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Elizabeth A. Day April 12, 2016

Social Reproduction Versus Social Mobility: The Influence of Parents' Education Levels on Undergraduates' Work Values and Career Aspirations

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Abstract

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This study explores the relationship between socioeconomic status and undergraduates' values and aspirations in the context of career goals. I conducted twenty semi-structured, in-depth interviews with both first-generation college students and non first-generation college students at Emory University, a highly ranked, private university in the southeast United States. Specifically, I looked at how parents' education levels relate to undergraduates' work values, career aspirations, and the process of discovering and working toward these career goals. I found that students at Emory, regardless of parent's education levels, share some similar work values and career aspirations. However, first-generation college students and non first-generation college students differ in how they discuss these topics, as well as in the resources and support systems they use to reach their career goals. Referencing Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, DiMaggio's social mobility theory, and corresponding research, I argue that my findings reflect the subtle differences between first-generation college students and non first-generation college students as one group is working to achieve the social status that the other group has inherited from their parents.

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I. Introduction

Historically, college attendance has been viewed as an opportunity for low income individuals to achieve upward mobility and increase social status (Aries and Seider 2005). There has been a lot of attention focused on students from lower class backgrounds and the challenges they face within the education system (Anderson and Hansen 2012, Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997, Hansen and Mastekaasa 2006, Jack 2016, etc.). As a result, colleges and universities have increased specialized support for these students as they transition from high school to college. Such support at Emory University includes The 1915 Scholars Program, a program solely for first-generation college students, and a partnership with QuestBridge, which helps provide low-income students with full scholarships to top colleges. Although research has focused on first-generation students' transition to college, their transition out of college has received less attention. With this study, I hope to shed light on this process. Thus, my research explores the similarities and differences between first-generation college students and non first-generation college students and how the education levels of their parents impact their work values and career aspirations as these students prepare to enter the workforce.

II. Theoretical Framework and Empirical Research Background

Theoretical Framework

Research on the relationship between culture and the social world has been a major focus in sociology. In the late nineteenth century, Max Weber explored the development of cohesive status groups as a mode of stratification within society. Weber believed that status groups were not purely determined by one's economic position, but rather were "determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*" (1958:187). Those who own property and those

who do not can belong to the same status group if they share a specific style of life, thus they share the same ideas and values (Weber 1958). One's position in a status group grants him or her specific privileges, permitting a specific manner in consuming goods. Consequently, people in the same status group see a commonality among themselves and use this commonality to exclude others in an effort to secure their position in society and maintain prestige.

As sociology developed, divisions within society continued to be of interest to sociologists. By the late twentieth century, Pierre Bourdieu pioneered further research on perceived social class differences with his concept of *cultural capital:* cultural resources or knowledge. Those in different status groups have different levels of cultural capital, or knowledge of high culture, which influences one's success in society, such as educational success (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997). Social inequality is a result of unequal distribution of cultural capital. Thus, when looking at social class, it is important to understand that status consists of more than just economic wealth. Though Bourdieu believes economic wealth can increase class status because similar economic conditions lead to similar lifestyles, other dimensions such as education and social wealth also contribute to one's status. Therefore, sociologists often refer to the combination of these wealth dimensions as socioeconomic status when discussing social class divisions. Those with high socioeconomic status tend to have high cultural capital, and are seen to know the right things, value the right things, and want the right things (Lawler 1999). These *right things*, it seems, are socially constructed in order to maintain the power of the elite and preserve the boundaries between the social classes.

Bourdieu argues cultural capital is passed down through the family with early socialization, thus, exacerbating social inequality. He terms this process of parents instilling cultural capital into their children as *social reproduction*. Therefore, we can determine a child's

socioeconomic status, as well as one's cultural capital, by the socioeconomic status of his or her parents. Bourdieu explains that "the initial accumulation of cultural capital, the precondition for the fast, easy accumulation of every kind of useful cultural capital, starts at the out-set, without delay, without wasted time, only for the offspring of the families endowed with strong cultural capital" (2011:84). Cultural capital is reproduced; families ensure their status by providing their children with the knowledge, aspirations, and practices needed to associate with the elite.

Paul DiMaggio and Michael Useem emphasize that the "appreciation of and familiarity with [high culture] is a trained capacity" (1978:149). Therefore, they argue that anyone can be taught to know, value, and want these *right things*. Although they accept Bourdieu's notion that this training is unequally distributed among social classes, leading to social reproduction, DiMaggio and Useem claim one can ascend or descend their social status. They term this change in social status as *social mobility.* While Bourdieu claims early socialization affects cultural participation and educational success later in life, DiMaggio's social mobility theory claims "cultural participation *always* enhances educational chances, regardless of whether or not it stems from early socialization" (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997). These two competing theories primarily disagree on whether culture is a means to reproduce social class or an aid in social mobility.

This study looks at two cultural aspects of college students' lives: career aspirations and work values. For the purposes of this study, career aspirations will be defined as one's desired type of work in the labor market; typically, aspirations develop and change as part of a larger career choice process (Correll 2004). Work values will be defined as the personal importance attached to various rewards derived from an occupation (Marini et al. 1996). Undergraduates' career aspirations and work values are likely to be related to cultural capital, the cultural element

of social class (Correll 2004). Therefore, I will use Bourdieu's and DiMaggio's theoretical framework to guide my research on Emory undergraduates' career aspirations and work values. In accordance with social reproduction theory, I will categorize the undergraduates' participating in my study by their parents' cultural capital. Parents' education levels will be used as a proxy for cultural capital because the most noticeable indicator of cultural capital is education; those with high levels of education most likely have high cultural capital (DiMaggio and Useem 1978). Education is also one of the best indicators of monetary earning; those with high levels of education are likely to have occupations with substantial incomes (Khan 2015). If education has a strong positive association with cultural capital and income, we can infer that cultural capital is positively associated with income. As a result, educational levels can indicate socioeconomic status, thus implying economic, social, and cultural wealth. The importance of these dimensions of socioeconomic status will become evident in my results.

Since Bourdieu popularized his theory, many sociologists have conducted their own research to explore the validity of cultural capital, early socialization, and social reproduction. Though many of these studies provide further evidence of the legitimacy of social reproduction and the benefits from cultural capital, other studies challenge the importance of cultural capital on one's future and support DiMaggio's social mobility theory. This raises the question of whether my observation of career aspirations and work values in relation to parents' education levels will better support social reproduction or social mobility.

Empirical Research Background

Research has shown that, in accordance with Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, parents' socioeconomic status is one, if not the best, indicator of children's success in the social

world. Annette Lareau's (2002) research illustrates the advantages of socioeconomic status by observing white and black families from different social class backgrounds. Lareau's choice to include black families from high socioeconomic status and low socioeconomic status permits her to argue the benefits of high socioeconomic status while controlling for disadvantages as a result of race. Her main finding shows that parents in different social classes have different childrearing practices with middle-class parents engaging in *concerted cultivation* and working-class parents engaging in *accomplishment of natural growth* (Lareau 2002). Middle-class parents "attempt to foster children's talents through organized leisure activities and extensive reasoning," while working-class parents provide "the conditions under which children can grow but leaving leisure activities to the children themselves" (Lareau 2002:747). The more active socialization practices of the middle-class parents provide their children with the skills needed to succeed, reproducing cultural capital. Even if working-class parents wanted to provide these resources, their working-class status prohibits them. Working-class parents lack the economic means to enroll their children in extracurricular activities and they lack the confidence to advocate for their children in the educational system (Lareau 2002).

In many instances, it seems as though the main root of low socioeconomic status is low educational levels. Educational levels relate to cultural capital as well as to economic capital, implying that simply increasing one's educational level increases cultural and economic capital. But the relationship is not that simple: cultural capital, too, corresponds to educational success. Bourdieu argues that the educational system contributes to the "reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among these classes" (1973:71). Those who enter the education system with existing levels of cultural capital as a result of early socialization by their parents of high socioeconomic status tend to achieve more highly in school than their lower-class

counterparts. The tendency for middle-class children to receive higher grades than working-class children cannot be solely a result of innate variations in intelligence (Andersen and Hansen 2011). Findings have indicated that this achievement disparity within primary and secondary schooling continues into university levels and cultural capital becomes increasingly more valuable (Hansen and Mastekaasa 2006). If cultural capital reproduced by parents becomes increasingly more valuable throughout schooling, it is seemingly impossible for students entering primary school with low cultural capital to catch up to their peers from high socioeconomic classes. If this is true, is social mobility realistic?

