liminal space by attending university.

Depicting the expected life-course of women and inherent challenges to patriarchal structures, Heilbrun (1999) described the concept of liminality:

[7] That said, Bourdieu (1990) asserted that "of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and *the most ruinous* (emphasis added), is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism" (p. 25); therefore, while habitus and narratives, generally refer to subjective and objective conditions, the boundaries are quite blurred and narratives (particularly self-narratives) can and should also be seen as subjective.

> [Women are expected] to follow the logical or common-sense life for a woman: dating, marriage, childbirth, mother. In my view, the reason why these old structures so appeal to some people is precisely that they can, in following them, avoid liminality, avoid hovering on the threshold, avoid having to take brave decisions and then having to live with the anxiety and uncertainty those decisions inevitably produce. It is easier to do what is expected of you than to live in 'intensity and suspense'. (p. 90)

She went further stating that "the threshold was never designed for permanent occupation, however, and those of us who occupy thresholds…know that we are in between destinies. But this is where we choose to be, and must be, at this time, among the alternatives that present themselves" (p. 102). For first-generation students, university is a liminal space as it is a place where existing stories do not make sense and where beliefs and values seem incongruent. Therefore, decisions to leave university (or not apply in the first place) can be seen as moving towards creating narrative coherence and habitus consonance. It should, therefore, be clear that narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodology for attending to my research topic.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provided a rich description of narrative inquiry as "a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus…narrative inquiry is stories lived and told" (p. 20). They further established narrative inquiry within a framework that positions a researcher to *experience* experience by moving inward and outward and backward and forward through time and place with participants. The framework is developed as a three-dimensional inquiry space framed by dimensions of sociality (*interaction)*, temporality (*continuity)*, and place (*situation)*. Examining interaction becomes a process where inquiry moves inward and outward from the participant's internal world, consisting of hopes, feelings,

morals, and attitudes, to their social environment. This outward place also encompasses the situational and contextual milieu, in addition to the physical attributes of the environment, in which in the inquiry is located. Moving backward and forward focuses examination on the temporal nature of experience where, while situated in the present, the past and future constructs of the events or experiences are examined. Webster and Mertova (2007) highlighted that narrative inquiry provides a lens through which we can learn to appreciate how the construction and reconstruction of stories shape human experience and, consequently, how narrative inquiry "is well suited to addressing issues of complexity and cultural and human centredness because of its capacity to record and retell those events that have been of most influence on us" (p. 2), enabling researchers to holistically represent the complex and rich experiences of participants to understand worldviews. Dewey's criteria of experience (i.e., interaction, continuity, and his construct of situation) create an appropriate and robust foundation for examining the experiences of first-generation students.

Within the narrative inquiry discourse there are many different ways of understanding experience, which reflect its many nuanced epistemological foundations. Squire, Andrews, and Tamboukou (2008) provided an overview of the various perspectives, which include event-centred (which assumes that internal representations are fairly constant) versus experience-centered (which, contrarily, assumes that internal representations vary over time and context) research and "big-story" versus "small-story" research (the use of traditional methods such as interviews to explore past, personal, and non-shared events compared to being in the midst and sharing experiences as they unfold). Although I was drawn to the small-story approach in order to explore the participants' university experiences as they were unfolding, issues of timeline and access prohibited me from being directly in the field with participants. That said, while

conventional methods were used (e.g., interviews) to explore past experiences, I attempted to explore current and imagined future experiences with participants through the interview, journals, and photographs, as will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Recruitment and Selection

Narrative inquiry enables deep exploration of experience, where stories serve as both the method and unit of analysis. In a class I took with Dr. Jean Clandinin, she would continually emphasize the importance of trusting and collaborative participant-researcher relationships and that researchers must be "in the midst" so that, to the extent possible, researchers appreciate the participants' context (personal communication, January 2011). Further, many narrative scholars (Carr, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008) have conveyed that participants and researchers co-construct stories (which reflects the interactive nature of the inquiry, ranging from the choice of questions posed to responses to nuanced non-verbal communication) that will then be analyzed. The resulting rich, detailed, and co-constructed stories then become the unit for analysis, which proceeds according to a three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly), where experiences are explored simultaneously across sociality, temporality, and place. Further, attending to talk-in-interaction details to explore the small-story meaning-making experiences requires methods that are more possible for students, while also providing deep insight into experiences.

I have chosen Pillar University because of its convenience to where I live, my knowledge of the Ontario policy context concerning first-generation students (as a result of my research and conversations with colleagues at conference presentations I delivered), my familiarity with university programs for first-generation students resulting from both research and my interactions with administrators through my participation in the Canadian Association of College

and University Student Services (CACUSS), and my access to students at Pillar University through student affairs administrators, whom I am well acquainted with through CACUSS. Most importantly, however, having the research situated at Pillar University and within Ontario, allows critical comparisons between the Alberta and Ontario postsecondary policy contexts, where the issues of first-generation student underrepresentation is articulated very differently.

Following ethics approvals at both the University of Alberta and Pillar University in Fall Term 2012, I began recruiting participants. To recruit participants, I developed an invitation inviting students to "share their story" by participating in a research opportunity and specifically articulated eligibility criteria to be students whose parents(s) and/or guardian(s) did not complete postsecondary education in Canada (see Appendix 2: Participant Invitation). I contacted four student affairs administrators at Pillar University, seeking their assistance to disseminate the invitation to students within their jurisdiction: two administrators were responsible for residences and the other two were responsible for first-generation student programming. The administrators forwarded the invitation to students in October 2012 and, in addition, I "followed" the first-generation program on Twitter and "tweeted" a truncated version of the invitation. I received interest from five students (four females and one male) expressing interest and requesting additional information.

I sent each student a prepared document that overviewed the nature of research participation (see Appendix 3: Participant Participation Letter and Consent Form), which included that December 2012 would entail relationship building and brief introductions and that, from January 2013 to April 2013, participation would entail making monthly journal entries with an associated picture (emailed as a Word document) and monthly interviews or focus groups (pending their comfort). Four of the five participants confirmed their desire to participate and

indicated their preference for individual interviews (the male who declined communicated that he likely did not have time to participate). I then met with each participant in November 2012 to fully review the participation letter (including expectations for the $50 compensation) and had them sign the consent form. Once the consent forms were signed, I proceeded to fulfil a number of obligations to facilitate participation in a clear and transparent manner, consistent with the plan I provided. First, I established a Facebook group for the study (as all participants indicated that they were comfortable joining such a group), posted an introduction of myself, and asked each participant to do the same: as the participants posted, I commented on their posts, indicated how excited I was to be part of their journey. Second, I posted additional information articulating participation requirements for the journals (which included pictures) and interviews, including timelines, topics, and guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 4: Guide for Journal Entries and Focus Groups). The participants confirmed their desire to continue and that they understood what was required. I then proceeded to set up administrative details for the interviews: I solidified the participants' availability (which happened to be on Fridays, which was convenient for my work schedule) and booked a room on campus to conduct the interviews. From January 2013 to April 2013, I sent monthly reminders about the due date for journals (which was one week before the interview so that we could explore the content in person) and confirmation for the interviews. Journal entries with photos were always sent before the interview (though not always by the due date) and all participants attended all scheduled semi-structured interviews, resulting in my being able to develop extensive field texts as planned in the form of journal entries, pictures, and interviews.

Though we connected over Facebook to increase comfort, I realized that meeting in person might be a difficult transition for the participants. To ease their comfort, I planned for the

first interview to be one and a half hours in order to build rapport. Further, I baked for the participants and brought in beverages (a ritual we all enjoyed). Exploring the narratives of an individual's experience through narrative inquiry is an intimate journey, requiring attending to ethical considerations, as noted by Clandinin (2006):

> For those of us wanting to learn to engage in narrative inquiry, we need to imagine ethics as being about negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices. We need to learn how to make these stories of what it means to engage in narrative inquiry dependable and steady. We must do more than fill out required forms for institutional research ethics boards. (p. 52)

Indeed, while I did not indicate in the ethics review that I would bake and participate in extended engagement on Facebook, it felt right given the relational nature of the inquiry (and I continue interactions to this day)[8]. The following section details my movement from methods in the field, to interim texts, to the final research text in this dissertation.

Movement from Methods to Research Texts

Field texts were generated from multiple sources, beginning in December 2012 with participants joining a Facebook group and responding to introductory questions about themselves. Specifically, they provided an overview of their Fall 2012 university experience (including one high and one low experience, something I asked them to do) and discussed their hopes for the future. This introduction provided me with an initial glimpse into the temporal thread of the participants' lives as they shared motivations to pursue university, general experiences regarding the transition in and through to current time, and protentions towards their

[8] Using Facebook for initial contact was approved by ethics at both institutions and all participants consented that they were comfortable with its use. As per the protocol I provided for approvals, I informed the participants at the closure of the study (i.e., once they felt comfortable with content and I submitted) that they could "unfriend" me and that I would close the group. The group was closed (as it was no longer needed), but the participants indicated a desire to stay connected, which I also felt was important.

future and overall career ambitions. This initial sharing, as I noted in my reflection journal, provided me with the first "real" insight that I was engaged in research and was about to enter the very personal world of four first-generation students. I also remember noting questions about how I would, with the little information at hand and the amounts to come, move from field texts to research texts: a process that I conceptually understood as a *fluid inquiry*, not governed by methodological strategies (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), but unsure of how I would actually represent the participants' narratives and illustrate findings of social significance. This section is intended to detail that journey so that readers can understand how: (a) the narratives represented in Chapter Four were created from the methods employed, and (b) the structure chosen in Chapter Five (upon reflection of many exemplars) illustrates salient and class-based resonant threads (i.e., sub-stories within the participants narratives in Chapter Four) that illuminate larger social relevance through "a narrative view of experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 127).

As detailed in Appendix 4, my methods included monthly participant journal entries (where they took a picture about a specific experience and discussed the meaning of that picture), four hour-long interviews at the beginning of each month from January to April 2012, and my own reflection journal. Each month from January to April, the participants emailed journal entries to me and participated in a one-on-one interview, both of which were constructed around guiding exploratory questions (many more questions were asked as evident in the transcripts) derived from salient topics from the literature review (January explored family and social stories and the university experience; February was concerned with experiences of inclusion and exclusion; in March the participants explored stories that they would tell themselves about university, and in April we explored their values and beliefs towards university and also their

reflections of how culture affected their orientation towards university), which is detailed in Table 1: Monthly Journal Entries and Focus Group Guide[9].

Table 1

Monthly Journal Entries and Focus Group Guide

Month and Theme	Journal Entries with Picture (two per month)	Focus Group Guide (once per month)
January (How family and social stories affect university experiences)	Tell me a story you were told about university by your family? How did these stories affect you? Take a picture that represents the stories you were told about university (from family or society). Discuss why you chose this picture.	What aspects of university were you anxious about? In the past, what stories did you hear about university attendance from family members or "the world?" What stories did you tell yourself about university? How do these past stories affect your current experience? What values, attitudes, and beliefs do you have towards university and education?
February (Experiences of inclusion and exclusion)	What experiences (if any) have helped you feel part of the university experience? How so? What experiences (if any) have made you feel excluded from the university experiences? How so? Take two pictures: one that represents how you (b) feel part of the university experience (b) do not feel part of the university experience. Discuss why you chose these pictures	Did you feel like you didn't belong at university? If so, why and how did you manage this feeling? How do you feel about social class? How does this relate to university attendance?
March	What stories do you tell yourself	What were your successes and what do

[9] The title of this table was presented to the ethics boards and participants as a focus group guide, which reflected my preference to conduct focus groups. However, all the participants preferred interviews and the same guide was used.

(Self narratives and the university experience)	about university life? What made you construct this story? How does this differ from the story you would have told yourself 5 years ago? Take a picture that represents the story you now tell yourself about university. Discuss why you chose this picture.	you attribute these successes to? What stresses or tensions did you experience and how did you manage these?
April (Values and beliefs towards university)	What has surprised you about university life? What experiences are exactly what you thought they'd be? What values, attitudes, and beliefs do you have towards university and education? How does this differ from 5 years ago?	Looking back, has your perspectives about university changed and, if so, how? What values, attitudes, and beliefs do you have towards university and education?

In addition, during the interviews, I would inquire into their journal entries, asking them to elaborate further on salient points.

I followed the overall guide presented in Table 1 (Monthly Journal Entries and Focus Group Guide); however, I began to realize that the topics of culture and immigration were surfacing quite prominently. Serendipitously, the questions I had intended were all asked within the first three interviews and the participants wanted to come back for the April interview. I felt lucky to have their commitment and so, for the fourth and final interview, I asked an additional broad question (which I posted in the Facebook group so that they would have time to reflect): How does your culture and immigration play into your experiences of university? This proved to be a very worthwhile question and provided me with additional insights about their experience

into and through university. The challenge was then to move from the field texts to the research text.

I was told by many colleagues (including Andrew Estefan whose doctoral work I reviewed as part of a course requirement with Jean Clandinin) that it is extremely beneficial for qualitative (and especially narrative) researchers to do their own transcription. Although I was tempted to "throw money at the task" (particularly after realizing that each hour interview took two days to transcribe), their wisdom became quickly apparent as I felt, through the transcribing task, that I was gaining deeper insights. I noted these personal thoughts right in the transcription document as capitalized text so that I could discern my thoughts while keeping the interviews intact.

Co-Construction of the Narrative Accounts

Once transcription was complete, I had four kinds of field texts (or data sets) for each participant: the interview transcripts (each being approximately 22 pages of single-space type and 11 point font), journal entries, pictures[10] with expanded explanation, and the Facebook introductions. Although I had "conveniently" organized the journals and interviews around specific themes (see Appendix 4), they were not useful for constructing the participants' narrative accounts because each interview touched on many different elements beyond the planned themes and throughout the participants' lives. This realization brought me back to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000): I re-read the data with my temporal lens on, which enabled me to *narratively code* the field texts around salient *narrative elements* such as events, actions, tensions, and characters (Clandinin & Connelly). The

[10] Unfortunately, while the participants were asked to take original pictures void of identifiable information, for convenience they downloaded images from the internet and included these in their journals. For copyright reasons, these images remain as field texts and are not included in the dissertation; however, the exploration of the pictures contained in the journals are woven into the narratives.

challenge then became developing narrative accounts to serve as the focus of analysis in this dissertation research text.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) articulated that, "as narrative researchers engage in this work, they begin to hold different field texts in relation to other field texts. However, it is responses to the questions of meaning and social significance that ultimately shape field texts into research texts" (p. 131). Riessman (2008) further stated that stories participants tell should draw the reader into experience, but that "determining the boundaries of stories can be difficult and highly interpretive" (p. 74). During the process of constructing the narrative accounts for use in the research text, I reflected on the field texts and was pulled backwards in time to two moments. The first was during my EDES 501 Narrative Inquiry class with Jean Clandinin in Winter 2011, where many of the participants in exemplar inquiries expressed a desire to the researcher to both hear and see their voices in the research text. This sentiment, and going to the second moment I was pulled backwards to, was echoed by the participants in this study; all expressed excitement to re-experience their stories. In thinking of my research text, I wanted to ensure prominence of their voices and, therefore, used direct quotes to the largest extent possible. I cut and pasted text from their journal entries and interview transcripts to form the narrative elements that developed into the narrative accounts presented in Chapter Four; that is, narrative elements were woven together from all field texts to compose the narrative accounts with minor supporting text incorporated by me to string together the narrative elements temporally towards flow and coherence. As a result, the narrative accounts are written in first person from the participants' perspectives.

In summary, I temporally wove together narrative elements from all field texts until the narrative accounts took shape in a way that I felt that they: (a) illustrated salient moments for the

participants; (b) reflected the voice and tone of the participants (and I was again glad that I transcribed my own interview notes as I felt that I had a good sense), and (c) encapsulated the social dimension of experience, which is a significant element of my work. I sent a draft of the narrative accounts to the participants with the instruction that they were intended to be "co-constructions" and that liberal edits and suggestions were needed in order to ensure that the narratives honoured their experience. Other than a few minor edits, I received no substantive comments. On the contrary, I received comments of appreciation for helping them tell their stories in such an emotive manner and that they were proud of the stories (with one indicating she was going to share the story with her family)[11]. These narrative accounts are represented in Chapter Four.

As I reflected on the process of weaving together narrative elements to compose the narrative accounts, I relived the participants' retelling of their transition into, through, and (imagined) out of their university experiences: my research question began to pulse in mind and into all the imagined and unimagined spaces of social significance.

Resonant Narrative Threads and Social Significance

I knew that the narrative accounts contained substance worthy of contribution to the larger scholarship and that this had to do with habitus development resulting from the "stories of our lives"; indeed, many storied elements of the participants' lives, especially childhood, were very similar. Bourdieu's (1984) assertion that class-based worldviews exist, resulting from similar social contexts, resonated with me. I also wanted to – needed to – honour narrative inquiry as the methodology and not get drawn into making generalized themes across the participants. I reflected on Riessman's (2008) directions regarding generalizations. Although

[11] Though the Facebook group has dissolved, I am still connected and interact with all participants on Facebook and, additionally, have plans to meet when them individually over coffee in the near future.

Riessman regards people as cases, a significant difference from narrative inquiry where individual experience is a source of insight and worthy of exploration, she suggested that *theoretical propositions* are possible with narrative inquiry (which is way narrative inquirers must speak to the personal, social, theoretical, and practical justifications of their work [Clandinin & Connelly, 2000]). Riessman made this suggestion by underscoring that narrative data was never intended to be statistical data to generalize across an entire population:

> Making conceptual inferences about a social process (the construction of an identity group, for example, from close observation of one community) is an equally "valid" kind of inquiry with a long history in anthropology and sociology…case-centred models of research can generate knowledge that, over time, becomes the basis for others' work – the ultimate test. (p. 13)

I dove into the mental challenge of untangling the resonant narrative threads that I felt were woven across the narrative accounts. To do so, I created an *interim research text* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to help me compare and contrast narrative threads from all four participants. The result was a large table: in the left column were (at that point, tentative) narrative threads and the right column included significant sections of each participant's narrative accounts that related to the thread. This also illuminated to me that two participants, while technically defined as first-generation by the institution, grew up with unique stories that made them different and equipped them with more social capital than the other two. This interim research text was a significant step in the research process, because it supported Bourdieu's (1984) statement that class-based worldviews exist and that the resonant narrative threads were a key contribution to the literature. I shared this interim text table with the participants, who all

agreed that the resonant narrative threads that I identified represented salient stories in their experience. The next challenge was to represent this information.

I struggled with how to move from the narrative accounts in Chapter Four to discussion within the literature and reflected upon many examples, mostly from a narrative inquiry course that I took with Jean Clandinin in 2011. I wanted to show that resonant narrative threads existed and, for a moment, simply wanted to include the interim text table that I had created, but that would look too much like a positivist representation: field texts cannot speak for themselves (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I thought back to examples where a narrative account excerpt was presented on a page, followed by a discussion of the literature on the same page in bold text, and followed again by the researcher's perspective again on the same page in italicized text. I was drawn to this, but felt that it was too disjointed for my style, but liked how significant narratives were kept intact. The format of Chapter Five, therefore, is an attempt to: (a) illustrate the resonant narrative threads that surfaced as a result of social and largely class-based experiences; (b) provide readers with excerpts from the narrative accounts that substantiate the stories within stories, and (c) allow the readers to re-read and re-enter the experiences of the participants with this new lens. Indeed, for me, the re-read and re-entering allowed me to appreciate differently the significance of the research and better transition to larger discussions within the literature, which is done in Chapter Six.

Of note here is a discussion of the unimagined space. I was advised early in my doctoral journey by my supervisor, Randy Wimmer, that the research "has a mind of its own" – this came to be my reality. I imagined that the research would focus my gaze on social and academic belonging (versus integration) and illuminate the role that student services could play to enhance retention for first-generation students. Although this aspect did surface, what became apparent

was the salience of childhood experiences and the transition into and through university. This was an area I did not anticipate and, consequently, was drawn to stories preceding university.

Narratively Progressing

I revisit my experiences as a first-generation student every year during move-in and orientation. Following undergraduate convocation in 2001, I have remained working in student services and affairs and have been involved, through various capacities, in helping students and families transition in, through, and out of their university experiences. I constantly wonder how their experiences are similar or different from mine. I also wonder how they perceive me and hope they find my presence supportive and helpful. I also hope that, for other first-generation students, they find a place within the campus that they identify with and that helps them develop a sense of place in the university community; a place where they feel like they belong.

I was at a silent auction and charity fundraiser for Camp Fyrefly in March 2011 where Dr. Andre Grace, one of the organizers, emphasized that "policy is power." This statement is very true as policies, particularly when tied to funding, are powerful vehicles to facilitate change and improve circumstances for people. The discourse concerned with first-generation student underrepresentation requires further contributions conducted through a narrative inquiry methodology and a Bourdieuian framework to better understand how these students truly experience university. Inquiry in this mode can contribute substantially to facilitating equal opportunities and equal outcomes by serving to better ground policy problem definitions, goals, and means to support access and persistence. Such inquiry also has the potential of helping us "make the familiar strange" and influence changes within university environments, instead of taking a deficit approach with students and placing the burden of responsibility on them (Marker,

2004). Altogether, these different approaches help us to better understand our problem of first-generation student persistence and affect changes to improve the situation.

Habitus and narrative concepts of experience are extremely complicated social constructs and, when existing to reinforce each other, whether consciously or subconsciously, one wonders to what extent, and in what contexts, an individual is an agentic-body, a lemming of social forces, or a mixture somewhere in between. Naturally we want to believe the former, that we all, first-generation students included, have a measure of choice in our social situations. However, as depicted by the research presented in Chapter Two, we are left to wonder about the salience of the latter (i.e., the magnitude of social forces that affect behaviour) and the extent that a given habitus prevents first-generation students from entering and then persisting in university through to degree completion. Nelson's (1995) concepts of *found community* (i.e., those groupings or gatherings that we were born or storied into – family networks for example – where interests, values, and beliefs may not resonate strongly across the group) and *chosen community* (i.e., groups we chose and find ourselves in based on similar interests, values, and beliefs – communities we identify with) are relevant here as they are a function of the stories of our lives. For non-first-generation students, university attendance is an expected and normal life progression; consequently, she or he is familiar with the field of higher education, even taking it for granted to some extent. For these privileged students, university is both a found *and* (tacitly) chosen community where they would, at least usually, experience habitus consonance and narrative coherence. Conversely, first-generation students, in choosing a community that is markedly different from their found community, may experience significant discomfort (i.e., habitus dissonance and narrative incoherence) that they must attend to in different ways. For some first-generation students, the experienced tension might lead them to find congruence

through choosing an alternative community more congruent with their found community, and thus depart from university. For other first-generation students, the experienced dissonance can be managed. To choose a different community from their found community likely means two things for first-generation students: they have to be self-aware and reflexive in understanding the dissonant experiences and they also have to find a place of acceptance in the university. This struggle is much deeper than simply seeking integration and understanding; it involves a paradigm shift. Indeed, universities (and perhaps the educational system more broadly) must change so that responsibility is not solely placed on first-generation students. Nelson's concepts underscore the importance of exploring subjugated perspectives that develop when one experiences travel between found and chosen communities. Hearing the stories of first generation students and inquiring into them might illuminate experiences that challenge university norms. Indeed, it is these *counterstories* (i.e., stories from minority perspectives) of first-generation students that can only be explored through a bona fide narrative inquiry that investigates persistence through the storied-futures narrative and in the spaces between the storied-futures narrative and more privileged meritocratic narrative.

Bateson (2000) shared that "we are both representative and unique" (p. 228), which illuminates that first-generation students may be like other university students to some extent, but also have unique experiences to share, resulting from their unique habitus. Further, not all first-generation students' experiences are the same and can be homogenized neatly for research and interpretation purposes. Although generalizations have been posited across first-generation students, my intention is to go deeper into individual stories of experience as I believe that their individual stories can significantly touch and shape our understanding. Like a feather that lands on a still puddle, creating subtle yet discernible ripples, the stories of first-generation students

can help progress understanding and begin filling a largely unexamined void. The salience of narrative inquiry as a methodology is that the resulting stories have the potential to resonate with audiences on emotive and experiential levels, drawing attention to the importance of addressing the articulated social concern of first-generation persistence in university, by contributing to the research puzzle in a novel way.

Chapter Four: Journeys Towards University

Welcome to a window into Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani's lives: four students who attended Pillar University (a world-renowned institution in Southern Ontario) and whose parents did not complete university education in Canada. They are all first-generation[12] students as defined by Pillar University; however, Kayla and Katrina's parents both attended university outside of Canada, while Marina and Dani's parents did not attend university. It is also noteworthy to mention that Kayla, Katrina, and Marina were all in their second semester of first-year during the research stage, whereas Dani was in her second semester of third-year and also a student leader with the first-generation program at Pillar. Further, all the women are from immigrant families (Kayla, Katrina, and Dani are first-generation immigrants, having been born outside of Canada, while Marina, having been born in Canada, is a second-generation immigrant), which also features prominently in their narratives.

Although all stories are partial stories (Clandinin, 2006), the narrative accounts presented in this chapter were composed with participants to illustrate what they and I considered salient moments of their journeys into and through life at Pillar University. As detailed in Chapter Three, to develop the narratives, I transcribed all the interviews myself and examined the: (a) transcription text; (b) journal entries and associated pictures, and (c) content shared on Facebook in order to identify salient narrative elements that travelled with each participant and were reawakened and/or reexamined while discussing their experiences in the midst. This is consistent with Andrew Estefan's perspective, where he shared that "even though I am not there [in the past], fragments of this story have traveled with me across continents, through time, serving as a constant reminder that we are our stories, and our stories are what we need to learn,

[12] Recall that Pillar University defines a first-generation student as one whose parent(s) and/or guardian(s) did not attend university *in Canada*. For the purposes of this research with Pillar University students, I adopted this definition.

to live, and to live well" (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 578). Indeed, the participants were ecstatic when re-examining the stories of their past, both during our time in the field and when they re-read their stories in the form of these narratives.

On behalf of Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani, I invite you into the narrative accounts of their experiences of transitions into and through Pillar University.

Kayla:

“I’d rather cry in a Mercedes than on a bike”

Balanced Advice

Although my parents may not have attended university in Canada, they are, in fact, educated people. Now, considering they actually did attend a university, they both had interesting stories to share about their experiences. I must point out, however, that although my parents both attended the same university, their experiences and views about university are extremely different.

Let's start with my mother (she's more interesting). My mother had nothing but wonderful stories to share about university (well mostly nice stories). To her, university was the land of freedom. It's the place where you can skip class whenever you want and no one will notice or care. It's the place where you don't have anyone nagging you about your work. And most importantly, it's the place where there are lots of cute boys (yeah, I rolled my eyes when my mother said this). The point is, my mother *loved* university (emphasis on the love; I am not exaggerating). A summary of my mother's university experience goes something this: university is an awesome place, it really is, but it's also a place where you have to pay attention to your studies. To my mother, university was the place where you must take advantage of all the opportunities available; that includes extracurricular activities and spending time with newly made friends. But above all, it's the place where you must work hard or all that freedom that university gives you won't last very long (that is, you'll get kicked out if you can't take the academic pressure). The most important thing I got out of my mother's stories about university is that it is not a place you take advantage of: it is expensive to attend and you must work hard to ensure that the expensive tuition is worth it. Keeping this in mind, my mother managed to enjoy her time in university to the max, all the while making my grandparents proud. This is how my mother wants me to be: she wants me to enjoy everything university has to offer, but at the same

time, she expects me to excel in my studies. My mother's little story about maintaining a balance between enjoying the freedom university gives you and keeping up with your studies has really guided me through my first semester of university, and now through my second. I've kept her stories and advice with me, which has made me love university even more because I now know what it takes to be a successful university student: balance studying and having fun, and I will be guaranteed a wonderful four years.

My father's university experience, on the other hand, is nowhere near as interesting as my mother's (he was your typical nerdy engineering student). My father is a very educationally-oriented person. His story in simple terms was this: "Go to the library, study, and you'll do well like your Papa." I guess that's good advice, but I prefer taking my mother's, and I have. Ever since I started university, I've kept my mother's experience and words with me. I have managed to make many friends, join clubs, skip a few classes here and there, AND go to the library every day. I have always been very focused when it comes to school, so my mother doesn't need to worry about me slacking off. However, she was right about the fact that it isn't easy to do well and pass everything with flying colors. If you want to do EXTREMELY well, you'd have to be like my father, who just studied all the time. But like my mother said, you're only in university once – make the most of it, but at the same time, don't lose your focus and forget about why you came to university in the first place.

I try to balance. If I spend a great deal of my time at the library, I'd end my university career like my father: I'd be the top of my class, but wouldn't have made the most out of university. If I go to the library everyday for a bit, join clubs, and spend time with my friends, I'd end up like my mother: I'd do well in school and have made the most out of university. As of now, I have followed in mother's footsteps. Although my GPA right now is not a 4.0, I honestly

believe that, as I progress through my university experience, I will learn to manage everything and get a high GPA. University, after all, is a place where you learn and one of things that I'm learning here is how to maintain a balance. Hopefully, by the end of my fourth year, I will have mastered that skill and will graduate to one day tell my children about the key to a successful university experience.

It Started Early

As you can tell, university was expected. Though my grandparents didn't even finish high-school, their children and all my cousins are highly educated, being doctors or lawyers or engineers. My parents want the best for us: they're not forcing me or my brother into anything specific, just that we must go to university and get an education. The message started early. For example, ever since my brother was three (he's 14 now), they'd tell him that he'd be a great architect and that he should go to Waterloo.

I'm the first in my family to attend university in Canada and that is huge. Beyond huge. In the Middle-East, a North American education is highly revered and so my family puts my situation in high esteem. Even if I only graduate with a bachelor's degree, it will be very respected if I were to move back to Syria and would enable me to have a very successful and lucrative career. Pillar is also recognized as being one of the best universities in the world. My dad was ecstatic when I chose Pillar University because it's "up there" and gave him a bit of an extra boost (I think he may brag to other members of the family too, but wish he wouldn't). The downside of my parents having not completed university in Canada, and it's minimal, is that I don't have any help or guidance from my parents with respect to the university system here in Canada. That's fine as I knew what I had to do and would just get my dad's credit card.

