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“Sometimes Education Will Help You Lead The Life That You Really Want To Lead”: Factors Influencing Undergraduate Women’s Motivation To Pursue A Bachelor’s Degree

Debra Lynne Radi

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UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN'S MOTIVATIONS

**“SOMETIMES EDUCATION WILL HELP YOU LEAD THE LIFE THAT
YOU REALLY WANT TO LEAD”: FACTORS INFLUENCING
UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN’S MOTIVATION TO PURSUE A
BACHELOR’S DEGREE**

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy, Higher Education

Grand Forks, North Dakota

December
2021

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This dissertation is dedicated to all who have a dream and never stop trying
never stop believing and never give up. This is for you!

*Nevertheless ... **she** persisted!*

ABSTRACT

As a collective, women's experience in higher education has been disparate and differential to some men's experience over the last two centuries, fundamentally based on the societal influences of the time. In the formative years of higher education women attended higher education institutions for social stratification reasons or for marital choice opportunities and to a lesser degree for college outcomes. This study's purpose was to explore the current motivations of freshmen individuals who identified as female undergraduate students in their first year of pursuing a bachelor's degree in higher education.

This study used a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews of five undergraduate women at a mid-sized university campus in the Midwest United States. An initial pre-interview questionnaire was given to participants which provided background and demographic information to ensure an illustrative sample of undergraduate freshmen women who were pursuing a bachelor's degree.

Considering societal changes for the advancement of women using a historical lens, this study used qualitative research methods to articulate what the current motivations and influences are for women who enroll in higher education in contemporary society. By listening to the women's stories college going was seen as a viable and important next step in their life journey helping them to achieve their personal and professional goals and aspirations. Both K-12 and post-secondary practitioners and administrators can learn through their voices what matters most to them as they seek to

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fulfill their personal aspirations for a career to make a difference while having a better life not only for themselves but also for those who they plan to influence through their careers and with their future families.

By understanding women's motivations for higher education credentials, institutional supports can be developed to foster a deeper understanding of women, as students, in higher education. With this knowledge, K-12 and post-secondary educators and leaders can design pre-college academic programs and student support services to facilitate student discovery built on the aspects that motivate female students to pursue the full higher education experience.

Keywords: women, higher education, undergraduate, history of women in higher education, motivation

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Women choose to enroll in college for many reasons, including personal growth, to find a relationship, desires to engage in familial responsibilities and for professional preparation. In an effort to increase their independence from family and community some women use college as a way to personally grow and develop. By way of example, Ramsey County Judge Rosanne Nathanson didn't go to college intent on achieving a degree in political science or business; she went to find a husband. "When I went to college I was looking for Prince Charming" (Thornton, 2011). "The positive relationship between college education and the likelihood of marriage continues to hold true. In fact, women with college degrees are more likely to get married than those without degrees" (Huggins, 2016, p. 3).

Professional preparation is another motivator for enrolling in higher education. Women engage in professional career roles which require degrees and college is one way to attain this pathway, whether that be in education, business, or science to name a few career pathways (Green & Hill, 2003). As women become more responsible for themselves and their futures rather than being reliant on their family or a spouse, women are motivated to pursue higher education in an aspiration towards finding themselves, a process that can be facilitated by higher education both as an environment and as an enterprise. As Baxter-Magolda (1999) stated, "Higher education has a responsibility to help young adults make the transition from being shaped by society to shaping society in

their role as leaders in society's future" (p. 630). Indeed, higher education can play a role in a female student's lifelong personal and professional journey with going to college as an important first step as she explores her pathway to success within the realm of a college education.

Background on Women's Experiences in Higher Education

As a collective, women's experiences in higher education have been disparate and differential to some men's experiences over the last two centuries, fluctuating fundamentally based on the societal influences of the time. The early American colleges (c. 1600s) were modeled after Oxford and Cambridge in the British colonies, and they were exclusively the purview of white males from middle-or upper-income families focusing on the training of young men (Brock, 2010; Katz, 1983). Social stratification was perpetuated as young, white, upper class males from the sectors of society with wealth and prestige enrolled in college to position themselves in society's privileged ranks. The curriculum of the day was more of a male "finishing school" as the students were molded to be of service to the community (Horowitz, 1987; Thelin, 2011). Following the American Revolution, men of privilege continued to enroll in college, however this era saw a shift in student population to include students who enrolled to engage in a more diversified curriculum. In this same time period, the rise of women's colleges provided access to women from affluent families. Single-sex institutions provided good facilities and a clientele of women from wealthy families whose education

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was funded by endowments. The college women had a shared commitment to being social and academic pioneers embracing a strong educational mission (Thelin, 2011).

A commitment to co-education, pedagogy, curriculum and living arrangements began with Oberlin College Institute in Ohio in 1832 due to its' dual commitment to co-education of both gender and race (Thelin, 2011). This was not the first time that women and Black individuals had access to higher education. It was the first time, though, that an institution welcomed everyone regardless of gender identity or race to study at their school.

The 1880s to the 1930s saw the rise of women's colleges, namely the "Seven Sisters" institutions. Young women from prosperous families were supported with robust endowments as they embraced a sense of being social and academic pioneers by being committed to a strong educational mission (Thelin, 2011). The attitude of the public at this time towards the education of women supported an engagement of co-educational, affiliated, and separate colleges for women. Despite the ability of women to prove their worth academically higher education continued to offer the societal expectations of finishing school curriculum for women.

Co-educational enrollment was evident at some institutions in the early 1900s, but in the 1930s and 1940s, more women entered co-educational learning environments alongside their male counterparts than ever before (Horowitz, 1987). College life in the 1930s to 1945 saw the expansion and reform of higher education regarding the students who enrolled and the academic courses that were offered. Gender norms of who attended

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college expanded to including women as socialites as well as to include more of a diversified population such as commuter students. The 1930s saw the rise of an expanded curriculum with a vocational and technical emphasis serving the local community leading to a 2-year terminal degree. The introduction of the 4-year degree was on the horizon during this time period. These academic changes altered the nature of the student who attends college to embrace women who were reformers and professional women (Horowitz, 1987).

While academic changes were occurring, societal expectations for women attending college remained bound in gender defined expectations. Tidball (1973) cites a study of 1500 women randomly selected from the editions of *Who's Who of American Women*, of which 60% of the achievers were college graduates who received their bachelor's degree between 1910 and 1940. Tidball discovered that the undergraduate co-educational environment reinforced the young woman's college task as one of finding a suitable mate, becoming eventually a wife and mother and in the interim experimenting with male/female relationships as was expected by society (p. 132).

In the early 1940s the enrollment of women (particularly in 1943-1944) accounted for about half of the students in college whereas the enrollment rates of males dropped as young men went to fight in World War II. However, by the end of the 1940s, college enrollment surged as large numbers of World War II veterans entered college. They were assisted by such programs as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, also known as the GI Bill, which provided education benefits (Snyder, 1993) such as generous scholarships to

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veterans who enrolled in accredited colleges (Snyder, 1993; Thelin, 2018). Inflated enrollment rates saw a surge in the number of men enrolling post World War II due to the popularity and success of the program. Brock (2010) stated that, “The federal G.I. Bill had covered college costs for tens of thousands of veterans after World War II, but it, too, had ‘masculinized’ campus life” (p. 111). As a result, the “proportion of women dropped to 30 percent” (Snyder, 1993, p. 65). During this time period, overall enrollment for women and men was concentrated at 4-year colleges, with less than 10 percent of students at 2-year colleges (Snyder, 1993, p. 65).

The 1950s was viewed as the period of prosperity, prestige and popularity leading to the rise of universal education, and ideally (but not in actuality) irrespective of class or gender, which should have encouraged a more diverse and inclusive student population. (Thelin, 2011). Also known as the “Golden Age” was not necessarily golden for everyone, rather was only golden for white people with privilege. As women gained wider access to higher education, the stereotype of women pursuing a college degree for the sole purpose of finding a husband and getting married as soon as possible, sometimes before graduation, became a trend during this time period (Huggins, 2016).

Another key access point for students occurred in 1972 with the introduction of Title IX Education Amendments to the Higher Education Act which was enacted to eliminate sex discrimination in higher education. After more than a century of limited options for women--either at all-female colleges or in a few forward-thinking, inclusive institutions--Title IX ensured that women were finally able to have access to a wide array

of educational options. Today, almost 60 years later, women attain bachelor's degrees at a higher rate than men (Lapin, 2018).

The trend of a more diverse student population continues with today's college attending students. The rates of students attending college was increasing, and "(t)he overall college enrollment rate for young adults increased from 35 percent in 2000 to 40 percent in 2017" (U. S. Department of Education, 2019, p. 1). Women now attend college in record-breaking numbers and at some colleges surpasses the enrollment of men, thus emphasizing an upward trend in enrollment. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019):

In fall 2017, female students made up 56 percent of total undergraduate enrollment (9.4 million students), and male students made up 44 percent (7.3 million students). Between 2000 and 2017, enrollment for both groups showed similar patterns of change: both female and male enrollments increased between 2000 and 2010 (by 39 percent and 36 percent, respectively) (p. 3).

Additionally, the diversity of students attending has also changed during this time period. The U.S. Department of Education (2019) reported that, "In 2017, the college enrollment rate was higher for Asian (65 percent) young adults than for White (41 percent), Black (36 percent), and Hispanic (36 percent) young adults" (p. 1).

Statement of the Problem

Enrollment numbers suggest that women have access to higher education significantly more so than they did at any other point in the history of higher education. While women

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are enrolling in greater numbers in higher education, we know less about how women make the decision to go to college, what or who motivates them to enroll, and what motivates them to benefit from women's expanded access to higher education. This study explored the motivations of undergraduate women to pursue a bachelor's degree in college. By understanding women's motivations for higher education credentials, institutional supports can be developed to foster a deeper understanding of women, as students, in higher education. With this knowledge, K-12 and post-secondary educators and leaders can design pre-college academic programs and student services supports to facilitate student discovery built on the aspects that motivate female students to pursue the full higher education experience.

Study Purpose

The purpose of the research study was to understand the motivations of people who identified as women to pursue a bachelors' degree after high school and the factors that influence their motivation. I used a qualitative research design to explore these motivations.

Research Question

This study was guided by one research question:

What are the motivations for undergraduate women to enroll in a bachelor's degree? In answering this question, a deeper understanding of undergraduate women's motivation to enroll in college was illuminated.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework provides “primarily a conception or model of what is out there ... and what is going on with these things and why – a tentative theory of the phenomena” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 39) that is based on the research question informing the research design for the proposed study. Figure 1 presents an illustration of the conceptual framework for this study. The elements were further developed through the research study with a more robust qualitative research design and the sample population of undergraduate women.

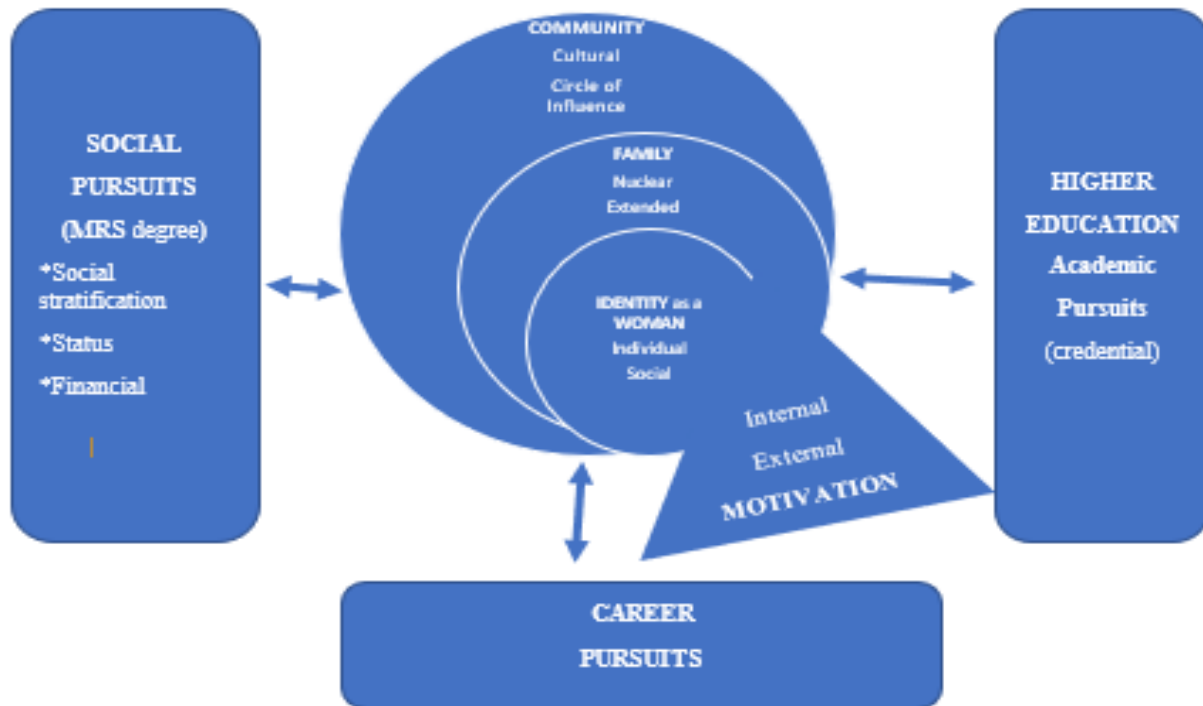


Figure 1. Conceptual framework. This figure illustrates the potential elements that women identify for enrolling in college.

At the center of the diagram is the woman herself as an individual and as a social being influenced by her nuclear and extended family and her community, both cultural and circle of influence, such as her peer group (Baxter-Magolda, 2004, 1998). External influences on the individual woman as she engages in higher education are the social pursuits, such as social stratification, partner status, and/or financial attainment (Huggins, 2016; Thelin, 2011). Career pursuits might also be an influence on the individual as an intersectoral expectation of engaging in higher education (Lapin, 2018). Finally, and not least, the academic pursuit of the credential which is one of the aims of higher education, degree pursuit and attainment. The conceptual framework is explained in more detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Overview of the Research Method

To conduct the research study, I used a qualitative research design influenced by ethnographic approaches. Ethnographic approaches facilitated the exploration of insights shared by the participants providing me with an insider's perspective of their lived experiences (Roulston, 2010) that led them to enroll in college. In my study, I used ethnographic approaches to gain insights into what led the women to enroll in college to gain an insider's perspective (Roulston, 2010). I began with a pre-interview questionnaire followed by two semi-structured interviews with five undergraduate people who identified as women in their first year of study at a university in the Midwest United States. The interview questions were developed with the conceptual framework in mind to explore how women make the decision to go to college, what or who motivates them

to enroll, and what motivates them to benefit from their decision to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Definitions

The following definitions were used in this study:

Agency: “the power and ability to have choices and make decisions, and especially to have a say at crucial junctures of one’s life” (Munoz Boudet, Petesch, & Turk, 2013, p. 83).

Intrinsic Motivation: pertains to activities done “for their own sake” or for their inherent interest and enjoyment (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Extrinsic Motivation: which concerns behaviors done for reasons other than their inherent satisfactions (Deci & Ryan, 2020).

MRS. degree: refers to a woman who attends college in order to find a well educated husband with a good future ahead of him (msmichelle, 2014).

Undergraduate: a student at a college or university who has not received a first and especially a bachelor's degree (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

Woman: is a socially constructed gender term that refers to the characteristics of women. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman as well as relationships with others. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Gender interacts with but is different from sex, which

refers to the different biological and physiological characteristics of females such as chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs (World Health Organization, 2021).

Rationale for the Study

The early history of women in higher education and their reasons for attending post secondary education has been recorded in historical archives describing the experiences of the early pioneers in higher education (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Solomon, 1985). Society has changed in its orientation to women's contributions however have the underlying reasons as to why women attend university or college evolved with the changes in society or are the expectations still the same for young women attending university or college?

After reflecting on the early days of higher education and the reasons why women attended university or college this study aimed to learn how today's women make the decision to go to college, what or who motivates them to enroll, and what motivates them to benefit from women's expanded access to higher education.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study centers on its potential to lead to a deeper understanding of the motivations of women who pursue higher education. By understanding women's motivations for enrolling in college, institutional supports can be developed to foster a deeper understanding of women, as students, in higher education. With this knowledge, university administrators can design student service programs and

supports to facilitate student discovery towards aspects that motivate female students to pursue the full higher education experience and thereby achieving their full potential.

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study focus on societal expectations of women which I believe have not changed substantially over time. Women are still bound by what society dictates as their aspirations relative to their gender designation which includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman in contemporary society. From a societal lens, there is an assumption that women should want to get married and want to have children which can be in juxtaposition with their engagement in the pursuit of higher education studies. “We are all familiar with the stereotype of women as pretty things who go to college to find a husband, go on to college to find a husband, go on to graduate school because they want a more interesting husband, and finally marry, have children and never work again” (Bayh, 1972, p. 5804). These “(c)ontroversies intensified the ways to integrate women’s undergraduate study with their future roles as wives and mothers” (Solomon, 1985, p. 150). Discriminatory laws and prevailing societal attitudes during the time period of 1965-2005 limited the role of women and their college-going as well (Brock, 2010, p. 111). While I do not hold the belief that women need to choose between either academic pursuits, a career, or a family I wondered if the young women in this study would articulate societal expectations of making choices, as a woman that might limit their options depending on which pathway they choose. Even though I do think that expectations for women have changed over time, I do believe that at the

fundamental roots of women's experience is still the societal expectation that women are to get married and have children as part of their role as women in society, rather than have a career *and* a family. "By the mid-twenties many also received the societal message that that it was time to marry and have children. As Leah explained it, "you graduate college, then you get married, then you have kids. It's the next step in our lives." (Baxter Magolda, 2004, p. 12). Because of this societal expectation, where do women meet suitable marriage partners? University or college could then be a desirable place to meet intelligent men who are career bound with academic credentials and social stratification connections.

Personal Significance

This research topic is personally of interest because when I went to university for my first degree, my high school peer group, who were not university bound, wondered if I was going to university for my MRS. degree, essentially to find a husband to get married. At the time it was common for young women to meet and marry their high school sweethearts and if not, then they would continue on to university in the hopes of finding a suitable mate. A Mrs. degree refers to a woman who attends university or college in order to find a well educated husband with a good future ahead of him. At the time I found the question intriguing and one that I had never considered as my reason for going to university. In the early years of higher education some women went to university for social stratification reasons, in essence to marry well. The Mrs. degree, a marriage, was as a result of attending a 4-year university of moderate to high prestige

with the sole purpose of getting married and consequently not necessarily completing college. The motivation for enrolling in college in this case was purely for marriage. My own personal experience and the historical roots of women's engagement in higher education revolving around the notion of the MRS. degree prompted my interest in this research study.

Additionally, as a higher education educator who teaches a course entitled Introduction to University, I am curious about what motivates students to enroll in college. From my personal experience there are diverse reasons that the students have shared as to their reason for enrolling in university. However, in class discussion and assignments, some of my female students have indicated that they are there to meet male students, their life partner, which makes me curious if the Mrs. degree is a thing of the past or if it is alive and well in college classrooms today.

Contextually, it is important to note that within the United States, college refers to an institution of higher education that offers an undergraduate degree. In Canada, university is the preferred term for an undergraduate degree granting institution. In the United States, college is the preferred term that connotes the meaning of university in Canada. As a Canadian researcher it is important to differentiate the meaning of these terms within the context of this research study, despite the use of both terms in this study to mean the same idea in higher education.

Summary

Currently in the history of women going to college, there have been changes from women's experiences in higher education. Improvements in the number of women enrolling in college is promising yet, there is little known about how women make the decision, or who or what motivates them to enroll in college. This research study's aim was to understand the motivations of women to pursue a bachelors' degree after high school and the factors that motivated them to engage in women's more expanded access to higher education.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review of the formative years of higher education by exploring various time periods highlighting the motivations for women's engagement in college. Aspects of motivation are also explored to understand the influences of women in higher education as they provide a lens through which to explore contemporary reasons why women pursue an undergraduate degree.

Chapter 3 explains the research design, the pilot study that informed portions of the research study, the description of participants, and a discussion of how the data were collected and analyzed.

Chapter 4 describes the stories of the five research participants leading to a description of the five themes that describe intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of personal reasons, career aspirations, pre-college academic pursuits, personal relationships and mass media. The individual participant stories, as well as the collective themes and

subcategories that highlight the influences and motivations of the women participants in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree in college.

Chapter 5 examines the women's motivations for enrolling in a bachelor's degree through the lens of the five themes: personal reasons, career aspirations, pre-college academic pursuits, personal relationships, and mass media by connecting the participants' stories to the historical perspectives about women's college-going experiences.

Implications of the findings make recommendations for K-12 and post-secondary practitioners. Suggestions for further research are articulated with a view to uncovering ways to encourage additional student groups to pursue a bachelor's degree in higher education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the reasons why women engaged in higher education institutions in the formative years of higher education and determine whether women enrolled for purposes of advanced learning or an advanced social status by marrying at or above their social status. Through an exploration of various time periods in the history of higher education, the investigation examines the motivations for women's engagement in higher education whether that be for personal reasons, academic pursuits, career aspirations or by virtue of the community contexts. Finally, aspects of motivation are described to understand the influences of women in higher education as they provide a lens through which to explore contemporary reasons why women pursue an undergraduate degree.

History of Women in Higher Education

At the turn of the nineteenth century, women's participation in higher education within the American higher education system was limited to a select few. Higher education was seen as an opportunity for women to engage in finishing school rather than in the pursuit of knowledge. Women in the early years were educated to "to prepare to please the other" (Solomon, 1985, p. 26) and as such the pursuit of academic knowledge was viewed as secondary in their education, if included at all.