Currently, "attending college has been preached as one of the strongest routes to upward mobility for the poor in our society" (Aries and Seider 2005:419). However, upward mobility may not be guaranteed for individuals from low socioeconomic status who enter college. Do students from lower-classes acquire the cultural capital in college needed to join the elite classes? If so, lower-class students in college would eventually share the same values and aspirations as their upper and middle-class peers, since cultural capital is believed to affect these factors (Lawler 1999). To attempt to understand the impact of education on values and aspirations in the context of long-term career goals, I interviewed both first-generation college students and non first-generation college students at Emory University. Through these interviews I hope to better understand the following two questions:

1) How do parents' education levels relate to undergraduates' career aspirations?
2) How do parents' education levels relate to undergraduates' work values?

Previous research provides some insight into the answer to these questions, but contradictory findings continue to leave unclear the relationship between parents' education levels and undergraduates' career aspirations and work values.

Both Charles Werts (1966) and Michael Goldstein (1974) surveyed male undergraduates in the United States around the 1970s, but came to different conclusions. Werts' research supported Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction when looking at college freshmen's career aspirations with data taken from 248 heterogeneous colleges and universities (Werts 1966). Although at the same institution, students of high socioeconomic status typically aspired to occupations that required more education than students of low socioeconomic status. Werts argues that most male students aspire to occupations equivalent to or more prestigious than their fathers; therefore, students from low socioeconomic status do not need to aspire to occupations as prestigious as students from high socioeconomic status in order to surpass their fathers (1966). While working-class students can aspire to become teachers after college and still increase social status, upper and middle-class students must aspire to professional degrees in order to increase social status (Werts 1966). More recent research shows a similar trend. Though students from low socioeconomic backgrounds aspired to occupations that elevated them over their parents' social class, many of these jobs required only bachelor's degrees, while students with high socioeconomic status had occupational goals "that would award them much more power, income, and status than those of [lower income students]" (Aries and Seider 2007:148). Upper and middle-class students may have had such high aspirations because their parents had likely succeeded educationally and professionally.

Goldstein studied male undergraduate students as well, but only from Brown University, an elite institution. He surveyed students regarding their academic majors, grades, plans for

further education, career plans, and anticipated satisfaction with various careers. Within all categories, he found little to no difference between students from working-class and upper middle-class backgrounds (Goldstein 1974). He attributes the overall high cultural capital of the student body to Brown University's selectivity. Goldstein argues that Brown University admits "a group of working-class students who have been presocialized to the norms of the upper-middle students;" thus, "asserting that Brown does provide a channel for genuine social mobility" (1974:505). This social mobility, however, seems available only to students who have already acquired some cultural capital before entering college. Still, Goldstein does argue that this elite institution does maintain and possibly strength cultural capital for its working-class students (1974).

Anthony Jack (2016) continues research on working-class students in college who may or may not have acquired cultural capital before entering higher education. He divides these students into two categories: "the *privileged poor*—lower-income undergraduates who attended boarding, day, and preparatory high schools" and "the *doubly disadvantaged*—lower-income undergraduates who remained tied to their home communities and attended local, typically distressed high schools" (Jack 2016:1). Because of their different high school experiences, these two groups navigate college differently. Most notably, the privileged poor feel comfortable engaging with university faculty because they engaged with authority figures in high school and learned that these adults can facilitate their academic career (Jack 2016). On the other hand, the doubly disadvantaged with less cultural capital were less likely to develop such relationships in high school and tended to engage less with faculty compared to their peers (Jack 2016). First-generation college students with low levels of cultural capital are also likely initially to feel intimidated, uncomfortable, and incompetent (Aries and Seider 2005). This research supports the

benefits of cultural capital in college and suggests that cultural capital can be developed sometime between early socialization by one's parents and one's undergraduate career. But is college-age too late to acquire cultural capital? Will the doubly disadvantaged students stay disadvantaged for the entirety of their academic career and beyond?

While Jack's findings imply social mobility may only be plausible for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds that attended affluent high schools, other researchers suggest students can, and do, acquire cultural capital during their college years. When discussing the impact of socioeconomic status, we are inclined to focus on parents' cultural capital because of Bourdieu's famous theories, yet one's parents may not be the only role models in an individual's life. An individual's world is filled with countless people to influence his or her hopes and dreams (Johnson 2002). These worlds may differ greatly for those in different social classes, but eventually, despite social upbringings, all undergraduates in the same institution begin to share at least one dimension of their world. College provides "exposure to different kinds of people and cultures [which help] students identify points of commonality and envision more geographically, academically, and occupationally varied life trajectories for themselves" (Ellison, Wohn, and Greenhow 2014:531). For students from the upper classes, college may not change their world drastically, and therefore, their desired life trajectories do not change drastically. For lower-class students, however, college offers an exposure to a world filled with people and cultures that their previous low-income communities may not have provided. Universities, especially elite universities, provide alumni connections and academic opportunities for all undergraduates regardless of socioeconomic status (Aries and Seider 2005).

Some students believe that they left college with a different social class than the one with which they entered because of the socialization that occurred during those years (Aries and

Seider 2007). Though the family, through social reproduction, "determines the life career and the prospective social position of the children…the family test and influences to some degree are retested and reconsidered by other agencies, the education and the teacher among them" (Sorokin 2015:18). The educational system is "a piece of social machinery, which tests the abilities of the individuals, which sifts them, selects them, and decides their prospective social position" (Sorokin 2015:18). Through granting bachelor's degrees, higher institutions legitimize individuals' social class. Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron claim that "school helps to make and to impose the legitimate exclusions and inclusions which form the basis of the social order" (1990:x). Higher education was once a mechanism employed by the elite classes to facilitate the social reproduction of their children and ensure cultural capital attainment, but has now been used by lower-class individuals to gain class status (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997). If colleges instill cultural capital in all of their undergraduates by the time they enter the workforce, is this cultural capital sufficient for low socioeconomic students to achieve social mobility?

Research shows that low socioeconomic status creates obstacles unrelated to cultural capital that may prevent social mobility. Even for some undergraduates with high aspirations, "hopes for a 'better life' crumble in the face of obstacles" (Brint and Karabel 2015:652). Many of these challenges stem from the low socioeconomic students' lack of financial resources (Aries and Seider 2005). Financial constraints prevent these students from pursuing careers that may require graduate degrees because of the cost of further education, a hindrance affluent students do not likely encounter (Aries and Seider 2007).

Kate Huppatz (2009) explains in her research that the lack of monetary wealth for individuals of low socioeconomic status urges them to aspire to jobs with financial stability. She interviewed both working-class and middle-class women entering paid caring occupations, such

as nursing and social work, to investigate why women aspire to these occupations. She found that "while all participants cited a desire to care as an important motivating factor, the working-class participants also placed a heavy emphasis on economic motivations. For the working-class women, this type of work appears to provide upward mobility and stability" (Huppatz 2009:130). Middle-class women did not express economic interests nearly to the extent of the working-class women, and instead focused on altruism as their primary motivation for entering paid caring occupations (Huppatz 2009). Both middle-class and working-class women valued helping others, but the working-class needed to also ensure their career aspirations provided financial stability. If not, the working-class women may have shifted their career aspirations to an occupation that may not have aligned with their values.

Lareau's (2002) study regarding the childrearing practices of different social classes can help explain why those from different social classes hold different work values, as evident in Huppatz's (2009) research. Lareau's study concludes that work experiences affect one's conception of adulthood, which in turn, affects one's conception of childhood. She explains that "for the working class, it was the deadening quality of work and the press of economic shortages that defined their experience of adulthood and influenced their vision of childhood" (Lareau 2002:771). The working-class parents that Lareau observed did not enjoy their jobs, but rather worked tirelessly to barely sustain their family. As a result, working-class parents viewed childhood as a time for unstructured play and freedom from the hardships of adulthood and the workforce. This was in contrast to the middle-class parents who were "often preoccupied with the pleasures and challenges of their work lives," and, "viewed childhood as a dual opportunity: a chance for play, and for developing talents and skills of value later in life" (Lareau 2002:771). The life experiences, such as work experiences, tied to social class can be seen as deeply rooted

in the childrearing practices of adults and explain why some engage in accomplishment of natural growth and others in concerted cultivation. Therefore, childrearing practices may have an influence on one's work values with middle-class students viewing work as a place of pleasure and welcomed challenges, while working-class students hold on to their parents' view that work is primarily a means for economic stability.

