

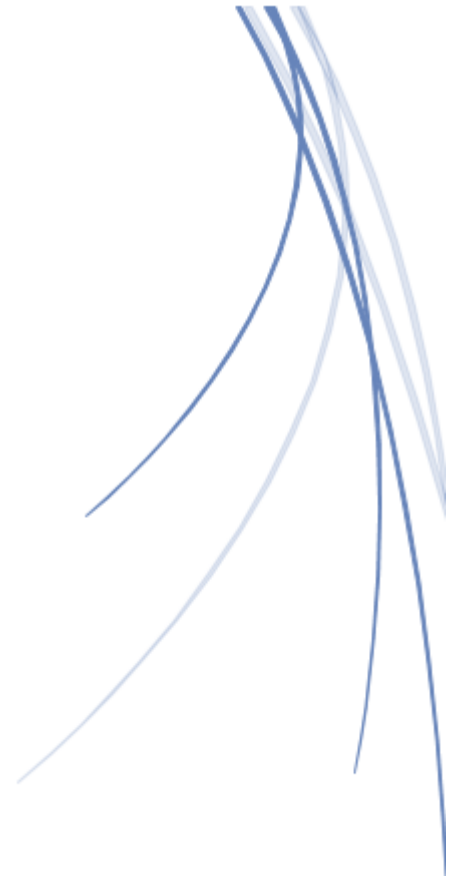
**First Generation College Student Experiences:
A Comparison Across Ages**

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Sociology Honors Thesis
2018

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FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

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Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the help and support of so many. I'd like to thank my two wonderful advisers, Dr. Barbara Anderson & Dr. Dwight Lang, for their patience over the past year and a half. Dr. Anderson has assured me time and time again that I was actually making progress when I had doubts, which was always a great to hear. The discussions I had with Dr. Lang were always thought provoking and motivating, and helped produce this finished product. I would also like to thank a handful of people who helped me with this journey. Carson Philips, a graduate of the honors program himself, assisted by providing sections of the University of Michigan Asks You (UMAY) survey data cited. Terra Molengraff, a graduate of both LSA and Michigan's Higher Education program, helped me develop a better understand of first generation college students at Michigan during the early research phases of my work. Of course, I would also like to thank our undergraduate adviser extraordinaire, Tamara Kennedy, who has worked with each of us since the beginning of our projects to ensure we present a complete and thorough thesis. Lastly, I would like to thank my family, who have been unconditionally supportive. Without them, this project and, my interest of first generation college students, would not have been possible. Thank you for never doubting me.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Abstract	1
Introduction	3
Literature Review	8
Methods	16
Hypotheses	18
Data	21
The 12 First Gens	21
Results	33
Hometown Effects	33
Salience of Identity	35
Stigma Management	37
Future Thoughts	39
Discussion	44
Implication	52
Limitations & Future Research	54
References	57
Appendices	63

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

First Generations Student Experiences: A Comparison Across Ages

Sociologists have been interested in first generation college students because of their unique experiences. While much of the previous literature focuses on the adjustment of freshmen first generation students, little research covers the experiences of upperclassmen with this identity or of students after they complete their undergraduate degrees. This research investigates the experiences of both underclassmen and recent graduates at a prestigious Midwestern university to understand how salience of first generation student identities changes as time progresses. To control for additive experiences regarding social identities, this thesis focuses solely on white, English speaking students. Results showed salience of being first generation depended on age. Freshmen were less aware or concerned, sophomores were aware and took pride in their identity, but failed to acknowledge possible negative effects, and graduates' perception depended largely on their current work. However, both groups speak of stigma management techniques used during uncomfortable times. An unexpected finding shows that characteristics of participant's hometowns (rural or suburban) have effects on social adjustments to college due to cultural capital, with rural students having more difficulties adjusting. Universities could use this research to implement programs to develop awareness of first generation college students, and create communities that facilitate support for students beyond academic adjustments. Future research should investigate these claims through longitudinal techniques.

Key words: *First generation college student, cultural capital, stigma management*

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

First Generations Student Experiences: A Comparison Across Ages

In recent decades, the number of students who are first in their families to attend college in the US has risen significantly, from approximately 17% of entering students in 2007 to nearly one out of three students in 2012 (Greenwald, 2012). Literature focusing on first generation college students (FGCS) has shown how these students often come from significantly different backgrounds than their continuing generation peers (college students who have at least one parent who has graduated from college). These backgrounds can include being students of color, having minority ethnicities, or being from lower class white families, and pose difficulties in their transition to a post-secondary institution. FGCS are not as academically prepared since they often do not have access to Advanced Placement courses, mathematics beyond basic classes, or standardized test preparation (Bui, 2002; Engles & Tinto, 2008). FGCS also have different motivations than peers to attend college. A common theme is intending to give back to their families by pursuing careers that prioritize financial stability over personal interests (Dundes, Cho, & Kwak, 2009; Hodge & Mellin, 2010; Xie & Goyette, 2003). Despite having a strong motivation to attend college, FGCS have higher dropout rates than their continuing generation peers, theorized to be because of not feeling like they belong at their respective institution (Ishitani, 2006; Lehmann, 2007; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Soria, Stebleton, & Huesman, 2013; Tinto, 1987). This is significant because education is thought to be an equalizer between social classes. But there are factors that may challenge this assumption. This the focus of the current research.

Although there is no universal definition for first generation college students in the literature, it typically refers to those who are the first in their immediate families to attend

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

college. Parental experience with post-secondary education is where most of the variation in this definition occurs. For the current research, first generation college student refers to those who are the first in their immediate families to attend an accredited four-year institution and whose parents do not hold a four-year degree. This can include students whose siblings did go to college. FCGS consist of a heterogeneous demographic group of students who share similar experiences (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Additional salient identities of these students are that of being a student of color, nontraditional (over 24), and coming from lower income backgrounds (Bui, 2002; Engle, 2007).

For racial minorities, who often come from a lower socio-economic status (SES), it can be difficult to separate these two social identities that contribute to their experiences. In Torres's work on black students at an elite college, it was found that students struggled with adapting to their predominantly white environment. Participants often discussed how they felt a disconnect with the norms and attributed this to their racial background (Torres, 2009). However, this "culture shock" was only experienced by black students who came from a lower SES background. For the two interviewees who grew up in more affluent communities, and who had previous experience with white, middle and upper-middle class culture there was little surprise or discomfort expressed in their new environment (Torres, 2009). Other researchers have indicated that fellow colleagues can make mistakes when ignoring social class to focus on race, such as Hurst's critique of Mestre and Robinson (1983). Mestre and Robinson compared Hispanic students to white students without holding class constant, leading them to drawing conclusions about race that may have otherwise been attributed to class (Hurst, 2010). Due to the interconnectedness between being a racial minority and lower SES, the discriminatory experiences that are more often attributed to racial backgrounds than social class, the present

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

research focuses only on white FGCS who come from a lower social class background, and not lower SES students of color.

Growing up in rural areas can differ greatly from growing up in urban or suburban centers, even when social class is held constant. Regarding the experiences of minority students at rural schools, a longitudinal study by Gándara, Gutiérrez, and O'Hara (2001) suggests that “rural high school[s] are more like each other than they are like their ethnic counterparts in the urban school” (73). Those from rural schools, despite racial or ethnic differences, have more in common with each other in college settings than their same-race peers who attended urban high schools. Furthermore, rural schools, when compared to suburban schools, tend to be more economically disadvantaged and have populations that prevent lower and working class students from interacting with middle and upper-middle class individuals (Baldassare, 1992; Tickamyer, & Duncan, 19990). To isolate FGCS identities, and not interfere with other background characteristics, researchers attempted to draw on a sample of students from self-described rural hometowns. However, recruitment efforts were unable to select a sample from rural students alone. Suburban students were then included in the sample to increase its size, which led to a surprising compression finding that will be discussed in detail later.

The literature surrounding FGCS has three major investigative points: (1) how students make decisions to attend a post-secondary institution; (2) initial experiences students undergo after arriving on campus; and (3) the correlation between first generation students and lower retention rates compared to their continuing generation peers (Padgett, Johnson & Pascarella, 2012; Terenzini et al. 1996). The current investigation is focused on the second of these ideas in connection with belonging and retention. Significant attention has already been given to first year FGCS because this is a time of major adjustment, these students lower-class identity

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

becomes more salient than in the past (Baxter & Britton, 2001; Martin, 2015; Walpole, 2003). First year students are of particular interest because a considerable portion are not retained for the second year (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Jehangir, 2010; Pascarella, 2004; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Specifically, this study has three aims: (a) to investigate the salience and experiences of being a first-generation student from a lower-class background on an elite campus and stigma management techniques used during these times; (b) how individuals predict their identity will affect them in the future, both during undergraduate careers for freshmen and in real-world applications for graduates; and (c) how graduates perceive the role of their first generation identity in their current work.

Social class had long been of interest to sociologists, politicians, and policy makers alike due to its effects on daily life interactions on a micro level, and potentially how class influences laws on a more macro scale. The United States spends millions of dollars each year on welfare programs dedicated to helping those in financial need. Sociologists have been captivated by the idea of social class reproduction, described as the ways values and cultural capital of a social class are institutionally passed on. This makes it difficult to change class, especially in an upward mobility sense (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). As the gap between the upper and lower classes widens in the U.S. it becomes increasingly more important to understand social class reproduction. Education can be beneficial to those who desire to rise above their current social class, but this does not mean education is the only solution to for upward mobility. If everyone who attended post-secondary schooling came from equal backgrounds (including academic, financial, racial, and family) education would prove worthy of social mobility. Yet, the different backgrounds students come from have the potential to be a major influence on their degree attainment and experiences in college. While research assessing interactional effects of gender

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

and racial differences have been explored, work is lacking on the influence of social class and generational status on higher education due to the nature of it being seemingly invisible. By understanding the unique situations first generation, lower-working class students encounter at different stages in their academic careers, administrators can develop new programs to assist these students and combat the reproduction of lower social classes.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiences of first generation college students, and those from lower social class backgrounds, have been explored by many researchers. Their findings can be broken down into two primary groups: (1) academic integration and (2) social integration. Both have been found to correspond with feelings of student belonging.