Early Beginnings: The nineteenth century

At the start of the 19th century, women had a mixed educational legacy as they had been excluded historically from the usual forms of formal education. As Rury (2009) stated:

Although some female academies may have been established, no colleges admitted women in the 18th century. In 1800, despite evidence of growing female enrollment in common schools, at least in the North, most American women were poorly educated compared to the men of their time. (pp. 100-101)

In the colonial era, “women were excluded from the colleges by statute” (Thelin, 2011, p. 30). Historical accounts exist of women being considered for entrance examinations; however, there was never an intention to have a woman matriculate even if she had been successful in the entrance examination (Thelin, 2011). Allowing women to be considered for entrance examinations yet excluding them from colleges is an example of the illusion of inclusion which seems to continue throughout women’s experience in higher education despite the particular era in history.

In the next 100 years, from the 1800s to the 1900s, the number of women in higher education grew significantly as women outnumbered men in high schools and as such were increasingly entering American colleges and universities. Despite societal challenges, the early 19th century’s visionary leaders began to pave the way for women’s engagement in higher education. Emma Willard, the founder of Troy Female Academy, wrote an essay in 1819 denouncing the state of women’s schooling particularly at the

secondary level. Rury (2009) in summarizing her main thesis stated that, “Willard argued that women deserved and needed an education similar in quality -if not exact content- to that provided for “young gentlemen” (p. 101). Willard’s vision for higher education did not include training young women for work or careers outside the home. Rather, she argued that higher-quality education was necessary “to form the character of the next generation, by controlling that of the females who are to be their mothers” (Rury, 2009, p. 101). Dawson (1871) agreed with Willard’s view on the purpose of education for women during her introductory lecture to the first session of classes of the ladies Educational Association of Montreal, stating that “(t)ruly the art and profession of a mother is the noblest and most far-reaching of all, and she who would worthily discharge its duties must be content with no mean preparation” (p. 515). Dawson advocated that young women, not young men, were most deserving of an elaborate and costly education for they are responsible for the diffusion of knowledge and as such should be afforded the educational opportunities to develop the training, culture and high mental qualities to help with society’s transmission of culture.

Willard was also a pioneer in seeking endowment funding for higher education to keep tuition fees modest so that institutions would not be overly dependent on students for income (Rury, 2009). Diversifying funding sources beyond student fees was viewed as critical to the ongoing viability of higher education to mitigate fluctuating enrollments and funding sources.

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Thelin (2011) noted that “(t)here is no record of a woman of the colonial period having received a degree. In contrast, between 1800 and 1860, at least fourteen institutions enrolled women for advanced studies in what is thought to have been “college level” work” (p. 55). The earliest noted colleges opened in 1830 to 1850 with a commitment to co-education, pedagogy, curriculum and living arrangements. Of particular note during this time period was Oberlin College Institute in Ohio due to its’ dual commitment to co-education of both gender and race. As the oldest coeducational liberal arts college in the United States “Oberlin was the first college in the country to admit women and one of the first to admit African Americans” (Jacobs, 1996, p. 339) in 1835. “Women studied in the “Ladies Department” ... from the beginning but in 1837 four women entered the regular college courses. Three of the four graduated in 1841, becoming the first women in America to receive bachelor’s degrees” (Jacobs, 1996, p. 339).

As the first of the Seven Sisters, the female equivalent of the once predominantly male Ivy League, Mount Holyoke College in western Massachusetts was distinguished for coherent and integrated curriculum, pedagogy, and living arrangements (Thelin, 2011). Comparatively “elite families in the South invested substantially in creating institutions that tried to provide advanced academic work while emphasizing preparation for such conventional feminine roles as household hostess, supervisor, wife and mother” (Thelin, 2011, p. 56).

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While ordinary schools were seen to be essential preparation for all persons of both sexes and of all grades of social position for the ordinary work of life, Dawson (1871) knew that:

(o)nly a certain limited proportion either of men or women can go on to a higher education, and those who are selected are either those who by wealth and social position are enabled or obliged to do so, or those who intend to enter into professions which are believed to demand a larger amount of learning (p. 515).

In these early beginnings of higher education, both social stratification and family wealth were strong indicators of one's access to higher education and then as a result entrance into the professions which were primarily the domain of men. Dr. Mary Putnam-Jacobi in her personal assessment of the state of the higher education in the 1890s describes less of an emphasis on intellectual pursuits as girls were expected to acquire manners and *finish* while boys were expected to learn manliness. "The feminine counterpart to the boys' public school was the young ladies' boarding school" (Putnam-Jacobi, 1891, p. 295). She argues that parents were inclined to send their daughters away to school for a number of reasons. First and foremost, contemporary society of the day perceives that students needed to be a resident of a university town in order to share the privileges of the university, so girls tended to be sent away to boarding school at the university and away from any familial influences that were viewed as less than complementary to university studies. She espouses the belief of the times that this parental approach benefited the young women as they were removed from their home environment which was viewed as

being on a lesser intelligence level or on a lower scale of refinement. In this way, the young woman could be immersed in a different sphere of influence while her mind and character was being molded over the four years of “finishing” school. So much so that when the college years were finished, “the student herself is regarded as a finished product” (Putnam-Jacobi, 1891, p. 296). Putnam-Jacobi in her assessment of this time period provides a window into societal expectations of the day for women. Her firsthand account of the times shares the influences and experiences of women like my study seeks to explore from the participants of contemporary society who are enrolling in college.

Societal Shifts

By the end of the 19th century, most of the teachers in America were women and job categories requiring nursing and secretarial skills were becoming feminized as well. From a societal perspective, gender roles were beginning to shift along with the rise of women’s activism as the suffrage movement gained prominence. Women sought to find their place in society outside of the traditional roles of being wives and mothers and “education contributed materially to the process of social change, even if female schooling was delimited and tended to reinforce traditional gender roles” (Rury, 2009, p. 109). Despite an emphasis on societal change, “the ideology of domestic feminism was pervasive, and it linked schooling inexorably to female roles of domesticity and motherhood. The very same ideas that served to expand women’s education also defined the limits to which it might develop (Rury, 2009, p. 107).

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At the turn of the 19th century, a high proportion of women remained single. Almost half of the college graduates as compared to their age contemporaries also chose not to marry due to expanding employment opportunities for educated women thus making early marriage less desirable (Horowitz, 1987). College provided an acceptable alternative to marriage. Women “could enter into the female community of reformers and professional women, a subculture that provided them with companionship and love and respected their choices and achievements (Horowitz, 1987, p. 198).

Women’s colleges and the rise of the “college woman” gained prominence in American higher education with what was known as the “Seven Sisters” institutions namely, Wellesley College, Radcliffe, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, Vassar College, Barnard College, and Bryn Mawr College as well as the coordinate colleges of Pembroke College at Brown University, Jackson College at Tufts University, and Sophie Newcomb College at Tulane University. Most of these colleges enjoyed two advantages: good facilities due to robust endowments, and a clientele of young women from prosperous families. A third common element was a sense of being social and academic pioneers, creating a shared commitment to a strong educational mission (Thelin, 2011).

Bryn Mawr College contributed significantly to the ideals and achievements in the higher education of women. By the time of Bryn Mawr College’s development in 1885, the attitude of the public had already begun to transform the education of women leading collegiate women to engage in co-educational, affiliated and separate colleges for women. This transformation led to “Opportunities for advanced study and research and

the careers (were) now open to women and the large achievement of to-day as contracted with the relatively meager results of those earlier years” (Welch, 1922, p. 1). Women engaging in higher education were able to pass the required mental tests and benefit from college breeding enhancing their womanly charm, attractiveness and fitness for domestic happiness. “Girls go to college for the same varied reasons, aims, motives and ambitions as their brothers, and seem destined to seek it in equal numbers” (Welch, 1922, p. 2). Despite the ability of women to prove their worth academically higher education continued to offer the societal expectation of finishing school with women’s’ motivation for academic pursuits.

Twentieth century expansion

The twentieth century expansion saw the enrollment of middle-class women, beyond the first women college students who were few in number, often from elite families, and intent on academic work in preparation for professional careers, as land grant schools and universities and normal schools were created in the United States. By the turn of the century, women began to be able to have both social approval and a college education. Middle-class women were being attracted to college campuses in larger numbers to pursue college for socialization reasons and academic credentials. The rise of coeducational institutions encouraged women to pursue a bachelor’s degree while at the same time engaging in campus life (Johnson, 1981; Radke, 2002; Thelin, 2018).

Co-education, while not completely accepted in the late-nineteenth century despite the passing of the Morrill Act of 1862, saw a rise in the twentieth century. The Morrill Act created public land grant colleges for the education of agricultural and industrial classes using the proceeds from the sales of federally owned land. While the Morrill Act did not require the admission of women, most western states included coeducation as part of their land-grant charters which was an important movement towards equal access for women. As land-grant colleges grew across the United States, the curriculum also expanded beyond agriculture and mechanic arts to include science and technical education with a focus on the accompanying professions (Johnson, 1981; Radke, 2002; Thelin, 2018).

The beginning of the twentieth century also saw the rise of state normal schools which provided elementary level teacher certification and offered various degrees in pedagogy to prepare students, particularly women, to become teachers. “The enrollment at coeducational normals nationwide were between 25 and 90% female” (Ogren, 2003, p. 643) with schools in the South mainly restricting their enrollment to women. Normal schools provided female students with a “rich intellectual and social community and encouraged them to reach beyond their underprivileged backgrounds” (Ogren, 2003, p. 658) As more schools began to offer 4-year college work and grant bachelor’s degrees they began to be renamed from normal schools to teacher colleges in the 1920s and 1930s (Ogren, 2003).

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At Barnard College Margaret Mead, graduating senior in 1923, “found-and in some measure-created-the kind of student life that matched (her) earlier dreams...Mead and her Barnard friends “felt extraordinarily free” as women, free to choose not to marry or to marry” (Horowitz, 1987, p. 93-94). The rise of a domestic science curriculum for college women became dominant in the college curriculum. College women, particularly those attending coeducational universities, were encouraged to major in home economics leading them to careers in nutrition, institutional management or education which were not that far removed from the domestic responsibilities of the women who went before them (Gordon, 1987).

Despite the advancement of women's motivation to seek academic pursuits, some institutions of higher education, particularly state universities, continued to justify their existence because of the finishing aspect of women's education, the domestic science curriculum. To support the aim of educational advisors supporting young women to make adjustments to university life a study of 341 freshman girls was conducted in 1931-1932 to create an inventory of the desires, ambitions, experiences and habits of thought of young women so that their academic advisors could utilize appropriate conditioning techniques to ensure their academic and scholarly success (Jameson, 1939).

Jameson (1939) found that there were four reasons why young women experience difficulty in higher education: financial strain, the technique of learning was on a different level, participatory class discussions and finally disillusionment with the college experience. With regards to financial strain, university administrators espoused the

benefit of higher education in terms of financial gain after graduation; however, the experience of the student was that the financial strain was greater than their endurance to complete the degree. The significant differences in the techniques of learning between secondary school's methods of recitation techniques and dependence on a textbook coupled with the rigidity of the teacher are in sharp contrast with the specialized knowledge base of the university professor, 'the' lecture style of classes and the intimidating list of references leaves the student seeking ways to survive or she chooses to leave. Class discussions encompass a multitude of issues including co-education with women being less used to having boys in their classes, the bluntness of the professor, the larger size of classes and finally the complexity of the subject-matter itself. Finally, women were disillusioned by the experience of higher education. Female students' expectations of the experience make it difficult for the actualities to live up to the anticipations. While women's motivations for higher education were academic in nature the constraints of the experience outweighed the anticipated benefits and the unclear stated purpose of the college colliding with the actual female student experience caused the disengagement or lack of motivation to pursue the higher education credential (Jameson, 1939).

While women enrolled in greater numbers in higher education in the 1930s, we know less about how women make the decision to go to college, what or who motivates them to enroll, and what motivates them to benefit from women's expanded access to higher education. The Jameson study was one of the first times that a researcher actually

asked women for their perspectives and opinions on their college-going experience. This particular study intrigued me to discover what women now in a contemporary educational context thought about their college experience through my intention of hearing – in their own voices – women's stories.

The enrollment of women, particularly in 1943-1944, accounted for about half of the students in college whereas the enrollment rates of males dropped as young men went to fight in World War II. "The popularity and success of the GI Bill of 1944 in providing generous scholarships to veterans who enrolled in accredited colleges" (Thelin, 2018, p. 62), inflated enrollment rates seeing a surge in the number of men enrolling post World War II. "The federal G.I. Bill had covered college costs for tens of thousands of veterans after World War II, but it, too, had "masculinized" campus life" (Brock, 2010, p. 111). As a result, the "proportion of women dropped to 30 percent" (Snyder, 1993, p. 65).

The advancement of the civil rights movement for Blacks to gain equal rights under the law in the United States assisted women in higher education in the 1950s and 1960s to advance as well. Women in higher education were being recognized for their talent and dedication to higher education during this time period noting that more women completed doctorate degrees than previously when access for women to higher level degrees was limited. Vetter (1972) summarized:

The proportion of all research doctorates conferred on women ... has averaged 12.2 percent since 1920...(i)n the physical sciences, 4.6 percent of the Ph.D.'s granted since 1939 were conferred on women. The proportion in the life sciences

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is 11.4 percent; in the social sciences, 14 percent; in the arts and humanities, 15.5 percent; in engineering, 0.5 percent; in education, 20 percent; in professional fields, 11.4 percent; and in all fields combined, 11.9 percent (p. 815).

In contrast to the state university experience, Wellesley College, a conservative women's private liberal arts college in Massachusetts, provided an opportunity for talented, privileged, elite American women to gain a degree in higher education. From the college's perspective, in addition to being blessed with intelligence and a certain pedigree the women who attended the historic "Seven Sisters" were measured by how well they marry. Women were afforded status by who they married, and this was a particularly important rite of passage for the women of Wellesley College as had been the tradition for the women who went before them.

Consistent with the "Seven Sisters" educational experience, Arum, Roksa and Budig, (2008) conducted a study in 1975 and in 1976 to examine the effects of college stratification on marital selection. They hypothesized whether

women who attend more elite colleges will have a greater likelihood of marrying men with higher achievement; men who attend elite colleges will have an increased likelihood of marrying women with greater ascriptive resources, such as being beautiful, charming and talented (p. 111).

They discovered that not only did college graduates seek to find a partner of similar educational attainment to marry they also discovered that "women's elite college attendance was associated with marrying a man with higher subsequent annual income,

and men's elite college attendance was associated with marrying a woman from more privilege social origins" (p. 117). Therefore, the type of college attended is likely to affect one's choice of marital partners due to physical proximity of meeting and social networks that are afforded by the choice of college which provides the opportunity to meet the right person.

While elite college students were prone to coupling for social stratification and ascriptive reasons, women at other colleges were experiencing a different component of the cultural idiom of romance and attractiveness. Despite this difference in institutional type the results were very similar: the women faced constant evaluations of their worth on the basis of their sexual appeal to men, and they made life "decisions" in the shadow of that reality (Holland & Eisenhart, 1992, p. 21). Holland and Eisenhart summarized in *Educated in Romance*, their 1979 study of women from two higher education institutions: Bradford, predominantly a women's college and now co-educational and Southern University (SU) an institution of higher learning for persons of color. Irrespective of institution, "women in the study were constantly exposed to societal evaluation-to judgments of their worth on the basis of their sexual attractiveness to men and that much of what they did was addressed to improving or avoiding that evaluation" (p. 18). This scrutiny based on sexual desirability affected women's motivation for higher education. While both the Bradford and the Southern University women engaged in academic pursuits to learn from experts at the higher education institutions, the Southern University women were motivated to do well in the academic work. Conversely, the Bradford

women did the required academic work to get it over with realizing that the academic credential was necessary, but they did not believe that they necessarily received a relevant education (Holland & Eisenhart, 1992).

By the 1970s, with 43.3% of women working outside of the home, females' reasons for attending college were expanding to consider academic credentialing for professional pursuits according to a 1974 study by Schab of 791 women; women stated that they wanted to learn a certain career and develop their thoughts (Green & Hill, 2003, p. 557). The rest of the responses were less concerned with professional preparation or career advancement and were more social in nature such as having fun and child rearing. The opportunity to hear the perspectives from a larger sample of women in the Schab 1974 study provides an expanded insight into the reasons why women make the decision to go to college. Schab's study results share the motivations for women to attend college. In my study, I was curious if women of contemporary society would also pursue academic credentialing for professional pursuits as Schab discovered in his study.

Interestingly, women perceived the motives of other women as: meeting an appropriate husband, making their parents happy, having a good time and being able to raise their children better and finally pledging a sorority were all identified reasons for engaging in higher education (Green & Hill, 2003, p. 557). In 2003, thirty years later, the Schab (1974) study was expanded to compare women and men's reasons for attending college (Green & Hill, 2003). Schab's 2003 study continued to include students as an important subject of inquiry by listening to the voices of students rather than merely

reporting on the trends. This was also the aim of my study to engage in hearing the voices of the women as to their reasons for attending college. Due to the change in women's role in society, with 60.2% of women working outside the home (U.S Bureau of the Census, 2002) and changes in family structures with 31% being single parent families. Of those single parent families, 84% were mother parented necessitating the need to work outside of the home to support their children. The study had 141 participants; 67 women and 74 men representing a wide range of ethnic backgrounds who engaged in the study (Green & Hill, 2003). The authors noted that:

Women reported different reasons for attending college than did Schab's (1974) participants. The top five reasons for the current sample were: 'to improve career opportunities', 'to increase knowledge', 'to make more money', 'to succeed like or unlike your parents', 'to have a more balanced life' ... Four of these five reasons seem to be pragmatic and market-oriented reasons for college attendance, whereas only two of the top five reasons (i.e., 'to learn a specific occupation' and 'to improve my mind') in Schab's findings (1974) appear concerned with preparing for employment (p. 559).

Women now shifted their motivation for attending college to improve their career opportunities; "whereas 30 years ago women reported that having fun and becoming a better parent were among the top five reasons for their decision to attend college" (Green & Hill, 2003, p. 561). Not only has there been a shift in motivation for academic

credentialing there has also been a shift in the academic disciplines that women are pursuing. This finding was further supported by Thelin's (2011) summations:

When one looks at Ph.D. degrees awarded in 2007, one finds that women earned 44 percent of the doctoral degrees in biological science, 29 percent in geology and mathematics, and 33 percent in chemistry ... and by 2010 women were more than 90 percent of the students in veterinary schools (p. 371).

Twentieth century women are motivated to pursue academic credentials through a focus on academic disciplines in the sciences and mathematics than ever before in the history of women in education. This shift in the pursuit of non-traditional academic disciplines broadens the exploration of career opportunities for women towards the formal, natural and life sciences of mathematics and medicine.

As a collective women's experience in higher education has been disparate and differential to men's experience over the last two centuries fluctuating fundamentally based on the societal influences of the time. While the pursuit of a higher education degree has shifted from finishing school and mothering to academic credentialing and the pursuit of professional careers, there is still a perception of discriminatory practices in higher education.

Motivation

This section of the literature review explores models of motivation to understand the motives for why women pursue a bachelor's degree in college. By examining what motivates people from various dimensions an understanding of the complexities of why

women go to college can be illustrated. Each model of motivation in the literature emphasizes different aspects, of which some are interrelated. Motivation provides the reason for why we do what we do. Decisions are usually made based on several factors. Our motivational expectations tend to be built by our lived experience.

Daniel Pink (2009) in his research on motivation articulates three drivers: autonomy, mastery and purpose. Autonomy speaks to “the urge to direct our own lives” (Pink, 2009). Mastery is “the desire to get better and better at something (Pink, 2009). Purpose is “the yearning to do what we do in service of something larger than ourselves” (Pink, 2009). While each of these drivers can be motivating on their own, it is the intersection of them that provides for powerful motivation.

McLelland (1985) examined motivational behaviour theory through three factors: motives, probability of success (or skill), and incentive value. The importance of motivation, incentive value, and probability of success were independently measured for predicting achievement performance using an Achievement and Social Goal Model. McLelland’s study examined the “joint effect of motives, skills, and values or schemas as joint determinants of what people do (i.e., their operant behaviors) as well as what they consciously say they choose to do (i.e., their respondent behaviors)” (p. 824).

Both the theory and experiments led to the conclusions that motive strength, particularly in relation to the strength of other motives in the person, is the more important determinant of what people will do. Incentive value is the more important determinant of cognitively based choices and motive strength and probability of success

combine to increase response strength or probability. The strength of other motives in the person is the more important determinant of operant act frequency and incentive value is the more important determinant of cognitively based choices. Motive strength and probability of success have the power to multiply response strength or probability (p. 813).

Motivation is considered to be a significant psychological construct in the learning process, and highly connected to academic achievement. Many educational studies have explored the role of motivation to achieve academically however they have not used an interval level scale where the items are linked to behaviour. Waugh (2002) aimed to:

Create an interval level, unidimensional scale of Motivation, with attitude items linked to behaviour items based on a conceptual model of Motivation based on three main aspects of motivation with each operationally defined by a number of sub-sets namely: Striving for Excellence (Standards, Goals, Tasks, Effort, Values and Ability), Desire to Learn (Interest, Learning from Others and Responsibility for Learning), and Rewards (Extrinsic, Intrinsic and Social) (p. 67).

Using three main aspects of motivation, Striving for Excellence, Desire to Learn and Rewards, 239 first year students, selected for three special entry programmes at an Australian university, responded to the questionnaire indicating whether it was *What I am for* or *What I actually do*. The analysis of the conceptual design of motivation based on a multi-aspect model as presented in this study affirms that:

motivation is based on an ordered line of three first order aspects (from Desire to Learn as the 'easiest', to Personal Incentives and Striving for Excellence as the 'hardest'). Each of these first order aspects is based on a number of second order aspects (p. 78).