Further, Lareau argues that childrearing practices transmit skills "to children for negotiating their own life paths" (2002:749). Whereas middle-class children develop a sense of entitlement through concerted cultivation, working-class children develop a sense of constraint through accomplishment of natural growth and this creates a divide between them and adults. Middle-class parents focus on developing their children's opinions, judgments, and observations, which enables these children to interact with adults in a way that makes them feel almost equal (Lareau 2002). This blurred divide between middle-class children and adults enhances their sense of entitlement. Therefore, middle-class children may carry this entitlement into their career aspirations, valuing a profession that is enjoyable and gratifying, while working-class children do not.

This contrast in work values for different social classes reflect two different perspectives and can be divided into two general categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic work values are those that "attach importance to the work itself, valuing work for its inherent interest and importance [while extrinsic] work values focus on the instrumental resources that are separable from the meaning of work, such as income, prestige, and security" (Marini et al. 1996:50). Holding intrinsic work values is seen as a middle-class phenomenon because professional occupations typically satisfy these ideals, and such values may be passed down to middle-class

children. Working-class children, on the other hand, may primarily value extrinsic work values because they were socialized to see work as simply a means to make money.

Previous research provides evidence that cultural capital affects career aspiration and work values. Yet, there are different conclusions on whether undergraduates from low socioeconomic backgrounds at elite institutions have cultural capital and whether this cultural capital—either acquired before or during college—enables them to transcend their original social class. Does gaining cultural capital during college limit the influences of one's parents' education levels? This leads me to a third, and related, question:

3) How do parents' education levels relate to undergraduates' process of discovering and acting on their career aspirations?

Whether or not parents' education levels have a great significance on undergraduates' academic and occupational success, there is strong evidence from previous research that socioeconomic status of one's parents relates to an individual's cultural capital in some capacity. Therefore, based on implications from previous research, I expect to find some differences between first-generation college students and non first-generation college students as they discuss their work values and career aspirations. The question is not *do* undergraduates from different socioeconomic statuses differ, but *how* they differ in the process of transitioning from college into the workforce.

III. Methods

I chose in-depth interviews to explore my research topic because "qualitative methods, by contrast [to quantitative methods], are best understood as data *enhancers*" (Ragin and Amoroso

2011:123). I am not interested in simply knowing whether parents' education levels relate to undergraduates' work values and career aspirations, but *how* these variables relate. Previous research has already shown a relationship, and therefore, I hope to expand on this research and provide detailed examples of how parents' education levels relate to undergraduates' transition out of college and into the work force. A qualitative study, rather than a survey, can best explore this complex process.

Sample

I recruited the participants by first sending out an email through the Sociology Listserv for majors and minors and posting on various Emory College Facebook groups. All volunteers were accepted as long as they fell into one of the two cohorts: first-generation college students, meaning neither of their parents received a four-year college degree, and non first-generation college students. Once I had an initial group of participants, I asked those I interviewed for referrals and continued my recruitment through snowball sampling (Weiss 1994). All twenty participants are undergraduates currently enrolled at Emory University at the time of the interview and were between the ages of 18 and 22. Participants were purposely chosen by parents' education levels to maximize the range of data. Ten participants were first-generation college students and the remaining ten participants have one or more parent with at least a bachelor's degree. Two of the first-generation college student participants identify as Latino. Three of the first-generation college students are biracial. Of these, one identifies as Latino and Indian, another as Caucasian and Vietnamese, and the third has one Puerto-Rican parent, though he primarily identifies as Caucasian. The remaining five first-generation college students and all

ten non first-generation college students identify as Caucasian. Five of the first-generation college students were raised by single mothers. All other participants were raised by two parents.

Procedure

Semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted in a private area of the participant's choosing. All participants received a consent information sheet. I further highlighted the fully voluntary nature of the interview, and participants gave verbal consent. These interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. Interviews were recorded and then later transcribed. During the transcription, participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Participants were not compensated for their time and there were no foreseeable risks or benefits.

I began with an initial interview guide and progressed the interview based on individualized answers. Although no two interviews were the same, all were structured to address several main points. Interviews discussed topics concerning participants' family, early schooling experiences, work values, career aspirations, and resources used inside and outside Emory to facilitate long-term career goals.

Data Analysis

The twenty interviews were coded using the system MAXQDA. My research is both deductive and inductive because my research questions are derived from existing theories about social reproduction and social mobility and I also seek to advance existing research through my qualitative data (Ragin and Amoroso 2011). I created an initial list of deductive codes derived from theoretical concepts discovered through my literature review. *Work values*, "the importance

attached to various rewards of working" (Johnson 2002), and *career aspirations*, the professions the participants hoped to occupy one day, are examples of these deductive codes. Inductive codes were developed during the coding process as new themes became apparent. The inductive codes were then applied to all interviews. An example of an inductive code is *parents as role models*, which was used to express undergraduates defining their work values or career aspirations in relation to their parents' careers.

IV. Results

Career Aspirations

Many of the undergraduates I interviewed had loosely defined career aspirations. Though they all expected to graduate within the next few years and enter what most consider the *real world*, the participants discussed their career aspirations as goals for the distant future. Often they rattled off several career choices, some realistic and others more difficult to attain. But overall, the participants, regardless of parents' education levels, put a greater emphasis on fulfilling their work values after graduation than on working in a specific profession.

When asked about a potential career, I rarely received a short answer. Rather, participants would string along several careers as possibilities. For Gabriella, a first-generation college student, her various career choices related to her studies as a political science major.

> So my general thing is either going into foreign diplomacy so like, I, I w-would work at the State Department and honestly you start off pretty low at first and then they like—you slowly like move up, and—or just like go to law school and then work in like international law. So, um, as far as like, I feel like, I don't know, right now I'm wondering about all the institutions that are like the international institutions. Um, but I'd probably end up working for like an NGO, so.... –**Gabriella**

Gabriella seemed content to consider various careers for after college as long as they fit with her political and international interests. As a sophomore, she was not concerned with finding the perfect occupation right away. Samuel, a non first-generation college student, had a similar take regarding future careers, but his preferences aligned with his environmental studies major.

> Most of them I say, have to do with environmental science because that's what I'm studying, that's what I'm interested in. So, there, that's kind of one of my broad reaches, to be figuring out what I want to do with environmental science, so that could be environmental law, um policy, going into policy or going into actual, being an environmental lawyer, um, environmental consulting, that sort of—that would be interesting, what I'm thinking about. –**Samuel**

Additionally, Samuel has strongly considered becoming a pilot due to his fascination with the Navy's flight squad, the Blue Angels, which he first saw at the age of seven. He believes this career choice is "kind of random" but that the Blue Angels are also "the coolest thing [he has] ever seen." Similar to Samuel, many of the participants shared careers options they viewed as realistic because they were directly related to their undergraduate studies and other careers that would simply bring them enjoyment.

Table 1: *Participants by parents' education levels and their expressed career aspirations*

Participant Pseudonym	Highest Level of Education for Parents	Career Aspirations/Plans after Graduation
Aaron	Graduate Degree	Consulting, High School History Teacher, Ph.D. (in History)
David	Graduate Degree	Hospitality Industry
Fiona	Graduate Degree	Psychologist (private practice), Ph.D., MSW
Haley	Graduate Degree	Counseling, Social Work, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy
Henry	Bachelor's Degree	State Department, Politician, High School History Teacher
Kate	Graduate Degree	Medical School (primary care)
Matthew	Graduate Degree	Sales and Trading
Rachel	Graduate Degree	Journalism
Samuel	Graduate Degree	Environmental Law/Policy/Consulting, Pilot
Sasha	Graduate Degree	Law School (defense attorney), Teacher
Amanda	High School	Ph.D. in Behavior Neuroscience, Science related field
Bryan	Some College	Data Analytics Consulting
Charlie	High School	MBA, IT Consulting
Christian	Some Middle School	Ph.D., Academia ("Scholar Activist")
Gabriella	Some High School	Law School (International Law), Foreign Policy
Joseph	Some College	Business, Positive Psychology, Life/Executive Coach, Education
Kevin	Some College	Graduate School for Political Science/Public Policy, Political Consulting, Politician
McKenzie	Some College	Social Work
Nathan	Some College	Law School, Teaching
Olivia	Some College	Management Consulting

As seen in Table 1 and mentioned earlier, most of the participants gave two to three possibilities for their future careers. Most of the participants who gave only one possibility had already secured jobs or graduate school admission upon graduation and tended to focus on these plans throughout the interview. The majority of the students aspired to prestigious careers that required further education. The desire for a graduate degree was shared by both first-generation college students and non first-generation college students. Kevin, a first-generation college

student, was committed to attending graduate school even though he was unsure what degree he wanted to pursue.