Academically, FGCS are less prepared for the rigors of college than their peers, lacking math, reading, and critical thinking skills (Choy, 2001; Terenzini et al. 1996). Many FGCS do not have resources to successfully navigate financial aid sites, leading to increased strain from the financial burden of their academic careers (Lundberg et al. 2007). Aries and Seider (2005) found that FGCS attending elite schools had feelings of inadequacy, intimidation, and deficiency in relation to their more affluent peers in general and especially in the classroom. Further, this lack of preparation could affect students' participation in class, willingness to interact with faculty, seek help when needed, and ability to find peers to study with; each of which could be connected to feelings of not belonging (Ostrove & Long, 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). FGCS, when compared with continuing generation students, are enrolled in and earn fewer credit hours, and have lower grade point averages (Pascarella et al., 2004). In general, first generation college students are less likely to be academically engaged and thus have lower learning gains (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Much of the literature on social class and campus involvement suggests the reason these students are less involved is because they work significantly more hours each week than their peers (Pascarella et al. 2004; Terenzini et al, 1996; Walpole, 2005). Many FGCS must work when attending college due to their financial situation: they need money to pay for their education. These students are at a disadvantage since working takes away from time studying

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

with peers, attending structured study groups and office hours, and staying on schedule with coursework. It should come as no surprise that FGCS perform worse than their continuing generation peers after arriving at college less prepared and having critical nonacademic responsibilities.

First generation students from lower SES backgrounds have difficulties navigating the social world of college. Social class has an influence on students' ability to make and maintain friends. Those who come from more affluent classes are more comfortable and find it easier to make new friends than their lower-class peers (Stuber, 2011), due to the middle-class culture they were raised in. In relation to extracurricular activities—a major source of involvement on campuses—Stuber found that students from upper-middle class backgrounds are more motivated to join clubs, while FGCS are occupied trying to adjust academically and are further constrained, to an extent, by the financial requirements for these clubs (2009). Social Greek Life¹ is also a setting that shows disparities between the social classes and social class reproduction. Due to its expensive nature, Greek Life can be highly exclusive, especially for girls, where material markers of social class are common (Stuber, Klugman, & Daniel, 2011). Depending on the prominence of Greek Life at a given college, being excluded from this can be upsetting for students. As with academic involvement, FGCS employment plays another factor in the amount of time students have available to participate in campus activities compared to middle class peers (Pascarella et al. 2004; Terenzini et al, 1996; Walpole, 2003). In a survey administered to students at University of California, Los Angeles investigating class, work habits, and belonging, lower and working class students rated the campus lower in economic diversity and campus climate for personal characteristics. Researchers concluded “that working-class students perceive

¹ Social Greek Life refers specifically to the Panhellenic Association and the Interfraternity Council, not the Multicultural Greek Council or National Pan-Hellenic Councils, which recruit primarily racial minority students

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

a less welcoming campus climate in regards to respect for differences and are less likely to feel as though they belong on campus,” (Soira, Stebleton, & Huesman, 2013:228).

Literature describing FGCS and low SES shows the importance of involvement and belonging on campus, although the causation arrow is undetermined. Some researchers believe feelings of not belonging affect amount of involvement, and others that not being involved affects feelings of not belonging. Regardless, sociologists suggest these feelings and experiences play a factor in the retention rates of students (Inkelas, et al. 2007; Lehmann, 2007; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Tinto, 1987). These findings are supported by investigating “habitus” differences between lower class FGCS and their continuing generation peers. “Habitus” refers to the habits and ideologies ingrained in a person due to early life experiences and their social class origins accompanied by the social and cultural capital someone possesses (Bourdieu, 1977). Cultural capital can be defined as general knowledge about and availability of resources pertaining to the dominant, or most prevalent, culture. In terms of college, this can include access to college admission test prep, messages about the importance of education from parents and secondary schools, and information about the norms in a college setting (Jehangir, Stebleton, & Deenanth, 2015). Social capital refers to the social networks available that could influence access to particular spaces, such as having connections to well-educated and influential persons for letters of recommendation or job access (Jehangir, Stebleton, & Deenanth, 2015). This would suggest students from a lower-class background, and especially FGCS whose parents have limited information about college settings, are at a distinct disadvantage in college environments, which could lead them to lack feelings of belonging. Bourdieu suggested that details of habitus dictating much of our persona are beyond conscious control and difficult to voluntarily change.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Although they may be changeable with extreme effort, our original habitus cannot be completely discarded (1977).

Lower SES, first generation students experience a sort of habitus dislocation when they arrive at college, leading to feelings of disconnect with their background and current setting, which develop as feelings of not belonging (Baxter & Britton, 2001; Lehmann, 2009). In *The Burden of Academic Success*, Allison Hurst (2010) explores how the internalization of a lower-class identity for FGCS affects student perceptions of the middle class along with their relations to families/ hometowns. Hurst found that students who internalized their identity had a tendency to reject their home life, often blaming their parents for being lazy and not trying hard enough, while seeing themselves as ill prepared compared to continuing generation peers. These students often embraced the middle-class culture of college while feeling “shame, embarrassment, and humiliation when among middle class students” (2010:215). These students had difficulty at times adjusting because of attempts to reject their habitus. On the opposing end, were students who understood education, especially post-secondary, as an institution that favored a “mental over manual labor” mindset. These students rejected the middle-class lifestyle of college and were proud, rather than embarrassed, of their hometowns. Hurst found FGCS’s identification with their background affected how much students were willing to portray themselves as separate from the working class.

We can now explore literature devoted to changes FCGS make in an attempt to increase belongingness and be accepted by peers in college when they have internalized their working class, first generation identities. To understand the strategies employed by these students, it is important to understand Goffman’s concept of “stigma management”.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

In *Stigma*, Goffman (1963) suggests that “stigma management” refers to the strategies deviants use to distance themselves from their negatively perceived identity, which was discrediting in some way, and could result in social exclusions. With this conceptualization, the desire to distance oneself from a stigmatized identity has expanded to frames beyond deviance to include areas such as social class, medical conditions, racial stereotypes, and more. A commonly used form of stigma management involves passing, or attempting to adapt a non-stigmatized identity by mimicking the behaviors, dress, and other qualities of the desired identity (Goffman, 1963). In this thesis research, this can be equated to lower and working class students learning and copying the ways of middle and upper-middle class peers. Social class, although not explicitly discriminated against or stigmatized, can lead to exclusions and feelings of not belonging on campus, as expressed earlier. However, unlike other social identities, such as race or gender, social class is not as readily visible, allowing FGCS who come from this background the ability to use stigma management techniques to fit in on elite college campus.

As students attempt to be upwardly mobile through education, they are often motivated to hide aspects of their identity that signal a lower class, first generation background by using stigma management passing techniques. Kaufman (2003) found that there are three primary ways students do this: associational distancing, associational embrace, and presentation of self.

Associational distancing refers to how students from lower class backgrounds attempt to break away, or separate themselves, from their past identities (Kaufman, 2003). This may include avoiding high school friends that did not attend college when home (Baxter & Britton, 2001). In his article on working class law students at an Ivy League school, Granfield (1991) found evidence of associational distancing with students who did not volunteer information about their parents’ or spouses’ occupations, for fear of being “discovered” as lower class.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Associational embrace, or purposefully interacting and involving oneself with peers who are like one's aspired social class, was also found to be a technique used among lower class students (Kaufman, 2003). Students would tactically choose middle- upper class peers who had something in common with them, such as occupation goals, and maintain these relationships as a source of motivation and a resource. These relationships would allow students to observe their desired social class. The final area of management techniques Kaufman discusses is presentation of self, which involves behaviors, dress, and expressions of a person in order to communicate her/his identity. For first generation, lower class college students, this may include adapting a wider range of vocabulary than previously known, mimicking the behaviors of peers, and changing speech patterns (Granfield, 1991; Reay, Crozier, Clayton, 2009; Stuber, 2011; Torres, 2009). Students do not necessarily choose only one strategy to adopt for stigma management, but instead adopt multiple strategies. Take for example how lower SES students feel intimidated by money and at times hide their lack of resources from peers by not ordering at group dinners (Aries & Seidner, 2005). In this case, students distance themselves from their previous social class, aligning themselves with students from a class they desire to join, and changing how they present themselves to others in an attempt to belong on campus.

So far, we have learned that students who are the first in their family to attend college, and who come from a lower-class background, often feel out of place and uninvolved at their colleges, which can lead to difficulties with integration into college environments and lower retention rates than middle class peers. In an attempt to feel more acquainted, these students are found to employ stigma management techniques of passing. Yet long term discrepancies still exist between FGCS and their peers. Walpole (2003) concluded from her longitudinal study that

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

being from a lower-class background can have an impact on experiences beyond college, despite obtaining a collegiate education. Specifically, she found that

“...low SES students have lower incomes, lower levels of educational attainment, and lower levels of educational aspirations than their peers from higher social strata nine years after college entry. Low SES students’ ability to convert their college education and experience into social and economic profits may be greater than that of their low SES peers who did not attend college, but it is lower than their high SES college peers.” (2003: 63).

Despite these findings, little attention has been given to individual experiences of first generation students from a lower-working class origin in their later undergraduate years or shortly after graduation, as compared to first year students. Looking through demographic variables of previous studies, I find that participants are either strictly first year students assessing integration, or no distinction is made regarding the year or age of participants. Although the experiences these students witness when during their first year of college can hold significance to feelings of belonging, by the time these students are upperclassmen it can be theorized they have suppressed their feelings of not belonging, persisted in the environment, or have come to believe they finally belong. Given the literature on habitus, however, it can be inferred that, while the display of their low SES background is less visible, the salience of this identity can still be felt. By investigating this gap in the literature, that is the presence of coming from a lower SES background among recent first generation college graduates, further explanation can be provided regarding the long-term effects of holding this identity. In addition, potential programs can be developed at universities to counter these effects. Therefore, the present research addresses when

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

the identity is salient for each age group, stigma management techniques enacted, and how individuals feel about the future of their identities.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

METHODS

This thesis used in-depth interviews with first generation college students who were freshmen, sophomores, or who had recently graduated to compare the different experiences these students encounter. Although I originally wanted the sample to be only freshmen or recent graduates, initial findings on future thoughts of their identities and low turnout of freshmen led to the inclusion of sophomores in the sample. Participants were recruited during the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year and continued through October, 2017.