The study demonstrated that students' self-reported aspirations and actual academic performance varied as a function of subject class difficulty.

Motivation and college going

A review of the literature on motivation suggests that there could be up to six widely endorsed motives for entering college: career interests, financial security, intellectual curiosity, social opportunities, norms and family expectations, and self-discovery.

Boatwright, Ching, and Parr (1992) examined the influences affecting high school seniors' decisions to attend college. The factors they measured were financial, external influences such as parental pressures and internal influences. Their results suggested that parents do not influence their child's decision to attend college as much as they did ten years ago in previous studies. They also discovered that students were influenced more by their friends than any other factor. Their study discovered that the factors that most influenced students' decision to attend college were financial aid and career opportunity.

Croake, Keller, and Caitlin (1973) focused their research study on the career and financial motivations of college students across demographic groups by gender and race.

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Their study found that women attend college to gain more career opportunities motivated by wanting to strive for intellectual success and for equality in the work force.

Green and Hill (2003) in their research questionnaire included statements about increasing one's knowledge, improving career opportunities, having fun, and playing a sport as motivations to attend college. They discovered that women place a greater emphasis on the importance of the career preparation aspect of college attending college for professional and academic preparation rather than non-professional reasons (e.g., to make friends). The women attended college to better their futures intellectually and financially.

In developing The College Motivation Scale, Cortes and Stoner (2011) integrated social motivators in their scale to measure the student's motivations to enter college. The scale "measures five factors that influence a person's decision to go to college: career/financial, social opportunity, intellectual, self-discovery, and norms/obligations" (p. 775). What they discovered in their first study using the scale was that students went to college as a means to an end with the career and financial factors being prominent. Their second study indicated that career and social motives were positively correlated with grade orientation whereas intellectual and self-discovery motives positively correlated to learning orientation. They also discovered that student motives varied by subject matter majors.

Concluding thoughts

Motivation theory analyzes the why of human behaviour as a means of understanding people's decision-making processes. While motivation can be measured as unidimensional the research study models emphasized different aspects, for which some are multi-dimensional and inter-related. Decisions are usually made based on several factors. Our motivational expectations tend to be built by our lived experience. Research highlights better career opportunities, as well as financial and intellectual reasons playing a large role as to why people choose to attend college. By understanding what motivates people from various dimensions an understanding of the complexities of why women go to college can be illuminated.

Summary

Exploring the historical roots and various time periods in the history of higher education provides perspectives as to why women enrolled in college. Chapter 3 describes the research design, the pilot study that informed portions of the research study, the description of participants, and a discussion of how the data were collected and analyzed. The complexities of what motivates women go to college will be explored through the research study data.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the motivations of women who are pursuing bachelor's degrees in higher education. I used a qualitative research design influenced by ethnographic approaches to gain an insider's perspective (Roulston, 2010) from the participants in my study. I conducted semi-structured interviews with five undergraduate women in their first year of study at a mid-sized university campus in the Midwest United States. In this chapter, I describe the research design, the pilot study that informed portions of the research study, the description of participants, and a discussion of how the data were collected and analyzed.

Research Question

This study explored the following research question: What are the motivations for undergraduate women to enroll in a bachelor's degree? By answering this question, I gained a deeper understanding of each woman's experiences that influenced her decision to enroll in college to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Research Approach

I used a qualitative research approach that was influenced by ethnographic approaches to explore the experience of the participants and to describe the current motivations for women to pursue a bachelor's degree. Ethnographic inquiry helped me to “uncover meanings and perceptions on the part of the people participating in the research,

viewing these understandings against the backdrop of the people's overall worldview” (Crotty, 2015, p. 7).

In my study, I used an ethnographic approach to seek insight into the personal life journey of each of the five participants to explore what led her to enroll in university to pursue a bachelor's degree. One of the characteristics of ethnography is the small number of cases. “Depth rather than breadth of coverage is the norm, with a relatively small number of cases being studied” (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 160).

My research approach was designed so that I could develop a deep understanding of the motivations of five first-year undergraduate women to enroll in college. I built a rapport with the women through regular interaction and email correspondence. The multiple interviews with the participants led me to understand their perspectives and points of view. During the interviews, I also wrote descriptive field notes on their verbal and physical reactions to the questions and how they answered them which facilitated reflection and analytic insight, a key feature of an ethnographic approach to qualitative research. Immediately after each interview I reviewed my field notes to ensure that what I had recorded reflected the observations that I made during the interview. The conversational style of the interviews relied on ongoing analysis of the data generated via field notes, development of rapport with participants and multiple interviews (Roulston, 2010).

After the initial interview with each participant, I transcribed the interview data verbatim. Once transcribed, I then referred to the field notes and my researcher's

notebook ideas and thoughts to help guide my second round of interviews with the participants as to areas that I wanted more clarity or to probe for specificity about what the woman had shared in her initial interview. For the second round of interviews, I continued to construct field notes which I reviewed after the second interview. By reviewing the transcriptions and the field notes after each interview I was able to determine if I had explored fully the questions and the responses of the participants to determine if an additional interview was required. I used the visual teleconference video to affirm and supplement my field notes as to what I had observed and noted. Field notes helped to develop the participant stories using the synthesis of detailed observations that occurred during the interviews and also post-interview to support reflection and thoughts about what I heard.

Pilot Study

The use of a pilot study gave me the opportunity to test the recruitment methodology for this student population, the interview questions, and protocols to make corrections to interview questions and other research study adjustments prior to undertaking the full dissertation study.

Recruitment of first year undergraduate women was more challenging than anticipated. The first recruitment strategy was to solicit participants by email referral through my higher education cohort colleagues. I requested referrals twice by email. While this generated interest from my colleagues in supporting my efforts, it did not generate any participants due to their lack of access to first year students as well as school

closures at the mid-western university due to inclement weather which made email communication inconsistent. One colleague even asked his college freshman son to make a connection with his female colleagues. All these efforts did not generate any participants for the pilot study.

The second recruitment attempt was through a professor who sent the recruitment email to Education graduate students and alumni. This strategy did not generate any responses either. What was discovered during this outreach was that I was using an older institutional email address, which could have resulted in missed responses because they went to an expired email address, possibly accounted for no responses.

The third recruitment strategy attempt was through a reach out through the institutional English Department Head to recruit in first year English classes. Despite several attempts to connect I did not receive a response to any of my requests.

The fourth recruitment strategy I looked to engage first year students from my home university. With the timing of my request in the midwestern university cycle of first year student engagement with Spring and Summer approaching and knowing that my home university offers Spring and Summer first year introduction courses, this seemed to be the next best strategy to use. As a result of this contextual knowledge, I approached the home institution's Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation to access students in their first year who attend classes in the Spring and Summer terms. After ethics approval, I presented my research study in two different classes, an Introduction to University class and an Introduction to Indigenous Studies class. Unfortunately, the day

that I presented in the Introduction to University class on May 21, 2019, there were no eligible students present in the class that day as the female students who were present were either first year international students or not first year domestic students. While the study discussion generated lots of interesting questions and discussion, sadly there were no eligible participants in this class. The Introduction to Indigenous Studies class presentation generated lots of interesting discussion about the research study however the only female student who did reach out to engage in the study was also an international student, which was not part of the population under study. Both professors sent out the information to their students about the research study by email after the class presentation, which did not generate any additional engagement in the pilot study.

The fifth recruitment strategy attempt was a multi-pronged approach which included reaching out to a) Orientation staff, b) Student Involvement staff, and c) undergraduate course Introduction to University Life faculty. From these approaches the best strategy was reaching out to the Introduction to University Life faculty. Through this approach I gained access to two Introduction to University Life classrooms where I was able to recruit enough female students for my pilot study.

What I learned through this process is that this group of students prefer to meet the person with whom they are going to be engaging in research with rather than engage through a cold call email. I believe this is part of the trust and relationship building process that allowed me to understand the story of the participants more deeply. Additionally, the students preferred to connect first by phone for an initial conversation

rather than solely by email. Once class presentation and conversation by phone have occurred, students appear to be more willing to engage with me, as the researcher who is conducting the research for an initial interview. After initial rapport was built through the first interview, additional emails were responded to more quickly and the second interview connection was established by email and then executed through Skype.

To that end, I interviewed two undergraduate women who are pursuing their bachelors' degree at a mid-sized mid-western university to evaluate the pre-interview questionnaire and the semi-structured interview questions. The pre-interview questionnaire was helpful in providing information for the participant profile as well as providing demographic information to use to build relationship with the participants during the interview process.

The first participant identified as a single, white woman from a mid-western state other than the state of the college where she is attending. She is a full-time freshman student who lives on campus and is studying in the Business program with a declared major of business management. She is financing her current program with grants, scholarships, the outside support of family, student loans and is paying for her studies herself.

The second participant identified as a single, white female from the same mid-western state as the college that she is attending. She is a full-time freshman student who lives on campus, taking courses on campus studying Elementary Education. She is

financing her current program with scholarships, the outside support of family, student loans and paying for it herself.

While my intention was to begin the research process with a pre-interview questionnaire and then move on to the interviews, the pilot study participants wanted to engage in a telephone conversation between these two steps in the research process. I engaged with both participants in a phone conversation reaffirming the research process starting with the consent form, followed by the pre-interview questionnaire and then arranging for the first interview and what the next steps in the research study process entailed.

The initial round of interview questions resulted in interviews that were 13 and 20 minutes respectively. They provided preliminary information to accomplish an opportunity to build relationships with the participants. While ideally the first interview would be preferred to be longer in length, as in 30 – 45 minutes per participant, it did provide an opportunity for the participant to begin to tell their story eliciting additional questions that built on the first interview to construct the second interview. Additionally, the questions posed seemed to generate responses, while not necessarily deep and explicit in detail, they did provide an opportunity to go deeper probing for more detail and specificity on the second round of interviews. Some tweaking of the first round of questions was also conducted. For example, the fourth question “Can you think of any TV shows or movies that informed your perspectives about college?” was expanded to include social media. The revised question is now, “Can you think of any social media

(i.e. Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter), TV shows, or movies that informed your perspectives about college?” This question was asked on the second interview with participants to test the responses and generated a deeper response than initially with the limited previous influences. Two additional questions were also added after the media question to the first round of interviews as a result of participants stating the influence of family and other significant relationships. The two new additional questions were:

“Can you think of any relationships, family and friends, in your life that informed your perspectives about college?”

“How did those conversations inform your beliefs about college?”

The pilot study also assisted with determining the length of time required for the interviews as well as ensured the quality of the recording using Skype as the teleconference platform. The length of time for the first round of interviews was shorter than initially anticipated at 45 to 60 minutes and seemed to continue the trust building aspect of building relationship with the participants. Deeper conversations elaborating on the stories of the participants occurred in the second round of interviews. The use of Skype as the interview recording mechanism worked well and the participants were willing to engage with Skype as a teleconference platform, even if they previously did not have an account.

Recordings of the pilot study interviews were transcribed and coded to support the evaluation of the research design for the proposed study, including ascertainment of the trustworthiness and credibility of the data collected and analyzed.

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Students were asked to sign the IRB approved informed consent form upon initial recruitment with the pre-interview questionnaire. Student's anonymity was maintained by designating each participant with a pseudonym coded for the pre-interview questionnaire and the interviews. Pilot study participants will not be considered for participation in the full study but will be individuals who otherwise meet or very closely approximate the selection criteria for full study participants. The data is stored on my personal laptop which is password protected. The data will be retained for three years according to the IRB standards of practice.

By conducting a pilot study, I discovered ways to enhance my dissertation research study methods. I learned how challenging recruitment would be with this population and that I needed to be flexible and creative in my recruitment approaches. Ideally, students preferred in person recruitment rather than a cold call email reach out. This initial in class, in person connection provided them opportunities to build relationship and ask questions about the research study before committing to engage in the research study opportunity. Throughout the pilot study process I learned that relationship building is key to building trust to facilitate learning about the woman's trajectory to college. The use of a pre-interview questionnaire provided an opportunity to build relationships with the participants allowing me to build trust with them by using the information that they offered. The pilot study process allowed me the opportunity to test out my interview questions. I learned that I needed to add more specificity to one of the questions. I also learned that I needed to add additional questions about the influence of

family and other significant relationships that participants discussed during the first interview. Finally, through the pilot study I was able to test out the teleconference platform for participant engagement and recording quality.

Research Design

The research design pays attention to the elements of both data gathering and data analysis. The data gathering section focuses on the selected research study site, the participants and how they were recruited, and how the data were collected. The data analysis section describes the plan for analysis including aspects of validity, the researcher's reflexivity, the limitations and delimitations of the study, as well as the ethical considerations. The final design of the research study was informed by the lessons learned from the pilot study process.

Site Selection

My research took place at a public, co-educational state university with a strong liberal arts foundation located in the midwestern United States. In Fall 2019, 75% of the student population were predominantly undergraduate students with female students making up 48% of the student population. The selected mid-western university offers 225 fields of study which includes 105 Undergraduate Majors and 70 Undergraduate Minors. The institution offers a comprehensive student experience from both an academic and a social perspective. On campus services includes career services, financial aid supports, on campus and off campus housing options, co-curricular opportunities which includes over

250 clubs and organizations, a health and wellness center, an American Indian Center, multicultural programs and services, ROTC and an international student center.

Participant Selection

The participants for the study identified as female undergraduate students in their first year of full-time on-campus study. Due to the impact of COVID-19, three students had both on campus and on-line classes. Participants were from any academic discipline (or undecided in academic major). They were 18 to 20 years of age, with most of the students being 18 years old.

While I would have preferred to have more students engage in the research study, I was able to collect enough rich, thick data collected through the interviews to reach saturation from interviewing each of the five participants twice for a total of 10 interviews conducted. Students were selected from those who volunteered to participate. Participant selection did not intend to provide a representative sample as this was not the point of my study, rather the intention was to seek to understand the insider perspective of the lived experiences of the participants.

Those under 18 were not selected as they are not considered legal adults. In one case, a student who was under 18 did offer to be interviewed and we mutually agreed that she would participate in the fall when she was of legal age to consent to participate in the research study. International students were not part of the study due to the diversity of their cultural values and influences. Students are a product of their cultural identity and

perspectives that are as unique as the country where they originate from. An exploration of cultural identity and perspectives is not part of the scope of this research study.

Impact of COVID-19 on the research study

The data collection for this research study was impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic. In my pilot study, I discovered that the preferred method for recruiting students was to attend their Introduction to University Life class to share the aims of the research study and how they could be part of the research study experience.

Unfortunately, the proposed research study recruitment strategy needed to pivot due to the pandemic and the suspension of on campus classes. University courses moved to online learning and the number of classes offered also declined with the change in course delivery methods at the recruitment institution. Recruiting students became challenging as students and instructors were learning to teach and learn within a new reality of higher education in an online delivery format, even though they had signed up for in person course delivery. When students and instructors normally would have welcomed the opportunity to engage in a research study, this request seemed to be “just one more thing to do” in an already exhausting college learning environment. Participants shared their concerns about their college experience articulating the impact of not only engagement with anticipated university experiences, like research studies but also their initial college experience as they were socially distanced from peers, friends, and social connections. Students shared that they experienced feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Campus life was not what they signed up for or had hoped that it would be.

Recruitment Procedures

With COVID-19 in mind, I sought permission from the instructors to engage with the students in their classes. By way of email and video introduction to the research study, I virtually visited Introduction to University Life classes to recruit participants for my research study. Introduction to University Life is a 2-credit course for Freshman students only that meets weekly for 1 hour and 50 minutes. The course description reads as follows:

This course is designed to promote the personal and academic success of new students. This course covers all facets of student transition to University Life including academic success, intellectual skill development, personal growth, wellbeing, intercultural skills, and connections across the University with peers, faculty, staff, and advisors. This course aims to help students develop skills that will ensure their success at the mid-western university. (Policy document)

Introduction to University Life classes were chosen as the entry point for the research study as it is an undergraduate credit course that is open to all students who are new to the mid-western university, including transfer students. While there is no requirement for students to enroll in Introduction to University Life, it is highly encouraged by the university advisors. According to a senior academic administrator at the institution, “sections are set aside for some student populations (e.g., first generation college students)”.

My original plan was to visit the class sessions in person to explain the research study and to request students' participation in their first year of college, ideally their first semester. However, due to COVID-19 I needed to adjust my recruitment processes to recruit via email and by online virtual methods such as a video introduction and an offer to virtually pop into the classes to share the research study with the students. When a classroom presentation was not possible, I requested that the instructor send out the recruitment email with the video presentation link to the students in their classes. Students were asked to indicate their interest in signing up for the research study by emailing me directly. A follow up email was sent out post class presentation and the initial email request to solicit their interest in participating in the study. Depending on the response rate, a maximum of two subsequent emails were sent to the class instructors to solicit student engagement in one-week intervals. (See Appendix A).

Once students indicated their interest in participating in the research study, either by email, I emailed the informed consent form (see Appendix B) and the pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix C). The pre-interview questionnaire served two purposes: 1) to screen participants to ensure that they meet the study criteria for participation and 2) provide background information that was used in relationship building during the interviews.

As anticipated, there was a break of about one to three weeks between the first and second interviews allowing me enough time to analyze the first interview data for

follow up questions that would further illuminate the women's experiences. All participants engaged in two interviews.

All students who were selected for interviews were offered a financial incentive of a \$25 USD gift card of their choice for their participation. Offering an incentive provided a tangible reward for student engagement and increased the likelihood of students participating in the study. All students were appreciative of the gift card, and some were even surprised that it was being offered as they said that they would have engaged in the research study even without the incentive.

Data Collection

The study began with the pre-interview questionnaire to gain formal and social demographics about the study participants to determine if they could be selected for the interviews. See Appendix C for the pre-interview questionnaire. As discovered in the pilot study, students were offered to be contacted by phone to explore the research process and their engagement with the pre-interview questionnaire and the informed consent document. None of the research study participants engaged in this reach out opportunity.

Once selected, participants engaged in two rounds of recorded semi-structured interviews using Zoom, a cloud-based video teleconference program. Due to my physical distance from the research site campus and the COVID-19 pandemic, a cloud-based video program was the preferred medium to observe and record non-verbal communication as well as voice record responses to the interviews for interview data

collection. The length of the interviews varied from 16 to 49 minutes. The informed consent form was emailed to each participant as part of the recruitment process. Prior to the scheduled interview, I received the signed informed consent form. Additionally, at the start of the interview, I affirmed that the participant consented to engage in the research study allowing an additional opportunity to respond to any questions that the participant may have had regarding the research study.

Interview questions explored women's motivations for pursuing higher education credentials (see Appendix D). The questions focused on each of these aspects with probes to delve deeper into the motivations for women's pursuit for higher education. The interview questions were "structured to facilitate asking multiple participants the same questions ... to achieve data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). The first and second interviews with the five participants provided rich, thick data allowing me to be reasonably assured that further data collection with more participants would yield similar results. The data generated served to confirm the emergent themes and conclusions discovered through the interview questions.

Data Analysis

I transcribed verbatim each interview to become intimate with the data by using qualitative research influenced by ethnographic approaches. Qualitative research aims to understand a society by listening to what its members have to say about it. Ethnographic approaches helped me to "look for relationships that *connect* statements and events within a context into a coherent whole" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 113). As I transcribed the

interviews, I began to look for connections with what the participants said and their experiences to create the participant stories and to conduct a coding exercise with the transcript data.

The first phase of data representation was in the form of participant stories gleaned from the teleconference platform videos, my researcher's notebook, field notes, and the interview transcripts. During the interview I took note of visual body language and affirmed what I saw when I reviewed the teleconference platform videos. My researcher's notebook was helpful as a place to record thoughts and ideas to consider or further explore during the phases of the research study. Field notes helped to develop the participant stories using the synthesis of detailed observations that occurred during the interviews and also post-interview to support reflection and thoughts about what I heard. Lastly, the interview transcripts provided the verbatim thoughts with recorded utterances of the women's responses to the questions posed. The level of detail provided the basis for the creation of the participant stories and the ability to hear in their own words what they had to say about their experiences. By weaving all of these aspects together I was able to create a comprehensive picture of each women's experience in enrolling in college to attain a bachelor's degree.

The key to the exploration of the motivations of undergraduate women pursuing their bachelor's degrees were the codes, categories, and emerging themes coupled with the general implications captured in my researcher's notebook which encompassed memo writing about what I discovered through the data analysis process.

The second phase was a coding exercise from the transcribed interviews. I sought to identify patterns in the study participants' data that led to codes, categories, and themes. Initially, I used an inductive approach to generate substantive codes from the data to assist in understanding the women's motivations for pursuing a bachelor's degree. The first cycle of data analysis after the first interviews generated initial coding (see Appendix F) to determine where next to collect data and which, more focused, questions to ask in the subsequent second interviews as the deductive phase of qualitative inquiry. In the second cycle of data analysis, I compared, reorganized, and focused the ninety-two codes into sixteen categories to prioritize them to formulate a central or core category that became the formulation for the five themes to understand the women's trajectory towards college.

I engaged in constant comparative analysis to systematically reduce the data using open coding to related categories and themes to each other. The goal of constant comparative analysis is to generate a theory, or set of themes" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008, p. 594).

During the phases of constant comparative analysis, after each round of interviews, I engaged in open coding where I looked at putting the "data into smaller segments, then in to descriptors or "codes" for each segment" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008, p. 594). Inductive and deductive reasoning was used to "rearrange (the codes) into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107).