> I personally value the experience of grad school. Um, I think that like um, th-, the way I see it, like, I should really shoot to achieve the next level possible, and like really improve myself. And like, I think that grad school's a, um, is definitely a way to do that, to like really um, move up to the next level. And also, I think w-, it couldn't hurt to um, with future career opportunities. –**Kevin**

Kevin may not know the exact career path he wants to take, but he believes graduate school will be a good step. He sees graduate school as an opportunity for him to build on his Emory education, continue to grow intellectually, and prepare him to flourish in his eventual career.

Work Values

Interest and Enjoyment

Many of the work values mentioned throughout the interviews were similar for both first-generation college students and non first-generation college students. They spoke of finding interesting careers that provided enjoyment, made an impact on their community or profession, and helped others in need. These values, particularly enjoying and continuing to enjoy their career, represented success for the majority of the participants.

> I'm the kind of person that thinks of like if you are doing what you love and you're good at it, then you're always going to be successful. –**Gabriella**

> [Being a doctor is] the only thing I can see myself doing for the rest of my life and not getting bored pretty much. As soon as I started taking classes at Emory I realized how much I loved studying it and I think that as I started like finding out more about the field

> I realized how much of like an inspiring, intellectual and like never-ending type of field it is and that's what I think I needed for the rest of my life to be like happy. –**Kate**

Along with Gabriella and Kate, a large majority of the participants aspired to a career that gave them enjoyment, which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: *Participants by expressed personal value of having an interest in and enjoying a career*

	Non First-Generation	**First-Generation**
Significantly motivated by having an interest in and enjoying a career	Aaron David Fiona Haley Henry Kate Matthew Rachel Samuel Sasha	Christian Gabriella Joseph Kevin McKenzie Nathan
Somewhat motivated by having an interest in and enjoying a career		Amanda Bryan Olivia
Not motivated by having an interest in and enjoying a career		Charlie

Typically, enjoying one's career was seen as working in a profession that was interesting and using the knowledge and skills developed during his or her time at college. Participants also hoped that their profession would provide them with additional skills and continuous learning. Here, David explains how the skills he developed as a computer science major were helpful during his summer internship.

> I spent the majority of my summer designing and implementing a time analysis project for [my boss,] which was cool for me to be able to apply my math and [computer science] skills into the industry just because I didn't really expect to do that this summer. I expected really to dive head first into hospitality fully instead—but instead I got to spend

> a decent amount of time working on stuff that I study as well as doing a lot of hospitality. –**David**

David aspires to a career in the hospitality industry, which is unusual for a computer science major. Yet, David chose his college major because he realized computer science would provide him with a strong analytical skill set that can be applied to many different fields. David hopes for a worthwhile career that is both interesting to him and actively uses his education and skill set.

Only several of the participants were not significantly motivated by having a career that was interesting and enjoyable. These students were all first-generation college students and hoped for an enjoyable career, but were more motivated by other work values.

Giving Back

The desire to help others was a work value that was frequently mentioned in the interviews. Many of the participants may not have known the exact career that they wanted, but they saw working towards the betterment of others as a definite in their future.

Table 3: *Participants by expressed personal value of helping others in relation to career*

	Non First-Generation	**First-Generation**
Significantly motivated by helping others	Fiona Haley Henry Kate	Christian Gabriella Joseph McKenzie
Somewhat motivated by helping others	Aaron David Sasha	Nathan Olivia
Not motivated by helping others	Matthew Rachel Samuel	Amanda Bryan Charlie Kevin

As shown in Table 3, about an equal number of first-generation college students and non first-generation college students shared the value of helping others. Yet, how these two groups spoke about helping others differed. First generation-college students drew upon their own experiences for why they wanted to contribute to the wellbeing of others. One first-generation college student, Christian, spoke of his own childhood in the Latino community as an influence on his career aspirations.

> I've suffered throughout my life because of these systems of oppression. I've seen others suffer because of them, and I want to be able to change those so others don't have to go through what I went through, and others that I have seen go through. I'm very passionate about uplifting my community. –**Christian**

Here, Christian discusses the hardships that he suffered and his community continues to suffer. He sees his education at Emory as an opportunity to break the cycle of oppression. Therefore, he has put great thought into the best career path for him to take in order to uplift the Latino community and grapples with the best way to both help his community and meet his personal career goals.

> There's not enough Latino educators. There's not enough educators that students of color like myself could have related to in high school. And it's like a big thing for me. Like I feel kind of guilty about it, but I'm still going to pursue this path of academia because I feel like I will eventually have enough authority in order to like influence policy, and, you know, start non-profits. **—Christian**

Initially, Christian entered Emory wanting to become a high school teacher. As he mentioned above, the Latino youth in his community have very few Latino educators as role models. He views this as a reason for why many Latinos struggle to go onto higher education. Christian,

however, is at Emory receiving a college education from an elite institution and he does not want to waste this opportunity to use his education to uplift the Latino community. Though he sometimes feels guilty that he will not be working directly within these underprivileged students, he believes that entering academia will eventually allow him to have an influence on education policy and will benefit disadvantaged students of color.

Similar to Christian, Joseph considers entering a field that provides education for marginalized groups. Both Christian and Joseph are first-generation college students who identify as Latino, but Joseph attended a primarily white, middle-class high school. He attributes his opportunity to attend Emory to his strong academic performance in high school and his scholarship through the program QuestBridge. Therefore, he has considered working for QuestBridge after graduation to help others, like himself, access educational opportunities.

Haley, was one of the few non first-generation college student who also discussed her personal experiences as an influence for entering a field that primarily helps others. Unlike the first-generation college students, however, Haley's struggles did not stem from poor access to educational opportunities. Rather, she briefly explains that her history with mental health issues has encouraged her to enter a field helping adolescents with similar diagnoses.

> So, with past struggles, like, mental health issues that I've had in my past, I could see myself wanting to go and like, help the people, like, teenagers struggling with the same things that I did. So like, going into counseling or working, um, with, you know, adolescent, like teen girls. Like, body issues and all that stuff. I could see myself doing counseling or social work. **–Haley**

While Christian, Joseph, and Haley drew on their own experiences, others valued a career that benefitted disadvantaged communities even if they were not part of that population. Sasha is a sociology and education double major, which has opened her eyes to the disparity in America's

education system. Though she ultimately wants to go to law school, Sasha mentioned she would find it valuable to teach for a few years beforehand.

> If I do go into teaching, I want to teach in underprivileged middle schools, um, because I know that that is where a lot of the need is. Um, and it started for a while, I wanted to teach in a juvenile prison, um, but then I realized that because of the school to prison pipeline, it makes much more sense for me to go to the start of it, which is the schools in underprivileged neighborhoods, um, versus trying to stop a cycle that's already begun once they're in juvenile prison. **–Sasha**

Sasha may have similar goals to Christian and Joseph, but her personal history is not what influenced her to pursue this path. Unlike Christian and Joseph, Sasha attended an affluent private school in the Northeast and has not experienced firsthand the adverse effects of America's education disparity. Like Sasha, other non first-generation college students mentioned Emory courses, internship opportunities, and previous volunteer positions as reasons for why they valued helping others. Several hoped to continue this volunteering throughout their lives even if their careers took them in another direction.

> Me pursuing a career is not the same thing as pursuing service even though it's something that I will always focus on in some degree. **–David**

> So, its sort of two paths: one of which is to go into for—nonprofit world and do good, the other is to make a lot of money and then do good with the money. Um, I don't know which one I'll go down. **–Aaron**

Both first-generation college students and non first-generation college students valued a career that benefitted the wellbeing of others, but their reasons for holding this value and their approaches were different.

The Importance of Money

Only one participant, Joseph, did not mention income or financial stability during his interview. All other participants, regardless of parents' education levels, discussed money in some capacity. Yet, as with the value of helping others, differences between the two groups of undergraduates emerged.

Table 4: *Participants by expressed personal value of money in relation to career*

	Non First-Generation	**First-Generation**
Money is a significant motivator	Samuel Matthew	Amanda Charlie Olivia
Valued financial stability	Aaron Fiona Kate Sasha	Bryan Christian Gabriella Kevin McKenzie Nathan
Money is not a significant motivator	David Haley Henry Rachel	
Did not mention money		Joseph

As shown in Table 4, four non-first generation college students mentioned that their career aspirations were not motivated by money. A few of them understood that their desired occupations had low salaries, but that was a sacrifice they were willing to make in order to pursue their dream job.