Struggle and Values

I know I'm painting quite a positive picture and, for the most part, it is and I know that I'm very fortunate. That said, my parents struggled with the move to Canada as foreign credentials are not easily transferable. My mother was a dentist in Syria; she was a pediatric dentist and loved working with kids. She tried so hard when they first came here to Canada to practice, but there were a plethora of barriers that made things impossible. It literally broke her heart. She currently works as a dental hygienist, which she finds frustrating because she knows she can perform the procedures to the same quality (and better, in some cases). I wish this was different for her, but it fuels me to not have the situation repeat as I don't want my goals shattered.

My parents worked really, and I mean *really*, hard to get where they are now. When they first came to Canada, my dad would work a ridiculous amount of hours at a plastic manufacturing company, close to 14 hours a day, and just come home and sleep; we'd never see him. My parents were in debt coming here and had to borrow quite a bit of money. My dad is also the only son and has the additional responsibility of taking care of his parents, so he worked double time to work off the debt, support mom and me, and take care of them. He worked so hard. He really and truly is my hero. That's part of why I'm so determined to work hard; I want to provide him with an easy retirement. No matter what, I'm going to give him something in return for his sacrifice.

They also didn't have a car and would take public transit, often scraping together change for the fare (my dad told me of a time he had to count pennies in order to pay the fare). I remember my mom dragging us everywhere on the bus because we didn't have a car and we

would bring groceries home in the freezing cold with a stroller. Those times were hard: when you've seen the bottom, you don't want to be there.

For years they worked hard and made many sacrifices in order to reach their position and provide for me and my brother. The fact that my parents are immigrants and struggled to establish themselves is the biggest influence in my life. I appreciate what they did for us, but I don't ever want to go through that. It makes me frustrated with how unfair the situation can be sometimes. My parents come from poor families and money hasn't been available to be passed down. A lot of people that come to Pillar seem to come from very rich families that have considerable savings or investments backing them up. My parents had nothing when they came and were in debt. They are inspirational people and I have to make it up to them. It's part of the reason I live at home. I'm very pragmatic with decisions and always think at least 20 steps ahead. I know that I have many years of university in my future in order to reach my goals, so why put myself in debt now by living in residence just for that experience when I can save money and be better off financially in the future? Yes, living in residence has its benefits, but I'm not one that feels comfortable sharing communal facilities like washrooms and why would I pay so much money for a room that is a quarter the size?

Overall, I'm grateful for the values that my parents instilled in me. I value hard work and am not scared of it: my parents worked exceptionally hard for what we have. I value achievement: my dad, being the typical Middle-Eastern father, would always ask me where the other 5% was when I got 95% on a test. I value being pragmatic and having an awareness of privilege and am constantly reminded that we weren't simply lucky; we had to plan and must always be grateful for our circumstances. I value education as a means to a better and contributing life. I value determination: I have high goals and the means to achieve them.

Perhaps most of all, I value family – and not just how Canadians might value family, but deeper and broader. For example, I have an aunt who lives in Syria who is disabled. While her female siblings take care of her immediate needs, my dad (as the only male sibling) takes care of her financial needs. He sends about $200 a month and it goes a considerable way there (he sometimes reminds me that I spend $90 a week on food and transportation and that I should not take advantage of my situation). I work hard now so that I can hopefully move up the social class ladder, go to a really good law school, and become more so that I can take care of my family (my aunt will be my responsibility when my dad retires). As the saying goes, I'd rather cry in a Mercedes than on a bike (money doesn't buy happiness, but at least you're comfortable). That said, I would never compromise my values.

My Definition…

University, to a high-schooler, can seem like a terrifying place. This fact alone should be reason enough for universities and upper-year university students to do everything they can to make incoming students feel as welcome as possible before classes start. And indeed, Pillar University did exactly this, which significantly helped me get past the anxiety of starting university. There are two major experiences that really helped me feel part of the university. The first major experience was called My Definition (MyDef): a weekend long leadership retreat during the summer for incoming first-year off-campus students. Not only did MyDef help me make friends, but it was also a way for me to get to know my college, and some upper-year off-campus students who gave me advice on how to get involved and make friends while living off-campus (one upper-year, in particular, would answer all my questions on Facebook and helped me print an essay on-campus when I left it to the last minute and stressed out about handing it in on time). This is extremely important because feeling included in a university is hard for

everyone; however, it is *especially* hard for a commuter. This retreat guided me on how to manage the commuter life and make the most of my university experience. In fact, the biggest help came from being able to talk to people like me who've had the experience of being a commuter and being involved. The MyDef retreat significantly helped me make a smooth transition from high school to university and feel part of the ideal university experience. I will always remember going to McDonald's at 2am and I was like, "I've never done this before!" It felt good to hang out and be in a big city talking to some great people. It hit me at that moment that I belong and was meant to be here.

The second significant experience that really helped me feel part of the university experience was Frosh week; possibly the best and most memorable week in my life. Having already attended MyDef about a month earlier, it was even easier for me to feel part of the university because I had already met a lot of people and was familiar with the campus. My friends and I from MyDef were able to get even more involved in frosh week than the average first-year student because of our already established connections with upper-year students and our familiarization with the campus. The establishment of connections, in my opinion, is very important in making yourself feel part of the university. When school started after Frosh week, I knew I had many upper-year friends that I could ask about courses or any questions I had concerning academics and extra-curriculars. Therefore, if any university wants to make its incoming students feel welcome, it should establish good summer programs and develop a fun and informative Frosh week that will get students pumped about starting school and feel part of the university.

Even with all the friends I made during MyDef and Frosh week, it is hard to keep in touch with everyone and see everyone regularly. This is primarily due to the fact that not only is

Pillar a huge university, but it is also a difficult one that requires you to work really hard to stay in. The fact that Pillar does not allow its students to have a social life, like that of other universities in the city, can sometimes make you feel excluded from the complete university experience. Now, after almost completing my first-year, I understand why Pillar tries its best to make everyone feel welcome before classes start. Because once classes start, things get serious and there is no time to waste. You hear about other universities with reputations as being the "party school" or the "easy-peezy" school. Not Pillar. Pillar is a "work, work, and work" school! Pillar students don't really get the full university experience: while other students are partying, Pillar students are pulling all-nighters trying to finish that essay or study for that test. Partying is known to be part of the university experience, and since I don't involve myself in such activities and Pillar isn't a party school to begin with, it makes me feel like I am missing out on the complete university experience.

I Can. Period.

The North American educational system really frustrates me and I think we should adopt the European system. I don't like having to do a bachelor's degree as it seems like a waste of time and money. Why can't it be like the European system so that if you want to be a doctor or a lawyer, you can do so right after high-school? They're doing fine, aren't they? These schools take the best kids anyway, so it seems like we're suffering and wasting money instead of being able to start our future. OK, I got that out of my system: I'm really happy to be here, I guess I just want to reach my goal and want to get there faster and doing a bachelor's degree is another stage of unknown as I'm still not guaranteed a job or entrance to a professional school.

There will still be struggles and there have been struggles. Essay writing was difficult for me and often resulted in severe anxiety and tears. I often find that I have so much to say and

then have difficulty mapping it all out and then writing it down on paper to form a coherent argument. Truth be told, I dropped a class and am down to four in order to concentrate more fully on doing this well.

Money will likely be an issue going forward into law or graduate school. Although most of the students at Pillar are like me (I don't see too much variance; because we live in Canada, it's pretty much the same and you can't spot differences), the international students are pretty well off. It makes me angry at some of them at times because they have all this money and don't always work hard to succeed. I'm also aware that I don't have the same connection as other people whose parents were educated in Canada. I know some upper-year students who can help me, but establishing connections takes a lot of work and I should start – I've been lazy. The upper-year students have been an invaluable asset to my transition and my journey and I feel it would be great for every entering student to have a mentor that they identify with. The first-generation student programs seem to offer this well, but it's something all students would benefit from if they knew of the opportunity.

In high school, I was at the top of my class. Also, anytime we had presentations and debates in world issues or law class, people could see that I'm really into this stuff (i.e., world issues) and very passionate, often commenting that "you're going to be a diplomat" and do this and that. Everyone expected that I would go to university and do something big. If I told people that I was just going to go to college or just work, it would be a total shock (in such a case, I think my dad would find me a husband because I wasn't doing anything with my life). I guess it's more than just my parents' expectations that brought me here, it's also the expectations that others have projected onto me as I don't want to disappoint them. People feel that I'm going to do something big and I know that I can. I want to. I'm a Muslim girl and whatever I do, I can

make a difference. My parents couldn't do that as they didn't have the language or social skills. I do and can make people understand what my culture and religion is all about. I can show that, just because you're from a different country or different religion doesn't mean you can't make meaningful contributions as a citizen in a new country. It's important for me to succeed to show that the Syrian Muslim girl could do this.

Marina

“I like eating at restaurants, not working in them”

Exclusive Things Validate

My parents are so proud of me. Sometimes I'm too self-centred to notice, but I recently realized that they're really proud of me. It really makes me tear up thinking of this because I've worked really hard to get where I am, but I also realize that I'm making their dreams come true.

I've always wanted to achieve and like getting into elite things that verify this for me. I initially really wanted to go to McCabe University a few hours away as they have an Arts and Sciences program that accepts only 100 students each year versus Pillar University where more students are accepted. The McCabe program is competitive and elite and I wanted to be a part of it, but it would have meant living away from home and that wasn't in the cards. You see, I live in the same city as Pillar University and so it was the option I went with. It would mean living at home and having my parents pay for tuition. I have no idea where they get the money (I don't even want to ask as I know money is tight), but tuition and living costs are covered for Pillar University. When I first got into Pillar University, I googled it and realized that it was one of the best in the world. I told my parents, and, to this day, it's a badge of honour that they bring up at family gatherings. They're proud. And they should be given what they've done for me and our family.

My parents are from the Philippines. My dad, the son of rice farmers, went to university there to become an accountant (though I'm not sure if he completed). My mom worked a few odd jobs, but I'm not sure if she did any postsecondary. Life was good for my family there and we had our extended family around us. All my cousins went to university and most are in the sciences. They don't get me being in poli sci. The boys tended to go the pharmacy route and the girls went the Filipino stereotype of becoming nurses. Typical. Anyway, I grew up with university being an option, but it wasn't an expectation. Postsecondary was valued and so

college or anything would be fine for my family. The big thing that we were always told was to work hard so we can be our own bosses. We were also told that, "hey, it's your life, so if you want to shit on it, you can." However, the words were different than what was actually meant.

Though my parents said it's my life, it's really theirs. They put a lot of pressure on me to do well. Even though university is not better than the other options (and there are many success stories in the subway about the colleges and jobs) and there are different paths, I saw university as the only path because of them. If I dropped out, they would criticize me for wasting the little money we had. If I chose college, they would be disappointed (as an aside, my brother is a great artist and wants to go to college, but my parents, now knowing that Pillar University is one of the best in the world, are pushing him there to be like me). I work hard so that they'll not only be proud, but also stop nagging me. I know that if I work hard, there will be personal gain and I won't have to worry about my future and I don't want to struggle like my parents did. I've always wished I was more upper-class, especially to buy clothes, but my parents are both working-class and work as managers at a restaurant and constantly say, "work really hard in school so you don't have to work in a restaurant." I hope I'm not working-class in the future; I like eating at restaurants, not working in them (ironically, I do work at a fast food chicken place during the year to help pay for university – I hate it). I have an opportunity that not many people have and I'm appreciative of this and am going to make something of myself so that I'm not working-class. There's also pressure for me to do well to support my family when they're older. It's something that I want to do; they're family and sacrificed for me and I want to provide for them when I'm older, but sometimes I just want them to stop their nagging and say, "get off my back…it's not my responsibility yet!" I think it's an immigrant thing, to support parents into old age and not put them into a retirement home. My White friends don't get this.

Mean Girls

Going to an all-girls school was hell. Utter hell and I needed out. All the stereotypes are true: when you put a bunch of girls together there's intense judgment and cattiness and cliques – I just couldn't handle it. Especially this girl named Fiona: she was an utter bitch.

Because of my parents, I knew I wanted to go to university, but wasn't really sure where or for what, to the point that I was rushed to pick a university in grade 12. This was different for other girls like Fiona and Edina. Fiona talked about university all the time and how she was going to university and that she was going to be a high-powered corporate lawyer and pop out two kids and live the dream. The part that bothered me the most was that I knew this was likely possible for her and not me because her family came from money. I'm sure her parents went to university, but like I said, she's a bitch and very pretentious. One time she asked me where I was going to go to university. I froze as I had no idea at all. I had heard of this university called Royal University and just quickly responded that I wanted to go to Royal. Fiona quickly snapped back with, "well, why do you want to go there? You know that Royal is like a slut and everyone gets in?" I hate Fiona, but can't escape her as she also goes to Pillar.

And then there was Edina. She was this White girl from a neighboring city and was totally the type from the movie Mean Girls. She had everything handed to her (unlike me where I've had to work for everything) and lived in one of those types of big houses with a pool in the back yard. The other lucky thing for her is that her mom works at Pillar University and she gets tuition for free: it doesn't seem right that she gets it for free and I have to work, when I could probably benefit more from that. I think she's an airhead and fucking dumb and doesn't work very hard. There's another time that she and her friends made up nasty rumours about a bisexual girl in our class; that she was making out with another girl. I guess that's a bonus of coming

from very little; I know that I have to work hard to get anywhere. It's based on merit and if you work hard, you will succeed; if you don't get what you want, it means you didn't work hard enough.

Anything You Can Do…

My dad told me that I'd encounter pretentious people at university…and he was right. He told me about a time when he was in university (I can't remember if he finished or not, he was supposed to be an accountant because he was good with math, but I think that crumbled) and was sitting around with a group of guys and they were talking about their parents and money. When it came to him, he said that his father was a barber and that his mom didn't really work, but sold rice cakes (a common thing for low-class people to do). He wasn't embarrassed and I'm not embarrassed either. I don't think I should be embarrassed. I'm competitive and things like this just make me work harder…though it is frustrating. It did also make me anxious about university, especially making friends.

As I mentioned, high-school was not great and I didn't get very involved. I was like "screw that" being nervous and not putting myself out there shit: I was going to university and was going to be myself and not hide anymore. The one thing I was most nervous about was making friends and wondering if my effort would be enough for people to like me. Sometimes when I try too much I can get awkward. It's true. During Frosh, I was very outgoing and sometimes I looked awkward, but I didn't care; people weren't judging and no one really seemed to care – I didn't! I loved the screaming and the parties and making new friends. It was so different than what I thought Pillar would be like – because it is so academic, I figured everyone would be so into studying and being serious. I was at this one frat party during Frosh (it was my first frat party and I stayed overnight in the residences so my parents wouldn't know) and it was

very cool, until this one loser came up to me and started grinding. Ewww. The sight of him drunk, googly-eyed, and alcoholy with the loud music and sticky, beer carpets was revolting! I told him I had a boyfriend and he just continued to grind, asking, "well, he's not here now, is he?!" Ewww. I left. I went by to Campus College residence where I crashed in the common room (though I was admitted to Pillar University and placed in Campus College, I sometimes wish I was in Gabriel College as most of the friends I made through class are from there. For some reason, the people I met during Frosh, we were unable to keep in touch…oh well). I wished I lived in residence, even to be closer to the library, but we only have money for tuition…I'm still grateful to be here.

My boyfriend, David, didn't go to Pillar, though he wishes he did as he really wanted the university experience, with parties and residence. His family is very well-off, but comes from a history of being in the trades, so he felt that he should be going to college and went to a nearby one. He may transfer to university, but who knows. It was ironic because, during one of my philosophy learning communities (smaller cohort for discussions), I met this guy Roy and we hit it off: he had a Drake (musical band) T-shirt on and I asked him about it and we started talking about music and realized that we loved the same things (the reason why meeting him was ironic was because he was a friend of David's – small world right? A lot of the friends I met ended up knowing David). Roy was very easy going, approachable, and easy to talk to. He doesn't come from a well-off family, which is so different from another guy we both met, whose name is Luigi. Luigi would keep complaining about how he doesn't qualify for OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) because his parents' income is too high and so he has to work. Biggest first-world problem ever! I hate people that brag about stuff. It's great if you have means and your own achievements, but I feel that people try to undermine me and I have my own

accomplishments. There's another girl from a suburb city, who goes to a satellite campus of Pillar. She's irrelevant. She goes on about how their campus is building all these new facilities and she likes to think that it's more prestigious. I say, "When you see pictures about Pillar, you see the main campus, not yours," but never actually share that. She also likes to think she's really high-class because she has a really big house in her hometown, which is really a small town…it doesn't count when it's a small town! As an aside, she also has to pay rent, which leaves me confused because my family would never make family do that; I just don't get it.

Anyway, back to my boyfriend David. He has a lot of friends and they're all so well-off and I usually don't feel like I belong. You know those picturesque homes where there's a shiny, polished, spiraling wooden staircase with a loft where everyone takes those cliché prom pictures. All his friends have houses like that. It was great because, for prom, we had many places we could take pictures and finally chose to have them done at my boyfriend's place, which made me feel more at ease. I also wished I had a cliché prom staircase – that, or I wish I looked better in those pictures as my hair was all over the place and no one told me! His friends are very upper-middle-class and are very free-spirited. They're also always able to go to the latest concerts and buy nice clothes. They all talk to me and are really nice, but it doesn't go much further than that. They're so free and able to talk about so many things and I just want to go home and study as I don't get to go to all those concerts. They try to include me anyway. They're also all so talented and good at something and I'm kind of the jealous type and want it all. They can sing and dance and I wish I had that artistic ability, while I'm like, "well, I like to read books and I can write an essay." I do feel guilty that I'm jealous. It's wrong to be jealous, but to top it all off, they're all also so attractive. I usually pretend that I don't mind: they're so nice and don't deserve my petty bullshit in the corner.

I do get into these moods quite a bit. For example, there are times when I hear that someone goes to Royal University and I'll respond with, "well, that's nice," with my intention being to say that "well, Pillar is way better." There's another person I follow on Twitter, who goes to another "university" in the city called Oatson, and she was complaining the other day about having to write a five page paper for philosophy class. "Must be nice," I thought as I have to write a 10-page paper. Sometimes, I wish I was at college or one of these less prestigious universities as things would be easier, but then I realize that it's not me. It's not prideful, but I like knowing that I'm in an exclusive place that not everyone can go. I know that's not the case as other people choose what they need. I'm not an attention seeker, but I like that recognition that I worked hard to get this.

Philosophy

Part of my challenge with university is philosophy class as it didn't start out great. For example, in our philosophy learning community, we were doing ice-breakers to try to get to know each other. The learning community was great and we had mentors, which helped make this large university seem smaller. The great thing with the mentors was that, even if you didn't talk to them, it felt nice to know that they were there to help (they were all so nice and outgoing). During one of the ice-breakers there was this girl, Wilma, and she announced that she was from Flah-ryda. Then, we were to name famous people who went to Pillar and she mentioned her dad! I couldn't help but think, "no one knows your dad you stupid bitch," but again, restrained myself. She was more upper-class and presented herself as very rich. I also could tell that she was intelligent, but I just got the feel from her and knew that we wouldn't get along.

The professor is brilliant, which also means that he's very pompous and arrogant and always highlights everything he's done to advance the field of philosophy. It's intimidating and

I will never, ever go and ask him a question as I don't want my sense of intelligence shattered. There are students in the class that do talk to the professor outside of class and even during lectures. They are keeners and always seem to know exactly what to say to make the professor excited. They intimidate me because they know so much and I would never dare say something for fear that I'd say something wrong and the professor and the keener-students would think I'm stupid. I do love the subject, but it doesn't love me back and, on my first test, I got a 58. It drives me to do better because I love it and want to be a lawyer, but it's hard. It's also hard because other people in the class seem to get it so easily. We talk a lot in our learning communities; they're intended for discussion and debate and have only 20 students. Everyone is arrogant and talks down. I don't know how to describe it and you just need to be in the class. All I know is that I'm not going to associate with them: I hate when other people pretend to be better than me and want to say, "hey, we go to the same school, remember? Save it for someone else!" For example, I forget what the context was exactly, but I remember it to be about the World Bank and I commented on how they create policies, but that the policies don't really help the nation, which is true. This one girl then just verbally assaulted my point with, "but actually…!" She did bring up a good point, but was talking down to me like I was wrong. I disagreed with what the girl said, but never spoke to this. I'll usually make a point each class (to get the participation points), but when it comes to disagreement, I usually don't fight back. Another time, we were talking about the conflict in Syria and I couldn't recall any other details other than the fact that there was a conflict in Syria. I just remember thinking after, "how do they know so much about Syria?" I barely have enough time to read the school stuff and yet they have all this time to read the news. I feel that a lot of people in my learning community are upper-class because how informed they are on worldly issues: I imagine that they have this time

to explore interests (because they don't have to work like me) and sit at the table and have intellectual conversations with their parents (who are also well educated and help to teach them). Their parents likely don't have to ask them what fascism means (my dad is very intelligent and I don't want to talk him down, but he doesn't know this stuff the same way). I don't like looking dumb in public and don't want my intelligence broken apart, so I'm usually cautious about what I say and when I contribute. I just aim for the participation mark and know it'll all work out, cause I'm intelligent, am working hard, and at the same school with these other higher-class people and we're all going to be equal with the same degree.

Also, update: My parents want me to apply for OSAP and take advantage of being a "Canadian student" (whatever that means??)!!

Katrina

“You know there’s a lot of pressure when you know your parents moved countries so that their children can study”

Education is the Key

My parents were born and raised in India and, to this day, feel pride towards their heritage (a pride that they instilled in me and my brother very young). While in India, both my parents furthered their education. My dad went to Bombay, where he completed his undergraduate and master's degrees and found work immediately after as an accountant. My mom took a gap year after she completed high-school because her father passed away, but then she continued to university to complete an undergraduate degree in arts. Once they were established in India, they had me; however, a great work opportunity for my dad then took us to Saudi Arabia. Soon after, my brother was born. We were both raised in Saudi Arabia and enjoyed the culture and the people. The education system was also quite good and we were used to writing exams and doing a considerable amount of homework throughout elementary school (I remember how my mom would sit down with me during exam time and go through things because school was important). Both my parents valued education and nurtured this passion in both me and my brother: it was expected that we would go to university because the belief was that, if you're educated, you're going to be treated better, get a better job, and be around smarter people. I don't want to not have a university degree and have to do normal labour jobs (that said, I also realize that I'll have to do more than just a bachelor's degree as it's not a guaranteed path to a job, so I'm also looking at a master's program at Pillar for when I'm done. I'd like to pay for this on my own, but I also know that my dad will want to help).

I remember a story that my dad told me about my cousin that always reminded me how important education was to him. My dad's sister passed away from cancer and left behind a two year-old daughter (my cousin). Her father didn't think she needed to go to university or be educated, so my dad and another sibling came and took my cousin for "a drive," but then took

her to a boarding school that was known for its academics. It was insane and I remember my mom once commenting that, "she's not your daughter and you can't just do that with someone," but it showed how serious education was for my family. Even during family gatherings you can tell that everyone is educationally-oriented. It's the reason we had to move from Saudi Arabia, because they don't have universities there that non-citizens can attend. We moved to Canada about eight years ago and the sole reason was so that my brother and I could go to university. Higher education was not optional – you know there's a lot of pressure when you know your parents moved countries so that their children can study.

The move to Canada wasn't easy. When we were in Saudi Arabia, the accounting company that my dad worked for gave us a house, tickets to travel, and a car (in addition to his salary), so we really only had to spend money on food. My mom also worked as an educator and she started her own school for children. When we came from Saudi Arabia, the currency was OK, but it wasn't great and, even though dad found an accounting job, it wasn't as good as they had there. He ended up going back to Saudi Arabia for a year and worked from there. That time was rough. It wasn't a situation where we were trying to "make ends meet," but we had to adapt for a while until things got better, which they did!

It also wasn't easy culturally, particularly as I wanted to do things that other Canadian students were doing. For example, I remember in grade six there was a three day overnight camp trip and everyone was going. My dad was pretty relaxed about it and was OK with me going, but my mom was a different story. She didn't understand the purpose of an overnight trip with a school and kept going on about how she never had overnight trips. There was a lot of screaming and crying as I really wanted to go and she finally broke. The ride for my brother has

been a lot easier since I gave my parents a crash course on Canadian culture through my screaming and crying: I hope he appreciates my efforts one day.

Decisions

University was stressed, so I never really knew any alternatives like colleges or other programs. That said, I never really started thinking about where I'd go or what I wanted to do until the summer before grade 12. I was so ready to leave high school by then and would read a lot about it on Facebook from friends who were a year older and were experiencing their first year. I was particularly looking forward to the idea of not having a set schedule of when to do readings and stuff like in high school; I was looking forward to being independent. What scared me most was knowing that my marks were going to drop.

The biggest decision I had to make was whether I would go into the sciences or international relations. Both were appealing, but I didn't know which was going to be right for me. I ended up choosing sciences because it seemed right, until it came to first semester midterms. My first biology midterm mark was in the 50s and my organic chemistry mark was in the high 40s, which was devastating as it really made me second guess if I was in the right program (I didn't even think I'd pass the courses) for my future and even if I was at the right university. I chose Pillar, because of the prestige it has, being one of the top in the world, and because it would enable me to live at home and not have to work; however, I felt that others were having an easier time. I would talk to friends at other universities and they seemed to be doing pretty well, so I thought that I chose wrong because I would have higher marks if I went to a different university. I was feeling a bit frustrated with my parents because they wanted me to stay close to home (ideally live at home) because a lot of other people that my parents know had their children stay at home. I totally appreciate the price difference, but getting involved is so

much harder when you're commuting. In high-school, I got myself really involved in clubs or whatever; just because I've done it for so long, I wanted to keep myself involved. As a commuter it's hard because you have to keep in mind the commute times: unlike people who take the train and have to remember the schedule, I'm a bit better off because I take the bus and it comes all the time. It's a hassle though because, even if I want to go to the gym, I need to plan ahead and can't just drop into my room for things. Another part of living in residence is that you can network so much more easily and can just walk down the hall to either get help on a project or just hang out with friends. Not living in residence does pose some disadvantages, particularly the networking aspect and potential job connections in the future. That's what I think about the most since my parents don't really have those here.

Another disadvantage of not having parents attend university in Canada is that the whole environment here is different. My friends' parents are able to help them navigate the system and talk to them about the importance of joining clubs and stuff. My parents would have attended many cultural socials, but they don't know about other types of ways to get involved and, therefore, also don't value them. Those opportunities to get involved are so important to learning skills and networking and I wish my parents understood that more. Even when I was in grade six, I remember wanting to participate in events like Free the Children, Vow of Silence, and the 30-hour Famine and, while my dad found it interesting, mom was like, "what's the point with this stuff?! You could spend more time studying!" Essentially, I still have to figure things out on my own, but others have their parents to go to and those parents get it. I'm glad that my brother has had an easier time with everything though.

No Difference

The great thing about university life is that everyone is generally the same. In high-school there were the cool kids and cliques and stuff. Other than parents maybe not being able to help with things, people are generally the same. It's different here because, back home in India you can see the super rich and the not-so-rich: it's obvious with the types of cars they drive and all the nice things they have. Here, everyone wears the same sort of clothing and does the same kind of things; it's almost like everyone is the same class because of tuition and all the fees. My situation would likely be somewhere in the middle: it's not like I can go out on a $1,000 spending spree, but at the same time, I'm not struggling with textbooks and have enough to go out and have fun with friends. Most of my friends are in the same boat as me; we're all pretty comfortable and are able to go out for lunch and stuff.

There have been times that I felt like I didn't fit in and it was mostly about grades. When you get marks back that are low (especially those midterm marks where I didn't feel I would even pass the course) and you find out that everyone else is doing better, then it's an issue. I remember wondering why I wasn't as smart as them to also get high marks, or why I wasn't at a university that was easier. I've also felt like I didn't belong during Frosh and wondered if I wasn't outgoing enough.

On Labour Day, there was a scavenger hunt and I was in a small group with a leader and three other first-years. One girl was also in life sciences, but I didn't get the feeling that we'd ever make plans to go out for lunch or anything. If I met someone from Indian heritage, things would have been easier because we likely have the same things that we can talk about. That's not always true, but I was hoping I'd have more in common with the girls in my group. They were definitely different and it made me uncomfortable. They would party every weekend and

do this and that (things that I'm not even fully comfortable thinking about, let alone saying), but I'm not necessarily that sort of person. There was another time during Frosh where we went to a club in the city. I went with a group of friends – well kinda – I knew one of them well and just met the other. Even though I was at the club and had fun, it's not something I willingly – not something I want to – do all the time; I'm not comfortable with that type of environment. A lot of people there are more open and that makes me uncomfortable. When we were there, one of the girls was dancing on a speaker and showing quite a bit off to everyone and then this guy came up and then two minutes later they were on the couch doing their thing. Most of the people there do that sort of thing and I felt awkward and uncomfortable. Most of the people do that sort of thing, so I felt that I shouldn't even be going to those places.

At the end of Frosh, there was a formal called "red and white" and I planned on going with some friends. Because I commute, I planned on bringing my things and then getting ready at a friend's room. I didn't really want to go, but felt that I should since everyone was going and thought I might miss out on something. I was tired and didn't feel like bringing my stuff with me, so I just decided to not go and it felt like the right decision…until I saw the pictures and thought, "damn, that looked like fun!" Early in first year, I really felt alone. I do wish that I had joined a mentor program, but didn't really see this information. There's so much advertising during the beginning of school that most of it gets lost out of context. Mentoring would have been great, particularly to know ways to get involved and to understand the system as my parents didn't know.

I did find some events that were more "me." One of the girls I met during Frosh was going to this cultural club event and she invited a few other girls she knew. I didn't know the other girls, but was able to chat with them on Facebook as we were all part of the same message

thread. The girl I knew cancelled at the last minute, but I felt like I knew the other girls, so I went anyway. The event was a simple ice-cream and board games night and we spent the time chatting about each other's programs. There were upper-year students there and we were also able to talk to them about their programs and how they got involved. It was a good night, but got even better. On the way home, I checked my marks for a test and I did well on it. It really felt like everything was coming together. I thought that I had it all because I had a great time socially and there was promise that things were going to be good academically.

Some other things really started to come together for me toward the end of first-year. I came across a Global Health program that I wasn't aware of before and realize that it's perfect for my interest in both the sciences and international relations. I also applied for a job with a global health magazine and was so happy to have been offered the position. It's one of the only things I've ever applied for and felt good to be accepted based on my merit. In the role as Co-Director Events, I'm responsible for planning activities to discuss issues published in the magazine, through roundtables or cocktail parties for example. The people involved with the magazine have been great and we can have great conversations and be supports as we're all interested in the same thing. I'm definitely looking forward to being a part of this club and focusing my program more.