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Table 1 is a demonstration of the constant comparative analysis process that I created with my research study. I transcribed the interview data verbatim and then coded the data from what each participant said. After coding the data, I then sought out concepts that were common across participants. Categories were then created which led me to the development of theoretical constructs which inform the emerging theory of motivations for undergraduate women to pursue bachelor's degrees.

Table 1

Data Analysis for Research Participants

Codes	Concepts	Categories	Themes
brother	family	siblings	
personal			
sister	experiences with college		relationships
father	past &	parents	
mother	present		
doctor			career
veterinarian			aspirations
Sydney White		film	mass media
YouTube		video	
Twitter		social media	

Validity Techniques

Trustworthiness of the data was achieved by paying attention to both design validity and analysis validity as well as to the triangulation of data. I conducted two rounds of interviews to achieve both quality rich and quantity thick data. Through the types of questions posed in the first interview followed by the second interview I generated a significant amount of data that is dense and rich as I listened to the stories of the young women's motivations for enrolling in college. "Thick data is a lot of data; rich data is many-layered, intricate, detailed, nuanced, and more" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). Through a constant comparative analysis of the first and second interview data I was able to deepen my understanding of the women's experiences as I compared the responses from the first round of interviews and the second round of interviews. My understanding of their perspectives was deepened by comparing how their responses to the first round of questions and to the second round of questions through probing for specificity in the responses from the participants.

Design validity was achieved using respondent validation through member checks of the transcribed interview data. Participants were asked to review the verbatim transcripts to ensure the meaning of the data collected was accurate. I gave the transcripts back to the students and had them review them for meaning "this is what I heard" and subsequently asked them a clarifying question "is this what you meant?" to ensure that I understood what they intended. For the most part, the participants agreed with what was

said; however, in a few cases further clarification of meaning or an expansion of a response was shared allowing me to gain even more insight into their experiences.

Analytic validity used the rich data generated through the interviews from the verbatim transcripts of interviews to ensure that the data was believable and authentic. Participants were asked to review the analysis with a view to responding to my interpretation framed by “this is how I interpreted what you were saying – what do you think?” Audit trails documented the data processes used throughout the data collection phase. As Maxwell (2013) emphasizes:

reading and thinking about your interview transcripts and observation notes, writing memos, developing coding categories and applying these to your data, analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships, and creating matrices and other displays are all important forms of data analyses (p. 105)

which are intended to be captured by the audit trail process. I traced and documented my data analysis processes as well as the choices and decisions that I made along the way to capture my *thinking it through* process by journaling in my researcher's notebook. My field notes helped to build from the interview questions, where I would probe for specificity by further questioning that built on the response that the participant shared. Additionally, I considered what codes, concepts, and categories emerged through the data analysis process. See Appendix E for an example of the iterative review process that I went through using data from my research study.

The teleconference platform video feature provided visual information to add to the descriptive field notes that I took during the interview process. The review of the teleconference videos facilitated reflection and analytic insight enlightening the participant stories as part of data analysis.

Researcher Reflexivity

The continuous process of reflection on the research being conducted is essential for the integrity of the research study. “*Any view is a view from some perspective and is therefore shaped by the location (social and theoretical) and lens of the observer*” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 46). To mitigate potential bias, I examined and noted my assumptions and pre-conceived notions in my researcher’s notebook as I selected and worded the research questions. I noted personal impressions and feelings to help identify personal bias that had potential to impact my interpretation of the data (Sangasubana, 2011). My researcher’s notebook was used to reflect on the analysis aspects and data points such as the emerging patterns, the codes, the core categories, themes, and the general implications captured during the data analysis process. The process of memoing provided an opportunity to examine the tensions and contradictions that arose as I captured my own reactions in my researcher’s notebook. Based on my initial conceptual framework for the research study I had conceptualized certain themes that would emerge however in listening to the women’s stories I discovered that I need to be more open to hearing what the women were sharing with me as to their own personal trajectory and put my initial thoughts and ideas aside to fully engage with their stories.

Additionally, I examined how I built a trusting relationship with the participants, and how relationship dynamics might have affected responses to the interview questions. As Maxwell indicated, “(U)nderstanding how a *particular* researcher’s values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be positive or negative) and avoiding the negative consequences of these” (p. 124). For example, due to the conversational style of ethnographic interviewing I was able to be actively engaged, reflective and flexible in the researcher role (Roulston, 2016, p. 159) allowing me to “go with the flow” of where each woman’s story led to. Sometimes the women talked about ideas that were not related to the question being asked. As the researcher I needed to take the lead from the participant to build relational trust letting them meander to other topics while finding opportunities to weave the research question focus back into the discussion.

Lastly, triangulation of data, “explores different levels and perspectives of the same phenomenon” (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1411), included the use of the existing literature and research with the participant’s review of the verbatim transcriptions of the two semi-structured interviews with the analysis and interpretation, making sense of the collected data to formulate forming the triangulation of the research data. For example, in the first interview a particular concept would emerge, such as the experiences of family members which in the second interview I would explore in further depth affirming the perspective further of what the family member’s experience was in college.

Ethics

Application to the university research site Institutional Review Board (IRB) to protect the participant's rights and welfare was submitted for review and approval. Students were asked to sign the IRB approved informed consent form upon initial recruitment with the pre-interview questionnaire. Their anonymity was maintained by designating each participant with a pseudonym coded for the pre-interview questionnaire the interviews and the data analysis. Each participant chose their own pseudonym at the research study pre-interview questionnaire entry point.

Delimitations and Limitations

As explained in participant selection, participants were delimited to domestic freshman university students who identified as women and are pursuing a bachelor's degree.

Using a teleconference platform rather than a face-to-face interview may have limited the depth of the interpersonal connection formed with the participants, and it presented some challenges in observing fully the non-verbal communication aspects when interviewing participants. However, due to the COVID-19 and the more frequent use of teleconference platforms like Zoom, the students were more familiar with the use of this type of interface for making connections. One of the challenges of this medium was not being able to see the full person to take into account body language, only facial expressions were visible coupled with verbal responses. To mitigate this lack of body language engagement when I was unsure of the reaction that I was receiving verbally and

facially I clarified with the participant how they were feeling about the particular question being asked to ensure that I was accurately reading their body language response.

Summary

In this research study, I examined the motivations of five undergraduate, domestic, freshman female students in their first year of study at a mid-sized university in the Midwest United States who are pursuing bachelor's degrees in higher education using a qualitative research design. The pre-interview questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews provided multiple opportunities for the female participants to tell their personal story of the journey that led them to enroll in college to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Chapter 4 describes the stories of the five research participants that leads to a description of the five themes that describe intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of personal reasons, career aspirations, pre-college academic pursuits, personal relationships and mass media. The individual participant stories, as well as the collective themes and subcategories highlight the influences and motivations of the women in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree in college.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the motivations of women to pursue a bachelors' degree after high school and the factors that influenced their motivation. In this chapter, I present the findings from analyzing participants' responses to interview questions to help me answer the central research question in this study: What are the motivations for undergraduate women to enroll in a bachelor's degree? Data were obtained through a series of two interviews with each of the five participants in the study. After the completion of a pre-interview questionnaire, the first interviews were 16 to 25 minutes followed by a second interview of 25 to 50 minutes where participants shared what influenced their decision to enroll in college.

I begin by sharing the stories of the five participants to provide a perspective of each woman's college-going trajectory, beginning with their pre-interview questionnaire background information followed by focusing on their individual lives and the experiences that led to their motivation for enrolling in college and their initial college experience impressions. The field notes that I took during the interviews which captured my observations, reflections and thoughts supported the development of the participant stories. Openness varied from participant to participant based on what they were prepared to share about their experiences. Therefore, some stories are longer and more detailed than others. Following the participant stories, I provide a detailed thematic analysis to

address the research question. The themes presented illustrate and describe how the women's motivations to pursue college were influenced by many factors in their lives.

Participant Stories

Each woman shared her own personal trajectory that led her to enroll in college. The participant stories showcase the perspective of each woman's college-going journey. Background information gleaned from the pre-interview questionnaire (see Table 2 below), visual data from the teleconference platform videos, the field notes, my researcher's notebook analysis and the interviews with the women all led to the development of the participant stories. By weaving all of these aspects together I was able to create a comprehensive picture of each woman's experience in enrolling in college to attain a bachelor's degree. Each individual woman's life experiences explore what motivated her to enroll in college. Their initial college experience impressions are shared through each woman's story.

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Table 2
Pre-Interview Data for Research Study Participants

Measure	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Pseudonym	Olivia	Katherine	Jennifer	Tyra	Joey
Age	18	18	18	20	18
Race	White	White	White	Hispanic or Latina	White
Live on Campus	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Relationship Status	In relationship not living with partner	Single	Single	Living with partner or spouse	Single
Dependent children	0	0	0	0	0
Support other people	No	No	No	No	No
Employment Unemployed Status	Unemployed	Unemployed	Unemployed	Unemployed	
Declared major	Kinesiology Science	Forensic	Biology	Psychology	Spanish
Declared minor	Psychology	Psychology	Criminal Justice Studies	International Studies	
Typical course enrollment	On campus	On campus	Both on campus and online	Both on campus and online	Both on campus and online
Financing Current Waiver Program	Scholarship Outside support (e.g., family) Student loans	Scholarship	Scholarship	Scholarship Grants (e.g., Pell Grant) Student loans	Scholarship Tuition Outside support (e.g., family)

Olivia

Olivia is an 18-year-old, white female, from a neighboring state who entered college directly after high school. Initially, she lived on campus but due to the impact of COVID with her campus housing situation, Olivia had to move back home to live again with her parents while continuing her classes remotely. Relationship wise, she indicated that she is in a relationship but does not live with her partner. She is not currently working while she is going to college. She is a first-year, full-time student double-majoring in Forensic Science and Spanish. She finances her college education in multiple ways, including scholarships, student loans, and family support.

In our conversations, Olivia was very animated, excited to make a connection to talk about her motivations for going to college as well as her current college experiences. She openly shared her perspectives and seemed to enjoy the social interaction during our conversations.

Olivia first thought about going to college when she was in middle school and took a pre-ACT test which led her to start making plans for her future. She applied to colleges where there were free applications so she could have other options to consider should she not get her first choice which was to the only university in the Midwest area that offered a forensic science program. Ultimately, Olivia made her location choice due to the type of academic program offered, however having a best friend come to the same university was a bonus, as she describes it. "My best friend is with me at (college) so ... maybe she influenced that because you know we were together".

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Before Olivia enrolled, she knew that college was going to be an amazing experience for her. As an independent person she thought that moving out of her parent's house and going to school away from home in a new place was going to give her all of the independence that she craved. Olivia shared:

I knew college was going to be an amazing experience for me. I have always been an independent person and I thought that moving out of the house and going to school away from home in a new place was going to give me all of that independence that I craved.

Before she came to college, Olivia learned about the college experience through movies that portrayed "how college is a big party, but there's also that independence piece that I was paying attention to along with new people and experiences". These perspectives really solidified the excitement she felt about going to college and experiencing all of the new things. Family also shared the same information with her telling her about all the crazy stuff that they did as well as the new things they were able to experience because of college. Despite the fact that neither one of her parents went to a four-year school, they both instilled the value of the college experience in her. Her dad went to a trade school and her mom started a community college program but didn't finish. Her mother, in particular, was definitely excited for her to go to college and have the experience of living on campus because she did not get that opportunity. As Olivia describes it:

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(My) dad knew how important the college degree is now and it seems like ... it's very important for like those better jobs and everything to have a degree so I think they tried to ... put that in my head that it was important and also like just important to get that experience like my mom had thought.

To prepare for college, in high school she took Biology and an Introduction to Forensic Science course which helped her to feel confident in the path that she was beginning. As she grew up in a small Midwest town there weren't a lot of options for college preparatory courses other than the few that were in the school curriculum nor were there opportunities for jobs or internships in her area of interest. When Olivia was accepted to college, she was so excited and relieved even though she knew that she is a good student and was confident that she would get in, it felt so good to her to open up the acceptance letters. "You know that you would most likely get accepted but like waiting for the letter and the anxiety of actually getting the acceptance letter. So, ay, it was a lot of excitement".

Olivia always knew that she wanted to go to college regardless of what other people thought and how they tried to influence her. She knew that she wanted to continue her education and keep learning, but she also felt that social norms push high school students, like her, to go to college even though it wasn't until her senior year of high school where they actually talked about other options than a four-year college. In high school, she started learning about jobs and what's required of them; by that kind of

exploring, it brought the realization that “Oh, a lot of these require college. Oh! Let’s go to college.” Her next step was always going to college.

Olivia’s main reasons for enrolling were to further her education and “I hope to grow as a human being by going to college. Through the experience I will have and the things that I will learn I hope to leave a better person”. Her goals really have not changed as she has always had big goals for herself, and she thinks that she’s held onto her goals throughout her first year of college. Ultimately, through her college experience she hopes to make new connections with other friends, professors, and organizations that can help her once she gets out of college through experiences and building memories that also come along with everything that she does while she is in college. She hopes to leave a better person as a result of the experiences she will have and the things that she will learn.

Katherine

Katherine is an 18-year-old, white, female, first-year student from the East coast. She is single, unemployed and lives on campus. Katherine has a full athletic scholarship as a member of a college sports team. She is a full-time student registered for courses on campus, however, is now taking courses online due to COVID-19 restrictions. Student athletes were the first students during the COVID-19 online class pivot to be on campus getting ready for the fall athletic season. The students continued to take classes virtually however were on campus for sports team training. Katherine is currently enrolled in a Bachelor of Science program with a declared major in Biology and a declared minor in Psychology.

During our interview sessions, Katherine displayed a strong interest in the interview questions as she responded to them with clarity of purpose and orientation to college learning. She demonstrated a strong desire to succeed and has put her plans in place to do so. Katherine also candidly shared the impact of COVID-19 as having an effect on her college experiences not being what she had hoped that they would be so far.

Katherine always knew that she would go to college. She first thought of going to college “when I was ... old enough to think. It is ... always been the plan in my life.” Both of her parents went to college and their parents before them and their parents before them. Everyone in her family has gone to college or university. She knew that she too wanted to make a difference somehow in the world like everyone else in her family has. When she was little, she wanted to be a veterinarian, and she knew that you had to go to college for that. However, as she grew older her career plans and interests changed from being a veterinarian to becoming a medical doctor, but it was always the plan for her to go to college. Katherine always expected that she would attend college because she has “always had pretty high goals, high standards and I knew that I wanted to be a doctor.”

As a student athlete, Katherine committed to attend this Midwest university as a result of being recruited two years previously. She was very engaged in club sports from 8 years of age and began the recruitment process with college coaches in her high school years of playing her sport. She identified that being accepted into the university was basically a given since she had been recruited to play a sport on campus. What really was

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“very, very stressful” for her was the recruitment process which was definitely more stressful than being admitted to college.

As a college student, Katherine thought that she would love the independence of not being with her parents all the time. She thought that it was going to be great to be able to go eat whatever she wanted and spend her days doing whatever she wanted including her time with her sport thrown in there as well. She also thought that she would have more friends by the time she entered college. However, due to the impact of COVID-19, student athletes were the only students on campus during the summer. Due to COVID-19, students were kept as far apart as possible in the residence halls with no one being even near her room. For campus dining, students were not allowed to eat together in the dining hall with everything being very spread out with social distancing. She shared that she was finding the college experience very lonely.

Both of Katherine's parents shared their experiences with her as college student athletes and were quick to let her know that it was going to be hard and that she would have to dedicate her time as she was recruited at a higher ranked level than they both were in college. Her mother shared that Katherine was going to find herself and decide what she wanted to do with the rest of her life through the college experience. Her mother also encouraged her to have fun but not too much fun. Her parents, based on their experiences, warned her to avoid fraternity parties.

Katherine also benefited from the college experiences of her sister who is three years older. Both women play the same sport which helped Katherine learn about

recruitment processes and college experiences. Unlike Katherine, her sister chose to stay close to home by going to university on the east coast. Even though Katherine and her sister are not that close she openly shared about her college experiences at a big public university reminding her younger sister “to be smart in college (and) don’t do dumb things.”

Katherine is determined to become a doctor to help people in as significant ways as possible which requires her to attend college to achieve her career goal and, as she summarized, “So, college is obviously a requirement of that.” In preparation for her college plans, she came into college with 32 or 33 earned Advanced Placement (AP) credits from her high school AP classes. She took AP Psychology, AP Biology, AP Computer Science, AP Microeconomics, AP Chemistry, and AP Calculus. By taking these courses in advance, not only did she enter college with almost her first year completed she also had teachers who prepared her for the independence of the college experience. Katherine shared her thoughts about this experience:

I’m really thankful for that and I think especially in those courses our teachers were more hands off in the fact that I’m going to lecture and you’re going to have to, you know, kind of figure it out for yourself.

She expressed that her high school teachers really helped her orient herself to college expectations. She found the courses “really helpful because obviously professors aren’t here to hold your hand. They’re here to help you but they are not going to walk you through step by step through everything.” While she did not participate in any

internships, she did engage in a college preparatory activity by going to her dad's office and shadowing him at the local public university. These behind-the-scenes experiences provided opportunities for her to engage in conversations with his colleagues about medical school and to witness their professionalism.

Katherine hopes that her college experiences will prepare her for life by being able to see and do different things by experiencing:

all of the normal college things such as dating someone, having a class that I really struggle with that I finally get through to the end and have persevered and am happy with my results, going to see hockey games, going to see football games, and meeting new people from different backgrounds. I'm here, I'm here for it all.

Jennifer

Similar to Katherine, Jennifer is a student athlete. As she was recruited to play college sports she does not work and is on a full athletic scholarship. Jennifer is a single, white, 18-year-old, freshman female who is from the southern United States. She lives on campus. Academically, she is enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts program with Psychology as her declared major and Criminal Justice Studies as her declared minor.

During our interview sessions, Jennifer delved into the various topics in an open and exploratory way. She was thoughtful in her responses sharing how her academic journey has not been linear but instead has been built on the various experiences that she

has explored over time. She identified that even her college sports recruitment process was unorthodox given that she was a pretty late commitment being recruited in February of the year that she would attend college. Another aspect that Jennifer was candid about was how her campus experiences were altered by the impact of COVID-19. Ultimately, Jennifer is hoping that the job that she will land after college will be one that benefits other people.

Jennifer couldn't remember a specific moment when knew that she was going to go to college. She shared that she felt like she always knew since elementary school that she intended to go to college after high school. "I knew when I was little that I wanted to be a veterinarian and I knew that I had to go to school beyond high school to do that." Jennifer's parents also reminded her that if she wanted to pursue this as a career that she would need to go to college to do what she was saying that she wanted to do.

For as long as Jennifer can remember she wanted to be a veterinarian because when she was little, she loved animals. Her neighbors had horses and her family always had dogs and cats growing up, so she always loved animals as a result of these experiences. Basically, her whole life she always thought that she wanted to be a veterinarian and then her thinking started to shift to maybe becoming a doctor.

This shift occurred due to the experiences that she had while in high school. She really liked the experience of going to the hospital with her mom who is a nurse as part of the Take Your Kid to Work Day. She then started to think that maybe she wanted to go in to medicine instead.

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In the summer between her Junior and Senior year in high school, she worked at an animal daycare centre where she really liked the job. She was still contemplating whether she wanted to be a veterinarian or a doctor. This job experience helped her decide that being a veterinarian was not necessarily what she wanted to do because she never wanted to put a dog down.

In high school, Jennifer liked science classes like Biology, Chemistry, and Anatomy which consolidated her shift towards wanting to study medicine in college. Jennifer took the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program sciences, specifically Biology and Chemistry, to explore various subjects and interests to see if medicine or a STEM field was really something that she wanted to do.

Over time and based on her experiences in the veterinary clinic, job shadowing with her mom and finally conversations with her dad, she shifted what she wants to do for a career, moving away from being a doctor to now exploring Psychology and Criminal Justice. This shift came because of interactions that she had with her dad thinking about cases within his law practice. Her dad would talk to her about cases and how you have to think through things by taking into consideration a number of factors that play a role in the work that you do rather than the hard and fast facts of medicine. Jennifer is using her college experiences to inform her thinking like she did in high school to explore what she wants to do and what she does not want to do. Her explorations remain focused on having a job that benefits others and one that she enjoys; these core qualities remain intact in her thinking.

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Ultimately, she decided to go to college because she wanted to have a job that would be impactful. Jennifer felt that each job that she thought about requires a bachelor's degree or some kind of graduate school degree. She describes her thinking here: "I think it was just kind of maybe the type of job, the type of career I wanted to pursue required some type of higher education."

Jennifer is looking forward to college "being an opportunity for diversity of people, places and experiences." Through the movies that she watched about college, she thought that college would be "different bunch of groups of people and that you are pretty much only friends with your group." She is looking forward to going to college and being on her own since she was a junior in high school. Jennifer was excited to come to college to meet her roommate and meet new people.

Due to COVID-19, Jennifer has not met very many people other than her teammates on campus right now because there are not any gatherings to meet people as there usually would be, such as a welcome orientation. Jennifer is aware that her sports team members are friends with non-student athletes so she is anticipating that will be the same with her as well as she definitely will not restrict herself to only being friends with student athletes. Jennifer remains hopeful that in the fall when classes start that she will have a chance to gather, meet people and make friends both in her classes and on her sports teams.

Both of her parents went to college and graduate school becoming professionals in their respective professions. Her dad is an attorney, and her mom is a nurse which was

influential in her wanting to go to college. Dad was a student athlete who shared his experiences about combining sports with academics with his daughter. Jennifer also has an older brother who is a college student athlete. He helped her to understand that going to college and being a student athlete is difficult sometimes but is definitely doable and worth it to play a sport. He warned her how busy she will be, and to make sure that being a student athlete is something that she really wants to do. In her family, “from a super young age I always just ... knew that after high school you go to college because of my family and how they all went to college before me impacted my perspective on going to college.”