All participants, at some point, attended the same prestigious midwestern university; the University of Michigan². Michigan is located in Ann Arbor, MI, an urban-like area known for cultivating diverse racial and cultural experiences, despite being in a predominantly upper-middle class environment. The tuition for Michigan averages roughly \$7,500 for in-state and \$25,000 for out-of-state undergraduate students per semester (Regent of the University of Michigan, 2018). I chose this location due to proximity, realizing the prestigious nature of the university could have effects which counter Walpole's 2003 findings: individuals are able to reach their middle-class desires given their experience at Michigan.

Once in contact with prospective participants, they filled out a pre-screening survey to ensure the target population was selected for the interview process (see Appendix A). This survey used *Qualtrics* and inquired about parental education, race, gender, hometown, and class standing in college or graduation year to ensure the sample consisted of first white students (because having a racial minority identity might conflict and/or enhance first gen experiences) from a mix of rural and suburban communities. Using this allowed an assessment of whether a participant fit the population in question, without advertising the need for participants who have

² Also referred to as "Michigan", interchangeably

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

potentially sensitive backgrounds. After participants were confirmed through the pre-screen process, interviews were scheduled. It should be noted that data collected in the pre-screen survey was not intended to be used for analysis.

Interviews were structured around concerns first generation college students experiences during freshmen year, and asked participants to compare the university setting with their hometowns in terms of social class dynamics. Additionally, support received from parents to attend college was addressed. These initial questions provided insight regarding how participants' background might influence their feelings towards their first generation student identities. This is an important factor to consider since the more a student internalized his/her identity, the more likely he/she can try to change how she/he were perceives and enacts stigma management techniques. Both age groups were asked to report, if they remembered, worries they had about coming to campus and their identities prior to their freshmen year. I also asked about overall salience of their first generation student identities and if there were times and environments in which this was heightened. A primary goal of the interviews was to investigate how participants felt about the future of their identities and to compare whether the experiences of graduates were already of concern to freshmen. I also inquired whether graduates believed their identities would continue to affect their lives. This was of particular interest considering Walpole's 2003 findings that even after graduating with a college degree differences arise between FGCS and continuing generation students.

Interviews took place in a public university space chosen by participants or via *Google Hangouts* if alumni could not meet in person. Interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes on average, with freshmen having shorter interview times. Participants were compensated \$20 for

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

their time, either given at the time of the interview or mailed. No one withdrew early from the interviews despite it being an option.

Two interview guides were used, depending on the age group of the participant (see Appendix B). I chose interviews because they allow the researcher to obtain in-depth answers and understandings of participant experiences. Interviews also allow insight into the differences that arise between freshmen experiences, and difficulties that emerge later in collegiate life. Using a survey may have reached a larger audience, but would have also limited the amount FGCS could expand on their answers, or be prompted to elaborate on different experiences.

The goal of this research design was to interview first generation students about their experiences, expectations of college, social adjustment, and confidence in the future. Having a pre-screen survey allowed me to assess prospective participants on identity features needed for the interview, without explicitly advertising for these features and possibly deterring participants from the study. Lastly, the study was designed to *understand* the experiences of first generation students, as many previous studies have, but also expand on the class standing difference that FGCS may experience, since much of the existing literature focuses on adjustments to college life but does not examine concerns after graduation.

After completion, all interviews were transcribed to further draw connections during analysis. No pre-existing coding scheme was used for analysis. Instead, I used an inductive method of analysis while looking for patterns within the sample and across age differences.

Hypotheses

It was expected that freshmen would feel the salience of their first generation and lower-working class identities in the presence of peers and potential friendships. Freshmen, concerned with fitting in, adjusting, and making friends when first arriving at Michigan, would be more

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

inclined to enact stigma management techniques in relation to their different identities in the presence of middle and upper-middle class peers. These tactics may include attempting to change their dress, adapting more affluent speech patterns and vocabulary, and not disclosing information about their pasts that would signify their status.

Recent graduates, on the other hand, were predicted to have different experiences with their identities as they reflected on their time as undergraduates. It was hypothesized that recent graduates, who now have established social groups, would be more concerned and aware of their identities in a future-oriented sense. They would be more aware of and inclined to hide their background during career opportunities that pertain to their post-undergraduate careers. In sum, salience of a FGCS identity would peak in freshmen year, when there are concerns of social adjustments, and again near the end of an undergraduate career, as students became concerned with prospective jobs and feel the effects of their social class habitus.

An alternative hypothesis was that recent graduates no longer feel the salience of their first generation student identity. This could be a factor of the prestige associated the University of Michigan. To support this hypothesis, in 2015 an annual survey distributed to Michigan students found reports of belonging on campus, involvement with organizations, and time spent discussing concepts with faculty outside of class did not vary significantly between FGCS seniors and continuing generation seniors, *or* between freshmen with these identities (Phillips, 2017). This would suggest that all students enter the university on relatively equal terms, and would therefore leave the university as equals after overcoming their class backgrounds. This may not disadvantage FGCS to the same degree as FGCS at a different, less elite, university. It very well could be that after completing their undergraduate careers, first generation graduates

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

believe they have successfully integrated into a middle class lifestyle, and no longer worry about their previous social class identity.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

DATA

Twelve participants were interviewed, half were graduates and half were in their freshman or sophomore years of college. Of the current students, four were freshmen and two were sophomores. All participants identified as white, non-Hispanic, native English speakers. In total, two thirds of the sample were women, half were from rural communities while the other half was from suburban, and only one participant came from a household that earned more than \$61k per year. Despite originally hoping to interview all rural students to keep the group as homogeneous as possible, the data pool expand the sample to suburban students when recruitment failed to bring in enough rural students. (For complete demographic information please see Table 1.1 in Appendix C). Although all 12 participants shared characteristics, including being first generation college students, it is important to understand that each person is still an individual with her/his own experiences on campus. For this reason, I have provided individual descriptions of each interviewee, including their background prior to Michigan.

The 12 First Gens

Emma graduated from the University of Michigan in 2016 after completing her degree in sociology and psychology; including an honors thesis in psychology. Both parents attempted higher education, but left after just one semester each, for personal reasons. Still, they realized the importance of education and moved from a poor, rural town to a middle-class suburb when Emma was eight. In this new school district, Emma could enroll in multiple honors courses and complete college-level courses through the school's International Baccalaureate (IB) program; both of which helped her gain admission to Michigan. During our interview, she spoke of how her parents supported her decision to attend college, but did not fully understand the difference between a community college education and the education an accredited four-year institution

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

could offer. Later on, she described how it was difficult to talk about her studies with them because of their lack of understanding and general concern about her education in college. In terms of her first generation college student identity, Emma talks about how she was implicitly aware of it, even in high school because of peer interactions. This difference was heightened in college. At the time of the interview, she worked in the southern U.S. as a high school teacher through Teach for America, a non-profit organization focusing on decreasing educational inequalities. In this position, her first generation status is extremely salient, as she utilizes her experiences to encourage her senior students to apply to colleges. Planning on obtaining a PhD in the future, Emma explained how her identity, and especially her relationship with her family, has caused some distress as she “divorces” from her past. In a sense, her parents were supportive of her plan to obtain a bachelor’s degree, but were more hesitant to accept her desires beyond a bachelor’s that could not only move her across the country, but increase the educational gap between them in the process.

Emily, a freshman in the Ross School of Business, admitted to being nervous about attending such a large college due to her rural, small town roots. During her interview, she acknowledged little about how well her school prepared her for a college environment, but mentioned that there was no mentorship or career advising provided by her high school. One of the most influential moments from her childhood is a memory of her dad sitting down with her sister and her and explaining the importance of education and college, and how they were expected to do this. Because of this, her parents were supportive of her decision, but not necessarily overly excited for expense reasons, when she decided to attend Michigan. In terms of her first generation identity, Emily was not aware that first generation students “were a thing,” but remembers being surprised by the number of college peers who have college educated parents. Prior to college, she said she was not worried or concerned about this aspect of her identity because in her hometown she was not a minority in the way she is at Michigan. Now in college,

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

she described two spheres where her first generation status is notable: Social Greek Life (Greek Life) and the Ross School of Business. When asked about Greek Life, Emily told me how she felt out of place while rushing, both in terms of wealth and purpose. She explained that she was in college to study hard and be successful and that did not seem to be the “cool” thing to do in Greek Life, which made her feel out of place. In the Ross school of business, she explained how she’s concerned about being exploited for her lack of knowledge on how things work. Outside of the Ross School of Business – she did not intend on continuing with Greek Life at the time—Emily did not see her identity playing a major role in her future at Michigan. Instead, she described how she was proud of how she arrived here and planned to use that persistence to her advantage, but was not concerned about possible negative effects in her future.

Abigail was a freshman from a suburban area whose high school had a program that allowed her to visit the University of Michigan multiple times since 6th grade. This school, self-described as “mostly middle class,” offered multiple Advance Placement courses, along with basic engineering classes. She found many of her friends’ parents did have college educations. Her parents were supportive of her decision to apply to colleges, but were worried about her attending Michigan until her financial aid package was revealed. When asked about her first generation identity, she did not often think about it, no matter the circumstances. When pressed further, after revealing personal struggles of being first generation, she turned defensive, suggesting that I could have lied about my parents’ background. Overall, Abigail believed the identity, if anything, was positive because “there’s a lot of resources” available. She made it very clear she does not think about her first generation identity nor does she think it will be relevant during her time at Michigan.

