ENROLLING IN EARLY COLLEGE:
AGENCY AND CIRCUMSTANCE IN THE LIVES OF RURAL STUDENTS

By

Stavroula S. Erfourth

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education – Doctor of Philosophy

2017

ABSTRACT

ENROLLING IN EARLY COLLEGE:
AGENCY AND CIRCUMSTANCE IN THE LIVES OF RURAL STUDENTS

By

Stavroula S. Erfourth

Most empirical work on dual enrollment has been quantitative and concerned with issues of demographic participation (minority, first-generation, etc.) and college persistence (Carey, 2015; Cowan, & Goldhaber, 2015; D'Amico, Morgan, Robertson, & Rivers, 2013; Habersham, 2013; McCormick, 2010). Less research, however, has focused on the perspective of the students and how they perceive both their experience in dual enrollment programs and in their schooling and lives leading to the decision to participate. Fewer studies have concentrated on discovering student motivations for participating and to better understand their experiences (Hudson, 2016; Kanny, 2015; Wallace, 2015; Smith, 2015).

As a group, rural students from economically depressed regions have not had the same academic opportunities as their urban and even suburban counterparts (Wallace, 2015; Koricich, 2013; Berg, 2010). By offering early college options, a particular type of dual enrollment program, to these students, school districts and their postsecondary partners can increase the college-going of their communities' children, and perhaps positively impact the trajectories of lives. However, success of these early college programs is influenced by many things including the foundational development–academic, personal, and social–of the students that attend.

To situate my work in this space, using the portraiture method, I sought to expand the limited use of work images and extend it by intersecting the idea with secondary students' postsecondary choices, specifically as they apply to early college program enrollment. To accomplish this, I employed Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) theory on human agency and

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social ecology as a framework to guide questions to students about their decisions to participate in an early college program.

I made use of Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis' (1997) approach to producing a portrait, which is the product of the aesthetic whole. They believe,

> In developing the aesthetic whole we come face to face with the tensions inherent in blending art and science, analysis and narrative, description and interpretation, structure and texture. We are reminded of the dual motivations guiding portraiture: to inform and inspire, to document and transform, to speak to the head and to the heart (p. 243).

In this work, I offer the portraits of four early college students from a rural, economically disadvantaged area who made the decision to attend college while still in high school and why that decision is valuable for them and the institution they attend.

For my parents and anyone else
who has ever had the desire to go to school
but circumstances of life would not allow it.

And for my Michael.
You never once made me feel like this wasn't worth it.
That is a gift I may never be able to repay,
but I will never stop trying.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My intent has been to produce work that is readable and approachable to all people and that bridges the gap between the academy and the greater interested readership. If I cannot explain myself to someone who knows nothing about my topic, then I have failed. I am forging a path. I am a bridge between those without formal education and others at the terminal level and my goal is to begin to illuminate the path (perhaps in the far distance) for those who desire more. It is a responsibility that I am deeply committed to personally and professionally, in scholarship and in application. I extend my first acknowledgement to Michigan State University for allowing me to find my own way forward through my educational pursuits. I have been forever changed.

I would like to acknowledge Baker College of Owosso, especially Dr. Aaron Maike, for fully supporting my scholarly pursuits. Without your support and the support and encouragement of the following people, I would not have reached this goal: Dr. Pete Karsten, Dr. Denise Bannan, and Dr. Carol Dowsett. Dr. Dowsett, especially, has my strongest gratitude and love for her mentorship and friendship for the last fourteen years, before and throughout my doctoral work. You have believed in me since the beginning, even when I didn't believe in myself. You are a better role model than I could have dreamed for myself. I cannot thank you enough.

Thank you for the guidance of my MSU College of Education HALE faculty – Dr. Steve Weiland and committee–Dr. Marilyn Amey, Dr. Patricia Marin, Dr. Terah Venzant Chambers. I am grateful to each of you for the gift of your time and attention to my work. It is better for having passed through your talents. And to others whom I admire and whose influence I will take with me: Dr. Ann Austin, Dr. Rebecca Jacobsen, Dr. John Yun, Dr. Leslie Gonzales, and Dr. Cary Roseth. Thank you for sharing your passion with me and all of your students.

To the HALE PhD 2013 cohort, I am a better person for having met you all. I learned from each of you and that makes us the best cohort ever, obviously. A special thank you to my friend and partner-in-research and other scholarly shenanigans, Nate Cradit. You pushed me when you did not even realize I needed pushing, just by being supportive of our shared research interests. Thank you for your example and friendship. An additional and special HALE-IE I would be remiss not to mention is Dr. Qiana Green. On more than one occasion, by divine intervention (no other explanation), you were exactly where and when I needed someone. Thank you for being in the right place at the right time, and mainly for being gracious with your experience.

Thank you to Greg Nave, Kristina Marshall, and Michalene Lichon for listening through my ideas, papers, and research for the last several years. I am lucky to have colleagues like you. And thank you to Phil Gobel for his graphic design advice. I didn't use it, but I am grateful for your calming assurance when I needed just that.

I am humbled and lifted up by the memory and lives of my grandmothers, Yiayia Athena Skoutelas and Yiayia Stavroula Oiknomou, one who traveled far to find more for herself and her children and one who sent her baby just as far for the same reasons. I stand on the shoulders of these giants. My mom has taught me so much and still does. Thank you, Mama, for the important lesson that there is honor in making and keeping a home and that not all important accomplishments happen outside of those walls. These lessons have taught me the importance of balance. To Bean, thank you for doing all the right things which cleared a path for me to do it differently. If you had been the rebellious one, what role would I have to fill? To Bobby, you did everything better, easier, and quicker than me, and that has really annoyed me. But it also motivates me. Thank you. To my Debbie, thank you for teaching me that family is made by more

than blood, it is also made by serendipity and circumstance. To my cousins, all of them. Because everyone should have Greek cousins. To Christine and Thanasi, you made our sibling family complete. To Simon, Aleko, Leo, Nina, Edward, Penelope, Daphne, and Violet. I only gave birth to two of you, but you are all my babies. You can be whatever you want. All you have to do is work for it.

Finally, Baba, you passed on to me your love of learning. In your 41st year you earned your GED in the country you adopted. In my 41st year I give you this. You passed up your chances for us, so this is for you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1: Introduction

> "The coolest thing I've done, at least on paper, is graduate from Yale Law School, something thirteen-year-old J.D. Vance would have considered ludicrous…The statistics tell you that kids like me face a grim future – that if they're lucky, they'll manage to avoid welfare; and if they're unlucky, they'll die of a heroin overdose, as happened to dozens in my small hometown just last year. I was one of those kids with a grim future. I almost failed out of high school. I nearly gave in to the deep anger and resentment harbored by everyone around me. Today people look at me, at my job and my Ivy League credentials, and assume that I'm some sort of genius, that only a true extraordinary person could have made it to where I am today. With all due respect to those people, I think that theory is a load of bullshit. Whatever talents I have, I almost squandered until a handful of loving people rescued me" (Vance, 2016, pp. 1-2).

High achieving high school students who identify as future college-goers generally start earning college credit through Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate programs and research has paid considerable attention to this population (Demaree, 2016; Klopfenstein, 2004a & 2004b). In fact, the Education Commission of the States stated, "in another effort to improve students' readiness for college and career, policymakers in 25 states require school districts to provide opportunities for advanced courses such as Advanced Placement (AP), dual enrollment or International Baccalaureate (IB)" (ECS Blueprint, 2014).

Another group of students, however, who are cognitively capable of attending college, but may not for a variety of reasons identify as future college-goers, is worthy of research. Often, career and technical education or vocational education programs are often marketed to this population of students, and these students begin to identify themselves toward their potential future career, and not by their education. However, getting a quality job in today's job market generally requires some college (Coder & Green, 2016). And so now we are encouraging some students into college even sooner, through dual enrollment options like early college, when they may not be ready for it. While some may not be up for the challenge, for others it may be the self-efficacy boost they need to succeed in an early college program and matriculate to higher

education. No less significant is that students who participate in early college programs elect to extend their high school graduation by a year to participate. The decision to participate is fraught with concerns, both social and academic.

The purpose of highlighting early college participation is to provide a different perspective of a population of students taking advantage of education funding aimed at increasing and improving college and career preparation. Through a lens of social ecology and agency, this study sheds light on what this population of students thinks about work and college and how they make decisions to participate in early college programs.

In this chapter, I will provide an introduction of the history and trends on dual enrollment, specifically early college programs, and the effect of early college programs on a certain population of high school students. Following this introduction, I will provide the purposes of the study and how these purposes inform the guiding research question to address the problem–that rural students, for various reasons, may by unprepared for the rigors of early college programs, which could negatively impact the trajectory of their future college-going and, potentially their career path. The research question will guide a discussion of the study design. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an explanation of the significance of this research.

Early College Overview

Secondary institutions in the United States are not generally directly aligned with vocational training, as they are in some other countries in the world (Labaree, 2010). This leads high school students to feel encouraged to be ready for the workforce, while simultaneously only having vague notions, at best, of how to do so. Vuolo, Mortimer, and Staff (2104) note, "In this challenging context, most youth today attempt to obtain as much schooling as they can to situate themselves favorably in the labor market" (p. 146). Getting to college is important to get a good

job and thus, college access remains a vital conversation for higher education in the U.S. context. We must continue to deepen the conversation, however, to consider that getting to college is not enough, especially for certain populations of students.

Students from rural, low-income areas can often get to college, but they do not complete degrees at the same rates as urban or suburban, more financially stable students (Berg, 2010; Jacobs & Dirlam, 2016; Pretlow & Wathington, 2014; Reardon, 2011). Federal and state policies have produced many programs meant to help these types of students get to, and thus complete, college sooner. Dual enrollment programs (those where students are simultaneously earning secondary and postsecondary credits) currently have the most momentum in the P20 educational pipeline, which is a way to consider the complete trajectory of education from preschool to professional or post-graduate work. Much literature is devoted to the success of these programs for more at-risk populations of students, but that is not the complete story.

Often, rural students from under-resourced areas are the ones who not only take longer to finish college upon matriculation, but drop out at higher rates ("Time to Degree," 2016). In their longitudinal studies on pathways from school to work, Vuolo et al. (2014) said that "…youth from more advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to follow BC [Bachelor degree to career] pathways…those from more disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to leave college early and subsequently flounder [in career]" (p. 159, brackets added for clarification). Many factors contribute to this, most of which are around non-cognitive or foundational support issues. Ultimately, they get to college, but are not always ready, because no one has assisted them to be ready for what will be expected of them in college.

Students from rural, low-income places may or may not be college-ready, they may or may not have self-efficacy toward college work, but they are interested in the idea that they can

earn college credit for free, and get to work sooner than they might have expected. Generally, this provides an impetus for the families of the types of students who are encouraged to participate–students who may be academically capable, but not emotionally or socially ready for what college work will entail.

Early college programs are a solution and attempt to fill an important gap that, in order for our workforce to be prepared for the jobs of the future, those wishing to be employed will need a college credential. Programs like early college are rationally derived. They serve to offer opportunities and fill gaps. Rational solutions and policy and funding implementations are often at odds with the identity development and resulting decision-making process of students, however. The current literature suggests that dual enrollment programs positively impact the college-going of students (Kilgore & Taylor, 2016; Pertlow & Wathington, 2014), however, we have not unpacked the complicated decision-making of adolescents who have images of how they want to meet personal goals, but not always the support and foundation to do so successfully. There are dangers for policy-makers, for institutions, and for the students and families in ignoring these tension points. As policy-makers direct funding toward these programs, if students are not prepared for the rigor of college-level work, that money could be wasted. For students, unsuccessful attempts at college coursework while still in high school could lead to reduced self-efficacy toward college.

Early College: Policy History and Trends

Early/middle colleges serve as an outreach to underserved, underrepresented and underachieving students by allowing them to earn college credit at reduced time and cost to families. According to the Michigan Department of Education, "Early/Middle College (EMC) schools and programs are an extension of the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act (PA 160 of

1996), and designed to afford students with the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and either an associate's degree, the Michigan Early/Middle College Association (MEMCA) technical certification, or up to 60 transferable college credits at the same time" (EMC FAQs, 2015). While dual enrollment programs like EMCs have existed for decades, they have grown considerably since the turn of this century as a result of policy interest to increase college-going rates.

In the early college program included in this study, eligible high school students must have an earned minimum grade point average of 2.5 (on a standard 4.0 scale) to participate. They must apply by spring of their 10th grade year to begin college classes in the fall semester of 11th grade. Finally, the institution requires them to select a program of study geared toward a specific major or career as their academic path to follow. These students hold back a high school credit, thus delaying their official high school graduation, which makes them eligible to receive funding for their full-time participation in college classes in the 13th year, which otherwise would have been their first year of college. So, for appearances, they are a traditional college freshman during the 13th year, however, their school district receives funding to pay for them to attend college classes, thus making the program free for the students and their families.

Participation in EMC improves the college-going of underserved students (like those from rural, economically disadvantaged areas), but does it improve degree-earning? Like anything involving people, there are benefits and obstacles for all stakeholders (see Table 1). EMCs are great in theory and on paper when initially created by policymakers, but difficult to put into practice for individual students with unique circumstances and desires. These obstacles provide the impetus for studying the decision-making of students who participate.

Table 1: Benefits and obstacles of dual enrollment programs

	Benefits	Obstacles
Postsecondary institution	-Recruitment/enrollment tool -Meeting institutional mission -Community service mechanism	-Students who are academically and otherwise unprepared for the rigors of coursework and campus culture -Transcript issues (transfer credit) -Low matriculation post-EMC
School districts	-Potential for increased graduation rates -Better opportunities for their community students	-Funding -College readiness of students -Qualified instructors
Students	-Free or reduced college credits -Complete college and begin work sooner -Potential for increased college-going self-efficacy -Increased future career opportunity -Access to curricular options not found at smaller or underfunded schools.	-Funding -Transportation to college campus -Wi-Fi or computer access -Academic unpreparedness -Lack of family support or encouragement

(Kilgore & Taylor, 2016, Pertlow & Wathington, 2014)

Purpose of the Study

In this study, I aimed to discover how the work images formed and held by high school students from a rural, low socioeconomic (SES) background influence decisions to participate in career-focused early college programs. Increasingly, postsecondary education is necessary for people to be employed at a level adequate enough to live comfortably. In fact, many current employers expect some level of degree attainment to adequately fill required work roles (Coder & Green, 2016). This has changed in the last several decades. Where a high school graduate was able to find stable employment that offered a certain quality of life, those jobs are becoming more rare. School, family, and the workplace today tell high school students that in order to make a living, they need education beyond a high school diploma.

A current trend in education and government policy is to introduce opportunities and provide funding to allow students to earn college credits while still in high school. These bodies recognize the need to reduce time and cost to degree, as well as better prepare students for postsecondary education experiences (college and career readiness.) A well-known example of this is Advanced Placement, a program that has been around for many years and is targeted to high-achieving students, which allows students to prove mastery on subjects by taking courses in high school and being tested on them, thus potentially earning college credit (Klopfenstein, 2004). Another example is early college, where students attend both high school classes and college courses simultaneously and then delay high school graduation for one year with the goal of earning a high school diploma and an associate degree by the end of the 13th year [or the year after they would have graduated high school] (Kilgore & Taylor, 2016).

Students from rural, low SES backgrounds hear the same message as other students about the importance of college, and although they generally matriculate to higher education at lower rates than even their urban counterparts (Diete Courrégé, 2013; Marré, 2014), they have ideas of the types of jobs that will give them the kind of life believe they want. And the message is that in order to get that job, they have to go to college. High achieving high school students typically identify as future college-goers, based on family and school expectations. The next tier of students, however, many of who are capable of attending college, but may not for a variety of reasons identify as future college-goers, might be overlooked. Often, Career & Technical Education or Vocational education programs are often marketed to this population of students, and these students begin to identify themselves toward their potential future career (Morehead, 2015; Rabren et al., 2014), and not by their education. However, these students know that college is necessary to get them to that career. And families want to take advantage of any opportunities

provided to them to help students earn college credit sooner and at no cost, often because of their own economic situations (i.e., out of perceived financial necessity.)

We know, though, that not all of these students are mentally and academically prepared for the effort that succeeding in college entails (Koricich, 2014; Reardon, 2011). The hazard of programs like early college, is that they seem to fail these students in meeting both the students' and families' goal of getting closer to a career, and the goal of the programs themselves, which is to graduate students with a college degree. My purpose was to develop a deeper understanding of what leads rural students to make decisions to participate in early college programs. What is missing from the current body of literature are the stories of students who begin these programs, but may not complete them and why.

I believe that there is more to student decision-making than rational goals; that they make emotional decisions based on non-rational goals, which they may create and might be informed by their social context. Ultimately, many of these students do not reach their intended goals. I wonder if they do not fully consider implications of participation in early college programs because they focus on the work images they hold to propel them into the program.

With my study, I am telling the stories of a group of students who have chosen to participate in a college program while still in high school. By better understanding the decisions and experiences of early college students, I hope to assist school districts and higher education partners to better prepare students and families for success and to avoid potential implications of failure (reduced self-efficacy, loss of financial aid, a poor academic transcript, and potentially an unbroken cycle of poverty).

Research Question

Through this research, I hoped to better understand the motivating factors that lead rural high school students from under-resourced areas to college earlier. Dual enrollment programs are drawing these students to college sooner, and these programs, early college as one example, are growing quickly. All stakeholders, from higher education to K12, from policymakers to local communities need to better understand the students that take advantage of these opportunities. I was curious about how the work images formed and held by high school students from a rural, low socioeconomic background influence decisions to enroll in career-focused early college programs. To discover this, I sought to answer the following research question:

How does the social context (circumstance) of students from a rural, economically disadvantaged area influence them to make a decision and take action (agency) to enroll in an early college program?

Portraiture: A Qualitative Design

The study, based on the research question, examined and discovered the stories of a population of students from a rural, economically disadvantaged area who make decisions to begin college-level coursework while still enrolled and actively completing their high school education. Through portraiture, I investigated the research question by collecting stories of students from within a specific context: an early college program at a single, career-focused, Midwestern, postsecondary institution. A research portrait is a written narrative "designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences. The portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.3). Thus, the

interviews allowed me to develop a relationship with the participants, which was vital to the process. The feelings they communicated while telling their stories were as important as the words the participants spoke. This specific context is bound by post-industrialization and a post-recession job climate, where the parents of the students have likely experienced job insecurity or underemployment in the last several years or more with the changing nature of the auto and other manufacturing industries in the Midwest. One goal for the research was to describe the phenomenon from within its context and to do so, both the population and guiding idea require a clear definition.

Current Situation of the Rural Poor in America

In the final quarter of the last century, the wealth disparity between rich and poor grew much more quickly than any measured economic change in the entire century. Additionally, the earners at the bottom are getting poorer (Berg, 2010; Jacobs & Dirlam, 2016; Reardon, 2011). Two perpetuating beliefs about the poor that many people incorrectly hold are: 1. They are poor because of their values and ability and 2. They can change if they want to (Berg, 2010.) The reality of the situation is that students from rural and inadequately funded school districts simply do not have the same opportunities as their more suburban or urban peers in more resource-rich geographic areas.

Rural education and students fall behind their urban peers in college-going and postsecondary opportunities (Berg, 2010; Koricich, 2014; "National College Progression Rates," 2013). While some programs have been implemented to assist them, these programs are new in many places and often lack clear direction for school districts and communities to leverage. And so, while school districts attempt to take advantage of funding available to support college-going by high school students, many programs focus on career and technical education or similar

programs that might attract students that would benefit most from the programs. This is significant because many of the students may not have developed a college-going identity, but choose to participate because they understand the need for a college degree to get steady and quality work.

Poor college students in America

The current U.S. political and economic context is such that the gap between the wealthy and poor is growing (Jacobs, & Dirlam, 2016). What this means is that the struggle for people with limited economic means is likely becoming greater. And yet, in order to try to improve their situation, students hear the same message as others, which is that they need college to get a job to do so, in a system that was inherently not designed for them. Sentier Research, in their "Annual Earnings by Detailed Occupations 2014 Report" (2016), aggregated data collected in the Census Bureau's "American Community Survey for 2014" to explain the highest and lowest paid occupations (Coder & Green, 2016). They found that of the top 25 paid occupations, 19.4% of workers have completed a high school diploma, but not a bachelor degree (many of these are business owners.) Of the lowest 25 paid occupations, 65.4% of workers have completed high school, but not a bachelor degree. Also relevant, 9.4% of bachelor degree-holding workers hold jobs in the lowest 25 paid occupations, where that number jumps to 80.2% for workers in the 25 top paid occupations list (Coder & Green). Essentially, it still pays to earn a college degree.

Many students, though, have to navigate difficulties within their current context at home, school, and in their community to get to a comfortable pay grade. Achieve, an "independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit education reform organization" reported that in Michigan, among low income students, only 19% met the college readiness benchmark in math, and 42% in evidence-based reading and writing, based on 11th grade SAT scores ("Michigan State Report," 2017, p.

4). Those with less are at a disadvantage academically, and more. With a greater wealth disparity in the United States (Reardon, 2011), more students are experiencing things like food insecurities, housing insecurities, and financial stress as they attempt college. While "no comprehensive national research has been conducted to firmly establish the prevalence of food insecurity among college students, available literature suggests that the rate of food insecurity among college students is up to four times greater than the national average" (Dubick, Mathews, & Cady, 2016). Dubick, et al. surveyed 3,765 college students in early 2016 to get a sense of their experiences with hunger. They report that,

> 48 percent of respondents reported food insecurity in the previous 30 days, including 22 percent with very low levels of food security that quality them as hungry…more than half of all first-generation students (56 percent) were food insecure…sixty-four percent of food insecure students reported experiencing some type of housing insecurity…fifteen percent of food insecure students reported experiencing some form of homelessness…of the food insecure students in the study, 32 percent believed that hunger or housing problems had an impact on their education (Dubick, Mathews, & Cady, 2016, p. 7).

The educational impacts were because they could not buy a textbook, or because they missed or dropped a class because of their food and housing problems (Dubick, et al., 2016). While early college students do not have to pay for tuition or books, they experience some of the same food and housing issues as other college students, which may affect program persistence and success. For example, how do the poorest students participate when they are responsible for transportation to get to their college classes? Most school districts do not provide transportation for early college students to get to class. To overcome this obstacle, some institutions allow students to complete classes fully online. However, do the poorest students have reliable wireless

connection and the technology tools required of the program? Also, can they complete online coursework without support at home – academic, moral, or otherwise? The struggle of low-income students is not new, but it still exists and is growing in all sectors of college students.

Students in rural, under-resourced county of study

The population in the county of study is described below (Table 2). Many students are from economically disadvantaged areas, leaving them at risk of not attending or completing education beyond high school. The rates differ greatly among the districts across the county in many categories. Having said that, around half of all graduates go to college within six months of graduating high school.

Table 2: 2014-2015 MI School Data for EMC Participating School Districts

Participating districts	Economically disadvantaged students	Free-reduced lunch participation by eligible students	Dropout Rate	4-year Grad Rate	School bond attempts
B1	38.1%	80.7%	6.82%	86.36%	4 failed since 2005
C2	49.6%	100%	8.16%	86.73%	8th attempt since 1998 passed in 2015 (all rest failed)
D3	50.5%	81%	7.14%	83.93%	passed last 3 since 1997
M4	57.6%	66.6%	11.86%	69.49%	9th attempt since 1997 passed in 2017 (all rest failed)
O5	61.6%	92.9%	8.2%	81.64%	3 failed since 2002 (bigger district, larger amount requested)
P6	45.4%	62.1%	5.38%	91.54%	3 passed since 1997
Average	**50.5%**	**80.6%**	**7.93%**	**83.3%**	

(Dashboard & Accountability Scorecard, 2014-2015, MI School Data & School Bond Election Results, State of MI)

In the 2014-2015 school year, of all county high school graduates, 56.4% began college within six months. That number dropped to 45.7% for economically disadvantaged students (MI School Data, n.d.). Some school districts had more college-goers than others, which ranged from

63.1.% to 44.2% for the entire group of graduates, to 58.8% to 36.8% of their economically disadvantaged students going to college within six months of graduation.

Additionally, based on the American Community Survey conducted by the US Census Bureau French (2016) reported there is a college dropout problem in Michigan. “Nationally, Michigan ranks 28th in the percent of high school grads entering college (61 percent), but drops to 41st in graduation rates” (par. 5). In the county of study specifically, 29.8% of adults have some college, but no degree, and 28.7% have earned an associate degree or higher, compared to the next county, where a major research university exists, where 47.3% have an associate degree or higher (French, 2016). When taking the factors presented into consideration, it becomes evident that students are well served with college and career preparation opportunities like an early college program.

