ABSTRACT

QUALITY OF LIFE DIFFERENCES: FIRST-GENERATION AND GENERATIONAL

STUDENTS AT BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

Morgan R. Koziol

Director: Coretta M. Pittman, Ph.D.

This study addresses Impostor Syndrome and class differences through an analysis of the quality of life for first-generation and generational college students at Baylor University. Within 158 anonymous survey responses, 60 first-generation experiences and 98 generational experiences were represented. Participant responses were coded with IBM SPSS to conduct Chi Square and Fisher's Exact tests in RStudio that reveal statistical trends distinct to each student population. It was hypothesized that the difference in quality of life for these two student populations on the Baylor campus would be an issue of socioeconomic class differences. Results confirmed this hypothesis as financial independence and financial instability are most visible in Baylor's first-generation college student population. These findings suggest that a students' college experience is impacted by their socioeconomic status, which then facilitates impostor feelings within first-generation college students.

Keywords: First-Generation College Students, Income Inequality, Impostor Syndrome

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

_____

Dr. Coretta M. Pittman, Department of Professional Writing & Rhetoric

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

_____

Dr. Andrew Wisely, Interim Director

DATE: _____

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GENDERATIONAL STUDENTS AT BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

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By

Morgan Koziol

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dedicated to my papaw, Leroy Collum, who had a passion for serving disadvantaged youth. Our family lost my papaw to COVID-19 on August 3, 2020. We miss him more and more every day.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I made my first resume in first grade because my Girl Scout leader said it would help me get into college someday. I felt proud to write on my first resume that I participated in fundraisers for "Jump Rope for Heart." The pride I felt in adding to my resume continued into my high school years. I spent twelve-hour days on campus starting with 6 a.m. football practice as a student athletic trainer, 8 a.m. soccer practice as center defense, 10 a.m. student council class as Prom Committee Co-Chair and Drugs/Alcohol/Safety/Health Committee Chair, and my after-school time commitments varied every day. As a senior, I was president of four clubs and rotated these responsibilities with afternoon athletic events that I attended as a student athletic trainer. There were some nights that I was not able to go home and start my homework until 10 p.m. I saw this large amount of time invested into extracurriculars as a way to earn my spot in college. When the days felt long and exhausting, I thought about Baylor University, my top choice, for motivation. When I think about all the time and effort I spent to get admitted into Baylor, I am disappointed. My time at Baylor has not been what I imagined it would be because I was unaware of the challenges that come with being a first-generation college student.

My mother divorced my father and left us when I was two. My dad raised me and my two older brothers from the ages of 2, 3, and 5. My mother fell more than seventy thousand dollars behind in child support over the years. My dad worked as a self-

employed house painter to take care of us. As a self-employed house painter, he was able to maintain autonomy over his schedule, have freedom to attend any of our school events and take multiple summer vacations. Although my father's job was flexible, he worked long eleven-hour days and his responsibilities did not end with the conclusion of his workday. When my brothers and I got home from school his responsibilities included cooking dinner, doing laundry, getting us bathed, making sure we did our homework, and getting us into bed at a reasonable hour. My father stayed so busy that he rarely had the time to help with our schoolwork. He was also limited, though, in his ability to help with my schoolwork because he did not go to college.

My college experience has partially been shaped by limitations my father faces. Since my dad earns a low-income as a house painter, I have had no choice but to work throughout college to make ends meet which has made it difficult to invest the necessary time and effort to succeed academically. My father's ability to financially support me through college is limited by his lower income. His income results from his low education level that restricts his access to higher-paying jobs. Despite these limitations, my father made many sacrifices to make college easier for me. Similar to my father, many dedicated and loving first-generation college parents make countless sacrifices to ensure a positive experience for their college students. Nevertheless, factors outside of parent and student control facilitate negative experiences for first-generation college students.

I have struggled as a first-generation college student at Baylor University in ways that my generational college student peers have not. Generational college students have better college experiences often because their parents support them through college.

Generational college parents are more able to do this than first-generation college parents because they went to college and have degrees that provide access to higher income. An example of a struggle specific to first-generation college students that students and families cannot always resolve is that the college experience can cause a disconnect between a student and their family. My family does not have an interest in academics like I do, their disinterest causes me to have anxiety in family interactions, and we collectively have limited understanding of financial preparedness because my father does not understand college costs like some generational parents do. Even though we made multiple road trips to Waco to meet with the financial aid office, no one warned me or my father of the high out-of-pocket costs that come with sending your child to college like spending over $200 a semester on textbooks that will not resell for the same value. My father and I assumed that textbooks would be affordable and that they would resell easily. In my first semester, I purchased a $98 paperback book in addition to five other texts *for one class*. The total cost of textbooks has been overwhelming, and no one warned my family that out-of-pocket costs add up to incredibly expensive amounts. Many generational students belong to families with savings and assets that can offset the burden of these associated costs, but the hindrances that first-generation students face continue beyond finances. The struggles specific to first-generation college student experiences are not always ones that students or their families can prevent through preparedness like finances, for example. Negative first-generation college experiences are significantly influenced by intersections of marginalities related to minority status, income inequality, sexual orientation & gender identity, mental health, and impostor syndrome. These complex marginal positions are often a non-negotiable aspect of the first-generation

college experience, so I hope that higher learning institutions will invest resources to improve negative experiences associated with these five marginalities.

Baylor has attempted to improve the first-generation experience on our campus with implementation of the Center for First-generation Student Success, a program first created by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) in collaboration with the Suder Foundation. NASPA has recognized Baylor as a First-gen Forward Institution. A First-gen Forward Institution is a two year or four-year accredited higher institution that designates at least two faculty members to represent the initiative and be a NASPA member that secures participation and commitment to fulfilling the requirements of participation in the initiative. NASPA recently promoted Baylor's distinction to Advisory Institution. The Advisory Institution designation means the First-gen Forward Institution has remained active for two years and will continue to participate in the NASPA Center's initiative. Baylor was a part of the Center's inaugural cohort of First Forward Institutions in 2019 after just one year in the program which can signify that Baylor has made significant strides in first-generation student support. This designation shows that Baylor, as one out five universities elevated to Advisory Institution[1] in the academic year 2019 - 2020, demonstrated unwavering commitment to "improving experiences and advancing outcomes of first-generation college students," that "lead[s] the nation" (Media and Public Relations, 2020).

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[1] All Advisory Institutions for the 2020 – 2021 cohort are: Arkansas Tech University, Baylor University, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Florida State University, Ohio University, Santa Clara University, University of California San Diego, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Utah Valley University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Wichita State University.

Baylor is identified as one of the nation's leaders in the effort to make the college experience equal for first-generation college students, so there is much to learn from the impact of their efforts. The first-generation student population at Baylor is now at 18% of the overall student population, up from 16.9% in 2017 (Little, 2018; BaylorProud, 2018). This growing student population on the Baylor campus is important to study because there are observable inequalities, such as income inequality, on this campus which significantly constrain first-generation experiences. Income inequality is visible in low-income, first-generation Baylor students' struggles with food insecurity and textbook costs while a large portion of generational Baylor students experience wealth and food abundance. Baylor also possesses a campus culture that defines *the norm* as conservative, religious beliefs through a white, heterosexual, religious, affluent worldview. This norm has proven harmful to racial & ethnic, religious, and LGBTQIA+ minorities on campus. As these students are defined across campus as *the other*, many of these students also fast first-generation college student struggles. If we do not address the toxic campus norm, it will be difficult for Baylor to fully meet every unmet need of their first-generation college student population.

I surveyed students at Baylor to assess the quality of life for first-generation college students in comparison to generational college students to understand the impact of Baylor's support for first-generation students. The goal of this multilayer project is to expose the differences in experiences for first-generation college students and generational college students at Baylor University. This study also aims to provide a nuanced understanding of impostor syndrome because it is often defined as a negative result of the first-generation college student experience. Student experiences recorded in

my study demonstrate that impostor syndrome is often a cause of the negative first-generation college experience, so it is important that we develop our understanding of the notable influence that Impostor Syndrome has over a students' experience. In my experience, Impostor Syndrome caused feelings of not belonging and internal pressure to pretend I am not first-generation so that others cannot identify me as *the other* that led to the marginalization I experienced on campus. These impostor feelings can direct students away from campus involvement and prevent them from feeling entirely welcomed and safe in every space on campus. As a student becomes marginalized, they grow less connected to the campus and less involved on campus. The lack of personal connections to a student's campus causes negative feelings toward college to develop. This is an example of how impostor syndrome can shape negative first-generation experiences in college: rejection from social groups can lead to a student feeling like a fraud on their campus, no longer seeking campus community, and having a negative experience in college.

If the dominant social group on campus that is predominantly white and affluent did not reject *other* students throughout religious rhetoric, these students may not develop impostor feelings through social invalidation that leads them away from seeking campus involvement that would facilitate positive college experiences. This dominant social group may not even intentionally be rejecting *other* students, but there is discomfort in the integration of affluent white students and both first-generation and minority students on campus. This discomfort is partially caused by Baylor's history of racism. The original buildings for Baylor in Independence, Texas were built through labor of enslaved people (Commission, 2021). This reality can cause separate campus experiences between

white and minority students. Prior to freshman year, students travel to Independence, Texas for a ceremony with one of the first original buildings. This experience can be exciting and sentimental for white students, but this experience, visiting monuments built by unknown, undocumented enslaved people can be a painful reminder of Baylor history that defines minorities as *the other*. Baylor founders were slaveholders and many supported and justified slavery after the Civil War (Commission, 2021). The historical ties of Baylor to slavery can cause impostor feelings in minority students who may not celebrate the founders in the same way that many Baylor students and alumni do. As a judge, R.E.B. Baylor imprisoned many abolitionists and did not promote the end of slavery (Commission, 2021). As religion and law were used by founders to support slavery and the confederacy, some students do not always believe that religion or law are good for them (Commission, 2021). Because Baylor is a Baptist University with mostly conservative students and faculty, most of the campus supports religious interpretation of laws and law enforcement. This is not wrong of Baylor, but it is important for Baylor to address that these beliefs affect how safe minority students feel at Baylor. The history of Baylor necessitates empathy for racial, ethnic, and religious minorities on our campus because their college experiences matter too. Every Baylor student deserve a positive Baylor experience whether they have shared beliefs or not.

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       "I spoke last semester with a member of the Baylor community about my experience at Baylor. She is Hispanic, and from a low-income part of San Antonio. She came to Baylor for undergrad and went on to earn her doctorate. She told me that she told an admissions counselor that she wanted to see more people like her (Hispanics from low-income communities) at Baylor, but when she told

the counselor to go recruit from her old high school, the counselor told her, 'No. That's not the kind of student we're trying to attract to Baylor.'"