Dani

“I will also always be there to support my family through my success and make whatever sacrifices that I need to make life easier for them”

If That's What You Want: I Support You

I'm actually in my third year at Pillar University, which has made my family very proud. You see, my parents are from Hong Kong and never attended anything beyond high school there. Though they never attended postsecondary, they valued education and, when I was four years old, we moved to Canada because my parents wanted to provide me with better opportunities for education. It's kinda weird in a way: they valued education, but didn't really have any expectation that I attend university. My mom was concerned with me getting high marks in high-school (I remember the various incentives she would give me, particularly shopping money as I love to buy glittery things), while my dad was more care-free and didn't care what I did, provided that it was what I wanted and that I had fun doing it.

So, growing up, I knew education was important and that I'd be supported doing whatever I chose. That said, when I was growing up, I also knew that money was a problem and, when it came to education or money, the latter was more immediate. For example, my grandpa would tell me lots of stories when I was younger (he lived with us and still does), which I always enjoyed because he'd be in a cozy sweater and have me on his lap – it was time for just me and him. He told me that my grandma really wanted to send my mom to Australia or somewhere for a better education, but with two younger sisters, they couldn't afford that luxury as they needed the money. It's the reason why my mom worked after high school. Grandpa also wasn't able to go to university or college; though he loved learning, he had six other siblings and needed to work to keep the family afloat (even to this day, with him almost 80, we have our granddaughter-grandpa time and it's more of an intellectual nature – I'm glad we have so much in common after all this time).

My parents also struggled to "make ends meet" and I remember my dad working several odd jobs (sacrificing sleep and time with the family) in order to make money. Dad didn't have a profession, but had many jobs all over the place like being a taxi driver, and delivering newspapers. My mom also worked many jobs (she currently works doing bookings with a travel agency). When I was seven or eight, they had a little supermarket in our neighborhood, but had to move because our lease ended. I didn't know details as I was young, but I knew that it didn't work out well (it was a struggle) and remember my parents fighting about money. It wasn't a good childhood experience. All of my friends at the time were wealthy and well-educated: they would ask what my parents did and I didn't know how to explain it. That said, I'm very proud of what my parents did for me and my family and will always be grateful. I will also always be there to support my family through my success and make whatever sacrifices that I need to make life easier for them.

My dad passed away in the summer before my grade 12 year (four days before the start of the year, in fact) and my memory of him fuels me, particularly his immense support for me to just do what I wanted to do. Even when I practiced piano, he would just lie there and listen and be supportive. It's what I miss sometimes, but I can always hear him say "If this is what you want to do, then I'm there to support you." Thanks dad.

A Fish in the Pacific Ocean

I do feel that I would have disappointed my family if I didn't go to university. I remember my grandpa saying that he thought I was pretty bright and that "if you can go to university, I think you should; there is a difference between not wanting to go and not being able to go." They wouldn't have been disappointed if I didn't go to university because I didn't want

to or didn't feel I was ready or able to succeed – they would be disappointed if I didn't go because they believe in my ability.

I became interested in university as I had older cousins who went and most of my friends were going as well. In high school, a lot of emphasis was placed on university education and there were a lot of presentations about universities (I don't even recall any about college), as early at grade 10. It started to feel natural.

Most of the stories I heard about university were scary. I remember my grade 12 counsellor telling me that I'd be a little fish and that image really stayed with me in that I'd be a small fish (or even a number) just existing and swimming upstream. It didn't help that my first-year biology professor also talked about how there were so many students and they're not going to follow-up if we're failing: I never went to a professor with questions as they are so intimidating and so higher up there. My cousins also said that you don't really make friends in university and your true friends are the ones you made in high school. Essentially, I was told that university was the Pacific Ocean and that I was just a little guppy fish that didn't matter in the grand scheme of things.

When I got my offer to Pillar University, I was overwhelmed. What made things worse was that my grade 12 counsellor told me that Pillar University is one of the largest and most prestigious in Canada. I was really scared and went home and Googled how big the campus was, but by then there was nothing I could do. What made it better was that I was accepted at Pillar University's Smallville Campus, but would still be one of those little fish.

Flying from Vancouver to Ontario, I remember feeling sick. Not only was university a foreign place, but I had recently lost my dad, was moving across the country, and knew no one from high school to be my social safety net. Moving into residence was also traumatic, but my

mom stayed strong and kept things short, saying, "You have to take care of yourself and go and learn to do laundry." Oh crap. I didn't know how to do laundry! After a tearful goodbye, we parted ways and another chapter began. When I think back on this moment, I think about how strong my mother was (not just at that moment, but throughout her life and into today where she still serves as my rock). My mom worked for her family instead of getting an education. My mom picked up everything and left Hong Kong so that I could have better opportunities. My mom struggled (so did my father) to provide for us. My mom lost her husband. My mom encouraged me to go abroad and take advantage of opportunities and to live and grow and learn and have fun. My mom is self-less and I will always remember this. Thanks mom!

My mom left and I was alone in a way I had never felt before, because I had always been surrounded by family and friends. And now I was in this place that was foreign: not just a huge city, but also university (it didn't help that, when I went to my first class at 8am, the prof kicked out another student. It was my first class and someone was kicked out! That was really scary and I was like, "oh my gosh, we really don't matter if he can just kick us out…and on the first day!").

Being a social person, I was also anxiously awaiting my next friend to walk into the room and; although my roommate, Adelaide, did walk in and was a nice person, we didn't hit it off initially as she seemed obnoxious (nor did we remain friends). Nonetheless, I started talking to her and learned that she was from a nearby town, Watergate, which is only 120 kilometers away. Being excited to explore the new world of university, I told her about all these things that I saw for us to get involved and she curtly responded that she didn't want to: that her parents were accountants with a large firm and that all she needs is to get a degree and then she's set. She then asked what my parents did.

Back in high school, I would have intentionally avoided such questions. Even when she asked it made me uncomfortable and I felt that she was being too nosy for someone I had just met as it would also mean sharing about my dad passing away the year before. I was not comfortable. Regardless, I started telling her my story and she did the token, "I'm sorry to hear about your father," but became fixated on the status of my parents, going so far as to ask how I could afford to be at university. I responded that "we have our ways" (though, to this day, I'm not sure where my mom gets the money from) and then started talking about the seminars I was participating in; seminars for other first-generation students. Adelaide was interested in these and I told her that they are similar to the other first-year learning groups, but are specifically for first-generation students and that the Peer Academic Leaders were also first-generation students, which is nice because they have the same experience as me. An interesting introduction to university, but looking back it makes me feel like I worked hard for what I have.

I still see Adelaide and am working on a project with her. The more I get to know her, the more I realize that I worked a lot harder to get where I am. I feel like I have more of a drive to do better, whereas for her, she's just doing it because she should. She doesn't go to class and always asks for my notes, saying that she overslept and couldn't go to class. She currently works off campus and always brags about how it's great to have all this extra money that she can just spend. She's smart and a really nice person, but has had a lot of things handed to her and it's frustrating as I had to put in all this time and effort to get what she was just handed. She also knew so much about university: at least, in terms of advice from someone who has been through all this. Her mom told her that she didn't have to go to all classes and pay attention, as long as there is someone who has class notes to borrow, and to study a few days before an exam, and she'll be set. Adelaide was not my only encounter with differences of social class.

I remember one time after accounting class I was talking with a friend; I was near tears as I couldn't do accounting. She said that she could help as her mom was an accountant. She then asked what mine did and I told her that my mom worked with a travel agency. She was shocked and said, "That's surprising, I would never have known." I don't know why she put it like that. I guess it's because I fit in, which is good, because I try to fit in. It may also be because there's an assumption that if you're in university, then your parents must have also. It's kinda true in the case of my friends where their parents didn't go to university and they also aren't in university.

Being first-generation is about feeling different and noticing certain things. It's not about being able to tell whether someone is first-generation or not, but it's being able to tell who are from more privileged backgrounds. I place most people as upper-middle-class and don't know right away if their parents went to university or not, though I assume they did. The first things I notice is all the resources, such as nice things, nice clothes, and being able to go shopping and to concerts. A lot of people seem to have nice things. The talk is also different, not sure how to describe it, but it comes across as smart, confident, and "higher." I've never felt sad; I just think it's nice that their parents were able to buy them things and I'm grateful to my parents for the opportunity to attend university.

I've also never actually felt excluded at my school; however I think that at times I do feel like I don't fit in. For example, even though I'm in the commerce program, I feel that I don't necessarily connect with the people in my program. Some people are really nice, but I don't feel like I would be friends with them had it been another situation besides sharing classes. A lot of my classmates have families who have connections with large companies, or their families are knowledgeable in terms of the jobs that are provided for them after graduation. I don't always feel like I can contribute to those conversations.

I think the lowest point in my university experience was my inability to balance school work with social life back in first year. At times, I felt extremely alone because I didn't feel like I was caught up with school work, yet I also wasn't making friends with whom I felt like I could bond/share my feelings with. You know when you walk into a classroom and see those wild equations and you experience utter bewilderment? That's kinda how I felt…LOST! But not everything about my first-year was gloom and doom.

A First-Generation Community

I really didn't fit in during first-year, though I did feel that I belonged at university. The fitting in trouble was more because I was very studious in first-year and didn't know of all the opportunities to get involved. I also wanted to focus on doing well academically because it was hard and I was committed to my goal – intensely focused on my goal – to get a university degree. As a result, I made friends here and there (and some I never saw consistently), so I never had a group that knew each other. I would go to class, but didn't have the social aspect of going for lunch or going out. It wasn't good. I felt lonely and didn't feel I had people to fall back on or support me. There was a time I met someone in class and she got to know me and my roommate really well. She was a commuter student and my roommate was more social, so she became better friends with my roommate and "picked her" over me.

My FirstGen group was also pretty small. I made some friends, but didn't really connect and don't really speak to them now. There was one friend, Anil, that was also a first-generation student (and one of the first-generation students, like me, whose parents never attended university, whether in Canada or abroad), who was very easy to get along with. We got to be better friends because we had more in common than other people: his parents, like mine, didn't have any knowledge about university, didn't have a lot of money to freely flow, and didn't have

the networks or connections that so many other students had. It was good to have this connection, and it sparked a desire in me that connecting people to other people was important and something I would be good at. At the end of first-year, I applied to be a Peer Academic Leader with the FirstGen program and things changed for me – I didn't know anyone else applying, but wanted to be more involved and liked what they were doing and wanted to do the same for future students.

I was ecstatic when I was hired because I was excited for meeting other like-minded leaders and to attend training with them. Training occurred in August before my second-year and, for the first time, I felt like I really belonged. There were about 20 of us and we spent a week together that required lots of group activities and ice-breakers to get to know each other. My favourite ice-breaker was the one where we were asked to share a funny story from over the summer. My story was about getting a car. It was a happy experience to have a car of my own as I never thought I'd have one until I was a working person in the real word, so I took a lot of pride in the car. That is, for the few hours that I had it because, during my first fun-ride, I crashed it. It was an accident, easily fixable, but I felt guilty about it. That being said, it was a great conversation starter, and a few other peers started sharing their unfortunate auto accidents. Some much sillier than mine! Another activity was to develop our presentation skills. We had to put our hand in a plastic bag and grab an item that we couldn't see. As soon as the item came into view, we had to present the object to the group. I can't remember my item or the story I made up, but I remember not feeling embarrassed and laughing along with everyone. It was a good memory.

It's interesting to note, however, that there are differences in the students in the FirstGen program. In my first year (and I noted that it was a small group) all the first-generation students

admitted were those whose parents never attended university (whether in Canada or abroad). In my second year (when I was a Peer Academic Leader), the definition was expanded and defined as any students whose parents didn't attend university in Canada. This increased the number of first-generation students in the program (and who would qualify to be a Peer Academic Leader), but the differences became apparent. I feel that those whose parents attended university outside of Canada are still more knowledgeable of the environment and also grew up with university as an expectation and natural progression. I wonder if these first-generation students as Peer Academic Leaders (those whose parents attended university outside Canada), really understand what it's like to be a first-generation student and not know anything about university. Another thing about the program is that the opportunities get confusing for students. I remember not knowing of all the opportunities to get involved because there's so much competing for our attention. With the FirstGen program, it's exactly the same as the First Year Seminars (all the sessions and workshops are the same), with the exception that it's only for first-generation students. This confused me and other students as they would ask why I was going there and why it was different. I think it would be better to simply have a First Year Seminar program for all students, but connect students to mentors (e.g., Peer Academic Leaders) based on our background. So in my case, I'd probably choose to be paired with a first-generation student (whose parents didn't attend university) as I feel that's important. Have these Seminars for workshops and learning and then connect us to clubs for the social. Then it becomes much simpler.

Those comments aside, it's the first-time I felt connected and really enjoyed being a Peer Academic Leader. This year I coordinate the Peer Academic Leaders and have less interaction with the first-year students. It's a different perspective, but it's helped me grow in a very

different way and one that I'll never forget. Especially because, and this is probably my highest point of my university experience, a first-year student of mine last year when I was a Peer Academic Leader (who is now in her second –year) came up to me and told me how helpful I was to her when I shared with her my experiences at school. It definitely made me feel that connecting students is important and that my work is fulfilling!

A Note to Self

I'm currently in my third-year and will be leaving the FirstGen program in order to pursue other opportunities that Pillar University has to offer. It's been such a memorable and transformative experience, that I'd like to take a moment and share some advice with my former self (and maybe with future students also). It would go as follows:

Dear Dani:

University life is exactly like how you imagined it to be. NOT. It's not at all like the movies, where there is nice weather year round and everyone studies at the courtyard, as students ride their bicycles to class and others play Frisbee during their spare time. No, but neither is university going to be like how your older cousins told you it would be like. There are spare times that you can go for a nice quick coffee with friends and not every weekend are parties or all-nighters before finals. It's a combination of both. You'll first need to grow up quickly because first-years are NOT the bomb on campus. In fact, if you act like you know everything, people will not be too keen on meeting you. You should be open to new experiences and making new friends. Get involved. Yes, it is hard, but it'll be nice to get to see familiar faces in class and on campus. The campus that you chose is a small, nature-esque place so don't worry about getting lost on campus. The lectures are hard and the classes are huge, but it's ok. It's

an experience. No matter how difficult a midterm or a final exam may seem, you can always pull through. Getting a bad grade is a part of the university experience. Getting an excellent grade is also a part of the university experience. All-nighters DO happen, but it's ok. Handing in late assignments will happen, but you will be doing your best.

I think the reason why you believe that university is scary is because no one has prepared you for it. You didn't have parents who went to university and your cousins, whom you were not too close with, are your only source of information in regards to university life. Even with this one source, it is easy to make assumptions. Five years ago, I would have told you that university is super scary because, well, you barely were able to get to classes in your high school, how in the world would you feel like you belong in university? It was a scary thought to know that you would be a number, and professors wouldn't know who you are. But looking back, this seems silly. Just like high school you'll adjust to the setting. No one you knew went to your high school, so university is rather similar. It's a new setting and everyone is out not knowing what's going on. Just be yourself and try everything.

Today, I can say that university is sometimes stressful, but for the most part, very fun and exciting. I get to meet people every day, and get to work with the most amazing crew ever. There are times where we can incorporate fun into our stressful lives. For example, last weekend was Science Formal. Now, even though I am not in science a majority of my friends are, and so, it was very nice to get dressed up and experience a formal event. Never in a million years would I imagine making friends in a program of my program's size, let alone, the sciences. It's a part of the experience that I wouldn't

change because, despite the fact that it was intimidating at first to reach out and meet new people, it's rewarding. People know who you are and remember you.

So, for my five year ago self, don't worry about going into university. Everyone around you is scared just like you, but as long as you act friendly and aren't afraid to try new things, you should be fine (just don't procrastinate and end up pulling all-nighters…though that's also an experience).

Chapter Five: Resonant Narrative Threads

Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani's narrative accounts of their journeys towards university were presented in Chapter Four: the narrative accounts reflect the temporal, personal, and social nature of their experiences, situate the experience within various contexts, and include insights into how they made meaning from the experiences. Although the focus of Chapter Six will be discussing the social significance of these narratives within the existing literature, this chapter will focus on discerning *resonant narrative threads* (Clandinin, 2013). As participants reflected on their experience, oriented towards the past, present, and future (and even simultaneously spanning the temporal continuum), they reconnected with formative stories during their journey – a sense of wideawakeness (Clandinin, 2013). Indeed, some of these narrative threads garnered quite a bit of energy that they warrant additional teasing out, particularly because of the resonances across all four narrative accounts.

That resonant narrative threads surfaced across the storied lives should not be surprising; it is concomitant with Bourdieu's (1984) notion of "the set of agents who are placed in homogeneous conditions of existence imposing homogeneous conditionings and producing homogeneous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices" (p. 101). Resonant narrative threads refer to patterns or reverberations across narrative accounts that, while difficult to discern, open up "particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and place through an individual's narrative account" (Clandinin, 2013). I identified these threads during the stage where I engaged with the interim research text: I reflected upon the narrative accounts and began sensing some reverberation across time and stories, particularly towards childhood. I then played with the interim text to organize elements from the narrative accounts around these threads and they appeared to gravitate into place.

The threads are not intended to serve as macro-themes or generalizations across the narratives (though *conceptual inferences* [Riessman, 2008] or wonderings [Clandinin, 2013] will be presented in Chapter Seven). Instead, the threads are presented to illustrate that resonant narrative threads exist and condition the habitus as a result of similar conditions, thereby shaping how the participants' experience the transition into and through university. Table 2 (Resonant Narrative Threads Explained) overviews the seven narrative threads with a brief description of each:

Table 2

Resonant Narrative Threads Explained

Number	Thread Name	Description
One	Do Well in School: Education is Important	Family stories about the importance of education and storied future roles as postsecondary graduates
Two	They Work Hard for the Money	Family stories of struggle and sacrifice and storied futures to be socially more
Three	Others Have it Easier	Awareness of class differences and storying that students from more privileged backgrounds have more capital
Four	I'm at a Better Place*	Storying Pillar University as possessing higher cultural and symbolic capital than other institutions
Five	I am Privileged and Value Family	Feelings of privilege to be at university and storying future caregiver roles to honour their families' sacrifices
Six	I Want More**	Belief in system of meritocracy and attaining cultural capital (i.e., degree) for social mobility
Seven	It's about the Community Feeling	Stories of belonging vis á vis of upper-year students and university programming to create community

**Not a first-generation thread: specific to Pillar University*
***Potentially more related to the immigrant student literature than the first-generation student literature*

Thread One: Do Well in School: Education is Important

Childhood stories about education featured prominently for Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani. All vividly recall stories about the importance of education to the extent that, while they were young, valuing education became part of their habitus and storied roles as a postsecondary graduate became part of their self and family stories for their future selves.

Kayla. Although her grandparents did not finish high school, they storied the value of education and future roles as university students into the lives of their children (i.e., Kayla's parents), to the extent that the generations following pursued university education and professional roles: *Though my grandparents didn't even finish high-school, their children and all my cousins are highly educated, being doctors or lawyers or engineers.*

Kayla's early childhood was similarly storied: the value of education and role as a university student were introduced quite early (for both Kayla and her brother), illustrating a family narrative towards education: *As you can tell, university is expected… My parents want the best for us: they're not forcing me or my brother into anything specific, just that we must go to university and get an education. The message started early. For example, ever since my brother was three (he's 14 now), they'd tell him that he'd be a great architect and that he should go to Waterloo.*

For Kayla, stories about university began early with stories about how one is successful in university: *To my mother, university was the place where you must take advantage of all the opportunities available; that includes extracurricular activities and spending time with newly made friends. But above all, it's the place where you must work hard or all that freedom that university gives you won't last very long (that is, you'll get kicked out if you can't take the academic pressure). The most important thing I got out of my mother's stories about university*

is that it is not a place you take advantage of: it is expensive to attend and you must work hard to ensure that the expensive tuition is worth it.

Although her mother provided broad perspectives about the holistic benefit of university and taking advantage of both curricular and co-curricular opportunities (and the space in between), her father's advice was somewhat more academically-pointed: *My father is a very educationally-oriented person. His story in simple terms was this: "go to the library, study, and you'll do well like your Papa."*

Stories about education are prominent in Kayla's family and are reflected in her habitus and behaviours, to the extent that others in Kayla's life serve as a mirror to her family stories and thus reinforce stories about education and her future: *Everyone expected that I would go to university and do something big. If I told people that I was just going to go to college or just work, it would be a total shock (in such a case, I think my dad would find me a husband because I wasn't doing anything with my life). I guess it's more than just my parents' expectations that brought me here, it's also the expectations that others have projected onto me as I don't want to disappoint them. People feel that I'm going to do something big and I know that I can. I want to. I'm a Muslim girl and whatever I do, I can make a difference.*

Indeed, the value of education and her ability to be successful through education were stories that were ubiquitous in Kayla's life, influencing the stories Kayla told herself and shaping her habitus valuing education.

Katrina. The pursuit of education also features strongly in Katrina's narrative, with her parents sharing stories of furthering their education despite life's happenings: *While in India, both my parents furthered their education…Once they were established in India, they had me; however, a great work opportunity for my dad then took us to Saudi Arabia*

One can imagine the family stories around pursuing education, despite life's obstacles and challenges: education was akin to the metaphorical horse in the adage "get back on the horse" in Katrina's family and was storied vividly. In fact, they moved to Canada so that their children could access quality university education: it's the reason we had to move from Saudi Arabia, because they don't have universities there that non-citizens can attend. We moved to Canada about eight years ago and the sole reason was so that my brother and I could go to university. Higher education was not optional – you know there's a lot of pressure when you know your parents moved countries so that their children can study.

Further, Katrina's father, in particular, believed so strongly in the value of education that he and his sibling interceded when Katrina's cousin was not being encouraged to pursue university: *My dad's sister passed away from cancer and left behind a two year-old daughter (my cousin). Her father didn't think she needed to go to university or be educated, so my dad and another sibling came and took my cousin for "a drive," but then took her to a boarding school that was known for its academics. It was insane and I remember my mom once commenting that, "she's not your daughter and you can't just do that with someone," but it showed how serious education was for my family.*

Such stories, as conditions of existence, would have been salient forces in shaping a habitus oriented towards valuing higher social classes and education. Indeed, education was not storied as optional for Katrina: *Even during family gatherings you can tell that everyone is educationally-oriented. It's the reason we had to move from Saudi Arabia, because they don't have universities there that non-citizens can attend. We moved to Canada about eight years ago and the sole reason was so that my brother and I could go to university. Higher educational was*

not optional – you know there's a lot of pressure when you know your parents moved countries so that their children can study.

Marina. Marina's experience was quite similar in hearing stories about the importance of education; however, unlike Kayla and Katrina whose lives were storied as university bound (i.e., they experienced university as a natural progression), Marina understood all postsecondary options to be acceptable. *I grew up with university being an option, but it wasn't an expectation. Postsecondary was valued and so college or anything would be fine for my family. The big thing that we were always told was to work hard so we can be our own bosses.*

Although Marina heard stories of the importance of education and that all options were fine, these stories were in tension with family stories (resulting from future projections that Marina's parents had for her), which included storying her as a university student at a prestigious institution: *Though my parents said it's my life, it's really theirs. They put a lot of pressure on me to do well. Even though university is not better than the other options (and there are many success stories in the subway about the colleges and jobs) and there are different paths, I saw university as the only path because of them. If I dropped out, they would criticize me for wasting the little money we had. If I chose college, they would be disappointed.*

Marina's stories shaped a habitus with a disposition towards education, prestige (which Marina expands as highlighted in later threads), and commitment through scarce resource investment.

Dani. Similar to Marina's and Katrina's, Dani's parents also valued education and moved to Canada to provide their children with better opportunities. Through being here, university became a preferred option, but not an expected progression like Kayla and Katrina: *Though they never attended postsecondary, they valued education and, when I was four years*

old, we moved to Canada as my parents wanted to provide me with better opportunities for education. It's kinda weird in a way: they valued education, but didn't really have any expectation that I attend university.

Dani's relationship with her grandfather has always been quite strong. So much so that Dani vividly recalls sitting on her grandpa's lap and hearing stories about her ability and future opportunities: *I do feel that I would have disappointed my family if I didn't go to university. I remember my grandpa saying that he thought I was pretty bright and that "if you can go to university, I think you should; there is a difference between not wanting to go and not being able to go." They wouldn't have been disappointed if I didn't go to university because I didn't want to or didn't feel I was ready or able to succeed – they would be disappointed if I didn't go because they believe in my ability.*

Although Dani's parents and grandparents were not university educated, stories about university as a possibility (though not an expected progression as reflected in the habitus of Katrina and Kayla) were introduced (through parents and/or self stories) to the extent that cousins attended university and Dani began to feel university as natural: *I became interested in university as I had older cousins who went and most of my friends were going as well. In high school, a lot of emphasis was placed on university education and there were a lot of presentations about universities (I don't even recall any about college), as early at grade 10. It started to feel natural.*

Thread Two: They Work Hard for the Money

The students all deeply experienced their families' struggle financially to survive and this served as a strong impetus to become different. Their family stories of struggle and sacrifice

resulted in a storied social class view of the world: the participants identified that their families were working-class and they wanted *more*.

Kayla. Kayla vividly recalls how hard it was for her parents to "make it" in Canada to the extent that her father would work for most of the day in order to make enough money: *My parents worked really, and I mean really, hard to get where they are now. When they first came to Canada, my dad would work a ridiculous amount of hours at a plastic manufacturing company, close to 14 hours a day, and just come home and sleep; we'd never see him. My parents were in debt coming here and had to borrow quite a bit of money*

She recalls struggles with money to the extent that "counting pennies" was typical in order to stretch financial resources. Although social class wasn't something Kayla would have thought of at the time, her storied recollection of this time is about being from a less privileged background: *They also didn't have a car and would take public transit, often scraping together change for the fare (my dad told me of a time he had to count pennies in order to pay the fare). I remember my mom dragging us everywhere on the bus because we didn't have a car and we would bring groceries home in the freezing cold with a stroller. Those times were hard: when you've seen the bottom, you don't want to be there.*

Katrina. Katrina's family also struggled financially, which was a difficult transition because in Saudi Arabia they had ample resources: *The move to Canada wasn't easy. When we were in Saudi Arabia, the accounting company that my dad worked for gave us a house, tickets to travel, and a car (in addition to his salary), so we really only had to spend money on food. My mom also worked as an educator and she started her own school for children.*

Katrina's father made a significant sacrifice for the family and went back to Saudi Arabia to make more money, while the family stayed in Canada. Stories about sacrifice and working

hard, like Kayla, featured strongly in Katrina's life: *He ended up going back to Saudi Arabia for a year and worked from there. That time was rough. It wasn't a situation where we were trying to "make ends meet," but we had to adapt for a while until things got better, which they did!*

Marina. Parental struggles and lack of resources also feature prominently in Marina's narrative account, to the extent that she does not want to be considered working-class and has storied a different future for herself: *I know that if I work hard, there will be personal gain and I won't have to worry about my future and I don't want to struggle like my parents did. I've always wished I was more upper-class, especially to buy clothes, but my parents are both working class and work as managers at a restaurant and constantly say, "work really hard in school so you don't have to work in a restaurant." I hope I'm not working-class in the future; I like eating at restaurants, not working in them (ironically, I do work at a fast food chicken place during the year to help pay for university – I hate it).*

Dani. Lack of resources has been a constant worry in Dani's family for the past two generations and, while she heard stories of valuing education, she experienced stories of sacrificing luxury (education included) in order to afford food and shelter: *When I was growing up, I also knew that money was a problem and, when it came to education or money, the latter was more immediate. For example, my grandpa would tell me lots of stories when I was younger…he told me that my grandma really wanted to send my mom to Australia or somewhere for a better education, but with two younger sisters, they couldn't afford that luxury as they needed the money.*

These financial struggles were rough, with Dani recalling how, though her dad worked many different jobs, money was never enough and would be a source of tension in the family: *My parents also struggled to " make ends meet" and I remember my dad working several odd*

jobs (sacrificing sleep and time with the family) in order to make money. Dad didn't have a profession, but had many jobs all over the place like being a taxi driver, and delivering newspapers. My mom also worked many jobs (she currently works doing bookings with a travel agency)…I didn't know details as I was young, but I knew that it didn't work out well (it was a struggle) and remember my parents fighting about money. It wasn't a good childhood experience.

Thread Three: Others Have it Easier

The participants were aware of social class differences and the economic, social, and cultural capital (primarily in the forms of money, parental connections and knowledge of the university field, respectively) available to them compared with other, more privileged students. That said, Kayla and Katrina perceive the university environment as more homogenous compared with Marina and Dani, which is likely a result of parental educational levels and, relatively speaking, greater economic capital (recall that Kayla and Katrina's parents are university educated).

Kayla. Kayla speaks primarily of the greater economic capital she perceives others to have, storying them as coming from rich families with greater resources; however, she also comments that the disparity between the "haves and have-nots" is not as pronounced in Canada: *A lot of people that come to Pillar seem to come from very rich families that have considerable savings or investments backing them up. My parents had nothing when they came and were in debt. They are inspirational people and I have to make it up to them.*

Again, narrative threads of family sacrifice surface, reinforcing Kayla's story of herself as a future provider for her family: it is part of the reason she is very conscious of how resources are spent on her now: *I'm very pragmatic with decisions and always think at least 20 steps*

ahead. I know that I have many years of university in my future in order to reach my goals, so why put myself in debt now by living in residence just for that experience when I can save money and be better off financially in the future?