Olivia was a current graduate student in the School of Public Health. She describes her family as being generally supportive of her desire for a bachelor’s degree, but having general “low expectations” for her after high school. She attended community college for two years before transferring to one of the better-known schools in her home state of New Jersey. Her older brother, who also has a bachelor’s, returned home after college to take care of their mother, who

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

is on disability. Olivia's pursuit of more education has created some rift in the family, especially because her parents do not necessarily understand what the field of Public Health does and that she did not return home like her brother. When asked about her hometown, she described the environment as blue collar, white, and poor. Yet the high school she attended—which was in a different town, since her hometown did not have their own—was more middle class, with “rich kids” to counter her poorer background. Regarding her first generational identity, she describes how she was not that aware of it, both in high school and at community college. Even in her first semester of graduate school at Michigan she describes how she was not consciously aware of how this identity affected her, but how she did remember the surprise when she realized generations of families have attended this institution. Retrospectively, she acknowledged that with each institution she has attended, her lower class and first generation identity has become more salient. Her time at Michigan has provided the sharpest incline in salience, since she feels she is at a larger disadvantage compared to peers because of general lack of cultural capital. She has also had a handful of experiences in Ann Arbor that have created a negative perception of what this environment has to offer. In one interaction a third generation peer essentially used the “boot-straps approach” to ignore her disadvantages. Moving forward, Olivia is worried about her identity in the job sphere because she believes she has had less experience than continuing generational peers, and describes her identity as being an inherent disadvantage because of her upbringing.

Mason was one of two sophomores interviewed who transferred to Michigan as a freshman after completing some work at a small community college in his hometown. He grew up in a lower working class family, and is unique to this study in that he had little interest in his education throughout high school and instead preferred to do “delinquent shit” with his peers. It was not until meeting his mentor in community college that he was inspired to pursue a bachelor's degree. His parents were also the only

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

parents mentioned in the study to not fully support his plan to attend Michigan. For them, community college was reasonable, but furthering his education at Michigan was not supported. Mason distinctly recalls his dad telling him: “Don’t forget where you come from,” as if he was becoming too good for the family. This lack of support from parents, and lack of understanding from them and his high school peers, has created some tension at home, since both groups consistently ask him why he works so hard reading and writing papers and what is he getting out of his education now, as they receive bi-weekly paychecks. In terms of his first generation identity, he discussed how he was vaguely aware of some differences in high school and community college, but at Michigan the difference – though not named—was instantly noticeable. For Mason, office hours and small group discussions are when his identity appears most salient. He detailed how in these situations he feels intimidated, as if those around him will think less of him based on whatever contribution he might make. Because of this, he speaks up less in discussions and avoids office hours, the opposite of what he did in community college. By the time of the interview, he took pride in his first generation, lower class identity, believing he has shown persistence by making it this far, and using that as motivation in the future. Going further, he believes it will help in him in the job and internship search because it communicates to others his resilience. Other than this, he does not see it having a negative impact in years to come.

Sophia graduated in the spring of 2017 as a Spanish major with a pre-med track. She grew up in a rural, working-class town, where she felt her high school did not prepare her for her experiences at Michigan. Although she did have a college advisor in high school, her school focused less on analysis-type work common in colleges and the middle class lifestyle, and more on the “plug and chug” work associated with menial labor. She also described the shock she felt when witnessing the amount of wealth displayed by University of Michigan peers. While preparing for college, she did not expect her first generation college student identity to play a role in her college experiences, but she was very much unaware of the identity since most of the kids in her high school had similar backgrounds. Once on campus, she was aware of her identity

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

and acknowledged she faced different challenges because she did not have the same resources as more affluent peers, but was resilient and determined to succeed. Sophia felt her first generation identity was most salient during meetings with advisors. During our interview, she described the frustrations felt during these times when she was always told: “Do what you want.” There was no constructive guidance. She attributed advisors acting in this way to their assumptions she would have other resources (e.g. parents) to consult, like many of their continuing generation students. She was reminded of her lower class background once again immediately after graduation as she saw many of her friends taking exotic trips and receiving lavish presents—even a Rolex—from their families as graduation gifts. She, on the other hand, started the expensive process of applying to medical school. Sophia believes she will continue to experience the salience of her first generation identity. She explained the medical school application process, and how most applicants will apply to between 35 and 60 schools, while she only applied to 21 for expense reasons. Once admitted to medical school, she does not see her identity playing a major role in the social sense, but still very much so in all other fields. She described her concern that most people in medical school will have the cultural capital needed to succeed because they have family or close family friends who have already gone through the process, where she does not. Interestingly, her parents have been supportive of her entire college career, including medical school. This is opposite of what Emma and Olivia have experienced in their education beyond a bachelor’s, but this could be because of the topic area and careers associated with each respective field.

James was one of two freshmen interviewed who lived in the First Generation College Student (1st Gen) oriented living-learning community. He moved around often during childhood before his family settled into a town he described as rural and fairly homogeneous, with a majority of the population being white, Christian, and conservative. He did not feel his high school prepared him for collegiate life, despite

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

the fact it offered multiple Advance Placement courses and one field trip to Michigan's planetarium. Prior to college, he recounted how he had little concern about his first generation identity. In terms of making friends in college, he believed the biggest aid for him was general dorm life, rather than his living-learning community. He denied that the shared background of his dorm peers contributed to this, and insisted that it was the communal living that helped. James was very open about his lower social class growing up because it was something completely out of his control and therefore there was no reason to be ashamed. However, when I inquired about salience and effects of his first generation campus identity, he became defensive, as did Abigail. What mattered to him the most is that he made it to Michigan, not his parents' backgrounds. He has not experienced his identity as a first generation student academically because he believes "all of us are pretty much of the same caliber of education, and [that is] what's more expressed." Socially, he assured me he would be able to fit in because he is confident in how he presents himself, because in high school he did theater work that focused on self-presentations. Overall, he was insistent his identity does not and should not matter during his time at Michigan because he felt "like we [freshmen] all have the same experience, because we're all tossed into this new situation."

Liam was a student in the School of Social Work when interviewed who graduated in 2016 with a psychology major and community action social change minor. He grew up in a very rural, working class town where "farmers were the richest" people around. His high school only offered two Advance Placement, college level courses, which were not necessarily beneficial for him because of the subject matter. His college search and application process was very independent, as he described his high school as not being particularly college-oriented. He was the second in his school's history to attend the University of Michigan. Like Sophia, he felt social class differences between him and other students almost immediately, especially in his dorm, where he was a member of a living-learning community with several peers who had professional parents. He joined the Co-Op community—a student-run affordable housing network that focuses on communal living—because he thought these students would be more

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

understanding and from similar backgrounds. Instead, he ran into more class conflicts. He described the community as “more Hipster than Hippie,” with many students more focused on the substances associated with the housing network than a need for affordable housing. In terms of his first generation status, Liam thought he was partially aware of it during freshmen year, before he was introduced to the First-Generation College Students @ Michigan student group. In general, he described feelings of not belonging, only heightened by the number of people who came from other, more affluent communities. He often reacted to this by joking about his own background, as if to beat others to the punch. He also described the frustration he felt when he witnessed peers getting “free stuff” from relatives and other family members, not to mention job connections they easily made which he lacked. In fact, Liam discussed how he decided to continue his education in social work after a year-long job search that resulted in no employment. He attributed this inability to find a job to lack of cultural and social capital, with minimal fault to his major/minor choice. However, he believes this was for the best, since he has been able to better connect with his social work peers, many of whom come from similar disadvantaged backgrounds. He believes his first generation identity will influence what types of jobs he pursues (social justice oriented), but not necessarily his ability to obtain them.

Megan was a sophomore studying psychology who planned on graduating a year early. Despite being lower-working class, she grew up in a middle to upper-middle class suburban town where she was able to attend a good high school which offered multiple Advance Placement courses she took advantage of. She felt prepared for life at Michigan in academic and social fields because she did hangout with a range of peers in high school, participating in student council, playing rugby, skateboarding, and being academically inclined. Still, she did not know she was first generation, or that it could be “such a big deal,” as she explained how she called the financial aid office after receiving a full ride scholarship designated for first generation college students. She thought the scholarship was a mistake! However,

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

once on campus she found it difficult to connect with others because of a “lack of common background.” She has never been to Europe, making it challenging to contribute to a conversation where someone has just returned from their eighth visit. When I asked about salience of her first generation identity in the past few years, she said that, although she may not have known the exact name for it, she definitely felt it while applying colleges. It became more apparent that she was different by mid-semester of her freshman year. In general, she discussed how it was difficult because of general lack of cultural capital, for example, not knowing how to navigate forms for financial aid or even what to bring for her dorm room. Similar to Mason, she hopes to use her identity in the future to communicate to prospective graduate schools and employers that she is resilient, but does not see it playing a negative role.

Ava was the only engineering graduate interviewed for this study. She was supposed to graduate in April of 2015, but due to credit issues did not complete her degree until 2017. In her rural hometown, her family—consisting of her legally blind mom, nurse dad, and four other children—was considered one of the more well-off. Her high school, despite having three Advance Placement English-based courses, did not offer physics or calculus, and thus did not prepare her for Michigan Engineering. Upon admittance, she was selected and enrolled in the Michigan Science Technology and Engineering Math Academy, a program for at-risk students and one (of the three) place where she was required to take pre-calculus before enrolling in Calculus I at Michigan. When asked about how she chose Michigan, she admitted she was only looking at the prestigious level of education, and knew little of the social class atmosphere of the institution. Her parents, although supportive of her decision and ability to pursue higher education, were hesitant about her decision to attend Michigan because of the affluence associated with the university. This lack of concern from Ava could be attributed to her position in high school, where, as previously stated, she was one of the more well-off students. She did not know about nor recognize her first generation identity or her lower-working class

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

background. This quickly changed as she entered college. She described how as she became more aware of her position and disadvantages and she began to resent those who could afford more. In particular, she described instances of how her peers would say they were broke meaning “[they] can’t get my hair done... or [they] can’t afford this Kate Spade purse,” whereas Ava would be ‘broke’ in the sense she could not afford rent. This led to feelings of isolation from peers, on top of isolation from a family that did not really understand her difficulties due to lack of experiences and unwillingness to listen. This was and still is a salient aspect of her identity. She described how her mom often “gives up” when Ava tries to explain her work in environmental engineering policy, which she believes to be her parents’ way of dealing with a daughter who is more educated than them. In terms of salience of her first generation identity during college, she had many experiences. First, she described her stigma management techniques around peers, where, because of her desire to fit in, she would go out to nicer restaurants, but order the least expensive item – in one case a side of olives—and not tip the server. In the academic field, she felt professors and staff would put on a front about understanding her experiences. They continued to fail her rather than make further exceptions; especially in the context of her need to work and her inability to meet professors at designated office hours, as well as their unwillingness to meet weekly on her schedule. She also described how her identity in general meant she had little knowledge about resources on campus, especially those for substance abuse. She believed finding resources to help students coping with substance abuse at the beginning of her struggles would have helped her recover and complete her degree on time. In her current job, though, she sees her identity as an asset, since her struggles show resilience and determination that she believes got her the job. In the future, she does not see her first generation identity as something that will continue to affect her

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

experiences. Instead her rural, out-doors-y background seems to be more relevant in creating friction with peers.