- *Anonymous*

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Because of pride in religious values, Baylor's campus culture currently condemns *the other*. Students who support Black Lives Matter, who are LGBTQIA+, who are other religions can often feel rejected in their time on campus. There is a dominant social group on campus that uses religious rhetoric to center white affluence and evangelism as morally superior to all other students and this facilitates impostor feelings in marginalized student groups. There is also a sense of rejection for marginalized students in interactions with professors if social cues on campus have provoked impostor feelings in the student. Most times, professors do not even learn which students are first-generation. Professors could make the effort to see which students in their classes are first-generation at the beginning the semester or insert a note in their syllabus that they are willing to support first-generation students without being judgmental. If a professor is unempathetic with a first-generation college student who has no comprehension of traditional student-professor dynamics while they also face difficulty integrating into campus culture, the student may never seek professor support again.

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I experienced uncomfortable, unempathetic conversations with professors who seemed to not even *try* to understand my experience in their class or on campus. I once struggled in a course because the long hours I worked restricted the amount of time I could study. I went to office hours to be transparent with the

professor about my time constraints and asked for suggestions. The professor recommended that I drop the course which would have made me a part-time student instead of full-time, cause me to lose my scholarships, and most likely cause me to drop out of college due to lack of financial stability. I told him dropping the course was not an option, and I began to cry in front of him because of how overwhelming my financial stress felt in addition to my academic stress.

Through impostor feelings, I constantly felt like my education could be withheld from me at any moment, and this professor's unyielding expectation of time investments made me feel like I was going to lose my education. Instead of showing empathy and offering practical ways to better use the limited time I had for studying, he pulled up the Baylor Psychiatry Services web page and wrote their phone number down on a sticky note. Little did he know, I stopped using this service six months prior to his recommendation because I could no longer afford the cost. Rather than asking if this service was accessible for me, he said "please give my friends over at the psychiatry clinic a call, I believe they can help with the stress that you are experiencing." I felt incredibly misunderstood and unsupported in this interaction. This suggestion from the professor emphasized *the norm* of affluence and made me feel like *the other*. I threw the sticky note away and never went back to this professor's office hours.

The campus-wide norm that projects affluence onto all Baylor students hinders the support that low-income students receive. Another example of this on campus takes place within Baylor University Health Services. Health Services do not accept Medicaid insurance which is the most affordable insurance. They are unable to accept Medicaid because they are not in the Medicare network because of not working with the age range for Medicare. Instead of accepting Medicaid, students are charged $50 per medical appointment and $90 per psychiatry session. To put this in perspective, $90 is more than I spend on a month's worth of groceries. Free counseling services are offered but many other services like psychiatry are high cost for low-income students. Baylor University Health Services increases the burden that low-income students face through its insurance policies. Creating an affordable program for low-income students to utilize student health services would benefit first-generation college students greatly. When student services and professors exclude low-income students, they further the development of impostor feelings in marginalized students.

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Situations where first-generation students are unable to establish personal connections with peers or with professors often facilitate impostor feelings that lead to negative academic outcomes. Anxieties toward professor interactions can also prevent these students from seeking professor support in office hours, and even over email, which also causes negative academic outcomes. First-generation students sometimes do not feel like an impostor on their college campus until negative social cues in classmate and professor interactions introduce them to the idea that they are *the other*. Institutions of higher learning can, *and should*, inform generational students and professors of the hardships distinct to first-generation college experiences so that these students can be met where they are instead of being misunderstood and marginalized.

To meet students where they are, we must understand the full extent of their struggles. I believe that examining student life qualities and factors that contribute to the overall quality can signal where the most significant unmet needs of first-generation college students exist. Analyses of perceived life quality, financial stability, mental well-being, physical well-being, and impostor feelings in both student populations are used in this study to determine quality of life differences between these two student populations. I conducted an anonymous survey of nearly 200 Baylor students for the data in this study. This results and recommendations will be used as resources to improve the lives of first-generation students at Baylor. I hope these results and recommendations can guide many universities toward equity as well.

The First-Generation College Experience

Before I share my investigation of the common first-generation college experience demonstrated across research, I want to first define key terms discussed

within this study. Postsecondary education is defined as a public good throughout this study because it has become an essential for high-skill employment that provides income above the minimum wage (Jackson & Holzman, 2020). Despite being a public good, marginalized populations, such as racial & ethnic minorities, have experienced exclusions in college access. These exclusions have become less strict through progressive policies in recent decades for us to now see a growing first-generation college student population. However, exclusions from academic resources, policies, and social groups are visible in the first-generation college experience due to students experiencing one marginality or sometimes multiple, intersecting marginalities. A marginality is "an involuntary position and condition of an individual or group at the margins of social, political, economic, ecological, and biophysical systems that prevent them from access to resources, assets, services, restraining freedom of choice, preventing the development and capabilities and eventually causing extreme poverty," (von Braun & Gatzweiler, 2014). The difference between marginalities and inequalities or disparities is that marginalities cause inequalities and disparities. Marginalities and inequalities contribute significantly to the first-generation college experience while disparities in academic outcomes result.

As we seek to understand first-generation experiences, we must also understand the diversity of backgrounds represented within the first-generation student population. Diversity across the entirety of American postsecondary education is illuminated by the increase of varied demographic representations within undergraduate student bodies through the growing population of first-generation college students. Diversity includes all characteristics, experiences, and cultural influences that make every individual unique. In sociology, diversity comes in forms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender,

socioeconomic status, age, ability, religious or political beliefs, or other ideologies that are viewed as different in comparison to the dominant social group. In American education, Offices of Diversity and Inclusion often define diverse populations as student populations different from heterosexual, white Americans. Baylor's Office of Diversity and Inclusion defines diversity and inclusivity as crossing "boundaries of racial, ethnic, gender, socio-economic, religious, and other expressions of human difference," while also stating that "we are a university *with* diversity" rather than a campus *of* diversity (Commitment to diversity and inclusion). The rhetoric within this statement guides the reader's understanding of diversity and inclusion as an addition to our campus that we choose whether to participate in rather than a part of our campus that we *all* contribute to. Baylor's statement furthers the notion that diversity is all students different from the majority student group of white students instead of diversity being a characteristic of the entire student body. This concept of diversity at Baylor, and across college campuses, implies that *the norm* for American education is the heterosexual, white American student.

The system of American postsecondary education historically centers whiteness and affluence through limited college access which upholds forces such as systemic racism and stratification. Consequently, these forces constrain the academic success of marginalized populations (Jackson & Holzman, 2020). Systemic racism, also known as institutional racism or structural racism, is when an institution has policies or procedures that disadvantage racial & ethnic minorities. Examples of disparities that result from this from of racism include education, income, criminal justice, and healthcare. Systemic racism may be difficult to understand without the knowledge that white privilege is an

underlying influence. The privilege that white Americans is not a system of "bonus points," but rather an "absence of obstacles and barriers" related to things outside of their control like their race or ethnicity (Beecher, 2021). Because the system of education began by only allowing affluent, white, male Americans, many first-generation college students are students that experience intersecting inequalities related to race & ethnicity, class, gender, and even healthcare that restrict their academic success. First-generation college students can include low-income white Americans, like me, but the marginalities limiting our academic success do not relate to our biology.

It is assumable that, as American culture becomes more progressive, college becomes more accessible to populations outside of white Americans which allows for more diverse populations to be represented in the first-generation college student population in America. This can also be assumed given that the diverse demographic representations and the first-generation college student population are growing in correlation to one another. If college were more affordable and more accessible, first-generation college students would experience less obstacles and barriers that only they experience in their time at college. I believe that an increase in affordability and accessibility would also improve racial disparities in education because of the large portion of racial and ethnic minorities within this population. Among undergraduate students in America, 25% of white and Asian-American students were first-generation while 41% of African American and 61% of Latino students were first-generation (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2021). First-generation issues largely affect racial minorities, so racial issues and first-generation issues can be inextricably intertwined.

Research shows that the positive relationship between increased commonness of diversity and the growth of the first-generation college student population has developed throughout several decades (Choy, 2001; Hodgkinson, 1985; Levine & Associates, 1989; Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issue, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Rendon, Hope, & Associates, 1996). Additionally, first-generation college students are distinguished as diverse by neither of their parents having education higher than the high-school level because *the norm* in American postsecondary education is affluence. Affluence can be defined as social capital through wealth, high education levels, and career success. This standard for affluence negatively impacts the first-generation college experience. This student population ultimately deserves support that facilitates positive experiences without defining them as *the other*.

Studies conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study with Choy in 2001 found that 34% of students entering the nation's four-year institutions and 53% of students starting at two-year colleges were first-generation students in the academic year of 1995-96. As the first-generation population grows on campuses across the nation, the amount of support specific to first-generation struggles should also increase. Although, instead of increased support, recent statistics reveal that first-generation students face increased difficulty on college campuses despite an increase in their presence on college campuses. These struggles occur in the realm of employment, finances, academic success, and mental health. While 66% of first-generation students were employed, only 35% of those students had a job related to their major and only 6% of first-generation students worked on-campus jobs (Choy, 2001). This shows that the first-generation students need to work

to afford their postsecondary education can cause them to be distanced from their

academics through jobs that are off-campus and unrelated to their academic goals. Retail

and food service jobs often deter students from academic goals because they can hinder

and impact academic success.

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I worked in Baylor University Dining Services managed by the Aramark Corporation for a year. I was an Aramark employee, but there were student employees who worked in dining services to earn the work-study allowance offered in their federal financial aid. The work-study program is often necessary income for first-generation college students because of their parents' limited ability to support them financially. I applied to be an Aramark employee instead of a student worker because I found out that Baylor pays student workers $7.25 an hour while Aramark workers receive $9.25 an hour doing the same job. Not every student worker is aware that there is a pay difference and Aramark supervisors ask us to not inform student workers of this which makes this wage inequality almost predatory in nature.

Working at a Baylor Dining location is often strenuous with long shifts because of understaffing. As an Aramark employee, my scheduled shift every Saturday was ten hours long after a twenty-hour work week. I had to spend my thirty-minute break in that ten-hour shift driving home, walking my two dogs, and driving back to campus. This made me so exhausted that, after completing weekend chores like laundry, I almost never got homework done on the weekends. There were student workers with the same, long shift, yet they are paid less while investing the same amount of time and effort as Aramark employees. These students sacrifice valuable time and energy that could go toward their academics to afford their college education. As Baylor students work twenty hours a week earning $7.25 an hour, they could work 4.5 hours less to earn the same amount if they were paid $9.25 an hour like their workplace counterparts. Those 4.5 hours could be invested in academics and mental health so that students have better academic outcomes and college experiences.