> I want to still like what I do, because I think, um, I think your career choice is something you can easily fall out of love with and just switch careers […] but I think that I want to do this now, knowing that I'm not going to make any money—which sucks, but whatever, price to pay so to speak. **–Rachel**

> **David:** …being rich is not my goal.
> **Interviewer:** So what is your goal then?
> **David:** Being happy.

These non first-generation college students focused on personal satisfaction as their main work value when determining their future careers and they were willing to sacrifice a high salary. This belief was not shared by first-generation college students. The majority of first-generation college students and several non first-generation college students expressed a desire for financial stability. It was not the deciding factor when determining a career path, but definitely a consideration.

Many of the first-generation college students valued financial stability because they hoped to help their parents, as well as to provide for their own future families.

> But also like take my family out of poverty. Take my family out of their circumstances. Um, providing for both myself and my family. That's really what I want to do. **– Christian**

> I lived with my mom growing up and she was, you know, a single parent kind of raising a kid, and that sort of I think was difficult, um, for her, financially still is. So hopefully I do well and make money to take care of her later on. **–Bryan**

They were still interested in pursuing careers they were passionate about but they did not want to continue to live with the financial hardship with which they had grown up. First-generation college students also saw their Emory education as a tool to join professions they would not have been able to consider without a bachelor's degree. It was important to them to use their college credentials to obtain a job that would increase the wellbeing of their entire family.

The pressure to succeed financially caused three of the first-generation college students to change their career paths. Their initial career aspirations did not provide the financial stability

they hoped for and they disregarded other work values in favor of pursuing a high paying career. Most notably, Charlie drastically changed his field of study and future career plans in order to alleviate his fear of remaining in poverty. When asked why he looked for a job in business for after graduation, Charlie had an earnest response.

> **Charlie:** There was just no other option, so…
> **Interviewer:** And that was an economic concern?
> **Charlie:** Yeah. Yeah, it was, there would be no other reason. Yeah. I would go to grad school otherwise. So…
> **Interviewer:** Okay. Is there something that you value about business other than money?
> **Charlie:** [laughs] No. No, no, um, no. No, not really. Financial stability, yeah, that.

Charlie was unable to give a reason other than financial concerns for why he was entering business after college and pursuing a Master in Business Administration. Yet, Charlie still felt this was the correct career path for him to follow. His father had passed away several years earlier and neither his mother nor older brother had jobs themselves. It was especially important for him not to be a "financial burden" on his mother after he graduated.

Financial stability caused Amanda and Olivia to change their career plans, but they are still pursuing their interests. Amanda is continuing her path towards a Ph.D. but no longer anticipates becoming a professor because of its financial unpredictability. She now wants to pursue a career in science administration. Olivia originally wanted to work in a public relations firm somewhere in the District of Columbia. After realizing those jobs had salaries lower than she had hoped, she began pursuing a career in management consulting, another interest of hers. Olivia has secured a job in management consulting and is excited to move to the District of Columbia after graduating. Unlike Charlie, Amanda and Olivia were able to shift their initial

career aspirations in order to fulfill their desire for financial stability without sacrificing all of their other values and interests.

Though most first-generation college students looked at a significant increase in wealth as a positive, McKenzie had a much different take. Her career aspiration changed from wanting to become a doctor to planning on becoming a social worker.

> I was also worried about if I became, like, a doctor or something I would end up, like, leaving home and, like, feeling because—more isolated from my family just because most of my family is working or lower middle-class and that I would just feel, like, too different from them if I became a professional in, like, the upper middle-class or something. I didn't want to distance myself that way, um, so I really didn't want a job that paid a lot of money. **–McKenzie**

McKenzie is close to her family and she believes their economic status is a characteristic that binds them all together. If she were to have a significantly greater income than the rest of her family, she would occupy a different class, and as a result, isolate herself. She does, however, still wish to pursue higher education and has determined a degree in social work will fulfill her desire to help others and enable her to stay integrated into her working-class family.

When discussing financial stability, the non first-generation college students do not speak of increasing their financial wellbeing, but rather state the need to maintain the lifestyles their parents have given them. Fiona's parents both have graduate degrees and her family lives a comfortable life in the middle of a major city. In addition, she has had the opportunity to travel all around the world and enjoys experiencing new cultures. Though her aspiration of becoming a psychologist with a private practice will provide financial stability, she will not have the same financial freedom as her parents and has realized that if she continues on this path, her lifestyle will be forced to change.

> **Interviewer:** Is that okay with you though?
> **Fiona:** Um, sometimes I wax and wane. I mostly fall on the side of okay. Sometimes I worry about it, um, and so I'm still grappling with it a little bit and that's why I still tried—that's why I still haven't decided exactly which schools I want to go to because with more prestige comes more money and things like that and ways I want to try to approach it.

Similar to Fiona, Kate's parents have provided her with a comfortable life. Kate believes that in order to be successful, she must be happy. Though having a job she enjoys and a family she loves is important to her happiness, she agrees that an income that funds her lifestyle is important to her overall happiness as well. As shown through these examples, many first-generation college students and non first-generation college value financial stability, but the way these two groups express this desire is different. First-generation college students typically refer to their families' financial struggles as reasons for pursing jobs with financial stability. On the other hand, non first-generation college students, such as Matthew, mention how fortunate they were to grow up without financial worries and want to continue this good fortune.

> I was very fortunate that I had nothing to worry about financially as a kid when I grew up. I didn't have to worry about how I was going to get my next meal, didn't have to worry about if I was able to go to college or not. So my main goal is to provide the same thing my family and my children. **–Matthew**

Providing for his future family is a main motivation for Matthew, which is why he hopes to be as successful as his own parents. Financial motivation is something Matthew shares with many of the participants, but how personal experience influences this motivation differs between first-generation college students and non first-generation college students. Although many of the

work values were the same for both groups of undergraduates, subtle differences emerged when they discussed why they found these various rewards of working important.

Career Discovery Process

How Decisions Are Made

Although the actual work values and career aspirations of first-generation college students and non first-generation college students are quite similar, the processes in which these students discover and act on their career aspirations are quite different. Overall, as shown in Table 5, the non first-generation college students' discovery process is highly influenced by their parents as compared to the first-generation college students.

Table 5: *Participants by how often they reach out to parents in relation to the career discovery process*

Uses Parents as Resource or Influence	Non First-Generation	First-Generation
Often	Aaron Fiona Haley Henry Samuel	
Somewhat	David Kate Matthew Rachel Sasha	Gabriella Nathan
Rarely		Amanda Bryan Charlie Christian Joseph Kevin McKenzie Olivia

The non-first generation college students considered their parents' careers as inspiration for their plans after college. These students admired aspects of their parents' careers, which they

hoped to achieve as well, or discussed aspects that they openly disliked. Although many participants are not following the same paths as their parents, they often reference their parents' work values, which they praise.

> But for me, I think what influenced me was my dad. He works really hard and he has a really good work ethic and I think that kind of rubbed off on me but for in a totally different realm. Like a different industry because I am not business at all. I can't add two numbers together. **–Rachel**

> **Interviewer:** And how do you envision your work life in the future?
> **Aaron:** Hopefully similar to my dad's, which was like 9-5, Monday through Friday, not away on the weekends that often, relatively flexible. I only think I could withstand the sort of 50, 60, 70, 80 hours a week of work in my sort of early twenties before I have a family and kids.

Like Rachel, many of the non first-generation college students that I interviewed had very successful parents. They grew up with parents who excelled in business, medicine, and academia. As Table 1 shows, the majority of the non first-generation college students' parents held graduate degrees, some more than one. They have seen their parents accomplish professionally, which most attributed to hard work, and they hope to do the same. Aaron's father was particularly accomplished, holding a Ph.D. and two master's degrees, yet he still found a balance between work and family life. Aaron hoped to eventually have a work schedule similar to his father's in order to spend time with his family as well.

While most non-first generation college students talked about their parents with great admiration, not everyone was positive. When I first asked Henry what his plans were for after college, he immediately responded: "Not what my father does." He continued to express his disdain for occupations that revolve around making money and hopes to have a career more fulfilling than he perceives his father's. Henry has considered becoming a high school history

teacher because he values a different work environment from his father's, which he describes below:

> Whatever, um, toxic environment in some of these Wall Street firms. I mean, especially the stories that my father has from the 80's and 90's on the trading floor are, like, not the—the opposite of a compassionate, or caring environment, and accepting or open environment. Uh, yeah. It was mostly just white dudes screaming vulgar things at each other who'd all gone to college together. And that's not very attractive to me, either. – **Henry**

Henry has been able to see what he perceives as the negative side of Wall Street through observing his father. Although Henry's father has had a successful career, Henry has determined that he will sacrifice monetary success for a positive work environment. Henry and his father may put emphasis on different work values, nonetheless, his father's career has still had a significant influence on Henry's career aspirations. A similar view was shared by Samuel whose father also works in finance. Samuel respects his father's success in the financial world, but he sees himself following a career path in environmental science, which is likely to have a lower salary.