Jennifer looks at college as being the place where she can learn as much as possible so that she can do the most good or be the most impactful in society. She also hopes that, like her parents, she will develop friendships with a solid group of people that went through the same thing, became friends from different places who trusted each other through four or five years of college. Jennifer summarized that, “hopefully I can develop some good friendships that last beyond when we graduate as well.”

Tyra

Tyra identified as a 20-year-old, first generation Hispanic or Latina woman from a neighboring state in the Midwest United States. She lives off campus with her male partner. Tyra is unemployed and is funding her academic program through a combination of grants, scholarships, and student loans. She is pursuing a degree in Spanish with a declared minor in International Studies. Due to COVID-19, she takes

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courses on campus and on-line. During our conversations she also shared that she views herself as a strong feminist. In our interviews, Tyra presented as very engaged and animated. She very openly shared her thoughts, opinions, and ideas as she answered each of the interview questions.

Growing up in Tyra's family, education was always put on a high pedestal. It was very important to Tyra's parents that she did well in school. Her parents came to the United States of America for a better life and her parents wanted Tyra to take advantage of all of the opportunities that she had. By going to college, she hopes to get a better education, to get a better paying job and to help people.

For the past seven years, Tyra has been working at her family's Mexican restaurant learning people skills and was promoted to Assistant Manager and also learned the office management aspects of a career in food service. Originally, Tyra thought of going to college when she was graduating from high school. However, she didn't end up going for two years because she wanted to work full time; she didn't feel ready or committed yet as to where she wanted to go and what she wanted to do. During the two years after high school while she was working full time, she did begin to think of not going to college. She kept on telling herself that she needed to feel more stable, more ready, and know what she wanted to do before she could go to college. Then she realized that she just needed to start and that just the process of being in college will help her to decide. Part of her hesitancy to go to college was that she never thought or imagined that she could be one of those intelligent people that went to college. She thought that with

hard work she could get by but “sometimes education will help you lead the life that you really want to lead.” Initially working at the restaurant full time, she was very punctual, dedicated, and very much on top of it all. She wanted to be able to help her family’s restaurant and have fulfillment in her life. However, after a year and a half of working full time, she was just miserable. She began to realize that working all day with no break, even though the money was decent, was not the life that she wanted to have. She realized that if she has the opportunity to do something productive and good then she could not only help her parents better, but she could help herself and to get where she wants to be instead of feeling stuck in a restaurant for 12 hours a day. She also found that in the management position not everyone has the same work ethic as she did, yet she had all of the responsibility. She was realistic that going to college would not exactly make her happy but would give her another opportunity. She made the decision around November of the previous year to enter college.

Initially, Tyra applied to college to pursue a two-year Culinary Arts degree. As she already had experience in the kitchen currently working in her family’s restaurant, she thought that she could learn the skills that she needed and perfect them so she could further her career and obtain a higher-paying position. The school that she selected was well-known for culinary arts as well as being in a good location for her to be near home and family, but Tyra soon realized that she did not want to cook commercially. Instead, Tyra decided that she would prefer to cook at home for her own family and not turn what she liked doing into a job that she would do every day.

Tyra then re-evaluated her options and decided to focus her attention on a college that had a good Spanish program because she thought that was a better career path for her. As a first-generation immigrant she grew up speaking Spanish with her parents and needed to interpret for her family in everyday life. She then realized, "Hey! I could make money off of that." Tyra thought that would be a way for her to help people to be able to talk at their level of literacy rather than the level of their English language ability.

Tyra thought that college would be "super intimidating, super crazy difficult, and very stressful." She thought that she would have to be very dedicated to her studies. While her experience is not exactly incorrect, she realizes that college is doable because professors want to see students succeed so they will help them with their skills. When she was in elementary school, Tyra was a good student who did very well academically with straight A's. In middle years and high school, she began to have a love-hate relationship with schooling. She began to not like school very much which distorted her view of grades and learning, and she began not to care. Struggling in high school, she felt intimidated and thought that she was not smart enough to go to college. Tyra took College in High School classes which she found stressful, as the classes were demanding, and she was concerned that college would be the same experience. Due to her less than positive experience in high school, she waited for two years to actually go to college. She expressed that she had a lot of issues in high school regarding her mental health. However, once she took care of her health, she realized that she had a lot more potential

and coping skills to be able to engage in college. Despite her hesitancy to go to college, Tyra has found college to be fun, interesting and she is enjoying the assignments.

One high school course that she did find helpful was her College Readiness class, which was once a week for 30 minutes. The course helped to educate students about the college process, how to apply, how to prepare yourself to be ready to write academically for college. As someone whose parents did not know anything about how to apply, she, unlike some of her peers, found the course to be very helpful. She was happy that she had this course offering and that she was not singled out as one of the kids whose parents did not go to college as the course included everyone.

For Tyra, social media provided perspectives on the experience of going to college. She mentioned that she had seen a few memes, jokes and pictures on Instagram that were nihilistic, edgy jokes that shared the pressures of college. Additionally, she found other social media posts where people shared what they were going through wanting to help others by sharing tips on how to manage your time to be successful in college. She found these posts to be reassuring and reminded her that it is hard work, but doable. Contrary to what was on Instagram she discovered through her experiences that as long as she keeps on top of her studies and reaches out for help when needed, the stress can be managed, and that professors are there to help.

Significant relationships influenced Tyra's beliefs about college. She identified that her boyfriend was a major influence and supported her interest in going to college. As a recent graduate of college himself, she really admired his ability to not fall into the

trap of finding college stressful. He was a very good student who worked really hard at his studies. Tyra noted that he set a good schedule that included making time for working out, sleeping, studying, and always making time for them to hang out together and have fun.

As someone who grew up in a family where no one went to college, Tyra was influenced by her boyfriend and his family's role models as college graduates. In Tyra's family, her parents had a middle school education, and her older sister who has graduated from high school has not yet decided to go to college. Tyra believes "you could live and work without college and I still believe that college is not for everyone." However, when she met her boyfriend and his family, her perspectives on going to college changed. In her boyfriend's family all of his aunts and uncles are college educated, and his mom is well educated as well. Compared to her family, in his family it was the norm to have educated parents. She felt that his family is kind, intelligent, and great conversationalists. Tyra attributes these qualities as being a result of being college educated. They have good jobs that they feel good about doing as compared to her family who works 12 hours a day in a back breaking job having little to no time for family. Tyra liked that his family had time, due to their office jobs, to spend time with family consolidating her belief as to "how much college education can really improve the quality of your life."

Conversations with Tyra's boyfriend's family encouraged her to explore college. His family shared that they really enjoyed their college experience a lot, despite those stressful nights trying to cram or get assignments done. They also shared that college not

only helped their knowledge, but it also helped them develop social skills, inspiring a sense of responsibility and independence. According to Tyra, college “definitely puts you in an environment where you are constantly being tested for those things.”

When Tyra was accepted to college, she was shocked! Even though she had good grades, Tyra was insecure and doubted herself and her abilities. Tyra knows however that if she is persistent and is dedicated enough then she can get into college somewhere. “I just felt like shock! I really did it!” Tyra hopes that in college she will meet people who want to learn, that she will change the things that she knows which will change the trajectory of her life by improving herself with education. When thinking of her goals for college, she shared that her goals were more short-term towards success such as doing well on her first college paper, keeping up with her studying and being able to juggle all the things that are expected of her. Her ultimate goal in college is to improve herself.

Joey

Joey is a single, white, women in her freshman year from the western United States who lives on campus. She is enrolled full time and due to COVID-19 takes courses on campus and online. Joey is in the College of Education, majoring in Kinesiology. She funds her postsecondary education through tuition waivers, an athletic scholarship and outside family support. Throughout the interview process, Joey was engaged and interested in making a connection about her experiences. She was friendly and willing to share her experiences openly without reserve.

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Joey began thinking of going to college as a high school freshman because she wanted to be recruited to play college sports. As other students were committing by the end of their freshman year, early in her sophomore year she knew that she needed to begin the recruitment process. Late in her sophomore year, she was recruited to play her sport after coming for a campus visit. As a result of that visit, she liked what she saw, so she applied only at this college committing to be on the team by signing her national letter of intent to play.

As a student athlete she heard that it was going to be overwhelming because you have to learn to balance school, your social life, and your sport. Joey was encouraged to focus on keeping everything on track by staying in control of her life and not letting things get out of hand. Normally you would have your parents to help and guide you along but in college you are expected to be independent of your parents' guidance and help. Joey needed to learn to be responsible to take care of what she needs to do and to not get overwhelmed. The independence part was really driven home for her because it was just "so foreign to me because I was just so used to like having my parents around for everything like my mom was like a stay-at-home mom so like she was always around."

Joey shared that there were several influences that built her understanding of the expectations of college. Coaches provided the student athlete perspective about the work ethic required to be successful in college. High school counselors and teachers provided the general student perspective when Joey was a junior and senior in high school. Her

parents who are both college graduates shared their advice about making sure that as a student Joey stays on top of everything that she is doing, both her studies and her athletics. They reminded her not to get too distracted with things that are not as important as her goals and don't matter as much. Additionally, older friends who had already been in college as well as the older girls on her sports teams who came home for the summer shared what college was like and how their sports seasons went. Rather than being influenced by mass media, it was the people around her that informed Joey's perspectives on college.

While in college, Joey thought that she wanted to explore either a career in physical therapy or strength and conditioning linked to sports with college athletes. She took high school courses in preparation for studying Kinesiology in college. Joey took an Anatomy and Physiology class that she discovered was very interesting helping her to consolidate her decision towards physical therapy or athletic conditioning. Joey also took Calculus BC which she found to be a very difficult class but ultimately, she was glad that she took such a challenging class because she felt that it really prepared her for college-level work. Even though she was used to getting good grades, the Calculus course required her to study and work harder than other courses that she experienced in high school.

Joey did not have any internships or jobs that helped her to prepare for college. She did, however, coach younger kids in her sports club. This experience "definitely

helped me to know that I was ... interested in like staying in the sports field and I definitely wanted to do a major related to that.”

For Joey, receiving her official acceptance letter was “super exciting!” She knew that she was unofficially committed but when she was actually accepted into college and signed her papers to play sports that was when it was like “Wow! This is really official. I’m really, really doing this.” Joey wanted to go to college because she knew that it would give her a way to keep playing her sport and to continue her education. Her parents encouraged going to college when she was younger, especially with wanting to play sports. Joey would have gone to college anyways even if she wasn’t playing her college sport because she knew that going to college was the best path for her to achieve a degree for her future career. Joey knew that she needed to “get more of an education ... so I could eventually like kind of set my own career and I just knew that was like the best option for what I wanted to do.”

Ultimately through her college experience Joey hopes to better herself in general, learn as a person, learn how to balance all the different parts of her life and stay in shape. Joey believes that she is “really preparing to get out like once I’m ready, once I’ve graduated, I’ll ... be ready to do what I want to do in the world.”

Thematic Analysis

This section provides a detailed description of categories and themes and subcategories created from the codes that were assigned to the interview data. The analysis delves deeper into the thoughts and perceptions of the participants in addressing

the research question: What are the motivations for undergraduate women to enroll in a bachelor's degree?

As discussed in chapter two, motivation is the reason why we do what we do. Motivation theory analyzes the why of human behaviour as a means of understanding people's decision-making processes. In the interviews each woman discussed how she in her own way chose her pathway to college. While being influenced by others within their sphere of influence, each woman shared how she developed a college mindset that led her to enroll in college. The women discussed how their own self motivation influenced their decisions to pursue a bachelor's degree considering the extrinsic influences of their career orientation, K-12 schooling, co-curricular and extra-curricular experiences as well as multiple people in their lives who influenced their pursuit of a college education.

By examining the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of each woman's lived experience I developed themes based on what participants experienced, how they experienced it, and how they made sense of their experiences to develop a college mindset to enroll in a bachelor's degree in college.

The following five themes were derived from participants' experiences: Those five themes are:

1. Personal reasons: Each woman leads her own trajectory towards college through the decisions that she makes along the way in her personal and educational journey.

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2. Career aspirations: Each woman discovered during her life journey that pursuing a college degree is essential to achieve her career aspirations.
3. Pre-College Academic pursuits: K – 12 school programs and courses helped the women engage in a college mindset.
4. Personal relationships: Personal connections provide information and inform perspectives about college.
5. Mass Media: Social media, television, and movies play a role in setting expectations of the college-going experience.

The theme describing personal reasons explores how each woman led her own trajectory towards college through the decisions that she made along the way in her personal and educational journey. The women demonstrated agency, the power and ability to have choices and to make their own decisions, as they shared how they navigated the decisions that they made during their educational and life experiences which led them to enroll in college. While each woman had her own experience their personal relationships empowered them to have a say at the crucial juncture of their life about college enrollment. They were encouraged and supported to explore their academic preferences, the location of college, whether they engaged in college sports which all led to their own personal reasons for making the choices and decisions that they had agency to make supported by their personal relationships.

The theme describing career aspirations explores the need that each woman discovered during her life journey which required her to pursue a college degree to

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achieve her career aspirations. Each woman participant learned through either school or family discussions that pursuing a college degree is essential to achieve her career aspirations. As the women explored the various careers or jobs that they wanted to pursue in their futures, they learned that most, if not all of them, would require a college degree. Their career aspirations led them to explore pre-college academic pursuits.

The pre-college academic pursuit theme explores K – 12 school programs and courses that helped the women to engage in and to develop a college mindset. Throughout the women's academic experiences in elementary school, middle years or in high school there were school programs and courses that the women were exposed to and that they with intention engaged in during their K-12 school experience. Some of the women shared how their teachers and their schools' provided experiences, classes and courses that helped to develop their college mindset. In some cases, it was through the offering of specific programs like IB and AP courses in high school and for other women it was College Readiness courses that prompted their orientation towards college enrollment.

The theme that focuses on personal relationships speaks to the array of people who influenced each woman to pursue her college education. The women spoke about their connections with family and significant others, friends and peers, K – 12 school teachers, counsellors, and for the student athletes, their sports coaches. Personal connections provided information and informed perspectives about college based on their educational and life experiences. Personal relationships also supported agency by

empowering the women to have a say at this crucial juncture of their life, college enrollment. The women's personal relationships encouraged them to explore their academic preferences, the location of college, engagement in college sports supporting the choices and decisions creating agency for the women in their lives.

Finally, the mass media theme discusses the impact of social media, television, and movies on the women's college going behaviour. Whether it was social media in the form of Twitter, Snapchat, or Instagram, the women were aware of what their friends and family posted about the college experience. Social media platforms were influential in providing information about the socialization aspects of college and to a lesser degree the expectations of the college experience. Television, and movies, like Sydney White or High School musical, provided examples of gender and college stereotypes. The women participants recognized the college movies as a less than realistic representation of campus life and professional prospects and as such did not place much emphasis on the messages that they conveyed.

Throughout the following discussion, each theme is examined as well as the subcategories that amplify each identified one.

Personal Reasons: Each woman leads her own trajectory towards college through the decisions that she makes along the way in her personal and educational journey.

Each woman described her unique lived experience and personal reasons that led them to become motivated to go to college. While each woman had her own experiences, there were some common themes that emerged throughout the interviews which are

intertwined with other aspects that will be discussed further in the analysis during the exploration of the other research themes that emerged. During the interviews each woman identified a personal, internal motivation or reason to pursue a bachelor's degree whether that be making a difference in the world through career aspirations, meeting family expectations, playing competitive sports or wanting a better life.

Katherine shared that she always had a college mindset from a very young age. "When I was little ... I wanted to be a vet, so I knew that you had to go to college for that. As I grew older things kind of changed but it was, it was always the plan to go to college". Katherine explained, "I always had this expectation for myself. I have always had pretty high goals, high standards and I know that I want to be a doctor." Despite Katherine's change of career trajectory, her self motivation to go to college did not waiver, it was always her plan to go to college. "I NEVER thought of not going to college!"

Jennifer, like Katherine, knew at an early age in elementary school that she intended to go to college after high school. "I've always (known) since I've been in elementary school I had the idea, the intent to go to college after high school". Her early thoughts of going to college were self motivated by her personal desire to become a veterinarian. "When I was little, I wanted to be a veterinarian and I knew that I had to go to school beyond high school to do that". Her early years elementary school career days experiences inspired her to go to college as she began to think of what she wanted to do after high school.

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Olivia's motivation to go to college began to emerge when she was in middle school. This is when her experiences in school opened the possibilities for her to engage in thinking about college after high school. Olivia first started thinking of going to college:

in eighth grade of middle school because we had done the pre-ACT and right round then is when they started like talking about it. That ... is a ... big option for people to go to college and to start thinking about college and ... then they also started making us think about like what we want to ... continue to learn in college. For Olivia the combination of middle year experiences and parental support bolstered her personal motivation to engage in college to achieve her career goals. Irrespective of these influences, she clearly stated, "I always knew that I wanted to go to college regardless of what other people thought and how they tried to influence me".

Joey's motivation to go to college was initially fueled by her desire to play her sport in college. However, she always knew that she would go to college for an education as well. She knew that college was the best way to get to a degree for her career aspirations:

I wanted to go to college was cause it would, it gave me a way to like keep playing soccer and continue my education ... I would have gone to college anyways even if I wasn't playing (sport) ... best path to get ... some sort of degree ... just keep going and get more of an education get everything under me so I

could eventually like kind of set my own career and I just knew that was like the best option for what I wanted to do.

Unlike the other women, Tyra's journey of self motivation took a different pathway to enrolling in college as she describes multiple influences that supported her decision making to enroll in college for a bachelor's degree. Despite being a good student in high school and engaging in academic supports towards a college trajectory, her motivation shifted after taking a family holiday following her final year of high school to think that she did not need to go to college, she could just get a job instead. She discovered that she needed to experience life through a less than satisfying job to realize that she had more to offer and that by going to college it would help her to get a better job, perhaps even a career. Tyra explains:

I realized like after a year and a half of that like when you are at the same, I guess the same dead-end job {*laughter*} It was just kind of like uh! like I have, *uh*, like, it really motivated me to like to go to school.

Additionally, even though Tyra is the younger sister in her family, she views her college going experiences as inspiring for her sister. Tyra sees herself as a role model for her sister to pursue a college degree. Tyra elaborates that:

I have more experience and more knowledge to be able to ... not only inspire her to go ... we've been talking about this for a few months, ... 'Oh, I want to like go to school for something, you know'

In this way, Tyra is also personally motivating herself to go to college to benefit not only herself but her sister as well, particularly as first-generation siblings without parents who went to college before them. Tyra also benefited from the support of her significant other who graduated from college to fuel her personal motivation to enroll in college to explore a career rather than a job.

Each woman in her own way based on her personal reasons intertwined with her lived experiences found her way to pursue a bachelor's degree in college as part of her next step in their life journey. In sharing her own experiences, each woman described her unique lived experience and personal reasons that led her to become motivated to go to college. Whether she had never thought of not going to college or began thinking of what college might look like at an early age or through parental support or middle years schooling or her desire to play her chosen sport or wanting to be a role model for her sister or aspiring to have better career options or through the support of her significant other, each woman found her unique pathway to higher education to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Career Aspirations: Each woman discovered during her life journey that pursuing a college degree is essential to achieve her career aspirations.

During our conversations, the women shared how their professional career aspirations would be achieved with a college degree. They expressed that if they wanted a better paying and personally satisfying job, career, or profession, they would need to go to college to get a degree. Whether they wanted to become a doctor, a veterinarian, a

forensic scientist, a language interpreter, or a physical therapist each of them realized through schooling and their personal interactions that they would need to go to college to acquire the academic credentials to be able to enter their chosen profession or career. Their professional career aspirations led them to know that they needed the academic credentials to achieve their career hopes and dreams.

As Jennifer explored her career options starting as early as elementary school, she began to understand that her career ideas would require a college education.

I just remember some of my teachers explaining like if you wanted to be a veterinarian 'cause that's usually what I wanted to do when I was little then I would have to go to x amount of school which obviously involved college. So, I think like they were just like the first I mean my parents as well but like the first kind of outlet in to like letting me know that I'm going to need to go to college to do what I'm saying I want to do.

When Jennifer first thought about going to college, she stated that she:

decided to go to college because I wanted to ... have a job that would be impactful and I felt like every, each job that I think about a job in that scope required a bachelor's degree or some kind of graduate school degree so I think it was just kind of maybe the type of job, the type of career I wanted to pursue required some type of higher education.

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As her career aspirations changed from being a veterinarian to becoming a doctor or maybe even working in psychology and criminal justice, each career path she explored required her to have a college degree.

When Katherine first thought of going to college, she knew that she would need college to pursue her career choice, “When I was little, I wanted to be a vet, so I knew that you had to go to college for that.” As Katherine continued to explore her interests her career ideas shifted from becoming a veterinarian to becoming a doctor; however, she always planned to go to college. “As I grew older things kind of changed but it was, it was always the plan to go to college.” She knew that college was a requirement to achieve her career goals no matter what she finally chose to do. “I really want to spend my life helping people in as significant ways as possible. So, college is obviously a requirement of that.”

For Olivia her parents and teachers in high school as well as mass media influenced her thinking “that college is just the next step in life ... you know like that’s just what you do.” Central to her thought processes was the notion that college is a social norm for what one does after high school particularly as she began to learn “about jobs and stuff in high school”. This realization affirmed her belief that going to college was a requirement. For Olivia setting the goal of going to college was important for exploring forensic science as a career choice “because obviously, you know, you need the education to get the job that I want.”