My experience working in dining service was rarely pleasant. I worked at the Chick-Fil-A stand in the Student Union Building as an Aramark employee. This job was extremely stressful on weeknights where only four of us were scheduled to prep chicken, bread chicken, fry chicken, fry waffle fries, package food, stock inventory, make lemonade, and more—all while taking orders from a

line of student customers that was out the door. This experience was often isolating often because Baylor students would treat me as beneath them. My understanding is that most Baylor students assume that dining service employees are not Baylor students like them because *the norm* for Baylor students is affluence. It is not okay that student workers face disrespect from peers to afford the same education while being underpaid by the academic institution that advertised a familial, loving environment. Other student workers and I feel a sense of betrayal because of our employment experiences in Baylor University Dining Services. I hope Baylor will pay student workers an equal wage and educate the campus community on manners that should be practiced when interacting with dining service employees.

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First-generation academic performance in college is inhibited through work demands, which also inhibits their academic success. Six years after entering post-secondary education, 56% of first-generation students had not earned any post-secondary credentials. Only 20% had earned a bachelor's degree and 24% had earned a certificate (RTI International, 2019). A study conducted by the Center for First-Generation Student Success from 2018 revealed that despite showing more educational commitment than their peers, only 27% of first-generation college students graduate within four years; another study from Campus Labs shows that first-generation students show more educational commitment than their peers (Snider, 2019). These findings mean that even though first-generation students fully invest in their academics, sometimes more than generational students, they still fall behind in academic success.

As the first-generation college student population has grown and despite increasing difficulties in degree attainment for these students, their college experience has gained increased research attention. The research conducted on this population can be sorted by three common themes (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

This first theme is the comparison of first-generation college students to generational college students, or all other college students, concerning each populations common demographic characteristics as well as their experience preparing for college (i.e. the decision process, college expectations, and effects of college preparation) (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Kojaku & Nunez, 1998; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). The overarching consensus from studies that follow this theme has been that first-generation college students tend to be at a clear disadvantage compared to their peers. This disadvantage pertains to postsecondary education preparation because these students have limited knowledge about general factors such as costs, application processes, and opportunities specific to postsecondary education. Additional factors that marked this disadvantage for first-generation college students were level of family income and support, education expectations, plans for their college career, and the quality of academics in high school.

A second theme within research on first-generation college student experiences strives to reconcile the transition from high school to postsecondary education while identifying aspects of this transition that are unique to first-generation college students (Lara, 1992; Rendon, 1992; Weis, 1992; Terenzini et al., 1994; Rendon, Hope, & Associates, 1996). These studies have consistently revealed that the first-generation student population has more difficulty with the transition from high school to college than generational college students because first-generation college students confront all anxieties, disorientations, and obstacles that any generational college student would while also facing substantial cultural, social, and academic transitions (Terenzini et al., 1996;

Pascarella et al., 2016). This finding further explains obstacles that disadvantage first-generation college students. Specifically, these were anxiety, disorientation, and general college obstacles such as determining a major or career aspiration.

The third and final distinct theme of research on first-generation college students focuses on the scope of persistence in college, degree attainment, and early career labor market outcomes (Attinasi, 1989; Berkner, Horn, & Clune, 2000; Billson & Terry, 1982; Choy, 2000; Horn, 1998; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Such studies indicate that, when compared to generational college students, first-generation college students are more likely to leave a four-year institution at the end of their first year, less likely to stay enrolled or attain a bachelor's degree after five years. As research focuses on degree attainment, there is a minor variation in the early career earnings of first-generation college students and generational students. This minor variation in early career earnings was that, generally, generational college students made more money than first-generation college students in their first years outside of college and in the career world. Research shows that, on average, male first-generation students earn 11% less than generational male students and female first-generation students earn 7% less than generational female students while in the career world (Manzoni & Streib). This could be from first-generation college students having limited networking contacts, limited connections to job opportunities, and lack of salary negotiation preparedness. Additionally, first-generation college students seem to be less likely to enroll in a graduate or professional program. Federal TRIO Programs began with a trio of success programs called Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Service. Additional programs, like the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate

Achievement Program, have been created by the government to propel underrepresented first-generation college students into graduate and professional programs, which has helped the numbers of underrepresented populations in college increase in graduate programs. The factors of different earnings and lower education levels shape the opportunities for success that first-generation college students have access to, so it is important that these differences are addressed by academic institutions.

As knowledge regarding the preparation, transition, and progress for first-generation college students continues to accumulate, there is still limited research on the direct quality of the overall college experience for this specific population. The overall quality of life measure considers the quality of preparation, transition, and progress that is unique to first-generation college students, but also assesses their mental health, financial struggles, and social obstacles. The few published studies that address the psychosocial and cognitive development as unaddressed issues that separate first-generation college students from generational students were conducted by Terenzini et al. (1996) and Pascarella et al. (2016).

The first study, from Terenzini and collaborators, utilized data from 23 postsecondary institutions that were also a part of the National Study of Student Learning. Terenzini and other researchers discovered that in their first year, first-generation college students earned less credit hours, completed less humanities and fine arts credits, invested less time into studying, worked more hours weekly, were less represented in honors programs, were less likely to feel as though faculty were genuine, and showed smaller progress on a standardized reading comprehension assessment than their generational peers. According to Terenzini, the pervasiveness of differences in

college experiences that contribute to the negative experiences of first-generation students remained evident in the study results after statistical controls were added. These statistical controls were intended to mitigate variations of pre-college life such as high-school extracurricular involvement, family socioeconomic status, degree ambitions, testing abilities, and other similar aspects of one's background, to see if the different experiences were only influenced by pre-college life. However, the same significant differences in student experiences between first-generation and generational students were still found (Terenzini, 1996).

This first analysis of cognitive and psychosocial aspects of the first-generation college student experience in the Terenzini et al. (1996) study allowed for researchers to have a foundation for further research. As literature continually forms a cumulative understanding of the experiences specific to first-generation college students, previous studies like Terenzini et al. (1996) remain significant. As research formulates a comprehensive analysis of the first-generation college student experience, each researcher builds onto the most recently published study to ensure that all following research is productive to the comprehensive analysis. It is important that researchers brought in the aspects of cognitive and psychosocial experiences in college for first-generation students because these are significant to one's identity and overall life experience. These studies also confirm and validate negative first-generation experiences so that these voices are more likely to be heard when they advocate for change on college campuses. Despite these great outcomes of the original study, researchers found the first study to be limited in scope as the data only recorded experiences in the first year of college. Because data only addressed one year of a student's experience, it was hard to

fully analyze their overall college experience. The current study at Baylor University does not address multiple years either due to time parameters, but it is important for future research to encompass multiple years of the first-generation college experience to determine the quality of their college experience more accurately.

The second study with a central focus on cognitive and psychosocial aspects of first-generation college student experiences, Pascarella et al. (2016), expanded upon the findings of Terenzini et al. (1996) to include the full four-year experience for first-generation students. Pascarella's study with other researchers formed a broader investigation of NSSL data by analyzing second- and third-year data in addition to data from first year experiences. The study accomplished this by setting three goals: 1) estimate net difference between first-generation students and generational (all other) students in their academic and nonacademic experience of college, 2) estimate net difference between first-generation college students and generational college students in various standardized measures of a variety of reasoning and comprehension skills, reception of diversity and challenge, self-awareness, self-control, preference for higher-order cognitive activities, and academic degree goals at the end of subsequent years of college, 3) establish specific academic and nonacademic experiences that shape the cognitive and psychosocial results which differ drastically for first-generation in comparison to generational college students (Pascarella et al., 2016).

This study contrasted data from first-generation college students against students with both parents holding a bachelor's degree or higher and students who had no more than one parent who held a bachelor's degree or higher. The results of this second study demonstrated that a parent's postsecondary level of education heavily influences the

academic selectivity of the postsecondary institution the student attends, the inherent

character of academic and nonacademic experiences the student has in college, and, by a

minimal amount, the cognitive and noncognitive products of college (Pascarella et al.,

2016). It is important that institutions offer support to first-generation students that

mitigates the influence of first-generation parent education levels on first-generation

student's academic success, nonacademic experiences, and both the cognitive and

noncognitive outcomes of their college experience. The academic achievements of one's

parents should not limit or advance a student in their academic career as all students

should have equal access to success and positive experiences in college. Marginalization

of first-generation college students at predominantly white and affluent campuses is

detrimental to not only social flourishing but also academic achievement and cognitive

development. In addition to these findings, Pascarella's study also noted differences

between first-generation and generational college students in how their academic and

nonacademic experiences influenced the outcomes of their college experience. These

lives are forever impacted by how their college experience goes, and that is not

information that institutions should take lightly.

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"Without proper support and resources, it's really easy for first-gen students to lose hope. They see themselves as alone and isolated from the rest of campus. Being part of communities like First-in-Line and McNair, I fortunately found resources that made the first gen experience a whole lot easier. However, I know my experience is not everyone's. I've met many students that had no idea that these organizations existed, or for some reason or another were not selected for these kinds of programs. Hearing about my and others' positive experiences and the strides made by these groups can definitely give hope to underclassmen, but for soon to be graduates, it's like a missed opportunity. They feel even more

hopeless because they aren't as prepared to move on after graduation as the rest of us are."

- Sarah Hale, senior Psychology major
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While Pascarella's study notes that parents' academic level can lead to negative outcomes of a students' college experience, it is increasingly urgent that universities address the marginalization of *all* first-generation college students to not facilitate negative outcomes. Universities should distinguish the achievements of parents from student achievements as each student invests in their education to different degrees regardless of their parent's academic achievements. For example, first-generation college students were found in a study above to have more educational commitment than generational students, yet their parents have lower education levels (Snider, 2019). The results of Pascarella et al.'s 2016 study are noteworthy in that as they broaden previous research, these results also suggest that first-generation college students "tend to be significantly handicapped in terms of the types of institutions they attend and the kinds of experiences they have during college," (Pascarella et al., 2016).

For researchers, this "handicap" on school choice and experiences became more obvious when the achievement gap between parents was widened through comparison focused on first-generation students against students whose parents both had a bachelor's degree or higher. This result is consistent with previous studies (Choy, 2001; Dougherty, 1994), and highlights how the difference between these student populations remains pervasive despite statistical controls that consider precollege influences such as parental income, high-school grades, standardized test performance and development, degree plans, academic motivation, and other similar factors.

<div align="center">********</div>

I felt *very* limited in my options for college when it came down to the most important factor for my family: cost. As a first-generation college student, I had to research opportunities for additional funding, complete the FAFSA on my own, and learn how to calculate estimated costs. I visited the estimated cost calculator web page of many universities to decide which schools to apply to. After I was accepted to multiple, affordable, state colleges, only one private, religious college was affordable for my family. State colleges are usually cheaper than private universities, but for low-income students with an Estimated Financial Contribution of zero dollars it can be cheaper to attend private universities that offer additional financial aid such as need-based scholarships and merit-based scholarships that are not always available at public, state colleges.