Ethan, the other freshmen living in the living-learning community, grew up in a conservative town with a high school that he described as not necessarily college focused. Although his high school was lower and middle class, since there was a private academy where upper-middle class families sent their children to, he was able to interact with peers of higher classes both through sports teams – particularly golf—and by dual enrolling in a nearby college. This college experience, along with a summer engineering camp at the University of Michigan, helped him matriculate into campus life. Prior to college, he described his identity as just “a characteristic that someone has,” and felt neither proud nor overly concerned about it. Not until being on Michigan’s campus and formally recognizing his identity did he feel a sense of pride for being one of few to make it this far. This is not to say he did not have worries about the effects of his first generation status prior to college. Specifically, he was concerned about finding a group of peers like him, which is why he applied to the living-learning community. In addition, although he did not formally rush Greek Life, he did mention that his identity was most salient when visiting fraternities on campus. He often found himself unwilling to disclose his family background in these situations and instead kept conversations on the topic of golf and other subjects that did not reflect his class background. In the future he sees his first generation identity playing less of a role as time progresses because he and his family will adjust and understand the expectations of life at the university.

Brooke was the oldest Michigan alumnae interviewed, having graduated with her bachelor’s in 2013 before taking a gap year and eventually getting her MSW. At the time of the interview, she worked in student advising at the university. Her parents recognized the importance of education at an early age and enrolled her in a private Catholic school across town, rather than the sub-par public school in her hometown. When Brooke was in tenth grade, her family moved to a more affluent suburb, where she started public school that offered multiple Advance Placement courses. At this point, she started to notice social class differences, primarily

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

in terms of dress—since her private school had uniforms— and class-based cliques at school, which she said resembled an environment similar to Michigan. This troubled her, since despite being in a school that prepared students for college, there was little help with the application processes since it was assumed most students could approach their parents for help. In college, Brooke’s experience as a first generation student was unique in that she was also a first generation immigrant; this meant that she commuted for the first two years of college. The commute provided challenges in adjusting to typical college life. She was not able to join clubs, live in the dorms, or participate in the various social activities that happened over the weekends. She described how she felt a “different-ness” about her freshmen year experiences, but wasn’t able to pinpoint them to her first generation identity until her sophomore year, when she attended a First-Generation College Students @ Michigan student dinner. Over all she described her undergraduate experiences as a general lack of cultural capital about colleges, including not knowing the importance of office hours, unawareness of resources available (or where to look for them), and not having parents that could assist in the navigation. She explained the only possible benefit of having immigrant parents, was at times their lack of understanding of the school system. Since they did not understand she could only have one class a day, she was able to stay on campus and work, rather than be forced to return home. In her future, Brooke sees her identity as first generation becoming more salient and important to her career. She was specifically hired at her current position because the department wanted a first generation graduate to advise first generation students. She plans on continuing work in her department while advising the university’s Director of First Generations Student Affairs in program development, thus increasing the awareness and importance of her identity.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

RESULTS

This study was designed to focus on identities of first generation college students at different points in their academic career. Results from in-depth interviews can be separated into four primary findings: hometown effects, salience of identity, stigma management, and thoughts toward the future. Three of these highlight experiences of FGCS expressed across age groups, and one manifests with differences between age groups.

Hometown Effects

Interviewees consisted of individuals who self-described their hometowns as either suburban or rural. This description closely aligned with how participants described the social class of their hometowns. As expected, those who came from rural communities characterized their surroundings as working class, blue-collar towns, whereas those who grew up in suburban areas saw their neighborhoods as middle and upper- middle class. Previous literature comparing the preparedness of students based on their hometowns tends to focus on academics. Specifically, more affluent suburban and urban schools are better able to prepare students for college by offering various Advance Placement courses, a range of electives focusing on critical thinking, and standardized test preparation (Handwerk et al., 2008; Hannum et al., 2009; Monk & Haller, 1993). Rural and urban schools, on the other hand, typically focus on basic core classes, and offer limited Advance Placements. However, this study found a pattern dependent on origins that had a greater effect on participants' social adjustments than their academics.

Many rural participants were unprepared and surprised by the customs of the university because they had little connection to such a rich culture prior to their arrival on campus. In addition, many rural students were less aware of their lower social class, first generation identities because in their hometown they were not a minority, as they were on campus. For

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

example, Sophia (G)³ described how she was surrounded by others like herself in high school, making her lower class hard to identify, or how Ava (G) belonged to one of the more affluent families in her hometown, and therefore was rudely awoken when she arrived at Michigan. Another participant, Emily (F), was somewhat aware of her lower social class at home, but never thought about her identity as a FGCS because a majority of her peers' parents did not have a college education. For these rural participants, adjusting to college, like other freshmen, came with the additional challenge of being tossed into a social they were unfamiliar with.

Suburban students were better prepared for the culture at the institution because they experienced the middle-class life and values prior to starting college. For instance, Ethan (F), despite not going to a high school that actively promoted college attainment, had extended interactions with upper-middle class individuals by being on the golf team that travelled to other affluent neighborhoods. In general, suburban students attended high schools that encouraged extra-curricular activities that created even more cross-class contact for students with different class backgrounds. Suburban first generation students were more aware of their class and generational status because they recognized themselves as being a minority in their high schools, as in Abigail's (F) case which was the exact opposite situation Emma (F) was in. Or for Brooke (G), who recognized her lower social class after she moved from a private school with uniforms to a public high school, where students could easily display their class through material means.

Through not only their peer interactions, but through interactions they had with peers' parents, who were often professionals, suburban first generation students could observe and interact the prevailing middle-class culture. This is not to say that cultural and social capital advantages that suburban-based participants possessed did not mitigate effects of their first

³ The letter in parentheses after a name refers to the age group associated with a participant; (F)- Freshmen, (S)- Sophomore, (G)- Graduate

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

generation identities. Instead these differences, however noteworthy, were marginal in terms of salience of the identity.

Salience of Identity

Current students and alumni identified similar times in which their identity was salient during college. This is contrary to my hypothesis that graduates would express an increased salience of their identity as they finished their undergraduate career and focused on developing professional careers or worked on graduate school applications. Two realms of college-life surface as areas where students felt the salience of their first generation identity. The first and most prominent is in relation to social and/or peer relations, whereas the second area focused on faculty and staff interactions. Although two-thirds of participants mentioned how academically unprepared they were for college—mostly because of their social class background. Researchers did not include this as a significant salience-based finding because a majority of college students, no matter their generational background or social class, could attest to being subjectively under prepared for the rigor of college academics.

Further, considering social experiences students had regarding their identity, the area of Social Greek Life was a realm that was exceptionally salient for those who participated. At the University of Michigan, the presence of (parental) wealth in fraternities and sororities is apparent to many lower income students when they see dues can range from \$300 to \$1,300 per semester. In addition, the rushing process for sororities involves dressing up and visiting each house. For students like Emily (F), it did not go unnoticed that many of the young women around her were displaying wealth symbols such as Coach purses, Gucci shoes, Lilly Pulitzer outfits, and other material markers. The mansions that house the sororities were equally intimidating, and for many students, like Ava (G), it was clear she did not belong in these settings. The salience of a FGCS

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

identity was not in isolation for women, but was also apparent for men who chose to rush. Ethan (F), who began the rush process, but later dropped to focus on academics, discussed how seemingly informal conversations consistently reminded him of his identity. This was because conversations tended to revolve around where parents attended college and what Greek Life affiliations they already had.

Students in both age groups related how their lack of shared experiences with peers lead to a difficult time adjusting socially. For example, Megan (S) explained during her freshmen year she did have a social group, but that it was more out of necessity and proximity, than similar background and connections, and she could not relate to her friends as they discussed family vacations overseas. In a more negative sense, Olivia (G) relayed how her identity was salient during graduate school when confronting more privileged peers. She discussed how a peer could not relate to *her* situation of being a lower income FGCS, *her* lack of resources navigating college, and how that created friction during a course project. In both cases, and in relation to Greek Life, participants expressed an underlying theme of not belonging on the campus because they could not relate with peers. Although all participants are either still enrolled or have graduated from the university, other previous research suggests that feelings of belonging at college can correlate to retention rates (Lehmann, 2007; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Soria & Stableton, 2013).

The second area interviewees discussed regarding the salience of their identities revolved around interactions with faculty and staff. As the literature reflects, many FGCS feel intimidated and uncomfortable during faculty office hours (Miyazaki & Janosik, 2009; Soria & Stabelton, 2012). Surprisingly another area within the faculty and staff umbrella of salience was the interactions students had with academic advisors. Graduate Sophie, who was on a pre-medicine

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

track, expressed how her first generation identity was salient during advising because it appeared as if each of the many advisors she met assumed she had other resources (e.g. parents) to help guide her in choices made during undergrad. She related how many advisors would present various options to her, but leave the final decision up to her and, although this may sound ideal for middle-class students, as a first generation student who does not have family members familiar with academic choices, it can be overwhelming and create more stress. This lack of structured guidance for first generation students can lead to extra course work, as was Sophie's case, or even delayed graduation, as in Ava's case.

Overall, students did not always overtly communicate this discomfort during these times of identity salience, but instead used various stigma management techniques.

Stigma Management

This project examined not only the salience of the FGCS identities, but how students choose to react in these situations using stigma management techniques. While participants were not asked directly about stigma management, they were asked to explain how they felt and what they did in response to these uncomfortable moments. Drawing on Kaufman's work, common themes of management across undergraduate experiences involved associative distancing, associative embrace, and presentation of self (2003).