Unlike the non first-generation college student, first-generation college students rarely discussed their parents' careers during the interview after answering my initial question regarding their parents' education and occupations. They did not speak about their parents' careers in relation to their own values and aspirations. When a few of the first-generation college students did mention their parents while specifically discussing their career plans, they stated their parents' desire for their children to have a lucrative career. Here, Nathan explains his mother's hope that he finishes college and accomplishes professionally before rushing into a relationship, a mistake she had made.

> My mom always wanted me to have something better than her. That's why she's like, 'don't rush into relationships,' and I'm like, 'trust me, I'm not." […] And, you know, the way she sees things and the way she teaches me to see things is, uh, as a parent, you exist to make your children's lives better than yours. **–Nathan**

The majority of the first-generation college students spoke about their parents being proud. Attending a four-year college is considered a great feat for many of them and their parents want them to continue on this road to success. Non first-generation college students did not mention to the same extent this pressure to succeed in college and in the workforce. Some explained that they felt anxious to achieve a high level of professional prestige in order to compete with their highly successful family, but I interpreted this as a personal goal rather than one resulting from explicit family pressure.

As I discussed earlier, non first-generation college students were more likely than first-generation college students to refer to their parents as inspirations for their career aspirations. But who did the first-generation college students mention? First-generation college students needed to look outside of their family for inspiration. Many of the first-generation college students mentioned Emory faculty, such as advisors and professors, as career models.

> Like my sociology professor right now […] she teaches my race and ethnicity course. She's wonderful. She's one of my personal heroes. Um, and I definitely ask her for advice. She—seeing her in the position that I want to be in someday is very gratifying, and I talk to her a lot about it. **–Christian**

Christian has become particularly fond of a Latina sociology professor because she has attained a professional goal that one day he hopes to reach as well. Christian's mother has the lowest level of education out of all the parents of the participants I interviewed. He also attended public schools in low income areas; therefore, it was unlikely he came into contact with successful

Latino adults during his childhood. His professors, then, provide him with a new depth of knowledge and advice that will help him determine his career path.

Utilizing Resources

The greatest difference I found between first-generation college students and non first-generation students was the ease with which they navigated discovering and acting on their career aspirations. Non first-generation college students spoke about their future with a sense of effortlessness. I attribute this to the help they received from their parents, adults who were highly educated and established in the workforce. The first-generation college students did not have parents who they could reach out to concerning higher education and work-related questions. Instead, they needed to use other resources.

Whenever non first-generation college students spoke about preparing for internships and job applications, they cited the help they received from their parents, such as reading over their resume. Some believed their parents had more experience than what Emory could offer (refer back to Table 5).

> It's definitely my parents, I don't even talk to my advisor at Emory. I think maybe because she just doesn't have experience with what I want to do […] so I talk to my parents a lot just because they are in the sort of like medically minded school centered profession […] they're the experienced ones. My dad's great because he runs this teaching program and interviews all of these people. He's really good at like knowing what a good cover letter looks like, what a good resume is and he's really helpful with interview stuff as well. –**Haley**

Others reached out to their parents when discussing matters related to employment and salary. Though David did not primarily value money, as noted earlier, he did understand the importance of discussing future employment contracts. He was greatly appreciative of his father, who has a

Ph.D. in economics, works as an economics professor, and is an economics consultant. David, therefore, made sure to seek his father's advice before making financial decisions.

A few non first-generation college students were very clear during their interviews that they tended to work alone on furthering their careers. This was not because their parents were unable to help them, but rather these students enjoyed their independence.

> **Matthew:** Yeah, I talked to my family about it a little bit, but I like to make my decisions on my own and don't like my family influencing what I do, so I try to keep away from those discussions with my family.
> **Interviewer:** So even though your dad is in business, you think that you kind of figured that out on your own?
> **Matthew:** Yeah, um, there's some part of my dad that I think wants me to take over his business, so I try to be aloof at that end.
> **Interviewer:** Why do you not want to take over it? Or you do?
> **Matthew:** I want to be my own person.

Matthew has a job in sales and trading starting after college, which he expects to stay in for a few years. He has enjoyed business since he was young when he set up lemonade stands with his father. It would seem like taking over his father's business would fulfill his work values and be a great opportunity. But Matthew wants to discover his own specific passion within the business world and to know that he accomplished his success on his own merit. Kate is similar to Matthew and typically works independently as she is applying to medical school. Her father is a doctor and her older sister is currently in medical school, but she believes she discovered her love for medicine on her own and continues to do most of her research online rather than asking her family for help with the medical school application process.

The first-generation college students, unlike the non first-generation college students, could not rely on their parents for career advice. Some students specifically explained that they felt unable to ask their parents to help them.

> Like, I wouldn't send [my parents] my resume to look at, or my cover letter, or something like that. They weren't people that I would go to. That's where I would talk to my boyfriend, or talk to people on the Student Alumni Board, or my friends at Emory, um, versus going to my parents for that. **–Olivia**

Neither of Olivia's parents have had to create resumes and cover letters for the type of prestigious jobs that Olivia had applied for earlier this year. This was the case for most of the first-generation college students. They were applying to graduate schools, Ph.D. programs, and business positions, opportunities beyond the reach of their parents. Therefore, similar to Olivia, they often reached out to their Emory peers, Emory Career Center, and Emory faculty.

Table 6: *Participants by how often they utilize Emory's resources in relation to the career discovery process.*

Uses Emory Resources	Non First-Generation	First-Generation
Often	Aaron Fiona Kate Matthew Rachel Samuel	Amanda Charlie Christian Joseph Kevin Nathan Olivia
Somewhat	David Henry Sasha	Bryan Gabriella McKenzie
Rarely	Haley	

When comparing Table 5 and Table 6, it becomes evident that the majority of first-generation college students utilize solely Emory's resources, while non first-generation students utilize both Emory's resources and resources from their parents. Emory's resources provided first-generation college students with similar support that the non first-generation college students typically received from their parents. This is further shown through Joseph, who utilizes his membership in a business fraternity to teach him the skills needed to secure a job.

> **Interviewer:** You said that you're in [a business fraternity,] correct? How has that helped you at all? um since it is the business fraternity….
> **Joseph:** It's helped me gain confidence and professionalism. It's help me with my resume […] Um, like, how to present yourself in an interview. How to, like, show confidence in a professional setting, and so, like that's definitely helped me. Like, how to, like network is something I didn't know about until [the business fraternity] came along. Like, how to treat a LinkedIn profile, cover letters, stuff like that. It's like the basic fundamentals of a business professional aspect.

First-generation college students' parents' inability to help them with entering the workforce did not mean that these parents did not support their children. Quite the contrary. These parents were very supportive of their children as they embarked on a journey different from most of their family.

> [My mom] listens to me, offers her advice when it comes, but most of the time it's just, like, telling me to, like, to just have confidence in what I'm doing and just doing, like, whatever it is, you know, I think is doing my best in whatever field that is, if it's a grade, internship, or whatever. If that makes sense? **–Amanda**

> My mother, she really, um, she really just like encourages me to just pursue whatever I want, and like whenever I'm like doubting it, like she reminds me that like this is, there's a reason why you're doing this. **–Kevin**

Amanda and Kevin explain that although they might not reach out to their parents for career advice, their parents are always there when they need general support. College is rarely an easy time for anyone and pursuing a career can cause anxiety and uncertainty. This is a feeling shared by both first-generation college students and non first-generation college students. Although these two groups used different resources to further their careers, they all tended to contact their parents when they needed encouragement.

Despite a variety of resources at Emory, first-generation college students still faced obstacles that non first-generation college students did not. These obstacles typically stem from lack of economic resources and lack of social networks. Many of the first-generation college students discussed how financial concerns made it necessary for them to work to earn money during the summer. Charlie, in particular, explained that a lack of economic resources was the reason why he did not participate in summer internships and this made him less desirable as a potential job candidate.