The process of finding a school that met my family's financial needs through additional financial aid opportunities came with financial sacrifices such as paying for college entrance exams and test prep in order to have the long-term benefit of decreased tuition through merit-based scholarships that reward academic achievement and competitive test scores. For my family, we believed that immediate costs associated with test fees and test prep were worth the long-term benefit of merit-based scholarships. Because not every college offered merit-based scholarships, I was unable to afford every school I applied to. While the estimated cost of attendance after financial aid for the University of Texas at Dallas was over $15,000 a year, the estimated cost of attendance after financial aid for Baylor University was exactly zero dollars. The financial aid offer from Baylor, including merit-based scholarships, covered tuition, and associated fees so that I only needed to cover out-of-pocket costs like textbooks, school supplies, and housing. I have been so incredibly lucky to receive this financial assistance from Baylor, but my father sacrificed hundreds of dollars that we could not afford to spend so that I could earn a higher score on my college entrance exams and receive a large merit-based scholarship. Not every family can make these sacrifices or has the guidance to research additional funding which drastically reduces college choice for low-income, first-generation college students. Even though I was excited that the only college I could afford was my favorite prospective college, I did not have a final choice. The limit that cost placed on my choices as a first-generation college student continued into my experiences during college.

Every student organization I wanted to join had a membership fee. Freshman year, after late night, where we walk around and meet every student organization, I laid on my dorm room floor and totaled up all of the membership

<div align="center">24</div>

fees for the student organizations I was interested in. To be as involved on campus as I had been at my high school, it would have cost me over $200 a semester just for membership fees. After sharing this information with my father, we concluded that the only reason I could not rush a sorority was because of the expensive membership dues, even though I really wanted to. I realized that having a social life at Baylor would be expensive regardless of which organizations I wanted to join.

My dad and I agreed that a private student loan to cover sorority dues seemed reasonable since a sorority would provide me with well-rounded experiences instead of balancing multiple student organizations with a job. I prayed and prayed that, after going through recruitment, I would get into the sorority with the cheapest dues, as they weren't all the same. I was only offered a formal invitation into the chapter with the second most expensive dues at the time. My dad and I were so excited about my selection into the sorority that we agreed we would try to make it work. Unfortunately, I endured a great number of negative experiences throughout my first year in the sorority, so I resigned from the chapter in January of my sophomore year. After resigning, I began to pay off the loan we used to pay for sorority dues. I worked thirty hours a week to afford the monthly payments, and, as a result, I was unable to join student organizations, became isolated socially, and my academics suffered because of work-related stress and time commitments. Because my paychecks went to loan payments and housing costs, I accumulated credit card debt to afford groceries, gas, and costs associated with the car I needed to get to my job.

There are many first-generation college students, like me, who can barely afford their basic necessities because we must work to make our ends meet. Because of this, some are not doing our best in our classes because of our financial stress and the reduced amount of time we have for studying. This also causes us to struggle to integrate socially in campus environments when not every classmate or faculty member can relate or even empathize with our experience. There are also many generational college students who eat dinner out every night and take up exciting hobbies like yoga because they can afford it. These students tend to thrive socially because their parents support them financially. First-generation students' parents cannot provide that same financial stability, and universities should take action to mitigate these differences so that campus involvement does not impede the academic success of first-generation college students.

Further, if your parents do not have the same academic achievements as other parents, your parents will not be able to experience campus events in the same way as affluent parents. There were so many times when my dad felt outright uncomfortable meeting other parents because he felt ashamed of his

career as a house painter interacting with parents who had a bachelor's degree or higher, who have high-skilled jobs, and have a solid network to connect their child to career-building opportunities. These were painful, invalidating experiences when Baylor advertised an exact opposite student and family experience. I felt guilty for exposing my dad to these environments, but I also felt betrayed by the tour guides and recruiters who sold me a version of Baylor that I could not afford to enjoy. They never tell you that, even if you're accepted as a student, being a part of the Baylor family isn't a given.

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Not every parent has the resources to propel their child in the workforce, thus, not every student has the same foundational experiences or resources for their career. If a university boasts equity for *all* students, it should be observable in *all* student experiences. As universities acknowledge pervasive differences in college experiences for first-generation and generational college students, it is beneficial for research to compare the lives of these students. The goal of my interdisciplinary study is to actualize this difference in college experiences through survey data with consideration that Baylor is leading in first-generation support as an Advisory Institution.

Summary

Because Baylor is distinguished as a leader in first-generation college student support, it is important to document what first-generation college students experience during their time at Baylor. Findings from my examination of student experiences allowed me to determine that first-generation and generational college students have different life qualities at Baylor. If institutions take responsibility for student experiences and implement inclusive policies that redefine *the norm* on college campuses, the American postsecondary education system will complete a step in the direction of alleviating education inequality. In this study, I will analyze quantitative data that records

first-generation and generational college student experiences at Baylor University. My hope for my study is that it will encourage and inform inclusive policies that target disparities specific to first-generation college students.

Chapter Descriptions

Several chapters communicate significant portions of the overall research project. Chapter one is an introduction to both the first-generation college student experience and my study of this experience. Chapter two will provide rationale for the survey method and document the process for this study so that this study may be recreated and improved upon for any future research purposes such as a similar investigation on another campus. Chapter three includes a literature review, survey results, and implications & discussion of the results for first-generation college student struggles related to minority status. Chapter four provides information on income inequality in the first-generation college experience through a literature review, survey results, and implications & discussion. Chapter five is a literature review, survey results, and implications & discussion of ways that sexual orientation & gender identity influence college experiences. Chapter six focuses on a literature review, survey results, and implications & discussions of mental health in the first-generation college experience. Chapter seven investigates Impostor Syndrome's presence in Baylor students while also providing a literature review, the survey results, and an implications & discussion section. The implications and discussion section within chapter three, four, five, six, and seven presents each test conducted, the data utilized in each test, interpretations of each test result, and what each result means for Baylor University. In chapter eight, I summarize all the implications and recommendations throughout the paper while providing further explanation of why these

recommendations are essential to achieving equity for Baylor students. The conclusion

chapter ends with a limitations and future directions for research section. The limitations

portion suggests ways to improve this study in future uses based on impediments that I

observed throughout the study. The future directions for research section will share

questions that occurred to me as I conducted this study so that other researchers may

build upon the current study. This overall research project advocates for students at

Baylor through documentation of their experiences and recommendations for relevant

support.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

I find that each individual experience within a grand societal issue is essential to

our understanding of societal issues. As individual first-generation college students from

various communities across campus validated my negative experiences, I learned that my

college experience was not the only one of its kind. Because we, as humans, focus on our

personal experience, it can be beneficial to connect multiple individual experiences to

determine whether a problem is systemic or individual. I felt that a research survey would

be able to unite first-generation experiences and generational experiences on our campus

in a way that reveals whether the negative experiences of first-generation college students

were due to systemic problems or due to individual challenges. As I designed this study, I

found that a "special-purpose survey" would be the best method to ensure all data

necessary for a specific analysis of first-generation experiences would be available in a

format that works with data analysis programs (Fowler, 2002). I also wanted to know if

first-generation college students have a more difficult time at Baylor than generational

college students, so the survey asks questions about various factors that contribute to

one's quality of life (Appendix A). Because the collective first-generation college

experience was found to be worse than the collective generational college experience at

Baylor through survey results, we can now identify and address systemic issues, such as

campus policies, that marginalize first-generation college students.

Survey research allows audiences to understand any population's experience with

an issue (Weisberg & Bowen, 1977). This is because the theory of statistical inference

allows for research to generalize a sample of statistics to estimate population parameters

inside calculable margins of error (Wright & Marsden, 2010). My hope is that survey

results can allow for readers to understand first-generation college students' negative

experiences through the common themes of disadvantage that are visible across

individual survey responses. Common examples of survey research areas include "mental

health, transportation needs and patterns of use, political behavior, characteristics of

housing, its cost and appropriateness to familiar needs, and worker satisfaction," (Fowler,

2002). When society recognizes that surveys can assist in generalizations of populations

that we seek to understand, "we will find ourselves forced to ask only a representative

group, or *sample*, of the large population that interests us (Weisberg & Bowen, 1977).

This is in part because in the 1960s, when survey research became most prominent, the

number of responses that each survey received continued to lower as survey costs rose

(Wright & Marsden, 2010). This means that as the costs associated with survey methods

became more expensive, researchers could only afford less survey responses. This is

because most survey programs charge researchers for each survey response so that survey

participants can receive compensation. As a result, survey research became a

multibillion-dollar industry that was so widely practiced that survey methods were

integrated into graduate student instruction in sociology, political science, education,

public health, and economics (Wright & Marsden, 2010). The survey in this study did not

cost me anything to conduct because Baylor pays for a license agreement with Qualtrics

for students and staff to utilize in their research projects. Today, thousands of individual

surveys are conducted annually by university, nonprofit, and for-profit survey

organizations (Fowler, 2002). However, survey research first entered the universities in

the late 1930s when Hadley Cantril established the Office of Public Opinion Research at Princeton University (Wright & Marsden, 2010).

The use of surveys in academic settings allows scholars to collect "numerous facts about the behaviors and situations of people [that] can be obtained only by asking a sample of people about themselves" (Fowler, 2002). Survey research may be perceived as "a first effort to try to learn something about a population," but "a full-scale probability sample survey should be undertaken only after it is certain that the information cannot be obtained in other ways" (Fowler, 2002). Instead of immediately deciding a survey is the best method for a study, researchers must consider other methods such as focus groups. Reasons that a study may lead to a survey method include the researcher desiring a large number of responses to generalize, the research being interested in an issue on a social/community level rather than an individual level, and to get the most information out of a sample of study participants in the most efficient way possible. Because focus groups can be personal and require planning, organizing, and scheduling, surveys can be the most convenient.

In some cases, research shows information about sets of events, but if a set of events cannot be paired with other characteristics to complete a desired analysis, a survey can provide data for the desired analysis (Fowler, 2002). Because the principal investigator saw a trend in first-generation college student research that surveyed first-generation students but did not compare their experiences to that of their generational peers, the study survey design allowed for data that would pair first-generation and generational students. The category of information collected in the study survey is "facts about people and their experiences" (Weisberg & Bowen, 1977). The study survey has

findings that are "*factual data* about the respondents themselves" in addition to their experiences (Weisberg & Bowen, 1977).