Significance of the Study

In light of the recent economic recession, rural students are seeking opportunities to get ahead by earning college credentials to get jobs that will lead to steady income and a comfortable life. Two linked issues I address in my work, dual-enrollment options and the necessity for an educated workforce, both appear in the “Top 10 issues for Higher Education State Policy Issues” as annually disseminated by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (“Policy Matters,” 2017). Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Gulish (2016) note that the recession is ending and “nearly all the jobs created in the recovery, 11.5 million out of 11.6 million, have gone to workers with at least some postsecondary education” (p. 3). Additionally, they recognize that “college access and success have been the defining factors in the growing economic divide in America since the early 1980s” (p. 5). Students understand that they need college to meet their work goals.

As a group, rural students from economically depressed regions have not had the same opportunities as their urban and even suburban counterparts (Berg, 2010; Koricich, 2013; Wallace, 2015). By offering early college options to these students, school districts and their postsecondary partners can increase the college-going of their communities' children, and perhaps positively impact the trajectories of lives. However, success of these early college programs is influenced by many things including the foundational development–academic, personal, and social–of the students that attend.

Success is defined differently for most people, but in this case of rural students, students who can pass college coursework and feel more positively inclined to continue to college degree completion, and finally to a career, would be the optimal outcome. By this definition, not all early college students are successful. Some may not be successful in college coursework. Some finish the 13th year, but may not continue to completion of their college degree. Others leave the program with more work confusion than they began the program (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015; Kanny, 2015).

There are far-reaching implications, both in and out of academe, for research aimed at students who take advantage of programs offered for them to go college. This study furthers the research that has already been conducted on the decision-making behaviors of early college students–those students who fall at the intersection of both high school and college–and how their decisions to enroll affects them and their families. This will provide an additional perspective to those who work in education, both secondary and postsecondary, practitioners who want to discover ways to help students get ahead and further support their efforts. A significant factor for these students, and one that cannot be overlooked, is their social context-rural, economically disadvantaged-and the effects that has on their decisions to participate in

early college programs. Outside of education, state policy makers and communities who are investing resources in programs to improve the workforce might benefit from understanding perspectives of students who directly benefit from, and in some cases, are hindered by their programs.

This introduction highlighted key characteristics of a specific population of students and of state-funded programs-early college programs-geared to supporting student goals of educational and occupational attainment. My work will support and further ongoing research of dual enrollment programs by studying the decision-making of a particular group of students, at the intersection of secondary and postsecondary education, to better understand the influences that lead them to an early college program and their goal of a college degree. The literature review in the next chapter will present information on how students develop and how they begin to form these goals for their futures.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

> "Growing up, my friends and I had no clue that the world had changed. Papaw had retired only a few years earlier, owned stock in Armco, and had a lucrative pension. Armco Park remained the nicest, most exclusive recreation spot in town, and access to the private park was a status symbol: It meant that your dad (or grandpa) was a man with a respected job. It never occurred to me that Armco wouldn't be around forever, funding scholarships, building parks, and throwing free concerts. Still, few of my friends had ambitions to work there…By the sixth grade, we wanted to be veterinarians or doctors or preachers or businessmen. But not steelworkers. Even at Roosevelt Elementary – where, thanks to Middletown geography, most people's parents lacked a college education – no one wanted to have a blue-collar career and its promise of a respectable middle-class life. We never considered that we'd be lucky to land a job at Armco; we took Armco for granted" (Vance, pp. 54-55).

The following literature review will provide history and a synthesis of the place of work in adolescent development, occupational aspirations, and how social class affects ideas of work. The three guiding thoughts for this review are that: adolescents begin to think about their futures, they develop ideas about work, and they are products of their environments. By weaving these thoughts into my review, I hope to provide a clear path that highlights the development of adolescents and how their development informs their work images and what they believe they want to be. To do this, I will show when and how they begin to think about their futures by outlining the process of how adolescents develop socially. It is during their social development that they begin to think about themselves in the future, and how work plays an important role in the future they see. Finally, I will discuss how their social context affects what they see and believe about the work of others and the work that may best fit them as individuals. Ultimately, adolescents come to decisions about work in two key ways: with what they bring (their own aptitude, attitude, and personality) and by what is around them (their social context).

Adolescent Social Development

This section will address the first of three guiding thoughts: adolescents start to think about the future and see themselves in it. Adolescents begin to experience great change in many

ways-physical, cognitive, environmental, and social development changes. These changes have been understood and described as difficult both for the children, as well as for the adults in their lives (Arnett, 1999; Buchannan et al., 1990; Wigfield et al., 2006) and occur as adolescents leave childhood and progress into adulthood.

Social development

It is within their social development where adolescents begin to contend with the idea of work and vocation and how they will fit into that future role based on their values, goals, and who they believe they are becoming. Erikson and Marcia are two of the significant researchers in area of identity development. Erikson (1968) identified eight stages of psychosocial development and that a person's identity develops further as he or she progresses through each stage.

Erikson believed that there was a balance to each of these stages, and if a person did not achieve this balance, they would not develop appropriately with the desired characteristics. Examples are: nurturing that leads to trust which gives infants hope (or a lack of hope if nurturing is not adequate), young children being able to navigate social situations gives them purpose (or guilt and self-doubt if they cannot work with others), etc. For adolescents in the identity vs. confusion stage, those who do not develop a sense of identity feel confused and insecure about their future (Erikson, 1950, 1968).

Marcia (2002) refined Erikson's work, concentrating some of it to a deeper examination of how an adolescent begins to answer the question "who am I?" A person at this stage starts to see himself as having a past, as living in the present, and also as having a future ahead of them. As they begin to make this realization, Marcia offered four answers to the process: "foreclosure" is when a person has not started to think of their identity yet; in "identity diffusion," he or she has begun to reflect, but may not have answers; in "moratorium," he or she is engaged in

thinking about themselves and who they want to be; and finally, he or she has reached "identity development," when they have made decisions about who they are related to vocational interests, values, political and religious views, etc.

Much of the recent work in adolescent identity development has been comparative, aimed at discovering if and how the stages apply in different international and cultural contexts (Crocetti, Rubini, Branje, Koot, & Meeus, 2016; Morsunbula, Crocetti, Cokc, & Meeus, 2016; Shubach, Zimmermann, Noack, Neyer, 2016). Also, there has been recent interest in examining intergenerational effects of the stages model on families – both the adults (parents and grandparents), as well as the adolescents (Fivush, Bohanek, and Zaman, 2011; Merrill & Fivush, 2016; Rubin, O. & Rubin, A., 2014). This work, particularly, asserts that adolescents develop a narrative identity, in part, based on their parents' and grandparents' narrative. Part of this development, as previously noted, is how adolescents come to think about work, the future, and themselves involved in work in the future.

Occupational Identity

In this section on occupational identity development, I will address the second of three guiding thoughts: adolescents begin to develop ideas about work and what it means to them. Over time, and because of the changes in industry, people began to believe that they could attain different career goals than those they inherit or that their parents had for them. They believed that they had a choice in what occupation to pursue. Much study was devoted to the idea of a vocational calling or identity, the process of how that identity forms, and the difference between that and occupational identity. Researchers and counselors are still devoting much time to how occupational identity plays out in current contexts and what that means for adolescents and their choices.

Occupational inheritance becomes occupational choice

Historically, people often inherited the work of their fathers or family members. There was no formal preparation, outside of an apprenticeship from which they would learn the trade. During the great industrialization of the nation, people moved away from inheriting the work of their fathers, became mobile, and moved closer to where the majority of work was–in cities and mostly factories. It was only into the twentieth century when researchers began to study the trends in occupational changes–both the continuation of occupational inheritance in its current form and in the idea of occupational choice (Savickas, 2007). The current concept of adolescence and how adolescents must prepare for the world of work comes as a result of the family's changing role in economic production–when people stopped doing the work of their families, they needed to look for preparation elsewhere (Stern & Eichorn, 1989).

The 1960 and 1970s were a time of much examination for social scientists interested in trying to measure occupational inheritance and then mobility among generations to determine the amount and type of growth among occupational choice (Bacon, 1977; Blau & Duncan, 1967; Cutright, 1968; Dubey, 1975; Hauser, Koffel, Travis & Dickinson, 1975; Pullum, 1975). Hauser et al. (1975) specifically addressed that while this was one of the most studied issues among sociologists, there was not enough data to come to any definitive conclusions, but that their work showed that while occupational structure was different (the manner of the jobs), the mobility (movement from social class) did not change (Hauser et al., 1975).

However, it was at this time that the number of people pursuing higher education also started to increase, as did the research in occupational choice. The pursuit of trends in occupations and the increase in college-going can be attributed to the desire for social equality and "efforts to understand the transformation of the labor forces in economic development"

(Hauser et al., 1975, p. 279). People began to aspire to achieve their preferences in their occupational choices.

Occupational vs. vocational identity

As stated previously, the second half of the twentieth century proved to be a busy time for research on occupational development and career choice. Many researchers from across disciplines discovered ways to consider and explain career choice in individuals. Psychologists sought to understand the person, and what the person brought to career decision-making process, while sociologists wanted to discover how and why external variables cause certain career decisions (Osipow, 1983).

Psychologists published subsequent studies and developed theories based on the person - personality, traits, and development (like Erikson, see above). Meanwhile, social scientists began to consider the effect of a person's environment on career choice (Cutright, 1968; Dubey, 1975; Savickas, 2007). Person-traits alone did not explain the myriad choices people make about careers they pursue and which they abandon or persist. The idea that people were now making decisions about what career or occupation to pursue changed the previously held expectation of occupational inheritance (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Cutright, 1968; Dubey, 1975; Hauser, Koffel, Travis & Dickinson, 1975; Pullum, 1975). But having more choice did not make the process simpler.

Deciding on an occupation is a developmental process. People should be able to identify and feel confident in both their aptitude of the skills required and of their own satisfaction of the work. Both aptitude and attitude must be a fit for the person in order for the choice to be the "right" one. Often, people feel "called" to a certain occupation. Vocational calling and

occupational are linked and are sometimes used interchangeably, however there is a difference, albeit subtle.

Crites (1974) assessed that at that time there was great change in vocational appraisal research because counselors had inadequate instruments. He believed that "person" and "problem" appraisals were needed to improve assessments. A person appraisal was descriptive and based on personality or attitude over time, and considered patterns of interests, personality, and aptitude. The problem appraisal, on the other hand, was diagnostic. This assessed the issues the person was having in making career decisions (Crites, 1974). He claimed, "Only infrequently is attention or consideration given to *how* career choices are made: What is the process that a client goes through to arrive at a decision?" (Crites, 1974, p. 274). He went on to describe content and process, where the content was the outcome and the process was the vocational decision-making (Crites, 1974). The process of arriving to an occupational choice and developing an occupational identity became very important in the work on adolescent development.

Occupational identity status

Occupational aspirations are formed early in the life of a child within "family social interactions" and are "associated with the quality of interpersonal support and perceived societal norms" (Jepsen, 2006, p. 3). These aspirations refer to the following: "goals, intentions, or orientations; manifestations of personality traits, such as interests, values, abilities; cognitive interactions among values and expectancies, reflections of past social experiences; representations of the self, self-concept, or identity" (p. 3). The development of the individual and their occupational identity is the key focus of this study.

Occupational identity is a construct by which individuals see themselves as identifying with a specific choice of occupation and work towards attaining that. Skorikov and Vondracek (2011), in summarizing Erikson (1968), said that occupational identity "represents a core, integrative element of identity" and also is "a major factor in the emergence of meaning and structure in individuals' lives" (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011, p. 694). Throughout much of the twentieth century, vocational researchers studied occupational identity and all agreed in its critical role in adolescent development The two most widely used theories are Holland's personality-based theory and Erikson's theory of identity.

Holland introduced his theory of vocational choice in 1959 and spent the next several decades refining and revising it. When he first published his idea, he believed that other researchers studying vocational choice were either too broad or too specific when explaining their theories and he sought to find the appropriate balance.

> Essentially, the present theory assumes that at the time of vocational choice the person is the product of the interaction of his particular heredity with a variety of cultural and personal forces including peers, parents and significant adults, his social class, American culture, of this experience the person develops a hierarchy of habitual or preferred methods for dealing with environmental tasks. From an ecological standpoint, these habitual methods are associated with different kinds of physical and social environments, and with differential patterns of abilities. The person making a vocational choice in a sense 'searches' for situations which satisfy his hierarchy of adjustive orientations. (Holland, 1959, p. 35)

Holland's theory became widely used for its ability to determine how a person's personality affects the occupational choice a person makes and how their occupational identity develops.

While he recognized that this identity develops during childhood, Holland did not thoroughly work through that childhood development, as Erikson did (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011).

Erikson's theory of identity was able to delve deeply into the effects of the childhood development through the lifespan and how that connected to occupational identity, which he believed to be a core identity element (Erikson, 1968). Skorikov et al. (2011) noted, "According to Erikson, failure to establish a sense of personal identity during adolescence leads to confusion with regard to future adult roles and can be associated with an array of adjustment problems" (p. 695). This identity development is difficult and stressful for most, as adolescents begin their occupational identity development (per Marcia) in foreclosure (characterized by early ideas held prior to and without career exploration), but process through moratorium (temporary crisis during exploration), until they reach achievement (goals and values adopted through career exploration) (Skorikov et al., 2011).

Using Marcia and Erikson as their lens, current researchers have made observations that are key to occupational identity: "Occupational identity is characterized by both continuity and change…is shaped by the changing system of interpersonal relationships around which it is constructed…individuals make a significant contribution to the construction of their occupational identity…individual occupational identities are constrained by social-economic structures and processes…there is considerable variation in the salience of occupational identity within the person's overall sense of identity" (Brown, Kirpal, & Rauner, 2007). Occupational identity, based on the foundations of Erikson, continues to inform much research today.

Current research shows an increase of study in international (Ahn et al., 2015; Berríos–Allison, 2005; Hirschi & Hermann; 2013; Hirschi, 2012: Shin & Kelly, 2013), gendered (Scott & Ciani, 2008; Song et al., 2016; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015), and racial or ethnic minority

contexts (Coutinho & Blustein, 2014; Diemer & Blustein, 2007; Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer, & Scanlan, 2006; Gushue, Scanlan, Pantzer, & Clark, 2006; Hammond et al., 2010). The research focus transitioned from career decision-making (external – what happens outside of the person and the outcomes of their decisions) to more personal/internal value or identity statements.

Erikson said a lot about how adolescents achieve occupational identity, and how their social context plays a role. While Erikson extensively addressed the social development of adolescents, he did not sufficiently discuss the effects of social class, as a more macro-concept of identity development.

Work in Social Class

This section will address the final of three guiding thoughts: adolescents are products of their environments. Many factors impact adolescents' identity development, as previously mentioned, including what they bring to work decisions (their aptitude, attitude, and personality.) The social class of their parents or family is another key factor. This begins to address the external influences of adolescent work decisions. Researchers look to socioeconomic status as a way to predict the trajectory of a student's achievements. Investigation of key influences like socioeconomic status in adolescent occupational identity development is important to my study, as it will help address the effects of the social and cultural context and their intersection with the individual and internal development of the adolescent.

Social class defined

The most common and basic definition of social class describes it as socially derived division of people based on economic criteria like occupation, income, status among one's own and other groups. Power or prestige (or the lack thereof) is tied to social class and to certain

occupations. Those with more money and power find themselves in a higher class than those without. A person's work or occupation (or lack thereof) is a key component of the construct of social class. Social class, and thus occupation, allows people to understand the differences and categorize themselves and others in a way that sustains or increases their own prestige, while also withholding the prestige of others. Thus, occupation, money, power, and prestige are all inextricably linked to each other and to ideas of social class.

Key sociologists, Marx and Weber, each wrote extensively about the ideas of social class, with both similarities and differences related to occupation; money and income; and power and prestige. Researchers throughout the latter half of the twentieth studied and published perspectives of the interactions of Marx and Weber. This brief review will summarize some of their ideas as they relate to the key concepts above (Eidlin, 2015; Giddens, 1971; Royce, 2015).

The nature of occupation is such that those in social class need each other for the process to function. Marx spoke of the capitalist, the person with the means of production, who needs the worker to actually fulfill and produce the product. The workers occupied the lower end of the social class strata, and were beholden to the capitalists, who held a majority of the money and power. Marx believed that these power differences caused conflict and disruption among the categories of production–the workers felt collectively taken advantage of and sought more power, while the capitalists sought to hold on to their power and keep a sense of order by providing opportunity for the workers to work.

Weber, on the other hand, believed in the power differences of the groups, but held that the divisions were natural, symbiotic, and not exploitive in nature. Further, Weber discussed the inequalities present in class and status positions and that these inequalities led to differences in resource availability and access. Both Marx and Weber believed that those at the top of the

hierarchical structure had more power and prestige, and simply by being at the top, better and more access to resources, and through it all, status (Eidlin, 2015; Giddens, 1971; Royce, 2015). Socioeconomic status, for one, is a common measure used to categorize people.

Socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is the position a person holds within a social structure, and it is the measure often used to measure social class. Rubin et al. (2014) noted that while social class and SES are often used interchangeably, there are key differences–SES is a current measure and can be changed when there is a culture that allows for movement, while social class captures a more macro picture of a person's background. Measuring one's SES often includes objective considerations of occupation, income, education levels, and lifestyle or consumption practices (Ma, 2009; Rubin, 2012; Rubin et al., 2014). This is important when considering the desire for social mobility, because children are typically assigned the same SES as their parents and this has a significant impact on their educational and, thus occupational opportunities (Sirin, 2005; White, 1982.) "The socio-economic status of a child's parents has always been one of the strongest predictors of the child's academic achievement and educational attainment" (Reardon, 2011, p. 3). Due to changes in the accessibility of higher education to the masses in the latter part of the last century, many students today pursue college in the hopes that they might be able to change or move up their SES. They believe, because of what they tell us, that college is the means to get to their end – a better or different kind of job than their parents.

Students are going to college as a necessity to get jobs, and simultaneously as a way to get jobs that will lead to different or better life situations than their parents, or than what they experience as children at home. Meanwhile, they must make decisions on just what kind of work they will want to do. Their decisions come from how their occupational identity develops and

embedded within that, the desire to change or achieve status. Occupations then, become a piece of the development of the individual, or an extension of their identity, through the work that they come to do (Chavez, 2016). Adolescents do not develop their occupational identity within and by themselves. On the contrary, identities develop as a result of social interactions, and from an adolescent's place in their social context.

Adolescents have occupational aspirations that are informed by their contexts. They value their peer relationships and come to place high value on the benefits of interactions with peers (Johnson & Mortimer, 2011). However, there are constraining factors like young people's pursuit of occupations most familiar to them from their peers and school context, if not directly from family. Family backgrounds may limit opportunity and expectations for employment, but depending on the school and community context, so could peer influence. Factors like these, which affect work image formation, should be considered as part of the decision-making process of adolescents.

Images of Work

When we hear from new college students about their reasons for attending college, the responses often start with "I want to be [insert job type–a nurse, a teacher, a business owner, etc.]" or "I want to [insert verb–teach, lead, help others, etc.]". "Want" signifies a desire of some kind, and we make assumptions that these specific wants are ones that students have considered prior to the moment of our asking. For certain populations of students, college is not an automatic next step after high school. And, I would argue, even for those students who do have college goals from early on, most of them make guesses based on preference, social context, family and school support and information, about what kind of work they expect to do upon graduating.

Early college students are not different, and, in fact, have some idea of work prior to starting dual enrollment, often up to two years before high school graduation. What do we know about these ideas of work? This section will address how people form images and how these images begin to inform how adolescents think about things like work. What are the contextual influences that lead to ideas about work? To get there, first we need to understand how people create or form images.

Forming images

What informs our images? Images are mental pictures or ideas that are emotionally and non-rationally derived and can be confusing to developing adolescents. They are not linear, not rational. They are not all influenced similarly by ideas, experiences, and beliefs. What affects people's images, their social context (external) or something more personal (internal), like their internal values and fears? Psychologists today are still investigating "our ability to be conscious of the world around us" (Pearson & Kosslyn, 2013, p. 1). Over time, psychology has developed to believe that language is a social practice, with which we use models and metaphors to understand each other.

The belief, still being examined, is that the use of models and metaphors applies to visual imagery as well. Thus, people create images based on social practice, meaning forming personal images based on things they see around them. These images are a visual representation of what happens around an individual (Forrester, 2000; Horowitz, 1970; Robertson, 2003). Robertson (2003) explains, "young children think using images more than words, but as they learn to speak and read, their ability to think in images gradually withers" (p. 34).

Thus, language and imagery are inextricably linked, even though they occupy different places in the brain. They work together to create what Robertson calls a "mental map" that we

read when trying to understand our external environment. Yet, image formation happens within each individual. As Forrester (2000) notes, "…the world is constituted by the images we find within it, along with all those processes of image production, reception and recognition understood either as sets of social practices or as internal cognitive mechanisms and procedures" (p. 125). So, the external world informs the images we create as individuals, and our personal images inform how we see and understand the world.

Ideas of work

How do people make sense of work? Most researchers agree that today's definition of work describes paid employment and social relationships as in with an employer or to employment, rather than simply the act effort exerted to do something (Thiessen & Blasius, 2002; Orr, 1998). Further, the extant literature suggests that work is how we define the difference of class, and based on perceived power assigned to work ideas, we would expect different attitudes about work from people of different classes (Svallfoors, 2006). So, some work is "better" or "more valuable" than other work, based on many value-laden factors including financial and emotional motivators and beliefs of the individual. Do some people aspire to different work, to feel more valuable to themselves, their families, and society? As a society, we aspire to more–more money, more happiness, more autonomy or authority–in our work. Why is this so?

Most adults have to earn money in some fashion to be able to meet minimal human needs–housing, sustenance, etc. The amount of money differs depending on limitless factors–the place people live, the number of family members to support, the entertainment people value, etc. Children begin to learn what work is from a young age, and mostly from watching and hearing what work looks and sounds like from adult influences (both parents and other influential adults,

alike) and from influences in society outside of the home–in school and from the media, among others. This exposure to work begins to form ideas and images, influenced also by the personality and perspective of the individual.

Work images

How do young people derive meaning from images they have of work and how do these inform decisions to participate or take action on something–like career-focused college program attendance? The body of academic literature on the formation of "work images" is limited. Studies conducted are few, and most, international.

Thiessen and Blasius (2002), for example, were interested in discovering how teenagers form images of work. They asked the question, "How do the images young people hold about the nature of work inform us about the social structures in which they live?" The authors made the case that young people form foundational beliefs about work based on their parents' work and that social structure informs their beliefs. According to the authors and their use of Bourdieu's work on social structure, social class defines most occupations. Thus, by asking young people to evaluate and explain their beliefs on work, the readers should come to understand the perceived social structure guiding the images of work. This Canadian study included surveying 1,209 17-year olds and their parents to get a sense of how they described and, based on their language, placed value on the work of their parents. Additionally, based on the responses, the authors were able to determine the social class of the students to infer meaning on the differences between working class and middle class student perceptions of work.

The work of Thiessen, et al.. sheds light on many things, including "that images of work are indeed socially distributed" (p. 74) but this message does not come from the stories and

words of the surveyed students, but instead from the survey tool. If asked open-ended questions, how might the students have responded?

Thiessen et al.. explained, “The main purpose of this paper is to explore the manner and extent to which young people’s location in the social structure colours their images of the nature of work” (p. 53). The proposed study will build on this foundational work to discover if the images of work contribute to students who elect to participate in early college programs, based on the assumption that the work they believe they want to do requires a college credential.

I come to my research believing that early college students form images (mental pictures and beliefs) of work individually (internally), but based on the social environment (externally) around them; and that their images influence them to feel limited or empowered to work toward their goal. And so, work images are intensely personal, yet open to judgment by others, which likely makes them profoundly meaningful to a developing adolescent. While no additional research has been conducted specifically on “work images,” many researchers have studied dual enrollment programs, of which early colleges are one type, and there is no evidence of research combining the two ideas of work images and dual enrollment.

The Early College Research Landscape

Most empirical work on dual enrollment (and early college as one segment of it) has been quantitative and concerned with issues of demographic participation (minority, first-generation, etc.) and college persistence (Carey, 2015; Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015; D'Amico, Morgan, Robertson, & Rivers, 2013; Habersham, 2013; McCormick, 2010). Interest in dual enrollment has been great. In fact, a cursory search of dual enrollment research within the last three years revealed publication of 269 dissertations/theses on the topic. Many, as those cited above, were

quantitative in nature and focused on the programs themselves and success and persistence of the students.

Less research, however, has focused on the perspective of the students and how they perceive both their experience in dual enrollment programs and in their schooling leading to the decision to participate. Fewer studies, but just as significant, have concentrated on discovering student motivations for participating and to better understand their experiences (Hudson, 2016; Kanny, 2015; Smith, 2015; Wallace, 2015).

My work is situated in this space and I aim to extend the knowledge of work images and how students take action based on those images, by intersecting them with high school student postsecondary choices, specifically dual enrollment. To do so, I used Emirbayer and Mische's human agency and Bronfenbrenner's social ecology as a framework to guide questions for students about how they come to their decisions to enroll in an early college program, a particular type of dual enrollment offering.