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Tyra realized through her work experiences that due to the competitive job market she would need more than her high school diploma to have job security and advancement past an entry level position. She knew that she would need more than a high school education to be able to achieve her career aspirations to be a language interpreter in a medical setting.

This competitive job market obviously like employers will you like even having just a Bachelor's degree is kind of like, oh, so what everyone has a Bachelor's degree. But when you have only a high school degree then it's like even less than that you know like you know I feel like you can even get tossed out as soon as. You can't like make it past that, those entry level jobs.

If Tyra wanted to advance in a job or career past entry level positions, she would need to have a bachelor's degree or even more education.

Zoey was interested in exploring athletic therapy for her career choice knowing that she would need to initially pursue a bachelor's degree to be able to set her own career path for what she wanted to do in the future which was to become a physical therapist. Zoey talked about her aspirations in terms of a career path:

I just like I just knew that was like the best path to get like a physical therapy or like some sort of degree like that to just keep going and get more of an education get everything under me so I could eventually like kind of set my own career and I just knew that was like the best option for what I wanted to do.

Not only did Zoey realize that she needed a bachelor's degree she also knew that she needed a graduate degree to achieve her licensure for her career aspirations:

I want to be a physical therapist and in order to do that like you have to have like, *um*, a college and then you have to have, *um*, like a little bit more of a higher education after that to get like, *um*, to get like your physical therapy license.

Pre-College Academic Pursuits: K – 12 school programs and courses helped the women engage in a college mindset.

In Jennifer's high school she enrolled in International Baccalaureate (IB) courses where she took two Science classes: "One Science was required and then I could choose an elective and for my elective I chose another Science". Taking these classes helped her to determine if she did want to pursue Medicine or "some kind of like STEM related field". When she reflected on her high school course decisions she thought "that was kind of my main thing in high school that has now like helped me make a decision or even like rule out medicine maybe and that's kind of what I used high school for".

Taking college focused classes while in high school was also a positive aspect of Katherine's high school educational experience that led her to college enrollment. She "was able to take a lot of AP classes and earn AP credits while I was in high school. ... I think I got credit for AP Psychology, AP Biology, AP Computer Science, AP Micro-economics, AP Chem(istry), and AP Calc(ulus)". This advanced work meant that she began college with 32 credits in to her first year by earning college credits while she was still in high school. She articulated that she was "really thankful for that and I think

especially in those courses our teachers were ... more hands off in the fact that I'm going to lecture and you're going to have to ... kind of figure it out for yourself". Having this opportunity in high school oriented Katherine to college academic expectations thereby preparing her for a smoother transition into college.

Katherine's high school experience included a class called SAT prep that all juniors had to take. In this class students would take the SAT tests multiple times over the year looking for improvement in the areas where they could do better. She felt that this class provided additional opportunities to focus on the academic aspects required in college.

Joey intentionally took high school classes to prepare for her first year in college because she knew that she wanted to major in Kinesiology, so she tried to take courses in high school like "an Anatomy and Physiology class" which she found "was actually super interesting and helpful for me". Taking these more challenging courses helped her to define what she wanted to pursue in college and helped her to be more ready for the anticipated academic challenges of college.

Similarly, Olivia took a number of college classes to help her to determine her college choices for courses and programs of interest. Olivia's "most influential ones were my Spanish classes and my Biology class and my Forensics Science class that I took". As a result of her high school course experiences, she has now decided to minor or possibly even major in Spanish. By "actually get(ting) some introduction to what I'll be doing ... that definitely like fueled the whole, ya, you're interested in this and it kind of reassured

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me”. Taking the Biology class, which to her was another piece of forensic science, influenced her decision by consolidating her pathway to continue to take these types of courses in college.

Like Olivia’s high school experience, Tyra credits the classes that she took “with college in mind *like* trying to get ahead and get as many, *uh*, classes done as I could”. While she did not take IB or AP classes she did participate in a College Readiness class in high school that helped her to be prepared to pursue a college education particularly as a student whose parents had not previously gone to college.

College Readiness, *uh*, class. It was like a once-a-week class of about 30 minutes that they would, *uh*, have to kind of educate people about the college process like how to apply, how to, *um*, *what do you call it*, *uh*, how to just kind of like prepare yourself to be ready like write resumes I think that one gave me the most insight in to how complicated of a process it is.

Tyra found this class very helpful “for people who grew up with parents who did not know how, anything about how to apply it was very, very helpful” to understand what was required for college entrance. Engaging in a lot of college classes in high school and being involved in activities as she prioritized her schoolwork helped Tyra to be accepted to all of the colleges that she applied to.

Personal Relationships: Personal Connections Provide Information and Inform Perspectives About College.

Personal relationships were the most persuasive aspect that inspired the women in this study to go to college. Unlike the women in the early days of higher education who were not encouraged to pursue higher education the women in my study were influenced, supported and encouraged by many personal relationships to pursue a college degree. The interpersonal connections that each woman had provided support and affirmed that college was the next step in education after high school if they wanted to achieve their career goals. Each woman identified numerous personal connections that they developed over the years that supported their decision making towards enrolling in college. The identified connections were with family and significant others, friends and peers, K-12 school teachers and counsellors, and, for the student athletes, their coaches.

Family Influence

For all of the women, their nuclear family played a significantly influential role in their decision-making to go to college. Whether it was their own immediate family or the family of their significant other, family matters! Family members, as formulated by the women themselves, over time engaged in conversations that were casually, perhaps intentionally, directed at the young women by sharing aspects about family members college experiences and accomplishments. Parents, mothers and fathers, as well as siblings, brothers and sisters, shared their college going memories and experiences. Extended family such as aunts and uncles as well as grandparents provided support for a

college education by sharing their beliefs in a college education and their career trajectories with the women in some cases.

Parents

From an early age, both Katherine and Jennifer's families shared their college experiences with them planting the seeds of college education expectations in their developmental years.

Katherine's family carried a multi-generational tradition of going to college: "Both of my parents went to college and their parents before them, their parents before them. Everyone in my, in my family has gone to college, university". Over the years, Katherine's mom and dad shared stories of their college experiences letting her know what to expect from the college experience. "My mom, my dad, just kind of I don't know not like making it a point to make that conversation but just over the years them telling stories" about their college experiences affirmed for Katherine that she too would go to college. Going to college was always an expectation in her family. She always *knew* that she would go to college.

Both of Jennifer's parents are professionals who went to college as well as graduate school which was influential in Jennifer's decision to go to college from an early age:

I think from a super young age I was always ... just knew that after high school you go to college ... I'm sure my family and how they all went to college before me impacted my perspective on that.

Jennifer's dad shared his experience of being a student athlete in college, which Jennifer believes probably informed her idea of going to college to become a student athlete as well.

Olivia's parents were supportive of her pursuing a bachelor's degree, even though neither one of her parents went to a four-year college or university. Her dad went to a trade school and her mother started a community college program but did not finish. Olivia's "dad knew how important the college degree is now and it seems like ... you know, it's very important for like those better jobs". Her "mom was definitely so excited for me to go to college and go in the dorms and have that experience because, like, she didn't get that". So "I think they tried to ... put that in my head that it was important and also like just important to get that experience like my mom had thought". Both of Olivia's parents emphasized the importance of college, her dad for the career benefits and her mom for the experience of going to college.

Olivia revealed that her family was an influence in developing her understanding of college being a place to have new experiences and meet new friends. Her parents emphasized for her the independence aspect of college as "they moved away from their high school friends and made new friends in college and had ... new experiences". They also told her "about all of the crazy stuff that they did and about all of the new things that they were able to experience because of college", encouraging her to pursue a four-year college degree that they never did.

Similar to Olivia, Joey's parents also shared advice about the need to become independent as part of the college experience. While both of her parents went to college, her dad went to a military college while her mom went to a public land grant research university so their experience with independence was very different. Her dad shared that he had to follow rules in college "him like becoming independent was very different because they were always like being told what to do all the time and he said that he didn't really feel like independent until he left [college]". She describes her mother's experience in greater detail:

[Her] experience was like the freedoms of college and ... learning how to manage time for herself and she ... had a job in college and doing all that it was probably it's more similar to ... what I'm doing right now.

Even though their experiences were very different, they both encouraged Joey to aspire to engage in the college experience.

Unlike the other women, Tyra defined family in a broader sense as she not only included the role that her parents played in her decision making but in discussion, she also included her boyfriend's family as being instrumental in her decision making to enroll in college.

As a first-generation college student whose family lacked the experiences of going to college, her parents expressed to Tyra the value of an education, particularly a college education.

When I was growing up education was always like put on like a high pedestal like it's very important that I do well ... my parents are coming here for a better life.

They want me to like take advantage of the opportunities that I have.

While Tyra's parents, who have a middle school education, were not able to share their own college experiences, they did instill their values and aspirations of Tyra going to college:

I grew up in a family where no one went to college. They only really had, my parents had middle school education at most and then my sister graduated high school, but she still hasn't decided to go to back to college or go to college yet.

Tyra's parents encouraged her to take advantage of the opportunities that she had that they did not when they were growing up in their country to engage in post-secondary education. Not only was Tyra encouraged by her parents she was also encouraged by her significant other, her boyfriend and his family.

Tyra was the only woman interviewed who identified the significance of the relationship with her boyfriend and his family. Unlike *some* women historically who were not encouraged to pursue a college degree, Tyra's relationship with her boyfriend supported and inspired her college going behaviour. Tyra's boyfriend is very well educated, having two degrees himself including two Associates' degrees. When Tyra "met his family where all of his aunts and uncles are college educated and ... it was just the norm ... to have educated parents" she was inspired by how they conducted themselves as educated people. Her boyfriend's family is very educated having at least

one bachelor's degree if not multiple degrees. His uncle is a professor, his aunt works in a bank, his grandma was a nurse, and his grandpa was a farmer who ran his own business. His mother has an accounting degree and has recently returned to study ASL while his older sister has her bachelor's degree and is going back to graduate school. From Tyra's perspective education was everywhere in his family. Tyra believes that going to college "helped them as a person and helped them get better opportunities. ... I think having an education especially university or college it makes you more open and, *uh*, kind of develops your character". In her aspiration to be in an equal partnership with her boyfriend she wants to go to college to be able to be an equally educated partner in the relationship.

Siblings

Not only did parents provide valuable information to the women that impacted their decision to pursue bachelor's degrees, but siblings also influenced the women's perspectives by offering information about their own college experiences. For Jennifer, her brother, who was also a college athlete, played a role in influencing her orientation towards college going, particularly as a student athlete. Jennifer explained that, "I would just ask my brother stuff ... and he would help me understand that it is difficult sometimes but it's definitely doable and worth it to play a sport." This affirmation from her brother provided support to Jennifer in her pursuit of a bachelor's degree as a college athlete.

Katherine's sister, who is three years older than her, went to a big public university very close to home, "so I've heard a lot about her experiences. ... my sister shared some of her not her proudest experiences in college. ... I know what to expect because of her." Having her sister share both what worked well and what did not work so well was articulated by Katherine as being supportive to her as she pursues her own college degree.

Friends and Peers

Friends and peers were the second most influential source of inspiration to attend college for the women. Friends who were exploring the same college supported women, like Olivia, to go to college. While both Olivia and her best friend were pursuing a college degree, the location of the degree pursuit was influenced by the fact that as best friends, they could have a shared college experience. "I went to school, my best friend is with me at (*college*) so... maybe she influenced that because you know we were together." For Olivia, having her best friend at college with her was viewed as a bonus to her academic and career pursuits. Olivia's academic program required that she attend this mid-western college so having her best friend there to share the college experience is an added benefit even though her friend had other college choices.

Joey, who both played sports both before and in college, found that her athletic peers were supportive of her pursuit of a bachelor's degree, particularly as a student athlete. Conversations centered around how to balance the sport with their scholarly activities. During the summers, returning athletes would share what their experiences

have been during their college year. For Joey these conversations helped to build her knowledge of what to expect from the college experience. She shared that:

older friends that like came back home that had already been in college and ... then I've played like soccer on, *um*, teams with like older girls and they like come back for the summer and then they like kind of like tell us what it was like and how their seasons were.

Joey found these conversations to be supportive of her aspirations for going to college.

However, Katherine, also a student athlete, found that "by the time my friends were in college I already had, like, I already knew what it was going to be like" so she did not find that friends influenced her decision to go to college. Rather Katherine found that her K-12 teachers were more influential in her decision-making path towards college.

K-12 School Teachers and School Counsellors

The women shared ways that teachers provided multiple opportunities to encourage college going behaviour through in class or school presentations, targeted coursework or other sources of information throughout their K-12 schooling. Whether they were teachers in elementary, middle years or high school or high school counsellors, teachers played a role in influencing the women to explore college as an option in their futures.

For Jennifer it was her elementary school experience that left an impression on her. She shared that in first or second grade she participated in a career fair day where they thought about what they wanted to do in the future:

I just remember some of my teachers explaining like if you wanted to be a veterinarian 'cause that's usually what I wanted to do when I was little then I would have to go to x amount of school which obviously involved college.

Middle years, particularly grade eight, was when Olivia recalls that her middle years school began to engage students in thinking about going to college. It was a "big option for people to go to college and to start thinking about college and, *uh*, and then they also started making us think about like what we want to ... continue to learn in college." After students took the pre-ACT test, they had a reflection afterwards with their teachers. In her situation, it was her history teacher who was assigned to have the post-test reflections with the students.

Katherine credits her high school teachers, particularly when she took AP courses in helping her to get ready for the expectations of college academics:

I'm really thankful for that and I think especially in those courses our teachers were, you know, more hands off in the fact that I'm going to lecture and you're going to have to, you know, kind of figure it out for yourself.

For Olivia, her high school teachers additionally prepared her for the independence aspect of college as well as what to expect. Her "teachers in high school had kind of always put out in the air that college is just the next step in life". Through her teachers she began to learn about jobs "and like what's required of them and kind of exploring that it was, it was kind of a, oh, a lot of these require college. Oh! Let's go to college".

Likewise, Joey began to think about going to college in the beginning of high school because she had decided that she wanted to play her sport in college. She revealed that the general student perspective of going to college was shared by their counsellors and teachers alike especially when she was a junior and senior in high school. She began to notice that “everyone who was like going to go to college was more focussed on it”.

As part of the high school experience, high school counsellors have a unique opportunity to influence and support high school student's engagement in post-secondary studies, particularly for college going. Jennifer shared that in her high school,

Our guidance counsellors would help us maybe like determine majors or even like when I was a Senior we would have days where or like mandatory meetings with your guidance counsellor where they would just help you maybe understanding what you are looking for in college or what degree path would help you.

Coaches

Three of the interviewed women, Katherine, Jennifer and Joey are student athletes who had been recruited to come to college because of being accepted on the college sports team. All three of them received athletic scholarships and had been recruited by coaches from the college to play on their respective teams. Each of them had a different recruitment experience yet all of them identified that the connection with the coach did matter in their choice of college and acceptance of their recruitment offer. In some cases, they knew early in their high school years that they were going on to college due to being recruited for their sport as student athletes.

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It was always Joey's dream to play her sport in college:

I wanted to go to college ... cause it would, it gave me a way to like keep playing (sport) and continue my education ... playing for ... a state university I get to do both of those things, so that was super exciting. ... I would have gone to college anyways even if I wasn't playing (sport)."

In her recruitment process, coaches shared that Joey needed to "be responsible and like make sure that I'm taking care of like what I need to do so I don't get overwhelmed." The coaches reinforced that you need to make "time for (sport) and ... when you are at (sport) like you are like doing that well but then like also when it's like time to not do (sport) you need to manage your time there" as well. While the coaches were focussed on the athletic side of things, they also shared that:

College is a step up both in (sport) and then like and in like, life obviously ... It's a step like forward and like they wanted to make sure like that we really understood that like, *um*, like college (sport) is harder than the (sport) than we've been doing and like doing all your homework and stuff and keeping that on track is going to be harder than what we have been doing. ... (You) couldn't like just keep the same habits you had to improve yourself and learn and get like better habits and just be like get better at what you are doing for college.

In this way, through the recruitment process, Joey knew what she could anticipate in college as a student athlete.

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Katherine, on the other hand, knew when she was a Junior in high school a full two years ahead of her college entry date that she was going to college because of being recruited to play her sport. She had been:

playing club (sport) since I was like eight, ... and once you get to about the 14 or 15 age, *um*, they kind of decide it's, it's time to start talking to coaches so I was talking to coaches, going on a bunch of, *uh*, visits, and you know, you have the phone calls and, *um*, it was actually it was the previous coach that recruited me to come here so then, *um*, about two years ago I, I said okay you know I'm done with my recruitment I want to come here.

Her dad, having been a student athlete when he went to college, was very involved in her recruitment process and was pushing the recruitment process a lot so it was nice to have that stress over with once she had decided where she would go to college and play her sport. "Once I decided, like this is it, I was very happy to have just that part of my life over. No more like going on visits, missing school, talking to coaches all the time." For Katherine making her choice was dependent on the college coach because the "coach is obviously a very big factor" in deciding which college to go to.

Unlike the other women, Jennifer's recruitment process was "unorthodox in that way where I was a pretty late commitment" in that she didn't commit until February of her Senior year of high school. For Jennifer,

[I] had committed to a school ... but they had like a coaching, their staff changed so the head coach that I had committed to had left and when the new coach came

in, he was just looking for a different position, so I had to restart my recruitment process.

When Jennifer arrived at this college, she “really, really liked it and, *um*, the coaches I really liked the coaches so I felt like at that point it would be a good time to make my decision.” For Jennifer the relationship with the coach was a key element to deciding which college she would go to rather than whether she would go to college. During her recruitment period, she found that “recruiting coaches always give you the warning of how busy you are going to be and make sure this is actually something you actually want to do.” This busyness was also affirmed by her brother who was also a college student athlete who helped her to “understand that it is difficult sometimes but it’s definitely doable and worth it to play a sport.”

Mass Media: Social Media, Television and Movies: Social media, television, and movies play a role in setting expectations of the college-going experience.

Given the perceived propensity for social media with young adults, it was interesting to discover the limited influence that social media had on the women’s impressions of college. Each of the women talked about their experiences with social media platforms as informing them about the socialization aspects of going to college to help set or manage expectations of college, whether that was fitting in or knowing what to do and how to do it. While some of the mass media representations were viewed as true the women discussed that, based on their experiences, they were actually a misrepresentation of what happens in college.

Online social media posts were mostly about the experiences that friends, or family were having while in college. Katherine shared that social media platforms “like Instagram, Twitter, ... even Snapchat (was) just talking to my friends who are older than me and who have been in college” definitely informed her thoughts about what college was going to be like. While Tyra found that Instagram posts were memes, edgy jokes, and pictures about the pressures of the college experience with comments shared “like “Oh my God, I have all this stuff due. Time to end my life, right away” “I need to be somewhere else.” or “I’m going to jump out”.” Tyra wondered if this really was the college experience however she has learned from her early college days that:

as long as you stay on top of things and like reach out for help when you need it.
... I know that it can be stressful, probably later in my years I gonna probably be in the same boat.

As well as the stressful perspective she also found social media posts that were helpful in providing tips for success in college:

I also saw like a lot of people with like tips like how to manage your time ... people who wanted to help, people who just know what you are going through, they just wanted to help, like give you study tips ... just reassure and style it’s going to be okay, it’s hard work but you can do it. It is possible.

Jennifer talked about *Legally Blonde* being one of her favorite movies when she was younger. In that movie she felt that “they certainly portray a bunch of different like stereotypical groups within college” Jennifer had also watched the movie *Sydney White*

which is “like a live action Snow White sort of and as you know as well it’s like a different bunch of groups of people and that you are pretty much only friends with your group”. Based on these movie experiences:

I assumed there were particular groups, and you were like kind of categorized based on maybe what your major was or what you or what clubs you are in or what hobbies you had. So, I definitely thought college was more like categorical because of the category of movies I would say.

However, when Jennifer came to the college campus to “see a little more for myself or just get a more realistic, *um*, view of college” she found that her experience was nothing like the movie portrayal. On a more practical note, Jennifer spoke about using U-tube videos to help her come up with ideas about how to decorate her college dorm room.

I definitely remember ... when I was trying to figure out how I wanted to decorate my dorm or even some essentials I would need for my dorm I definitely looked to U-tube videos ... just to try to figure out what kind of stuff I would need for my dorm.

Olivia’s engagement with social media and movies provided “the perspective about how college is a big party, but there’s also that independence piece that I was paying attention to along with new people and experiences”. One movie recollection that Olivia had was *High School Musical*, where the setting is college and “they moved away from their high school friends and made new friends in college and had like new

experiences”. The movie emphasized that “kind of that whole meet new people and have fun perspective which she felt was “true for sure”. For Olivia, engaging with social media and movies “really solidified the excitement I had to go to college and experience all of the new things”.

While social media, television or movies provided socialization perspectives for what the college experience would be like as well as ideas for college dorm decorating, none of the women identified social media, movies, or television as being significant motivators for them to enroll in college.

Summary

This chapter detailed the stories of five research participants, addressing the research question: What are the motivations for undergraduate women to enroll in a bachelor’s degree? Initially, by providing an understanding of who they are as freshman women enrolled in their first year of college, the study provided an opportunity to explore what motivated the women to pursue a college degree. A description of the five themes that emerged from the data provided further insight into participant experiences that influenced their enrollment at college. The themes and subcategories highlighted the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that influenced their decision making to pursue a college degree. The themes are personal reasons, career aspirations, pre-college academic pursuits which includes high school programs and courses, personal relationships which includes family and significant others, friends and peers, K-12 school teachers and counsellors, and for the student athletes their coaches and mass media which includes

social media, movies or television. The individual participant stories, as well as the collective themes and subcategories highlight the influences and motivations of the women in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree in college.