This study used an anonymous survey on the Qualtrics platform (Appendix A). The questions about factors that can be assumed to influence a student's quality of life include experiences with reliable transportation, food insecurity, student loan debt, and more. The purpose of this survey was to identify differences in quality of life for two populations: first-generation and generational college students. The study analyzed frequencies by the student status of respondents to generate an understanding of the distinct lives represented in each student population. After sorting frequencies by this qualification, I was able to determine that first-generation college students remain disadvantaged at Baylor University as a result of minority status, income inequality, sexual orientation & gender identity, mental health, and Impostor Syndrome despite Baylor's efforts to mitigate the differences in college experiences.

Survey Sample

The survey was distributed in June 2020 through Twitter, Instagram, and emails to student organizations at Baylor University. The hope was that responses would be limited to Baylor students through personal distribution of the survey. I am thankful for the student organizations who assisted with my study by sharing the survey with their members: Baylor McNair Scholars Program, Baylor Pre-Physician Assistant Society, Baylor First in Line Student Association, Baylor Pre-Vet Medical Association, Baylor University Research in Science and Technology, Baylor's American Chemical Society, and the Multicultural Greek Council. This sample was collected with no identifiers recorded to facilitate transparency in responses through anonymity. This means that there

is no guarantee of every response being a Baylor student since this is an anonymous, self-reported survey. Survey participants were informed that their survey response would be used for a summer, government-funded research project that would transition into a thesis project in Fall 2020. Participants were also informed that their responses would be used to improve support offered to first-generation college students at Baylor University. Data analysis of the survey sample continued into Spring 2021.

Initial Data Collection

The initial data collection was held from June 12, 2020 until June 26, 2020. After cleaning the data for incomplete responses, the final data pool is 158 responses: 60 first-generation and 98 generational college student responses. Of these Baylor student responses, .6% were freshmen, 17.1% were sophomores, 44.9% were juniors, and 55.1% were seniors. The data collection included questions that gauged demographic and socioeconomic levels for participants as well. The questions on the survey often utilized five-point Likert scales to recognize varying degrees of negative or positive responses from participants.

Variables

The variables of this study were student status as the independent variable and quality of life as the dependent variable. Earlier studies on first-generation college students' college experiences have established that four factors should be considered in assessments of first-generation experiences in college: (1) student demographic or precollege characteristics, (2) organizational or structural characteristics of the institution, (3) students' academic experiences; (4) students social experiences (Astin, 1993;

Chickering, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pascarella, 1985, 2014). To follow the previously effective framework while maintaining a narrow scope, I selected aspects out of these four factors that would provide an effective assessment of life qualities for these two student populations. I also relied on my own experiences as a first-generation student to identify factors that have constrained my personal growth and academic achievements at Baylor that other first-generation Baylor students may have also struggled with. The independent variables I utilized in this study were:

1. Demographic characteristics (sex, ethnicity, age, family socioeconomic status).

2. Organizational characteristics (year in university, number of student organizations a member of).

3. Academic experiences (measure of satisfaction with Baylor, student loan debt, parental and familial support/encouragement for academics).

4. Social experiences (job status, financial responsibilities, measure of enjoyment, extracurricular involvement, physical well-being, and mental well-being).

In the final stages of data analysis, I made table graphics to provide detailed operational definitions. The table graphics also display reliabilities related to all applicable variables (minority status, income inequality, sexual orientation & gender identity, mental health, and impostor syndrome) engaged in the analysis portion. All independent variables will be used to predict dependent variables, and it will be clearly noted which independent variables led to each finding. I hope these results can inform and encourage readers to urge academic institutions toward changes that promote inclusion and equity in higher learning.

Results

Survey results were transferred from Qualtrics to IBM SPSS to be coded and translated into frequencies. Frequency results produced cross-tabulations to create data tables for analysis. Chi-Square test of Independence was used in RStudio to test relationships between variables when group numbers were greater than five. A majority of the data analysis ran through Fisher's Exact Test for Count Data because there were numbers less than five in various answer groups on different survey questions. The data analysis addresses relationships between student status, race & ethnicity, quality of life, gender identity, socioeconomic status, family annual household income, sexual orientation, mental well-being, physical well-being, and student satisfaction at Baylor University. The final portion of the data analysis measures Impostor Syndrome in participants through survey questions that identify impostor feelings (Appendix A).

Survey Demographics

I believe that, because these are personal experiences demonstrated in the survey results, it is important to examine the demographics of the final survey sample to better understand the data analyzed. This information is presented in Figure 1. Participants shared gender identities, sexual orientations, race/ethnicities, annual household income, socioeconomic status, and year in school to understand each participants' unique perspective on the college experience. An interesting pattern in this data is that some participants identified as a socioeconomic level that does not match their annual income. For example, fifteen participants' annual household incomes were below the poverty line, but only nine participants identified as below the poverty line for their socioeconomic

class label (Poverty Guidelines, 2015). My understanding of this pattern in survey responses is that as an individual believes their quality of life correlates with their socioeconomic status they may identify as the socioeconomic status that their life appears to be instead of identifying as a socioeconomic status that aligns with their income. While household income may be below the poverty line, individuals may identify as "lower middle class" instead of "below poverty" because they do not perceive their life as one in poverty. My family's annual household income is below the poverty line, but it was not until college that I understood the difference between income and socioeconomic status because my father always defined our socioeconomic status as lower-middle class despite our lower income. An individual's self-categorization of socioeconomic status may not align with their numeric income also because of shame attached to lower statuses (i.e., poverty and lower middle class). The survey data also shows that, different from first-generation students, most generational students were of high socioeconomic statuses with high annual household incomes. It is important to note the pattern of academic disparity caused by structural inequalities and incongruencies (i.e., lower income parents working more and being less involved in students' education between the two groups when contrasting the quality-of-life differences between first-generation) college students and generational college students. These demographics can inform our understanding of these students' college experiences because they provide the context from which each student's college journey began.

FIRST-GENERATION, 60	GENERATIONAL, 98
9 male, 48 female, 1 gender fluid, 2 questioning	19 male, 76 female, 1 transgender male, 1 transgender female, 1 nonbinary
46 heterosexual, 3 gay, 1 lesbian, 6 bisexual, 1 bicurious, 1 queer, 2 preferred not to say	76 heterosexual, 5 lesbian, 14 bisexual, 1 asexual, 1 bicurious, 1 pansexual/queer
1 American Indian or Alaska Native, 4 Asian, 2 Black or African American, 1 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 23 White, 26 Hispanic or Latino, 1 Hispanic & Middle Easter, 1 White & Asian	2 Asian, 13 Black or African American, 65 White, 13 Hispanic or Latino, 1 Biracial, 1 Mixed Asian & White, 1 self-described as Multiracial: Asian & Caucasian, and 1 self-described as "other"
15 reported "less than $25,750," 11 reported "between $25,750 and $42,500," 15 reported "between $42,500 and $89,500," 14 reported "between $89,500 and $135,600," and 5 reported "above $135,600"	2 reported "less than $25,750," 10 reported "between $25,750 and $42,500," 20 reported "between $89,500 and $135,600," 29 reported "between $89,500 and $135,600," and 37 reported "above $135,600"
9 identified as "below poverty line," 33 identified as "lower middle class," 16 identified as "upper middle class," and 2 identified as "higher class"	2 identified as "below poverty line," 26 identified as "lower middle class," 63 identified as "upper middle class," and 2 identified as "higher class"
16 sophomores, 20 juniors, 24 seniors	1 freshman, 11 sophomores, 23 juniors, 63 seniors

Figure 1: Survey Demographics

Frequencies

Prior to analyzing the survey data, I wanted to find frequencies in the data to understand the nature of common experiences with each variable (minority status, income inequality, sexual orientation & gender identity, mental health, and Impostor Syndrome) for each student population. Frequencies are percentages found in quantitative data. For the survey results, frequencies were identified for first-generation students and generational students. When rating parental support, 30% of first-generation respondents answered good for the majority answer while 59.2% of generational students said excellent for the majority answer. Survey data shows that 71.7% of first-generation respondents and 86.7% of generational respondents have cars. Of these cars, 55.8% of first-generation respondents' cars were paid off and 57.6% of generational cars were paid off. A majority of respondents from both groups whose cars were not paid off said their parents were paying their cars off. Students with cars need parking permits which range from $125 - $420. Only 58.1% of first-generation respondents with cars own parking

permits and the majority answer showed that 23.3% of them purchased it for themselves. Only 58.8% of generational students with cars own parking permits and the majority answer showed that 45.9% of them said their parents purchased it. Over 95% of respondents in both groups said having a car affects their college experience positively.

For concerns about finances, questions about students' financial situations were asked. A 30% difference in the student populations was revealed when it came to student loans; 91.2% of first-generation respondents have student loan debt and 62.1% of generational respondents have student loan debt. When asked about monthly finances, 46.7% (majority answer) of first-generation respondents answered that they "barely make it" while 45.9% (majority answer) of generational respondents answered that they "only struggle a minor amount."

For experiences with food insecurity, 61.6% of first-generation respondents had experienced food insecurity to various degrees (once, sometimes, often), while 64.9% of generational respondents had *never* experienced food insecurity. Each student population accesses food differently; 58.3% of first-generation respondents access food through personal, earned income while 54.7% of generational respondents access food through parental support. For employment: 80% of first-generation respondents and 55% of generational respondents have a job. The majority of employed first-generation respondents (75%) and the majority of employed generational respondents (59.3%) have a job out of necessity. For the employed first-generation respondents, 43.8% said having a job affects their college experience negatively while having a job affects 59.3% of generational college experiences positively.

Data Analysis

I chose to document my data analysis process to show how issues affecting first-generation college students were found to be present at Baylor. The interdisciplinary approach to the current study strengthens the real-world applications of survey results while bridging mathematics, social sciences, and humanities, making these results applicable for research in multiple disciplines thus increasing the visibility of first-generation college experiences. If I did not utilize survey methods and statistics to find significant qualitative results, my argument that these issues affect Baylor students would be less reliable. As I utilize these results and distribute them throughout the following, the survey data and data analysis support the reliability of recommendations offered throughout. This empirical data analysis provides verifiable results to further the conversation of first-generation student struggles beyond theory and logic while also including multiple disciplines in the conversation on incongruencies and inequalities in college experiences.

To analyze the data, I ran multiple hypothesis tests to identify p values for relationships between student populations and variables, race & ethnicity, income, sexual orientation, mental health, and impostor syndrome. The p value determines the level of significance that each relationship has; if the relationships are insignificant, or if the relationships are entirely nonexistent. These p values allowed me to accept or reject hypothesized relationships between the two student populations at Baylor University. As you read data analysis throughout the following chapters, it is important to note that a p value greater than .10 is not significant, a p value less than or equal to .10 is marginally significant, a p value less than or equal to less than or equal to .05 is significant, and a p

value less than or equal to .01 is highly significant. The smaller the p value, the more important the relationship between the student population and the identified variable is.