Theoretical Frameworks: Human Agency and Social Ecology

Creswell (2014) explained that using theory in qualitative research serves many purposes: it provides an "overall orienting lens for the study of questions of gender, class and race," "they guide researchers as to what issues are important to examine…and the people who need to be studied," they "indicate how the research positions himself or herself in the qualitative study and how the final written accounts need to be written" (Creswell, 2014, p. 64). To frame my study, I looked to the sociological perspectives of Emirbayer and Mische's work in human agency, which explains how people come to have decisions and act on them, and also to Bronfenbrenner's work in social ecology, which addresses the interaction of the various contexts that inform an

adolescent's development, specifically, how social class affects occupational and educational decision-making (to address what is around them.)

In the previous section, I offered a foundation for how adolescents begin to develop ideas about work. These ideas are formed as a result of both the context of the adolescent, which I will explain later in this section through the theory of ecological systems, and also of what preferences and desires an adolescent has. These two work symbiotically. Beyond that, there is a link that takes the images an adolescent has formed internally and the action they take externally (decisions to enroll in early college, for example) based on those images. Human agency is the fundamental link between the two.

Human agency

In their seminal work on developing and clarifying the idea of agency from a social perspective, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) define human agency as "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments - the temporal-relational contexts of action - which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations" (p. 970). They believe their "central contribution is to begin to reconceptualize human agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects with the contingencies of the moment). The agentic dimension of social action can only be captured in its full complexity, we argue, if it analytically situated within the flow of time" (p. 963).

They made this claim to rebut previous attempts to define human agency that they considered to be flat, or neglectful of "crucial aspects of the problem" (p. 963). Mostly that

"since social actors are embedded within many such temporalities at once, they can be said to be oriented toward the past, the future, and the present at any given moment, although they may be primarily oriented toward one or another of these within any one emergent situation" (p. 964). By this definition, work images can be representative of the students' past contexts and how they come to taking action (intentionality), but also of their future state, as they see themselves there.

Emirbayer and Mische discuss the following three "elements" of human agency: iteration, projectivity, and practical evaluation, which "correspond to the different temporal orientations of agency" (p. 971). The iterational element speaks to routine and habit in patterns of thought and action, which gives "stability and order to social universes" and helps "sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time" (p. 971). The projective element "encompasses the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future" (p. 971). Finally, the practical-evaluation element allows actors to make judgments "among alternative possible trajectories of action" (p. 971). The researchers explain that while these three elements can exist separately, they can and often do work in tandem, with different elements dominating as necessary and that "the ways in which people understand their own relationship to the past, future, and present *make a difference* to their actions…" (p. 973).

This "chordial triad" of elements leads into an explanation of the iterational dimension of agency, in which the "schematization of social experience" holds the "locus of agency" where the "past, through habit and repetition, becomes a stabilizing influence that shapes the flow of effort and allows us to sustain identities, meanings, and interactions over time" (p. 975). They use the term "iteration" because to them, the more traditional words for agency–"routines,

dispositions, preconceptions, competences, schemas, patterns, typifications, and traditions-imply structure" rather than agency (p. 975).

Explaining this is important to their work because Emirbayer and Mische believe that most "contemporary theories of agency" (p. 983) end the discussion at the iterational dimension. To further it, these two:

> maintain that human actors do not merely repeat past routines; they are also the inventors of new possibilities for thought and action…We argue that an imaginative engagement of the future is also a crucial component of the effort of human actors. As they respond to the challenges and uncertainties of social life, actors are capable of distancing themselves (at least in partial exploratory ways) from the schemas, habits, and traditions that constrain social identities and institutions…The subset of words used to describe this ability has ranged from the strongly purposive terminology of goals, plans, objectives to the more ephemeral language of dreams, wishes, desires, anxieties, hopes, fears, and aspirations (pps. 983-984).

It is in this dimension, that Emirbayer and Mische call the "projective dimension of human agency," that the work images imagined by adolescents may become linked to the decisions they make to take action and enroll in early college. This claim is supported by the researchers' continued explanation that:

> "the formation of projects is always an interactive, culturally embedded process by which social actors negotiate their paths toward the future, receiving their driving impetus from the conflicts and challenges of social life. The locus of agency here lies in the *hypothesization* of experience, as actors attempt to reconfigure received schemas by generative alternative possible responses to the problematic situations they confront in

> their lives. Immersed in a temporal flow, they move 'beyond themselves' into the future and construct changing images of where they thing they are going, where they want to go, and how they can get there from where they are at present" (p. 984).

Emirbayer and Mische further explain the "internal structure of projectivity" by first reminding the reader that projectivity represents the present (even while actors simultaneously inhabit all three temporal areas), and then detailing the following concepts: anticipatory identification, narrative construction, symbolic recomposition, hypothetical resolution, and experimental enactment.

Anticipatory identification reminds us that people extract what they already know to start to identify possible options for action. Narrative construction helps form these possible options from a "causal" or "temporal sequence" (p. 989). Symbolic recomposition takes what someone already knows, and allows them to dissect and recreate alternative scenarios in its place. Then, "after surveying possible scenarios of action, actors face the task of proposing hypothetical resolutions that will adequately respond to the moral, practical, and emotional concerns arising from lived conflicts" (p. 990). Finally, experimental enactment "rests on the borderline between imagination and action" (p. 990) where an actor tests out potential actions. They give the example of Erikson's (1968) "role experimentation" where people, especially adolescents, "try out possible identities without committing themselves to the full responsibilities involved" (p. 990). Some students may view their early college participation as an experiment in college, or trying out something they are unsure of in an environment that feels like less of a commitment (both financial and of time.)

Only after projectivity is explained does one move into the present, or the practical evaluation dimension. This sequence can be described as problematization, where the actor

discovers something that is “unsettled” or “unresolved” and desires to resolve it. The actor then characterizes the issue by looking backward to see if it can be resolved with a known schema or habitual activity. After assessment, the actor deliberates on a course of action based on known patterns or potential new possibilities. Then the actor makes a decision, defined as “the resolution to act here and now in a particular way” (p. 999). Finally, he or she executes their decision by acting; in this case, the action of enrolling in early college. It is vital to recognize the complexity of humans where just as they act, they are acted upon, and as much as we create our context, we are also created by it.

Social ecology

Many things influence adolescents to develop their identity, as previously mentioned. The social class of their parents or family is one of them. Investigation of key influences in adolescent development is important to my study, as it will help address the effects of the social and cultural context and its intersection with the individual and internal development of the adolescent.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) influential work on human development provides an opportunity to asses the importance of the social context of a person on their development, in a multi-level or layered approach. Each system, beginning with that closest to the student, and working “out” to the systems that students may not always be aware of that are affecting them directly. First, the microsystem is defined as “the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person (e.g., home, school, workplace, etc.)” (Bronfenbrenner, p. 514). Further, he defines a setting as “a place with particular *physical features* in which the *participants* engage in particular *activities* in particular *roles* (e.g., daughter, parent, teacher, employee, etc.) for particular periods of time. The factors of

place, time, physical features, activity, participant, and role constitute the *elements* of a setting" (p. 514). Via this perspective, the microsystem of an early college student's home setting relating to their parents and other influential family, and their particular school experience relating to teachers, peers, and other influential adults, is closest to them, and thus, impactful to their development.

Next, the mesosystem "comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life" (p. 515). So, how does their home setting, for example, connect to school? This then becomes a layer outside of their microsystem, where different microsystems come together to form the influences of a particular student. The exosystem expands the mesosystem to specify other social structures "that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found, and thereby influence, delimit, or even determine what goes on there" (p. 515). If a student, for example, is unaware of criteria required to participate in an early college program, how can they be sure to be prepared to enroll? The program and its entrance requirements exist outside of the student and his or her awareness; however, it has tremendous impact on the student when they need it.

Bronfenbrenner continued explaining exosystems by saying that "these structures include the major institutions of society, both deliberately structured and spontaneously evolving, as they operate at a concrete local level" (p. 515). The macrosystem departs from the others in that it explains systems that operate outside of the individual person and their own social contexts, "but to general prototypes, existing in the culture or subculture, that set the pattern for the structures and activities occurring at the concrete level" (p. 515). He continued by highlighting that "most macrosystems are informal and implicit-carried, often unwittingly, in the minds of society's

members as ideology made manifest through custom and practice in everyday life" (p. 515). That is to say, the people give meaning and life to the patterns of examples like "economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems, of which micro-, meso-, and exo-systems are the concrete manifestations" (p. 515). The people create the structures to which we then hold ourselves.

I believe that students choose to participate in early college programs to "get ahead" or "do better" in life. However, many things in their context – both recognized and invisible - intersect to influence both the ideas and potentially the outcomes of adolescents. Bronfenbrenner's work in organizing the systems affecting adolescents, in this example, assists to address and clarify those influences, and ultimately, decisions. I was interested in examining how the work images they form and hold may influence their decisions to participate in career-focused early college programs. In Table 3 below, I applied the systems model to this population to help me understand what types of questions to include on an interview protocol that would lead students to speaking about their home and school contexts. My basis for using portraiture as a methodology was my interest in hearing the stories of the students, and of a desire to tell both their stories individually and as a whole story. I will explain this further in the next chapter.

Table 3: Applying Bronfenbrenner's systems to early college students (from the perspective of the college)

System	Influences	Questions
Microsystem	Parents, peers at high school, peers at college, teachers at high schools, instructors at college	Who helped encourage students to participate in early college program? How supported in that decision are they – by high school teachers and/or college instructors?

Table 3: (cont'd)

Mesosystem	Parents attending early college orientation High school counselor calling the college on behalf of student	Do parents make decisions about the student's program choice/occupational choice? When changes or requirements on the college campus interfere with the student's high school requirements, or interfere with extracurricular activities in which they want to participate. (I.e., there is a schedule conflict between a college class and their after-school job or sport?)
Exosystem	Parental work influences on the home life Parental life choices Early college program requirements (application criteria)	If the parents have jobs they do not like, how does this affect the home context? Does it cause stress? Does it change how a student's own identity develops? If the parent/s do not work, how might this affect the student's identity development and what they want to pursue related to schooling or occupation? Do students have enough time to improve GPA to participate, if necessary?
Macrosystem	Rural, geographical context Structural poverty State and federal funding allowances for early college programs The recession?	How is a student limited by living in structural poverty? Does living in a rural geographical area affect the opportunities students believe they have? What happens to these students when funding is cut?

Chapter 3: Methodology

> "To them [Middletown parents and grandparents], the American Dream required forward momentum. Manual labor was honorable work, but it was their generation's work – we had to do something different. To move up was to move on. That required going to college. And yet, there was no sense that failing to achieve higher education would bring shame or any other consequences…In Middletown, 20% of the public high school's entering freshman class won't make it to graduation. Most won't graduate from college. Virtually no one will go to college out of state. Students don't expect much from themselves, because the people around them don't do very much. Many parents go along with this phenomenon…There was, and still is, a sense that those who make it are of two varieties. The first are lucky…The second are meritocratic" (Vance, p. 56).

Much research exists, mostly quantitative in nature, which has studied the success and benefits of dual enrollment programs like early college. The benefit of conducting a qualitative study like this one is to better understand how a certain population of students makes decisions to participate in an early college program when they may not always find the same success (i.e., earning transferable college credit and applying it to completing a college degree more quickly). Additionally, among the research concentrated on the occupational identity development of adolescents, like those students who make decisions to participate in early college programs, most studies focus on the experiences of those students who are either in secondary institutions or postsecondary institutions, but not the students at the intersection of both institutions dually (as described in Chapter 2).

In this chapter, I will explain the reason for selecting portraiture as the best methodology for this study, based on the research question guiding the research. I come to this work with the epistemological constructivist belief that in order to understand how students make decisions, I recognize that they create the construct from which they assign meaning to their interactions with others (Creswell, 2014). Guiding my idea was my curiosity about how the work images formed and held by high school students from a rural, low socioeconomic background influence decisions to enroll in career-focused early college programs.

The research question that steered my study is:

How does the social context (circumstance) of students from a rural, economically disadvantaged area influence them to make a decision and take action (agency) to enroll in an early college program?

Portraiture as a Methodology

Portraiture as a research methodology looks to "combine systemic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p.3). It consists of five essential features: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). "The drawing of the portrait [or telling of the story] is placed in social and cultural context and shared through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image" (p. xv). My position within the institutional context made me the appropriate person to study these students and their motivations and then tell their stories. The subject in the research is important, but so is the researcher. Unlike ethnographers who "listen *to* a story…portraitists listen *for* a story" (p. 13). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) refer to the work of Eudora Welty who wrote about that "subtle but crucial distinction" (p. 13). When one listens "to" a story, he or she "waits to absorb the information and does little to give it shape and form" while when listening "for" a story, he or she "searches for the story, seeks it out, is central in its creation" (p. 13).

This work represents my story, as I have been long embedded in this context, as well as the stories of the participants. A key distinction I want to make is that while the students come from the same (rural, low-income region and post-recession Midwest) context, as I describe it in

this work, they do not have the same story and are not necessarily affected by the context in the same way. So, while I aim to tell a single story of a group of students and their experience in early college, the story can only be complete with each of their unique stories, life experiences, and voices woven in. Like a tapestry, the whole is better because of its parts.

I have spent the last fourteen years working with college students at an open enrollment, postsecondary institution with a career-focused mission. Students often make claims that they elect to come to college to get "good" jobs or "better" jobs than their parents. This institution is housed in, and draws from, a mainly rural student base. Many students come from low-income backgrounds, and it is common that they are first-generation college-goers. Of those whose parents did attend college, most of the parents attended a college like this one – where the majority of students aim to complete an associate degree.

In the last several years, state funding has increased to afford students opportunities to begin earning college credit while students are still in high school. This particular institution partnered with the regional educational service district to offer early college program options for county students. Many traditional college students come to the institution in need of remediation. The early college students are allowed to enroll in program classes and college-level general education classes under the assumption that they meet certain academic thresholds to be able to succeed in those classes. Not all of them do. In fact, when asked, many of the students who participate in early college programs identify by their future careers, and not as college-students. Portraiture is the appropriate method for this research because my experience from within the context gives me a unique understanding of the nuance and complexity of the context of these students and this particular program in the current political and economic landscape.

A second key feature of portraiture is voice and researchers should use their voice to find the goodness in the work, both as they define it, and how the subjects define it (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). Lawrence-Lightfoot elaborates,

> The researcher who asks first 'what is good here?' is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover the sources of failure…But it is also important to say that portraits are not designed to be documents of idealization or celebration. In examining the dimensionality and complexity of goodness, there will, of course be ample evidence of vulnerability and weakness. In fact, the counterpoint and contradictions of strength and vulnerability, virtue and evil (and how people, cultures, and organizations negotiate those extremes in an effort to establish the precarious balance between them) are central to the expression of goodness (p. 9).

This is important to establishing and maintaining the necessary relationship between the subject and portraitist, which starts with the selection of subjects.

Selection of Participants

To select my participants, I used purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2014) and collected data from students that self identified based on the following criteria: current early college students, specifically those currently taking high school and college classes simultaneously. To help me identify the students, I worked with the early college coordinator to target current early college students (11^{th}–13^{th} grades–dual enrolled students to full campus-based students taking only college classes.)

Once the students were identified (n=approximately 150), I sent them a Google form survey via email (Appendix A) to solicit interest. Interested students under eighteen years of age who completed the Google Form, were also asked to provide contact information for their parent

or guardian to gain consent to participate. Parents or guardians of those students were sent consent information via email and were asked to submit a signed consent form via U.S. mail, fax, or scanned in email (Appendix B, consent form). I responded to the first dozen students who completed the Google form. Two did not meet the criteria (not early college students) and one was not yet eighteen years old and did not gain parental consent. This narrowed my participant pool to nine, which was my goal.

Data Collection

A qualitative study relies on the collection of multiple sources of data from "a variety of lenses which allows multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood" (Baxter, 2008, p. 544). Thus, I met with early college students to discover their sense of their own occupational identity and how that might have influenced their decisions to participate in an early college program. Before doing so, I observed an informational session held at a high school explaining the early college programs to get a sense of how the program is marketed to students and their families. In the individual interviews, I hoped to discover personal beliefs, interests, and goals of students, along with examine the ideas of what helps form identity development – support of family, peers, school; career exploration; and social context and how all of these led students to decide to participate in the early college program.

Observation

Prior to beginning data collection, I attended an informational session at one participating high school to get a better sense of how the early college program is marketed to students and parents. My aim was to get a better sense of the student experience from the front end, or the point of initial EMC information access of most parents and students, to start to build a holistic account of the entire phenomenon (Creswell, 2014 & Baxter, 2008).

The session I attended was at one of the high schools that is heavily invested in the early college program and sends more students through the program than the other K12 school districts in the county. The early college coordinator, who works closely with the early college students by assisting them with enrollment, registrations, and advising throughout their program, gave the presentation. This individual is employed by both the regional education service district and the postsecondary institution at where this study takes place, which gives her the unique perspective of being both "within" the college context, while also outside of it.

What I discovered during this observation was that parents have questions about the program, which is still new enough to be unclear, but growing in popularity that there was a half-full auditorium of students and families. The questions parents asked were mostly logistical in nature, and not philosophical. I got the impression that they felt it was too good to be true, even while wanting it to be true – no cost, official college credit, the potential to earn an associate degree a year after completing high school.

Individual interviews

Via semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C for protocol), I spoke with participants (n = 9, see Appendix D for a chart of the participants) about personal occupational identity development, and about the student's awareness of the effects of his or her social context on their decisions by asking him or her about the images they have of work in general and as work relates to their future. After writing up my findings, to validate and triangulate data, I looped back to the individual students to have additional conversations about findings. This is a key feature of portraiture, where the researcher looks for emergent themes through repetitive refrains and resonant metaphors, which become identifiable as symbols and meaning, and then confirm the findings with the subjects, which become a part of the portrait. The participants who came back

to read the findings and the narrative portrait affirmed their own stories and verified the findings that emerged.

To turn the stories into data from which to extract my findings, I first used a web-based transcribing service to convert my audio files into text files. Once I had the raw text files, I reviewed them by listening to the audio files while simultaneously editing the text files for speaker errors and major formatting errors. On the next turn, I edited the transcripts for mechanical errors, and began to add to my field journal characteristics of each participant that seemed significant to their story and also major ideas that seemed significant, thus initiating the coding process. After I completed revision of the interview transcripts, I created a codebook (Appendix E), where I grouped the participants' responses by interview question and section, to better see themes emerge. I confirmed these themes with information I had garnered from the notes that I kept in my field journal during my interviews with each participant and while going through the audio and text files of the transcripts. The code book and field journal became my guideposts as I began to compose both the student portrait and findings sections.

After I completed reviewing the interview transcripts, organizing participant responses, and discovering themes, I narrowed, from nine to six to four, the number of participants whose stories ultimately are included in this research. I used the following criteria to do so. First, since all of my participants identified by traditional gender roles, I attempted to select an even number of males and females, to provide what I considered to be more balanced ideas. In this way, I eliminated one female first, Natasha.

This was an easy decision for me because during my time with her and after, listening to the audio and rereading the transcript, I got the sense that her responses to my questions were more what she felt was what I expected to hear and perhaps less authentic ones. Her responses

did not feel insincere, however they felt more surface-level responses than many of the other participants. Also, I realized that John's and Andrew's stories were similar, so similar that I found myself confusing them in my reflection, organization, and subsequent coding, leading me to remove them both. This made the choice to remove Natasha's story, as I mentioned above, easier. I did not end up with an even distribution after all, but one that works best for my study based on the participant stories and how well they fit into the larger story of the geographic context and early college participation.

At this point, then, I wrote six brief, more streamlined vignettes attempting to connect them into one portrait, but on the advice of my chair, I reduced the initial six to four more robust profiles. During our conversation, I knew which two students' stories I would exclude, Steve and Charlotte. I ultimately chose to remove these two because they were the oldest and youngest participants, and subsequently, the most and least confident of their goals for the program and beyond. Steve, the oldest participant, was completing the program and going into the military. In fact, he had already spoken with a recruiter and his plan was in motion. He had more self-efficacy about his future, and about his goal for his experience in the early college program than the others. He was using his credit to advance into a certain job in the military and hopefully also use his credential upon completion of his service. The one thing he was not certain of was how long he intended to serve.

Charlotte, on the other hand, was the youngest participant, and also the least certain about her goals and even if she wanted to continue in the early college program. (She did ultimately return the following academic year.) Her sisters attended one of the bigger state universities and gave her advice about how the rest of her high school career might go, and during our time together, she was slightly uncertain of what she really wanted, other than she knew she liked

being away from her high school for college classes, even though college itself intimidated her. Once I eliminated these two students' stories from the final product and focused my work on the four remaining portraits, which will be presented in the next chapter, I could assess and refine my findings for later holistic analysis.

Analysis

As a result of my interest in discovering "how" and "why" high school students make decisions to participate in early college programs, and in light of the research question that operates within a specific context bound by time and place (Creswell, 2014), and my theoretical framework of human agency and social ecology which, when considered together, say that adolescents make decisions and act on them based on their social environments (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Bronfenbrenner, 1977), I made use of Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis' approach to producing a set of portraits, which is the product of the aesthetic whole.

They believe, "In developing the aesthetic whole we come face to face with the tensions inherent in blending art and science, analysis and narrative, description and interpretation, structure and texture. We are reminded of the dual motivations guiding portraiture: to inform and inspire, to document and transform, to speak to the head and to the heart" (p. 243). The four dimensions of the whole are: conception, taking the emergent themes and organizes individual stories with a collective one thus developing the overarching story; structure, the layering of the themes "that give the piece a frame, a stability, and an organization" (p. 252); form, the movement of the story "providing complexity, subtlety, and nuance to the text" (p. 254); and cohesion, the integrity of the story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis).

It is critical to remember, also, that this study represents a distinct time and place as highlighted by the current stories and lives of the students. Recognizing this, I deeply considered

the idea of how we talk about something that we are in the middle of. I wondered, before starting, how open the participants might be to answering questions about themselves – if they are in the middle of developing their identity (which I believe they are), how responsive to my questions could they be? And, beyond that, would their responses be meaningful in a lasting way? I ultimately decided they would be, because of the students' representation of their current state as valuable to their own ongoing stories.

Confidentiality

As an ethical responsibility, research should work to ensure confidentiality. This is especially so when working with young adults, and inquiring about personal, potentially sensitive topics, like their home lives and peer relationships. I took this responsibility seriously, and employed several strategies so that confidentiality will be guaranteed.

All participants were provided with and asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B) that included an explanation of the research and their role in it as participant. For those students under the age of eighteen, I included the requirement of parental permission. Also, I changed the names of all participants, so no one can be identified within the research, and I took steps to lock and protect audio and all other data files.

Limitations and Exclusions

For the purpose of this study, I limited my research to a population of students who are from rural and economically disadvantaged geographic areas. Based on objective factors like parental education, community poverty rates, school free/reduced lunch counts, I made assumptions that come from anecdotal evidence that suggests that poverty forces some of these students to come to school stressed and perhaps hungry. I excluded the potential of their home

backgrounds to have affected brain development; I approached this research with the belief that they are cognitively able to make decisions and benefit from education.

I aimed to discover what leads these students to make decisions to willingly participate in college education while simultaneously still completing high school. Students like these typically and eventually become the student population of open enrollment institutions, and better understanding them may lead to better support and funding structures to aid them. To focus my work, this research did not specifically examine differences in race, gender, middle or upper class students, or how poverty or hunger might cognitively affect children.

Additional considerations that were not the focus of my study, although I recognize their importance in the larger scope of early college programs and accept they may appear in the data are: the transferability of college credits to other institutions and the influence of adolescent employment (work not leading to career employment–i.e., after-school jobs, babysitting, etc.) on early college participation.

Trustworthiness

There are many ways to ensure data reliability, including member checks and triangulation of data (Creswell, 2014). "Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (Creswell, p. 201). I met with the participants and the early college coordinator after the interviews to get a sense of their beliefs of the decisions of students, thereby assuring data triangulation and member checking (Creswell, 2014). To do this, I discussed with them the protocols, transcripts, and my initial coding/theme building and also with the early college coordinator who works with each of the students to assist with registration, as a liaison between the college and the high school, and as an advisor when

students need assistance and thus, had insight into the responses of students. The conversation with the early college coordinator was indeed validating. She said, “I discovered a very common thread with the majority of students currently enrolled in the early college program. In fact there were times in the conversation I could finish her [the researcher’s] sentences based on my working knowledge of the student population.”