> So when you're applying to jobs in business, they like you to have business experience, and how you get business experience is through internships. A lot of internships are unpaid, or they pay like minimum wage, and they are in high cost cities like New York City, etc. So I didn't do any of those during my time, so neither did my friends, so, you know, talking to them about how we try and, you know, get around that so you become employed. **—Charlie**

In contrast to Charlie, many of the non first-generation college students spent every summer participating in internship and volunteer programs that helped them on their career paths. Such internships and volunteer positions were in hospitals, nonprofits, publishing companies, etc. and they provided these students with important skills and experiences.

Table 7: *Participants by whether they participated in internship and volunteer opportunities*

Engaged in Internships, volunteer opportunities, etc.	**Non First-Generation**	**First-Generation**
Yes	Aaron David Fiona Haley Henry Kate Matthew Rachel	Joseph Olivia
Somewhat	Samuel	Amanda Bryan Gabriella Kevin
No	Sasha	Charlie Christian McKenzie Nathan

As shown in Table 7, the vast majority of the non-first generation college students held internship and volunteer positions that could help them attain future employment. Matthew, for example, participated in an internship program similar to the one Charlie described. Based on his performance as a summer intern, Matthew received a job offer from a financial firm in New York City. Such internship opportunities were not readily available to first-generation college students.

In addition, only a few of the first-generation college students talked extensively about networking. One specifically mentioned her lack of networking experience.

> I'm not sure how that like networking and things work, like, I, like, never tried it. I don't know. I don't think I would feel comfortable like doing it. But it's probably a good thing to look into. **–McKenzie**

McKenzie's insecurities surrounding networking may be from her lack of personal social networks and that of her parents, who are both unemployed. Non first-generation students, on the other hand, spoke of the extensive social networks provided by successful parents. Henry attributes his expansive social network to his parents.

> I've always had people in my life who I have been able to e-mail up or call up and say, "Hey, could you put in a good word for me?" […] Definitely because, uh, of the privilege with which my father and my mother grew up. Um, because of where I live. Um, because I was—my parents were able to afford for me to go to elite private schools that have old boy's networks. **–Henry**

Both Henry and McKenzie may be at the same elite institution now, but their past experiences are drastically different. Henry's elite private school education and his professionally successful parents, on top of his Emory education, have provided him with a social network and additional resources that can help him throughout his career. McKenzie only has the support of the Emory network. Emory first-generation college students and non first-generation college students share many of the same resources: Emory classes, Emory faculty, Emory Career Center, Emory Peers. But notably, the non first-generation college students have personal resources, such as their highly educated and professionally successful parents, which are unavailable to the first-generation college students.

V. Discussion

This study explores cultural capital as it relates to career aspirations and work values of undergraduates in light of two different theories about how cultural capital is gained: Bourdieu's social reproduction theory and DiMaggio's social mobility theory. Specifically, I looked at the relationship between parents' education levels and undergraduates' work values and career

aspirations. I used education levels as a proxy for parents' cultural capital (DiMaggio and Useem 1978). Therefore, I inferred that parents of first-generation college students had low levels of cultural capital and parents of non first-generation college students had high levels of cultural capital, and that they passed these cultural resources to their children in some way. While I was not able to directly measure other sources of the college student's own cultural capital (e.g., educational system, as per Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997), I was able to see how cultural notions of work aligned or diverged between the two groups. If the work values and career aspirations of these two student groups differed, I could argue that my study provides some support for Bourdieu's social reproduction theory. If these two groups of students shared work values and career aspirations, I could argue my study provides some support for DiMaggio's social mobility theory. However, my results do not fit neatly into one or the other model. Rather, I find support for both social reproduction and social mobility theories.

Participants in both groups aspired to similar careers and held similar work values. Almost all of my participants spoke of attending graduate school regardless of parents' education levels. Even if graduate school was not explicitly stated, most of the professions of interest required a graduate degree. In addition, the overwhelming majority of participants spoke of the importance of enjoying their future career, making an impact, and feeling fulfilled. This is true for both first-generation college students and non first-generation college students. But, expecting work to provide enjoyment and gratification, perhaps stemming from a sense of entitlement, is regarded as a middle-class perspective (Lareau 2002). In addition, other than a few non first-generation college students, the majority of the participants mentioned financial stability in some capacity. Cultural capital is believed to affect such aspirations and values (Lawler 1999). So, if first-generation college students and non first-generation college students

share similar career aspirations and work values, could it be that parents' cultural capital levels are insignificant once one arrives at college? Do first-generation college students adopt middle-class values during their college career?

If my study consisted of quantitative measures, it would be easier for me to arrive at a conclusion. But I chose to conduct in-depth interviews so my participants' individualized answers could give better insight into the complex process of discovering career aspirations and establishing work values, and show how parental influence may play a role. Yes, the career aspirations and work values are similar for first-generation college students and non first-generation college students. But their explanations for these aspirations and values are very different. For example, first-generation college students desire economic stability to provide a better life for their families who have struggled financially; non-first generation college students desire economic stability because they hope to maintain the lifestyle provided by their parents' lucrative careers.

Differences between these two groups are also apparent when undergraduates explain their parents' involvement in the career planning process. Non first-generation college students mentioned that their own plans were influenced by their parents' professional success. Some non first-generation college students aspire to careers within their parents' fields and many explained that their work values developed in response to their parents' values. Most of these students spoke of their parents' professional lives with great respect and admiration. Though one non first-generation college student was adamant about following a career path different from his father's, he constantly referenced his father's career. These parents also actively helped their children on their career path and were typically their first point of reference. Non first-generation college students frequently cited their parents reading over job applications, drafting cover letters

and resumes, and introducing them to family friends and colleagues who could help with their careers.

The first-generation college students, on the other hand, rarely spoke of their parents' professions while describing their own career plans. Unless it was to mention their parents' hope that their child would one day have a rewarding and lucrative career, first-generation college students did not refer to their parents during this section of the interview. When discussing the resources they used to help them obtain their desired career, first-generation college students did not indicate their parents as helpful. Many felt that their parents' low education levels prevented them from understanding their child's experiences in college and their future career plans. They did mention, however, that their parents were very proud of them for attending college and supported their plans after graduation, whatever they may be.

The different relationships first-generation college students and non first-generation college students describe with their parents fit into Lareau's (2002) concepts of the different cultures of the home: concerted cultivation and accomplished natural growth. My findings suggest that non first-generation college students' parents continue the concerted cultivation parenting style even when their children are in college. These parents provide their children with occupational opportunities by introducing them to other successful professionals or helping them to secure an internship, which further develops their career aspirations and work values. First-generation college students' parents do not provide their children with similar resources, but they do support their children throughout this process. This relationship between first-generation college students and their parents is similar to accomplished natural growth parenting style. Lareau (2002) argues that, comparable to Bourdieu's cultural capital, concerted cultivation enhances skills that are important for future success. Therefore, my findings suggest that non-

first generation college students' parents, through a process similar to concerted cultivation, provide resources that assist in social reproduction.

However, much like Ellison, Wohn, and Greenhow's (2014) claim, Emory University exposes its first-generation college students to different people and cultures, which aids their career discovery and job attainment process. Most first-generation college students reference Emory faculty as career role models and advice-givers. They also mentioned the Emory Career Center and multiple organizations on campus as great resources when applying to jobs and graduate programs. Therefore, Emory faculty, the Emory Career Center, and Emory organizations perform similar functions for first-generation college students as parents do for non-first generation college students. Through these Emory resources, it seems as though first-generation college students are given the benefits that non first-generation college students receive from their parents' cultural capital. This suggests that social mobility is a possibility at Emory.

Despite the resources at Emory, first-generation college students spoke of obstacles they faced while preparing to enter the workforce. Such obstacles included turning down unpaid internships in order to make money over the summer and having little experience with networking. Non first-generation college students did not mention these obstacles. Instead, most of these students attribute much of their success thus far to summer internships and connections with professionals they had made through their families. Though first-generation college students had resources at Emory, non first-generation college students had resources at Emory *and* additional resources from their families. This finding suggests that parents' cultural capital continues to enhance their children's achievement throughout college, supporting social reproduction theory.

It is important to remember that my sample is not representative of Emory University. I used snowball sampling rather than random selection. Therefore, it would not be unreasonable for the participants in my sample to be uniquely similar. In addition, Emory is an elite university, similar to the one in Goldstein's (1974) study. Goldstein attributes his findings that male undergraduates had similar plans for further education and career goals, regardless of social class, to Brown University's highly selective admission (1974). I was not surprised to find these similarities in my research because Emory is a nationally renowned research university. However, I cannot conclude that Emory's selectivity enabled them to admit first-generation college students who already acquired some cultural capital before entering college. All of my participants had spent at least one academic year at Emory and may have acquired cultural capital during that time. Perhaps a future study looking at undergraduates from non-elite universities as they discover and act on their career aspirations may provide further evidence that elite universities affect the cultural capital levels of their undergraduate students differently than non-elite universities.