The hypothesized relationships tested throughout this study relate to student's minority status, campus income inequality, sexual orientation & gender identity, mental health, and impostor syndrome. These chapters are defined by the five dominant marginalities found to affect first-generation college students at Baylor. Each chapter shares survey results and data analysis followed by a discussion to establish the applicability of findings to Baylor students.

CHAPTER THREE

Minority Status

Literature Review

Restrictions on access to higher education that began in the 1950s and the cost of college have created disparities for racial minorities (Gándara & Li, 2020; Jackson & Holzman, 2020). There is an observable trend in college for academic outcomes of minority students to be less successful than those of white students. In 2018, 64.5% of Black high school graduates enrolled in college while 70.9% of white high school graduates enrolled in college (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). Because fewer Black students entered college, their smaller student group is marginalized particularly at predominantly white institutions, but not at historically Black colleges and universities. Further, in 2018, the percentage of Black college students no longer enrolled was 35.3% and the percentage of white college students no longer enrolled was 19.9% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). Because of the 15.3% difference in students dropping out, with more Black students dropping out, it can be assumed that the racialized marginalization of Black college students influenced students' decisions to discontinue their enrollment. It is important that research addresses college enrollment and dropout rates of racially minoritized students because their goals to attend college can be discouraged by systemic barriers in both college and pre-college experiences (Gándara & Li, 2020). Examples of such barriers include lower education standards/expectations among faculty and staff for racial minority students (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Ferguson, 2003; Diamond et al., 2004; P. C. Gándara & Contreras, 2009;

Howard, 2019), school discipline disproportionately targeting racial minority students

(Noguera, 2009; Skiba et al., 2011), and segregation defined within schools (Noguera,

2008; Oakes, 2005). When racial minority students are segregated or separated and

isolated due to their race or ethnic group through barriers in social and educational

interactions, they begin to burn out, feel discouraged, lack motivation, feel helpless, and

embrace destructive emotions.

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I worked at an after-school program at a low-income charter school in Waco, Texas during my second year of college. I led a group of 21 students of different education levels from kindergarten to sixth grade. Most of these students were minority students. Many of these students were excited when after-school staff showed up because they felt they had more encouragement and stronger connections with us. On days when I arrived at the school early, I witnessed white staff members harshly scolding Black students for being too energetic when they were fidgeting in their seats or needing to stand by their seat instead of sitting. On the day that a white student was running around the building after slapping a teacher, not even the principal scolded the child. The teachers ignored the chaotic child and told me they would let his parents address his behavior when they arrived. I witnessed similar differences in discipline throughout my education beginning in pre-school. My understanding from research is that this difference in discipline influences minority impostor feelings that begin pre-college, continue into college experiences, and limit academic outcomes. While colleges cannot change pre-college experiences, they can validate minority students and treat them equally to white students.

For minority students at Baylor, racial stereotypes continue to affect their experiences on our campus. In January 2021, a group of Black students studied in the Garden Level of Moody Memorial Library, the area that allows maximum conversation volume, as part of an organized gathering for Black underclassmen to meet Black upperclassmen. A security guard interrupted the group because of noise level among the students and said, "this is not a basketball arena. This is a study area" (Cousins 2021). When freshman Jonah Shaw tried to have a polite conversation with the security guard about the offensive nature of his comment, the security guard called Baylor University Police Department for back up. In the

Lariat article about this event, senior Tarshyana Hall's comment states the fear that crossed these students' minds throughout this encounter; "I was walking out of the building when I saw the police, and it hit me that we are not safe anywhere. The situation could've easily turned any one of my peers into a hashtag because we were talking" (Cousins, 2021). Considering the prevalence of police brutality in our country, the security guard's decision to call the police was inconsiderate and unwarranted. This security guard incited feelings of unsafety in these students, demonstrating blatant disregard for their experiences, in a library that belongs to them as Baylor students. The security guard's remarks and his response of calling BUPD when the students attempted to have a civil conversation with him exhibit racial insensitivity and racial prejudice present on our campus that make these students feel unsafe far too often.

Shaw shared that the group of students remained polite for their safety; "We're taught when we're little about how to handle these situations. The fact that we have to be taught how to handle these situations, I think that says a lot as well" (Cousins, 2021). Racial & ethnic minority students are taught from a young age that society perceives them as *the other* and pre-college experiences continue minority student experiences with marginalization. When predominantly white institutions, like Baylor, do not take action to set a standard that racism, racial insensitivity, and racial prejudice are unacceptable, they further the marginalization of these students. Instead of validating the traumatizing effect of this experience for Black students, many white Baylor students argue that the group of students should not have organized a social event in a library in the first place. These responses blame the victims in this situation while also ignoring witness' statements that say the group was not loud or even distracting to other students (Cousins, 2021). Baylor's failure to reprimand and educate employees who exhibit racist behaviors does not only makes minority students feel unprotected by their university, but it also shows white students that it is okay for them to also be racist, racially insensitive, and racially prejudiced. Baylor's response to this situation stated, "In this instance, there was a cultural disconnect, and we simply missed the mark" (Cousins, 2021). It is no longer enough for Baylor to simply perform damage control when these students who remain "passionate" about this university deserve proactive changes on campus (Cousins, 2021). Postsecondary institutions have the authority to make impactful changes that improve minority student experiences through campus policy. I hope that Baylor will make policy changes that advance our institution away from *the norm* of white affluence toward a norm of equity and inclusion.

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Research has shown that first-generation college students, who are majority racial minorities, complete college at significantly lower rates than other college students (Ishitani, 2006). This lower rate of college completion has been associated with higher levels of stress, both long-term and short-term, across one's life from a pressure to perform or overwork oneself (Gaydosh et al., 2017). Every student enters college with basic levels of agency, and if the student is met with support relevant to their social and cultural capital, their agency, grit, and accomplishments can flourish (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Kundu, 2017). When racial minority students are not met with support resources relevant to their social and cultural experiences, they are more vulnerable to burn out, discouragement, reduced motivation, isolation, helplessness, destructive emotions, and discontinued pursuits of goals (Kundu, 2019). If a racial minority student experiences prolonged completion of a college degree without campus support relevant to their background, their body may maintain a state of high alert over an unhealthy length of time with irregular levels of cortisol (the body's fight-or-flight hormone), which raises the student's risk of developing clinical depression (McGee and Stovall, 2015; Brody et al. 2016; Kundu, 2019). The lack of representation on predominantly white campuses can also contribute to racial minority students' discouragement (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014).

The negative consequences that external influences, like racial stereotypes, have on the academic outcomes of minority students compounded with the first-generation college student experience demonstrate an urgency for research that brings light to the unmet needs of racial minority first-generation college students. Additional urgency is then placed upon the need for support and resources appropriate for the distinct backgrounds of minority students. These are all reasons why data analyses used in the

current study distinguish minority first-generation student experiences from overall

minority first-generation experiences. These results are shared in a later chapter.

Data Analysis & Results

Fisher's Exact Test for Count data in RStudio was applied to figures in Table 1 to

identify the relationship between the race/ethnicities of first-generation college students

and generational college students. This test found $p = 1.409e-10$ or $p = < .001$ which

implies that race/ethnicity has a highly significant relationship to whether a college

student is first-generation or not.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

		Are you a first generation student?		
		Yes	No	Total
What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0	1
	Asian	4	2	6
	Black or African American	2	13	15
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0	1
	White	23	65	88
	Hispanic or Latino	26	13	39
	Other	3	5	8
Total		60	98	158

Table 1: A cross-tabulation conducted in SPSS with race/ethnicity as columns and college student status as rows

The figures in Table 2 can be used in RStudio to measure the relationship between

first-generation college student status, race/ethnicity, and perceived quality of life.

Because the test conducted on Table 1 established that there is a significant relationship between race/ethnicity and student status, the survey data was split into two tables (Table 2 and Table 3) by student status to allow relationships between race/ethnicity and perceived quality of life to be conducted for each student group. When survey data on first-generation students' race/ethnicities and perceived quality of life was entered into RStudio, a Fisher's test was used to find that $p = .826$ or $p > .10$ meaning that there is no significant difference in perceived quality of life by race/ethnicity for first-generation college students.

How would you rate the quality of life you have as a first gen student? * What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice Crosstabulation

Count

		What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice							
		American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	White	Hispanic or Latino	Other	Total
How would you rate the quality of life you have as a first gen student?	Poor	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	5
	Fair	0	1	0	0	3	2	1	7
	Moderate	0	2	2	1	4	8	1	18
	Good	0	1	0	0	10	9	1	21
	Excellent	1	0	0	0	4	4	0	9
Total		1	4	2	1	23	26	3	60

Table 2: A cross-tabulation from SPSS with race/ethnicity as columns and first-generation students ranking their quality of life as rows

A Fisher's test was used on survey data in Table 3 to measure the relationship between race/ethnicity and perceived quality of life. This test found that $p = .268$ or $p > .10$ which implies there is not a significant relationship between generational students' race and perceived quality of life.

How would you rate the quality of life you have as a college student * What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice Crosstabulation

Count

		What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice					
		Asian	Black or African American	White	Hispanic or Latino	Other	Total
How would you rate the quality of life you have as a college student	Poor	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Fair	0	4	7	2	0	13
	Moderate	1	2	8	0	1	12
	Good	0	5	32	10	2	49
	Excellent	1	2	17	1	2	23
Total		2	13	65	13	5	98

Table 3: A cross-tabulation with race/ethnicity as columns and generational students ranking their quality of life as rows

In Tables 2 and 3, there is a more positive trend seen in the in self-ratings and majority answers across the board for generational students while Asian, Black or African American, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander first-generation students had lower quality of life self-ratings than White and Hispanic or Latino first-generation students. Fisher's test was applied to data of student status and perceived quality of life to determine the relationship between first-generation and generational students' quality of life. The result was $p = .005$ or $p < .01$ which means there is a highly significant relationship between student status and student quality of life. A follow-up Fisher test was used to determine the significance of a relationship, if any, between race and student quality of life without considering labels of student status (first-generation or generational). In this Fisher's test, $p = .437$ or $p > .10$ which means there is not a significant difference in quality of life by race/ethnicity demonstrated in the survey responses.

Implications & Discussion

I investigated the potential for inequalities within race/ethnicity between first-generation and generational students at Baylor University. I found that there is a highly

significant relationship between race/ethnicity and first-generation student status. Because there is an association between race/ethnicity and student status, this finding points to the lack of college access that these minority families had in past generations. Because college access previously excluded racial minorities through most of the 1950s-70s, many parents of first-generation college students today are individuals who were marginalized and unable to access college (Jackson & Holzman, 2020). The racial restrictions college access shaped income inequality seen today, so the possibility that this occurs in first-generation experiences today suggests a potential for continued income inequality. This also suggests a potential for future inequalities in economic and social capital for minority students if the progress in college access seen through increasing diversity in the first-generation student population does not alleviate these inequalities. The association between race/ethnicity and student status points back to previous research that revealed disproportionate college access in the past (Jackson & Holzman, 2020). In this historic example of systemic racism, systems excluded individuals based on their biology. In an equitable education system, no students would be at a disadvantage due to their biological traits.