After meeting with one of the participants upon completion of writing up the portrait and findings, she finally asked me to change her name to an alias. In our interviews, after several requests, she insisted that she did not want to change it, that she was fine using her real first name. Reading the portrait and findings made it feel real and she explained, “That’s my real life right there. You got it spot on. I want to be me, but…” The reality of her life and experiences being out for potential public consumption overwhelmed her to the point of tears. I did not expect that. Her sentiments were shared with another participant who expressed to me that “I’m just amazed you got that out of me. I don’t really share my feelings.” This came after her many questions and our robust conversation about qualitative research and a shared belief that we better understand ideas as told through stories. I was not prepared to feel anxious about meeting with my participants again after our interviews. I expressed to the participants how I felt, and that I felt compelled to make sure that I told their stories accurately.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

One of the main lenses from which I have viewed education and its purpose is that of poverty - both financial poverty and what I call mental poverty, or the idea of hopelessness/or a lack of desire for personal betterment (at the most micro-level). And so, questions like "Is it better for our society for all students/people to get the 'best' jobs possible?" and "What does education really do for our society?" really interest me.

In my work context, I often see students who come through the doors of our institution because they feel like they have no other options (whether they cannot find a job, or someone told them that they "have to" go to college, or frankly, to get student loans to live on) and I have never been able to fully accept that because I value education, knowledge, and learning so strongly. I seek to understand their values which are sometimes so opposite from mine.

Open enrollment institutions serve so many students that I feel like the experience of my institution cannot be unique. The institution suffers from a bit of an identity crisis in that we believe we offer quality academic experiences as do other accredited postsecondary institutions, however, we are often considered inferior, likely because of the career and vocational focus of the programs we offer and because of our open enrollment philosophy. Externally, we suffer from a prestige problem, as the ideas of academic quality and career focus conflict by conventional higher education standards.

I believe my experiential knowledge with this population of students and the program is important to my research. For more than a decade, I have had direct contact with students like those who make up our early college population. I am embedded in the institutional culture and because of this, I understand the nuance of the institution and of students like my research population better than an objective party. Instead of taking time to integrate myself into the field of study, I come to the research fully embedded. I do recognize that in addition to the benefit of my positionality provides to my research, I also understand that my biases play a role. Naturally, I come to this work about these students from a deficit perspective, but choose to consciously work toward changing my perspective to one of abundance. Instead of wondering what they are missing, I want to examine what these students have because of their environments that they can teach us.

This was not the career I planned for myself. I moved to this small community, in a rural county, a year into my secondary teaching career. My goal was to find a middle school English job like the one I left behind. However, I quickly discovered that for an outsider, it was challenging to "break into" the small, close knit school districts here. I began working at the college, the only postsecondary institution in the county, with the intent of only staying long enough to find a classroom of my own. But what drew me to teaching initially, the idea of helping others discover the wonder of learning, is was kept me at this institution for this long.

Once I decided that I was staying, I wanted to know more about the intersection of secondary and postsecondary education, specifically issues of access and college and career readiness, because these were the things affecting the students that I saw: many were not ready for college-level work; many did not understand how to navigate the college classroom from logistics to behavior, they did not know how to "be" college students; many were overcoming major hurdles in their lives, poverty, substance abuse, apathetic or absent family, etc. It was a challenge for them to attend class sometimes. At the core of it, though, was their desire, both pragmatic and idealistic, to do "more" and be "better" for themselves, for their families. It seemed they had something to prove to the world. This was what I wanted to explore.

So, my idea for this particular research began for me a dozen years ago when I started to work in student affairs at this institution, the type of which was at the time new to me. We had an open enrollment admission policy, but we were private, fiscally conservative, and focused on professional trades at mostly the associate degree level, with a few bachelor programs. Back then, our student body was made up more of post-traditional students – older, with families, often with jobs – who were trying to make a better life. The students often talked about their goals – admirable, to be sure - but when I would try to push them about the detailed steps of

getting to those goals, they would falter or stumble in their response. That was why they sought help. They didn't know how to do the actual work of getting to the end goal. I always felt like there was something special about the students who would seek me out for assistance with class scheduling, major changes, or class struggles. It felt like they were the same struggles as college students everywhere, but heightened somehow by insecurity, fear, or other generally negative emotion.

Overwhelmingly, it felt like these students had so many obstacles to overcome just to get to my office and I never fully understood why this resonated with me so deeply. Instinctually, I would feel proud of them when they would leave my office whether they met their graduation goals or not (fewer than half did). It felt like something important, I just could not articulate what that was at the time.

Fast-forward a decade and hundreds of similar conversations with students, to my work involving primarily faculty, but also oversight of dual enrollment partnerships. Early college seemed to spontaneously rise to everyone's minds and lips - from my doctoral coursework, to higher education policy conversations, national accreditation conversations, to my own employer institution and our partnership with the county regional education service district.

I quickly came to realize that our early college students, while younger in age, share similar goals and more importantly, similar stories as the students I spent a dozen years listening to. My idea began to take shape, and I knew I wanted to collect their stories, as a way to honor the students and the greater story of college and career readiness in this geographic region and potentially others like it.

Chapter 4: Student Narrative Portraits

> "My mom goes, like still to this day, she goes, 'you know, you never go to school, kid, how do you go to college?' And I'm like, 'Mom, I wake up every day and I go to college. School? Nope.' And so I mean, she's on me about it, but she's just glad that I'm taking that step further. And actually, because my sister...my sister wanted to go to the Air Force, but A, she wasn't mentally fit and B, she wasn't physically fit for it. So my mom never really counted on it. You know, she never really got her hopes up. But now that I'm taking my steps forward and everything, it's really bringing out like, holy crap, someone in our family is actually doing something, you know?" – Bralyn, 11th grade

The main purpose driving this research project was to better understand the motivating factors that lead rural high school students from under-resourced areas to college earlier. To discover these factors, I asked students questions about work, school, and their families guided by this principal research question: How does the social context (circumstance) of students from a rural, economically disadvantaged area influence them to make a decision and take action (agency) to enroll in an early college program? The student narrative portraits below are provided to tell the stories of influence of a few participants of this research.

Carlos

Carlos looks like an average kid from a rural area. Nothing really stands out about his appearance, other than his deep dimples when he smiles, which does not happen often; this is largely why it is memorable. He is of average height, a stocky build, and wears glasses. He has short, wavy brown hair, and a scruffy beard. He wears a torn, camouflage-printed hooded sweatshirt, work jeans (dirty), and work boots. Carlos is studying in industrial arts and has no goal of college beyond completing the credential he is currently earning. Carlos gives off an appearance of comfort and confidence.

He gave responses that he knew, on occasion, would shock. The responses themselves did not cause shock, but some of the detail did. He realized it because he stated, "I could tell you didn't like when I cussed, because you kept writing things down in your notebook."

He cursed. A lot. More than what would be deemed professional or expected in a traditional educational environment. It was not offensive, but he assumed it was and it seemed like he was communicating in his natural style. But then, one of the first things he discussed was the young members of his family, a topic that seemed at odds with his harsh language and attempt to seem tougher than maybe he is.

Carlos likes kids. On many occasions he talked about his niece and nephew. Nothing was clearer than Carlos' love of and loyalty to family. Immediately when asked about his upbringing two things became clear to me: he did not feel at home anywhere and his mother is the most significant person in his life. He made many comments about his mom including, "If I didn't have my mom, I wouldn't be where I am today. I would have shot myself by now" and "My mom is my everything." When describing his dad, however, he admitted that their personality similarities have caused some friction over the years. He described the two of them as too alike, too stubborn. Ultimately, he preferred to discuss the impact his mother has had on his life than his father. However, his parents are still together and the family is a unit that has stayed together through many life events most would consider significant.

When Carlos talked about the several generations of family that have lived and moved across state lines together, he seemed to get simultaneously dismissive and emotional. He grew up living with aunts, uncles, grandparents, his sister, and cousins in a building that had previously housed a "mental institution home" until that business closed. It had "something like nine bedrooms" so there was space for everyone. "This was [in a small town on the west side of the state, right in town] next to the McDonald's, but they tore that house down. The Amish bought it. They didn't care about anything, they just zipped it right up. It was there one day gone the next."

He described his childhood as happy, even though he went on to talk about several traumatic events. Those statements seem contradictory, but perhaps they were not. There can be peace and happiness in between moments of difficulty, and it seems that was how Carlos remembered his childhood.

Many of the adults in his family did not and still do not have jobs, but instead live off social security for various injuries or health problems. He talked often about wanting to be independent. Carlos appeared to put up walls emotionally, and yet was very forthcoming with details about traumatic events, although he described them in an almost clinical way. He was witness to one of his uncles dying in his bedroom (when Carlos was preschool-aged.) He does not recall his specific age.

> I didn't understand what was going on. And so the only picture I remember is my grandma's backside right in my face, because that's how tall I was, and she kept kind of shooing me back saying, "Get back, get back." I'm like, "no what are they doing to Uncle Rich?" And then there is a family friend who is the guy who takes the bodies away. So I seen him and I'm like, "what's he doing here, what's he here for? Uncle Rich?" And as they were wheeling him right past the door, my Uncle Rich's arm fell off the gurney thing and I seen that and I'm like, "hey, where you going?" And then that was it.

Carlos remembers hearing stories about this uncle's substance abuse problem, but does not remember this part clearly. Then he was also witness, two years later, to another uncle's passing (the brother of the first, both his dad's brothers), also to a substance abuse problem.

For much of his childhood, though, Carlos thought he played a role in this death, because he and his uncle had been "messing around" and Carlos, obsessed with wrestling, took a chair and swung it, hitting his uncle in the back. As a kid, he now realizes that he did not actually hit

his uncle hard, but at the time, he remembers being very afraid because it was after that when his uncle's back was bothering him, and he was taking pain pills for it. Ultimately, his uncle overdosed on those pills and died. Carlos carried guilt around for many years believing his horsing around with his uncle was the cause of his uncle's back issues and ultimate death.

It was about that time that the family began to move around every year or two – from different towns in the state to other states, sometimes extended family moving together, and sometimes just his nuclear family which consisted of his parents, his sister, and him. All the moving around left him unable to get attached easily and often unwilling to try to make friends, which he still claims he does not have to this day. "I kept in touch with some of the people, but you know when you move, you're forgotten about so I never really tried to get friends after that." There is one friend in Kansas that he still keeps in touch with, and this is the only person he could think of as a trusted peer.

For as much as he talked about his "obsession" with his mom, he realized that he and his dad are too alike for them to always get along the same way. His dad is restless, bored, unhappy, and never able to sit still long enough to keep a job, which accounted for all of the moving. In spite of the moving and inability to feel like any one place is home, Carlos will be the first in his family to graduate high school and college, with the ultimate goal of financial freedom, and with the pride that he exudes when talking about his family's feelings about his being in college. "Because technically my sister graduated from high school but so far I would be the only one that's, besides her, to finish high school and finish college."

It is easy to say that his mom was his main influence on Carlos staying in school, when he would not be judged by most of the family for dropping out. This support from mom led Carlos to be "obsessed with my mom and I still am." His story of witnessing trauma and death as

a small child led immediately to his strong and deep devotion to his mother. She has remained his closest and strongest ally. She encouraged him “not to drop out of school like she did” and for school to be his main life priority. “I wanted a job, but Ma always said no you're going to focus all your time on high school, you're going to get done.” She even helps him with schoolwork, even while Carlos’ dad is not pleased with all the time she spends doing so. She works, and his dad does not, and when she had attempted to take some college classes, Carlos explained to me that his dad did not like all the time that her work and school were taking away from him and the family.

Carlos could not articulate what work his dad had done back when he was working, but simply that he no longer worked. “He didn't really retire from it. He just stopped working and said ‘I'm retired.’” When asked if it was a health issue, Carlos replied, “No, it’s more an attitude issue.” He described an issue that occurred at his dad’s last job, where he had conflict with a colleague and their supervisor got involved. The supervisor was going to write up Carlos’ dad, who quit before his supervisor could do so. Carlos called his dad stubborn and admitted he got that quality from his dad. Even though his dad resents the amount time mom spends working both at and outside the home, his dad has not worked since the incident with his colleague many moves and many states ago, and does not plan on working outside of the home again. As much as his mom has been a positive influence on his persistence, his dad has been the one to guide him to the type of work Carlos has chosen.

Both of his parents then, influenced him, even though not many others did. There were not many people his age at home growing up, even while there were multiple generations living at home. It was he and his sister, with whom he does not get along. After the death of his uncle, his cousin (the uncle’s daughter), who is a few years older than Carlos, also lived with them,

because Carlos' dad promised his brother he would look after her. He kept his promise even through some trouble she caused the family when she invited some people to the house and they robbed the family. Carlos speculated that she played a causal role in that.

> They got probably fifteen grand in guns, ten grand in silver and gold, in computers and everything, and the worst part about it was my brother-in-law who was in the Army stationed in Afghanistan. His guns were there, too, and he had his grandpa's Colt 22, which is probably now worth about five grand, seven grand in rifles and including the two grand scope on the rifle. And they took it. And the funny part about it was where the guns were hidden. Wasn't near the safes where the coins were hidden. You had to know where they were put to get them. And the computers were hidden under the bed under presents and my computer was there because my parents got me one for Christmas. And so that was the present under the bed and they took all of that stuff, but left the broken camera and the broken laptop.

While that caused a lot of anger, resentment, and difficulty with the family, Carlos' dad stood by his niece. "And so the detective that was head of the case begged my dad to press charges so she can arrest him [the known thief] and also arrest my cousin, but my dad said, 'no I told my brother that I would watch over her and I can't do that to her.'" That event taught Carlos a lot about "forgiving and forgetting" when it comes to family. Family stuck together.

They moved often, at dad's insistence, including after that event. "Because my dad can't stand being in one spot for more than a year. Can't stand the cold, goes to heat. He can't stand the heat, comes back to cold. Gets bored, goes somewhere else," explained Carlos. That made making new friends difficult. Sometimes that mattered to him, and other times it did not. But it made school difficult both academically and socially.

Carlos talked about being bullied throughout school. He was often the new kid and said the bullying occurred "because I was ugly and fat." At one point in late elementary school:

> Somebody walked up to me and said, "Dude, somebody drew a picture of you with bombs strapped to your chest in a gun pointed at your head and a sniper going through your head and a knife in your chest and a grenade in your hand." So I walked up to the air vent thing and the picture was sitting right there taped to it. I looked at it and I'm like, "what's going on here?" So I told the teacher and he freaked out like, "who drew this?" And it turned out it was the kid that had walked up to me and told me that somebody drew it." Two months later, in gym class, the same student punched me to the ground and stomped on me and broke loose one of my teeth. (Carlos)

Carlos does not believe the other student suffered any consequences for either event. He went on to describe getting into trouble multiple times for offenses that he did not actually commit, but was blamed for. He was always either in the wrong place at the wrong time, or having people represent the truth to favor them and make Carlos look bad, while they were picking on him. It was easy for me to see why he did not enjoy school and was ready to leave. He went on to say,

> I always tried to stay home all the time. Like, if you look at my school record, I probably missed a good half of my entire twelve years of school. You think it was for reasons like that [getting picked on] because I didn't want to go back. OK. I got embarrassed easily. So like something happens, and no, I don't want to go.

When he did go, he worked to stand out to combat being different; it was a "defense by offense" method. "Freshman year, I didn't care. I had long hair. So I'd always wet it and try and scare people, [to make them] think I was crazy. Scared 'em. And everyone seriously thought I was crazy. So I'm just like hey I'm going to roll with it. I want to be the kid that sits in the back of the

class. Don't say nothin', don't do nothin'. I'm just going to freak people out. So that's what I did. I sat back there like this. And I closed my eyes or I played on my phone." He realized then, though, that he was not happy and was tired of not having friends, so that was the point when he made an attempt to do better in school.

In addition to social difficulties, moving around so often during adolescence left Carlos with reduced positive self-efficacy towards academics. So it was probably more profound for him than other students that he elected to enroll in college classes while still in high school. Ultimately, he made the decision to participate in early college at the insistence and support of his mom, who believed that he could be successful. She spoke with him about it after reading about the program in an email sent by the high school principal.

> We went to the orientation or whatever. And this dude was talking and all of a sudden I just hear "you'll be a fifth year senior." And that was it. I was like "nope. I ain't doing a fifth year of this stuff. This ain't happening. I fought to finish on time. I'm like, it ain't happening, ma." I got mad and she goes, "Honey it's free. You don't have to pay." And she's still in debt from it all, from the online stuff from her program. [Which she didn't finish.] So she goes, "you won't be in our boat. You'll be able to, you know, get free college. You won't have to worry about paying it all."

He realized she was right, so he enrolled. He did not feel academically prepared for it, but the potential cost of not being successful and having to pay for it later motivated him to try and in addition to, "I got tired of not having friends. I got tired of nobody talking to me" so he felt that he had nothing to lose. He said, "If you look at my grades from high school freshman year, God, I barely passed with a D in every class. Sophomore year." School and all of its pieces, from social situations to academic ones, did not work for Carlos.

But then it got better. “Because I stopped just you know saying I don't want to do this, I guess.” He describes the details of getting to this particular college as a bit of serendipity. “It was junior year. I was living in [another state] and my school had a thing like a career exploration or whatever it's called. And uh, I was fascinated by the [industrial program] work. And somehow it just happened to be that the representative from [this institution] was there with that program stuff. So that's what got me wanting to come here. Then when I was going to my high school [after moving back to this state] it just kind of fell into place.”

On more than one occasion, Carlos said that if things were different, he wished he could do it all again and make lasting friendships. However, while his family is intensely important to him and on the one hand he wants friends, ultimately, he just wants to make enough money to buy land, build off the grid, and live alone.

> You know I want to be able to retire at a young age, like you know forty-five, fifty [years old] because I mean I would not dream of…I mean I want to do this before I'm even thirty, but I know that ain't going to happen. But I got a dream I want to go to Canada, out in middle of nowhere, build me a cabin, and live with nobody. You know, hunt bear, wolf, elk, moose, caribou, all that, you know, at my dispense. I want to live off the grid. Nobody around me. The only people I hear, at that, are in a plane flying over me. I don't want to deal with people. People are stupid and annoying and it's just me, myself, and I, a gun, the wild livin'...or fighting to survive. You know that's what I want, but I know I won't be able to do that when I'm in my 20s, so I want to be able to retire when I still have an okay-ish back and knees and I want to go out there and build a cabin. So that's why I got to get money.

All of the trauma of his life likely affected Carlos more than he was willing to tell, and phrases like "I'm tired" and "I don't trust easy" spoke clearly. Through his smiles, jokes, and laughs – often at his own expense – is a guy who sounds the way he described his dad. As the product of his mom's support and attention, and his dad's personality and tough love, Carlos is a walking contradiction, and model of duality. He claims to be happy even through things that would make most people unhappy. He is lonely, but has lots of family around him that he loves and who love him. He wishes he had friends, but dreams of spending his life alone. Carlos' story is complicated, and yet he took the complexity that made him and has done something different than almost all of his family did – he came to college.

Rachel

Rachel is very respectful, kind, and soft-spoken. It was important to her that she be perceived as a hard worker, rule follower, and bright – and she is all of those things. She has done well in school, including her college classes. Much of the pressure to do well seems to have come from her. Rachel has a goal of a bachelor degree, which she hopes to keep working on at this institution, after completing the early college program. She is pursuing a degree in accounting, which is a job that seems symbolic of how she wants to live her life: governed by rules, order, and ethics. In fact, she is so goal-orientated that they all (she and her parents) decided she should not a hold a job – any job – until after she completes college. "My mom and dad don't really want me to have a job right now. They really want me to focus on college and everything, so they're fine with the fact I don't have a job. I mean, I would like to have a job, but I understand where they're coming from." All that so she can concentrate on school and keeping her grades up. This kept her from many extracurricular activities, except those community service events she participated in with her church or National Honor Society at school.

Rachel came across as grateful and mature, and very much in-line with characteristics of the oldest child in the family. "I live with my mom, dad, two brothers…Um, pretty happy home life. You know we have our ups and downs, just like any other family, but we get along very well and I feel like I can tell my mom anything, so peaceful, I guess." She seems responsible and thinks of others before herself. She spoke in generalities often, giving off the sense that she was trying to be open, but also still keeping private things like family comfort (income), but as her dad has not worked for several years and suffers from medical issues, having three children at home on one salary is probably challenging. The story she told omitted that sort of commentary.

However, she was very open about her changing role in the family over the last couple of years. After dad got injured, she took on a lot of the household responsibilities, and although she accepted the responsibility, she acknowledged the difficulty of it.

> My dad, he had to quit his job, basically, because of his migraines. He gets them every day so he can't do any work. So within the past few years, he's had to stay home all the time. He has his good days and his bad. All these tests…they've done MRIs and everything, but they don't know [what causes them]. I mean, it's been hard for my...for me with my dad home because he's supposed to be the provider, you know, and it's hard to see him like that, in pain. So it's kind of hard for me, emotionally. I've done the meals; I do all the laundry and everything. So I feel like I've had more…not burdens, but responsibilities put on my shoulders. Well this was just this whole past year, I felt like I've had to grow up really fast and it's hard. Sometimes I think his medication causes him to be upset with me. So sometimes he doesn't think I appreciate, you know, living at home and everything, but I do.

Rachel, as one of the oldest participants, and from a household that she described as “stable” and “peaceful” understands the nuance that while her father is suffering, which causes tension between them, she is mature enough to recognize and not blame him explicitly or assign his behavior or frustration on her directly. With that, though, mom is the one now financially responsible for the family and Rachel considers their relationship to be closer. Considering what some of the other participants have experienced, this may not seem harmful, but the recognition of it “ending her childhood” is probably no less traumatic for her than some other thing that causes the end of a childhood for another person.

Rachel named her mom as the person she trusts the most. She struggled to name others besides her parents, but since her mom understands being a woman, also, Rachel feels closer to her. When talking about trust relationships, Rachel said, “I guess I don't want to be, like sexist or anything, but because she's female she understands more things I feel like than my dad. So I can talk to her about school or just anything really. Whereas with my dad I will tell him some things but some things I don't feel like I can have him understand. You know?”

Additionally, Rachel’s mom has reached professional and educational goals that match her own. Mom went to college, earned an associate degree, and works as an administrative assistant. She went back years later to earn a bachelor degree. "Dad would've had a few associate degrees, but some family issues prevented him from accomplishing that. He had a few classes to go and he would have had a few in an automotive related career. He did go to college, but he didn't get a degree." After following up with her about her dad’s schooling, she deferred from talking about details in the spirit of respecting his privacy and decisions, thus providing proof that she lives by the morals and good behavior that guide her life.

Within seconds of beginning to speak, Rachel talked about the importance of the church and her faith in her life, and this became a running theme of her story, thus supporting her goal of rules and order. Her appearance and demeanor also match this idea of remaining within certain traditional guidelines. She is of average height, average build, has light brown hair, and glasses. She wore a t-shirt and jeans, and carried a backpack. Nothing about her appearance stood out, although her face is kind and her eyes are bright.

And while the importance of the church is key in her narrative, the people there are not. She explicitly talked about not really feeling a sense of closeness with any of the parishioners, a theme that continued when talking about her peers at school. Unlike many of the others, Rachel enjoys the academic work of school, and while she talked of not having many friends, she spoke very highly of her high school teachers and how they made her realize they were real people outside of school. “I really like school. Unlike most kids, I loved high school. I hated to leave, it was just kind of the closeness. I felt like I was really engaged with my teachers, really close. You know, they opened up about their personal life and stuff. It wasn't just about learning. It was about establishing a relationship with the student.”

Rachel seems to have responded favorably to her teachers, but for as positively as she spoke of the teachers and their being open to meaningful connection with the students, this did not translate to her peers. Rachel wondered why the people she thought were her friends in high school do not talk to her anymore. “I don't know. I've tried to contact some of them, but they don't want to be with me anymore, I guess. It's very painful. I'm a very emotional person and I have a big heart so I care about my friends.” Of her three friends she considered “close,” only one has decided to go to college. The other two did not have plans for their future the last time Rachel spoke to them.

She recognizes that perhaps being involved with other things that other students were might have helped build her community of peers. “I mean I wasn't really in sports or anything, and I had thought about going into sports. But I knew I wanted school to be my main focus, grades and everything...making sure I graduate with my 4.0 GPA. Everything like that, so maybe...but yeah, sports, I thought about it. I just thought I should keep active you know…” What Rachel felt was lacking though, would have aligned better with her own interests and desires:

> I thought it'd be nice to have like a religious group for kids at school. We did have, like at lunch they'd have people come in and talk about it, but it wasn't the same, like, denomination. But just like if we had a classroom where all the students who were religious could just talk about their feelings, because like, we had to learn about evolution, obviously, just like any other kid. And so I thought it'd be nice to have like other options out there than just teaching that, 'cause…and you're kind of forcing the beliefs on the kids. So having something like that, or like a home ec class. I thought that would have been cool. I wanted to do that, but we didn't have one. Which you thought that would have been useful to cook. Everybody has to know how to cook.

In small, rural communities like hers, having limited options is not unique. And while her district has the closest proximity to a major university than any other district in the county, she did not give it much significance. Her school would occasionally go on field trips to see campus labs or shows at the campus theater, but it seemed outside of her realm of influence of options for interaction. Instead, sports are at the center of all extracurricular options and it feels to those on the outside, like Rachel, that all the same smaller group of kids are involved.