With respect to differences in social and cultural capital, Kayla is also aware of the advantages other students have and stories them as having access to greater knowledge about the university system to transition in and connections for the transition out to the job market: *The downside of my parents having not completed university in Canada, and it's minimal, is that I don't have anyone to help or guidance from my parents with respect to the university system here in Canada. That's fine as I knew what I had to do and would just get my dad's credit card. I'm also aware that I don't have the same connection as other people whose parents were educated in Canada.*

Katrina. Though her parents have modest means, living in residence was not financially possible for Katrina. Her story about those living in residence is that they have increased social capital as a result of being able to make connections more easily: *Not living in residence does pose some disadvantages, particularly the networking aspect and potential job connections in the future. That's what I think about the most since my parents don't really have those here.*

Like Kayla, Katrina's experiences with her peers have led to her storying that those whose parents attended university in Canada have greater cultural capital with respect to knowledge of university processes and experiences: *Another disadvantage of not having parents attend university in Canada is that the whole environment here is different. My friends' parents are able to help them navigate the system and talk to them about the importance of joining clubs and stuff…Those opportunities to get involved are so important to learning skills and networking and I wish my parents understood that more.*

Having seen more disparate situations of wealth distribution, Katrina, like Kayla, notes that the difference in Canada is not as pronounced. Like the other participants, Katrina is aware that others have more, but she does not highlight economic capital as being prohibitive and finds that she is still able to do what she likes: *It's different here because, back home in India you can see the super rich and the not-so-rich: it's obvious with the types of cars they drive and all the nice things they have. Here, everyone wears the same sort of clothing and does the same kind of things; it's almost like everyone is the same class because of tuition and all the fees. My situation would likely be somewhere in the middle: it's not like I can go out on a $1,000 spending spree, but at the same time, I'm not struggling with textbooks and have enough to go out and have fun with friends . Most of my friends in the same boat as me, we're all pretty comfortable and are able to go out for lunch and stuff.*

Marina. For Marina, financial resources were quite a bit more constrained compared to Kayla and Katrina and she notes that this constrained her decision of which school to attend: *I initially really wanted to go to McCabe University a few hours away as they have an Arts and Sciences program that only accepts 100 students each year versus Pillar University where more students are accepted. The McCabe program is competitive and elite and I wanted to be a part of it, but it would have meant living away from home and that wasn't in the cards.*

In fact, she brought up McCabe so much in our discussions that one could easily imagine her imagining a possible path there. Her family's limited financial ability prohibited Marina from attending McCabe and further underscored her desire to accumulate greater wealth in order to possess greater mobility in her future. Marina also shares that, although she storied a university future for herself as a result of family stories for her, her family's absence of cultural capital provided her with fewer narrative elements to construct the story in finer detail when

compared with other students from more privileged backgrounds: *Because of my parents, I knew I wanted to go to university, but wasn't really sure where or for what, to the point that I was rushed to pick a university in grade 12. This was different for other girls like Fiona and Edina. Fiona talked about university all the time and how she was going to university and that she was going to be a high-powered corporate lawyer and pop out two kids and live the dream.*

Marina's stories about Fiona are interesting: although she stories Fiona as pretentious, the tension, reflecting a clash of class-based habitus, might be especially pronounced if Marina is jealous of Fiona's circumstance because Marina wants to be that "elite" person (a feeling she alludes to a few times, particularly when with her boyfriend's group of friends). Marina shares more about how her experience with others (in this case, her boyfriend's friends) having more creates a narrative incoherence as they are presently living the storied life she has imagined for her future: *You know those picturesque homes where there's a shiny, polished, spiraling wooden staircase with a loft where everyone takes those cliché prom pictures. All his friends have houses like that.*

This narrative incoherence (resulting from tensions when Marina's stories for herself tangle with her stories of others who have the social, cultural, and economical capital she desires) plays out in classroom settings also, to the extent that she stories classmates as arrogant and higher-class: *There are students in the class that do talk to the professor outside of class and even during lectures. They are keeners and always seem to know exactly want to say to make the professor excited. They intimidate me because they know so much and I would never dare say something in case for fear that I'd say something wrong and the professor and the keener-students would think I'm stupid.*

Again, this tension plays out as Marina stories that others in her class have well-educated parents who develop the cultural capital of their children through intellectual dinner-time conversations, which enables them to be superior contributes to class discussions: *Another time, we were talking about the conflict in Syria and I couldn't recall any other details other than the fact that there was a conflict in Syria. I just remember thinking after, "how do they know so much about Syria?" I barely have enough time to read the school stuff and yet they have all this time to read the news. I feel that a lot of people in my learning community are upper-class because how informed they are on worldly issues: I imagine that they have this time to explore interests (because they don't have to work like me) and sit at the table and have intellectual conversations with their parents (who are also well educated and help them).*

The extent that Marina stories her peers as more privileged may be rooted in a story she was told by her father about university being a place where more privileged people attended and how she would feel different: *My dad told me that I'd encounter pretentious people at university and he was right. He told me about a time when he was in university...and was sitting around with a group of guys and they were talking about their parents and money. When it came to him, he said that his father was a barber and that his mom didn't really work, but sold rice cakes (a common thing for low-class people to do)…It did also make me anxious about university, especially making friends.*

Dani. Dani brings very interesting perspectives as a third-year student: because stories are lived before they are told (Clandinin, 2013), her stories of first-year are more developed compared with the others. When reflecting on her experiences of differences, Dani stories that her friends have greater cultural capital with respect to the job market: *I've also never actually felt excluded at my school; however I think that at times I do feel like I don't fit in. For example,*

even though I'm in the commerce program, I feel that I don't necessarily connect with the people in my program. Some people are really nice, but I don't feel like I would be friends with them had it been another situation besides sharing classes. A lot of my classmates have families who have connections with large companies, or their families are knowledgeable in terms of the jobs that are provided for them after graduation. I don't always feel like I can contribute to those conversations.

Contrastingly, Dani found a connection with another person because, like her, he was a first-generation students whose parents did not have any university experience: *We got to be better friends because we had more in common than other people: his parents, like mine, didn't have any knowledge about university, didn't have a lot of money to freely flow, and didn't have the networks or connections that so many other students had.*

Discussed more fully in the "working hard for their money" section, Dani also comments on lack of economic capital compared with her friends when she was growing up: *All of my friends at the time were wealthy and well-educated: they would ask what my parents did and I didn't know how to explain it.*

Further, Dani shares that, in being aware of the privilege of others, she avoided questions of her background during high-school and, even when asked during university, she would be uncomfortable, resulting from a developed working-class habitus and stories of herself as less privileged: *Back in high school, I would have intentionally avoided such questions. Even when she [Adelaide] asked it made me uncomfortable and I felt that she was being too nosy for someone I had just met as it would also mean sharing about my dad passing away the year before. I was not comfortable.*

Dani revisits her experiences with Adelaide often: like Marina's stories of more privileged others, Adelaide represents something "greater" that makes Dani uncomfortable (as a result of a class-based difference in habitus) and results in Dani's storying Adelaide's and her own life in ways to attend to this habitus difference: *I still see Adelaide and am working on a project with her. The more I get to know her, the more I realize that I worked a lot harder to get where I am. I feel like I have more of a drive to do better, whereas as for her, she's just doing it because she should…She also knew so much about university: at least, in terms of advice from someone who has been through all this.*

Dani expands on the cultural capital that others have and, in the next example, provides a glimpse that university students might story everyone as coming from more privileged backgrounds: *I remember one time after accounting class I was talking with a friend; I was near tears as I couldn't do accounting. She said that she could help as her mom was an accountant. She then asked what mine did and I told her that my mom worked with a travel agency. She was shocked and said, "That's surprising, I would never have known." I don't know why she put it like that. I guess it's because I fit in, which is good, because I try to fit in. It may also be because there's an assumption that if you're in university, then your parents must have also. It's kinda true in the case of my friends where their parents didn't go to university and they also aren't in university.*

Her habitus, being different from others, found consonance with Anil, who was another first-generation student and whose story transitioning into university was similar: *There was one friend, Anil, that was also a first-generation student (and one of the first-generation students, like me, whose parents never attended university, whether in Canada or abroad), who was very easy to get along with. We got to be better friends because we had more in common than other*

people: his parents, like mine, didn't have any knowledge about university, didn't have a lot of money to freely flow, and didn't have the networks or connections that so many other students had.

Having lived her story as a first-generation student transitioning into university, Dani stories life as a first-generation student as follows: *Being first-generation is about feeling different and noticing certain things. It's not about being able to tell whether someone is first-generation or not, but it's being able to tell who are from more privileged backgrounds. I place most people as upper-middle-class and don't know right away if their parents went to university or not, though I assume they did. The first things I notice is all the resources, such as nice things, nice clothes, and being able to go shopping and to concerts….The talk is also different, not sure how to describe it, but it comes across as smart, confident, and "higher."*

In one of her reflection journals, Dani wrote a note to her former self, sharing advice for the transition to university that she was not able to receive: [From the passage where Dani wrote a note to herself] *I think the reason why you believe that university is scary is because no one has prepared you for it. You didn't have parents who went to university and your cousins, whom you were not too close with, are your only source of information in regards to university life. Even with this once source, it is easy to make assumptions.*

Thread Four: I'm at a Better Place

Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani all believe in the story that access to university is solely based on merit and, even though they may experience some disadvantages, hard work will translate to social mobility. They are proud of the fact that they attend Pillar University because it is regarded as one of the most prestigious universities in the country and will propel them towards social mobility: the degree carries significant *symbolic capital* internationally.

Kayla. Kayla notes that she is the first in the family to attend university in Canada, which is prestigious in itself; however, the fact that she's at Pillar brings more reverence in her family and cultural context: *I'm the first in my family to attend university in Canada and that is huge. Beyond huge. In the Middle-East, a North American education is highly revered and so my family puts my situation in high esteem. Even if I only graduate with a bachelor's degree, it will be very respected if I were to move back to Syria and would enable me to have a very successful and lucrative career. Pillar is also recognized as being one of the best universities in the world.*

Prestige was further projected onto Pillar University as a result of an institutional story that Pillar is more study-intensive than other universities: *Now, after almost completing my first-year, I understand why Pillar tries its best to make everyone feel welcome before classes start. Because once classes start, things get serious and there is no time to waste.*

Katrina. Katrina was told to live at home because her parents did not see the logic of moving away when there was a great university nearby and accessible by transit, but was still very drawn to Pillar because of its story of prestige as reflected in many media. She laments about low marks as she perceives other universities to be easier: *I chose Pillar, because of the prestige it has, being one of the top in the world, and because it would enable me to live at home and not have to work; however, I felt that others were having an easier time.*

Marina. Marina would often share during the interview that elite things make her feel good about herself. This comment reflects Marina's assessment that capital can be obtained as means towards social mobility. In her animated ways, Marina also describes that, while being at Pillar is more difficult, it is still an accomplishment that her and her family story about: *There are times when I hear that someone goes to Royal University and I'll respond with, "well, that's*

nice," with my intention being to say that "well, Pillar is way better." There's another person I follow on Twitter, who goes to another "university" in the city called Oatson, and she was complaining the other day about having to write a 5 page paper for philosophy class. "Must be nice," I thought as I have to write a 10-page paper.

When I first got into Pillar University, I Googled it and realized that it was one of the best in the world. I told my parents, and, to this day, it's a badge of honour that they bring up at family gatherings. They're proud. And they should be given what they've done for me and our family.

Dani. Dani, who, like Marina, comes from a family that did not understand the university field; consequently, she was not aware of how Pillar University was storied by others until it was mentioned to her after she received her offer: *When I got my offer to Pillar University, I was overwhelmed. What made things worse was that my grade 12 counsellor told me that Pillar University is one of the largest and most prestigious in Canada. I was really scared and went home and googled how big the campus was, but by then there was nothing I could do. What made it better was that I was accepted at Pillar University's Smallville Campus, but would still be one of those little fish.*

Thread Five: I am Privileged and Value Family

The participants are people who have storied their experience as one of privilege, even though they don't necessarily have as much social, cultural, or economic capital as some other students. Further, they storied roles for themselves as future family caregivers to honour the sacrifices of their parents.

Kayla. Working hard, appreciating what one has, and taking care of family are key elements of Kayla's habitus and aspects that she stories for herself as she imagines her successful

future self. Indeed, taking care of family members is a family story that she grew up with as her father and his siblings take care of another sibling who has financial need: *Overall, I'm grateful for the values that my parents instilled in me. I value hard work and am not scared of it: my parents worked exceptionally hard for what we have. I value achievement: my dad, being the typical Middle-Eastern father, would always ask me where the other 5% was when I got 95% on a test. I value being pragmatic and having an awareness of privilege and am constantly reminded that we weren't simply lucky; we had to plan and must always be grateful for our circumstances. I value education as a means to a better and contributing life. I value determination: I have high goals and the means to achieve them. Perhaps most of all, I value family – and not just how Canadians might value family, but deeper and broader.*

It was very clear from the interviews with Kayla has storied a role for herself as future provider for her family, with a strong felt desire to improve her father's life. Being responsible for family members is a family story as Kayla's dad also takes care of his parents financially: *My dad is also the only son and has the additional responsibility of taking care of his parents, so he worked double time to work off the debt, support mom and me, and take care of them. He worked so hard. He really and truly is my hero. That's part of why I'm so determined to work hard; I want to provide him with an easy retirement. No matter what, I'm going to give him something in return for his sacrifice.*

Katrina. For Katrina, family is important and she always makes important decisions about future opportunities with her family (for example, she shared during the interview that she was in the midst of exploring an oversees internship and was seeking her parents' approval); however, seeing her circumstances as privileged or valuing family did not feature as prominently in her narrative compared with Kayla, Marina, and Dani. That said, part of her story includes

sacrifice for the good of the family and one can imagine that her story for her future will include sacrificing for her family, particularly around education: *We moved to Canada about eight years ago and the sole reason was so that my brother and I could go to university. Higher education was not optional – you know there's a lot of pressure when you know your parents moved countries so that their children can study.*

Marina. When Marina reflects on her accomplishments, she is proud of what she has done for her family as they are able to tell stories of "making it" as a result of her accomplishments. And, while she feels pressure to succeed and take care of them in the future, she is also thankful for the privilege of attending university: *My parents are so proud of me. Sometimes I'm too self-centred to notice, but I recently realized that they're really proud of me. It really makes me tear up thinking of this because I've worked really hard to get where I am, but I also realize that I'm making their dreams come true.*

She also creates a story of providing for the family when she's older based on their sacrifices, but also shares how the pressure makes her feel, particularly as she has storied that such a future doesn't exist for her white friends: *I have an opportunity that not many people have and I'm appreciative of this and am going to make something of myself so that I'm not working-class. There's also pressure for me to do well to support my family when they're older. It's something that I want to do; they're family and sacrificed for me and I want to provide for them when I'm older, but sometimes I just want them to stop their nagging and say, "get off my back…it's not my responsibility yet." I think it's an immigrant thing, to support parents into old age and not put them into a retirement home. My white friends don't get this.*

Dani. Dani strongly values the sacrifices that her mom made and the support her father provided. Indeed, their stories of sacrifice, strength, and encouragement fuel her to take

advantage of opportunities they did not have. She recalls her mom's journey and how her mom also shared stories about taking advantage of opportunities to learn and grow: *I think about how strong my mother is (not just at that moment, but throughout her life and into today where she still serves as my rock). My mom worked for her family instead of getting an education. My mom picked up everything and left Hong Kong so that I could have better opportunities. My mom struggled with my father to provide for us. My mom lost her husband. My mom encouraged me to go abroad and take advantage of opportunities and to live and grow and learn and have fun. My mom is self-less and I will always remember this.*

With her father, Dani's stories of him revolve around support: though he passed away, these stories of support are woven into her current experiences and also serve as fuel to keep her going: *My dad passed away in the summer before my grade twelve year (four days before the start of the year, in fact) and my memory of him fuels me, particularly his immense support for me to just do what I wanted to do. Even when I practiced piano, he would just lie there and listen and be supportive. It's what I miss sometimes, but I can always hear him say "If this is what you want to do, then I'm there to support you."*

Her grandparents also live with her and are a source of support; their stories serve as fuel for her to take advantage of opportunities that they did not have: *Grandpa also wasn't able to go to university or college; though he loved learning (even to this day, with him almost 80, we have our granddaughter-grandpa time and it's more of an intellectual nature – I'm glad we have so much in common after all this time) he had six other siblings and needed to work to keep the family afloat.*

Dani values her family and the stories they shared with her, to the extent that she strives for coherence between their stories of her and her story for herself: *I do feel that I would have*

disappointed my family if I didn't go to university. I remember my grandpa saying that he thought I was pretty bright and that "if you can go to university, I think you should; there is a difference between not wanting to go and not being able to go."

Probably as a result of being older and family stories of valuing opportunities, Dani has a very positive outlook towards class differences and stories her situation as privileged: *The talk is also different, not sure how to describe it, but it comes across as smart, confident, and "higher." I've never felt sad; I just think it's nice that their parents were able to buy them things and I'm grateful to my parents for the opportunity to attend university.*

Thread Six: I Want More

All of the participants believed the larger cultural story that rewards are bestowed to those with merit; consequently, they work hard to gain the cultural capital of a university degree (heightened because it is a *Pillar University* degree) in order to realize social mobility.

Kayla. Moving to a higher social class features prominently in the way Kayla has storied a life for herself: through her life stories about education, family responsibility, and struggle, Kayla has storied a future role for herself as more upper-class in order to provide for her family: *I work hard now so that I can hopefully move up the social class ladder, go to a really good law school, and become more so that I can take care of my family (my aunt will be my responsibility when my dad retires). As the saying goes, I'd rather cry in a Mercedes than on a bike (money doesn't buy happiness, but at least you're comfortable).*

Katrina. Although not explicitly referring to a social class ladder, Katrina's storied future does not include what she considers "labour jobs" and, in fact, includes graduate school to ensure that she is as educated as possible to realize a better future: *Both my parents valued education and nurtured this passion in both me and my brother: it was expected that we would*

go to university because the belief was that, if you're educated, you're going to be treated better, get a better job, and be around smarter people. I don't want to not have a university degree and have to do normal labour jobs (that said, I also realize that I'll have to do more than just a bachelor's degree as it's not a guaranteed path to a job, so I'm also looking at a master's program at Pillar for when I'm done).

Marina. Marina stories a more upper-class future as a result of working hard. Indeed, as a current restaurant worker, she sees her future as enjoying restaurants as a customer and never working in one again: *I know that if I work hard, there will be personal gain and I won't have to worry about my future and I don't want to struggle like my parents did. I've always wished I was more upper-class, especially to buy clothes, but my parents are both working class and work as managers at a restaurant and constantly say, "work really hard in school so you don't have to work in a restaurant." I hope I'm not working-class in the future; I like eating at restaurants, not working in them (ironically, I do work at a fast food chicken place during the year to help pay for university – I hate it).*

Marina strongly stories her future self as not working-class: *I have an opportunity that not many people have and I'm appreciative of this and am going to make something of myself so that I'm not working-class.*

Dani. Similar to the other participants, Dani stories a future role of success so that she can make life easier for her family: *All of my friends at the time were wealthy and well-educated: they would ask what my parents did and I didn't know how to explain it. That said, I'm very proud of what my parents did for me and my family and will always be grateful. I will also always be there to support my family through my success and make whatever sacrifices that I need to make life easier for them.*

Thread Seven: It's About the Community Feeling

The participants were nervous about attending university and found that it was important to focus on academic success, likely due to their commitment to their goal to earn a degree and also respect the financial investment their families made. They talk about people and social experiences as important and, while they didn't spend much time socializing in their first year, they want to do more into their second year. They also talk about the importance of upper-year students to help with the transition.

Kayla. Kayla was able to attend a pre-orientation during the summer preceding her first year, which really helped her feel part of the Pillar community as she was able to create a story of belonging as she transitioned into Pillar: *Not only did MyDef help me make friends, but it was also a way for me to get to know my college, and some upper-year off-campus students who gave me advice on how to get involved and make friends while living off-campus…This is extremely important because feeling included in a university is hard for everyone; however, it is especially hard for a commuter.*

Kayla also talks about how Frosh Week helped reinforce a story of belonging and feels that universities can accomplish this through attending to the transition in, particularly through the use of upper-year mentors: *The second significant experience that really helped me feel part of the university experience was Frosh week; possibly the best and most memorable week in my life. Having already attended MyDef about a month earlier, it was even easier for me to feel part of the university because I had already met a lot of people and was familiar with the campus…The establishment of connections, in my opinion, is very important in making yourself feel part of the university.*

Katrina. Katrina felt alone at times, particularly during the beginning of the year. She notes that it was hard to get involved (to the level she was in high school) as a commuter student. She also shares the importance of wishing she had joined a mentor program to help with the transition and wished that communication was clearer: *Early in first year, I really felt alone. I do wish that I had joined a mentor program, but didn't really see this information. There's so much advertising during the beginning of school that most of it gets lost out of context. Mentoring would have been great, particularly to know ways to get involved and to understand the system as my parents didn't know.*

There were moments that made Katrina feel uncomfortable, as she shared that *on Labour Day, there was a scavenger hunt and I was in a small group with a leader and three other first-years. One girl was also in life sciences, but I didn't get the feel that we'd ever make plans to go out for lunch or anything. If I met someone from Indian heritage, things would have been easier because we likely have the same things that we can talk about. That's not always true, but I was hoping I'd have more in common with the girls in my group.*

Katrina openly shares that connecting with others of her cultural group is better, reflecting habitus consonance and the sharing of similar family and cultural stories. Such experiences, as the one shared below, helped Katrina feel more connected: *I did find some events that were more "me." One of the girls I met during Frosh was going to this cultural club event and she invited a few other girls she knew. I didn't know the other girls, but was able to chat with them on Facebook as we were all part of the same message thread.*

Although Katrina notes struggles with grades, she also wonders if something was wrong with her as she has storied her transition into university as one of not belonging socially: *There have been times that I felt like I didn't fit in and it was mostly about grades. When you get marks*

back that are low (especially those midterm marks where I didn't feel I would even pass the course) and you find out that everyone else is doing better, then it's an issue. I remember wondering why I wasn't as smart as them to also get high marks, or why I wasn't at a university that was easier. I've also felt like I didn't belong during Frosh and wondered if I wasn't outgoing enough.

Marina. Marina was looking forward to university because high school was not great, which she stories as being in a "gossipy" all-girls school. She challenged herself to be more social during Frosh Week in order to feel more connected: *As I mentioned, high school was not great and I didn't get very involved. I was like "screw that" being nervous and not putting myself out there shit: I was going to university and was going to be myself and not hide anymore.*

Differences in social class feature prominently throughout Marina's narrative; indeed, through interactions with those who she perceived as upper-class and more pretentious that caused reactions from her. Though Marina did not say she felt excluded (likely resulting from her value of being at Pillar), in reflecting on pieces of her narrative account, I wonder if unarticulated storied feelings of exclusion exist when she interacts with individuals whose stories are those that she wants as stories for herself: *During one of the ice-breakers there was this girl, Wilma, and she announced that she was from Flah-ryda. Then, we were to name famous people who went to Pillar and she mentioned her dad! I couldn't help but think, "no one knows your dad you stupid bitch," but again, restrained myself. She was more upper-class and presented herself as very rich. I also could tell that she was intelligent, but I just got the feel from her and knew that we wouldn't get along.*

Dani. Dani felt really alone during her first-year and stories this experience as not achieving good grades and connecting with other people: *I really didn't fit in during first-year,*

though I did feel that I belonged at university. The fitting in trouble was more because I was very studious in first-year and didn't know of all the opportunities to get involved. I also wanted to focus on doing well academically because it was hard and I was committed to my goal – intensely focused on my goal – to get a university degree. As a result, I made friends here and there (and some I never saw consistently), so I never had a group that knew each other. I would go to class, but didn't have the social aspect of going for lunch or going out. It wasn't good. I felt lonely and didn't feel I had people to fall back on or support me.

Though she felt alone, Dani persevered because she did not want to disappoint her mother and grandfather – she strove for narrative coherence between her stories and her family stories of her. She was part of a first-generation program group, but did not really connect with anyone; however, she experienced the benefit of having upper-year students concerned with her and others to connect with. It inspired her to become one of those mentors to connect other people (which also become a highlight of her university experience for her): *There was one friend, Anil, that was also a first-generation student…we got to be better friends because we had more in common than other people: his parents, like mine, didn't have any knowledge about university, didn't have a lot of money to freely flow, and didn't have the networks or connections that so many other students had.*

Dani, being in her third-year and very involved in the first-generation mentoring program at Pillar, shared some insights about the program with respect to the definition of first-generation students, communication to new students, and opportunities for enhancement. She also notes, as Kayla also mentioned, that such programs should be part of every student's transition to university and communicated more clearly: *It's interesting to note, however, that there are differences in the students in the FirstGen program. In my first year (and I noted that it was a*

small group) all the first-generation students admitted were those whose parents never attended university (whether in Canada or abroad). In my second year (when I was a Peer Academic Leader), the definition was expanded and defined as any students whose parents didn't attend university in Canada. This increased the number of first-generation students in the program (and who would qualify to be a Peer Academic Leader), but the differences became apparent. I feel that those whose parents attended university outside of Canada are still more knowledgeable of the environment and also grew up with university as an expectation and natural progression.

Another thing about the program is that the opportunities get confusing for students. I remember not knowing of all the opportunities to get involved because there's so much competing for our attention. With the FirstGen program, it's exactly the same as the First Year Seminars (all the sessions and workshops are the same), with the exception that it's only for first-generation students.

Theoretical Reflections

Storied futures as resilient university students. The first three resonant threads (i.e., *Education is Important: Do Well in School; They Work Hard for the Money; and Others Have it Easier*) bring us deeply to the conceptual nexus of narratives and habitus, where the stories of our lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) operate as conditions of existence (Bourdieu, 1984) in shaping one's habitus. The first three threads rocket us temporally backwards into the participants' lives and awaken us to the power of childhood stories. Indeed, as Chimamanda Adiche (2009) demonstrated "how impressionable and how vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children" through her illustration of how single stories project singular prejudices that rob us from understanding the complexity of multiple *stories*, with their breadth and depth, that compose our lives. Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani's childhood stories serve as

salient conditions of existence that shaped a habitus whereby education, higher-class, and hard work become values. Although Bourdieu did not explicate that conditions of existence encapsulate stories, evident from this chapter is the powerful force that stories play in shaping one's habitus (explored more deeply in Chapter Six). Their stories of their childhoods also story imagined futures for them to the extent that Ben Okri (cited in Steels, 2011) argued that such imagined states serve as pathways to fate.

Kayla and Katrina's families storied futures for them in university; consequently, their habitus was oriented towards university and they experienced university as an unquestioned progression – a rite of passage. Though their families may have been considered socially working-class in Canada, they came from university-educated families, and this taste for distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), or something regarded as an artifact of "higher-class," was passed to them through stories. In short, Kayla and Katrina's gaze was oriented towards realizing a university education. Conversely, for Marina and Dani, although education was valued, university was not at the forefront of their gaze, but in their peripheral vision (Bateson, 1994). However, poignant experiences (reflected in the first three resonant threads) brought university into the peripheral gaze of the students and shaped possible stories for their futures. These experiences were, in part, related to their family's experience as immigrants to Canada: as Finne and Mueller (2010) illustrated (and I discuss more deeply in Chapter Six), recent immigrants do not fare well in the Canadian labour market and, as a result, many communicate higher education expectations very early to their children to the extent that the children of immigrant parents are highly represented in the Canadian postsecondary context. All the students and their families wanted more and knew that education, particularly a university education (and especially a degree from Pillar), would bring that to fruition. For Dani and Marina, not having university-

educated parents, they, as Bateson (1994) wrote, broadened their vision to the peripheral and learned a "deeper noticing of the world" (p. 109). Both Marina and Dani also strove for narrative coherence (Carr, 1986; Clandinin, 2013) in that their childhood stories, while including stories that education was important, did not (like Kayla and Katrina, whose futures were storied towards coherence) include a storied future in university. By paying attention to experiences both within their direct gaze and those experiences at the periphery, Marina and Dani: (a) entered liminal spaces (Gilbert, 1991) or unstoried spaces of transition; (b) experienced university life as the first in their family, and (c) are now able to tell their story as a first-generation student (because stories are lived before they are told [Clandinin, 2013]). Further, all of the participants, oriented towards higher social status through university completion as supported by past stories of struggle and opportunity, experienced their transition through university with a habitus of resilience. That is, they were determined to attain their goal despite challenges in order to achieve a state of social and generational mobility to provide both themselves and their families with a better future.

Resilience refers to positive or adaptive behaviours associated with persistence when confronted with stress or challenge (Borrero, Lee, & Padilla, 2013; Masten & Obradovic, 2006) and all four participants experienced transitions to university with a resilient orientation. That is, their habitus was socialized, at a young age, to value education, hard work, and attain a degree in order to improve circumstances and gain social mobility. Although this will be discussed further in Chapter Six, it is worthwhile to highlight here that virtually all of the stories of their lives (reflecting larger social structures) shaped such a habitus: (a) *Do well in School: Education is Important*, oriented the participants to regard postsecondary education as a natural progression; (b) *They Work Hard for the Money*, *Others Have it Easier*, and *I Want More* propelled the

students toward greater social mobility and wealth as motivated by parental experiences of struggle and seeing wealth with peers from more affluent backgrounds; (c) *I'm at a Better Place*, provided reassurance of their ability and that they are better positioned for success in the job market, and (d) together with the story of *I'm Privileged and Value Family*, shaped their habitus toward completion, to honour their privileged place and family sacrifice.

All participants experienced university as something that would be completed and their past stories of struggle, ambition, determination, and "wanting more" propelled them to be extremely goal-oriented and resilient. The resonant threads in their lives, summarized in the preceding paragraph, were the conditions of existence that shaped how they both experienced and made choices in the university environment as a result of a habitus that oriented them towards resilience. Thus, when reflecting on Bourdieu's (1984) model and the experiences of the participants, it is evident that the stories of our lives shape practice as mediated by a habitus; thus, stories of our lives can and should be considered conditions of existence in which Bourdieu grounds his theory.

The many facets of culture and immigration. Threads four to seven (i.e., *I'm at a Better Place; I'm Privileged and Value Family; I Want More; It's About the Community Feeling*) take us to broad dimensions of culture and the immigration experience. All participants were oriented towards earning the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) that a Canadian, particularly a Pillar University, degree provides in order to change their social class – become upwardly mobile – in Canadian society. Further, as Kayla noted, a Canadian degree, regardless of where it is earned, carries significant cultural capital where she is from – thus the cultural capital of a Pillar degree is seen as powerfully ubiquitous and a goal worthy of serious commitment. The cultural capital that a Pillar degree caries was highlighted recently (March 2014) in a national

Canadian article where the author[13] discussed the institutional narrative of the "study culture" that exists at Pillar as storied by staff, faculty members, and students; therefore, it is not surprising that the participants also retold this story, as both a source of frustration (i.e., needing to dedicate significant time to academics) and pride (i.e., the perception that their education was more rigorous and, therefore, more prestigious). The author of this article argued that the study culture at Pillar is destructive and that, in an environment where foundation skills are valued more importantly than a degree (Council of Ontario Universities, 2014), an institutional narrative of co-curricular involvement must be introduced.