Associative distancing, or detaching oneself from their lower SES, first generation identities, was demonstrated often and in many ways. Emma (G) for example, would ensure no one overheard phone calls home by only calling in private. Similarly, Liam (G) mentioned how he would not openly discuss his background with peers, and when it did come up in conversation would joke about it as a way to distance himself from serious aspects of that background.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Associative embrace, on the other hand, involves aligning oneself with desired identities. Emily (F) partook in this form of stigma management in the business school community. Because the business school can be a heightened college experience compared to the overall university, Emily chose to rush a professional fraternity. Professional fraternities allow students to network with internships/ job opportunities and develop professional skills that will help in future endeavors. Since Emily had no experience with the business world, she opted to join one of these networks to learn what is needed to be successful, both formally from events hosted by the fraternity and informally from peers. Ava (G) participated in a somewhat different style of associative embrace as a way to manage stigma around peers. She described how, in a desire to fit in with a social group, she would go on outings to places outside her budget and choose the least expensive item on a menu. By doing this, Ava could still access the culture of a more affluent class without revealing her own status.

Presentation of self was the most explicit strategy, and interestingly the most recognizable by name to participants. James (F), for example, explained how his work in high school theatre would assist him during his Michigan years because he learned appropriate ways to present himself depending on the situation. In a less direct sense, Emma (G) discussed how she would present herself in a way that made it seem she was similar to her peers. In her own words: “[I] got really, really good at acting, and really good at pretending.... [And] trying to fit in and mitigate that social awkwardness I decided, ‘okay I’m just going to hide my first gen status and I’m going to hide my lower income status.’”

In addition to Kaufman’s theories of stigma management (2003), and specific to faculty and small group interactions, participants mentioned times when they would use what I call “withdraw tactics”. Mason (S) in particular mentioned these as his most used stigma

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

management technique, as he often felt the salience of his identity in many situations. “Withdraw tactics” were ways students essentially blended into the background in a classroom setting to avoid drawing attention to themselves and their status. Mason often did this by choosing not to speak out in small discussion groups for fear of being called out as incorrect or being judged by his first generation identity first and contribution second. He also explained how during his time in community college he felt comfortable approaching professors with questions, but at Michigan he would avoid these situations because he perceived his identity—a social class minority on campus—as being a factor in how professors evaluated his questions (ie whether they were a “stupid question” or not), even if this was not the case.

These four strategies—associative distancing, associative embrace, presentation of self, and withdraw tactics— were explored by both graduates and freshmen. However, when discussing feelings towards their identities, alumni expressed how they wished they would not have hid this part of themselves during undergraduate years. Despite the salience of being first generation college students remaining relatively stable during their undergraduate career, how participants felt about their identities did change, as Brooke (G) mentioned, “I never think of I as [a] negative thing anymore.” Moving forward, each age group discussed how they saw the future of their identities developing and the effects they may have. This is where findings across ages explained divergent perspectives.

Future Thoughts

One finding that varied across age groups was related to how participants saw their identities affecting them in the future. Graduates, possessing a clear sense of their identities, were better able to understand the effects it could hold for them in the future. In addition, graduates based their beliefs about the future on what field of work or study they were pursuing.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Sophomores—who mostly saw their identity as an asset for the future—were not originally part of this study design, but were added to the research design after freshmen responses about their futures lacked acknowledgment of their identity as having any major effect.

Graduate thoughts

Graduates, interviewees displayed strong awareness of their positions of being the first in their family to graduate from a four-year institution and the effects this was having on their time in college. However, when asked how they saw this identity playing a role in future, responses varied based on profession. Ava, who had ups and downs in college due to her first generation identity, now works in an engineering firm. In this position, she saw her rural background – one filled with camping trips, hunting, and knowing how to shoot a bow and arrow—as having a greater impact on her work than her first generation identity. Most of her colleagues find these activities unusual and mention this to her. So, besides the occasional awkward conversations with co-workers, Ava did not see her FGCS identity as playing a large role in her future.

A handful of graduates did think of their first generation identities in their current field, because it related directly to their work. Brooke worked as an academic advisor for the Michigan School of Engineering, where her supervisor specifically hired her to work with first generation engineering students. In addition, Brooke interacted with the newly appointed Director of First Generations Student Affairs for the university. Similarly, Emma worked as a senior year high school English teacher. In this role, she assisted her students in the college application process, since many of them were would-be first generation students. As can be assumed, for graduates in positions like these their own FGCS identity was salient because they could empathize with the people and students they worked with and would continue to be relevant in their future.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

A third category of graduates were those applying to or in graduate school. Because they were still in an academic setting, these graduates did see their identity as having an impact on their future, but not always in a positive sense. Olivia, who was enrolled in the School of Public Health's master's program, discussed how her time as a graduate student at Michigan was challenging because, similar to undergraduate years, she was at a loss for finding resources, both academic and financial. On top of this, she had strong feelings of imposter syndrome as a result of being first generation. As she explained:

“... I feel like I've had less experiences than people whose parents went to college, like, just for that fact alone.... So, I always look at it, no matter what degree you have... even if I had a PhD and I'm in a room full of people who have their PhD, I'm first generation—there's still like an inherent disadvantage because of like the upbringing behind it.”

Sophia, who was in the process of applying to medical schools, voiced a similar concern about class disadvantages she faced because of her identity. She described how she could not afford to apply to the normal⁴ amount of medical schools, which statistically limited her chances of being accepted. In addition, unlike her peers, she did not have a family or community friend who was a doctor and who could assist her during the application process or afterwards with work.

Sophomores thoughts

⁴ Between 45 and 60 schools, according to participant

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

The two sophomores thought their identities would have an impact on their remaining time as undergraduates and in a job search, and that this impact would be positive. Both felt a strong pride in their social class background and believed it showed their ability to successfully overcome difficulties, which would be positive qualities for prospective employers. Their FGCS identities were viewed as an asset and something that they could utilize to connect them to various resources. Megan, for example, received a scholarship dedicated to first generation college students. Sophomores, then, were aware of their identities and did expect them to have positive roles in their futures. However, when compared to graduates' reflections of their undergraduate years, the identity of being a FGCS can have positive and negative effects, which include *lack* of resources to assist with the navigation of college.

Freshmen thoughts

Freshmen were overall less aware of their identities and how they could affect their time at Michigan. Half the freshmen (n=3) had strong beliefs rooted in the meritocracy of education and therefore believed what mattered most was that they successfully enrolled at Michigan. They believed they were equal to their peers and their first generation identities should not have a major impact on their futures, positive or negative. When pressed further, freshmen became defensive about possible long-term implications of being first generation. They explicitly commented on how they did not think their identities mattered, they did not think about it, and that it should not matter in the future. The defensiveness suggests that, contrary to what was said, freshmen did have thoughts about their identities and what this could mean for their futures, but that these beliefs conflicted with American's publicly defined meritocratic system. For a meritocratic system to exist identity characteristics outside one's control (e.g. being a FGCS) should not factor into experiences in college. Yet previous research and alumni reflections,

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

suggest being a first generation college student has a significant effect on college experiences (Padget, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). For freshmen confronting this is something they would rather avoid at this early stage. It was because of freshmen defiance toward their identities and alumnus embracement towards the same identities that sophomores were included in the sample.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was trifold. I was interested in understanding: (a) the areas of higher education where first generation college student identities were most salient, and what stigma management techniques were used during these times; (b) how first generation graduate identities played a role in their current lives; and (c) how individuals predicted their first generation identities would affect them in the future. Data collected in this study involved twelve in-depth interviews; six with graduates, four with freshmen, and two with sophomores. In addition to drawing conclusions on the initial purposes of this research, additional findings showed important hometown differences, being from rural or suburban communities. This relies heavily on theories of cultural and social capital.

The first major finding involved areas where FGCS identities are most salient. I found there were two fields—social engagement and faculty administrative interactions. It is worth discussing how academics were not an area often mentioned by participants. Much of the previous literature highlights how FGCS are often underprepared for the rigorous academic routines found in college and do not have as much time to dedicate towards academics because of time devoted to work (Choy, 2001; Pascarella et al. 2004; Terenzini et al. 1996). Although most students voiced how their main priority in college was to be academically successful, none explicitly mentioned how their identity became salient in the academic realm. Instead, being FGCS identities were more salient when interacting with peers of higher social status, or with faculty, even though students were not always aware of the norms associated with these interactions.

This lack of knowledge leading to identity salience can be attributed to the cultural and social capital first generation students possessed, or rather lacked. Normally, FGCS did not share the same background or experiences of continuing generation, middle and upper-middle class

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

peers. Compared to continuing generation students, FGCS are less academically prepared prior to college, work more hours in college, and have difficulties making friends outside their social class (Pascarella et al., 2004; Stuber, 2011; Terenzini et al., 1996). In this research a lack of experience created friction starting in freshmen year and continued throughout the college experience. These frictions were experienced both in a general peer related sense and especially in Greek Life. The cultural capital differences were not explicitly noted by participants, but as they discussed feelings of different-ness as often related to material markers, international travel, and general life expenses, it became apparent that feelings of difference were rooted in cultural capital. This “different-ness” feeling was echoed during faculty and staff interactions, which can also be attributed to cultural capital. In *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau discusses how children learn from parents how to interact with adults (2011). For example, children in middle and upper-middle class families learn the importance of asking their doctor questions and voicing concerns, whereas lower and working class parents and their children are more complicit in the similar scenarios. Clearly this parallels how first generation students in the current study interacted with college faculty members. Middle and upper-middle class students are comfortable approaching faculty members and seeking out important connections whether or not they have explicit questions, while lower and working class, first generation students find this idea daunting.

Students discussed how they often felt uncomfortable in various campus settings because they did not have the cultural capital their peers possessed. These interactions lead to feelings of not belonging on an elite campus and eventual stigma management techniques.

For FGCS, these techniques involved a combination of aligning themselves with the prevailing middle class culture, discarding their original lifestyles (or at least keeping them

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

separate), monitoring how they presented themselves, and withdrawing from unfamiliar or uncomfortable situations. This last technique—withdrawing—did not appear in previous literature on stigma management techniques for lower social class individuals. However, the other three strategies mirror Kaufman’s (2003) work on associate embrace, associative distancing, and presentation of self used by lower SES students. Although stigma management is not a new phenomenon, it should be concerning that students of any minority status feel the need to enact these tactics during their educational career. This pressure for FGCS to change aspects of their identities can create more stress in an already stressful college environment, as in the cases of associative embrace and presentation of self, or not participating in valued learning experiences by withdrawing from the situations. These stigma management techniques could be the inevitable outcomes of upward mobility.