“Everyone knew everyone” is how Rachel described it, for better or worse. There were about three dozen students in her graduating class, but even at that size, there was space for archetypal high school hierarchy. “Usually the popular kids were like the jocks and stuff like that and then you had the nerds and then kind of everybody else. So, we still had our cliques.”

Unlike some low-income communities where the population can be transient because of finding available housing and work options, Rachel did not believe there is a lot of movement in and out of the community, because the faces stay the same and so do the stories. Her family, for example, has lived in the same house for Rachel’s entire life. It is that kind of stability, and her status as the oldest child and only girl in the family, that likely provided the framework for her of how she thinks she should and how she wants to live her life.

This can probably explain why she finds it so difficult to function with her dad’s medical issues. She discussed how challenging it is for her to see him in pain, but as he is unable to fulfill his role as the family provider, that is also difficult for her to watch.

Yet, she persists to have a career, to have a family, and to find a way to do these things without moving too far from her parents or brothers. She wants to make them proud. Her mom has taught her most about the goals she has, but she has learned from her dad, also. When asked about what dad has taught her, she replied, “just kind of life, in general, just enjoy it but don't be indulgent. You know, don't, obviously, don't do drugs or smoke or any of that, you know. So just the whole ethical thing. I mean some of my other family members will contradict what he says…He thinks I should marry a Catholic. But my aunts are kind of like, it doesn't matter if he's Catholic, you know. So it's you know, [there’s] this battle. Like, ok, who do I listen to?”

She has goals for the future and has already begun to think about how she may get there. When addressing her five and ten year goals, she thoughtfully considered her response before saying she would see herself,

> Hopefully out of college, having all my classes done and everything and getting my first job, maybe second. I don't know where I'll be. I would kind of like to work around where we live, because I mean I've lived [in the same small town], so that's kind of all I know. I would like to kind of travel maybe a little bit and see how other things are I guess. I mean I don't want to live in another state or anything but I mean like maybe a vacation or something, I'd like to see other places. Hopefully, I don't know, but maybe married? I don't know about kids yet. I haven't figured that part out yet. But I mean maybe married, I'd have my job. Hopefully the same one I've had. Not having to keep switching back and forth to different ones.

Unlike some of her peers in the early college program, she places college attendance (beyond the early college program) in high regard and believes that it is the main gatekeeper for people in reaching whatever career goals they may have. She recognizes that there is an aptitude component to career fit and says, “I feel like we're all good at different things and I have weak points just like anybody else and I strong points just like anybody else. But like a doctor, I don't know if I could memorize all those medical terms and everything. So that kind of pushes that out of the picture. But like anybody can work at like fast food or anything. That's not a difficult thing to do. So it just depends on who you are and what you're good at.” But with the recognition of preference and aptitude, she does not address access, limitations, or other circumstances that might affect a person’s career, but says instead,

> That's the main thing, just like, even if you...OK, two kids graduate from high school, one goes off to college and one doesn't. One could become the doctor because they can go on to college and do that. But if this guy, he didn't go to college, he can't become a doctor because he didn't get the degree and everything to be qualified to do that. So that's really the main thing.

This is the reason she believes that all students should take the opportunity to participate in early college, if their school offers it. “I think everybody should have college experience before graduating from high school, so they even consider college as an option. Because some of my friends, they aren't going to college. But would that be different if they had a [college] class in high school? [Some of them may be insecure about being successful.] Or they're worried about the cost. You know, student loan payments and all that. Like if their parents didn't go to college, like ‘why should I go to college if my parents didn't’."

The county students had an option of two different early college programs at two different institutions and many students who selected this one did so mostly because they did not want to or could not drive the extra thirty minutes to the other institution. In fact, Rachel considered another institution before settling on this one. “[This institution] hasn't been the only college that's been on my mind. I took two classes through [a regional comprehensive university about an hour away]. But, a few years ago we had to go down by there for my cousin's wedding. And so we were by the campus and I was just overwhelmed and I just, I don't know, I couldn't breathe or something. I was like, I can't do this. This college is not for me.”

Her experiences in and out of school have skewed the traditional framework and order under which she operates. In spite of that, this is the life she wants to lead, so much that she cannot see herself moving too far away. She wants a job “down the road” that is within a thirty-

minute drive of her current town – doable, but limiting in ways perhaps she has not yet realized or allowed herself to see outside of her current lens of rules and order of what is right and what it means to be a good person.

Taylor

Taylor is tall, lovely, fresh-faced, stylish, friendly, and cheerful. She deferred to friendly and cheerful in her responses, even when seeming a bit uncomfortable inside or talking about a terribly traumatic event. Taylor gives the impression of being helpful to a fault, seemingly at the expense of her own comfort. She is a generous conversationalist, which seems to cover up a sadness or unease. Taylor's ultimate career goal is to be a nurse practitioner, but wants to put in her time as a nurse before doing that. It seemed important for her that it was understood that she did not choose to become a nurse because she knows any nurses personally, but because she has a desire to help people and she knows that nursing is a stable and respected career. "I'm not doing it for really anyone besides me. So no one I've known right here is a nurse or anything." Taylor has held a steady job since she was sixteen and places value and self-worth on being a hard worker and a responsible employee.

Taylor's best friend is her mom, and she spent a lot of time talking about their close relationship. However, she is also ready to be on her own. She came across as self-reliant and responsible for herself and her future. She has been working since she was sixteen years old (a couple of years ago.) "I've saved a lot. So I feel like I can move out, but I just like...my mom's like my best friend, it's so hard. Like I've talked to people, and they're like, 'your mom's an adult and [she] doesn't know that she's like holding you back.' I'm doing this secretly. It's like it's really…I don't know. My mom's my best friend and I do everything with her and I help her out like with [her step-granddaughter] and all this stuff. So I really don't want to leave her."

Many things from her upbringing caused Taylor to have difficulty trusting people. Her parents divorced when she was so young she does not even remember it. Actually, she claims she does not remember many details from her childhood. She grew distant from her dad who lives about an hour away, but her brothers still see him on occasion. “I have two older brothers. One of them, he's 22. He moved out, but my oldest brother is 25 and he still lives with us. He doesn't really help out around the house, so it's like me helping my mom all the time and so I've thought about moving out. Like I can do it on my own. I am financially stable to do that.” Taylor’s mom remarried when Taylor was in kindergarten and her new family moved around a bit in the same small town she still calls home. Her stepdad also had children from a previous marriage, and so their home became an inconsistent blended family.

A notable influence on Taylor was her stepsister, who Taylor only referred to as her sister throughout the conversation. Taylor’s sister lived primarily in the Pacific Northwest, but she would come back to the Midwest to live with Taylor, her mom, stepdad, and Taylor’s two brothers for summers and for other extended visits. From Taylor’s explanations, her sister did not seem to be settled anywhere. There were a dozen years separating the two girls, but Taylor spoke highly of her and felt close to her. And so when, four years ago, her sister died of a drug overdose in her car in a fast food restaurant’s parking lot, Taylor was stunned. She was not aware her sister had a drug problem, and only realized after her death that the rest of the family knew and kept it from her.

> My stepsister died a couple years ago in….she died in January about four years ago. So her daughter lives with us now…my sister was living with us at the time, it was one of those times when she lived with us. She...so I didn't know, like when she would come to [this state], I thought it was just like for visits and stuff. It turns out like her mom wanted

her to come here because I guess she was like selling her mom's stuff for drug money. So she died of a heroin overdose. So what happened was she went, it was like the day of, she was kind of sick or whatever, like with the flu. It was wintertime. And so and I was like with her in the kitchen I was kind of skeptical because she took like a cold pill or something and she took it with like a mimosa, like orange juice and vodka, you know? So like why is she taking medicine with alcohol? So whatever. So then she said that she was like going to the doctor or whatever and this is like five o'clock at night. So like, you know, maybe she's going to urgent care or whatever. I guess her mom was texting her and telling her to go. And so normally my sister like is all done up when she leaves and all stuff and she wasn't. She was in like yoga pants and stuff like that. So when my mom saw her leave, like she kind of thought something. So then she ends up in [a city an hour north of home], I guess. And she was like at this McDonald's, like in her car. And I guess she had her head on her steering wheel and someone came up to her and was like, "Are you OK?" And they called the ambulance and then she died in the ambulance. And so we didn't...the cops came to our house at like 2:30 in the morning and told us…and yeah, it was like a waiting game for a long time finding out what really happened. And then my mom and I were cleaning out her stuff, and then in her suitcase was like a box of like needles that diabetics would get from the store, you know. And so, I was like, "what is this?" And well before that, like a week before, my parents got in a really big fight and like we thought they were going to get divorced. And then she died. So ever since then, it's like been the kind of rocky.

Taylor's sister also tragically left behind a daughter, now age eight, who lives with Taylor's stepdad, mom, and Taylor. The girl's father lives out west, but does not keep full custody of his daughter. This all seems to be a dynamic that has been significant to Taylor's own development.

Just before her sister's death, her stepdad planned a trip to Florida with his daughter (who died before they could go) and his granddaughter, but not the others. Taylor remembers that "it caused a lot of fights between my parents and one especially, [when] they were going to go to Florida. So when my sister told me that they were going to go to Florida, she just like texted me and was like, 'oh, I'm going to Florida and you're not' like kind of rubbing it in my face. And then I told my mom and my mom goes to my stepdad. And then it starts this whole fight and that's when that big fight happened and then it was like, oh like divorce and all this stuff and then like she died and whatever and that like put a pause on everything and then…I don't know it's still it kind of rocky or whatever, but…" For as mature as Taylor is, I believe she realizes that her sister was not so and that has been something that she has had to contend with often since her sister's death. She does not seem to resent her sister's life choices or death, but has certainly been permanently affected by it.

The death and fighting have changed the family dynamic. Taylor remembers them all going on trips and doing fun things together, like hot air balloons rides, "but the last time we did that, my oldest brother was 18, so we haven't done anything like that in...like we haven't been like a family in a really long time. And we stopped eating dinner at the table together, everyone eats at different times. Everyone's older, everyone does [things] on their own." She has also stopped spending time with her real dad, by her choice, even though one of her brothers still sees him. "Last time I saw him was my birthday and my birthday is in December. So I mean like we talk, but I don't know. He just like...I've kind of lost the connection with him. And every time he

comes around, like for my open house and then graduation, he just makes me feel bad sometimes for not spending time with him. Stuff like that." That makes for a lonely home or personal life for Taylor, which likely affects how she comes across to people at school, too.

At about that time of her sister's death and after, Taylor started to see a difference in how other students at her school treated her. While she did not say it, the chronology of her story led me to believe that this is when she began to have difficulty trusting other people. She talked about seeing girls at other schools, much bigger and more populated than her own, in bigger cities, with a sort of reverence and commentary that they all dress so nicely, and look so sophisticated and are prettier than girls in smaller towns. "Everyone's got these big fancy houses and then the wardrobe to go with it." It was odd to hear her say that, because she is quite a lovely girl (by society's traditional standards of beauty). These comments made her seem insecure and vulnerable almost.

As far as her own group of friends at her own high school, she described them as acquaintances, but did not really feel like she had anyone close to her that she could trust besides her mom and her boyfriend, who did not go to her high school, is a year ahead of her in school, and is now studying at a major university in the state. Taylor was a freshmen when her sister died and news travels quickly in a small town. "I had like, like people I could...I don't know. I didn't really have close friends. I knew people, but I didn't really...like my lunch table was always different, you know? I didn't really have close friends…I never really got invited to anything. And like even now, if people invite me to a party, I won't go or something like that. Everyone just was like, snotty and that kind of thing and I wasn't about that. I just didn't have any close friends. And if I was close to someone, they'd be telling someone else like half [of what I said]…so [I have] difficulty trusting people."

She talked about her mom the most, but almost as though she, Taylor, was the adult in the relationship. Taylor called her mom her best friend several times and shared that "my mom and I are really close. We're always together. Like at home we're always watching TV together, always doing dinner together, like everything." She sometimes feels a responsibility to take care of her mom, even though she is the child, and that has become a reason that she feels the need to not stray too far for college for the time being.

Her mom did not go to college, and has worked various jobs that Taylor can remember, and although her mom does not hold her back or keep her from doing something else, Taylor's sense of duty to her mother keeps her at home, even though she has enough money and responsibility to move out on her own. And so, her career choice of nursing makes sense. She wants to take care of people, like she takes care of her mom. Also, while she does not remember much of her childhood, she recalled that her sister had spoken of wanting to be a nurse, even though she struggled in college and never finished before her death. When Taylor was asked if she thought her sister's goal of being a nurse had anything to do with her own decision to pursue it, she seemed surprised, as though she had never made that connection before.

Taylor has career goals that the early college program is directly helping her achieve. By the time the new academic year begins, she will be just two semesters away from applying to nursing school, which she wants to pursue at the same institution. She does not really have a desire to leave the area; she wants to stay close to her mom, even though she does not see herself still living at home after she completes nursing school. Once she is established as a nurse, she wants to keep going to become a nurse practitioner.

But unlike her "work" goals, her career goals are not financial ones,

> Everyone is always like, ‘oh like I want to do this. They make such-and-such dollars’ and still to this day, I'm like I don't even know how much nurses make. Like when I told my boyfriend I wanted to be a nurse practitioner, he immediately looked at the numbers and I'm like first of all, I don't even know how much a regular nurse makes, let al.one a nurse practitioner. I don't care. Like that doesn't...I mean I know it's good, like you get a lot of money. But I obviously that's not why. A lot of people are drawn to the money and I'm like, like all my life I worked minimum wage and I really don't care. And I've saved a lot from that.

She has worked, as previously noted, since she was sixteen and has saved most of that money. But money was the reason she gave for wanting a job at a young age. “When I was younger I would always [say I] want to be a hair stylist. But I really didn't think about work until like right before I turned sixteen. I'm like, I need money. So, that's when I thought of actually working now. And I'll work anywhere. My first job was at [a local nursery]…Now I'm a CNA [certified nurse aide]; right now I have a career. So that's really cool.” Her current job required her to have training and it has allowed her to begin to find her place in her future field, so she places great value on it. She was able to pay for that class using money she saved by not paying for college tuition. “I got thirty-six college credits for free. I got my books in the fall that were close to $900. I got that for free. And not having to pay for tuition this year, I was able to pay for tuition for my CNA class by myself. And so, I did that instead of paying for tuition; for this and that.”

Her decision to enroll in the early college program through this institution was an easy one for her. She had her career goal in mind when she found out the program aligned with that goal, and she had already made the decision that she wanted to attend this institution. Both her sister and one of her brothers had attended this institution so it was familiar to her that way, and

also as part of the community. She does not remember hearing much about the program initially, “so we went to the meeting and they're like ‘free college’ and so then my mom and me were like, ‘oh let's do it.’ I just remember going to the meeting and then just signing up for it to see what it was like.”

Enrolling was not a big decision fraught with anxiety, and she spent no time talking about academic struggles, so it all felt natural for her. It seems that participating felt fairly low-stakes for Taylor, with more to gain (free college) than lose. And she could get out of going to high school, where she did not have many friends anyway. Unlike many of the other students, who struggled with the idea of extending their official high school graduation date, Taylor said, “I was like, as long as I still walk. Like if I was actually graduating with the other class [instead of still able to walk with my own class], I'd be ok, these aren't my friends, but like whatever.”

Her nonchalant attitude toward the decision to participate carried over to her first term of classes, even while her schedule was quite full.

> I came here from seven-thirty to nine-fifteen [in the morning]. I went to [high] school from ten to one. I had like two classes. Then I went to work. And then in between that was when I had my three online classes that I had all at once. And at first, I was like, oh like this is just like a college class, whatever. I didn't think it would go towards my [official college] GPA and I could've done a lot better. I mean I got As and Bs, but I'm like, oh man I could've done better. Literally the information is right here. Why didn't I do better?

It did not take her long to realize the stakes in the early college program were higher than she initially considered, along with a much more demanding workload. When describing a specific online course she took,

> One of them was three weeks [long]. And then it had like three or four assignments due on the same day and they're like pages and pages and I'm like, I'm still in high school. I would do everything in one day. One sitting. I would get everything done for the online classes. And then like, I remember I went [out of town] twice last year. One for our state competition for [a health science student organization] then the week after was our spring break and my mom and I went [away] for a couple of days. I remember doing homework both of those trips, for the online classes.

She learned quickly the amount of work it would require and she met the challenge, even while not quite understanding the expectation in the beginning.

> Well first of all, my freshman year [of high school] I didn't know what a GPA was. No one told me that. I didn't know that it's like set your freshman year. So I had a hard time bringing my GPA back up. I graduated like a 3.6. With all the young people, everyone is like stressing GPAs and grades and stuff. When I was like a junior and senior like they would be oh, do you guys want to come talk to the incoming freshmen about this stuff? And I'm like why didn't anyone do that for us? That would have helped…And then like everyone talks bad about [this institution] and I'm like, 'are you kidding me?' I have an 80 percent [in one class]. If you get below 80 percent, that's failing. Like that's an F pretty much. I failed a class this year. [By not meeting the minimum grade requirement.]

She does not believe her early performance affected her ability to be accepted into the nursing program next year, a full year before her peers would be ready to apply. Taylor seems goal-oriented and intrinsically motivated, although her ultimate goals are to help others, not herself. She has no plans for a family and she did not even mention that, even though she and her boyfriend have been together for three years in a strong relationship that weathered his first full

academic year away from home at a major university. Occasionally she wonders if his experience there will come between them and that one moment her confidence clouds into brief insecurity. But that soon clears, and her own goals come back into focus; aspirational goals that focus on her career and what she will need to do to get there.

Bralyn

Bralyn's ultimate career goal is to work for the FBI, by way of law enforcement (police officer) and then the military. She has a deep voice, which does not match her looks. She looks very young, and she is, at seventeen. She has long blond hair and braces. She is quite small in stature, but again, has a deep voice that is surprising. Bralyn's family is important to her, but they are not without their issues.

Her parents, like her paternal grandparents, have been together since they were in middle school. Bralyn's father, as she explained, never had a desire to do much. He took over the family business from his own father, because it was expected. It bothers him that Bralyn "doesn't need him" and she described him to be a little sexist. He wants to protect her, but in ways she feels she does not need protecting, and only because she is a girl and not because of her age. Through that, she is very close with her dad. She grants some exception and is a bit softer when talking about him because "he's had a hard life" and "bad things happen to him all the time" even though she does not believe he deserves it.

Bralyn presented a positive outlook on life, even when she would have every reason not to have one. She used words like "chill," "peaceful," etc. But the story she told made her life sound tough. Her storyline is that she hates school, hates the people there, that it is very easy for her academically, that she does not fit in at school, and that she is more mature than other

students her age, even though she has “lots of friends.” This all makes her not want to deal with any of it – the people or the classes.

She has very negative feelings about high school, but seems to feel very differently about college. “Like college, like this? It's great. I actually love this. But going to school and just...I think it's like not necessarily the kids, but like the kids. Because I'm a lot more mature than others. And so they really get under my skin with the way that they act. Like they all act like little fifth grade boys and girls it's just like...I've always like had older friends. So it's like school itself, like I'm getting to a point where it's just so easy, like there's really no point in me going. Like I can miss a week of school and not have any homework. Like, it's pointless.”

I opened this chapter with Bralyn telling part of her story. She loves college. She spoke about the level of motivation of the other students and that while they maybe did not share her intensity for a law enforcement career, they at least cared about the classes and were motivated to do well. And this was not what she experienced with students at her high school, although based on her story, she played an active role there. She has played multiple sports and has some friends that she likes (but not lots of them), but ultimately her wish was to be homeschooled. “I've always wanted to be homeschooled. Just because of, you know, like I can get it done WAY faster. And you know, not have to deal with stupid people.” It was not a possibility for several reasons including her mother’s work schedule and her father’s lack of patience and education. “But my dad dropped out when he was in eighth grade. I mean he's smart as crap. But he uh, he has to go constantly. So there's no way that he would be able to, you know...And then my mom, she works at [a hospital] in the ER. So I mean she's busy all the time. You know working twelve-hour shifts. So there's really no opening for me to get homeschooled.”

Bralyn talked about the tricky relationship she has with her parents. The previous summer, she moved out of their home and into the home of her aunt and uncle, because of ongoing issues with her sister, who struggles with long-term mental-health issues. “Bralyn has two sisters: her older sister, who Bralyn describes as a pathological liar, physically and emotionally abusive, and angry, all of which was “really hard on our parents” and her younger sister. Her younger sister has some “cognitive impairment” and it “takes her a long time to process things.” She idolizes their oldest sister and that bothers Bralyn, because of their older sister’s violent tendencies. Bralyn would try to stop her sister’s outbursts and call out her lies, but would end up in the middle of drama that she really did not want to be a part of. At one point, her older sister even threatened to kill Bralyn. So she left. Her aunt and uncle took her in, and she stopped speaking with her sister. That was the point when Bralyn began to experience a “normal” and “happy” life.

Bralyn attributed the beginning of her sister’s troubles to a boyfriend who her sister met in middle school. The relationship was an intense one and lasted several years and through the sister being sent to live with family in another state for a time. Bralyn did not say specifically, but led me to believe her sister was sent away so the couple could be separated. Upon her return, the relationship continued. In fact, Bralyn discovered not too much later that she would be an aunt. During this, the sisters were not speaking and Bralyn was still away from home.

Bralyn said that their mother is sad about it all, but does not feel like there was anything she could do. The boyfriend did not step up to the responsibility of being a father. According to Bralyn, “he left her when she was seven months pregnant. He was there when she had the baby, which was a plus. We were like, fine, whatever. But he's only...she's almost five weeks old, six weeks old. And he's only seen her three times. And so he's always like out doing better things,

which is partying every night." That is the behavior that influenced her sister when the two first got together.

> Well she used be a good kid. I mean she...having her baby has helped her out a lot. But like she, started drinking at like a really young age. She would miss curfew. She would not come home. I mean they [the parents] were upset. They tried, you know, like grounding her, but when they're all at work, you know, she gets home from school and she just leaves. So it's like they couldn't really do much. And so when they got that break, my Uncle Tim, he's a U.S. Marshal and he goes, 'dude, send her down here.' And so she went to South Carolina for about a year and it was great. She probably would have had one of the best lives ever. You know, they got a lot of money. You know, that she was able to go do a lot things and just out of, you know, this area and separated from that boy, so. Then she came back, and got back with him.

The pregnancy seemed to calm the sister's anger and issues, and according to Bralyn, gave her sister something positive to focus her energies on. For her part, Bralyn has forgiven much of the past drama with her sister, so she could provide a good example to her new niece. She was in the delivery room when her sister gave birth (mere weeks before our interview) and that she financially supports her niece by purchasing needs like formula, diapers, and clothing to make sure she is cared for.

Part of her motivation is to remove herself from the troubles of her sisters and family. "The farther I can go in life, the farther I can get away from her and that life." And yet, she and her sister have come to a truce of sorts. Bralyn helps out with her new niece so that the baby can "understand a loving environment" and because all kids need a 'crazy aunt.' Her sister lost her job after having the baby and for Bralyn that means pitching in. "You know, she's not on cash

assistance, she's not on anything, so I tend to help her out a little bit. I mean I have...I work, so sometimes I help her get some things for the baby or get some things for her, or like you know, her house or something. But I mean we also have our parents too, that help her. I push it because, I mean, I don't want [her baby] to remember the bad things about her mom. I want her to remember the good things about her."

Bralyn feels as though she was on the bad end of her sister's temper and episodes more than anyone and for an extended period of time, and moving out of their parents' home and away from her sister gave her a new life. It frustrated her that her sister was "awful" to their grandparents, who tried to be supportive of her, just like they have been with Bralyn. "I can go to them for anything at all. And they will sit down and talk to you about everything, you know? And they won't say a word about it. They just keep literally everything to themselves. And that's like, they've helped me stay...pretty much stay sane over the years." She is grateful to them, and it frustrates her that sister has treated their grandparents poorly. "The sad part about it is like one day she'll treat them fantastic and the next day she'll treat them like nobody. So it's like dude they literally...like they give...she used to live with them, too. And so like they've tried helping out. They literally have given her everything and she just keeps treating them like crap."

All the difficulties with her sister aside, she found happiness in a home that felt to Bralyn to be a more storybook "supportive" home. And even though now her sister has moved on into her own place, Bralyn enjoys being with her aunt, uncle, and cousins so much that she has no desire to move back home, even though her mom asks about it. "I would, I absolutely would, just on my parents', you know, side of it, but I am extremely happy with where I am. Like the family that [aunt and uncle] they have, is like the family that I've always wanted." She is still close with

her parents, though. “I'm over there every day. Call them. See what's on for dinner. See if I want that instead.”

Bralyn has grappled with anger issues of her own, partly blaming her sister for her own issues, because she had no outlet anywhere but school to release the anger her sister caused her. And part of why she hates school so much is that it seems to be the scene of many of her angry outbursts.