Intersections with Tinto's (1993) model are also apparent: the participants valued academic integration, perhaps as a result of their parents' emphasis on achieving through education (*Education is Important: Do Well in School*) and/or the devalued cultural narrative on foundational skill development (sometimes called "soft skills"), which also requires engagement in the social realm through co-curricular activities. As Katrina mentioned, her parents did not value such involvement and also noted that her friends of Canadian-educated parents understood that it was an important part of the experience. Indeed, as Dani and Kayla illustrate, it was the connection with others, particularly upper-year mentors that supported their transition of community members. They experienced, and now story, the importance of self in relationships which Bateson (1994) reminds us, is necessary for learning:

> Caring and commitment are what makes persons, and persons in turn reach out for a community. Personhood arises from a long process of welcoming closeness and continues to grow and require nourishment over a lifetime of participation. (P 62)

Said differently by Greene (1995), who urged educators to imagine community through friendships, "we must want our students to achieve friendship as each one stirs to

[13] Name of the author, publication, and article are not disclosed in order to maintain anonymity for the participants.

wideawakeness, to imaginative action, and to renewed consciousness of possibility (p. 43)." Indeed, it is this interactive diversity that supports deep and rich learning (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004) and why, contrary to Ward, Siegel, and Davenport (2012), cultural capital is not necessarily the most important aspect that should be fostered for first-generation students (see extended discussion in Chapter Six).

The participants also felt that their storied futures involved taking care of family members (both immediate and extended): a protention (Kerby, 1991) rooted in past family stories of responsibility and extending beyond traditional patriarchal expectations. Indeed, the participants felt that such a family story was a unique part of their cultural stories, often noting that their "White friends" just do not understand[14]. This is not surprising. As Finnie and Mueller (2010) illustrated, immigrants to Canada experience significant struggles in the labour market and, consequently, introduce storied expectations for their children to become more from their sacrifices. Because social class permeates our being as something that is felt beneath one's skin and clothes (Kuhn, 1995, as cited in Lehmann, 2009), it is also not surprising that the participants embrace the dominant story of meritocracy and that dedicated effort can and will be recognized with rewards for them and their families. They strongly desire social mobility for themselves and their families, which, as discussed previously, supports a habitus oriented towards resilience.

Dangers of one story and generational mobility. The danger of one single story, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) eloquently narrated, is strongly pronounced in the narrative accounts. Adichie warns that when we focus on a singular story we flatten the experiences of others and block other great stories that make up one's life. Further, single stories create stereotypes where "the problem is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete: they

[14] A statement that, as a second-generation immigrant, I also appreciate as the story resonates within my family context.

make one story become the only story" and, consequently rob "people of dignity and emphasizes how we are different, rather than how we are similar." Marina storied most of her peers as from higher social classes and projects a story that they are all pretentious and arrogant. She clearly illustrates Bourdieu's notion of habitus dissonance, being in a field that is not just foreign, but one that she desperately wants to acknowledge her to validate her social transformation (Kaufman, 2003). In another example, Katrina feels more comfortable with those that identify with her culture and storied those outside of her culture as socially less conservative with respect to alcohol and sexuality.

Lastly, and most relevant to the research questions, we cannot have one story about first-generation students. Prominent in the narrative accounts is that, although all four participants are considered first-generation students according to Pillar's definition, there is *clearly* a difference based on cultural capital and family stories: Kayla and Katrina, although disadvantaged because their parents did not know the Canadian system, grew up with storied futures as university graduates – going to university was a natural progression for them. Conversely, Marina and Dani, while growing up hearing stories of the value of education, did not experience a storied future as university graduates. Indeed, and argued by Esping-Anderson (2004), introducing multiple storied possibilities early on is central in providing a foundation for generational mobility – a theme that will be expanded in Chapter Six.

By extension, how are we at universities stereotyping and thereby ill-serving underrepresented student populations by flattening their experiences? Specifically, we tend to segregate students to better serve their needs; however, perhaps a better approach for supporting the transition in, through, and out for students, is to facilitate community among all students and

not set out to dissect students into fragmented identity constructs. A sentiment echoed by Ben Okri (2011):

> We concentrate too much on our differences. Poetry returns us to the surprise of our similarities. It brings us back to the obscure sense that we are all members of a far-flung family, sharing feelings both unique to us and oddly universal. (p. 5)

Implications for policy and practice that echo Okri's insights will be expanded further in Chapter Seven.

Imaginings in the midst. Stories are lived before they are told (Clandinin, 2013; MacIntyre, as cited in Carr, 1986): stories in Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani's past make tentative sense at present time. Indeed, the salience of childhood stories is evident through the participants' narratives and echo the wisdom of Ben Okri (as cited in Steels, 2011):

> We plan our lives according to a dream that came to us in our childhood, and we find that life alters our plans. And yet, at the end, from a rare height, we also see that our dream was our fate. It's just that providence had other ideas as to how we would get there. Destiny plans a different route, or turns the dream around, as if it were a riddle, and fulfills the dream in ways we couldn't have expected. (p. 253)

Okri also takes us to the future and how dreaming might become our fate. The participants' protentions of a future storied self also seem to make sense, based on their past family and cultural stories; however, because they were in the midst of experience, they are simply dreams that only *may* become fate. A similar sentiment is strongly echoed by Sarbin (2004), who espoused that imaginings shape future roles, which one begins to embody in the present:

> The thrust of my argument is that identity change can occur in response to subtle cues arising from embodied actions performed during attenuated role-taking sequences [i.e.,

> imaginings]. In this connection, embodiments and their sequel in emotional roles contribute to the person's assigning credibility to narratively created identities, setting the stage for action. (p. 6)

While in the midst of our lives, and through conversational reflection, the participants shared with me that they reconnected with experiences drifting through their vast memories of experience. In particular, they enjoyed how they were able to differently regard their families, particularly the pride that their families had for them (with many emotional moments during the interviews). This resonates with Clandinin (2013) that narrative inquiry is about stories lived, told, relived, and retold and also that neither the participants or the researcher leave the inquiry unchanged. The concept of reliving and retelling also provides a different sense making and, in the case of the participants, deepened their appreciation of their parents' sacrifices. Such reflection and meaning making is part of our narrative journeys, as Greene (1995) explained:

> In some strange way, by grasping them, by making them objects of my experience, I have imposed my own order, my own context, as I have pursued my own adventures into meaning. The narratives I have encountered in my journey have made it possible for me to conceive patterns of being as my life among others has expanded: to look through others' eyes more than I would have and to imagine being something more than I have come to be. (p. 86)

I was particularly drawn to Marina, possibly because much of her experiences resonate with my own. Although her past stories seem to make sense to her, in other ways, I imagine confusion. Being responsible for family are powerful cultural and family narratives to the extent that, while most of the participants found narrative coherence with this, Marina, while accepting, still experiences tensions as summarized by her statement "though it's my life, it's really theirs." She

has storied her future as taking care of her parents, but is experiencing a tension with what that story is at present time. One might wonder if her future story of a university graduate is an understood self-story (to which she is striving towards narrative coherence) or more of a family story (which is creating narrative incoherence): both seem tangled together while we were in the midst of her experiences.

Having grown up in similar contexts – from immigrant families where their parents did not attend university in Canada – has led to some very similar stories within the participants' lives, evidenced through the resonant threads. These threads illustrate, to various extents, awareness of social class differences vis á vis cultural, social, and economic capital. The threads, and moving to considerations within Bourdieu's theory of practice, appear to shape a particular type of habitus.

Reflection on these resonant threads and the narrative accounts in Chapter Four also reinforce the conceptual relationship between narratives and habitus. Stories are lived before they are told (Clandinin, 2013; MacIntyre, as cited in Carr, 1986), which makes sense because narrative elements are unfolding while one is in the midst of experience; however, there is an innate dynamic occurring while people are in the midst of their lives. Although the unfolding of experience is unstoried while it is being experienced (i.e., we are not yet telling stories of the experiences), the stories shape, through reinforcement or experiential tensions, our dispositions without our awareness. Living our experience, comprised of various cultural, social, family, self, and institutional stories, shapes us as our experience is continually unfolding: we are continually living the story, but may not be telling the story. However, the stories of our living experience shape our values, dispositions, and how we both experience and tell stories. The stories are

lived, they shape the habitus, and then the stories are told, relived, and retold, which reinforce or change one's habitus in the midst of experience – stories are, thus, conditions of existence.

The depth and breadth of these seven resonant threads and the conceptual terrain will be examined further in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six: Putting the Pieces Together

My inquiry began with the following question: **for first-generation students, how do the stories of their lives have a formative relationship with their habitus (i.e., the dispositions, beliefs, and values that constitute their worldview) and, if so, how do their lived and told stories shape their university experiences towards persistence?** The extant literature theorizes that first-generation students depart university as a result of not "fitting in" or, in Bourdieuian terms, experiencing a dissonance or disconnect between their habitus and the more affluent habitus of the institution and lacking the capital to navigate the transitions. That is, students choose to leave university as a means to avoid liminality and bring narrative coherence to their lives. This model is visually depicted in Chapter Seven (Figure 3: Narratives, Stories of our Lives, and Grand Narratives). But what can be gleaned about first-generation students' experiences that support their ability to persist? The literature suggests that when first-generation students depart, they typically do so within the first few weeks of the first semester (Tinto, 1993; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012), but what conditions support their continued enrolment towards degree completion?

My research (an act of serendipity as a consequence of a delayed timeline) involved first-generation students still enrolled beyond the typical "departure window" (or "persisters" as noted in other research). As a result, I had the opportunity to explore both the role of habitus in persistence and the extent to which the dominant theory of student departure (Tinto, 1993) explains the experiences of first-generation student persisters. As mentioned before, while Dani, Kayla, Katrina, and Marina are all first-generation students, there are some nuanced differences among them. Further, they are all women from immigrant families.

Although it may appear that such diversity of factors, other than being first-generation students (i.e., from immigrant families and one participant being in third-year), might minimize the research focus on first-generation students, I will demonstrate in this chapter how such diversity was another act of serendipity that jettisoned me outside the student affairs scholarship to analysis beyond siloed and convenient categories of formal education. The research led me into unexpected terrain, particularly into the realm of early-childhood experiences, immigration, and deeper conceptual spaces of narratives and habitus. In this chapter, I discuss how the students' stories contribute in novel ways to the existing literature. Specifically, I will demonstrate how Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani's stories contribute to further understandings about first-generation student persistence by illuminating the importance of a habitus oriented towards resilience and the salience of early-childhood experiences. Additional intersections with the immigration and generational mobility literature will also be presented. Then I will discuss how Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani's stories help inform Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus and practice by demonstrating how the stories of our lives – stories that span sociality, temporality, and place and grounded in a Deweyian ontology of experience – are *conditions of existence* (Bourdieu, 1984) that shape the habitus. I then conclude by contrasting two grand narratives (larger social stories that significantly shape how we interpret and interact within our social world) that surfaced during the study and discuss their implications concerning persistence.

Understanding Persistence for First-Generation Students

Missing the Bourdieuian mark. As presented in earlier chapters, current theorization of first-generation student underrepresentation using a Bourdieuian framework suggests that various forms of capital (particularly cultural capital through knowledge of the system), together

with experiencing habitus dissonance with the university field, results in first-generation students being reluctant to apply or, if admitted, choosing to leave because they feel like they do not belong (Aries & Seider, 2005; Lehmann, 2007; Lehmann 2009). That is, unlike for non-first-generation students where university is a normal rite of passage and they are equipped with the various codes to succeed, university attendance for first-generation students is a foreign and optional concept. A summary of current understandings of first-generation student persistence to degree completion was recently published in a book, titled *First Generation College Students: Understanding and Improving the Experience From Recruitment to Commencement* (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012), that is circulating through the student affairs professional circuit. Being the most recent work published in this area, I focus on it here because it, assumedly, captures the most comprehensive and relevant understandings to date.

The authors note key issues related to participation, stating that "cultural capital is therefore the key factor in shaping the experience of first-generation students" (Ward, Siegal, & Davenport, 2012, p. 8), which they define as the "value students gain from their parents that supports and assists them as they navigate the college experience and seek a higher social status and greater social mobility" (p. 6). With respect to examples, they describe cultural capital as knowledge about application processes (including financial aid, program choices, and terminology) and the overall university experience (including social connections, extracurricular activities, and campus resources). Though their focus and description of cultural capital captures current understandings that non-first-generation students likely possess more knowledge, finances, and connections than first-generation students, it is a very superficial and diluted understanding of Bourdieu's concept of capital. For example, in *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu (1991) introduced many forms of capital, including social, educational, economic, and

cultural, which are relevant to the discussion on first-generation students; however, the authors subsume all forms of capital into the concept of cultural capital – a practice that is clearly inconsistent with Bourdieu's own definitions and minimizes the various factors that are actually important considerations when exploring first-generation student persistence.

Notwithstanding the exclusion of the various forms of capital, the authors appropriately highlight capital as an important construct to consider. For example, in the *Others Have it Easier* story, Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani all shared feeling disadvantaged because their parents did not possess the cultural capital (with respect to knowledge of university systems) that parents of non-first-generation students possessed and were noticeably able to pass onto their children. They further commented on how their parents also did not possess the social capital that other students boasted with respect to job connections. Marina and Dani (the two whose parents did not have a university education) also noted the lack of economic capital available to them. Kayla summarizes this poignantly:

> *A lot of people that come to Pillar seem to come from very rich families that have considerable savings or investments backing them up. My parents had nothing when they came [to Canada] and were in debt.*

The extent to which one possesses the *various* forms of capital is, indeed, an important force affecting how university is experienced (as other authors have also suggested) and my research corroborates the conclusion that there is a class-based experience of the university field, with first-generation students feeling disadvantaged compared to the capital they observe with non-first-generation students.

Disappointingly, the authors do not venture into the world (consistent with Lehmann's work) of class-based experiences and students feeling like they do not "fit in." This appears to

be resulting from two shortcomings with the authors' approach. First, Ward, Siegel, and Davenport (2012) narrowly defined the concept of social class as "economic status and the ability to pay for college" (p. 69) as opposed to more robust definitions where class permeates one's being (Grabb, 2009). Secondly, and relatedly, they do not discuss Bourdieu's concept of a class-based habitus. This may result from the fact that, as expanded in the upcoming section on narratives and habitus, the concept of habitus has not been defined deeply enough, resulting in many scholars dismissing it as too abstract. Or, it may simply be due to negligence or the desire to incorporate a popular framework without appreciating its depth (Grenfell, 2012). Regardless, in defining class purely in economic terms and failing to introduce and discuss the habitus construct, readers of this text are not introduced to Bourdieu's theory in its fullest and, therefore, are blind to the salience of habitus and the class-based ways first-generation students experience the university environment, thus perpetuating the illusion that first-generation students can be fixed through economic measures. Dani represents the importance of social class when exploring the experiences of first-generation students:

> *Being first-generation is about feeling different and noticing certain things. It's not about being able to tell whether someone is first-generation or not, but it's being able to tell who are from more privileged backgrounds. I place most people as upper-middle-class and don't know right away if their parents went to university or not, though I assume they did. The first things I notice is all the resources, such as nice things, nice clothes, and being able to go shopping and to concerts. A lot of people seem to have nice things. The talk is also different, not sure how to describe it, but it comes across as smart, confident, and "higher."*

Excluding social class from the discussion ignores a very real and visceral and embodied component of the experience. Also, as the next section suggests, habitus is at least equally, and perhaps more, important to understanding first-generation underrepresentation and cannot be divorced from the concept of capital.

The authors also address the various institutional definitions of first-generation students. This is a worthwhile discussion because, if one accepts capital as an important factor playing into the experiences of first-generation students and there is a need to enhance their capital to increase persistence, then, first-generation students should be defined as those coming from families where parent(s) and/or guardian(s) did *not* attend university, regardless of where. However, this is not always the case. The authors provide examples of institutions that define a student as being first-generation if their parent(s)/guardian(s) did not complete postsecondary. Pillar University employs a similar definition whereby a student is considered first-generation if parent(s)/guardian(s) did not complete university in Canada. In both these cases, and echoed by the participants, parents who completed postsecondary outside of Canada still possess important capital, as Dani notes:

> *It's interesting to note, however, that there are differences in the students in the FirstGen program. In my first year (and I noted that it was a small group) all the first-generation students admitted were those whose parents never attended university (whether in Canada or abroad). In my second year (when I was a Peer Academic Leader), the definition was expanded and defined as any students whose parents didn't attend university in Canada. This increased the number of first-generation students in the program (and who would qualify to be a Peer Academic Leader), but the differences became apparent. I feel that those whose parents attended university outside of Canada*

> *are still more knowledgeable of the environment and also grew up with university as an expectation and natural progression.*

Conversely, both Kayla and Katrina's parents attended university and passed on: (a) knowledge of the system (albeit general), and (b) that university was expected, though their knowledge was from outside of the Canadian system. Kayla demonstrates this succinctly, stating that:

> *The downside of my parents having not completed university in Canada, and it's minimal, is that I don't have anyone help or guidance from my parents with respect to the university system here in Canada…As you can tell, university is expected.*

Further, Kayla and Katrina's parents, likely a result of their education, possessed more economic capital. If programs for first-generation are designed to maximize effectiveness and focus on capital, should the definitions be changed to be more stringent and focus solely on the absence of any forms of capital (and particularly cultural capital)? The authors of the book would suggest that definitions should change; however, they also state that the most important intervention is acknowledging that first-generation students indeed exist and require certain care based on the capital they possess. At this point I concur: capital is important and first-generation students typically have less of all forms of capital, regardless of whether their parents completed or attended university outside Canada or not. However, I do vehemently disagree with the authors' assertion that "the most important thing faculty, staff, and other students can do is erase the cultural capital deficit of first-generation students as soon and as completely as possible" (Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012, p. 74). In fact, it greatly concerns me that the most recent publication concerning first-generation students, and one discussed at student affairs conferences, would assert such a deficit perspective.

Bourdieu would agree that first-generation students have less capital and that those who are more affluent (i.e., non-first-generation students) mobilize capital to reproduce the social order, evidenced in the statement, "thus we find that as a rule those richest in economic, cultural, and social capital are the first to move into the new positions" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 68). Bourdieu would also concur that first-generation students, not being members of the dominant class, have likely had aspirations shaped in a manner to perpetuate the social order:

> This process occurs at all stages of schooling, through the manipulation of aspirations and demands – in other words, of self-image and self-esteem – which the educational system carries out by channeling pupils towards prestigious or devalued positions implying or excluding legitimate practice. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 25)

However, the statement that cultural capital should be erased is problematic and concerning for a number of reasons, likely stemming from an apparent superficial understanding and applications of Bourdieu's works.

First, orienting perception to regard first-generation students as deficient establishes an "othering" power dynamic between the institution and the students: although first-generation students may possess less knowledge of the system, the approach should be oriented towards building community and sense of belonging to help students gain, develop, or access additional capital. We see this need echoed in the narratives of Dani (*I really didn't fit in during first-year)* and Katrina *(early in first year, I really felt alone)*, whereas Kayla explains how getting involved early, particularly through the MyDef program helped her feel part of the community:

> *Not only did MyDef help me make friends, but it was also a way for me to get to know my college, and some upper-year off-campus students who gave me advice on how to get involved and make friends while living off-campus (on upper-year in particular would*

> *answer all my questions on Facebook and helped me print an essay on-campus when I left it to the last minute and stressed out about handing it in on time). This is extremely important because feeling included in a university is hard for everyone.*

It is that sense of belonging that Kayla summarizes quite well as being important to welcoming students: *If any university wants to make its incoming students feel welcome, it should establish good summer programs and develop a fun and informative Frosh week that will get students pumped about starting school and feel part of the university.*

Secondly, the statement assumes that first-generation students do not possess any capital (recall that the authors describe all forms of capital as cultural), when many possess the cognitive ability to succeed, evidenced through high grades (or educational capital), economic capital to various extents, and capital that is valued in different realms. Indeed, the participants all grew up with stories about their academic ability and storied futures with university as a possibility, as Dani's narrative illustrates:

> *I do feel that I would have disappointed my family if I didn't go to university. I remember my grandpa saying that he thought I was pretty bright and that "if you can go to university, I think you should; there is a difference between not wanting to go and not being able to go."*

Third, the authors ignore the immigration factor, where, at least in the Canadian context, immigrant students outnumber domestic students and come from families with highly-educated parents (Finnie & Mueller, 2010), who are thus able to pass on various forms of capital (particularly cultural and economic). Indeed, for Kayla and Katrina, university was expected, as Katrina states: *It was expected that we would go to university because the belief was that, if*

you're educated, you're going to be treated better, get a better job, and be around smarter people.

Fourth, ignoring the construct of habitus (or worse, conflating it with capital), as shaped by the stories of one's life, does not introduce readers to the full richness of understanding first-generation students through a Bourdieuian lens or provide coherence with other models of persistence (Tinto [1993] for example) that depict the importance of attending to overall student input characteristics. Indeed, participants' childhood stories shaped a habitus towards valuing education and being higher-class, to the extent that their storied futures were as university graduates who were in a higher social standing and providing for their families:

> Kayla: *I work hard now so that I can hopefully move up the social class ladder, go to a really good law school, and become more so that I can take care of my family (my aunt will be my responsibility when my dad retires). As the saying goes, I'd rather cry in a Mercedes than on a bike (money doesn't buy happiness, but at least you're comfortable).*
>
> Katrina: *I don't want to not have a university degree and have to do normal labour jobs..*
>
> Marina: *Though my parents said it's my life, it's really theirs. They put a lot of pressure on me to do well. Even though university is not better than the other options (and there are many success stories in the subway about the colleges and jobs) and there are different paths, I saw university as the only path because of them.*
>
> Dani: *They wouldn't have been disappointed if I didn't go to university because I didn't want to or didn't feel I was ready or able to succeed – they would be disappointed if I didn't go because they believe in my ability.*

It is dangerous to have a single story (Adichie, 2009) of first-generation students as not possessing capital, when, illustrated by the participants, there are rich stories at play that affect goal commitment and eventual persistence (Tinto, 1983).

Lastly, the authors, by attributing deficit to first-generation students and the solution to erase the deficit, ignore important environment factors (espoused by Tinto, for example), such as sense of belonging in the academic and social communities, that could function as protective factors in the persistence puzzle. Ignoring the construct of habitus is detrimental, resulting in conclusions that render absent the robustness of a class-based understanding of behaviours and experiences. Indeed, the reason that Dani, Kayla, Marina, and Katrina are persisting is, significantly, due to influences associated with social class and beyond the construct of capital.

Dani, Katrina, Kayla, and Marina all developed a habitus – dispositions, values, and beliefs – that oriented them towards university education, towards success, and towards social mobility, as the narrative excerpts above demonstrate. Although they identified having less social, cultural, and (to various degrees) economic capital, their habitus, oriented towards resilience, motivated them to manage and grow capital, and propelled them towards completion – none saw themselves dropping out of university or expressed that university was not for them. They developed a resilience-oriented habitus, which, as will be discussed later, may be of central importance to enhancing participation from under-represented populations. Indeed, if building resilience was part of the solution, it would require a paradigm shift concerning participation in higher education that would focus on childhood experiences as a way to better attend to both equal opportunity and equal outcomes. Before the concept of a resilience-oriented habitus is introduced, it is worthwhile to first explore the salience of habitus in the Canadian postsecondary education literature.

Understanding parental education levels. It truly is a matter of habitus. Upon reviewing the literature concerned with university participation in Canada, generational mobility in Europe and North America, and resilience, it becomes clear that, although parental educational attainment is a reliable proxy associated with student completion (hence the issue of first-generation student persistence to degree completion), there are factors much deeper that appear to be shaped during youth.

As discussed extensively in the literature review in Chapter Two, students whose parent(s)/guardian(s) did not attend university are unlikely to pursue university or persist to degree completion. Various facets were considered, with most converging on the construct of parental expectations; that is, students with university-educated parents expected their children to go to university – to the extent that attendance is regarded as a natural progression – whereas parents without a university degree did not communicate this expectation to the same degree. Katrina's parents both attended university and her experience exemplifies this rite of passage:

> *Both my parents valued education and nurtured this passion in both me and my brother: it was expected that we would go to university because the belief was that, if you're educated, you're going to be treated better, get a better job, and be around smarter people.*

Although expectations are indeed important, recent and robust Canadian data (described below) illustrate a multitude of other factors involved in shaping students' ambitions towards university and degree completion.

For the first time in Canadian history, a vibrant data set exists concerning youth and their educational pursuits. This is important, particularly in the area of persistence because, "the issue of persistence in higher education is much less studied" (Mueller, 2008, p. 48) compared with

access. The Youth in Transition Survey (YITS) was administered to two cohorts in 1999: those in Cohort A were 15 years old as of December 31, 1999 and those in Cohort B were 18 to 20 years old as of December 31, 1999. Cohort A is of interest to those concerned with access and persistence due to the survey's depth (including environmental conditions such as school and family characteristics) and its longitudinal scope, with student follow up in 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2006 (see *Who Goes? Who Stays? What Matters? Accessing and Persisting in Postsecondary Education in Canada* [Finnie, Sweetman, & Usher, 2008] for more information). Of importance for this discussion is the elucidation of lifestyle dynamics that are represented by the proxy of parental education level.

As noted in Chapter Two, the decision to attend university or not is shaped by many factors and, within the current policy context and the suite of funding options, not simply a matter of – and perhaps only minimally – affordability:

> An evolution in thinking about [postsecondary education] participation issues, moving away from debates on financial determinants – tuition, family income, and student financial aid – to a more in-depth discussion of the multitude of other factors that are at least as important. This emphasis does not imply that financial factors are irrelevant, nor that they might not become important as the context changes, but in the current context they appear to be crucial for only a small proportion of the population. (Finnie, Sweetman, & Usher, 2008, p. 2)

Inquiry then moves towards understanding what is meant by a "multitude of factors," which can be explored more deeply using the YITS data.

Utilizing parental education level as a proxy has been useful (even predictive) to a certain extent; however, public policy would likely never ensure that all parents are university-educated

in order to level the playing field and increase access and persistence for first-generation students (it would take an ideological change to view postsecondary education as critical and, therefore, everyone should have access). Summarized by Childs, Finnie, and Mueller (2010) about the current state of affairs is the following:

> What remains unknown, however, is the precise mechanisms through which these factors work. Is it, for example, parental education per se that determines access to PSE, either through its influence on the formation of preferences or the parental support provided for pursing higher education? (p. 245)

Required is a deeper understanding of what parental education encapsulates: "Parental education has, for example, been identified as being key to access, but what exactly does parental education provide that leads to college or university attendance?" (Finnie, Sweetman, & Usher, 2008). The YITS data engage this challenge and, together with understandings from this research, contribute to deeper understandings about the nature of parental education and the postsecondary education patterns of children.

By exploiting the YITS data, Childs, Finnie, and Mueller (2010) discovered many important and statistically significant correlations between university attendance and childhood experiences (noting that such relationships did not exist concerning college attendance). These factors were as follows: (a) *Cultural communication with parents*, which ranged from discussing politics, social issues, or books to listening to classical music; (b) *social communication with parents*, which involved frequency of parent-child conversations, regardless of the topic; (c) *family educational support*, with respect to time invested in helping with homework; (d) *family wealth*, which captured the amount of material possessions in the home; (e) *home educational resources,* such as educational references and places to study; (f) *classical culture,* included

going to museums, galleries, and theatre, noting that this facet had the *strongest* correlation with university participation; (g) *cultural possessions*, included books of poetry, classical literature, and art in the home; (h) *reading engagement*, involved reading practices outside of classroom reading and was *strongly* correlated with university attendance, and (i) *reading diversity*, included reading various materials like newspapers and comics, which was noted as a weaker correlation compared with the others (indicating that that reading engagement [point h], regardless of the material, is more important than what is read). These correlations provide additional details about the potential relationship between parental education and university participation of their children; specifically that such practices of bestowing cultural capital are more likely in homes where parent(s)/guardian(s) are university-educated. Marina is aware of these household experiences as she imagines the following:

> *I feel that a lot of people in my learning community are upper-class because how informed they are on worldly issues: I imagine that they have this time to explore interests (because they don't have to work like me) and sit at the table and have intellectual conversations with their parents (who are also well educated and help them). Their parents likely don't have to ask them what fascism means.*

However, the exact nature of these facets and their influence on access and persistence is still needed.

Upon examination of the plethora of studies involving family background, Lefebvre and Merrigan (2010) concluded that "the shaping of skills and the educational attainment of children are intimately related to the child's family environment at all ages and, in particular, at early ages (investments, resources, transmitted skills, values, motivation, etc.)" (p. 220) and that "within a portfolio of interventions geared to helping children attend PSE, proportionally more resources

should be devoted to early childhood interventions targeted toward children from low-income families" (p. 237). Notwithstanding that an unequal distribution of resources exists and is problematic in its own right, upon examination of multi-national studies of university access and persistence, it appears that, from a social policy perspective, the answer for improving circumstances lies within childhood and harmonizing an approach to formal education versus treating each domain as disparate entities.

Generational mobility and influences during childhood. Generational mobility is a concept concerned with social reproduction and the extent that a child's socioeconomic status is coupled with that of their parent(s)/guardian(s): "'Generational mobility' refers to the relationship between the socioeconomic status of parents – more particularly to their income – and the status and income their children will attain in adulthood" (p. 3). Stated differently, the playing field is considered more level, or generational mobility is increased, when "the tie between the adult outcomes of children and their family backgrounds is rather loose" (Roemer, 2004, p. 48): where children's success is a function of their abilities and desires rather than an accident of birth. For example, Corak (2004) summarized a substantial amount of quantitative data illustrating that, in the United States, "at least 40 percent of the economic advantage high-income parents have over low-income parents is passed to the next generation" (p. 9) compared with less than 20 percent in Canada and the Europe. Corak further noted that, while generational mobility is better in Canada and Europe, there is still concerning evidence of social reproduction as a function of the formal education system that (and echoed by Esping-Anderson [2004]) dispels the myth that modernization has increased individual mobility and equalized social classes.

Roemer (2004) challenged the concept of equality of opportunity, stating that, contrary to dominant beliefs, rarely, and only under extreme circumstances, does it support generational mobility. More specifically, he referenced empirical findings to conclude that belief in equality of opportunity is defunct because a cycle of inequality of educational outcomes has existed for years as a function of parental influences. These influences include: (a) social connection to schools and jobs; (b) family culture (e.g., family narratives) and the shaping of skills, beliefs, and attitudes towards education; (c) genetically-transmitted abilities, and (d) the shaping of motivations and preferences in children. Katrina speaks to the importance of identified home practices:

> *I remember how my mom would sit down with me during exam time and go through things because school was important.*

Kayla echoes the importance of social capital and is aware that other students are better connected to the job market:

> *I'm also aware that I don't have the same connection as other people whose parents were educated in Canada. I know some upper-year students who can help me, but establishing connections takes a lot of work and I should start.*

Roemer problematized current understandings of equity and the belief that solutions reside within the formal K-12 education system. Indeed, as put forward by Krahn (2009), the system has not yet enhanced generational mobility. Given this, concomitant with newly developed research, attending to childhood experiences, particularly the salience of stories and imagined future stories, might hold the key to realizing both equity of opportunity and outcomes.