Systemic issues result from racism inherent in policies of institutions, organizations, and even government. Institutions, organizations, and governments are examples of the social systems that would uphold racist policies or laws. In general, a system is a concept used to describe functional relationships that bind individuals into unity through a structured arrangement (Mondal, 2013). Schools of all education levels are systems as many individuals like teachers, staff, parents, and students work toward a common goal of education. It can be difficult to accept that there are racist policies within

organizations that have positive goals like education, but I feel that disparities for minority students will only worsen if we do not overcome feelings of discomfort to address and change racist policies.

An example of a racist practice in education systems is school funding. A 2015 study found that inequalities in school funding exist as minority majority student populations are severely underfunded (White, 2015). Because of underfunding at these schools, the quality of these students' education is reduced which provides precollege disadvantages that impact their college experiences. As this issue of underfunding is not common within predominantly white schools, this systemic trend of underfunding predominantly minority schools confirms that systemic racism is pervasive throughout a minority student's years of education.

<p style="text-align:center">********</p>

The office of Diversity and Inclusion was created at Baylor University by Brittney Wardlaw in 2018. In Wardlaw's experience leading this office, she observed "the staff members with little or no recourse are demoted and or terminated for their failure to conform to a white culture" (Shipp, 2020). Wardlaw resigned from this position after three years because of her bosses that continually opposed progress toward equity and diversity. One supervisor even went so far as invalidating the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, writing in a 2018 email "I prefer that we do not have the Equity Office number published. It gives an incorrect perception. Since it's not a full office…" (Shipp, 2020).

When Wardlaw began an investigation into a claim made by Jewel Bishop, a manager at Baylor's College of Nursing, that her white, female boss was engaging in discriminatory practices that impeded her job performance, her boss stopped the investigation (Shipp, 2020). Because there are policies that allow supervisors to prevent progress toward diversity, equity, and inclusion at Baylor, systemic racism affects minority students, faculty, and staff. As Wardlaw reflects on her experience, she asks:

"Why does this institution have every single person of leadership is white? Every single President's Council member, every single provost, every single dean. We had a huge celebration because we had a Black woman who is the chair of department now. Let's celebrate because a school that is 175 years old cannot manage to find a Black person competent enough to lead," (Shipp, 2020). More than fifty years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, diversity is still underrepresented within Baylor faculty and staff.

Experiences similar to Wardlaw's further impostor feelings of minority students, as well as minority faculty and staff, who may experience feeling unsafe because of the rhetoric on campus that defines diverse populations as *the other*. If Baylor is committed to creating an equitable campus environment, it must take reports of racism on campus seriously and increase representation of racial & ethnic minorities within staff. Until then, the students, faculty, and staff can see through the statements that make empty promises for change. Baylor must redefine the campus norm from one that prioritizes white, affluence to one that prioritizes positive campus experiences for *all* students, faculty, and staff.

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For racial/ethnic minority student respondents, significant relationships were also found between first-generation college students' race/ethnicity and quality of life, race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status within both student groups, and race/ethnicity and annual household income within both student groups. These results are important to address because the population of students from diverse backgrounds is continually increasing within higher education (Choy, 2001; Hodgkinson, 1985; Levine & Associates, 1989; Chronicle of Higher Education: Almanac Issue, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Rendon, Hope, & Associates, 1996). These findings that both minority first-generation college students and minority generational college students experience negative college experiences and financial instability may imply the influence of a systemic factor. The systemic force that disadvantages most minority students financially found in previous research is systemic racism which augmented college access and consequently created income inequality that now hinders academic outcomes for first-generation college students. This means that, as a system, institutions of higher learning must actively re-narrate *the norm* for their campuses through inclusive policy changes such as creating an action plan for recruiting more BIPOC faculty or implementing a formal procedure for investigating claims of racism that supervisors cannot interrupt. Inclusive changes on campus would provide disadvantaged minority students with relevant support in their journey to earn college degrees and overcome systemic racism that prolongs generational financial instability.

Additionally, because a student's race or ethnicity could potentially affect whether they are first-generation or generational, institutions of higher learning should work toward equity, representation, and inclusion to combat both the obstacles that cause first-generation students to leave college and the marginalization that minority students face within higher learning (Lara, 1992; Rendon, 1992; Weis, 1992; Terenzini et al., 1994; Rendon, Hope, & Associates, 1996; Terenzini et al., 1996; Ishitani, 2006; Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; McGee and Stovall, 2015; Brody et al. 2016; Pascarella et al., 2016; Gaydosh et al., 2017; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018; Kundu, 2019; Gándara & Li, 2020). I suggest that institutions of higher learning provide representation for minority students across campus, in every single department, office, and resource, so that *the norm* for diversity & inclusion is present in every area of campus. This action would prove each institution's commitment to providing relevant support to minority students. The increased representation across campus would also validate minority students and hopefully allow them to make more personal connections to their college campuses. Increased representation that brings tangible, meaningful relationships across campus for minority students in all disciplines can also assist minority first-generation students in overcoming impostor feelings. If these students can make personal connections on campus, they will be able to find personal encouragement to maintain academic momentum and not drop out of college. This will also improve the overall mental health of minority students because the lack of representation in campus support places them at a higher risk of developing depression. These actions together can bring postsecondary institutions one step closer to equity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Income Inequality

Literature Review

An external factor that restricts academic outcomes for first-generation college

students is income inequality. The income inequality hypothesis suggests that rising

income inequality influences the distribution of life chances such as attending college

(Jackson & Holzman, 2020). This hypothesis ultimately implies that college is not

accessible for everyone because of income inequality. Over the past century, an

observable association between income inequality and college inequality has been

recorded (Jackson & Holzman, 2020). This association is important as it establishes

income inequality's crucial effect on the distribution of a variety of social and economic

outcomes as college education provides individuals access to higher-paying jobs. A direct

correlation between income inequality and college inequality is observable over time

beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, when income inequality and college inequality were

both low. In the 1980s, when income inequality reached peak levels, college inequality

also reached peak levels (Jackson & Holzman, 2020). The relationship between these

inequalities is increasingly important as the expectation for college degrees becomes

normalized in the workforce. If you do not have a college degree, your job options are

significantly limited in America. As social mobility is associated with college education,

lower family income is associated with lower chances of college completion (Goldrick-

Rab et al., 2016). The chances a student attends college and reaches degree completion

are drastically reduced by direct and indirect effects of lower household income

(Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016). This is significant to first-generation college student success as most first-generation college students come from low socio-economic backgrounds (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). As a result, we see cyclical poverty through generations of low-income Americans.

When wealthy, white males secured a large portion of the few spots in American colleges in the 1940s-60s, their chances for college completion were seven times higher than poor, white individuals, and racial/ethnic minorities because of their resources (Jackson & Holzman, 2020). Wealthy college students from the 1940s-60s excluded women and minority students because it was *the norm* for white males to attend college in this period. As the wealthy in the twentieth century accessed higher education much easier than the poor, it makes sense why now, decades later, we see mostly low incomes among first-generation college students and higher incomes for generational college students. As the wealthy families in the 1940s-60s obtained many of the limited college slots, because of their wealth, they also obtained more opportunities for social and economic advancement in comparison to the poor families that struggled to access a college education. We now see income inequality shape the unequal life qualities between first-generation college students and generational college students because most generational college students have families of higher incomes from their college education securing their access to higher paying jobs while many first-generation college students have lower household incomes with parents who lack college education and have limited job opportunities. As an overall result, America is "experiencing levels of collegiate inequality not seen for generations" (Jackson & Holzman, 2020).

Although the college enrollment rate of 20-21-year-olds has increased 45% from the 1940's to the 2000's, dropout rates have also increased in correlation with higher income inequality (Jackson & Holzman, 2020). The American education system reproduces income inequalities that perpetuate stratification as lower income students struggle to complete degrees and pay bills while higher income students, with financial security, focus solely on their education (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016).

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> "Growing up, my parents always told me how important it was for me to go to college. After my dad passed away when I was in high school and we really started to financially struggle, my mom stressed this even more. She knew that my sister and I having college degrees would help us to be more financially stable later in life. However, when I got to Baylor, I realized that idea was a lot more complex. Towards the end of my first semester, we realized that I would have to start taking out loans. I tried to work both on-campus and off-campus but between my mental health and trying to keep up with class, I ended up having to take out even more loans so I could afford things like rent and groceries. After taking out loans for undergrad and soon graduate school, I will be over $40k in student debt, and I know I'm going to paying off loans for a really long time. I still see education as a gateway to a better life, but I don't think poorer students should be forced to choose between being comfortable now or comfortable later."
>
> <div align="right">- Anonymous</div>

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These studies and student experiences reveal that the price of college, metaphorically and literally, is not the same for all students, especially low-income first-generation students (Kane 1994; Heller 1997, 1999; Ellwood and Kane 2000; Linsenmeier, Rosen, and Rouse 2006; Dowd 2008; Dynarski 2008; Angrist, Lang, and Oreopoulos 2009; Angrist, Oreopoulos, and Williams 2010; Chen and DesJardins 2010;

Crockett, Heffron, and Schneider 2011; Castleman and Long 2013; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016). As need-based financial aid granted yearly has surpassed $40 billion, poor families still spend up to 75% of their annual household income to afford college for their children (Goldrick-Rab 2013; Goldrick-Rab and Kendall 2014; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016). To better support first-generation college students who are affected by income inequality, increased financial capital on a continuous basis can provide financial security for students to achieve academic momentum that facilitates degree completion (DesJardins and Toutkoushian 2005; Deil-Amen and DeLuca 2010; Attewell et al. 2012; Harris and Goldrick-Rab 2012). However, studies show that financial aid cannot ameliorate income inequality as students' out of pocket costs (the difference between their calculated financial need and the financial aid they receive) continue to be unmanageable and cause dropout rates to increase alongside the increase of income inequality in higher education (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016). Because of the increasing importance in addressing income inequality's effects on college outcomes, this study examines ways in which income inequality has shaped the differences in life qualities between first-generation and generational college students at Baylor University. The survey questions that assess income inequality's impact on student experiences record student loan debt, experiences with food insecurity, financial security, and work experiences (Appendix A).