> Ninth grade was my last straw. This girl started crap with me and I again had never said a word about anything. And she just thought it would be funny to pick a fight with me. And after, you know, I got suspended for fighting, it hit me. Like you know, I'm done. I want to go to do great things. But it's kind of hard with a freakin' mile long record, you know? So it just like...I always had the mindset well, if I show them they can't mess with me anymore, then they won't mess with me anymore. So then I'd always use violence as the answer. So I would always, you know, take the consequence. Still to this day, I'd rather be suspended than be in class. It's just so much better. I get things done and I'm out, you know? So it's like especially during those hard times. And I think they kind of used that as a way out too, because when they suspend you, you go in your own little room you know you're on your own. And so then you'd like make me relax and just be by myself, you know? So it would calm me down a lot. It's crazy how dramatically I've changed over the years.

The suspensions began in elementary school. “I honestly wouldn't know what to do without sports, because like I used to get in a lot of trouble when I was younger. I never took people's crap. So I was always fighting and I guess my attitude was on a little down low. So I mean like, if people said something to me, you know, like I was right on them. I had a very bad temper. So I

was always in and out of class. It got to the point where I wasn't allowed to go back to those classes." She credits sports (soccer, specifically) and her coach for helping her finally learn not to necessarily let go of the anger, but to redirect it.

> He's helped me a lot. He's had probably all my cousins. He's had my siblings. I've had him since sixth grade. So I mean he knows a lot about me and a lot about my family and he's always there if I need him. And he always strives to have me do better. And he pushes me. Because I don't really have that, like I push myself. Like I said I use the negativity to push myself. So like when I have him, especially out on the field, you know like he pushes me and he's not doing it you know to be mean. He's doing it because he knows what I can accomplish.

While recognizing that she wants something different in her life, she talked about enjoying the family's lifestyle. None of them read for fun. In fact, when asked, Bralyn chuckled at the idea of anyone reading without a purpose, like school. "I've never really had to be encouraged to do good in school, because I've always been good in school. But like, in school obviously they encourage you to read all the time, I just choose not to."

As a family, they enjoy the outdoors and having space. The neighbors are not close, which suits Bralyn fine because, "I like to be separated from others." Before moving to the country many years ago, Bralyn recalls the benefits of living near everything, but ultimately, she prefers the country. "I mean I liked it because everything was there. So that was a plus. But I was just like, you couldn't really, if you wanted to have a small, little, party and stuff, you know you couldn't. People complained. So it just like you really gotta be courteous of others and really watch what you do. Where in the country, you can party all day long and no one says anything. And especially with us like being like so outdoorsy, like we're all hunters. So like in town we

can't really do that. There's kids running around, we can't ride our dirt bikes and so..." Bralyn hunts with her dad, she rides dirt bikes with him, and enjoys parties that they have on their property. Of course, that lifestyle has not always been kind to her father, as was previously noted.

She spoke in detail of her father's set up, wrongful arrest, and jail time. She explained how a friend of her father's ratted people out, including him, while trying to plead his own drug offense. Complicating this experience is knowing many of the law enforcement officers in the area (including the former sheriff who was a family friend). Bralyn talked a lot about her dad and his life-long troubles, including his incarceration, the trial of which began when Bralyn was in middle school. The trial lasted almost two years, until the time when he actually served his sentence. When asked if he changed his lifestyle after his time in jail, Bralyn hinted that he did not, but that he trusts people less now. During this time, Bralyn struggled in school, but never academically. While she never connected the issues with her dad with her own issues at school, she admitted that for a long time she had difficulty managing her anger and knew that if she want to work in law enforcement, which was her ultimate goal, she would have to learn to control her anger.

She has a clear plan for her future, and talks about it confidently, beginning with staying at this institution after the completion of the early college program to finish her bachelor degree in criminal justice. In five years, she says, "I'll probably be coming out of the Air Force and going into the police academy." And then ten years from now, "I'll probably be pushing to be enrolled in the FBI. You got to be at least 23, but they like experience, so I mean, with experience in the military and the experience being an officer and everything, I'll be pushing to try to be there." She believes she wants a family, but "I want to wait until I'm settled and to

where I'm happy with where I am because of the job. I'm going to be moving all the time. Especially being an FBI agent. You know it's going to be really hard, because we travel a lot. So I just want to wait until I'm settled down and you know, not just physically fit, but mentally fit too."

Bralyn has known since elementary school that she wanted to work in law enforcement, and her uncle has helped her find her way. "[My uncle] like I said before, is a U.S. Marshal, but he's also teamed up with the FBI, too. He works through both of them. And he's also been in the military, which a lot of my family has been in the military, also. So they helped me out with that decision, too. And I kind of go to him because he's been through it. He's been through all of it. He's helped me with my recruiter. You know I mean to help [me with] those decisions, everything seems very clear to me." My sense, beyond what she verbally articulated during her interview, was that her career decision was more about her need for her to find control and order in her life, which she did not have much of yet in life. Law enforcement represents the ultimate opportunity to follow rules, and require others to do the same. By enrolling in the early college program, she was controlling something in her life, and more significantly, it was something that no one else in her family had done. It can represent the first step of forging her own distinct path.

Bralyn gives credit to her uncle and two teachers for influencing and then supporting her career decisions, including the early college program. "This is kind of a pretrial for me. Like I said, freshman year, [I realized] you know, in order to be an FBI agent you gotta at least have your bachelor's degree. But I want to shoot for my master's just so then I can do anything. So then when you guys came to the school and talked to us about it, I was like "oh yeah and you know, it might be pretty cool, you know? They offer criminal justice; that's what I'm going for." So I came here and it's a hundred times better than high school. So I mean I love it and I'm

looking forward to next year." This would be a big accomplishment for her dad's family, especially, since "I think only like two of my dad's seven siblings graduated [high school]. My dad and, I think, his three brothers...they all dropped out. Even my grandpa, they all dropped out when they were in eighth grade. And they all went into flooring. My uncle was in the Marines, my other uncle went to the Army or the Navy, one of them. My aunt went to the Army."

Bralyn sees herself in her dad and speaks tenderly of him, even when they do not always agree. "Dad kind of keeps to himself. I mean, he's outgoing and stuff, you know? He is pretty much like me, but a dude. So like when he, like I said before, he's always on the go. So if he gets out of work early, he ain't sitting around. He doesn't get home until ten at night, because he bought a house. So he's working on the house and he just likes to keep going. So he doesn't sit down." He takes care of his family, despite his own failings. Unlike her dad, school has been easy for Bralyn, and taking an opportunity to do something else was appealing to her. "Well like I've said before, I'm always really good in school, grade-wise. So I mean I've never had a problem either catching up or falling behind. So I knew...and I like a challenge. I like to be challenged. So I thought of it as a challenge and I wanted to try it out."

Bralyn's decision to not repeat her family's choices and lifestyle, but to do more, to do better, and to help others in the same turbulent circumstances, belies her young age and her own previous troubles. She is determined. She is motivated. She is persistent. There is a good chance she will reach her goals, but she will be beating the odds to do so.

As we see, not all the participants in the study have had the same experience and because of this, they cannot be combined into a single narrative. Additionally, while the introductory description of the population assigns them to a single context of post-recession America and rural America in a direct way, and while these are connected, they are also unique. The recent

recession affected more than just rural areas in the American Midwest. Moreover, rural Americans are not the only ones to experience issues of job insecurity, lower rates educational achievement, and fewer economic and cultural opportunities. These students are affected by both of these major contextual characteristics; which can be considered together, but also must be considered separately. Presenting them separately reminds us that each stands alone, however, it is also important to find cohesion among the stories. The next chapter will connect the pieces of the students' portraits that are similar and can be discussed more broadly than one individual portrait to unify this research.

Chapter 5: Analysis, Discussion, and Implications

> "[This is] a great opportunity. A lot of people think it's dumb, in a way, but I just laugh at them. So they're like, 'dude, why not wait until you graduate?' Why? Three years free, you know? Why not jump on it? Like I told one of my friends. We were talking about it and she goes, 'Oh, are you really going to do that fifth year?' And I goes, 'Heck yeah. Because I'll already have my associate's degree by the time you're even trying to pick out a college.' And she just started laughing. And I was like, 'And I'll be saving like fifty grand. So have fun pulling that out of your pocket.' And so I mean it's like a huge advantage." – Bralyn

The previous chapter offered student narrative portraits as the springboard from which I have examined my idea that student work images influence participation in early college programs. This chapter will begin by addressing the findings that came from reflecting on the participants' stories, which are important to those students specifically and their larger story of early college enrollment. I will then provide the foundation for analysis of the influences that led the students to early college enrollment by explaining them in a model, followed by a discussion of how those ideas interact. Finally, I will offer some recommendations and implications for further research, centered on the work of this study and how furthering the knowledge of early college enrollment can help postsecondary institutions support other students like these participants.

Below, I will restate the problem to resituate the students' stories and then I will follow with a discussion of the findings I discovered in the data. Next, I will discuss what the findings may tell us about work images, especially those of this group of early college students. I will provide an analysis and discussion of the opportunities of rural early college students and finally, will conclude with implications for future research.

The problem that I have examined in this study is how early college students form work images and how those images influence students in making decisions to participate in an optional

dual enrollment opportunity. First, just like other high school students, students from a rural, economically disadvantaged geographic region want to get what they consider to be good jobs and live well. To get good jobs, they believe they need to go to college.

They take presented opportunities to complete college sooner and reduce cost by participating in a career-focused early college program. However, based on their home and school environments, they do not always identify as college-goers, but instead by their future jobs (as represented by their life goals), so college can, at times, seem like an unlikely fit. Yet, this is the option they choose. Students have beliefs about work, which they connect to their life goals, and these work images influence their decision-making in early college program participation, as the vehicle to achieve their goals.

As a reminder, images are emotionally and non-rationally derived. Research has shown that mental pictures and language are inextricably linked (Robertson, 2003; Forrester, 2000; & Horowitz, 1970). We know that people form images based on what they see and hear around them. Thus, the external world informs the images individuals create, and then those personal images inform how people see and understand the world. Work is a major part of peoples' lives and represents paid effort and social relationships with an employer or to employment. Most people define class, and thus perceived power, on work. Thus, our work images are intensely personal, yet open to judgment by others, which makes them profoundly meaningful to developing adolescents, as will be explained below.

Beliefs about work

The participants in this study have clear images of work. Work, to them, represents any of the following ideas, which I will describe in more detail below: comfort, freedom, less stress, control, dignity, respect (of others), self-respect, accomplishment, independence, self-

sufficiency. Work allows: a person to not live on the verge of things falling apart; a person to set an example for others; and a person to honor another person (by fulfilling their wishes for you).

The participants recognize major differences in types of work. During our conversations, I asked students about if or how they viewed differences between job and career. Most responded that career was more permanent and required some level of preparation, like college. Charlotte, for example, placed value on career by saying, "A career is something that you want to do, that you look forward to every day, that you take pride in, that's something you worked for. I feel like work is just something like a temporary job, kind of thing until you get to your career." Her value-laden statement emphasizing "career" simultaneously devalued "job". Likewise, Steve believes in the permanence of work saying that once someone is prepared for a career, he or she does not lose that preparation. "Work is where you get all your money. Career is long term. Because work can always go away, but careers can't," explained Steve. Ultimately, all of the participants have goals and believe they are in their early college program because they are working toward a career.

A career is more than what others directly around the participants might have, but represent what those people want for them. Bralyn talked about her coworkers at a fast-food restaurant she works at in the evenings and weekends. "Well during work, I mean, everyone really supports my decisions because they're not going nowhere with their lives, you know? So to have somebody like me work there, you know, they really you know it's a huge impact on them to do better. And so I mean they always give me what they can [hours or schedule], which is always good." Bralyn, like many others, talked about her career goals with pride. That pride also comes with the belief that ideally things will be easier down the road.

The participants experienced lots of hardships in their childhoods, many of which will be explained below. They believe that hardships are easier to handle when there is steady and stable income making life easier. John said of middle school, “I think that's when I started to become more independent and didn't want to be a burden on my family [in the future].” And so, work represents control and freedom and is valued. According to Charlotte, “A career is something that you want to do, that you look forward to every day, that you take pride in, that's something you worked for.”

Ultimately, to this group of people, work is egocentric, something for them and their own. Most did not talk about the greater good, or work as selfless and giving. Work instead is about receiving something (money – representing comfort, stress reduction, a safety net.) They talked about themselves and their families, but most did not mention making a larger contribution to community or society. I attribute this to the participants coming from rural, under-resourced communities, and needing, developmentally, to find a foundation for themselves prior to thinking beyond.

Taylor alone spoke of wanting to be a nurse to help people. My sense of Taylor’s desire to be a nurse, while she explains in an altruistic way, feels like a way to heal herself and her family in the wake of her sister’s death, and even as a way to honor her late sister, who also spoke of wanting to be a nurse, but never fulfilled that goal. As Maslow (1943) discusses, they must have basic needs met prior to reaching a place of self-actualization and considering the greater needs of society or community. Many of their parents did not attend or complete college, and so the parents’ own foundations are likely not yet stable, which likely affected their children’s ideas of the purpose of work, as did the circumstances in their lives that I will interpret below.

Influences

During my conversations with the participants, I discovered many things that likely influenced their beliefs about work, as discussed above, and definitely shaped their home and school social contexts and thus the circumstances from which they make decisions: impactful family dynamics, normalized traumatic events, and personality mismatches for traditional high school.

Impactful family dynamics

Research on urban areas often shows us the archetype of the single mother and largely absent father (Dlugonski, Martin, Mailey, & Pineda, 2016; Adair & Dahlberg, 2003). The participants of this study offered a slightly different scenario, of a largely physically present father, but perhaps absent as a strong role model. There, but not there for them. Mom, for this group of teens is the central authority in responsibility and therefore worthy of the most respect and gratitude.

Most of the participants named mom as their "best friend," "biggest supporter," and "my everything". Carlos, for example, during his story about finding his uncle dead in his childhood bedroom, said that at that time he was frequently sleeping in his mother's room with her (he recalled being about six years old) was "obsessed with my mom and I still am." His story of witnessing trauma and death as a small child led immediately to his strong and deep devotion to his mother. She has remained his closest and strongest ally. She encouraged him "not to drop out of school like she did" and for school to be his main life priority. "I wanted a job, but Ma always said no you're going to focus all your time on high school, you're going to get done." She even helps him with schoolwork, even while Carlos' dad is not pleased with all the time she spends doing so. She works, and his dad does not, and when she had attempted to take some college

classes, Carlos explained to me that his dad did not like all the time that her work and school were taking away from him and the family.

Many others also described mom as the central figure of their lives. Taylor called her mom her best friend and shared that “My mom and I are really close. We're always together. Like at home we're always watching TV together, always doing dinner together, like everything.” Taylor shared that before her sister’s death, her mom and stepdad were arguing a lot and she worried that they would divorce. For a while after the death, the fighting intensified but the divorce did not materialize and they remain married. Taylor talked often about not being able to leave her mom, even though she is financially capable and believes she is emotionally prepared to do, because she feels her mom needs her.

Rachel, as well, named her mom as the person she trusts the most. She struggled to name others besides her parents, but since her mom understands being a woman, also, Rachel feels closer to her. When talking about trust relationships, Rachel said, “I guess I don't want to be, like sexist or anything, but because she's female she understands more things I feel like than my dad. So I can talk to her about school or just anything really. Whereas with my dad I will tell him some things but some things I don't feel like I can have him understand. You know?”

Additionally, Rachel’s mom has reached professional and academic goals that match her own. Mom went to college, earned an associate degree, and then later a bachelor degree and now works as an administrative assistant. Her dad began college, but did not complete. "Dad would've had a few associate degrees, but some family issues prevented him from accomplishing that. He had a few classes to go and he would have had a few in an automotive related career. He did go to college, but he didn't get a degree." For this group of people, mom has certainly played a

strong role in encouraging and supporting career and college decisions, and thus, holds the place as central influencer.

On the other hand, many of these students have been lifelong witnesses to paternal suffering. They shared stories of their dads as restless; injured or with other health issues; and who are un- or under-employed. This suffering certainly has been impactful to the students' images of their futures. They view work as something to be valued, and by which to earn respect and live comfortably, and yet, many of them have fathers who do not or cannot work and expressed that they either want to be different or do what they can to support the family.

Carlos could not articulate what work his dad had done back when he was working, but simply that he no longer worked. "He didn't really retire from it. He just stopped working and said 'I'm retired.'" When asked if it was a health issue, Carlos replied, "No, it's more an attitude issue." Carlos called his dad stubborn and admitted he got that quality from his dad. Even though his dad resents the amount time mom spends working both at and outside the home, his dad has not worked since the incident with his colleague many moves and many states ago, and does not plan on working outside of the home again.

Rachel's dad, though, worked for as long as she remembered until the last couple of years when his health began to suffer. She told the story of how he had to quit work because of terrible migraines. There is a lot of uncertainty about the cause, which probably affects the family's insecurity and anxiety about his long term health. Rachel said, "He has his good days and his bad. All these tests…they've done MRIs and everything, but they don't know [what causes them]." So, in addition to the physical pain and suffering, there is a level of mental or emotional suffering not only from dad, but also from Rachel and her brothers, and mom, too. For Rachel's part, it has been difficult. "I mean, it's been hard for my...for me with my dad home because he's

supposed to be the provider, you know, and it's hard to see him like that, in pain. So it's kind of hard for me, emotionally." It has led to more pressure to grow up and take more adult responsibility at home. "I've done the meals; I do all the laundry and everything. So I feel like I've had more…not burdens, but responsibilities put on my shoulders. Well this was just this whole past year, I felt like I've had to grow up really fast and it's hard." Without having held a job outside of the home, the perspective of the additional responsibility at home has added to her stress and tilted her viewpoint.

Rachel, as one of the oldest participants, and from a household that she described as "stable" and "peaceful" understood that while her father was suffering, she knew not take his frustration with her personally. With that, though, mom is the one now financially responsible for the family and Rachel considers their relationship to be closer. As someone who intentionally lives by traditional rules, her mom's central role as the provider for the home has further skewed Rachel's perspective.

Bralyn's father, for his part, works. As previously discussed, he followed in his own father's footsteps working in the construction trades. So, although he did not complete high school, he supports his family. He is not without his struggles, however. Bralyn noted that while they tried, her parents could not help her sister through the troubles caused by her mental illness. They sent her to live with family out of state, but she returned home to her same patterns as before. According to Bralyn, it bothers her parents that she, Bralyn, still has not moved back home even though her sister is moved out on her own with her new baby, but Bralyn is happy in a stable home and is not motivated to change that.

She talked about enjoying the family's lifestyle. As a family, they enjoy the outdoors. Bralyn hunts with her dad, she rides dirt bikes with him, and enjoys parties that they have on

their property. Of course, that lifestyle has not always been kind to her father, as was previously noted. When asked if he changed his lifestyle after his time in jail, Bralyn hinted that he did not, but that he trusts people less now.

Many of these students' ideas of work arguably come from gratitude to mom for being supportive and strong and wanting to give back, and also in response to the dynamic of dad who is contributing "less" or may not be the role model that mom is. In addition to the impact of their parents on their lives, the participants experienced some traumatic events that surely played a role in their development. It is difficult to watch the people you love suffer – mentally or physically – and because of that, these teens have experienced much suffering themselves.

Normalized traumatic events

Most of the participants experienced something in their childhoods that would be considered traumatic and memorable, with the possibility of long-term impact. These events include adoption, family moves, multiple deaths, and parental incarceration. Events like these can teach a person strength of character. Many of the participants talked about these moments like they were just part of life and while describing them, they made it seem that they simply moved on from these events because hard things happen.

Steve, for example, told the story of his adoption as a child. "I was adopted in 2005 with five others when I was five or six. We're all from three different families. 'A' and 'T' are family. Me, 'S' and 'G' are one family. And 'I' and 'R' are biological to my parents. It was a closed case [adoption], I'm not sure why. I was born in Kentucky, and then we moved here [after the adoption]." All of the children have been heavily active in the family's small business, where they have worked alongside their parents. When asked for more details about the circumstances around the adoption and living in a large family, Steve had a very easy-going attitude about it all,

although he did not often talk about his many siblings. He talked about not having many friends or people he could trust.

This is a common theme with Carlos, as well. There were not many people his age at home growing up, even while there were multiple generations living at home. It was he and his sister, who he does not get along with. They moved often, at dad's insistence. "Because my dad can't stand being in one spot for more than a year. Can't stand the cold, goes to heat. He can't stand the heat, comes back to cold. Gets bored, goes somewhere else," explained Carlos. That made making new friends difficult. Sometimes that mattered to him, and other times it did not. These contradictory statements seemed to apply other things, as well, like his uncles' deaths. One of Carlos' uncles died in his childhood bedroom, and the other a couple of years later. He talked of being close with his uncles, and his whole family. At the same time, he spoke pragmatically about their deaths, and their struggle with drugs.

Drugs took the sister of Taylor, also. Although at the time, she did not know her sister had a drug problem. That was kept from her. She spoke at length and in great detail about the experience, which had a lasting impact on Taylor and the whole family. In fact, there has been tension since then, which began before the death, "and well before that, like a week before, my parents got in a really big fight and like we thought they were going to get divorced. And then she died. So ever since then, it's like been the kind of rocky." Without fully realizing it, this event has caused people in her community to treat Taylor differently, leading to a seeming sadness or loneliness covered up by her smile and cheerful words.

After her interview, Bralyn talked a lot about her dad and his life-long troubles, including his incarceration, the trial of which began when Bralyn was in middle school. The trial lasted almost two years, until the time when he actually served his sentence. During this time, Bralyn

struggled in school, but never academically. While she never connected the issues with her dad with her own issues at school, she admitted that for a long time she had difficulty managing her anger and knew that if she want to work in law enforcement, which was her ultimate goal, she would have to learn to control her anger.

Bralyn has two sisters: her older sister, who Bralyn describes as a "pathological liar," which was "really hard on our parents" and her younger sister. Her younger sister has some "cognitive impairment" and it "takes her a long time to process things." She idolizes their oldest sister and that bothers Bralyn, because of their older sister's violent tendencies. At one point, her sister threatened to kill her, and that was the point when Bralyn moved out of their parents' home and in with her aunt and uncle, where she has experienced a "normal" and "happy" life.

Part of her motivation is to remove herself from the troubles of her sisters and family. "The farther I can go in life, the farther I can get away from her and that life." And yet, she and her sister have come to a truce of sorts. Bralyn helps out with her new niece so that the baby can "understand a loving environment" and because all kids need a 'crazy aunt'. Her sister lost her job after having the baby and for Bralyn, that means pitching in. "You know, she's not on cash assistance, she's not on anything, so I tend to help her out a little bit. I mean I have...I work, so sometimes I help her get some things for the baby or get some things for her, or like you know, her house or something. But I mean we also have our parents too, that help her. I push it because, I mean, I don't want [her baby] to remember the bad things about her mom. I want her to remember the good things about her."

These young adults have found ways, through trauma and adversity, to move forward and to have goals, goals beyond survival. In their experience, not everyone gets to survive. Their

ability to persevere in spite of some events is admirable. But it is not without some difficulties, mostly with their peer groups.

Personality mismatches for traditional high school

All of the participants talked in some way about not fitting in at their high school. The struggle to be "normal" in a traditional social environment could be attributed to what they experienced in their home environments, and some made that connection. Carlos talked about being bullied throughout school. He was often the new kid and said the bullying occurred "because I was ugly and fat." At one point in late elementary school:

> Somebody walked up to me and said, 'Dude, somebody drew a picture of you with bombs strapped to your chest in a gun pointed at your head and a sniper going through your head and a knife in your chest and a grenade in your hand.' So I walked up to the air vent thing and the picture was sitting right there taped to it. I looked at it and I'm like, 'what's going on here?' So I told the teacher and he freaked out like, 'who drew this?' And it turned out it was the kid that had walked up to me and told me that somebody drew it." Two months later, in gym class, the same student punched me to the ground and stomped on me and broke loose one of my teeth. (Carlos)

Carlos does not believe the other student suffered any consequences for either event. He went on to describe getting into trouble multiple times for offenses that he did not actually commit, but was blamed for. He was always either in the wrong place at the wrong time, or having people represent the truth to favor them and make Carlos look bad, while they were picking on him. It was easy for me to see why he did not enjoy school and was ready to leave. He went on to say,

> I always tried to stay home all the time. Like, if you look at my school record, I probably missed a good half of my entire twelve years of school. You think it was for reasons like

> that [getting picked on] because I didn't want to go back. OK. I got embarrassed easily. So like something happens, and no, I don't want to go.

I believe experiences like those he described probably interfered with Carlos' identity development, related to confidence, efficacy, and thus, future ability to work with others. He intentionally selected a solitary job (in an industrial trade).

Charlotte also described regular bullying by another girl in middle school, but in her case, she talked more about how she has matured and better manages it now that the girl moved back to the district after being away for a few years.