In addition, looking at first-generation college students with different high school experiences, as Jack (2016) did with his study about the privileged poor and doubly disadvantaged, may assist in determining if cultural capital can be developed during high school. If so, what impact will this have on the development of cultural capital in college and its effect on career aspirations and work values? I did not explore my participants' high school experiences to the extent needed to make a conclusion about the effects of high school on cultural capital. This might be an area deserving of further research.

Though my study suggests social mobility may occur in college, it also shows that parents' education levels do relate to undergraduates' work values and career aspirations in some

capacity. My in-depth interviews allowed subtle differences between first-generation college students and non first-generation college students to emerge and these differences provided support for social reproduction theory. This raises the question: if social mobility can occur, when does one's parents' education levels, or cultural capital, no longer affect one's achievement and success in our society? My study cannot conclude that the impact of parents' cultural capital becomes insignificant in college. However, since my participants, regardless of parents' education levels, aspired to careers with high prestige and similar work values, social mobility may become a reality once their careers are established. Therefore, I recommend additional research to observe established first-generation college adults and non first-generation college adults who can give insight into their transition into the workforce and the development of their professional careers.

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VIII. Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Attributes

Attribute	First-Generation	Non First-Generation	Total
Class Year			
Second-Year	4	0	4
Third-Year	3	5	8
Fourth-Year	3	5	8
Race/Ethnicity			
Biracial	3	0	3
Latino	2	0	2
White	5	10	15
Sex			
Female	4	5	9
Male	6	5	11

Appendix B: Recruitment Message

Dear Emory Undergraduates,

My name is Elizabeth Day, and I am an undergraduate majoring in Sociology. I am currently working on a Senior Honors Thesis on students' work values and career goals. I am looking for undergraduate volunteers who are willing to participate in one interview with me, which will last between 30 to 45 minutes. All information will be kept confidential; we will password protect any files with your personal information. We will do everything possible to protect your privacy.

Your participation is completely voluntary and it will in no way affect your class standing, course grades, graduation status, or standing with any faculty or staff at Emory.

The interview will be conducted in a quiet private room either in a smaller seminar room in Tarbutton Hall or in a study room in the Library. I am unable to provide compensation for your time, but your participation is essential for my study and will be greatly appreciated.

You must be at least 18 and an undergraduate at Emory to participate in this study. If you are interested and willing to spend about 45 minutes of your time being interviewed, please contact me by email: elizabeth.day@emory.edu . You may also contact me at (781) 572-8634.

If you are unsure of whether or not you wish to participate and would like to ask me any questions before deciding, please contact me and I will be happy to answer any questions or address any concerns.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,
Elizabeth Day
Department of Sociology
Emory University
Atlanta, GA 30322
elizabeth.day@emory.edu

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Emory University—Department of Sociology
Consent to be a Research Subject – Information Sheet

Title: *Undergraduate Honors Thesis: The Influence of Social Class on Undergraduates' Work Values and Career Goals*
Principal Investigator: Tracy L. Scott, Ph.D.
Co-Investigator: Elizabeth A. Day

Introduction:
You are being asked to be in a research study. This form is designed to tell you everything you need to think about before you decide to consent (agree) to be in the study or not to be in the study. It is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the research study. You can choose to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

You were chosen to participate in this study because you are an undergraduate between the ages of 18 and 22 at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. Participation in this study will last between 45 minutes and 1 hour. The study is being conducted as part of my Senior Honors Thesis under the direction of Dr. Tracy L. Scott.

Before making your decision:

- Please carefully read this form or have it read to you
- Please ask questions about anything that may not be clear

You can take a copy of this consent form to keep. Feel free to take your time thinking about whether you would like to participate in this research study. By signing this form, you will not give up any legal rights.

Study Overview
The Purpose of this study is to examine the way in which undergraduates' social class backgrounds influence their work values and career goals after graduation.

Procedures
You will be participating in an in-depth interview in which you will be asked about your work values and career goals and how these have developed and change over your lifetime. The interview will last between 45 minutes and 1 hour. With your permission, the interview will be taped using an audio recorder. The recording will not be shared with anyone other than the Principal (Tracy L. Scott) and Co-Investigator (Elizabeth A. Day) of this study. The Co-Investigator will transcribe the interview, and immediately after transcribing, the audio recording

will be destroyed. The Co-Investigator will be conducting the interview. The interview will take place at a location on campus that is easy for you.

Risks and Discomforts

The only foreseeable risk is a breach of confidentiality. However, researchers will protect all personally identifiable information with password protected documents and computers (see Confidentiality section below). There are no other foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research study.

Benefits

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about undergraduate students and their process in developing work values and career goals. The study results may be used to help others in the future.

Compensation

You will not be offered any form of payment for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

Certain offices and people other than the researchers may look at study records. Government agencies and Emory employees overseeing proper study conduct may look at your study records. These offices include the Office for Human Research Protections, the Emory Institutional Review Board, and the Emory Office of Research Compliance. Emory will keep any research records we create private to the extent that we are required to do so by law.

A study number and/or pseudonym rather than your name will be used on study records wherever possible. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. All identifying information will be destroyed. Only the Principal Investigator and Co-Investigator will have access to participants' identities during data collection and interview transcription. Interview recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet in the Principal Investigator's office, downloaded only to password-protected computers belonging to the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator, and then destroyed upon transcription.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study

You have the right to leave the study at any time without penalty. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. This decision will not affect your class standing, course grades, graduation status, or standing with any faculty or staff at Emory.

Contact Information

Contact Elizabeth A. Day at elizabeth.day@emory.edu or (781) 572-8634 or Dr. Tracy L. Scott at tscott@emory.edu or (404) 727-7515 if you have any questions about this study or your part in it or if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research.

Contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at (404) 712-0720 or Toll-Free at (877) 503-9797 or irb@emory.edu if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research. You may let the IRB know about you experience as a research participant through our Research Participant Survey at http://surveymonkey.com/s/6ZDMW75.

Verbal Consent

Do you agree to be in this study? If so, please indicate by saying "yes" for the audio recording now. By agreeing, you will not give up any of your legal rights. We will give you a copy of this Consent Information Sheet to keep.

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Background

- Emory
  - What year are you at Emory?
  - What part of Emory are you enrolled in/what is your major?
  - Why did you choose Emory/look at Emory?
- Childhood
  - Where did you grow up? What was your neighborhood like?
  - What school did you go to?
    - Public or private?
    - What was the general atmosphere of the school? What did teachers expect from their students?
- Parent(s)/Guardian(s)
  - What is your parents' highest education level?
  - Where did your parents go to school?
    - College? Grad School?
  - What are your parents' occupations?

Work Values

- "Tell me what you are thinking about doing after graduation. It's ok if you don't have a concrete idea"
  - Yes Idea
    - How did you come to this idea?
      - When did you decide?
      - Is this something you have thought about for awhile?
    - What motivated you to think about this as something you wanted to do?
      - Money?
      - Helping others?
      - Freedom?
    - What do you value about that type of work?
      - What is it about this work that makes you want to do it?
      - What are the reasons you like this particular career?
    - Do you have any experience in this field?
      - Internships?
      - Parents/friends
      - Media influences?
      - Classes?
    - Have your plans ever changed? If so, how?
  - No Idea
    - Was there ever a time you thought you knew what you wanted to do?
    - Do you wish you had a concrete idea?

- Are you having trouble coming up with an idea of what you want to do after graduation?

Influences

- Did you talk to anyone while thinking about what you wanted to do after graduation?
  - Parents? Friends? Etc.
  - Anyone in particular?
  - Were they helpful? Stressful?
- Did you get any other forms of guidance?
  - Career Center?
  - Books?
  - Internet/media?
    - What did you think of this guidance?
    - Why did you seek out this guidance?
    - What were you looking for?

Future?

- What do you see yourself doing long-term career wise?
- How do you envision your work life in the future?
- Can you tell me about your overall life goals?
  - Marriage
  - Family
  - How does you career choice affect this?

Wrap-up

- Is there anything else about your career plans or about your future that you think is important that I haven't yet mentioned?
- Is there anything we have talked about that you would like to go back to and talk more about?
- Do you have any questions for me?