Highlighting additional international data, Esping-Anderson (2004) also concluded that the development of cognitive abilities, aspirations, and motivations (which are developed early in

life, particularly before the age of six) are pivotal in influencing life course outcomes. He anchors this conclusion in a body of evidence concerning adult remedial education: "One solid finding is that attempts to correct skills deficiencies later in life are ineffective if people do not already possess adequate motivational or cognitive resources to begin with" (p. 297). Although he further noted that parental income indeed plays a significant role in being able to afford opportunities (for example, attending museums and concerts), he provides evidence of practices in countries with high levels of generational mobility, arguing that investments in social services, and childhood experiences (and education in particular), establish greater generational mobility compared with investments in formal education. For example, he discussed practices in Scandinavia, where accessible daycare and high pedagogical standards level the playing field and mitigate social reproduction:

> Scandinavian day care is basically of uniform, high pedagogical standards, meaning that children from disadvantaged families will benefit disproportionately. Day care in the United States is of extremely uneven quality, and children from disadvantaged families are likely to find themselves concentrated at the low end [of the quality spectrum]. (p. 308)

He summarized that the significant benefit of such practices, where the state adopts an approach to provide accessible and quality childcare to all families, is that "uneven distribution of cultural capital among families is greatly neutralized in the Nordic countries" (p. 308) and better supports both equity of opportunity and equity of outcomes. The research presented above is consistent with the stories of participants in underscoring the salience of childhood experiences; stories during childhood significantly shaped their dispositions and values towards education to the extent that they imagined future stories for themselves with greater social mobility.

Scandinavian policy establishes programming for all students, without treating peoples at a deficit. The programming reflects an ideology that social structures have an effect on generational mobility. Therefore, the policies are designed to provide high quality childcare and education for everyone, offering programming that allows all students to explore future stories for themselves in conjunction with established family stories. However, not all childhood programming is created equal, with some derived from an ideology where peoples are seen at a deficit without attention to inherent structural problems. That is, there is a significant difference between *everyone* having access to high quality child care/education and providing *intervention* to those who "need it." For example, in the Canadian context, Mueller (2008) advocated for early interventions "in school to level the playing field between children from different family backgrounds, and information and counseling to help students make the right PSE decisions" (p. 52). This is a description of an interventionist approach that does not address structural issues perpetuating inequities: interventions are aimed at "treating" the disadvantaged instead of fixing the problem. A recent case study exemplifies this.

Bay Academy (pseudonym used in the publication), a K-12 school in the United States, is comprised of a student demographic that, statistically speaking, would not pursue university education: 100% of students are youth of colour; 50% are English language learners; 90% qualify for the free lunch program for students from low-income households (Borrero, Lee, & Padilla, 2013). Further, none of the students comes from families where parent(s)/guardian(s) have postsecondary education; however, the students have achieved an Academic Performance Index score that is comparable to the socioeconomically privileged students attending more affluent schools and all of students from the first three graduating classes were admitted to college upon graduation. The researchers tout the school's attentiveness to equalizing social

disparity at early ages as pivotal to its successful outcomes, which follows recent conclusions from the various authors in the book *Generational Mobility in North America and Europe*. Specifically, Bay Academy employs a holistic and intentional approach through practices that include deeply engaging parents in the school's community life, providing them with educational tips for motivating their students, and instilling a "college-going culture" through school visits to colleges, hosting college educational fairs, and even naming each classroom after notable colleges. Teachers also discuss college paths with each student as early as Kindergarten and attempt to bridge classroom and home practices through frequent communication and family engagement. Essentially, teachers assume an *in loco parentis* role with the goal of developing cultural capital (i.e., information about postsecondary education systems) and a habitus oriented towards success and betterment through education:

> Such classrooms promote agency by nurturing students' academic efficacy, self-determination, and self-control. These classrooms also promote supportive relationships that extend into students' various social groups, including teachers, peers, and family. (p. 101)

Although well-intentioned, with noteworthy outcomes, such interventions perpetuate systems of inequity by isolating and treating specific populations without attention to the whole. In contrast, the Scandinavian system aims to equalize development for all through supporting the development of future stories within the whole population.

The salience of childhood experiences, particularly parental influences, is also evident with children of immigrants. Given the background of the participants, the next section compares the literature concerning experiences of immigrants' children and first-generation

students. Interestingly, with minor exceptions, the two bodies of scholarship have significant areas of congruence.

Children of immigrants. The fact that the participants were both first-generation students (as defined by Pillar University) and children of immigrants very much clouds analysis, begging the question: to what extent are these resonant narrative threads reflective of their experiences as first-generation students versus their experiences as immigrants? Interestingly, children of immigrants outnumber children of non-immigrants in university (Finnie & Mueller, 2010) and, although the research exploring their postsecondary experiences is scant, considerable research exists concerning parental influences and the desire for social mobility among immigrants. The aspect of conscious investment in cultural capital for social mobility appears to be the most significant difference when comparing the scholarship between first-generation students and children of immigrants.

Finnie and Mueller (2010) responded to Mueller's (2008) observation that "we do not know much about the [postsecondary education] experiences of immigrants to Canada" (p. 54). They opened their discussion with a summary of existing literature, highlighting current observations that immigrants have been underrepresented in the Canadian labour market (despite their advanced credentials required for immigration) and that first-generation and second-generation immigrants are participating in the postsecondary system, particularly university, in greater numbers than non-immigrant Canadians: 57% and 54.3% of first-generation and second-generation immigrants, respectively, participate in university, compared to 37.7% of non-immigrant Canadians. In examining the YITS data, they found that parental education is a strong predictor of university attendance for students from immigrant families, but, like the

Childs, Finnie, and Mueller (2010) array of correlates, they found something deeper with respect to parental aspirations:

> Parental aspirations are generally an important correlate of a child's access to university, but it is the desired level of [postsecondary education] completion that is by far the most important influence, and immigrant parents' higher aspirations for their children help explain some of the access gaps we observe. (Finnie & Mueller, 2010, p. 209)

It is not surprising that the aspirations of immigrant parents drive their children towards acquiring cultural capital in the form of a degree.

Although most first-generation students' families (unlike the participants in this study, who are persisting) may not story future roles for their children as university students, because university is not seen as a natural progression (Lehmann, 2007), immigrant families see education as cultural capital to invest in: "Families from migrant communities will often put all their resources into educating one or more of their children in order to effect a similar transformation (in this case, a move from one class position to another)" (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2014). Indeed, according to Colombo and Rebughini (2012), although children of immigrants are likely to experience discrimination and be underrepresented in the workforce (consistent with Finnie & Mueller's [2010] findings), relegated to less privileged social positions, it "has not prevented most of them from achieving upward social mobility" (p. 39) through investment in cultural capital.

Not surprisingly, the participants expressed significant desire to achieve greater capital and enhanced social status in order to provide for their family (reflected in the *I Want More* thread); the sacrifices of the parent(s)/guardian(s) propel their children socially upward through investment in cultural capital. Dani summarizes the sentiment as follows:

> That said, I'm very proud of what my parents did for me and my family and will always be grateful. I will also always be there to support my family through my success and make whatever sacrifices that I need to make life easier for them.

As a result of experiencing significant challenges as immigrants (with Kayla and Katrina's parents having university credentials from outside of Canada), the participants' family stories of struggle, sacrifice, and education as a means to a better future, propelled them to story futures as university graduates. Marina summarizes the sentiment conveyed by all participants as such:

> *I know that if I work hard, there will be personal gain and I won't have to worry about my future and I don't want to struggle like my parents did. I've always wished I was more upper-class, especially to buy clothes, but my parents are both working class and work as managers at a restaurant and constantly say, "work really hard in school so you don't have to work in a restaurant." I hope I'm not working-class in the future; I like eating at restaurants, not working in them.*

This aspect, initially, appears to be a central difference between first-generation students and students of immigrants – the focussed investment of resources in acquiring cultural capital, illustrated in the *I Want More* resonant thread. Moving to the larger social context, these family stories to want and become more are contrary to the dominant grand narrative of where immigrants "should" be in our society: such a realization of structural inequities may, in fact, be the genesis to this narrative thread. However, first-generation scholars highlight that many first-generation students also invest in capital to achieve social transformation (Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Granfield, 1991; Kaufman, 2003; Lehman, 2009). Given this, all resonant narrative threads clearly straddle the first-generation *and* immigrant student bodies of scholarship; however, the extent to which they reside more prominently in one or the other is difficult, if not

impossible, to untangle. This reflects the interwoven complexity that the stories of Dani, Kayla, Marina, and Katrina are their stories as first-generation students *and* first- or second-generation immigrants.

Identified in the Chapter Two literature review, Lehmann (2009) and Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009) summarized the adolescent experiences of first-generation students with respect to feeling different early on (particularly with respect to academic ability), being aware of differences in distribution of capital, and experiencing family struggles. These three themes are reflected in the resonant narrative threads of: (a) *Do Well in School: Education is Important,* where their educational potential was identified early by others and they began to see themselves as university students (with Kayla and Katrina seeing university as a natural progress based on their parents' expectations – a function of them possessing university degrees); (b) *They Work Hard for the Money,* focusing on lived experiences of family social struggle; (c) *Others Have it Easier,* with respect to awareness of class differences and others having more or having things easier, and (d) *I am Privileged and Value Family*, where students shared their admiration of parents, particularly concerning their development of "working-class values," such as working hard. The narrative thread *I'm at a Better Place* also straddles both areas of scholarship with respect to awareness of cultural capital – a specific form that is unique to Pillar University. In a broader sense, the thread *It's About the Community Feeling*, represents the search for belonging to community and, evidenced through Marker's (2004) work cited earlier concerning Aboriginal students, applies beyond first-generation students and children of immigrants.

Although the motivation may be different, a common base is that parental influences (i.e., family stories) matter – and they matter early in life! This conclusion corroborates much of what is found in the literature concerning university attendance for all students: aspirations and

expectations are salient forces concerning participation (Barr-Telford, Cartwright, Prasil, & Shimmons, 2003). Although this discussion does not clearly answer the question as to the influences of being first-generation versus a child of an immigrant (indeed, the scholarship seems to straddle both realms), it does lead to curiosity about childhood influences and education as shaping dispositions towards resilience and future possible stories. However, parental influences, manifested through storied expectations, have their genesis in macrosocial structural forces of inequity that perpetuate ideology of the dominant class, including the educational system. Indeed, Bourdieu (1984), being a first-generation student himself, problematized formal educational as being an instrument of the bourgeoisie. As mentioned before, this led Taylor (1994) to conclude that "in virtually no Western industrialized society has formal education become an instrument by which disadvantaged and impoverished groups can achieve a substantially greater degree of social and economic equality" (p. 47). Parents are not at fault and policy interventions designed to help parents "parent better" are not the answer. As will be explored further, policies oriented to ensuring high-quality programming for all children may hold the solution. Notwithstanding structural social barriers, the participants storied futures as university students and developed a resilient orientation to realize that imagined future.

The concept of resiliency warrants further attention; indeed, evident from the literature is that fostering resiliency in childhood is important for enhancing generational mobility and reducing the cycle of social reproduction inherent in current models of formal education. Although this concept does not adequately critique the macrosocial system of inequities, which would be the focus of a critical inquiry, the concept will be discussed further as a means to change outcomes within the current system.

Resilience-oriented habitus. Masten and Obradovic (2006) summarized major progressions within the resilience scholarship discussed at the Resilience in Children conference in February 2006. They highlighted four waves of resilience research as follows: (a) The first wave in the 1970s located primarily within behavioural psychology concerned with youth who fared well with serious mental disorders; (b) the second wave examined physiology and explored regulatory systems and processes; (c) interventions, preventions and policy characterized the third wave, and (d) the fourth wave is currently attempting to integrate existing knowledge of resilience across disciplines. Masten and Obradovic suggested that interdisciplinary integration has only recently been possible due to the elucidation of agreed upon tenets or "hot spots" within the scholarship:

> Theory and data to date point to important processes amenable to study at multiple levels…some of these spots include the core adaptive systems implicated by the short list at the level of child, relationships, family, and other systems (e.g., effortful control; goal-directed behaviour in the context of affectively arousing conditions; the motivation to adapt and succeed; parenting under stress; up- and down-regulation of affect by media, peers, parents, and religious practices). (p. 23)

In short, Masten and Obradovic defined resiliency as "positive patterns of adaptation in the context of adversity" (p. 14), which includes goal-directed behaviours, motivation to succeed, and taking control of one's destiny. They also stated that resiliency development is a complex interconnection with a child and her/his surroundings, which includes peers, media, and parental influences – they illuminate the salience of family, social, and cultural narratives in shaping resilience-oriented dispositions.

These facets of resiliency surfaced prominently in both the preceding section and in Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani's narrative accounts (presented in Chapter Four), to the extent that it was difficult to ignore. In particular, in the resonant thread, *They Work Hard for the Money*, the participants and their families all experienced significant financial struggles, which strongly shaped the participants' storied futures to be university educated to both not struggle and also provide for their families. Kayla shares how the struggles shape her future story:

> *They also didn't have a car and would take public transit, often scraping together change for the fare…Those times were hard: when you've seen the bottom, you don't want to be there…For years they worked hard and made many sacrifices in order to reach their position and provide for me and my brother.*

Dani's conversation with her grandfather illustrates how this resilience is fostered as a result of family stories orienting her towards the goal of university completion:

> *I remember my grandpa saying that he thought I was pretty bright and that "if you can go to university, I think you should; there is a difference between not wanting to go and not being able to go." They wouldn't have been disappointed if I didn't go to university because I didn't want to or didn't feel I was ready or able to succeed – they would be disappointed if I didn't go because they believe in my ability.*

Indeed, their strong sense of resiliency convinced me that their persistence in university and eventual degree attainment – because they all *will* complete – was a predetermined future state; that is, narrative coherence is attained for these women and held taut and strong by a resilience-oriented habitus thread that spans their past, present, and future. Stories as conditions of existence represent larger social structures: parents experienced class-based struggles to survive within a structure of unequal resource distribution. Correspondingly, their storied experiences

shaped a habitus oriented towards resilience: their stories of strife, rooted within structural inequities shaped a habitus in their children to *become more* (yet another dominant social narrative rooted in capitalist ideology). The resilience-oriented habitus is, thus, also a product of macrosocial structures.

Evident in their narratives, Marina, Kayla, Katrina, and Dani exhibit goal-directed behaviours, are motivated to succeed, and take control of their situations: the stories of their lives shaped a resilience-oriented habitus such that they desire social mobility, not only for themselves but also for their families, and orient choices towards that goal. For example, with the resonant thread, *Do Well in School: Education is Important*, the women internalized that education was valued, that they must do well, that they must work hard to achieve, and that postsecondary education of some form was in their future (with Dani and Marina receiving messages that college would be acceptable, but the preference would be university since they were capable). Their goal to do well in school and attend postsecondary (and university, in particular) was established at a young age, as Marina shares:

> *The big thing that we were always told was to work hard so we can be our own bosses. We were always told was to work hard so we can be our own bosses. We were also told that, "hey, it's your life, so if you want to shit on it, you can." However, the words were different than what was actually meant. Even though university is not better than the other options (and there are many success stories in the subway about the colleges and jobs) and there are different paths, I saw university as the only path because of them.*

Further, considering the resonant thread, *I'm at a Better Place*, being at one of the most prestigious universities in the country further reinforces their goal to attain a degree and is consistent with Tinto's theory that both institutional commitment and goal commitment are

important to persistence to degree completion and Bourdieu's assertion that people will invest in capital to advance their social position.

With respect to motivation, Dani, Marina, Katrina, and Kayla all experienced their parents' struggle to establish themselves, which is apparent in the *They Work Hard for the Money* thread. Along the same lines, and illustrated in the *Others Have it Easier* thread, the participants were aware of social class differences and possessing less economic, social, and cultural capital compared with peers. These forces culminated into a drive for social mobility – to be more than their parents – and feature prominently throughout all resonant narrative threads, but particularly in the *I Want More* thread. Kayla, Dani, Katrina, and Marina's narrative accounts not only illuminate the salience of early-childhood development of resiliency, but also shed light upon persistence in the university context and Tinto's theory of student departure.

Tinto's model of student departure. Consonance with Tinto's model is once again apparent as these students entered the university with various dispositions and such dispositions influenced motivation towards degree completion. Also consistent with Tinto's model, and apparent in the *It's About the Community Feel* story, is that sense of belonging is important and, although academic integration was their initial focus, they now understand and are oriented to becoming more involved and engaged so that they experience more balanced membership in both the academic and, in particular, social communities. Kayla summarizes her experience with this tension:

> *Not only did MyDef help me make friends, but it was also a way for me to get to know my college, and some upper-year off-campus students who gave me advice on how*

> *to get involved and make friends while living off-campus…the establishment of connections, in my opinion, is very important in making yourself feel part of the university*.

Although Tinto's model serves as a good framework overall for conceptualizing persistence, there are a few aspects that, in light of the narratives of experience, should be revisited. First, the concept of integration continues to be problematic: as other critics have stated, it places sole responsibility on the student to integrate into the academic and social fabrics of the institution. The requirement to integrate should be re-conceptualized as fostering sense of belonging within the university's academic and social communities as a partnered endeavour between students and the institution. All participants shared feeling out of place at first, which is a natural consequence of entering liminality. They all also noted the litany of information they encountered and how it was difficult to make sense of every opportunity and event. For example, Dani shared that she was bombarded with information about ways to get involved and did not know exactly what to do, which Katrina echoes as follows:

> *I've also felt like I didn't belong during Frosh and wondered if I wasn't outgoing enough…Early in first year, I really felt alone.*

Kayla also observed the large volume of information, but felt lucky that she identified the MyDef program. From a cultural capital perspective, this is problematic because those that could benefit from a streamlined and more pointed orientation or pre-orientation to build social and cultural capital capacity might be getting lost in the flurry of communications. Katrina provides an example of this:

> *Early in first year, I really felt alone. I do wish that I had joined a mentor program, but didn't really see this information. There's so much advertising during the beginning of school that most of it gets lost out of context.*

Dani also shares an example of the influx of information, also offering insights that opportunities may exist to simplify program offerings based around common outcomes:

> *Another thing about the program is that the opportunities get confusing for students. I remember not knowing of all the opportunities to get involved because there's so much competing for our attention.*

Universities may be assuming students possess a certain amount of capital to enable them to decipher the myriad of publications, but this may be a dangerous practice if students cannot effectively navigate the myriad of information.

This reaffirms the notion that opportunities for engagement should be streamlined and communication should be enhanced, which is particularly important for those that enter the university environment with less knowledge of the system. It also suggests that, when programs have similar transition and capacity-building outcomes, they may benefit from consolidation. Consolidation (bringing international, Aboriginal, and first-generation students together) would enhance efficiency, streamline communications, and be more consistent with institutional values of diversity. This is not to suggest that each community does not have unique facets of diversity and belonging that need to be fostered, but that these community-building roles could be facilitated through student association clubs and mentors. Such an approach would be incumbent upon tighter partnerships between universities and students associations (including training and resource sharing) to build meaningful communities for students.

Another revision that would make Tinto's model stronger would be to incorporate aspects of traits (a resilience-oriented habitus and imagined future story, for example) that are developed in childhood and serve as a powerful predictor of persistence towards degree completion. Reconceptualizing the model to view the educational system as one seamless partner instead of disparate entities would greatly enhance the social approach to persistence to increase generational mobility. This is not solely a critique of Tinto's model, but also of governmental funding models that provide funding for universities to increase access, when, arguably, the funding could be more effective to ensure quality educational experiences for everyone throughout the lifespan, particularly during childhood. Such a revamping of the system could see enhanced support for children to imagine future stories for themselves. Universities could then be concerned with building *community* (through partnerships with students associations and peer mentoring relationships with upper-year students), *capacity* (through opportunities to build various forms of capital, including cultural [knowledge of the system] and social [concerning job connections]), and *confidence* (by providing peer feedback and other positive pedagogical approaches that engage diverse learners as per Universal Instructional Design principles).

Lastly, and evident in the *I am Privileged and Value Family* resonant thread, Tinto's model should embrace broader constructs of community and sense of belonging by espousing the benefits that membership in multiple communities provides for students; specifically noting that harmony among all communities is possible.

Conceptual Relationship between Narrative Conceptions of Experience and Habitus

An interesting aspect of this research concerns how the stories the students shared took me more deeply into theorization of Bourdieu's habitus construct. However, I must espouse an important limitation before venturing into this terrain. Bourdieu's work, largely embodying

Marxist ideology, is oriented to critical examination of bourgeoisie culture and power within capitalist dogma and, indeed, the narrative accounts whisper critique of such macrosocial forces. For example, the participants strongly value the meritocratic myth and cultural capital in the form of a Pillar University Degree in order to become bourgeoisie – a consumed desire to be part of that world. The narrative accounts illustrate a problem with capitalism, reflected in the meritocratic narrative in that there is an unequal distribution of resources that is ripe for the taking…for those with "bestowed" ability, meaning ability valued within a capitalist system of meritocracy.

I had previously conjectured that the habitus was shaped by the stories of our lives and also filtered what stories were heard and how they were interpreted: *the stories we live by have a reciprocal formative relationship with our habitus (dispositions, values, beliefs, and attitudes), which, in turn, shape behaviours in our social world*. However, I only provided minimal grounding through literature references or direct evidence. It was a conceptual hypothesis that seemed logical. Upon closer examination of the literature and the students' narrative accounts, the stories of our lives indeed have a formative relationship with habitus as can be considered *conditions of existence* (Bourdieu, 1994) that shape the habitus. Indeed, all participants shared examples of how childhood experiences shaped their views towards education:

> Kayla: *As you can tell, university is expected. Though my grandparents didn't even finish high-school, their children and all my cousins are highly educated, being doctors or lawyers or engineers. My parents want the best for us: they're not forcing me or my brother into anything specific, just that we must go to university and get an education. The message started early*

> Katrina: *Even during family gatherings you can tell that everyone is educationally-oriented. It's the reason we had to move from Saudi Arabia, because they don't have universities there that non-citizens can attend. We moved to Canada about eight years ago and the sole reason was so that my brother and I could go to university.*
>
> Marina: *Though my parents said it's my life, it's really theirs. They put a lot of pressure on me to do well. Even though university is not better than the other options (and there are many success stories in the subway about the colleges and jobs) and there are different paths, I saw university as the only path because of them.*
>
> Dani: *Though they never attended postsecondary, they valued education and, when I was four years old, we moved to Canada as my parents wanted to provide me with better opportunities for education.*

The discussion below expands this line of thinking and, thus, contributes to deeper understandings of Bourdieu's habitus.

Though a highly regarded sociologist, Bourdieu's work is not without scrutiny, particularly concerning his concept of habitus. Many have critiqued that, while Bourdieu himself likely comprehended the breadth and depth of the concept, clear definitions are not evident in his writings. For example, Crossly, (2001) suggested that "there is more potential for an elaboration and deepening of [Bourdieu's concept of habitus] than his work to date has achieved" (p. 81). This sentiment is echoed more recently by Lizardo (2004):

> The reaction of many American sociologists when faced with this perplexing conceptualization of habitus is to dismiss it as a fuzzy idea or to treat it as under-specified and abstract, [while others] regard it as a foreign object in Bourdieu's overall theoretical scheme. (p. 378)

In attempts to clarify Bourdieu's concept of habitus, some have drawn parallels with concepts from other disciplines, suggesting that, having incorporated aspects concerned with information and sensory processing, the concept of habitus is both a cognitive and sociological construct, such that Bourdieu himself would more appropriately be considered a *cognitive sociologist*.

DiMaggio (1997) and Lizardo (2004) traced the conceptualization of habitus back to the many explanations Bourdieu provided, highlighting many references to *schemes*, a concept widely employed in cognitive psychology. Although the full discussion of how habitus can be considered interdisciplinary in nature, bridging the disciplines of sociology, cognition, and psychology (to name a few), is outside the scope of this paper (see Lizardo for an in-depth discussion), I share it here to underscore the need in the scholarship to bring greater clarity to the concept of habitus within sociology.

In defining habitus within the discipline of sociology, Lizardo (2004) stated that it is "a socially produced cognitive structure" (p. 393), which is a description supported by Bourdieu himself. Before examples from Bourdieu's works are discussed, it is important to recall that my research is embedded within a Deweyian ontology of experience, which assumes reality is unrepresentable in a single entity, spans the past to the future, and is inherently social. Through this lens, Bourdieu's definitions of habitus convey the formative role that the social world has on its development (making it "structured") and how the habitus creates schemes that enable interpretation of the social world (thus, "structuring structures"). One of Bourdieu's earliest definitions of habitus is as follows:

> A system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, applications, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical

> transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 95)

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu, once again, highlighted the salience of environment and, therefore, the social, in shaping the habitus: "The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment…produce habitus" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). In *Distinction*, Bourdieu presented a robust explanation, which positions the habitus as shaped by the social and includes key Deweyian principles related to interaction, continuity, and context:

> The cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world are internalized, 'embodied' social structures. The practical knowledge of the social world that is presupposed by 'reasonable' behaviour within it implements classificatory schemes...historical schemes of perception and appreciation which are the product of objective division into classes (age groups, genders, social classes) and which function below the level of consciousness and discourse. Being the product of the incorporation of the fundamental structures of a society, these principles of division are common to all the agents of the society and make possible the production of a common, meaningful world, a common-sense world. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 468)

This is why Bourdieu hypothesized that all agents within a social class exhibit similar behaviours: because they are socialized into similar ways of doing, knowing, and feeling – the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective domains of learning – they develop similar orientations to practice within a given field (as noted before, practice gravitates towards replication as a result of a stable habitus; however, the habitus is malleable and subject to reshaping when brought into consciousness, particularly when one is in a new context).

Later in *Distinction*, Bourdieu presented a vision of how habitus is shaped and how it, in turn, shapes behaviours. Of note, is that Bourdieu illustrated that *conditions of existence* condition the habitus. Although Bourdieu does not provide a clear definition of what he means by conditions of existence, what can be inferred is that conditions of existence refer to the social through Bourdieu's statement that "different conditions of existence produce different habitus" (p. 170), which again refers to how people from different classes (or even cultures for that matter), learn different ways of being. In Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power*, the editor, John B. Thompson, provided the following account that highlights the social as conditions of existence:

> Dispositions are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation in which early childhood experiences are particularly important. Through a myriad of mundane processes of training and learning, such as those involved in the inculcation of table manners ('sit up straight', 'don't eat with your mouth full', etc.), the individual acquired a set of dispositions which literally mould the body and become second nature. The dispositions produced thereby are also structured in the sense that they unavoidably reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired. An individual from a working-class background, for instance, will have acquired dispositions which are different in certain respects from those acquired by individuals who were brought up in a middle-class milieu. (Thompson, cited in Bourdieu, 1991, p. 12)

This is (perhaps the only) direct reference to stories shaping dispositions (or habitus): the set of dispositions are shaped through family narratives, which are shaped by broader structural forces. They are shared within a social class across generations and reflective of dominant class ideology.

In the same book, Bourdieu (1991) directly referenced social history noting that habitus, like status or social identity, "are products of history, subject to being transformed, with more or less difficulty, by history" (p. 248). Further, cognitive psychologists have consistently demonstrated that people take information in without critical assessment. This information, stories included, enter our minds and shape our habitus in unconscious ways and, only when brought to consciousness through reflection (likely when we are in liminal spaces) so we recognize and critique our innate dispositions. Gilbert (1991) summarized this as follows:

> Findings from a multitude of research literature converge on a single point: People are credulous creatures who find it easy to believe and very difficult to doubt. In fact, believing is so easy, and perhaps so inevitable, that it may be more like involuntary comprehension that it is like rational assessment. (p. 117)

Understanding conditions of existence as: (a) conditioning the habitus through unconscious means; (b) relative to one's context, and (c) embedded in the social (which includes the stories that we live and tell) it is axiomatic that the stories of our lives shape habitus and, by extension, practice.

Grand Narratives of Meritocracy and Storied-Futures

Grand narratives significantly shape how we interpret and interact with our social world, particularly when that grand narrative has obtained a place of dominance. For example, most people in society (even the most liberal of us) are greatly enveloped by the *heteronormative narrative,* such that seeing a male wearing a ring on his left hand will cause many to assume that he is married to a woman: we are groomed to regard marriage as a heterosexual union. Another example of grand narratives is illustrated in Estefan's (2008) work with suicidal gay men and the health care system. Although most health-care practitioners based their care on interventions

shaped through the *harm narrative*, which resulted in assumptions that the men were impulsive and behaving wrongly, Estefan's narrative inquiry illustrated that the men were harming themselves to cope and stay alive; a way of being responsible in order to cope with stresses in their lives. The harm narrative concept represents the dominant societal view that harming behaviour is wrong – an escape from troubles in the absence of more positive coping mechanisms – and should immediately cease. Such an approach minimizes the salience of context in treatment and prioritizes blind cessation intervention. However, the *moral narrative*, an example of a grand narrative that Estefan nourished in his analysis, challenges health-care practitioners to think differently about (and therefore care differently for) patients in their care. Specifically, the participants in his study perceived their self-harming behaviour as a positive way to stay alive for others (i.e., not an escape from life), while viscerally dealing with other hurts and stresses in their life. Estefan's study challenges practitioners to relegate perceptions about self-harm and suicide to the background so that they can explore the context underpinning the behaviour and more holistically help such individuals. Social stories shape our worldview and how we interpret phenomena or interactions: they are ontological in nature, shaping both our intra- and inter-personal perceptions of our social world.

Grand narratives exist within the domain of higher education, particularly upon reflection of Dani, Marina, Kayla, and Katrina's narratives. Their experiences cannot fully be understood through the larger *meritocratic narrative* dominant in the current postmodern world; although participants believe in the meritocratic myth (a neoliberal structural tenet), they did not attend simply as a result of good grades and demonstrated ability. What surfaced when analyzing their narratives was the prominence of socially co-constructed roles and dispositions that shaped their view of, and experiences in, the university field. Merit was only part of the story. The other part

was concerned with how future stories to live by are imagined and created for a life to play out – or the *storied-futures narrative*. These grand narratives will be expanded further.