> I take her with a grain of salt now and I got bigger and better things do… she has two older siblings and two younger siblings. Her [older siblings went away to college], but they both live at home now. And her mom's a bartender. Her parents are divorced. Her dad's always away working. So I think it [the bullying] just kind of...made her happy and made her…I look back and I feel bad for her. (Charlotte)

Charlotte learning to find peace through being bullied was similar to Bralyn working through her anger issues, in the name of moving beyond her family struggles to her future career goals. Working towards a goal allows the students to work through their loneliness. Taylor named her mom as her best friend, and said that she did not have many friends at school. Rachel, too, wondered why the people she thought were her friends in high school do not talk to her anymore. "I don't know. I've tried to contact some of them, but they don't want to be with me anymore, I guess. It's very painful. I'm a very emotional person and I have a big heart so I care about my friends." This has affected her mostly positive memories of high school.

The early college program has afforded the students an opportunity to get out of the school environment that they did not like and yet remain in a productive environment where they

are still “moving forward” or “getting better”. They view college as a necessity, but also as a way to bypass high school, which they see as a win-win. I wonder how they thought they might fit in at college when they did not fit it in high school. Did they pick this program to escape high school? To prove they are not losers? Is there pride in taking college classes, while others, who seemingly have more going for them, did not?

Why this vehicle?

The quick and easy answers the participants had about why they chose to participate in the early college program was to save time in getting employable by starting college sooner, thus saving money that their parents did not have to spend on college. Also it was more convenient than the other early college program option, which would have caused them to have to find transportation into the next county where the nearest community college is. Most of the students did not have the extra time between school and jobs, did not have reliable transportation (many of them drove to campus with friends from high school), or they were not comfortable driving so far away. For many it was double the distance to the other institution.

Students from under-resourced communities have fewer choices than students from larger or better-resourced ones. These students made the choice to take advantage of a program that was made available to them. Many of the students noted that education is something that cannot be taken away from a person, regardless of circumstance. So, the bigger reason was that this early college program would help lead them to permanently “better” work than not going to college would. They chose this early college program as a way to build a safety net, ultimately through a career, to ease suffering, and to feel more in control by being able to support themselves and others as needed without the stress of going without or losing home, personal property, or people. This program allows them to perhaps prevent the suffering they witnessed

and experienced with their influential loved ones, who they rely on for support, strength, and survival.

By building their own safety net, these students do not have to rely on others, thus removing burden, and can feel pride in their self-sufficiency, which also makes their loved ones proud, too, potentially helping to ease their suffering. And so, participation in this program could be seen as way of breaking a cycle of suffering. For many, participation is proof to others that they are more than the expectations society may have of them, expectations earned based on family, school, and their life context.

I recognize the tension between career/job and the students' dream or desire to do "more". There is the idealism of working toward their dreams/aspirations, which intersects, with the pragmatism of their desire to save time and money, and subsequently make money that the family does not have now. For these students, the early college program, specifically, is the vehicle by which they actively work toward their dreams, but their enrollment means more to them than the classroom learning and credits earned. It also represents an actualization of their desire to become financially stable.

These findings lead me to some broader themes that will guide the following analysis and include: a sense of urgency to progress and a loyalty and obedience to family. These themes arose from the student stories, but can be more generally applied to the larger ideas around dual enrollment and ideas of work.

Sense of urgency to progress

Perhaps my most profound discovery has been the prevailing sense of urgency at all levels of decision-making in the push for dual enrollment. From policy-makers and the government, to school districts, to the families, and finally to the students themselves, everyone

seems to be in a hurry to achieve the goal, the next phase. Policymakers and government want more students to be college ready and also prepared to work ("Policy Matters," 2017). The issue of dual enrollment has appeared on the AASCU's annual list of higher education state policy issues for the last several years. Instead of slowing or falling off the list as budgets shrink across states, dual enrollment has become a priority as states attempt to quickly build their workforce being affected by retiring baby boomers, the changing workplace, and technology growth. By pushing college credit earning to high school students, states can fill their workforce gaps sooner.

School districts have similar goals – to build a strong workforce for their communities - and also for their students to complete and find success. They take funds made available to them to give their students more options when they cannot provide those opportunities within the districts. This is especially true of more rural, under-resourced districts in the county of study. Often, this early college program is one of the few alternatives that students can participate in, outside of the standard, required curriculum and participation has grown quickly in the last few years, as previously indicated by the level of national and state attention it has garnered.

Families encourage their children to take the opportunities so they can more quickly reach goals. Generally, as I discovered with this population of students, mom is the biggest supporter and encourager for students to enroll in early college. They want their children to have better opportunities than they have had. Often, these families are the ones who have been caught in the changes and reduction of industrial, factory jobs. They were the workers whose parents made a good living and were able to raise them on the salary from the readily available factory jobs, jobs that were no longer there when they wanted to follow in their parents' footsteps. These students were in elementary school when the recession peaked. Now, these parents are

supporting and encouraging their own children to take opportunities to get good jobs by doing what they need to, to get working sooner.

Family first

Parents are central to the stories of the participants of this study. It became clear from the first interview that family comes first for these teens. However, I began to wonder why these students did not defy their parents, who overwhelmingly seemed to encourage their child to participate in early college. Based on Erickson (1968), typical development for students of this age is to rebel against their parents (developmentally, if not actually) and look to others for guidance, peers and other adults included through "role experimentation". What makes these students so obedient and mindful of their parents' wishes?

Often, if life is very challenging and one does not know what to count on or trust (steady income, health, etc.), your people are there to be kept close. If everything else is bad, then you can have something good, by having a close, connected relationship with your family. Likely, these students were reminded that parents (most often moms) sacrifice to be able to provide more for their children. This is not a unique message and these students show gratitude by remaining loyal. I am left to wonder, though, will they wake up one day and feel regret or disappointment that they did not forge their own path?

Additionally, these students overwhelmingly feel supported by their families, including extended families when necessary, as in the case of Bralyn. However, their families, while offering emotional or general support, do not often have any information beyond a willingness to encourage their students to "keep going" or "work hard". They do not always know, like other first-generation, at-risk students from less resourced areas, how to navigate the bureaucracy of the academy, not limited to using the very specific language used by colleges and universities.

Postsecondary education uses its own language – transcript, credit, FAFSA, syllabus, learning management system, registration portal, etc. – and we often make assumptions that students and families know what these are without actually providing definitions for them. Arguably, some eventually catch on. But why should we put that extra learning curve, hurdle, or test before a student when we could prevent it? There are many barriers, like this one, that students have to navigate, whether the students are aware of these barriers or not.

Analysis

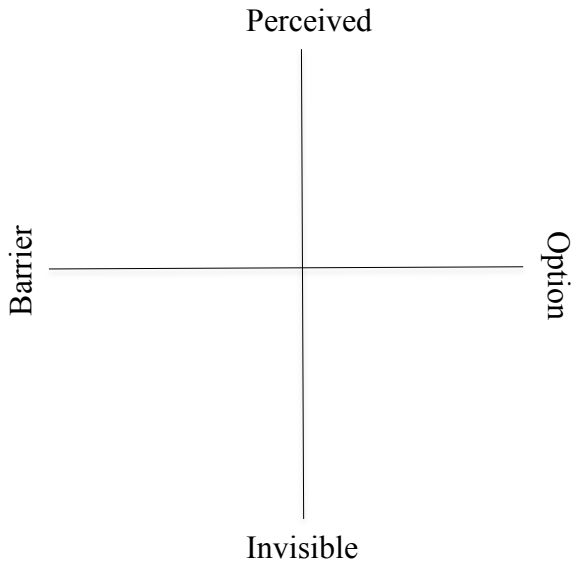
My broad interest in studying early college students was to find what influenced their decisions to come to college early. I asked the questions I did to get at the students' connections of work images and their decision to participate. Also, I hoped that I would get a sense of their potential lack of awareness of circumstances that may be affecting their goals and decisions, based on their social context at home and school and how that interacted with their upbringing and now with their identity development.

The participant group, by nature of the methodology, is small and thus the emergent findings are not generalizable. However, I created a four-quadrant model to use as a visual guidepost to explain more broadly ideas of student choice and barriers and how those relate to whether the students perceive or understand those choices or barriers or not. Following that, I will discuss several points to help situate the participants' influences on their choices within the larger conversation of opportunity and achievement.

Four-quadrant model of agency and circumstance

The model itself consists of two axes. The vertical axis represents a student's awareness, with the top as what they perceive, and the bottom as what is invisible to them. The horizontal axis represents opportunities, with the right representing options and the left representing barriers (or lack of choice.) Specifically, there are two options: 1. An opportunity that exists to select/take action on or 2. An opportunity that exists to NOT select/NOT take action on. There are also two types of barriers: 1. An opportunity that does not exist at all or 2. An opportunity that exists, but not for a particular person.

Figure 1: Four-quadrant model of agency and circumstance



I chose those specific words to describe my model because my study is concerned with student decision-making and this is a way I can express choices they have in school and in life, and ones they do not, perhaps based on their community, school, or home environments. Additionally, I wanted a way to explain how and when students recognize choices and barriers, or how and when something affects them when they have a gap in awareness, which can be equally important to reaching (or not) their goals.

Quadrant 1, the option-perceived quadrant, is when students recognize what opportunities they have, like their participation in the early college program. This is significant, because while there are many unknowns for the students, because of their home and life context, their desire for change propels them to make the choice to participate. This quadrant can be impacted by a student's microsystem, as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1977), because they learn about

options available to them from the people closest to them through their close contact and interaction. Also, though, when there are gaps in awareness of those close people, as well, the students' own gaps are that much more pronounced. The participants of this particular study would all fit into quadrant 1, the option-perceived category, since they took the opportunity and enrolled in the early college program. I would like to further examine the usefulness and function of the model on other students however, in future research, as a way to organize points of intersection between agency and circumstance.

In quadrant 2, the option-invisible quadrant, a student may hypothetically have other opportunities that they do not know about, and since they would not know about those opportunities, it would be unlikely that they would use their choice option. Perhaps they were struggling with a traumatic event during the enrollment period for participation in the program, and they are not at school long enough to realize they are eligible. They would not realize their choice. On the other hand, for students from under-resourced communities, there are often barriers in place that they are not aware of which come out in the form of opportunity gaps, represented in quadrant 3, the barrier-invisible quadrant, and also affected by the student's macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1977). Finally, quadrant 4, the barrier-perceived quadrant, represents when students are aware of what limitations or barriers exist for them. Typically, these students assign these as personal limitations, such as family or personal circumstance, instead of societal or geographic ones, i.e., macrosystem ones. These, like the gaps in quadrant 3, make a bigger impact on the students' choice than they realize.

Opportunity gaps (as inputs)

Opportunity gaps can be defined as "inputs – the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities – while achievement gap refers to outputs – the unequal or

inequitable distribution of educational results and benefits" ("Hidden Curriculum," 2014) and can further be explained by the macrosystem example of which I gave earlier: the rural geography, the under-resourced communities, etc. Many things contribute to opportunity gaps and have probably affected the participants in this research. For example, among the thousands of students who could potentially participate in early college programs (based on district enrollment and academic performance), only a couple hundred are involved. Affecting these numbers are likely parents who have not themselves gone to college, so have difficulty thinking about how they would support their own children through it, or who do not value college in general. This can be also described as a student's exosystem, or the effect of the parent choices on those of the participant (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1977).

In July 2009, most of these students were in elementary school, the unemployment rate hit a high of 16.9% for the county, compared to its current rate of 4%. (Labor Force Statistics, Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics). This not only affected the students' families directly, it affected the school districts, because families moved away to find work. Fewer students means less funding. So, because of the economic disadvantages of rural, and under-funded districts, students likely have fewer and less diverse programs offered to them than students at larger districts. Couple that with the lack of availability of diverse or cultural community opportunities, from where students might benefit on their own if they did not have them at school, and these students suffer ("Hidden Curriculum," 2014).

Achievement gaps (as outputs)

Due, in part, to their fewer opportunities, students from rural and less-resourced communities perform at lower levels. These gaps in achievement are typically measured in standardized tests, but there are other ways to see this in action. College enrollment and

completion are a way, and so are others, measured much earlier than that including absenteeism and discipline ("Hidden Curriculum," 2014). When applied to the stories of the participants of this research directly, this becomes clear. Students from families who are moving so much that the children have difficulty making friends because "I'm not in any place long enough" certainly have difficulty building a strong attendance record. Similar to attendance, grades are affected by moving. How does a student build a strong academic record when they are moving from state to state, district to district every year or two?

Regarding the discipline metric, students who are witnessing the deaths of family members or feel forced to move out of their parents' home because of extreme negative behavior of a sibling that interferes with their own safety, are bound to struggle with their own feelings of anger and grief. What vehicles would these students have to rehabilitate safely and positively? Probably few, if any. And so, they react at school. Like Bralyn, for example, who shared with me that she started getting regularly suspended for fighting in elementary school, episodes like these begin to affect what these students can contribute to a strong academic body of work that might serve as the foundation for their postsecondary or life goals.

Tradeoffs

I initially began to consider the idea of choice when reading Schwarz's *The Paradox of Choice* and while he focused on consumerism, I believe there is a connection that could be applied to my interests with early college students and how their circumstances led them to college when it did. In the book, Schwarz discussed in a section about "The Psychology of Trade-offs," that "the options we consider usually suffer from comparison with other options" (Schwarz, p. 131). So, to these students, going to college and working toward even an abstract goal of work they value is better than the alternative, which may just be what they are

accustomed to seeing at home or high school. This alternative can be represented by under- or unemployment, dissatisfaction in life because of employment status, stress about finances, physical or mental injury, etc. Early college students may see these barriers around them, impacting their family and fellow students, yet they choose another path.

By deciding to enroll in early college, the students make the choice partially to remove themselves from high school environments, where their life experiences may have already influenced. By taking themselves out of that situation, they feel they can put themselves in a better one. However, when they are in college classes for half the day or more, they are missing even more opportunities at the high school, ones that might have improved their feelings and sense of belonging there and given them another chance to connect with someone or something there. So they further isolate themselves; thus proving their beliefs that they do not fit in. It's a tradeoff, and something that needs to be considered when attempting to assist students in making the best decisions about early college participation.

Discussion

Why is it so important to tell this story? The participants of this research are the children of people industrialization and the economic downturn left behind. The work that was easy to find, but hard to do, is gone. And along the way, society began to devalue that work. So even if the work was there, who would have wanted it? It was work for the under-educated, over-labored, suffering, and restless masses. They want better for themselves and their families, because they have not had it easy, and neither have their parents. They have a voice and they want to use it. With the rapidly changing nature of the workplace, these were the people industry left behind, often with nothing to take the place of the huge employers who left their towns empty behind them.

Society has overlooked people from rural, economically disadvantaged areas for many years. So like the large group of people in situations similar to this who changed the political climate overnight last year, the participants and their families have every right to feel angry. Yet, they do not feel that way. They do not fit in to what we know about that larger group of people, working class Americans who value their independence, although the participants also value their independence. They, like the larger group, do not feel entitlement, they want to work and they value hard work. However, these particular people are not diminishing or questioning the value of college, they are seeking it as the vehicle to move up. As long as they have the chance, though, they will exercise their individualism. They will find what benefits them, and they will take options they have to get there. None of the participants spoke directly of politics or the recession. But indirectly, they talked about the felt effects when talking about suffering, drug deaths, underemployment, and incarceration. This is their context.

The desire for upward social mobility is great. Instead of being angry, they take action in their way by choosing a different path than their parents or grandparents before them. Through this, they send a message that they believe they have more capacity and ability, and expect to receive more at the end. What they believe they will receive – freedom, control, and comfort – ultimately leads to more choice. More choice in the types of jobs they find, homes in good areas, and even in their health.

Ultimately, these students have a desire for a sense of belonging. They aspire to belong to a different group, that of educated professionals, than what they currently see around them. By belonging to this group, with all its benefits (financial freedom and control over decisions), these people will be able to put aside some of the suffering, and be better equipped to live a better life for themselves and their families. Some students believe this program is the only option for them

to earn a postsecondary credential and meet their goals of control and comfort. Whether because of time or money or eligibility or admission, they feel like this was their only chance. Of the small group of students I met, there is a spectrum of influence and intensely personal reasons, but all of them expressed, albeit uniquely, a desire for more. A desire to push past the bounds of their current lives, and experience something more and new.

These students are still finding their way, still developing their identity. They prove this by how they speak in contradictions, as though they have not quite figured it out yet. Take Bralyn, for example. She often used words like "chill" and "relaxed" to describe her life, and then told stories about moving out of her parents' home and her dad's incarceration. Additionally, Carlos talked about wanting to be alone for the rest of his life, and yet when asked about other opportunities he would have liked, he responded that he would have liked the ability to more easily make friends. They, like all adolescents, rely on others (at school, at college) for information and assistance, and hold an assumption that those people know the best way, without being able to evaluate if they actually do. These students have concrete goals, with abstract ideas of how to reach them.

Many students who have traditional views of a college experience, on the other hand, may list future job or career somewhere in their list of purposes going to college, but it seems that for many of those students, that represents the abstract idea, one to be considered later. For the students like the ones in this study, however, for whom a traditional college path-where a student tries to get into the best institution possible, maybe research-based and with the benefits of institutional prestige–is NOT the plan, a career is a much more concrete and necessary plan, not just an abstract idea. For many of these students, the pathway to the career is the goal and the institutional opportunities matter to them less than the promise of meeting their goal at the

end. Like other students, the experience may be important, but it is not the most important. This clear goal of getting to a career can make things more difficult for some students, because it keeps them from focusing on the journey, which is where the learning and changing happens.

The popular media and many Americans are now questioning the value of a college education, not because of the education itself, but because of the debt and money concern. Will college get students the job they want with the salary they want? Or can they find that good job without college? In this rural area, this early college program might feel like the easy way to get them to the goal of a good job. This is a pathway that is set up for them, by people who "know" what they're doing. So even if the students don't exactly know how to navigate it themselves, they trust that someone does. But without college, there is no longer a clear path to get them to a good-paying job where they can be self-reliant.

I began my research by asking the question: How does the social context (circumstance) of students from a rural, economically disadvantaged area influence them to make a decision and take action (agency) to enroll in an early college program? These students, as I learned, want what others want: a comfortable life. But also, they have a desire to ease the suffering that they witnessed in their families, their most important influence.

These students take their circumstances, which they could not control or change as a young child, and make an intentional decision as they mature from adolescence to adulthood to change those circumstances moving forward, toward a different way of life, not only to help themselves, but also to help their families. By making decisions that will allow them to remove additional burden from their families, they help themselves, but again, also their families. It is an intensely personal decision, but becomes a collective achievement and a decision to benefit many. Their agency becomes a change, a break in a cycle of suffering, and a purpose for pride

and recognition. But making this decision is a tradeoff. By striking out on their own path, these students are forced to confront that their support system cannot fulfill the supporting role. They must try to seek assistance elsewhere or risk failure. This is where institutions can step in.

Recommendations

There are many ways to assist early college students who choose the path to career via an early college program including avoiding assumptions about: support off campus, academic language use, and access to tools required to succeed in the twentieth-century classroom. We can better use the support they do have, and provide mentoring to fill in the gaps left beyond that.

First, understanding the experiences that the students come to college with can help postsecondary institutions learn how to better bridge the gaps and remove barriers. Through the survival of trauma, these students have learned how to be resilient, and that should be recognized. Through their difficulties, these students still value hard work and relationships. By including their families in the decision-making, or understanding that these students will likely prefer to consult with key family members for assistance, early college programs can support transitions.

Often, it is helpful to have conversations with the students, but then also have the conversations with the parents – this is by design and by choice of the student. Also, by speaking with the parents directly and avoiding the jargon of higher education terms, the parents learn how to better support their students through advice from a college official. They want to support, but cannot always help students navigate the bureaucracy or unwritten rules of the academy. The families cannot often relate to terms like credits, transcripts, or syllabus. They may have vague notions, but typically, by explaining these terms in advance, using common language, without prompting from the family member, the level of understanding and comfort increases. Parents

may become more comfortable by knowing how they can best help their child through something they do not fully understand. Generally, these people are going to be champions of their children, and because of the close relationships, they have great influence on them. Ultimately, the students will benefit, with their family becoming part of the process.

Additionally, as families sometimes see early college programs as "low stakes" options, it behooves everyone to understand the implications of poor grades on an official college transcript, whether the student attempts the credit during or after high school. Official credit will follow them, and it is the responsibility of the early college officials that they are aware of this. This can come into play when students might belatedly realize that there will be online components in their college class, since most make use of a web-based learning management system during the semester to support what happens beyond the classroom walls. Some families from lower-income and lower-resourced areas do not always have access to reliable technology or reliable wireless access, which hinders a student's ability to participate fully in the class. On the other hand, a student may have the technology available, but the family may have difficulty with access to reliable transportation to get their student to college classes when necessary. All of these barriers should be assessed prior to the student's attendance into the program.

By working with students earlier, some of these barriers can be removed before they become permanent ones. By beginning to speak with students earlier, in middle school, for example, we give them time to process and prevent the consequences of poor high school GPA even in the first two years, which may lead them to be ineligible to participate in an early college program. Also, working with students earlier may help mitigate some of the sense of urgency felt by the families and schools, so that feeling may be transferred less to the students. Ideally, this can help encourage strong occupational identity by giving students other adults besides family

members to look to as professional examples, and to start to gain self-efficacy in believing that if they want to go to college, they have an option to do so.

Implications for future research

There are many additional opportunities to increase the breadth and depth of further research based on the questions still left with this study. The participants all volunteered their time and stories to this work. Are the stories this group of students shared with me, similar to other stories that the other early college students would have? What about other students in other rural, low income geographic regions? Would we find similar influences and motivating factors with students in other places? I would also like to further examine the usefulness and function of the model on other students in future research, as a way to organize points of intersection between agency and circumstance using a different protocol which would focus on scenarios of fictitious students and ask participants relate to them, instead of asking them directly about perceived opportunities or barriers.

Additionally, what would be the long-term impact on this same group? What would they say about their choice to enroll down several years in the future? I would find value in following up with this group of students several years out from this point to see how many of them reached their goals and what effect, if any, do they feel their decision to participate in an early college program have on how well they met those goals. Also, I would like to start asking questions about work images and college sooner, in middle school, as students are beginning to develop occupational identity. Having perspectives prior to program participation and then after program participation would give a more complete picture of the effect of work images on choice and ultimately, on goals.

One additional idea came from the conversation with the early college coordinator who works closely with the students in the program, and it is worthy of examination:

> There is one additional observation I have noticed over the last three years regarding students in the fifth year of high school. We have a small percentage who leave home, work more, and become disconnected from the wrap-around support services provided by the early college program. The challenge of retaining these students is difficult. They have not earned their high school diploma yet and need to remain engaged with their education. Does independence or a little more in their paycheck begin to influence the sense of the better life they were previously in search of? (L. Michaels, personal communication, 2017, name change for confidentiality).

Getting a taste of the life they seek may be tempting them away from their long term goal, which may tell a story of the benefits of instant gratification of having some resources where they previously had very little.

Many of the questions about this particular group of students I have are around some of the indirect, yet important findings. Why are these dads struggling? I wonder if it has something to do with what I could liken to an identity crisis. Many of them cannot support their families like their fathers and their fathers' fathers could for generations by using physical strength and labor. Industry has changed and I feel that maybe they have not yet caught up with the changes. How have their struggles impacted their children? There is more here that this study did not capture. However, it does connect to an idea that some students seem to come to the early college program with "stunted" occupational identity development. They did not process through all of the phases that "normal" development would expect. I believe it is likely because of their

home environments and the trauma they experienced, but I would be curious to know the level of the effect on them and their academic pursuits.

Finally, we don't know how the sense of urgency that permeates every level of decision-making affects students. Everyone around them tells them that saving time and getting to their goal of a good job is good, but is it? How does rushing through high school and college affect these students? It may be worth learning about the potential implications for these students and if they struggle later on in their educational journey or in their careers by feeling rushed through the end of their adolescence.

Epilogue

> "[This program] it's going to help you in the long run and like, it may not feel good right now, but it will definitely feel good in the future. Because like, that's the thing I always think about. What will happen next? You know, like I always think about the future, because like how would I pay for college? Where am I going to get that money to go to college, you know? And if I wait, like if I'm in that mood to do something, I have to do it now.…that's another reason why I did this program. Because if I were to wait for college, it's not gonna happen. Like it just won't. I'd find better things to do than go to college. So I mean it's really...you really gotta think about it. And if you're really passionate about doing what you want to do, get started on it." – Bralyn

All of the participants returned to the institution for the next academic year, with the exception of one, who graduated at the end of the last academic year and got a job over the summer. A handful of the students finished the early college program and enrolled as official college students to continue to pursue their career goals. I caught up with several of them when they came to meet me to read my initial portraits and findings to ensure my work was true and that I captured their essence in a satisfactory way.