The focus of identity salience with peer engagement and faculty/administrative interactions, which lead to forms of stigma management, is closely connected to an unexpected finding related to hometown differences. Although all participants encountered some form of “different-ness” or difficulty connecting to college peers from a higher social class, this was especially true for students who came from rural communities. Participants who attended high school in more affluent suburban neighborhoods had a much easier time adjusting to Michigan’s social atmosphere. Rural students, however, encountered a type of cultural shock in the university’s upper-middle class atmosphere.

Even though FGCS from suburban areas had some difficulties with social life at Michigan, it is hard to deny they had an advantage over their rural peers. This can be attributed to the cultural capital middle class suburban students gained, however subconsciously. Cultural capital consists of knowledge ranging from how to dress in certain situations to appropriate ways

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

of talking with authority and faculty (Jehangir, Stebleton, & Deenanth, 2015). In a sense, economically advantaged suburban students had previous experiences that benefitted their transition to college. For example, Emma (G) was able to retrospectively recognize how her experiences in the International Baccalaureate Program of her largely upper-middle class high school prepared her for Michigan. She recalled:

[Talking about college peer interactions] “I was really good at faking my way through it. ... And I think a lot of that did come from the IB Program and being surrounded by people who are of a much higher class than me, who had a lot more social capital than I did, and like, having to fake my way through that, too...”

Even if the suburban areas where many study participants grew up were not at the top of the social class ladder, their experience with middle class culture in high schools prepared them more than rural first generation students, who had little contact. Despite little literature existing on the social class differences between rural and suburban communities⁵ the findings presented here expand on literature on cultural and social capital, as well as theories of habitus.

Rural students had more difficulties adjusting to life at an Michigan because they did not have prior experience with the prevailing upper-middle class culture. They did not necessarily know the “proper” way to act, dress, or even talk in certain situations. Although both rural and suburban FGCS groups may not have had the same experiences as elite peers (i.e. trips abroad), suburban students were familiar with ideas of the middle classes and had previous interactions

⁵ Most literature focuses on the suburban versus urban comparison

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

with similar individuals in high school. This prepared them for interactions with upper-middle class interactions in college. This cultural capital advantage can explain how the non-academic knowledge one processes can be just as important, if not more, when entering an environment different than one's origins. When admitting first generation or lower income students, many colleges will be pre-occupied with ensuring these individuals are able to succeed in their academic worlds. However, given the results of this study, equal attention should be given to social integration.

The second major finding of the present research, is how graduates saw their first generation identities in their current lives. It was hypothesized that these individuals would either continue to hide their identities to prospective employers for fear of being seen as inferior, or that time spent at college would negate any first generation, low income disadvantages. This first hypothesis was formed based on previous findings that suggest lower income students are at a continued disadvantage, even after successfully graduating college (Walpole, 2003). The second hypothesis was introduced given the prestigious nature of the university where research took place. Graduating from a high-ranking school, like Michigan, could allow students to overcome disadvantageous backgrounds (Thomas & Zhang, 2005). However, interviews provided mixed results in which the primary indicator of thoughts towards their identities were dependent on what career an individual was pursued.

For those working in the education field, their identity as a FGCS was continually salient because it helped them with their current work. It was an asset for these individuals because knowledge they had from their own experiences was relatability to students co-workers lacked. They not only possessed cultural capital to pass down to other first generation students, but could be empathetic to situations, making the interactions easier for these students. Participants who

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

were not in the education field, (i.e. current students) however, continued to feel the disadvantages of their identity. This could be because their cultural and social capital compared to that of middle class peers, was still lacking. It can also be inferred that at each level of education, more knowledge about the settings and culture is beneficial for success. Lastly, there were a handful of participants who appeared to fall into the second hypothesis. That is, these individuals may continue to feel some aspect of their background in current work, but that it is not directly connected to being first generation. These individuals were able to successfully matriculate into a middle class lifestyle after graduation. Given that one purpose of this research was to test whether a college education mitigated disadvantages of FGCS identities, the findings do not provide a concrete answer. Instead, the primary predictor of this would be what field or career path individuals pursue.

Despite graduates having three trains of thought on the future of their FGCS identities, there was a common theme of parental defensiveness that often increases as participants are upwardly mobile. Half of the alumni discussed how their current career path and degrees were difficult to discuss with parents. Ava specifically said how her parents just “give up” when she attempted to explain what she does in her current role. Similarly, Emma and Olivia experience parental push back when they discuss wanting to pursue graduate degrees, as if acquiring a bachelor’s degree was enough. But anything more widens the social class gap which many parents are cautious and worried about. Interestingly, Brooke had strong support from her parents to pursue a medical degree. This outlier could be attributed to the field of study. The medical field is widely respected as a practical and respectable degree path which ensures economic stability. Emma and Olivia’s desired paths—psychology PhD and public health MA

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

respectively—are viewed as less economically dependable and are not easily understood by parents.

Finally, it is worth discussing the identity realization and embracement that took place between freshmen, sophomore, and alumni interviews. Freshmen, although aware of their FGCS status, were not actively thinking about their identities at the time of the interview (Fall, 2017), nor in terms of future effects they may have at Michigan. Sophomores, who recognized their positions, saw their identities as assets. They believed their first generation identities would connect them to resources and be attractive on resumes. However, they overlooked negative side effects. Lastly, graduates recognized the positive and negative effects of being first generation, and how these identities affect future career paths. We can attribute the changing thoughts towards identities to a form of student development theory (Jehangir, Williams, and Jeske, 2012).

One student development path is described by participants in a longitudinal study conducted by Jehangir et. al. which focused on the influence of multicultural learning communities on racial minority FGCS. During their first year of college students participated in a multicultural learning community that focused on an aspect of their identity, and then were indirectly asked to relate the influence of this years later (Jehangir, Williams, and Jeske, 2012). They found that participation in multicultural communities provided an outlet for participants to express frustrations surrounding their identities encountered during their first year. Later, they developed the ability to embrace their identities and advocate for them by their senior year.

In the current research, it can be inferred lower and working class first generation students may be aware of the negative role their identities could play, and therefore attempt to ignore and suppress them. This is supported not only by freshmen who were reluctant to discuss

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

their identities, but also graduates who discussed the stigma management techniques they used during early years at Michigan. As students continue with their educations, they may become more aware of their identities in a positive light, as is the case with the two sophomores interviewed. These students had acclimated to university life and found peers like themselves by their second year, allowing them to explore aspects of their identity without worry. As graduates reflected on their undergraduate experiences, by the time they reached their senior year they were fully aware of the implications of their identities, both positive and negative. However, they had embraced their identities, and many created their own narratives of the first generation college student by graduation. They sought to give back and assist other first generation students. The path of questioning one's identity, to realizing the benefits of it, to fully embracing it, did not differ by hometown affiliation, and, for graduates, was not supplemented by a living community as in Jehangir et al.'s work (2015). With this development, it can be inferred that other minority groups on elite campuses like the University of Michigan may experience similar courses of development.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

IMPLICATIONS

This research hoped to examine a gap in the literature regarding first generation students as they graduate and leave university settings. Given that previous literature focuses on matriculation to college environments either among freshmen or without regards to class standing, it is hard to understand if there is something about FGCS that affects their lives after the initial adjustment takes place freshmen year. The results of this study yield three suggestions for elite universities to increase the successful matriculation of first generation college students.

First, a majority of findings were related to cultural capital theories (Bourdieu, 1977). Specifically, how FGCS often have less knowledge of the university climate than middle and upper-middle class peers. This suggests that universities should take concrete steps to welcome lower income FGCS both prior to enrollment and once on campus. This could be done by creating a separate orientation session for first generation students who may lack knowledge about general college processes beyond financial assistance. Many colleges have well developed financial aid offices that readily offer assistance. However, FGCS struggle with much more than affordability. By creating separate seminars and informational settings, students could adapt to a middle class university climate faster. Given the trajectory of first generation lower income identities between arriving on campus and graduating, it would be also beneficial to structure these sessions based on academic standing. This way seminars could be structured around what is important for each group. For example, planning social events for freshmen to connect with other FGCS, and alumni dinners for seniors to see how they can be successful given their developing identities.

Second, colleges could take steps to inform faculty that not all students may be familiar with office hours and other administrative practices, and that staff should keep an open mind

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

towards first generation students. Taking this a step further, informing the entire student body of peer differences could create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for FGCS. As Sophia (G) expressed:

“... maybe an orientation to have like, or maybe a section about the [social] classes that you’re going to encounter... just so people are aware, because I feel like, especially the kids who come from the very affluent families, they’re not aware of like, the problems first generation students are encountering...”

In the past and currently, universities focus on racial and religious inclusivity, while ignoring social class differences, mostly likely because it is not as visible. Students of middle and upper-middle class backgrounds may not intentionally be excluding their peers. Instead, they are not consciously thinking about how they are socially and culturally better off than others because it is not a primary focus of university efforts. By raising awareness, faculty and students alike would hopefully be more respectful and understanding of peer class backgrounds.

A final and third suggestion is one the University of Michigan is beginning to embrace. Michigan is developing learning communities, where students can learn and understand more about their identities while connecting to peers with similar backgrounds. While the new First-Gen residential program is a living-learning community, learning communities are not bound to this factor. Non-residential communities could be more beneficial because they allow students to explore their own identities but do not limit them to their in-group.

Limitations and Future Research

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Limitations of this research relate to its generalizability to all first generation students. This study's sample, although controlled for various demographic factors, is still small and from a prestigious university, where the benefits of the education attained may contradict the findings of Walpole (2003). When reviewing literature on FGCS, most does not necessarily emphasize the institution's academic, social, and overall prestige. Therefore, it can be theorized that first generation freshmen integration to a selective university may reflect what this research has already emphasized: students may see no differences between themselves and continuing generation peers as they prepare for graduation.