Chapter 5 examines the women's motivations for enrolling in a bachelor's degree through the lens of the five themes: personal reasons, career aspirations, pre-college academic pursuits, personal relationships, and mass media by connecting the participants' stories to the historical perspectives about women's college-going experiences. From the themes, implications of the findings will be drawn to make recommendations for K-12 and post-secondary practitioners. Suggestions for further research will be articulated with a view to uncovering ways to encourage additional student groups to pursue a bachelor's degree in higher education.

CHAPTER 5

MOTIVATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research study was to understand the motivations of women who enroll in a bachelor's degree after high school and the factors that influence their decision. Using qualitative research influenced by ethnographic approaches I sought to gain a deeper understanding of each woman's motivations for enrolling in college to seek a bachelor's degree. Using an ethnographic approach helped me to understand and explain contemporary society and ground a set of assumptions (Crotty, 2015) about the lived experiences of the undergraduate women participants in my study. I identified significant statements from their personal stories that I coded and subsequently categorized. I then used those categories to arrive at five themes related to women's motivations for enrolling in college to pursue a bachelor's degree.

In this chapter, I explore each theme in depth, connecting my participants' stories to historical perspectives about women's college-going experiences. I also engage relevant literature to arrive at a comprehensive picture of each theme as a motivation for women to attend college in today's contemporary context. Following a discussion of each theme as a college-going motivation, I provide a narrative concerning implications of my findings and recommendations to support educational leaders and administrators. With this knowledge, educational structures, academic and student service programs, policies and practices can be designed to facilitate and support student discovery built on the aspects that particularly motivate female students to pursue the full higher education

experience. Finally, I conclude by highlighting areas for future research that were illuminated by the findings from my study.

Discussion of Themes: Women's Motivations for Attending College

In this section, I discuss the five themes related to personal reasons, career aspirations, pre-college academic pursuits, personal relationships, and mass media as women's motivations for attending college that emerged from my research study. By weaving the highlights of my participant experiences with historical perspectives and relevant literature I provide a discussion of each of the themes.

Theme 1: Personal Reasons: Each woman leads her own trajectory towards college through the decisions that she makes along the way in her personal and educational journey.

Each woman in my research study described her unique lived experience and personal reasons which led her to become motivated to go to college. During the interviews each participant identified a personal, internal motivation or reason to pursue a bachelor's degree whether that be making a difference in the world through career aspirations, meeting family expectations, playing competitive sports or wanting a better life. Higher education plays a role in female students' lifelong personal and professional journeys and going to college is an important first step as they explore their pathways to personal and professional success. By embracing her own trajectory towards college through the decisions that she makes along the way in her personal and educational

journey each woman's personal reasons for going to college guided her motivation to enroll in college to attain a bachelor's degree.

Some of the women described having a college mindset from a very young age emerging in elementary or middle school and had never actually thought of not going to college. They set high goals and expectations for themselves which reinforced their personal motivation to go to college. Pink (2009) affirms what I found in my study that the autonomy to direct one's own lives coupled with the mastery to get better at something such as college level academic work is motivating. The women were inspired by their K-12 schooling and career days programming as well as their own career choice. Programming such as pre-ACT courses, International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses motivated the women to explore college level academic coursework affirming their own personal motivation to pursue a degree in college to fulfill their career goals. Boatwright, Ching, and Parr (1992) in their study discovered that one of the most influential motivators was career opportunity when deciding to attend college which was also expressed as a personal reason for the women to pursue a college degree in my study as well.

Engagement in sports also fueled the personal desire to be a student athlete by playing their preferred sport at the college level combined with the attainment of a college degree. Being recruited at an early age was motivating for the women to pursue both their sports passion while at the same time achieving their college degree. Green and Hill (2003) explored in their research questionnaire about the benefit of playing a sport in

college. Even though in neither their study nor mine was playing a sport a key motivator, the aspect of financial support through scholarship did come through as an aspect that encouraged participation in college sports.

For one woman having a job working in the family restaurant after high school motivated her decision to enroll in college for a bachelor's degree. She was personally motivated to go to college to benefit not only herself but her sister as well, particularly as first-generation siblings whose parents had not experienced college. She also benefited from the support of her significant other who graduated from college which fueled her personal motivation to enroll in college to explore a career rather than a job. Croake, Keller, and Caitlin (1973) also found that women attend college to gain more career opportunities motivated by wanting to strive for intellectual success and for equality in the work force. The women who expressed these ideas also spoke about her desire for equality in her life and particularly in her relationship with her significant other.

Each woman in her own way based on her personal reasons intertwined with her lived experiences found her way to pursue a bachelor's degree in college as part of her next step in their life journey. In sharing her own experiences, each woman described her unique lived experience and personal reasons that led her to become motivated to go to college. Whether she had never thought of not going to college or began thinking of what college might look like at an early age or through parental support or middle years schooling or her desire to play her chosen sport or wanting to be a role model for her sister or aspiring to have better career options or through the support of her significant

other, each woman found her unique pathway to higher education to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Historical Intersections with Contemporary Perspectives

From the early days of higher education, women's motivation for attending college has varied depending on the societal influences of the time. For example, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the select few women who pursued higher education did so more for the opportunity to engage in finishing school rather than for the pursuit of academic knowledge (Thelin, 2011). Unlike this period of history, the women in my study, emphasized their personal reasons for enrolling in college as being the pursuit of academic knowledge towards their career aspirations which were not a motivator for women in the early days of higher education.

Over the course of the 19th century, women engaged in college level work with an emerging commitment to co-education, pedagogy, curriculum and living arrangements for women to pursue advanced studies. Elite families in the Southern United States began to invest in creating institutions that provided advanced academic work while providing preparation for traditional women's roles (Thelin, 2011). Social stratification and family wealth were indicators of access to higher education during this period of history. As demonstrated in my study access to higher education has shifted from elite families. Rather than relying on social stratification and wealth, as seen in the 19th century, the women are funding their college education through college sports team scholarships, tuition waivers, student loans, grants and through outside support such as family which

provide more open access to a broader representation of people in society rather than a select few.

By the end of the 19th century, women entered the job market with an emphasis on teaching, nursing, and secretarial skills; college provided an acceptable alternative to marriage (Horowitz, 1987). The rise of women's colleges offered good facilities, a clientele of young women from prosperous families who were social and academic pioneers with a strong commitment to education (Thelin, 2011). None of the women in my study indicated career aspirations of teaching, nursing or secretarial skills which were prominent at this time period. Additionally, while two of the women indicated that they were in a relationship none of them spoke about attending college instead of getting married nor did they share aspirations of marriage in lieu of college academic pursuits.

In the 20th century due to world wars and the civil rights movement women's enrollment increased in colleges as women sought to pursue academic credentials. Finishing aspects of women's education remained prominent in state universities. Women experienced challenges due to financial strain, learning techniques and participatory class discussions that did not favour women's engagement as well as disillusionment with the college experience (Jameson, 1939). College going experiences were linked to social stratification and the aspiration of marrying well as women were being judged on the societal expectations of worth (Holland & Eisenhart, 1992).

With more women working outside of the home in the 1970s, academic credentialing for professional pursuits towards career attainment became the prominent

rationale for going to college (Green & Hill, 2003). In a 2003 study, women reported career opportunities, increasing knowledge, making more money, succeeding like or unlike their parents, and to have a more balanced life as the reasons for why they attended college (Schab, 1974). Women were now more focused on academic credentials in expanded academic disciplines for career pursuits in biological science, geology, mathematics, chemistry, and veterinary schools (Thelin, 2011).

The experiences of the women in my study were unlike the early days of higher education when women pursued a college degree for socialization reasons. The women in my study had agency to make their own decisions while being influenced by their personal relationships they were clearly making their own way towards enrolling in college. They were motivated to pursue college for their own personal reasons whether that was for academic credentialing leading to their career aspirations, to be a student athlete continuing to pursue their chosen sport or to make a difference in the world. The women clearly articulated that they were pursuing a bachelor's degree for their own reasons and not for someone else.

Theme 2: Career Aspirations: Each woman discovered during her life journey that pursuing a college degree is essential to achieve her career aspirations.

Like the women in recent history, the women participants in my research study were focused on academic credentialing that led to career aspirations requiring them to go to college.

UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN'S MOTIVATIONS

During our conversations, the women shared how their professional career aspirations would be achieved with a college degree. They expressed that if they wanted a better paying and personally satisfying job, career, or profession, they would need to go to college to get a degree. Whether they wanted to become a doctor, a veterinarian, a forensic scientist, a language interpreter, or a physical therapist each of them realized through schooling and their personal interactions that they would need to go to college to acquire the academic credentials to be able to enter their chosen profession or career. The types of career aspirations that the women shared differentiated them from the early women pioneers of higher education. These women articulated many career choices and, in some cases, had not yet settled on where they might end up career wise. Some were very much in career exploration mode demonstrating that they had choice to make the decisions that they needed to make for themselves not being bound by societal or family pressures to explore a particular academic or career pathway.

Wanting to have a job that would make a difference choosing a career that would make an impact on society by helping people in significant ways was articulated as a career aspiration by my study participants. K-12 practitioners through career exploration initiatives helped the young women explore options letting them know what academic pathways would lead them to their career choices. Higher education can facilitate student's need to fulfill their professional career aspirations by letting them know early either before entry into college or in the first year what academic credentials they need to achieve their career hopes and dreams. Baxter-Magolda (1999) noted that, "Higher

education has a responsibility to help young adults make the transition from being shaped by society to shaping society in their role as leaders in society's future" (p. 630).

The women explored career options starting as early as elementary school learning about career ideas of becoming a veterinarian, a doctor or working in psychology and criminal justice which would all require a college education. The influence of K-12 teachers was expressed by the women as being an influence in their decision making. Elementary and middle years teachers offered career exploration opportunities in class and through dedicated exploration days, discussions about careers and even in some cases by sharing their own college experiences. Parents as well shared their experiences about their professions through "Take Your Kid to Work" day to explore the careers of their parents as influencers in their child's academic future. Kazi and Akhalaq (2017) discovered in their research study that "fathers who had a professional degree exerted more influence. Similarly, mothers' influence was significant in (that they) ... exert a lot of inspiration and motivation in their children's lives" (p. 194). The mothers of the women in my study aspired for their daughters to engage in college with experiences that they may or may not have had. The range of experiences from Katherine's multi-generational college and university family experiences to being a first-generation student like Olivia and Tyra, all of the parents were instrumental in motivating the women to pursue a college degree. Ultimately, career decision making "requires a balance between the freedom given to the pupil to make an independent decision, and counselling on behalf of the parents and teachers, to share their insight and

experience” (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). In this way, the women in my study were encouraged to have agency to make their own decisions informed and motivated by the personal relationships in their personal and schooling experiences in K-12.

Through her work experiences and due to the competitive job market one woman knew that she would need more than her high school diploma to have job security and advancement past an entry level position. Job security was viewed as an important element in her career selection. McLelland (1985) in his motivational behaviour theory articulated that both incentive value and advancement affirm her reasons for aspiring to job security and advancement as motivating factors.

Each woman discovered during her life journey that pursuing a college degree is essential to achieve her career aspirations.

Theme 3: Pre-College Academic Pursuits: K – 12 school programs and courses helped the women engage in a college mindset.

K – 12 school programs that included co-curricular and career education programs and academic courses such as International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), and College Readiness courses helped the women engage in a college mindset. These high school courses and programs assisted the women to decide one way or the other as to what academic program they wanted to pursue in college. Schuh, Jones and Torres (2017) affirm the value of Baccalaureate programs offering college-like experiences at the high school level as being beneficial to college readiness. A high school curriculum of high academic quality, as measured by the number of Advanced

Placement courses completed and the highest level of math achieved had a greater impact on bachelor's degree completion than any other pre-college indicator of academic preparation, including the student's high school test scores or grade point average (Adelman, 1999). Therefore, as affirmed by the women in my study, the influences of pre-college academic pursuits affirmed their enrollment in college to pursue their academic degree.

Having the opportunity in high school to have teachers who oriented the women to college academic expectations of the college lecture style with less direct support from the teachers prepared them for the college academic experience. Some of the women intentionally took academically challenging high school classes to prepare for college entrance which helped them to be more ready for the anticipated academic challenges of college. As a result of their high school course experiences, the women consolidated their academic pathway to continue to take these types of courses in college. Similar to my study, Roderick, Coca and Nagaoka (2011) discovered that associations between college-going climate in high school supported being accepted into a four-year college and enrolling. They learned that "where teachers report having high expectations and strong supports for college attendance ... (students) are more likely to plan to attend, apply to, be accepted into, and enroll in a four-year college" (p. 178).

The women who were involved in college sports affirmed that early exposure and experiences with co-curricular and club sports supported post-secondary engagement. This was particularly true for the women who pursued sports that led from club

participation to high school sports teams and then to college sports opportunities combined with colleges offering scholarships as a recruitment incentive to become a member of the college team. As Hextrum (2021) affirms “developing the athletic talent requires individual, familial and community investments” (preface). This engagement by the community of support provided the women in my study the opportunity to pursue not only their academic aspirations but also their dreams of being student athletes in college.

Exposure to jobs that were linked to career interests and aspirations solidified, or in some cases averted, the pursuit of a particular career aspiration. Summer jobs, internships and volunteer experiences helped to solidify both academic pursuits and career aspirations.

Theme 4: Personal Relationships: Personal connections provide information and inform perspectives about college.

Each woman's own personal motivation for pursuing the goal of achieving a bachelors degree was linked to not only K-12 schooling but also their parents' aspirations for their futures. For all of the women, their nuclear family played a significantly influential role in their decision to go to college, whether it was their own immediate family or the family of their significant other, family matters! Family members over time engaged in conversations that were casually, perhaps intentionally, directed at the young women by sharing aspects about family members college experiences and accomplishments.

UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN'S MOTIVATIONS

Parents, mothers and fathers, as well as siblings, brothers and sisters, shared their college going memories and experiences. Parents play a key role in influencing educational choices beyond high school either as alumni of post-secondary institutions or by affirming that education is important. The values espoused by parents are a crucial influence in decision making regarding career aspirations as parental values are transmitted to their children. (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). Early exposure to affirming beliefs of the value of education makes a difference in the pursuit of a post-secondary degree. Some of the women talked about these values being instilled at a very young age helping them to know that college was going to be part of their educational life journey.

The emphasis of how much education matters was particularly evident with the first-generation college student whose parents did not have an education past grade eight yet affirmed the value of education for their daughter encouraging her to pursue a college degree. Similarly, as Tomas A. Arciniega, president of California State University at Bakersfield affirms “It is absolutely the case that they [Hispanic students] have parental support, but they don’t have anybody in the family who really knows the ropes,” (Schmidt, 2003).

Additionally, her significant other’s family had a notably positive impact on her engagement in pursuing a bachelor’s degree affirming her decisions as the best way to meet her own personal goals for success. Her significant other’s family was highly engaged in higher education with many family members having undergraduate and graduate degrees. In this way, his family was able to be supportive of her engagement in

higher education to fill in the college knowledge gaps to help her to make connections between career goals and educational requirements (Vargas, 2004).

Friends and peers were the second most influential source of inspiration to attend college for the women. Friends who were exploring the same college supported each other to go to college. Having a best friend to share the college experience was viewed as a bonus for academic and career pursuits. Kazi and Akhlaq (2017) found that particularly female students, as in my study, reported feeling more comfortable and confident making college choices when they were with their school or college friends.

Athletic peers from club sports and high school teams were viewed as being supportive of the pursuit of a bachelor's degree, particularly as a student athlete. Conversations amongst student athletes tended to center around how to balance playing sports at the college level with their scholarly activities. During the summers, returning athletes would share what their experiences were during their college year. The conversations with athletic peers helped to build the women's knowledge of what to expect from the college experience especially as student athletes.

K-12 school teachers and school counsellors provided multiple opportunities to encourage college going behaviour through in class or school presentations, targeted coursework or other sources of information throughout their K-12 schooling. Whether they were teachers in elementary, middle years or high school or high school counsellors, teachers played a role in influencing the women to explore college as an option in their futures. Elementary and middle school teachers organized career exploration

opportunities that supported the discovery of careers that might be of interest to them. High school teachers, especially for the women who took IB or AP courses, helped them to get ready for the expectations of college academics and for the independence aspect of college learning what to expect from their professors and the college academic experience.

As part of the high school experience, high school counsellors have a unique opportunity to influence and support high school student's engagement in post-secondary studies, particularly for college going. Guidance counsellors help students determine majors by engaging in mandatory meetings, in some of the women's experiences, with the guidance counsellor where they would help to build understanding of what the women are looking for in college or what degree path would help them to pursue their career aspirations. As the primary facilitators of college transition, school counselors are uniquely situated to guide students through an increasingly complex college application process in their role as educator, academic advisor, and intermediary between secondary and postsecondary institutions. (Belasco, 2012; Bryan et al. 2011).

Three of the women I interviewed were student athletes who had been recruited to come to college because of being drafted for a college sports team receiving either full or partial athletic scholarships to play on their respective teams. In some cases, the women knew early in their high school years that they were going to college having been recruited as student athletes. Even though they each had a different recruitment experience all of the women identified that the connection with the coach mattered in

their choice of college and to the acceptance of their recruitment offer. Coaches encouraged the women to balance college sport expectations and academic requirements by developing time management skills that focussed on setting priorities.

Personal connections whether parents, siblings, friends, peers, teachers, or coaches provided information and informed perspectives about college aspirations and experiences.

Theme 5: Mass Media: Social media, television, and movies play a role in setting expectations of the college-going experience.

Social media, television, and movies played a lesser role in setting expectations of the college-going experience for the women. Kazi and Akhlaw (2017) found as I did in my study that print or electronic media was not reported by the student participants as influencing their decision making. This is particularly poignant because contemporary college students are known to be engaged in the use of technology, particularly social media yet in my study the women did not rely on technology to inform their beliefs about going to college or their career choices.

Each of the women talked about their experiences with social media platforms as informing them about the socialization aspects of going to college to help set or manage expectations of college, whether that was fitting in or knowing what to do and how to do it. While some of the mass media representations were viewed as true the women discussed that, based on their experiences, they were a misrepresentation of what actually happens in college.

Online social media posts on Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat were mostly about the experiences that friends, or family were having while in college. In one shared example, the Instagram posts were memes, edgy jokes, and pictures about the pressures of the college experience which misinformed the student as to what the college experience is all about. Another woman found that social media posts were helpful in providing tips for success in college by managing your time, offering study tips, making new friends, and having new experiences. These social media posts were reassuring that the experience would be good acknowledging that it can be hard, but it is possible to achieve success.

Another student found that social media provided perspectives that college is a big party really emphasizing the social aspects of college. This is something that her parents had warned her about in their conversations, and to particularly be wary of fraternity parties.

Another student found U-tube videos to be helpful with ideas about how to decorate her college dorm room to basically figure out what she would need for college essentials.

Other women talked about movies like *Legally Blonde* and *Sydney White* that they had seen which portrayed a bunch of groups in college in a stereotypical way. In the movie *Legally Blonde* the students tended to only stay within their own peer group based on the characterization of their majors or clubs or hobbies that they were interested in while being closed to others joining in. Similarly, the movie *Sydney White* represented

groups of people who were only friends with their group. One student found that her experience was nothing like the movie portrayal. The college movie *High School Musical* emphasized for one of the women that college is the setting where one can meet new people, have fun and make new friends which was very much her experience. Watching this movie amplified her excitement to go to college to engage in the experiences as they were represented. She really felt that the movie portrayed her experiences.

Fictional films not only misrepresent college socialization, but they also misrepresent personal reasons and college academic pursuits for pursuing a college degree as evidenced by the historical fictional film *Mona Lisa Smile*. Women in the early years of higher education were afforded status by who they married, and this was a particularly important rite of passage particularly for the women of female colleges in “fulfilling the roles that they were born to fill” (*Mona Lisa Smile*, 2003) according to the societal expectations of the day. “The mixed 1950s messages captured in the 2003 movie “*Mona Lisa Smile*,” women’s curriculum was often more geared to helping women accommodate to their family roles than preparing them for further education or careers” (Eisenmann, 2005, p. 6). Academic classes taught the classics such as art history however the classes that really mattered for the promised status coupling were those that taught finishing school qualities such as poise, elocution and speech as well as how best to support your husband and set a proper table (*Mona Lisa Smile*, 2003).

While social media, television or movies provided socialization perspectives for what the college experience would be like as well as ideas for college dorm decorating,

none of the women identified social media, movies, or television as being significant motivators for them to enroll in college. Kazi and Akhlaq (2017) investigated the influence of media on the career and academic decisions of 432 students from two public sector universities. Their findings, like those of my study, reported no influence of print or electronic media in the student's decision-making processes. Their study noted that one student was inspired by the way journalists were portrayed in movies impacting her decision to enter journalism as a field of study. Mass media did however solidify the excitement of the women in my study to go to college to engage in experiences.

A Consideration of Intersectionality in Motivation

Motivation provides the reasons for why we do what we do. Decisions are usually made based on several factors based on our lived experience. While motivation drivers of autonomy, mastery and purpose can be motivating on their own, it is really the intersectionality of them that provides powerful motivation. (Pink, 2009) Models of motivation emphasize different aspects, some of which are unidimensional, some of which are multi-faceted and inter-related as was demonstrated by the findings of this study.