After a long conversation about the effects that upbringing can have on us, both positively and negatively, one of the participants expressed her concerns about her boyfriend's family not liking her, not understanding her, or perhaps judging her. At first I did not understand the connection, but then she began to explain that her boyfriend is in the third generation of his family to attend what is arguably the best academic institution in the state. While she is the first person on her side that will finish college, it will not be one at the same level as her boyfriend's. Often, she says she is proud of our institution, but when talking of her boyfriend and his family, her confidence falters a bit. She understands the issue of prestige, even though she is unable to articulate it. She feels unworthy and that affects her confidence when she is around her boyfriend's family.

Our conversation about prestige began earlier she voiced her concerns after we discussed my findings. On several occasions during that conversation, she was on the verge of tears. She talked about how her mom made the decision to break with her family's generations of drinking and that instead of being happy for her, they ostracized her and told her she was trying to be better than them, which lead to permanently damaged relationships. She taught her daughter, an early college student, that trying to make changes is hard, but it is worth the struggle. And it is, at all levels, and in all ways. It is the best way to help a person become who they want to be.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Participation Request

Hello! My name is Voula Erfourth and I work for [this postsecondary institution]. I am also a PhD student at Michigan State University and for my dissertation, I am studying students like YOU. I am interested in how students make college and career decisions, and I want to hear from you in how you made the decision to participate in the early college program.

If you are interested in helping me with my dissertation research, please click on the link below, provide the requested information, and I will follow up with you. Your participation is voluntary and you will be compensated for your time. Participation will include one or two individual interviews with me, and potentially a group interview (of 6-9 students) sometime during April and May.

Thank you in advance for helping me out and letting me get to know you better by sharing your story with me! And if you have ANY questions, please email or call me at voula.erfourth@xxxxx.edu or xxx-xxx-xxxx.

https://[remainder of address here]

Voula

APPENDIX B: Early College Students Research Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how college students make college and career decisions. I am asking you to take part because you signed up for this study via the Google form provided by the campus Early College Coordinator. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn how students who come from rural backgrounds make college and career decisions.

What you will be asked you to do: If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct an interview (group and individual) with you. The interview will include questions about your background, family, previous school experiences, and ideas of work. With your permission, I would also like to audio-record the interview. The individual interview will last 45-60 minutes and the group interview will last 60-90 minutes.

Risks and benefits: I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

There are no benefits to you. I hope to learn more about students and what leads them to decisions about college and career.

Compensation: You will be provided refreshments and a $10 gift card for your participation.

Your answers will be confidential. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report made public will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. The data collected for this research study will be protected on a password-protected computer for a minimum of three years after the close of the project. Only the appointed researchers and the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) will have access to the research data. I will audio-record the interview, and will keep the audio recording in a password protected electronic file.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with Baker College. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher at Voula Erfourth, 1020 S Washington St, Owosso, MI 48867; or skoutela@msu.edu; or 989-729-3406. If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Participant Name (printed) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature_____ Date _____

(Required if participant is under 18 years of age)

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview audio-recorded.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Parent/Guardian Signature_____ Date _____

(Required if participant is under 18 years of age)

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol

Research question: How does the social context (circumstance) of students from a rural, economically disadvantaged area influence them to make a decision and take action (agency) to enroll in an early college program?

Interview Protocol

"Welcome and thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this interview. The study has two main purposes: first, to understand the reasons why high school students choose to participate in early college programs and second, what and how early college students think about work. The interview will last for approximately 45-60 minutes from the start until the end and all the information will be confidential. I will not use real names in the report. If you want to mention something 'off the record' please let me know during the interview. Your participation in this study is completely free and voluntary and you may choose not to answer any question you do not want to answer. As the email stated, our time together will be recorded. You have the right to request that we stop recording at any time. I'm going to begin recording now. Is that alright?

Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Background questions - Circumstance questions

"I'm going to ask you some questions about your home life and family before you started taking college classes."

1. Tell me about your home life growing up. Who lives with you? Do you get along? Are you happy?
2. Are there books in your house? If so, what kinds?
3. Are you encouraged to read?
4. Do your parents read? If so, what kinds of things do they read?
5. What do you like best about where you've grown up/your community? Least?
6. If you could have had other opportunities (school or otherwise) growing up than you have had, what would they be? What would that look like?
7. What do you do for fun with your family? What is least fun? What's your favorite thing to do with your family? Least?
8. Are your parents/adults home with you all the time you are at home? Do they work at night or during the day?

"This next set of questions is about the people and support you have around you."

Trust

1. Which adults do you trust and why?
2. Which peers do you trust and why?

3. Are there other people you trust?
4. What is your relationship like with them?

Advice

5. Who gives you advice?
6. Whose advice do you value most and why?
7. Whose advice do you value least and why?
8. What kind of school and work/career advice do they give you?

Support

9. What adults or peers do you get the most support from?
    a. How do you feel supported by them?

Identity

10. How or where do you see yourself one year from now?
    a. Five years from now?
    b. Ten years from now?
11. What do you think you need to do to reach those goals?

Career questions

"This next set of questions is about your career decisions."

1. When did you start thinking about work?
2. What does work mean to you? What does career mean to you?
3. Do you think you can be anything you want to be (work-related)? Why or why not?
4. What do your parents/family do for work? Do they talk about work at home? What do they say about work?
5. When did you start thinking about what you want to be as an adult? When did you become aware that you would need to go to college to do that?
6. Who or what has influenced you most in your career decision?
7. How have you explored careers?

College questions

"The last set of questions is about your decisions to come to college."

1. When did you start thinking about going to college?
2. Did your parents go to college? When?
3. What did your parents say to you about college? What about other important adults?
4. Where did you hear about this EMC program? What made you decide to participate? Who has supported your decision and how?
5. How did the idea of extending your official high school graduation date make you feel?
6. What do you think made you ready to do college and high school at the same time?

7. What led you to you pick this college?
8. Are you satisfied with your college choice? Why or why not?
9. What advice do you have for other high school students considering participating in an early college program?

APPENDIX D: Participant Chart

Name	HS Grade	Type of HS (compared to other schools in county)	Motto – "I want to be" statement	Career goal	College goal	Significant life event
Carlos	13	Small, rural	I want to be alone	Welder	EMC, certificate only, already completed	Death of many close family members, one while he watched
Rachel	13	Small, rural	I want to be a good person	Accountant	Bachelor degree at current college	Dad's medical issues, unable to work
~~John~~	~~11~~	~~Mid-sized rural~~		~~Engineer~~		
Taylor	13	Mid-sized, rural	I want to be counted on	Nurse	Bachelor degree at current college	Sister drug overdose, death
~~Natasha~~	~~12~~	~~Large, In city~~		~~Medical Examiner~~		
~~Andrew~~	~~12~~	~~Large, In city~~	~~I want to be like my dad~~	~~Engineer~~		
~~Charlotte~~	~~11~~	~~Small, rural~~	~~I want to be independent~~	~~Nurse~~	~~Finish bachelor degree at current college~~	~~Bullied~~
~~Steve~~	~~12~~	~~Mid-sized, rural~~	~~I want to be a hard worker~~	~~Auto mechanic~~	~~Finish associate degree at current college~~	~~Adopted along with five other children~~
Bralyn	11	Mid-sized, rural	I want to be free from drama	FBI agent	Finish associate degree at current college and enlist	Father prison, sister mental health issues, moved away from home

APPENDIX E: Code Book

			Participant					
			Carlos	Rachel	Taylor	~~Charlotte~~	~~Steve~~	Bralyn
	Details	**Theme**						
RQ1								
How does the social context (circumstance) of students from a rural, economically disadvantaged area influence them to make a decision and take action (agency) to enroll in an early college program?	Background, Trust, Advice, Support, Identity	Mom, central figure	x	x	x			
		Dad suffering	x	x	x			x
		Difficulty trusting others	x		x	x	x	x
		Career v Work, permanent v temporary	x	x	x	x	x	x
		Money as freedom	x					x
	College decisions	Family support to attend college	x	x	x	x		x
		Desire for increase economic and social capital	x	x	x	x	x	x
		Ease of suffering	x	x			x	x

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

Adair, V. C., & Dahlberg, S. L. (2003). Reclaiming class: Women, poverty, and the promise of higher education in America. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Ahn, S., Jung, S. H., Jang, S. H., Du, X., Lee, B. H., Rhee, E., . . . Lee, S. M. (2015). Planned happenstance skills and occupational identity status in high school students. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 63(1), 31-43. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/1662078585?accountid=12598

Allison, A. (2005). Family influences on college students' occupational identity. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 13(2), 233-247.

Arnett, J. J. (1999). Adolescent storm and stress, reconsidered. *American Psychologist*, 54(5), 317-326. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/614340192?accountid=12598

Bacon, P. (1977). Review. *Sociology*, 11(3), 565-566. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/42851940

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol13/iss4/2

Berg, G. (2010). Low-income students and the perpetuation of inequality: Higher education in America. Farnham, GB: Routledge.

Berríos-Allison, A. (2005). Family influences on college students' occupational identity. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 13(2), 233-247.

Blau P. & Duncan, O. (1967). The American occupational structure. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*(7), 513-531. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.32.7.513

Brown, A., Kirpal, S., & Rauner, F. (Eds.) (2007). Identities at work. Dordrecht: Springer.

Buchanan, C. M., Eccles, J. S., Flanagan, C, Midgley, C, Feldlaufer, H.,& Harold, R. D. (1990). Parents' and teachers' beliefs about adolescents: Effects of sex and experience. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, 19, 363-394.

Carey, A. R. (2015). Dual enrollment: An integration strategy for college persistence and achievement among first-generation students (Order No. 10009321). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1765421990). Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/1765421990?accountid=12598

Carnvale, A., Jayasundera, T., & Gulish, A. (2016). "America's divided recovery: College haves and have-nots 2016." Center on Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University. Retrieved from: https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Americas-Divided-Recovery-web.pdf

Chávez, R. (2016). Psychosocial development factors associated with occupational and vocational identity between infancy and adolescence. *Adolescent Research Review*. doi:10.1007/s40894-016-0027-y

Coder, J. & Green G. (2016). Comparing earning of white males by education for selected age cohorts: High school vs. college graduates, a statistical brief. *Sentier Research*.

Coutinho, M., & Blustein, D. (2014). Cape Verdean immigrants' career development and school engagement: Perceived discrimination as a moderator. *Journal of Career Development*, 41(4), 341-358.

Cowan, J., & Goldhaber, D. (2015). How much of A "running start" do dual enrollment programs provide students? *Review of Higher Education*, 38(3), 425-460. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/1664923405?accountid=12598

Creswell, J. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Crites, J. (1974). A reappraisal or vocational appraisal. *Vocational Guidance Quarterly*, 22 (272-279). doi:10.1002/j.2164-585X.1974.tb00891.x

Crocetti, E., Rubini, M., Branje, S., Koot, H. M. and Meeus, W. (2016), Self-concept clarity in adolescents and parents: A six-wave longitudinal and multi-informant study on development and intergenerational transmission. *Journal of Personality*, 84: 580–593. doi:10.1111/jopy.12181

Crocetti, E., Branje, S., Rubini, M., Koot, H. M. and Meeus, W. (2016), Identity processes and parent–child and sibling relationships in adolescence: A five-wave multi-informant longitudinal study. *Child Development*. doi:10.1111/cdev.12547

Cutright, P. (1968). Occupational inheritance: A Cross-national analysis. *American Journal of Sociology*, 73(4), 400-416. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2775939

D'Amico, M. M., Morgan, G. B., Robertson, S., & Rivers, H. E. (2013). Dual enrollment variables and college student persistence. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 37*(10), 769-779. doi:10.1080/10668921003723334

Demaree, R. D. (2016). A quantitative analysis of the association between advanced placement access and equity at high schools in a mid-Atlantic state (Order No. 10090331). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1779524753). Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/1779524753?accountid=12598

Diemer, M. & Blustein, D. (2007). Vocational hope and vocational identity: Urban adolescents' career development. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 15(1), 98-118. doi: 10.1177/1069072706294528

Diemer, M. & Blustein, D. (2006). Critical consciousness and career development among urban youth. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 68)2), 220-232

Diete Courrégé, C. (2013). Rural students lag urban peers on college enrollment, persistence. *Education Week*. Retrieved from: http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rural_education/2013/10/rural_students_lag_urban_peers_on_college_enrollment_persistence.html

Dubey, S. (1975). Social mobility among the professions. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.

Dubick, J., Mathews, B., Cady, C. (2016). Hunger on campus: The challenge of food insecurity for college students. *College and University Food Bank Alliance*. Retrieved from: http://www.cufba.org/report-hunger-on-campus/

Dlugonski, D., Martin, T. R., Mailey, E. L., & Pineda, E. (2016). Motives and barriers for physical activity among low-income black single mothers. *Sex Roles, 77*(5), 379-392. doi:10.1007/s11199-016-0718-7

"Early middle college and program FAQs." (January 2015). *Michigan Department of Education.* Retrieved from: http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-43092_51178---,00.html

Education Commission for the States. (2014). Blueprint for college readiness: A 50-state policy analysis. Retrieved from: http://www.ecs.org/html/educationIssues/Blueprint/Blueprint-intro.asp

Eidlin, B. (2015). Class and work. In, Edgell, S., Gottfried, H., & Granter, E., (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of the sociology of work and employment* (pp. 52-72). GB: Sage Publications Ltd. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473915206.n4

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What Is Agency? *American Journal of Sociology, 103*(4), 962-1023. doi:10.1086/231294

"Employment Statistics." (March 2016). US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from: http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_001.htm

Erikson, E. H. (1968). Identity, youth, and crisis (1st ed.). New York: W. W. Norton.

Erikson, E. H. (1950). Childhood and society. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co.

Fivush, R., Bohanek, J. G. and Zaman, W. (2011), Personal and intergenerational narratives in relation to adolescents' well-being. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2011: 45–57. doi:10.1002/cd.288

Forrester, M. (2000). Psychology of the image. Routledge: London.

French, R. (2016). Degree of difficulty: Michigan's college dropout dilemma. *Bridge Magazine*. Retrieved from: http://bridgemi.com/2016/09/michigans-college-dropout-dilemma/

Giddens, A. (1971). Capitalism and modern social theory: An analysis of the writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber. Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press.

Gushue, G., Clarke, C., Pantzer, K., & Scanlan, K. (2006). Self-efficacy, perceptions of barriers, vocational identity, and the career exploration behavior of Latino/a high school students. *Career Development Quarterly*, 54(4), 307-317. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://go.galegroup.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/ps/i.do?p=ITOF&sw=w&u=msu_main&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA147914528&sid=summon&asid=13c562fde25f328ba56eb1badb90da46:

Gushue, G., Scanlan, K., Pantzer, K., & Clark, C. (2006). The relationship of career decision-making self-efficacy, vocational identity, and career exploration behavior in African American high school students. *Journal of Career Development*, 33(1), 19-28. doi: 10.1177/0894845305283004

Habersham, S. L. (2013). Dual enrollment: An analysis of persistence, ethnicity and gender (Order No. 3564557). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1412677956). Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/1412677956?accountid=12598

Hammond, M., Lockman, J., & Boling, T. (2010). A test of the tripartite model of career indecision of Brown and Krane for African Americans incorporating emotional intelligence and positive affect. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 18, 161-176. doi:10.1177/1069072709354201

Hauser, R., Koffel, J., Travis, H., & Dickinson, P. (1975). Temporal change in occupational mobility: Evidence for men in the United States. *American Sociological Review*, 40(3), 279-297. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2094459

"Hidden Curriculum." (2014). In S. Abbott (Ed.), The glossary of education reform. Retrieved from: http://edglossary.org/hidden-curriculum

Hirschi, A. (2012). Vocational identity trajectories: Differences in personality and development of well-being. *European Journal of Personality*, 26: 2–12. doi:10.1002/per.812

Hirschi, A., & Herrmann, A. (2013). Assessing difficulties in career decision-making among Swiss adolescents with the German my vocational situation scale. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 72(1), 33-42. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/1267234931?accountid=12598

Holland, J. L. (1959). A theory of vocational choice. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 6(1), 35-45. doi: http://dx.doi.org.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/10.1037/h0040767

Horowitz, M. (1970). Image formation and cognition. Appleton Century-Crofts: New York.

Hudson, E. M. (2016). The lived experience of dual enrollment: A qualitative study of high achieving African American male students (Order No. 10169608). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1847986885). Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/1847986885?accountid=12598

Jacobs, D. & Dirlam, J. (2016). Politics and economic stratification: Power resources and income inequality in the United States. *American Journal of Sociology*, 122(2), 469-500.

Jepsen, D. (2006). Family background and careers. In Encyclopedia of Career Development, Greenhaus, J & Callanan, G., (Eds.) Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412952675.n112

Johnson, M. K., & Mortimer, J. T. (2011). Origins and outcomes of judgments about work. *Social Forces*, 89(4), 1239+. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A258051654/OVIC?u=msu_main&xid=67916fb7

Kanny, M. A. (2015). Dual enrollment participation from the student perspective. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2015(169), 59-70. doi:10.1002/cc.20133

Kilgore, W. & Taylor, A. (2016). Dual enrollment in the context of strategic enrollment management: An insight into practice at U.S. institutions. AACRAO.

Klopfenstein, K. (2004a). Advanced placement: Do minorities have equal opportunity? *Economics of Education Review*, 23(2), 115-131. doi:10.1016/S0272-7757(03)00076-1

Klopfenstein, K. (2004b). The advanced placement expansion of the 1990s: How did traditionally underserved students fare? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12, 68. doi:10.14507/epaa.v12n68.2004

Koricich, A. (2013). The effects of rurality on college access and choice. *National Partnership for Educational Access*, Research Brief.

Labaree, D. F. (2010). Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

"Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey." (September 2017). United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from: https://www.bls.gov/cps/

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Davis, J. H. (1997). The art and science of portraiture: Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, Jessica Hoffmann Davis (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ma, Y. (2009). Family socioeconomic status, parental involvement, and college major choices--gender, Race/Ethnic, and nativity patterns. *Sociological Perspectives*, 52(2), 211-234. doi: http://dx.doi.org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/10.1525/sop.2009.52.2.211

Marcia, J. E. (2002). Identity and psychosocial development in adulthood. *Identity*, 2(1), 7-28. doi:10.1207/S1532706XID0201_02

Marcia, J. E. (2002). Adolescence, identity, and the Bernardone family. *Identity*, 2(3), 199-209. doi:10.1207/S1532706XID0203_01

Marré, A. (2014). "Rural areas lag urban areas in college completion." US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Retrieved from: http://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2014-december/rural-areas-lag-urban-areas-in-college-completion.aspx#.V9QSSZMrKqA

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370-396. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

McCormick, K. G. (2010). A study of the relationship between high school dual enrollment participation and college persistence, including potential intervening variables, in southeast Tennessee (Order No. 3413703). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (749729760). Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/749729760?accountid=12598

Merrill, N. & Fivush, R. (2016). Intergenerational narratives and identity across development. *Developmental Review,* 40(72-92). Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org.proxy2.cl.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/10.1016/j.dr.2016.03.001

MI School Data, Michigan.gov. Retrieved from: https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles/ReportCard/EducationDashboard2.aspx

"Michigan State Report". (February 2017). Achieve.org Retrieved from: http://www.achieve.org/files/Michigan_2017.pdf

Morehead, C. L. (2015). Assessing the value of rural California high school career technical education (Order No. 10010858). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1765193038). Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/1765193038?accountid=12598

Morsunbula, U., Crocetti, E., Cokc, F., & Meeus, W. (2016). Identity statuses and psychosocial functioning in Turkish youth: A person-centered approach. *Journal of Adolescence*, 47(145-155). Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org.proxy2.cl.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.09.001

"National college persistence rates: For high schools participating in the National Student Clearinghouse StudentTracker service". High School Benchmarks. (2013).

Orr, J. E. (1998). Images of work. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 23(4), 439. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://go.galegroup.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=msu_main&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA53390402&sid=summon&asid=325d89dcf578bf7c1caf08dda3d82dfa

Osipow, S., 1983. Theories of Career Development (3rd Ed.). Prentice-Hall, Inc.: Englewood Hills, New Jersey.

Pearson, J., & Kosslyn, S. M. (2013). Mental imagery. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4, 198. http://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00198

Pretlow, J., & Wathington, H. D. (2014). Expanding dual enrollment: Increasing postsecondary access for all? *Community College Review*, 42(1), 41-54. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/1477574377?accountid=12598

Pullum, T. (1975). Measuring occupational inheritance. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Rabren, K., Carpenter, J., Dunn, C., & Carney, J. S. (2014). Actions against poverty: The impact of career technical education. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 37(1), 29-39. doi:10.1177/2165143414522091

Reardon, S. (2011). The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor: New evidence and possible explanations. In Duncan, G. & Murname, R, (Eds.), *Whither opportunity?: rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances* (pp. 91-116). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

"Reinventing high schools for postsecondary success." (2016). *Jobs for the Future*. Retrieved from: http://www.jff.org/initiatives/early-college-designs/history

Roberston, I. (2003). Opening the mind's eye: How images and language teach us how to see. St. Martin's Press: New York.

Royce, E. C. (2015). Classical social theory and modern society: Marx, Durkheim, Weber. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Rubin, M., Denson, N., Kilpatrick, S., Matthews, K. E., Stehlik, T., & Zyngier, D. (2014). I am working-class: Subjective self-definition as a missing measure of social class and socioeconomic status in higher education research. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications. doi:10.3102/0013189X14528373

Rubin, M. (2012). Social class differences in social integration among students in higher education: A meta-analysis and recommendations for future research. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 5(1), 22-38. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/904199149?accountid=12598

Rubin, O. & Rubin, A. (2014). Intergenerational religious transmission mechanisms among second-generation migrants: The case of Jewish immigrants in the United States. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 43B(265-277).

Savickas, M. (2007). Occupational choice. In Handbook of career studies. Gunz, H. & Peiperl, M., Eds. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi: 10.4135/9781412976107

Scott, A. & Ciani, K. (2008). Effects of an undergraduate career class on men's and women's career decision-making self-efficacy and vocational identity. *Journal of Career Development*, 34(3), 263-285. doi: 10.1177/0894845307311248

Schubach, E., Zimmermann, J., Noack, P., and Neyer, F. J. (2016) Me, myself, and mobility: The relevance of region for young adults' identity development. *European Journal of Personality*, 30: 189–200. doi: 10.1002/per.2048.

Schwartz, B. (2004). The Paradox of Choice. New York: Harper Perennial.

Shin, Y., & Kelly, K. (2013). Cross-cultural comparison of the effects of optimism, intrinsic motivation, and family relations on vocational identity. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 61(2), 141-160. Retrieved from:

http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/1371447563?accountid=12598

Smith, L. B. (2015). Student perceptions of dual enrollment and dual credit in a Mississippi community college (Order No. 3737155). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1737762835). Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/1737762835?accountid=12598

Sirin, S. R. (2005). Socioeconomic status and academic achievement: A meta-analytic review of research. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), 417-453. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/214114339?accountid=12598

Skorikov, V., & Vondracek, F. (2011). Occupational identity. New York, NY: Springer New York. doi:10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_29

Song, B., Kim, D. & Lee, K. (2016). Contextual influences on Korean college students' vocational identity development. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 17:175-184. doi:10.1007/s12564-016-9420-2

Stern, D., & Eichorn, D. H. (1989). *Adolescence and work: Influences of social structure, labor markets, and culture*. Hillsdale, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Svallfoors, S. (2006). The moral economy of class: Class and attitudes in comparative perspectives. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

Taber, B. & Blankemeyer, M. (2015). Time perspective and vocational identity statuses of emerging adults. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 63: 113–125. Retrieved from: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/doi/10.1002/cdq.12008/epdf

Thiessen, V. and Blasius, J. (2002), The social distribution of youth's images of work. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, 39: 49–78. doi:10.1111/j.1755-618X.2002.tb00611.x

"Time to Degree: A National View of the Time Enrolled and Elapsed for Associate and Bachelor's Degree Earners" (2016). National Student Clearinghouse.

"Top 10 Higher Education State Policy Issues" (2017). A Policy Brief by AASCU Government Relations. American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from: http://www.aascu.org/policy/publications/policy-matters/Top10Issues2017.pdf

Vance, J.D. (2016). Hillbilly elegy: A memoir of a family and culture in crisis. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Vuolo, M., Mortimer, J. T. and Staff, J. (2014). Adolescent precursors of pathways from school to work. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 24: 145–162. doi:10.1111/jora.12038

Wallace, P. D. (2015). Online dual enrollment student experience: An in-depth qualitative review of the phenomenon within a rural community college setting (Order No. 3663705). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1705294179). Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/docview/1705294179?accountid=12598

White, K. R. (1982). The relation between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. *Psychological Bulletin*, 91(3), 461-481. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/614357941?accountid

Wigfield, A., Byrnes, J. P., & Eccles, J. S. (2006). Development during early and middle adolescence. *Handbook of educational psychology*, 2, 87-113.