In addition, sample recruitment tactics could prove to be problematic. Given that I approached the First-Generation College Students @ Michigan group (run by current students) and the 1st Gen themed living community, these students were already aware that they were first generation and may have been hyperaware of this compared to FGCS that were not part of these groups. The First-Generation College Students @ Michigan group and living-learning host events that center around this identity, meaning these students are assumed to have a closer connection to their identities than other first generation college students. This could have biased my sample. Future research should aim to investigate the first generation identity with students who both do and do not participate in on campus groups to compare how this involvement can affect experiences and perspectives.

Given the lack of current research on rural versus suburban social class and cultural capital, further research should assess these variables independently. In the current research, the finding related to hometowns effects was incidental, and the research design was not strictly aimed at investigating this variable. This is certainly one of my contributions to the first generation literature.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Lastly, the comparison this study aimed to assess would have benefitted from a longitudinal study, rather than using different students at each age group. This would control for some individual factors, such as Emma's involvement in an IB program, that reflect the results found in the current research. Interviewing the same individuals at each year, not just freshmen and alumni, would add to a better understanding of first generation college student experiences, as well as assess the gap in literature that currently exists. In addition, to test the effectiveness of learning communities, a longitudinal sample could draw on students who were and were not involved in a community. This would provide a clear indicator of how beneficial these communities are for underrepresented student populations on elite campuses.

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

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FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Appendix A. Pre-Screening Survey

1. What is the highest level of education obtained by your mother?

- less than high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- 2 year degree
- 4 year degree
- Masters/Professional degree
- Doctorate

2. What is the highest level of education obtained by your father?

- less than high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- 2 year degree
- 4 year degree
- Masters/Professional degree
- Doctorate

3. What was your average household income growing up?

- Less than \$20,000
- \$21,000-\$40,000
- \$41,000-\$60,000
- \$61,000-\$80,000
- \$81,000-\$100,000
- \$101,000-\$150,000
- \$151,000-\$200,000
- \$201,000-\$250,000
- \$250,000
- Unknown

4. What is your year in school

- Freshmen
- Sophomore
- Junior/Third Year
- Senior
- Alumna, Class of 2017
- Alumna, Class of 2016
- None of the above

5. Are you a transfer student?

- Yes

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

- No

6. What is your race?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- Other

7. Is English your native language?

- Yes
- No

8. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

9. Please select which best describes your hometown

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

10. Please leave your email for further contact in regards to details of the study

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Appendix B. Interview Guides

Freshmen Interview

1. How did you learn about the University of Michigan?
2. What attracted you to the University of Michigan? Or Why did you choose this university?
3. How much did you know about Michigan's diversity.
 - What were you expecting to experience? How did these expectations play out? (If they don't mention class diversity, ask why)
4. How would you describe your hometown in terms of social class? (ie do you consider your town more affluent, most people in your high school come from well-off families, no one you know has to worry about money, etc)
5. How supportive are your parents of you attending Michigan?
6. Did you have summer jobs in high school?
 - Do you think this affected your peer relations?
 - Do you currently have a job? What effects has this had on your adjustment (if yes)?
7. What was your social life like in high school?
 - How many friends did you have? How often did you hangout outside of school? Were you satisfied with this?
 - Do you think your social class has played a role in this? Why/why not?
 - Is this something you even thought of in your hometown?
8. How concerned were you about making friends on campus? Have you made many friends yet?

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

- Have you noticed anything that has affected this, or something you didn't think would affect it that has?
 - In your opinion, do you think other first gen girls or guys have an easier time making friends?
9. Have you made any first generation friends?
- How did you find them?
10. Tell me about your experiences with Greek Life:
- Was is something you considered joining? Did you rush. If so, what are your general perceptions of it?
11. Were there any concerns you had before starting this semester that seem connected to your identity as a first-generation student?
12. Have there been instances where your first-generation status seemed more noticeable, or that you think it played a role in your interaction?
- How did you feel during these times? What did you do?
13. Do you think you've changed since moving to campus? How so?
14. How often do you talk about your family and background with peers?
- Do you often volunteer that you are a first gen/ hide this status/ remain neutral?
15. Have there been times when you felt ashamed of your background and/or took measures to distance yourself from this?
16. What is your perspective on your first gen identity in general? Is it something you've given thought to? Do you think it will play a role throughout your time at Michigan, or just primarily getting adjusting to campus?

Recent Graduate Interview

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

1. How did you learn about the University of Michigan?
2. What attracted you to the University of Michigan? Or Why did you choose this university?
3. How much did you know about Michigan's diversity and what were you expecting to experience your freshmen year? (If they don't mention class diversity, ask why)
 - What are your current perceptions of Michigan's social class diversity?
4. How would you describe your hometown, in relation to social class? Why?
 - How does it differ from campus?
5. Were your parents supportive of your decision to attend college?
 - Was there ever any tension between yourself and parents because of college?
6. Did you have a job before college? On campus?
 - How did this effect your experiences each year in college? (ie as a freshman/sophomore/ etc.)
7. Do you think your first gen background and class influenced your ability to make friends freshman year?
 - Can you remember any instances it played a role?
 - Did you rush your first year on campus?
 - i. What were and what are your current perceptions of Greek life?
 - In your opinion, do you think other first gen girls or guys have an easier time making friends? Why?
8. Have you made other first gen friends?
 - How did you find them?

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

9. Reflecting on freshmen year, were there any areas where your first gen identity was more salient, or where you believe it had a major influence on your experience?
 - What about during your sophomore and junior years?
10. How did your experience at Michigan change as time progressed?
11. Do you think your first gen identity still affects your experiences/ is it still salient? How so?
12. Do you feel you have successfully reached the same career plans as people whose parents did go to college? The same level of comfort as continuing generation students?
 - Do you think the university could have done something to help in your last years here? If so, what?
13. Moving forward, how do you think your identity as a first-generation college student will affect you? Why do you think that?

What attracted you to the University of Michigan? Or Why did you choose this university?

14. How much did you know about Michigan's diversity and what were you expecting to experience your freshmen year? (If they don't mention class diversity, ask why)
 - What are your current perceptions?
15. How would you describe your hometown, in relation to class and status and why?
 - How does it differ from campus?
16. Did you have a job before and during college/ currently?
 - How did this effect your experiences?
17. Do you think your first gen background and class influenced your ability to make friends freshman year?
 - Can you remember any instances it played a role?

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

- Did you rush your first year on campus? What were and what are your current perceptions of Greek life?
 - In your opinion, do you think other first gen girls or guys have an easier time making friends?
18. Reflecting on freshmen year, were there any areas where your first gen identity was more salient, or where you believe it had a major influence on your experience?
19. How has your experience at Michigan changed as time progressed?
20. Do you think your first gen identity still affects your experiences/ is it still salient? How so?
21. Do you feel you have successfully reached the same level as people whose parents did go to college?
- Do you think the university could have done something to help in your last years here? If so, what?
22. How do you think your identity as a first-generation college student will affect you?

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Appendix C: Participant Demographics

Table 1.1

	Graduates	Current students	Total
Demographics			
<i>Female</i>	5	3	8
<i>Rural</i>	3	3	6
<i>Suburban</i>	3	3	6
Highest degree of household			
<i>Less than high school</i>	0	0	0
<i>High school diploma</i>	4	2	6
<i>Some college</i>	1	2	3
<i>Two-year degree</i>	1	2	3
Annual household income			
<i>< \$20k</i>	1	3	4
<i>\$21k-\$40k</i>	2	1	3
<i>\$41k-\$60k</i>	3	1	4
<i>\$61k-\$80k</i>	0	1	1

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Appendix D, Humans Subjects Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of the Project: First Generation College Students' Experiences

Principal Investigator: Raven Knudsen, Undergraduate Sociology, Honors, University of Michigan

Faculty Advisor: Dwight Lang, Ph.D, Lecturer, University of Michigan

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

I invite you to be part of a research study about First Generation College Students and the experiences on campus that differ between freshmen and upperclassmen. The study is funded by University of Michigan, Honors Program in Sociology.

Description of Your Involvement

If you agree to be part of the research study, I will ask you to participate in an interview about personal experiences and beliefs about your life as a first generation college student lasting 60-90 minutes. All interviews will be **audio recorded** for the researchers benefit of ensuring quotations. You will be asked to describe your expectations before arriving on campus and how well these expectations held up. You will be asked to describe situations when your identity was particularly salient and your reactions to this, as well as instances when you attempted to hide your identity in the presence of others. There is a chance you will be contacted later, with a transcription of the interview, to ensure all information stated is correct.

Benefits of Participation

Although you may not directly benefit from being in this study, others may benefit because of possible implications that could contribute to programs designed to assist first generation students on campus.

Risks and Discomforts of Participation

There may be some risk or discomfort from your participation in this research, such as discussing uncomfortable topics with the researcher like social class and fitting in. To minimize this risk, interviews will take place in a private area, or wherever you believe you would be most

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

comfortable and your answers will remain anonymous so that no others will be able to identify you.

Compensation for Participation

For your participation in this research project, you will receive \$20 when the interview is over. If you choose to end the interview early, you will be compensated \$5 for the time given.

Confidentiality

I plan to publish the results of this study. I will not include any information that would identify you. Your privacy will be protected and your research records will be confidential.

It is possible that other people may need to see the information you give us as part of the study, such as organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly like the University of Michigan or government offices.

Storage and Future Use of Data

I will store your interview data in a password protected flash drive of which only I will have access. Data will be stored for up to two years after collection or until publication of the research. This is to ensure findings in the report can be references by academic journals if needed when up for publication. Your name and any other identifying information will be secured and stored separately from your interview information. Afterwards all data will be deleted from the flash drive and your identifying documents will be discarded.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer a question you do not want to answer. Just tell me and I will go to the next question. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed you will be compensated \$5 for your time. Additionally, you will be asked to indicate on a separate consent form if the answers given until this point may be used in data analysis.

Contact Information for the Study Team

FIRST GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES

If you have questions about this research, including questions about scheduling or your compensation for participating, you may contact Raven Knudsen, ravenkk@umich.edu

Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant
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If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the:

University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board
2800 Plymouth Road
Building 520, Room 1169
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800
Phone: (734) 936-0933 or toll free, (866) 936-0933
Email: irbhsbs@umich.edu

Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. I will give you a copy of this document for your records. I will keep one copy with the study records. Be sure that I have answered any questions you have about the study and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I agree to participate in the study.

Printed Name

Signature

Date