By sharing their life and educational experiences, each woman in my study offered her own personal and educational motivations for pursuing a degree in higher education by enrolling in a bachelor's degree. Whether they were motivated by personal reasons based on their life experiences and the people in their lives, by career aspirations that required a bachelors degree to get the job or career that they desired, by academic

pursuits giving them the credentials which would help them to achieve the career or job that they aspired to or whether it was personal relationships like family, parents, siblings, significant others – the family that they chose for themselves, friends and peers, K-12 teachers and guidance counsellors and coaches, particularly for student athletes each woman discovered her own pathway to enroll in higher education to seek a bachelor's degree. To a lesser degree, social media, television, and movies influenced their decision making. While each of the women articulated these themes in their own way, their intrinsic motivation was inextricably connected to the extrinsic motivations of others to see them succeed in their futures.

As Pink (2009) articulates it is the intersectionality of the three drivers of autonomy, mastery and purpose that provides the power to motivate people to make decisions. In the case of the women in my study, the autonomy that the women were given to create their own agency for decision making about their college decisions by their personal relationships motivated them to pursue enrollment in college. Each woman demonstrated mastery with their success in their pre-college academic pursuits that led them to meet the requirements to enroll in college. Finally, each woman articulated a strong purpose in her personal reasons and career aspirations as motivational reasons for pursuing a bachelor's degree. With these three drivers coming together the women in my study surpassed the expectations of previous women in history who sought college degrees.

Implications for K – 12 Practitioners and Decision Makers

A goal of this research study was to understand the motivations of women to pursue a bachelors' degree after high school and the factors that influenced their motivation. The findings from my study suggest that there are intrinsic and extrinsic factors that supported and influenced the women's decision to go to college. I believe that there are ways that the K-12 school system can encourage and support college going behavior. Thus, I suggest the following for K-12 practitioners and decision makers.

Early exposure to careers and career choices

Early exposure to careers and career choices in elementary school encourage children to engage in post-secondary learning experiences to envision their future careers with the support of a college education. Whether that is in early years bringing in individuals with various careers to show the children in developmentally appropriate ways what career choices are possible to having discussions about educational and career choices emphasizing what schooling is required to achieve these dreams. The impact of elementary and middle school exposure to potential career possibilities was highlighted by the women in my study as being supportive to their career aspirations.

Development of academic and life skills

The development of academic and life skills early in a child's schooling is also supportive of college going behaviour, whether that is the development of soft skills like independence in learning and teamwork or hard skills like studying and setting schedules with time management. The women in my study emphasized the development of a

college mindset by engaging in IB, AP or College Readiness courses that were offered as dual credits.

High school initiatives support the development of a college mindset as they help students explore and acquire college ready strategies to deepen their understanding of academic expectations in college. High school academic program initiatives such as International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses help students develop an understanding of college academic expectations while at the same time helping students earn dual credits for high school and the first year of college. These courses assist students to not only understand the academic and learning expectations of college courses, but they also provide them with dual credit offerings to encourage college going by giving credits for both high school attainment as well as for college. In this way students who enter college are already well on their way to achieving their bachelor's degree even before they enroll in college.

This approach to academics can assist students in not only acquiring academic credits but also eases the transition from high school into college academic expectations. Having college credits entering college from high school was viewed by the women in my study as being a positive way to understand the academic expectations of going to college as well as being advanced in their credit attainment.

Pre-college transition supports

In addition to academic course offerings some high schools also offer college readiness classes, entrance exam preparation sessions, teacher advisor groups and school

counsellors to facilitate an orientation towards post-secondary options. In college readiness classes, students have an opportunity to learn about college expectations regarding entrance requirements, the chance to write entrance exams followed by discussions about the results or alternatively offer opportunities for students to engage in selecting majors and minors of study. These types of opportunities eased the transition process for going to college helping the women in my study more fully understand what is required for success in college.

High school teacher engagement

High school teachers need to engage in discussions with students about postsecondary options exploring college options whether that be a 2-year or a 4-year college or university to encourage students to consider career and job opportunities with a bachelor's degree. A student's relationship with their classroom teacher, guidance counsellor or sports coach supports college going. Specifically, high school guidance counsellors have a role to play in the navigation and selection of post-secondary options. Learning from the ideas and having the support of high school teachers, counsellors and sports coaches affirmed for the women in my study that college was the next step in their life journey to support their career goals.

High school counsellors have a unique opportunity to influence and support high school student's engagement in post-secondary studies, particularly for college going. In their role, they assist students to find their post-secondary pathway by helping to take the pre-requisite high school courses that will ensure that students can move forward to

college. Additionally, they provide information about application processes and the multiple post-secondary options that are available. In some high schools, they also have lead roles in student advisory meetings to support students moving forward with their high school graduation while providing post high school opportunities to continue their education. Having access to the school guidance counsellor supported college exploration regarding the selection of academic study majors and potential colleges to attend.

Additionally, having scheduled opportunities for connection reinforced college going behaviour by exposing the women in my study to the possibilities that college presents.

Engaging parents in high school experiential learning

High school experiences such as “Take Your Kid to Work” day in grade 9 provides students opportunities to explore the careers of their parents, who are influencers in their child’s academic future. One woman shared the impact of going to work with her mother as being instrumental in helping her to decide which career to pursue while another participant stated that opportunities to engage with her dad’s colleagues at his work helped her to frame her career trajectory. As parents influence the decisions that their children make, high schools need to engage with parents as well as their children to encourage post-secondary engagement whether that be in terms of academics or co-curricular aspects such as, sports teams. “Relationships that institutions have with the parents of students will continue to evolve and likely will require additional attention in the future” (Schuh, Jones & Torres, 2017, p. 559).

High school sports teams

Engagement in sports teams, particularly at the high school level supports an early recruitment process for student athlete engagement as it influences where a student will go and where they will play their chosen sport. Exposure to co-curricular opportunities such as sports, amongst others, supports post-secondary choices. For example, engagement in club sports encourages high school sports which in turn can lead to post-secondary opportunities for scholarships and recruitment on college teams. The women who were involved in sports from an early age participating in club sports followed by high school sports teams had experiences that encouraged them to explore college sports opportunities to continue playing their preferred sport.

Implications for Postsecondary Practitioners and Decision Makers

Considering the themes of motivations for attending college couple with what the women in my study shared as being integral to their motivations for enrolling in college leads me to think about the ways that colleges and universities can encourage and support college going behavior. The findings of my research study suggest the following implications for postsecondary practitioners and decision makers.

Early exposure to postsecondary institutions

Early exposure to postsecondary institutions creates a stronger connection to the college experience, helping potential students to learn more about the opportunities that exist by enrolling in college. Suggestions such as career days, opportunities for shadowing, exposure to the college campus for campus visits, academic programs such as

enrichment programs for high school students, Spring Break or summer camps, summer bridge programs, or sport team game attendance help students to engage in the college experiences supporting a future vision of going to college.

Engaging parents as alumni

Alumni connections, especially with parents who went to the same college, support college engagement because parental influence matters! In that way, not only should post-secondary institutions consider engaging with the potential student, they should also consider engaging parents to make college engagement opportunities a family affair. Parents in my study shared with the women about their college experiences whether that be as student athletes or their academic programming. Parents also encouraged the women to watch college sports games as a family.

Dual college credit attainment

Creating opportunities for high school students to acquire college dual credits while in high school, particularly in grade 12, encourages them to continue with college. By already having acquired college credits students are more likely to pursue a bachelor's degree because they are already on their way with credit attainment in college having a sense of the learning expectations in college. Whether it was IB or AP courses, the women who had the academic opportunities to engage in college credit attainment spoke favourably about being firm in their commitment to attend college and ahead in their degree attainment as they had already accumulated college credits. In one woman's situation, she has accumulated enough credits to have her first year completed.

College sports team recruitment

An early sports team recruitment process encourages student athletes to pursue a college degree. The women who were student athletes in my study spoke of an early recruitment process in high school as solidifying their commitment to the college sports team and in turn to the college itself. The earlier that the college coaches recruited the female student the more assured that they were of going to college to play their sport and also pursue their bachelor's degree. Student athletes typically begin their engagement in sports in one of two ways, through school teams or through community-based club sports teams. As students progress in their interest and ability to play sports, they continue to seek opportunities to enhance their skill and development through engagement at school and in the community. Some colleges provide year long and summer junior team opportunities to orient the athletes to play for their college. This type of early introduction program develops an understanding for the athlete of the college team expectations while building relationship with the sports coach. Normally athletes begin to be known for their sports skill levels in middle years into high school. College coaches usually begin their recruitment processes with high school students seeking out the best athletes to recruit for their college team. Early recruitment by college coaches in high school makes a difference where a student will enroll for college. An early recruitment process reassures the student that they can continue with their engagement in their chosen sport and achieve their bachelor's degree.

Additionally, a college recruitment usually is accompanied with financial support for the student athlete's tuition and in some cases living expenses of either a full or partial scholarships for committing to play for a college team with eligibility for typically five years, the duration of a bachelor's degree. When this occurs for the student athlete the scholarship allows the student to better balance the college sport expectations with the academic expectations of going to college without requiring the student to take a part time job. The student athletes spoke about the benefits of having a full or partial scholarship as being a positive aspect of their college choice in playing for the team while pursuing their bachelor's degree.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, I suggest the following ideas for future study. Given the small sample recruited for this study, I recommend that the study be replicated with a larger sample of female students to determine if the themes found in this study hold true for a larger sample of women enrolling in a bachelor's degree. Exploring the same study with various demographic indicators that were asked for in the pre-interview questionnaire such as specific subset groups of the domestic college student population; first generation students, student athletes, in-state and out of state students, ethnicity (i.e., Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian or Native American), BIPOC students, Indigenous students, marital status – if women are cohabiting, or married and students with children, discipline (liberal arts, pure sciences, professional pursuits i.e., education,

law, engineering) as target groups would be of interest to determine if these factors influence motivation to attend college.

One of the motivational influences that I had identified in my conceptual framework was the impact of community; however, this aspect of potential motivational influence did not surface with the women that I interviewed. I wonder if this would be a motivational factor if a future study was to explore certain populations or communities specifically and what the community support might illuminate for students seeking a bachelor's degree in college.

I recommend surveying international students, perhaps by cultural groupings, to explore their motivations given that international students were not part of this study due to the diversity of their cultural values and influences. Based on the Fall 2019 institutional data, there are 50 states and 94 countries enrolled at the selected university. Students are a product of their cultural identity and perspectives are as unique as the country where they originate from and as such examining these in a future study would be an interesting exploration to determine if there are any influencing motivational aspects.

Exploring the various student groups to determine if similar or different influences impact each group of students would help to develop recommendations for K-12 and post-secondary institutions to encourage students from various communities to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Finally conducting a multi-year study with the same participants would be interesting to see if the student motivations change over time after their first year of enrollment or if the reasons that they shared during their first-year college experience still hold true as they continue towards achievement of their bachelor's degree.

Conclusion

As a collective, women's experience in higher education has been disparate and differential to some men's experience over the last two centuries, fundamentally based on the societal influences of the time. In the formative years of higher education women attended higher education institutions for social stratification reasons or for marital choice opportunities and to a lesser degree for college outcomes. This study explored the current motivations of women who pursue bachelor's degrees in higher education. Through the interviews with the five women, I discovered that the women in this study articulated their own personal journey of discovery influenced by internal and external aspects. They shared their personal reasons, career aspirations, pre-college academic pursuits, personal relationships and mass media interactions which all influenced to a greater or lesser degree their desire to enroll in a bachelor's degree in college.

Through this study I discovered that by listening to the women's stories college was seen as a viable and important next step in their life journey helping them to achieve their personal and professional goals and aspirations. Both K-12 and post-secondary practitioners and administrators can learn through listening to their voices as to what matters most to them as they seek to fulfill their personal aspirations for a career. Women

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want to make a difference while having a better life not only for themselves but also for those who they plan to influence through their careers and with their future families.

APPENDIX A: Student Recruitment Email

EMAIL to the students directly with information about the opportunity to participate in the research study.

Hello! My name is Debra Radi and like you, I am a student at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I am currently in the process of working on my dissertation research proposal [REDACTED] I am passionate about learning and would like to learn more about how to support student learning which is why I am reaching out to you today to ask you if you would participate in my research study.

As an undergraduate female student in your first year of study at the [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], I am writing to you today to ask you to engage in a research study about your decision to enrol in college to pursue a bachelor's degree. To maintain confidentiality in the research study, the person who referred you will not know whether or not you choose to participate. As part of the research process, you will be asked to complete a consent form to participate in this study that assures you that I will not use your name or any identifying information and protect the information provided while conducting this pilot study.

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As a potential participant in the study, you will be asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire. If based on your responses you are selected, you will then be asked to complete 2 to 3 rounds of interviews using SKYPE that will each last for about 45 to 60 minutes. With your permission, I will be recording the interviews. As a token of appreciation for your engagement in the SKYPE interviews, you will receive a \$25 gift card.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the research study. I would appreciate your reply by (*DATE*) to indicate if you are interested in engaging in this research opportunity. When you respond that you are interested, I will send you a consent form with more information about the research study. Once you sign and return the consent form, I will send you a pre-interview questionnaire to complete and then schedule our first interview.

I am really excited to learn why you decided to enrol in college to earn a bachelor's degree. Your involvement will make a difference for future students who want to go to college, just like you!

Regards,

Deb Radi

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

TITLE: **UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN'S MOTIVATIONS FOR ENROLLING IN COLLEGE AND PURSUING BACHELOR'S DEGREES**

PROJECT DIRECTOR: *Debra Radi*

PHONE # *1-204-254-1889*

DEPARTMENT: *Educational Leadership, Higher Education*

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are invited to be in a dissertation research study about undergraduate women's motivations for enrolling in college. The purpose of the research study is to provide me with an understanding of your undergraduate experience so that I can understand your motivations for pursuing a college degree.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately *12 - 16* people will take part in this dissertation research study at [REDACTED].

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in the study will last 6 months. You will need to engage in a pre-interview questionnaire that is provided by email and then if selected there will be 2 -3 interview times scheduled. Each visit will take about 45 to 60 minutes.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

Once recruited, you will receive a pre-interview questionnaire by email that will assist me in determining if you meet the selection criteria to participate in the dissertation study research. You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview responding to questions on Skype or a similar teleconference platform for up to 60 minutes. A second semi-structured interview of up to 60 minutes will be conducted. Both sessions will be recorded using Skype or a similar teleconference platform. As a participant, you may skip any questions that you would prefer not to answer.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There may be some risk from being in this study. You may experience frustration that is often experienced when answering interview questions. Some questions may be of a sensitive nature as you reflect on your undergraduate experience, and you may therefore become upset as a result. However, such risks are not viewed as being in excess of “minimal risk”

If, however, you become upset by questions, you may stop at any time or choose not to answer a question. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings about this study, you are encouraged to contact the University Student Counseling Center (UCC), McCannel Hall, Room 200 P: 701.777.2127

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You *will not* benefit personally from being in this study. However, I hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study as the research explores women's experience in college providing an opportunity to build an understanding of the diversity of women's experience in higher education.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You *will not* have any costs for being in this research study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will receive a \$25 gift certificate of your choice for your participation in the research study.

WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will record the interviews (audio and video) using Skype or a similar teleconference platform, but I will use a pseudonym for you when I transcribe your responses. I will also

change any identifying characteristics in the transcripts. The research data will be stored in a digital format on my computer, password protected, for a minimum of three years following the completion of the study. I will have access to the recordings and transcripts, as will my advisor.

You can review and/or edit the electronic recordings and you will also have access to the transcribed data if you would like to ensure accuracy of your responses. I will also keep the signed consent forms in a locked file cabinet in my home for a minimum of three years following completion of the study. The forms will then be shredded and recycled.

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by Government agencies and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board. Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

If you decide to leave the study early, I ask that you let me know about your desire to withdraw from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?

The researcher conducting this study is Debra Radi. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact **Debra Radi** at (204) 254-1889 or debra.radi@und.edu or my student advisor, **Dr. Deborah Worley**, at (701) 777-3140 or deborah.worley@und.edu.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279 or UND.irb@UND.edu.

- You may also call this number about any problems, complaints, or concerns you have about this research study.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is independent of the research team.

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- General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking “Information for Research Participants” on the web site:
<http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.html>

I give consent to be audio recorded during this study.

Please initial: **Yes** **No**

I give consent to be video recorded during this study.

Please initial: **Yes** **No**

I give consent for my quotes to be used in the research; however I will not be identified.

Please initial: **Yes** **No**

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subjects Name: _____

Signature of Subject

Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative.

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

Date

APPENDIX C: Pre-interview Questionnaire

**Undergraduate Motivation in Higher Education
Pre-interview Questionnaire**

1. Name (a pseudonym will be used in reporting the results): _____
2. Age in years: _____ * you must be 18+ over to participate in the research study
3. What is your race? (*please mark all that apply*) American Indian or Alaska Native _____ Asian ___ Black or African American ___ Hispanic or Latina _____ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ___ White _____ Prefer not to answer _____
- 4.. What is your state of residency? _____
5. Do you live on campus? Yes ___ No ___
6. Relationship status:
___ Living with partner or spouse
___ In relationship, not living with partner
___ Single
___ Other, please specify _____
7. How many dependent children (*18 years or younger*) do you currently support? _____
b) are there any other people that you are supporting? _____
8. Current employment status: unemployed ___ working part-time ___ working full-time ___
9. Current academic program: _____
b) Declared major: _____ Declared minor: _____
10. Current enrollment status: Part-time ___ Full-time ___
11. Typical course enrollment: On campus ___ Online ___ Both on campus and online ___
12. Current Class Status: Year 1 (*Freshman*) _____

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13. How are you financing your current program. Check all that apply:

- Tuition waiver
- Grants (i.e. Pell Grant)
- Scholarship
- Outside support (e.g., family)
- Student loans
- Paying for it yourself
- Other, please specify _____

APPENDIX D: Semi-structured Interviews

First set of interview questions:

The beginning of the semi-structured interview will be focussed on rapport building extension from the pre-interview questionnaire, providing an opportunity to clarify and expand what was reported.*

1. When did you first think about going to university/college?
2. What schools did you apply to? Why did you apply to those schools?
3. What did you think college was like before you enrolled?
4. Can you think of any social media (i.e. Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), TV shows or movies that informed your perspectives about college?
5. How did those experiences inform your beliefs about college?
6. Can you think of any relationships, family and friends, in your life that informed your perspectives about college?" "How did those conversations inform your beliefs about college?"
7. What did you write about in your application as your reasons for enrolling in college?
8. What classes did you take in high school that were helpful to your decision making for college?
9. Did you have any jobs or internships that helped you to prepare for or think about going to college?
10. How did you feel when you were accepted to college?
11. Why did you decide to go to college in the first place?
12. Did you ever think of not going to college?
13. What do you hope to get out of going to college?

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14. Have your goals changed since you first applied or since you first enrolled in college?
15. Is there anything that I should have asked you but didn't or that you would like to add to our discussion?

Prompts:

Tell me a little bit more about that ...
Can you expand on that idea ...?

Second Round of Interview Questions

Second round of interview questions will be generated from the first interview data analysis

APPENDIX E: Example of Iterative Review Coding Process

An example of the iterative review process that I went through using data from my research study. Building from the interview question, I would probe for specificity through further questioning building on the response that the participant shared. Additionally, I considered what codes, concepts, and categories emerged through the data analysis process:

DR: oh, Okay. Do you think that some of the things that you did in high school to prepare for college might have helped you with that?

Katherine: Definitely especially more than anything else my AP classes

DR: um, hmm

Katherine: really set me ahead. I'm a full year ahead of

DR: um, hmmm

Katherine: of everyone, everyone else that's coming in as a Freshman so, I'm really lucky in that aspect and my teachers that, you know, had obviously they all went to college and their teaching style reflects that of a college professor of I'm going to lecture, let you figure it out we'll do labs stuff like that but I'm not going to hold your hand and explain everything to you, you're going to have to figure it out yourself.

Commented [DR1]: College preparation AP classes
- a full year ahead of classes

Commented [D2]: How did your teachers influence your understanding of college?

Commented [DR3]: HS teachers' preparation
- teaching style reflects college professor
College mindset
- independent learning
- lets student figure it out by themselves
- no hand holding

APPENDIX F: Data Code Book

Pre-Interview Questionnaire Summary:

Measure	Item Options
Pseudonym	1
Age	1
Race	7
State of residency	1
Live on campus	2
Relationship status	4
Dependent children	1
b) Support other people	1
Employment status	3
Current academic program	1
b) declared major	1
Enrollment status	1
Typical course enrollment	2
Current Class Status	1
Financing Current Program	7

Semi-structured Interviews Summary:

Codes	Categories	Themes
Want to make a difference		
Helped them as a person		Personal reasons
International Baccalaureate (IB)	College preparation	Pre-college academic pursuits
Advanced Placement (AP)		
College Readiness course		
A full year ahead of classes	Dual credit acquisition	
Doctor	Professional career requiring college – graduate degree	Career aspirations
Veterinarian	Professional career requiring college – graduate degree	

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Psychology and criminal justice fields	Professional career	
Language interpreter in a medical setting	Professional career	
Physical therapist	Professional career	
Brother	sibling	Personal relationships
Sister	sibling	
Father	parent	
Mother	parent	
both of my parents went to college and their parents before them, their parents before them	Inter-generational influence	
Uncle, wife of uncle-aunt, grandma, grandpa	Significant other's family	
Elementary teacher, grade 2, grade 4	teacher	
Middle years teacher, history teacher	teacher	
Sports coach – community club sports	Sports coach	
High school teacher, college mindset, independent learning, Lets students figure it out by themselves No hand holding	HS teachers preparation,	
Guidance counsellor	teacher	
Sports coach – high school	Sports coach	
Sydney White	film	Mass media
High School musical		
You Tube	video	
Twitter	Social Media	
Snapchat		
Instagram		

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