The meritocratic narrative is ubiquitous in our society, derived from neoliberal ideology. The meritocratic narrative operates to the extent that most citizens believe that access to university is based on demonstrated ability: those who choose university possess the necessary talent, have weighed the costs and risks, and want to invest their skills in opportunity for the future. The market will sort it out. Although university-bound first-generation students may have the ability to succeed, the transition to and through university is different to the extent that choosing to apply or continue through to degree completion is influenced by a class-based role, defined before birth and continues during childhood. Further, the illusion of choice operating within the meritocratic narrative is present to various extents in provincial policies and remedies; it blinds us from exploring equal outcomes because we direct efforts to better supporting access through financial aid and integration through support services. In short, the meritocratic narrative is a dangerous single story (Adichie, 2009) and there is (at least) one other grand narrative that provides better insights into the experiences of first-generation students: what I have called the storied-futures narrative.

Exploring individual experiences to illuminate the genesis and reproduction of social roles enables unmasking of strong, formative, and largely reproductive, stories by which individuals "play their part." The storied-futures narrative guide exploration towards the rich worldviews and experiences that first-generation students possess, which enables us to better inform policies and procedures. That is, the storied-futures narrative are concerned with exploring actions, decisions, and interactions (i.e., practice) as a product of the stories of our lives and our habitus. For example, the multitude of stories, presented early, discussing the

salience of parental expectations illustrate the storying of future identities – as university graduates, for example.

Positioned against the dominant meritocratic narrative and concerning the issue at hand, the storied-futures narrative challenge us to look beyond systems of meritocracy and see that stories and dispositions exist and serve as barriers to those with merit; because of stories that we are born into, some may never see university attendance as a choice or option (Walpole, 2003). It is this perspective (one that is concerned with an interplay of the stories we live by and disposition or habitus) that needs to be explored and understood if circumstances are to change: meritocracy is not the whole story. Therefore, the perspective of the storied-futures narrative explore the seemingly axiomatic, yet overly neglected, experiences and stories of first-generation students, where both *habitus dissonance* and *narrative coherence* (generally reflecting subjective and objective conditions[15], respectively) becomes central to analysis. Such a research lens draws attention to the unequal class-based struggles of first-generation students as they seek space and place in university cultures, and problematizes both the dominant meritocratic narrative *and* integration models of student retention (Tinto, 1993), which assumes all students are skilled-equals who experience the university's social and academic systems uniformly. Indeed, the participants' narratives contrast how the meritocratic and storied-futures narrative, individually, do not provide the entire picture of their journeys to and through university.

Examining the narrative accounts through the meritocratic lens is simple. Through this lens, Kayla, Dani, Katrina, and Marina's academic success, represented by university-poised grades, is an expression of their inherited ability and hard work. The high grades, which were necessary for admission, become a symbol of potential to succeed at university. Having admitted students with merit, universities then orient efforts to challenge students, providing

[15] Bourdieu generally

access to support services and opportunities for engagement in order to help students develop holistically as persons, scholars, and citizens. Through such a lens, attention is not given to internal struggles of belonging, disparity in capital, or pressures for social mobility to care for families in the future.

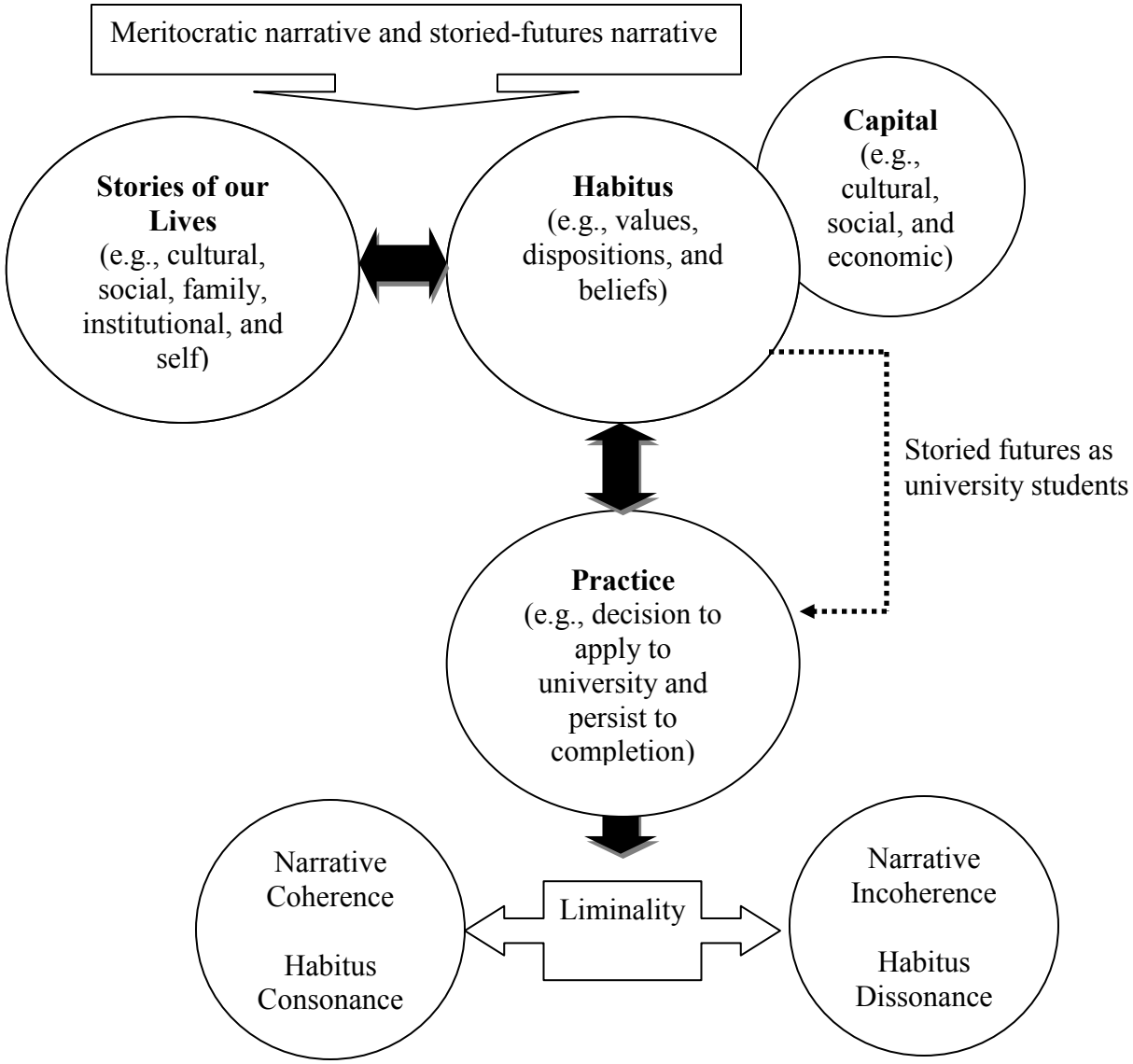
Conversely, examining Dani, Kayla, Marina, and Katrina's narrative accounts through storied-futures lens illustrates a different story. A result of many contextual factors, including struggle, sacrifice, and valuing education, the participants developed a habitus oriented towards resilience: a goal-oriented disposition that positions social mobility vis á vis educational credentials and in a kind of tension with social reproduction (i.e., the desire for achievement as a result of their experiences is both a critique of social reproduction and also a motivator). In addition, future stories as postsecondary students were co-constructed with formative figures in their lives (with Kayla and Katrina developing definitive university student roles, resulting from their parental expectations). These identities form part of their habitus and, consequently, shape a desire and determination to be successful at university. Such storied futures developed in their youth and underscore the salience of interventions during childhood to address equal opportunity and outcome dilemmas in the university field. Although storied futures exist, the participants still "feel" the social class difference. This is not surprising, as Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009) reminded that "dispositions of self-scrutiny and self-improvement – almost 'a constant fashioning and re-fashioning of the self' but one that still retains key valued aspects of a working-class self" (p. 1103). In short, storied futures project a future identity, orienting the students to their imagined fate (Okri, as cited in Steels, 2011), which becomes a likely future given a habitus oriented towards resilience and goal attainment, rooted in past stories of struggle and desire for more. However, given that social class becomes a deeply ingrained aspect of

identity, much of it is retained throughout the social transformation. Meritocracy is only part of the story.

Conclusion

The relationship of stories of our lives (as conditions of existence) to habitus and to the meritocratic and storied futures grand narratives are depicted in Figure 3 (Narratives, Stories of our Lives, and Grand Narratives). To expand, the stories of our lives (e.g., social-, family-, and self-narratives) are conditions of existence that mold one's habitus (i.e., dispositions, values, and beliefs) and, when combined with capital, shape behaviours. Behaviours gravitate towards both narrative coherence and habitus consonance. Behaviours are also a function of socially ascribed and storied identities that are co-constructed by the individual and her/his environment.

Figure 3: Narratives, Stories of our Lives, and Grand Narratives



Much of the discussion concerning generational mobility, in addition to previously noted examples with the Scandinavian system, orients quality childhood education within the storied-futures narrative: programs and activities attempt expand imagination of where one might see themselves, while still honouring family and self stories. In brief, potentially successful programs operate within the storied-futures narrative to foster development of a resilience-oriented habitus and introduce storied future possibilities, with social role possibilities for first-generation students so that they might tell stories of themselves as university students.

This conclusion gives rise to the hypothesis that those first-generation students who possess a habitus oriented towards resilience and story a possible future as a university student are more likely to persist towards degree completion. Figure 4 (Wonderings About Persistence Related to Storied Futures and Resilience) attempts to depict this more concretely; although non-first-generation students may not need to be resilient in order to attend university and persist through to degree completion, having been born into a storied future that university is expected, first-generation students that persist may need both a resilience-oriented habitus and storied futures as a university student.

Figure 4: Wonderings About Persistence Related to Storied Futures and Resilience

	Storied Future as a University Student	**No Storied Future as a University Student**
Resilience-Oriented Habitus	Very likely to persist	Might not persist
Non-Resilience-Oriented Habitus	Likely to persist	Unlikely to persist

Possessing just one (i.e., the habitus or storied futures) may result in persistence to degree completion, but potentially not to the same degree. I make these conceptual inferences based on the participants' narrative accounts, where a resilience-oriented habitus and storied futures as a

university student were instilled (albeit to various degrees). Regardless of the cases, first-generation students who persist (even those who are oriented towards resilience and story their future as university students) will likely have less forms of capital when compared with non-first-generation students.

Chapter Seven: Reflections and Wonderings

Their Stories

Naturally, as a co-constructor and someone who spent significant time talking with each of the students (a relationship that continues informally to answer questions and make connections to professional role models for them), I have come to admire Dani, Kayla, Katrina, and Marina and believe that they will all accomplish exactly what they set out to do. Their drive towards social mobility – to be more for both themselves and for their families – is so strong and was established really early in life. In fact, the idea of a resilience-oriented habitus that was established during childhood featured so prominently that I have been forced to think of what brought me to where I am today. It is a surprise state, but one that I have reflected on recently as a result not only of the research experience, but also experience in a recent interview.

Recently, I was interviewed for a Vice-President Students position at a nearby college. The college has a significant first-generation population (nearly 50% of students) and, naturally, the conversation involved discussing the needs and experiences of these students. It was interesting because, instead of talking about Bourdieu (which usually escapes from my lips first when questioned about my doctoral work), I started talking about myself as a first-generation student and what I learned from the participants, highlighting the interview setting as an example. I shared that, when I was younger, these "executive-level" positions were always for other people and that there was a part of me experiencing a dissonance with this place; not because I am not confident in my ability, but because it *feels* different (i.e., habitus dissonance). But what keeps me going is my imagined future for myself and my belief that the goals are possible – just like Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani. During the interview, I briefly overviewed what I learned from the participants' journeys to illustrate that, for me, and similar to the Pillar

students, being first-generation is about feeling different, but also believing in the goal and oneself and that this is at the core of helping first-generations succeed in the postsecondary system[16]. I reflected on this after the interview and, once again, looked back to my own childhood for explanations for why I am where I am today: completing a doctoral program and being considered for executive level positions, when I never foresaw such a future when I was younger.

Kayla, Katrina, Marina, and Dani's stories of their experiences and our inquiries into their lived and told stories held the answer. Reflecting back, the stories of struggle, wanting more, and seeing formal education as the answer to fight for always kept me going. I see now that I also developed a resilience-oriented disposition (being goal oriented and taking control of situations towards that goal) towards realizing a future story I had for myself – one of greater social ability.

Wonderings and Conclusions

The research journey began with the following question: **for first-generation students, how do the stories of their lives have a formative relationship with their habitus (i.e., the dispositions, beliefs, and values that constitute their worldview) and, if so, how do their lived and told stories shape their university experiences towards persistence?** In short, the stories of the lives of the participants (a) storied futures for them as postsecondary graduates (as university graduates for two) and (b) shaped a habitus oriented towards resilience. The stories of their lives shaped how they perceived university (that it was generally expected) and propelled them to succeed academically in order to acquire the cultural capital (a degree) and improve their circumstances (hence the initial drive towards the academic versus social community). Every

[16] As an aside, althoughwhile I did not get the job, I heard back from the President that it was close between me and the incumbent acting in the role; with the interviewers being impressed with my, what they consider uniquely impressive and refreshing, approach to student life. They then hired me into the Dean of Students portfolio.

challenge and opportunity they experienced during university was embedded in the present, with a constant gaze forward toward their goal of degree completion and grounded in the stories that shaped their lives. The complexities of their experiences generated many *wonderings* (Clandinin, 2013) concerning the research and the phenomenon of first-generation student underrepresentation at universities. I use the word wondering intentionally as I am cognizant that, as a narrative inquiry with four participants, the research was intended to provide a deep account of experience and conceptual inferences for future research.

As a doctoral student concerned with the larger scholarship and policy directions, I wonder about the following:

Resilience-oriented habitus and projected future stories to live by are important.

- Are first-generation students who possess a habitus oriented towards resilience and who story future stories for themselves as a university graduate more likely to persist towards degree completion? Could this assumption be explored quantitatively to acquire needed breadth?
- If the habitus and storied-futures are significant forces, does one have a greater impact on persistence (as illustrated in Figure 4)? Also, are additional factors important but remain uncovered due to the methodology utilized in this research?

Narratives as conditions of existence.

- Although Bourdieu makes no identifiable or specific references to narratives as conditions of existence, he extensively discusses the salience of history and the social in habitus development; however, would Bourdieu himself consider narratives as conditions of existence that shape the habitus? Would scholars more intimately involved with Bourdieu's work agree?

Holistic approach to educational policy.

- Would current funds invested in first-generation persistence strategies in postsecondary education (excluding grants geared to mitigating tuition costs) be equally invested in childhood, similar to Scandinavian practices, to equalize capital and facilitate imagining of possible futures during formative years?
- Are current policy interventions resulting in programs that are "out to lunch?" Would childhood interventions be more aligned with obtaining "successful outcomes" of equal opportunity and equal outcome?
- Should the formal education system work more harmoniously together? If so, should the role of the K-12 (particularly childhood education) system better support resilience and imagining future personal stories? Would the role of universities be to equalize cultural capital (with respect to knowledge of the system) and social capital (with respect to connects to jobs and sense of belonging)?

Common stories and social class.

- To what extent are the resonant narrative threads (identified in Chapter Five) similar for all first-generation students, meaning that, in a Bourdieuan sense, a class-based habitus indeed exists? Is the thread, *I Want More*, a significant difference between first-generation students and children of immigrants or does it straddle both areas of scholarship?
- If a class-based habitus exists and those stories are found to generally be in common, do they apply solely to first-generation students or could they also apply to other students who are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., Aboriginal students)?

As a practitioner, I also have a number of wonderings that surface as a result of this research:

Student transition support.

- Because identity is complex, current practices to segregate students to international, Aboriginal, or first-generation programs (for example) do not reflect the multifaceted nature of identity or institutional values of fostering diversity. Given this, should students be segregated (based on various identity constructs) to target support and transition programs or should the programs be organized around common outcomes of transition and development of capital and facilitate participation of all student types? If so, could identity communities be fostered differently, as elaborated in the next point?
- Given the importance of upper-year students and the student experience, should universities work more closely with students and students' associations to deliver programming? Could full-time staff numbers be reduced to incorporate greater roles for peer mentoring for first-year transition programs? If so, could students' associations be better prepared and supported to build community and could upper-year peer mentors focus on enhanced one-on-one support? Would such an approach (i.e., one that allows students to choose opportunities based on how they identify) better attend to multi-faceted aspects of diversity compared to current models where students are channeled to single and specific services? Would allowing students to *choose* their communities, mentors, and upper-year stories of transition be more beneficial than channeling students to specific programs based on a single identity construct they might identify during application?

Enhancing efficiency and effectiveness.

- Could orienting transition programs as discussed above enhance program and learning outcomes, while also minimizing costs and enhancing efficiency? This model of student transition (i.e., where programs with similar purposes are amalgamated) provides alignment with values of diversity (by facilitating interactions among students instead of grouping similar students together), makes communication effective (with all students getting information about one transition experience), and enhances efficiency (with less reliance on full-time staff performing similar roles in different units towards such experts supporting upper-year peers to mentor students and student association efforts to build communities).
- With so many departments seeking to compete for students' attention, is such a bombardment of communication detrimental to those who do not have the capital to understand the myriad of information? Should universities institute a more comprehensive communications plan so that those with less capital receive more clear instructions and information?

Reconceptualizing Student Persistence

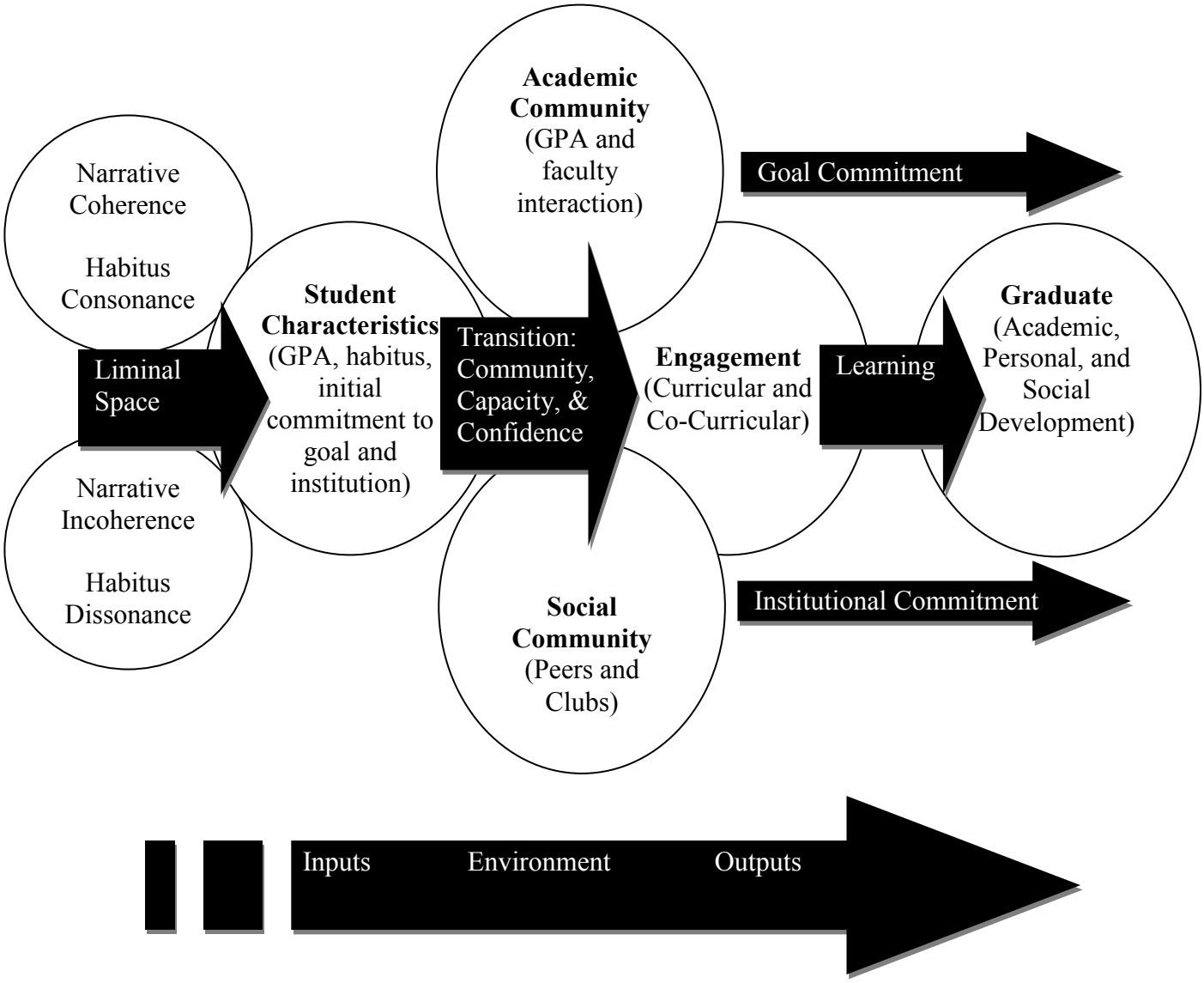
I previously believed that universities should own the problem of first-generation under-representation. Further, I also believed that a primary means would be to create a first-generation program to help first-generation students succeed: it would enable them to build cultural and social capital and experience a sense of belonging by being with other first-generation students. Not only do the narrative accounts provide no evidence for this, but they forced me to look outside typical literature, into generational mobility, immigration, and childhood. Further, the narrative accounts also caused me to think about established practices in student affairs, where separate programs are established for different student types. With the

latter, I am not suggesting a melting pot approach: quite the opposite. If program outcomes are the same (i.e., facilitate transition and build capital) and diversity is a value, students should be placed to experience transitions together and, like the Scandinavian system, students who possess higher levels of capital will benefit differently than students who do not possess capital. For example, if the first-generation program workshops have the same outcomes as other workshops, why would they be separated? Further, if: (a) mentor pairing could exist such that students choose upper-year students with backgrounds that they identify with; (b) students' associations provided a plethora of opportunities for community building, and (c) this peer-led system was supported by expert professionals through training and accountability measures, then why would institutions look to segregate students into different compartments of the system? Further, why do departments seek to communicate with students differently and compete for their attention instead of aligning communication around student needs? A true student-centred approach, particularly for those that may not have the cultural capital to understand all the opportunities, would be for universities to develop a streamlined and effective communications plan concerning the transition in.

Reflecting on this narrative inquiry, the literature concerning first-generation student underrepresentation at university, and persistence models, I now see persistence differently and have attempted to capture this in an expanded conceptual model (Figure 5: Conceptual Framework for Student Persistence) for understanding access to and persistence through to degree completion. The model uses Figure 4 (Wonderings About Persistence Related to Storied Futures and Resilience) as a base and builds upon Tinto's (1993) model of student departure. Based on professional experience and the literature concerning immigrant students, I also

suggest that it could be explored as a conceptual framework for understanding participation more generally.

Figure 5: Conceptual Framework for Student Persistence



Such a re-visioning of the system would attend to experience through both the meritocratic and storied-futures narrative. That is, although a focus may be on grades as a requirement to access future opportunities, more attention would be afforded throughout the system, but especially

during childhood, to help children explore future stories for possible futures. Universities, in turn, would be concerned with building *community* (through partnerships with students' associations and peer mentoring relationships with upper-year students) versus focussing on integration, *capacity* (through opportunities to build various forms of capital, including cultural [knowledge of the system] and social [concerning job connections]), and *confidence* (by providing peer feedback and other positive pedagogical approaches that engage diverse learners as per Universal Instructional Design principles).

Based on research concerning immigrant students' experiences, it is clear that their experiences largely parallel the experiences of first-generation students with respect to university access and persistence being related to social struggles and parental aspirations. The issue of social reproduction and mobility, therefore, is not narrowly a first-generation or immigrant problem: the issue is a social class issue and the solutions seem to reside within the entire education system and childhood experiences in particular.

Final Reflections

The interesting and very serendipitous aspect with this endeavour is that all four students are from immigrant families (Kayla, Katrina, and Dani being first-generation immigrants having moved to Canada by the age of 15, and Marina being a second-generation immigrant, having been born in Canada). If the sample were all first-generation students as I had previously defined the concept, I would likely have narrowly regarded the phenomenon as solely a first-generational issue; however, in attending to their experiences as first-generation students and immigrants, I see something different and, arguably, more holistic. This is largely due to Lehmann's (2009) work in identifying that first-generation students who persist possess certain qualities including hard-work, the desire for social mobility, and the determination to not

struggle like their parents did. Though Lehmann did not say this, he described a resilience-oriented habitus: a construct that features prominently in this research.

Although implicitly presented throughout the preceding chapters, the three dimensional narrative inquiry space and a narrative conception of experience serve as a framework to anchor and summarize conclusions from this inquiry, where the research question was as follows: **for first-generation students, how do the stories of their lives have a formative relationship with their habitus (i.e., the dispositions, beliefs, and values that constitute their worldview) and, if so, how do their lived and told stories shape their university experiences towards persistence?** Discussed in Chapter Five, the stories of their lives, particularly during childhood, shaped a resilience-oriented habitus, which included storying futures as university students. Interestingly, a handful of stories were common among the participants, suggesting, consistent with Bourdieu's work, that people within given social classes develop similar class-based perspectives resulting from similar conditions. These common stories were as follows: (a) *Do Well in School: Education is Important*; (b) *They Work Hard for the Money*; (c) *Others Have it Easier*; (d) *I'm at a Better Place*; (e) *I am Privileged and Value Family*; (f) *I Want More*, and (g) *It's about the Community Feeling*. I will discuss the facets of sociality, temporality, and place below, with the caveat that, although noted as separate constructs or spaces, the distinctions are particularly blurred.

Temporality is, arguably, the anchoring thread in the sense that the stories of Dani, Kayla, Katrina, and Marina's lives (particularly during the formative childhood period) were conditions that shaped a resilience-oriented habitus where social mobility became a desired goal and the means became education. This resilience-oriented habitus gave rise to future protentions of social mobility that propelled the women. Imagine a futuristic mountain climber situated at the

base about to begin the journey to the summit. Except, in this futuristic scenario the climber has one of those "James Bond" grappling-hook devices that allows them to accurately target their destination, activate the device, and attain a clear and secured means to proceed to their goal. In this analogy, the climber is the first-generation student, the summit is the future goal of social mobility, the base represents the foundational childhood experiences (including formative stories of their lives), and the line becomes the secured and clear path of formal education and degree completion to realize the goal (which is woven from the fabrics of a resilience-oriented habitus and imagined future story as a university student). As with all pathways towards significant goals, there are challenges to overcome, but commitment to the goal of degree completion and social mobility (shaped early in life in stories through stories like *Do Well in School: Education is Important; They Work Hard for the Money; Others Have it Easier; I am Privileged and Value Family;* and *I Want More*) is fuelled by identification as a university student and a habitus of resilience.

This habitus of resilience, and moving the discussion to construct of sociality within the three dimensional inquiry space, was the taut line in the climber analogy that kept Dani, Marina, Kayla, and Katrina anchored and progressing towards to their goals. Though they felt disparities in social class as a function of possessing less capital, evidenced in the *Others Have it Easier* story, they were focussed on the goal and such experiences of other's privileged situations just made them work harder. Experiencing the lower social class was also motivating in a different sense: the participants felt privileged for the opportunity to study and that they must take advantage of this opportunity (a function of their families' sacrifices) so that they can also provide for their families in the future (*I am Privileged and Value Family*). Further, students were also fuelled by Pillar's prestige: illustrated in the *I'm at a Better Place* story, Dani, Marina,

Kayla, and Katrina were told that they were at a prestigious place (even though they did not know it during the application process), perceived that expectations were higher when they communicated with students from other universities, and valued the enhanced cultural capital that a Pillar degree would provide. Being at Pillar not only fuelled their desire to complete, but provided reinforcement of their storied role as a university student: acceptance and success at a prestigious university served to solidify internal identification as a university student[17].

With place, the final construct in the three-dimensional inquiry space, all participants discussed the importance of belonging and, specifically, the roles that upper-year students played. Not only did upper-year students serve to facilitate belonging within the academic and social communities, but they also helped the participants build capital to feel more confident. The students also discussed how communications from the institution were cumbersome, but made more coherent by upper-year students. Moving to broader aspects of context, the students' narrative accounts point to different, and arguably, more impactful directions for policy.

Good international research concerning university participation points to childhood as central to improving generational mobility; that is, uncoupling children's social fate from that of their parents requires interventions during formative years to introduce scripts for different future storied possibilities. This aspect features strongly in Dani, Kayla, Katrina, and Marina's narratives. Indeed, upon examination of the scholarship pertaining to first-generation students, immigrant students, and generational mobility, the issues and desired outcomes are the same, though the "labels" assigned to the students are different. The issue of social reproduction and generational mobility, therefore, is not narrowly a first-generation or Aboriginal or immigrant student problem. The problem is a social class issue and the solutions – building resilience and

[17] Assuming that, as Bourdieu postulates, class-based world views exist and are common among those of a given social class, the *I'm at a Better Place* story, compared to the others, is the only story that likely will not apply to all first-generation students given that this study took place at Pillar University.

introducing future storied possibilities – seem to residence within the entire education system and childhood in particular.

Seen through a Bourdieuian lens, which, ultimately, has strong Marxist influences, the system must change in substantive ways to enhance generational mobility and eliminate the continuous cycles of social reproduction that the formal education system perpetuates. System hierarchies perpetuate because parental influences during childhood are socially-based, which is innately socially-flawed based on the symbolic establishment of social classes. Borrowing effective practices from Scandinavian countries, efforts should be made to harmonize the formal educational system, from kindergarten to postsecondary, such that children are, at early ages, exposed to the continuum of possibilities. Evidenced in the literature and this research, childhood experiences are substantively formative in the development of dispositions and future storied roles. All children should be exposed to the wide gamut of story possibilities and story futures for themselves based on their desires. Such interventions likely hold the key to addressing underrepresentation of first-generation, and other, student populations in universities.

Appendix 1: First Generation Initiatives at Canadian Universities

Ontario Institutions	Program Name	Type			Website
Carleton University	Science Student Success Centre		I[a]		http://sssc.carleton.ca/first-generation-students/how-we-can-help-you
McMaster University	First Generation Students Website		I		http://fye.mcmaster.ca/firstgen.html
Queen's University	The University Experience Program	O			http://www.queensu.ca/registrar/news/newsletters/march/firstgeneration-1.html
Ryerson University	Tri-Mentoring Program	O	I		http://www.ryerson.ca/studentservices/trimentoring/fgproject/
University of Guelph	One Day Workshop	O			http://studentlife.uoguelph.ca/parents/start-first-timers
	The Chroma Project			M[a]	http://studentlife.uoguelph.ca/oia/navigate-oia/chroma
University of Ottawa	First Generation Learning Consultant		P		http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/about/1generation.php
University of Toronto Scarborough	Leadership Institute & Learning Community		P		http://studentlife.utsc.utoronto.ca/firstyear/index.php/fgp/leadership-institute-a-learning-community
University of Toronto	First in the Family: Peer Mentor Program		P	I M	http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/Student-Resources/First.htm

University of Toronto Mississauga	genONE	P	I	M	http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/utmone/genone.html
University of Waterloo	N				
University of Western Ontario	N				
York University	N				

Other Canadian Institutions	Program Name	Type			Website
University of Alberta	Transition to University: residence Network	P	I	M	http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/residences/TURNProgram.cfm
Concordia University	N				
McGill University	N				
Memorial University	N				
Simon Fraser University	N				
University of British Columbia	N				
University of Calgary	N				
University of Guelph-Humber	N				
University of Manitoba	N				
University of Victoria	N				

[a] The Carlton University program targets science students, whereas the program at the University of Guelph targets racialized minorities

Note. The legend for the above table is as follows:

N= No program found.

O= Outreach programs targeting students in high school.

P= Program tailored specifically for first-generation students, which includes workshops and discussions specifically for those registered.

I= Information is communicated to first-generation students.

M= Mentoring relationships facilitated (when this is part of a formal program, an M is also noted to reflect this).

Appendix 2: Participant Invitation

Subject: Share your Story: Research Opportunity for First Generation Students

Hello (insert name):

Welcome to university life! I hope that you've had a great first semester at the UofT!

Share your Story: Research Opportunity

If you're the first in your family to attend university, I'm hoping that you'd be interested in sharing your story with me! We call such students "first-generation" students and need to know more about how university life is experienced.

If your parents(s) and/or guardian(s) did not complete postsecondary education in Canada, then you are eligible to participate. If you're interested, please read further!

Research Purpose

My doctoral research area concerns the university experiences of first-generation students. I am interested in this topic as a first-generation student myself, and because students who come from families without a history of university attendance (i.e., first-generation students) are less likely to continue through to degree completion.

The intention of this research project is to deeply explore the experiences of 3-5 first-generation students in order to better understand how university life is experienced.

Nature of Participation

Involvement is voluntary and entails making blog entries twice a month in January, February, March, and April (total of 8) and participating in 4 focus groups of 2 hours each month. You will also be involved in working with me to develop your university stories that will be used in the my doctoral dissertation

Compensation and Interest

You will be compensated a total of $50 (Bookstore gift certificate) at the completion of the project.

If you're interested and would like to discuss this opportunity further, please contact me at nbuddel@ualberta.ca or 519.820.4440.

Sincerely,

Neil Buddel

PhD Candidate
University of Alberta

This research project has been approved by the Research Ethics Boards at Pillar University and the University of Alberta and is being conducted to fulfill requirements of my Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Alberta.

Appendix 3: Participant Information Letter and Consent Form

Study Title: Digging Deeper: Exploring First-Generation University Students' Experiences Narratively

Research Investigator
Neil Buddel
#2304, 50 Lombard Street
Toronto, Ontario, M5C 2X4
nbuddel@ualberta.ca

Supervisor
Dr. Randy Wimmer
7.157 Education North
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2G5
rwimmer@ualberta.ca

Sponsor
Dr. Tricia Seifert
252 Bloor Street, West #6-226
University of Toronto: OISE
Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1V6
tricia.seifert@utoronto.ca

Thank you for considering participation in this research study (i.e., my dissertation). The information below is intended to provide you with an overview of the purpose of the study and the nature of participation.

Background and Purpose

My research area concerns the university experiences of first-generation students. First-generation students are students whose parent(s) and/or guardian(s) did not complete postsecondary education in Canada. I am interested in this topic as a first-generation student myself, and because students who come from families without a history of university attendance (i.e., first-generation students) are less likely to continue through to degree completion.

The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences of 3-5 first-generation at Pillar University in order to gain a deeper understanding of how (a) first-generation students might experience university. Through online communications and face-to-face conversations, we will, together, construct a story of your university experience. The story then becomes the data that will be analyzed, discussed, and published.

This study was approved by the ethics boards at both the University of Alberta and Pillar University and is being conducted in order to fulfill requirements of my Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Alberta.

The results of this study may be published in academic journals or professional magazines and presented at conferences or professional development workshops, in addition to my dissertation. Materials collected during the course of this study (e.g., images, pictures, text, quotes, blog excerpts, etc.) may also be used for the purposes described above.

Research Question

For first-generation students, how do the narratives of their life (for example, the stories one hears from her/his social setting or family, and the stories one tells themself) shape how they experience university life?

Nature of Participation

Stage 1 (December 2012): During this stage we would get to know each other and other participants (there would be 3-5 students in total) through Facebook (you are welcome to create a separate Facebook account for the purpose of participation).

Stage 2 (January 2013 to April 2013): During this stage you would electronically journal about your university experiences in Microsoft Word. It's expected that journal entries would be made and emailed to me (to nbuddel@ualberta.ca) at least twice per month (eight in total) and include a picture and description of a poignant moment of your experience. During this time, you would also participate in a monthly focus group. These meetings would only be for two hours (and I would supply refreshments for us) and would be held at a mutually agreed-upon campus location. If you're not comfortable with (or available for) the group meeting, we could meet separately instead.

Stage 3 (Spring/Summer 2013): During this stage, I would work with you to develop stories based on the information collected. This would largely be through email given that you may be outside of Toronto and/or have other commitments.

Voluntary Participation

You are under no obligation to participate in this study: participation is completely voluntary and you are not obliged to answer any specific questions, even if you are participating in the study.

You have the right to opt out without penalty (with the exception of the compensation conditions noted below) and can ask to have any collected data withdrawn from the database and not included in the study (i.e., even if you agree at the beginning to be in the study, you can change your mind and withdraw at any time). Once the dissertation is submitted, however, you will be unable to withdraw the data.

Information shared during focus groups may be difficult to remove based on the interactive nature of conversation, but attempts will be made to do so. If information cannot be removed, your confidentiality will still be maintained.

Benefits and Compensation

I hope that the stories from this study will help policy makers and university service providers better understand the experiences of first-generation students to inspire them to make changes to improve the experience for future students.

During the course of the study, you will likely learn more about yourself and institutional resources available to support your personal, social, and academic success (I am very familiar with the resources available at UofT and am happy to help by providing more information about them should you be interested).

Due to the substantial time commitment necessary from you over the course of one year, I am providing a monetary thank you of $50 (UofT Gift Certificate) that will be given to participants who allow use of the data in my dissertation.

Risk

The risks to you are considered minimal; that is, there is little likelihood you will experience emotional discomfort during or after participation. There may be risks to being in this study that are not known. If I learn anything during the research that may negatively affect your willingness to continue being in the study, I will immediately communicate the nature of this risk so that you can reassess your ability to participate.

Confidentiality

Information provided will be kept strictly confidential. The informed consent forms and other indentifying information will be kept separate from the data. Tape recordings will only be listened to by me.

The data will be kept in a secure place for a maximum of 5 years following completion of the research project. Physical materials will be kept in a locked cupboard in my place and electronic data will be stored on my password-protected and encrypted external hard-drive. After 5 years, all information will be permanently destroyed (shredded or erased, pending the nature of the information).

For the purposes of publication (i.e., whenever the data/stories are used), you will be able to provide a different name (an alias).

Confidentiality will not be possible during group interactions (as participants will get to know each other), so you will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement that you agree to maintain the confidentiality of other participants.

Though your identity will be confidential (aliases will be used) and details about your institutional and provincial context will be altered, there is a very small chance that someone may read this dissertation (or a related publication) in the future (near or distant) and be able to identify you. I want to highlight this and will remind you of this at various points throughout the study to ensure you are comfortable with the content at present. I will also ask you to assess how you might feel with the content in 20 or 40 years, again to ensure comfort.

You will receive an electronic copy of the full dissertation (or a summary if you wish), with an invitation to meet with me to debrief the experience.

Personal Information

Personal information is being collected for the purposes of contact and permission. This identifying information will be kept separate from the data and in a secured cabinet. While data will be retained for 5 years (as per University policy) and then destroyed, your personal information contained here will be destroyed once the dissertation has been accepted by my Supervisory Committee (i.e. the completion of the study).

_____ _____

First Name Last Name

_____ _____

Email Address Phone Number

_____

Alias

Further Information

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact me at any time.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Acknowledgement and Agreement

I _____ have reviewed this document in detail with Neil Buddel and clearly understand the following:

- The purpose of the research and that it poses minimal risk to me;
- That stories will be developed as data, which will then be analyzed for the purpose of publication;
- That materials I submit may be used in various publications as noted above, including for this dissertation;
- I may withdraw from the study at anytime and have data removed at anytime, except in the case when the dissertation is submitted as data cannot be removed after that point;
- If I withdraw and ask that information not be included, I am not eligible to receive the $50 Bookstore gift certificate;
- Information from focus-groups may not be able to be removed should I withdraw;
- I will participate to the fullest of my ability.

Confidentiality of Other Participants

I further promise that I will not reveal the identities of other participants in order to respect their privacy and maintain confidentiality.

Participant

_____ _____

Signature Date

Researcher (Neil Buddel)

_____ _____

Signature Date

Appendix 4: Guide for Journal Entries and Focus Groups

The following serves as a guide for discussion with participants in order to attend to the research question and provide a sense of focus and purpose for the dialogue.

Due to the co-constructed nature of narrative inquiry, however, dialogue will likely proceed in many different ways, as casual conversation between parties tends to do, and as information from blog entries are woven into the inquiry. Therefore, the research plan is semi-structured in nature and intended to adapt to explore emergent themes.

For clarity, the questions below are associated with the various research stages that I presented earlier.

Research Question (as approved by the Candidacy Committee)

For first-generation students, how do the narratives of their life (social, cultural, family, self) interact with their habitus and shape how they experience the academic and social aspects of university?

Facebook Connections (December 2012)

The purpose of this stage is for me and the participants to get to know each other and start building positive and trusting relationships.

- What has the UofT experience been like so far?
- What was a high and low from first-semester?
- What are you hoping to do after university?

Monthly Journal Entries and Focus Groups Guide (January to April 2013)

The focus during this stage is to dig deeper into experiences of inclusion and exclusion, through reflection and photographs, in order to explore how students' habitus and narratives shape their university experience.

<u>Introduction to Focus Groups Conversations</u>

- Revisit purpose of research
- Explain what I mean by narrative, story, and habitus (i.e., how the habitus consists of values, dispositions, beliefs, and attitudes) and is shaped by various stories we hear (from family, culture, society, etc.)
- Review nature of voluntary participation
- Reminder about focus group participation and confidentiality (i.e., it will not be possible to remove data should you wish to leave the study)
- Reminder about confidentiality agreement concerning other group members
- Ice-breaker (e.g., tell us something about yourself that people may not know by looking at you, talk about a favourite memory, etc.)

Guide

Month and Theme	**Journal Entries with Picture (two per month)**	**Focus Group Guide (once per month)**
January (How family and social stories affect university experiences)	1. Tell me a story you were told about university by your family? How did these stories affect you? 2. Take a picture that represents the stories you were told about university (from family or society). Discuss why you chose this picture.	• What aspects of university were you anxious about? • In the past, what stories did you hear about university attendance from family members or "the world?" What stories did you tell yourself about university? • How do these past stories affect your current experience? • What values, attitudes, and beliefs do you have towards university and education?
February (Experiences of inclusion and exclusion)	1. What experiences (if any) have helped you feel part of the university experience? How so? What experiences (if any) have made you feel excluded from the university experiences? How so? 2. Take two pictures: one that represents how you (b) feel part of the university experience (b) do not feel part of the university experience. Discuss why you chose these pictures	• Did you feel like you didn't belong at university? If so, why and how did you manage this feeling? • How do you feel about social class? How does this relate to university attendance?
March (Self narratives and the university experience)	1. What stories do you tell yourself about university life? What made you construct this story? How does this differ from the story you would have told yourself 5 years ago?	• What were your successes and what do you attribute these successes to? • What stresses or tensions did you experience and how did you manage these?

	2. Take a picture that represents the story you now tell yourself about university. Discuss why you chose this picture.	
April (Values and beliefs towards university)	1. What has surprised you about university life? What experiences are exactly what you thought they'd be? 2. What values, attitudes, and beliefs do you have towards university and education? How does this differ from 5 years ago?	• Looking back, has your perspectives about university changed and, if so, how? • What values, attitudes, and beliefs do you have towards university and education?

References

Adichie, C. N. (2009). *The danger of a single story* (TEDGlobal, filmed July 2009). Retrieved from http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Allen, K. A. (2003). University access and educational opportunity: A Canadian perspective. In K. S. Brathwaite (Ed.), *Access and equity in the university* (pp. 79-91). Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Angus, I. (2009). *Love the questions: University education and enlightenment*. Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.

Andres, L., Adamuti-Trache, M., Yoon, E., Pidgeon, M., & Thomsen, J.P. (2007). Educational expectations, parental social class, gender, and postsecondary attainment: A 10-year perspective. *Youth and Society, 39*(2), 135-163.

Andres, L. & Krahn, H. (1999). Youth pathways in articulated post-secondary systems: Enrolment and completion patterns of urban young women and men. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 19*(1), 47-82.

Aries, E. & Seider, M. (2005). The interactive relationship between class identity and the college experience: The case of lower income students. *Qualitative Sociology, 28*(4), 419-443.

Bamberg, M. (2006). Stories: Big or small: Why do we care? *Narrative Inquiry, 16*(1), 139-147.

Barr-Telford, L., Cartwright, F., Prasil, S., & Shimmons, K. (2003). *Access, persistence and financing: First results from the postsecondary education participation survey (PEPS)* (Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 81-595-MIE2003007). Ottawa: Minister of Industry Canada.

Barnett, R. (1988). Does higher education have aims? *Journal of Philosophy of Education (22)*, 2, 239-250.

Bateson, M. C. (1994). *Peripheral visions: Along the way*. New York: NY: Harper Collins Publishers.

Bateson, M.C. (2000). *Full circles, overlapping lives: Culture and generation in transition*. New York, NY: Random House.

Berger, J.B. (2000). Optimizing capital, social reproduction, and undergraduate persistence: A sociological perspective. In J.M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 95-124). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Biesta, G. & Burbules, N. (2003). From experience to knowledge. In G. Beista & N. Burbules (Eds.), *Pragmatism and educational research* (pp. 25-53). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Borrero, N., Lee, D.S., & Padilla, A.M. (2013). Developing a culture of resilience for low-income immigrant youth. *Urban Review, 45*, 99-116.

Bourdieu, P. (1971). Systems of education and systems of thought. In M.K.D. Young (Ed.), *Knowledge, education and cultural change* (pp. 487-510). London, UK: Tavistock.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Braxton, J.M., Sullivan, A.V.S., & Johnson, R.M. (1997). Appraising Tinto's theory of

college student departure. In. J.C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research volume XII* (pp. 107-164). New York, NY: Agathon Press.

Braxton, J.M., Milem, J.F., & Sullivan, A.S. (2000). The influence of active learning on the college student departure process. *The Journal of Higher Education, 71*(5), 569-590.

Brennan, J., & Naidoo, R. (2008). Higher education and the achievement (and/or prevention) of equity and social justice. *Higher Education, 56*, 287-302.

Bryan, E. & Simmons, L.A. (2009). Family involvement: Impacts on post-secondary educational success for first-generation Appalachian college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(4), 391-406.

Buddel, N. (2011). Queering the workplace. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 23*(1), 131-146.

Bugyi, P. (2008). *Cultural capital and educational attainment: A critique of the research*. Paper presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Boston, MA.

Caine, V., Estefan, A., & Clandinin, D.J. (2013). A return to methodological commitment: Reflections on narrative inquiry. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 57*(6), 574-586.

Carr, D. (1986). The self and the coherence of life. *Time, narrative and history*. Bloomington, IN : Indiana University Press.

Childs, S., Finnie, R., & Mueller, R.E. (2010). Family environment, family habits, and children's cultural experiences: Is there a link to participation in post-secondary education? In R. Finnie, M. Frenette, R.E. Mueller, & A. Sweetman (Eds.), *Pursuing higher education in Canada: Economic, social, and policy dimensions* (pp. 243-265). Montreal and Kingston, ON: Queen's Policy Studies Series, McGill-Queen's University Press.

Clandinin, D.J. (2006). Narrative inquiry : A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education, 27*, 44-54.

Clandinin, D.J. (2013). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Walnut Creek, CA : Left Coast Press.

Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin, D.J., & Murphy, M.S. (2007). Looking ahead. In D.J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 632-650). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Clandinin, D.J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions. In D.J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 35-75). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Collier, P.J. & Morgan, D.L. (2008). "Is that paper really due today?": Differences in first-generation and traditional college students' understandings of faculty expectations. *Higher Education, 55*, 425-446.

Colombo, E., & Rebughini, P. (2012). *Children of immigrants in a globalized world: A generational experience*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Corak, M. (2004). Generational income mobility in North America and Europe: An introduction. In M. Corak (Ed.), *Generational income mobility in North America and Europe* (pp. 1-37). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Corak, M., Lipps, G., & Zhao, J. (2003). *Family income and participation in post-secondary education* (Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 11F0019MIE No. 210). Ottawa: Minister of Industry Canada.

Council of Ontario Universities. (2014). *Experiential learning: Brining life to learning at Ontario universities*. Retrieved from http://www.cou.on.ca/publications/reports/pdfs/march262014---experiential-learning-report

Crossley, N. (2001). The phenomenological habitus and its construction. *Theory and Society, 30*(1), 81-120

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: Collier Books.

DiMaggio, P. (1997). Culture and cognition. *Annual Review of Sociology, 23*, 236-287.

Esping-Andersen, G. (2004). Unequal opportunities and the mechanisms of social inheritance. In M. Corak (Ed.), *Generational income mobility in North America and Europe* (pp. 289-314). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Estefan, A. (2008). *Harm, interrupted: Self-injury narratives and same-sex attraction*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Griffith University, Southport, Queensland, Australia.

Finnie, R., Lascelles, E., & Sweetman, A. (2005). *Who goes? The direct and indirect effects of family background on access to post-secondary education* (Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 11F0019MIE – No. 237). Ottawa: Minister of Industry Canada.

Finnie, R., & Mueller, R.E. (2010). They came, they saw, they enrolled: Access to post-secondary education by the children of Canadian immigrants. In R. Finnie, M. Frenette, R.E. Mueller, & A. Sweetman (Eds.), *Pursuing higher education in Canada: Economic, social, and policy dimensions* (pp. 191-216). Montreal and Kingston, ON: Queen's Policy Studies Series, McGill-Queen's University Press.

Finnie, R., Sweetman, A., & Usher, A. (2008). Introduction: A framework for thinking about participation in post-secondary education. In R. Finnie, R.E. Mueller, A. Sweetman, & A. Usher (Eds.), *Who goes? Who stays? What matters? Accessing and persisting in post-secondary education in Canada* (pp. 3-32). Montreal and Kingston, ON: Queen's Policy Studies Series, McGill-Queen's University Press.

Fleras, A. (2005). *Social problems in Canada: Conditions, constructions, and challenges*. Toronto, ON: Prentice Hall.

Georgakopoulou, A. (2006). Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis. *Narrative Inquiry, 16*(1), 122-130.

Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). *Small stories, interaction and identities.* Amsterdam, NLD: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Gibbons, M.M., & Borders, L.D. (2010). Prospective first-generation college students: A social-cognitive perspective. *The Career Development Quarterly, 58*, 194-208.

Gilbert, D.T. (1991). How mental systems believe. *American Psychologist, 46(*2), 107-119.

Government of Alberta. (2006). *Affordability framework for postsecondary education*. Retrieved from http://www.advancededucation.gov.ab.ca/post-secondary/policy/affordabilityframework.aspx

Government of Alberta. (2010). *Campus Alberta planning framework: Profiling Alberta's advanced education system*. Retrieved from http://aet.ualberta.ca

Government of Ontario (1996). *Future goals for Ontario colleges and universities*. Retrieved from http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/discussi/postdeng.pdf

Government of Ontario. (2006). *McGuinty government invests in opportunities for first*

generation students in 2005/06. Retrieved from http://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2006/08/mcguinty-government-invests-in-opportunities-for-first-generation-students-in-200506.html

Government of Ontario. (2007). *McGuinty Government Working On Behalf Of High School Students*. Retrieved from http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/07.11/bg1106.html

Government of Ontario. (2011). *Results based plan briefing book 2010-11*. Retrieved from http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/annualreport/1011/201011RbP_En.pdf

Government of Ontario. (2014). *Results based plan briefing book 2013-14*. Retrieved from http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/annualreport/2014RbP_En.pdf

Grabb, E. (2009). General introduction. In E. Grabb & N. Gyppy (Eds.), *Social inequality in Canada: Patterns, problems, and policies* (pp. 1-16). Toronto, ON: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Granfield, R. (1991). Making it by faking it: Working-class students in an elite academic environment. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 20*(3), 331-351.

Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Grenfell, M. (2012). *Pierre Bourdieu key concepts*. Bristol, CT: Acumen Publishing.

Grenfell, M., & James, D. (1998). *Bourdieu and education: Acts of practical theory*. London: Falmer Press.

Heilbrun, C. G. (1999). The rewards of liminality. In C. G. Heilbrun (Ed.), *Women's lives: The view from the threshold* (pp. 83-103). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Horvat, E.M. (2001). Understanding equity and access in higher education: The potential

contribution of Pierre Bourdieu. In. J.C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research volume XVI* (pp. 195-238). New York, NY: Agathon Press.

Jensen, D. & Andrews, M. (2002). *Philosophy of higher education.* Retrieved from https://webct.srv.ualberta.ca/SCRIPT/EDPS571/scripts/student/serve_page.pl?967755972+Activities/Module1/Module1.htm+OFF+Activities/Module1/Jensen.htm+

Kaufman, P. (2003). Learning to not labor: How working-class individuals construct middle-class identities. *The Sociological Quarterly, 44*(3), 481-504.

Kerby, A. P. (1991). Time and memory. In J. Salis (Ed.*), Narrative and the self: Studies in continental thought* (pp. 15-31). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Kitchen, J.D. (2006). Setting the stage for narrative inquiry: Negotiating relationships and understanding school landscapes. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 52*(4), 251-264.

King, A. (2005). The habitus process: A sociological conception. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 35*(4), 463-468.

Knighton, T. (2002). Postsecondary participation: The effect of parents' education and household income. *Education Quarterly Review, 8*(3), 25-36.

Knighton, T., & Mirza, S. (2002). Postsecondary participation: The effects of parents' education and household income. *Education Quarterly Review, 8*(3), 25-32.

Krahn, H. (2009). Choose your parents carefully: Social class, post-secondary education, and occupational outcomes. In E. Grabb & N. Gyppy (Eds.), *Social inequality in Canada: Patterns, problems, and policies* (pp. 1-16). Toronto, ON: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Lambert, M., Zeman, K., Allen, M., & Bussiere, P. (2004). *Who pursues postsecondary*

education, who leaves and why: Results from the youth in transition survey (Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 81-595-MIE2004026). Ottawa: Minister of Industry Canada.

Lefebvre, P., & Merrigan, P. (2010). The impact of family background and cognitive and non-cognitive ability in childhood on post-secondary education. In R. Finnie, M. Frenette, R.E. Mueller, & A. Sweetman (Eds.), *Pursuing higher education in Canada: Economic, social, and policy dimensions* (pp. 219-242). Montreal and Kingston, ON: Queen's Policy Studies Series, McGill-Queen's University Press.

Lehmann, W. (2004). 'For some reason, I get a little scared': Structure, agency, and risk in school-work transitions. *Journal of Youth Studies, 7*(4), 379-396.

Lehmann, W. (2007). "I just didn't feel like I fit in": The role of habitus in university dropout decisions. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 37*(2), 89-110.

Lehmann, W. (2009). Becoming middle class: How working-class university students draw and transgress moral class boundaries. *Sociology, 43*, 631-647.

Lieblich, A., Tuval-Masiach, R., & Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: Readings, analysis, interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lizardo, O. (2004). The cognitive origins of Bourdieu's habitus. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 34*(4), 375-401.

Longden, B. (2004). Interpreting student early departure from higher education through the lens of cultural capital. *Tertiary Education and Management, 10*, 121-138.

Marker, M. (2004). The four Rs revisited: Some reflections on First Nations and higher Education. In L. Andres and F. Finlay (Eds.), *Student affairs: Experiencing higher education* (pp. 171-188). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

Masten, A.S., & Obradovic, J. (2006). Competence and resilience in development. *Annals New*

York Academy of Sciences, 1094, 13-27.

Ministry of Industry (2013). Education and occupation of high-income Canadians. Catalogue no. 99-014-X2011003 downloaded from www.statcan.gc.ca

Mueller, R.E. (2008). Access and persistence of students in Canadian post-secondary education: What we know, what we don't know, and why it matters. In R. Finnie, R.E. Mueller, A. Sweetman, & A. Usher (Eds.), *Who goes? Who stays? What matters? Accessing and persisting in post-secondary education in Canada* (pp. 33-61). Montreal and Kingston, ON: Queen's Policy Studies Series, McGill-Queen's University Press.

Nelson, H.L. (1995). Resistance and insubordination. *Hypatia, 10*(2), 23-40.

Olssen, M., & Peters, M. A. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy, 20*(3), 313-345.

Okri, B. (2011). *A time for new dreams*. London, UK: Rider Publishing.

Pal, L.A. (2010). *Beyond policy analysis: Public issue management in turbulent times*. Toronto, ON: Thompson/Nelson.

Parkin, A., & Baldwin, N. (2009). Persistence in post-secondary education. In J. Berger, A. Motte, & A. Parkin (Eds.), *The Price of knowledge: Access and student finances* (pp. 64-84). Montreal, QC: The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

Pascarella, E.T., Pierson, C.T., Wolniak, G.C., & Terenzini, P.T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education, 75*(3), 249-284.

Pechar, H. (2007). "The Bologna process" a European response to global competition in higher education. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 37*(3), 109-125.

Phoenix, A. (2008). Analysing narrative contexts. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Pike, G.R., & Kuh, G.D. (2005). First- and second-generation college students: A comparison of their engagement and intellectual development. *The Journal of Higher Education, 76*(3), 276-300.

Polkinghorne, D.E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J. A. Hatch & R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative* (pp. 5-23). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Falmer.

Reay, D. (2004). 'It's all becoming a habitus': Beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 24*(4), 431-444.

Reay, D., Crozier, G., & Clayton, J. (2009). 'Strangers in paradise'? Working-class students in elite universities. *Sociology, 43*(6), 1103-1121.

Reay, D., Davies, J., David, M., & Ball, S.J. (2001). Choices of degree or degrees of choice? Class, 'race' and the higher education choice process. *Sociology, 35*(4), 855-874.

Riessman, C.K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rendon, L.I., Jalomo, R.E., & Nora, A. (2000). Theoretical considerations in the study of minority student retention in higher education. In J. M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 127-156). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Rinnie, R. (2005). Access to post-secondary education: An analytical framework and new evidence on background effects. In R. Sweet & P. Anisef (Eds.), *Preparing for post-secondary education: New roles for governments and families*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Roemer, J. E., (2004). Equal opportunity and intergenerational mobility: Going beyond intergenerational income transition matrices. In M. Corak (Ed.), *Generational income mobility in North America and Europe* (pp. 48-57). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Russell, C. (1993). *Academic freedom.* London, UK: Routledge.

Sarbin, T.R. (2004). The role of imagination in narrative construction. In C. Daiute and C. Lightfoot (Eds.), *Narrative analysis: Studying the development of individuals in society* (pp. 5-20). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Schmaus, D., & Wimmer, R (2013). Government policy and postsecondary education in Alberta: A 'field theory' analysis. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 59*(1), 92.107.

Stelmach, E. (February 18, 2011). *Contract letter*. Retrieved from http://aet.alberta.ca/media/267557/mandate%202011weadick.pdf

Slaughter, S. (1998). National higher education policies in a global economy. In J. Currie & J. Newson (Eds.), *Universities and globalization: Critical perspectives* (pp. 45-70). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Spector-Mersel, G. (2010). Narrative research: Time for a paradigm. *Narrative Inquiry, 20*(1), 204-224.

Squire, C. (2008). Experience-centred and culturally-oriented approaches to narrative. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (pp. 41-63). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Squire, C., Andrews, M., & Tamboukou, M. (2008). What is narrative research? In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Statistics Canada. (2007, January 25). Study: Postsecondary attendance among local youth following the opening of a new university. *The Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/070125/dq070125a-eng.htm

Steels, L. (2011). *Magic apples: Reflections to mull*. Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing.

Taylor, G. D. (1994). Sociological interpretations of schooling: The functional perspective. In L. Erwin & D. MacLennan (Eds.), *Sociology of education in Canada: Critical perspectives of theory, research & practice* (pp. 32-54). Toronto, ON: Copp Clark Longman Ltd.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (2007). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention, 8*(1), 1-19.

University of Alberta. (2009). *Institutional access plan*. Retrieved from http://www.provost.ualberta.ca/en/InstitutionalAccessPlan.aspx

Vryonides, M. (2007). Social and cultural capital in educational research: Issues of operationalisation and measurement. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(6), 867-885.

Walpole, M. (2003). Socioeconomic status and college: How SES affects college experiences and outcomes. *The Review of Higher Education, 27*(1), 45-73.

Ward, L., Siegel, M.J., & Davenport, Z. (2012). *First generation college students: Understanding and improving the experience from recruitment to commencement*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Webb, J., Schirato, T., & Danaher, G. (2014). *Understanding Bourdieu*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An*

introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Whitehead, L. E. (2006). Preparing for post-secondary education: New roles for governments and families. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 36*(1), 103-111.

Yanow, D. (2000). *Conducting interpretive policy analysis: Qualitative research methods* (series 46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Zepke, N., & Leach, L. (2005). Integration and adaptation: Approaches to the student retention and achievement puzzle. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 6*(1), 46-59.

Ziemniak, A. (2010, January 1). The contribution of family members to first-generation college student success: A narrative approach. *ProQuest LLC*, Retrieved from EBSCO*host*.