Data Analysis & Results

It is important to note that in survey responses, majority first-generation student respondents identify as "Lower Middle Class," while majority generational student respondents identify as "Upper Middle Class." A Fisher's test was conducted in RStudio

to determine the relationship between student status and what socioeconomic status

participants identify as found that $p = 1.125\text{e-}6$ or $p < .001$. This result demonstrates a

highly significant relationship between whether a student is first-generation or not and

what socioeconomic status they identify as. A second Fisher's test was applied to data in

Table 4 to estimate the relationship between race/ethnicity and the socioeconomic status a

participant identifies as resulting in $p = 1.066\text{e-}5$ or $p < .001$. This result means that there

is a highly significant relationship between race/ethnicity and the socioeconomic status

that each participant identifies as.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * Do you identify as socioeconomically * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			Below Poverty line	Lower middle Class	Upper Middle Class	Higher class	Total
Yes	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	1	1
		Asian	0	3	1	0	4
		Black or African American	0	1	1	0	2
		Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0	0	0	1
		White	4	12	6	1	23
		Hispanic or Latino	2	16	8	0	26
		Other	2	1	0	0	3
	Total		9	33	16	2	60
No	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	Asian	0	1	1	0	2
		Black or African American	1	4	8	0	13
		White	1	14	44	6	65
		Hispanic or Latino	0	3	10	0	13
		Other	0	4	0	1	5
	Total		2	26	63	7	98

Table 4: A cross-tabulation of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status identifies with, and student status.

There is an interesting revelation between Table 4 and Table 5 in that survey

participants identify as a socioeconomic status different from their income. Table 5

specifically has a trend that first-generation students are almost proportionate across

Below Poverty Line, Lower Middle Class, Upper Middle Class annual household

incomes while generational students increase gradually across the spectrum of Below

Poverty Line to where more than 1/3 of the respondents are in the Higher-Class income

bracket. Fisher's test was applied to the data in Table 5 to find $p = 4.256e-7$ or $p < .001$

which implies that the relationship between income and student status is highly

significant. Whether or not a student is first-generation is directly related to their income.

Another Fisher's test was applied to the data in Table 5 to determine the relationship

between income and race/ethnicity as $p = .006$ or $.10 > p > .05$ which means the

relationship between a students' race/ethnicity and their income is only marginally

significant.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * What is your home's annual income? * Are you a firs generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

			What is your home's annual income?					
			Less than $25,750	Between $25,750 and $42,500	Between $42,500 and $89,500	Between $89,500 and $135,600	Above $135,600	Total
Are you a first generation student?								
Yes	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	1	1
		Asian	1	0	3	0	0	4
		Black or African American	1	0	0	1	0	2
		Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0	0	0	0	1
		White	5	3	5	8	2	23
		Hispanic or Latino	5	7	7	5	2	26
		Other	2	1	0	0	0	3
	Total		15	11	15	14	5	60
No	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	Asian	0	0	1	0	1	2
		Black or African American	1	2	3	4	3	13
		White	1	5	9	23	27	65
		Hispanic or Latino	0	3	3	2	5	13
		Other	0	0	4	0	1	5
	Total		2	10	20	29	37	98

Table 5: A cross-tabulation of race/ethnicity, home's annual income, and student status

Relationship to Food Insecurity

A Fisher's test was used to determine the relationship between Race/Ethnicity and

experiences with food insecurity for first-generation college students via Table 6 found

that $p = .208$ or $p > .10$ which indicates that there is not a significant relationship between race and food insecurity for first-generation college students. To test, data in Table 6 from columns "once or twice," "sometimes," and "often," were combined as one column of data that can be described as "first-generation respondents that have experienced food insecurity at least once," with the responses per race/ethnicity becoming: zero for American or Alaska Native, four for Asian, zero for Black or African American, one for Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 15 for white, 15 for Hispanic or Latino, 2 for other which makes the total for this column equal to 37.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * Have you ever been unsure of where your next meal was coming from? Crosstabulation

Count

		Have you ever been unsure of where your next meal was coming from?				
		Once or twice	Sometimes	Often	Never	Total
What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	1	1
	Asian	2	1	1	0	4
	Black or African American	0	0	0	2	2
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	1	0	0	1
	White	8	5	2	8	23
	Hispanic or Latino	7	5	3	11	26
	Other	0	2	0	1	3
Total		17	14	6	23	60

Table 6: A cross-tabulation of race/ethnicity and first-generation college student respondents' experiences with food insecurity.

An additional Fisher's test was used to determine the relationship between Race/Ethnicity and experiences with food insecurity for generational college students via Table 7 found that $p = .763$ or $p > .10$ which indicates that there is not a significant relationship between race and food insecurity for generational college students. To test, data in Table 7 from columns "once or twice," "sometimes," and "often," were combined

as one column of data that can be described as "generational respondents that have experienced food insecurity at least once," with the responses per race/ethnicity reading: zero for American or Alaska Native, one for Asian, five for Black or African American, zero for Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 18 for white, 4 for Hispanic or Latino, 2 for other which makes the total for this column equal to 30.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * Have you ever been unsure of where your next meal was coming from? Crosstabulation

Count

| | | Have you ever been unsure of where your next meal was coming from? | | | | |
		Once or twice	Sometimes	Often	Never	Total
What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	Asian	1	0	0	1	2
	Black or African American	2	2	1	8	13
	White	11	7	0	47	65
	Hispanic or Latino	1	3	0	9	13
	Other	1	1	0	3	5
Total		16	13	1	68	98

Table 7: A cross-tabulation of race/ethnicity for generational student respondents' experiences with food insecurity

The tables reveal that the totals of first-generation students who have experienced food insecurity is 37 and the number who have not is 23 out of the 60 first-generation student participants. The number of generational college students who have experienced food insecurity is 30 and the number who have not is 68 out of the 68 generational student participants. A 2-sample test for equality of proportions with continuity correction used in R to compare the presence of food insecurity in both student populations using these totals [prop.test(x = c(37, 30), n = c(60, 98))] found that $p =$ .0002 or $p = < .001$ which implies that there is a highly significant relationship between whether a student is first-generation or not and their experiences with food insecurity.

Implications & Discussion

For the issue of income inequality, survey data demonstrated notable relationships between student status and socioeconomic status, annual household income, food insecurity, and physical well-being. Since food insecurity and physical well-being can demonstrate an individual's level of financial security, a possible implication of the associations between these variables is that income inequality actively affects the lives of first-generation college students at Baylor. The survey results demonstrates that opposite ends of the financial security spectrum exist on our campus. Most first-generation respondents support themselves with jobs that negatively impact their academics and long-term life goals while experiencing food insecurity and incurring student loan debt. Most generational students have jobs that do not impact their academics negatively because parental financial support prevents financial stress associated with experiences of food insecurity and student loan debt. It is also possible that majority generational college student respondents work less hours than first-generation college student respondents since most reported that their jobs do not impact their academics negatively. The absence of parental financial support for first-generation college students is a direct result of their parents not having a college degree to access higher paying jobs. As college was not accessible for all individuals in its origin, high skilled jobs are not accessible for all and as a direct consequence there are families who cannot access the incomes necessary to achieve and maintain financial stability. If education was accessible for all in its origin, first-generation parents would have been able to earn college degrees, earn a job with a stable income, and provide financial security to their children who are now in college,

struggling as first-generation college students. However, this is not the reality for many

first-generation students' families. Because the limited access that parents had to college

which inhibits student financial stability is out of the students' control, it should not

constrain their academic success.

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       As a parent of a first-generation college student, my dad sacrificed more than most parents would to afford a positive college experience for me. Sacrifices he made include giving me the car my mom gave our family even though his was breaking down, paying my electric bill before his because my paycheck did not cover it, spending his food stamps on my groceries instead of his, spending a weekend in Waco to do my laundry because school and work put me behind on chores, and even taking care of my two dogs when I get the opportunity to present my research at conferences. Despite my father's remarkable commitment to supporting me financially through college, we were not always able to make ends meet and that affected my academic performance. This is something that many generational students never even have to worry about because of the financial security that comes from high-skilled, high-paying jobs that their parents can access with college degrees. My father spent his late teen years in a foster home and was unable to access college as easily as other parents may have been able to. This directly impacts my academic outcomes, but my family's income should not limit my ability to succeed in a classroom this way. Positive, low-stress experiences in college should not be a luxury reserved for the wealthy.

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Research has found that income inequality can either hinder or improve one's

chances of attending college and graduating, so institutions of higher learning should

address the spectrum of income inequality within their campus community to better

design resources for disadvantaged and marginalized students (Blackwell & Pinder,

2014; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016; Jackson & Holzman, 2020). Research also emphasizes

that the cost of college, including the sacrifices each student and their family makes to

afford college, is not the same for every family through the increasing levels of income inequality within America which disproportionately disadvantages first-generation college students (Kane 1994; Heller 1997, 1999; Ellwood and Kane 2000; Linsenmeier, Rosen, and Rouse 2006; Dowd 2008; Dynarski 2008; Angrist, Lang, and Oreopoulos 2009; Angrist, Oreopoulos, and Williams 2010; Chen and DesJardins 2010; Crockett, Heffron, and Schneider 2011; Castleman and Long 2013; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016). I have observed a difference in first-generation and generational student experiences at Baylor based on costs of college and survey results are a potential indicator of my observations, so it is important that Baylor considers implementing solutions for income inequality on campus. As institutions plan for improved resources that target such inequalities, we must also remember that academic financial aid is not the solution as studies have found that does not entirely help because low-income families still spend on average 75% of their annual household income to afford costs associated with college (Goldrick-Rab 2013; Goldrick-Rab and Kendall 2014; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016). While out-of-pocket costs that are not covered by financial aid packages influence growing college dropout rates, first-generation college students need increased financial capital consistently to maintain academic success that facilitates degree completion (DesJardins and Toutkoushian 2005; Deil-Amen and DeLuca 2010; Attewell et al. 2012; Harris and Goldrick-Rab 2012; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016). One potential solution could be housing & utilities stipends for low-income first-generation college students so that their families are not using a large portion of their household income to pay for family housing and student housing. An additional potential solution would be stipends or scholarships that first-generation college students can apply toward student organization membership dues;

depending on funding available, this may not include sororities and fraternities. I believe

that assisting first-generation students with housing costs and social expenses can

simultaneously reduce the number of hours that first-generation college students need to

work to afford their monthly expenses and increase first-generation student campus

involvement. I know that stipends to cover costs associated with housing and campus

involvement would have drastically improved my college experience at Baylor

University. These resources can improve the experiences of first-generation students

across Baylor's campus.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity

Literature Review

In addition to first-generation students of a racial & ethnic minority or low socioeconomic status, first-generation students who are not heterosexual have negative college experiences that worsen the effects of being a first-generation college student. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual individuals have defined the campus climates at their respective universities as hostile for decades (Rankin, 2003; Rankin & Reason, 2008). At Baylor University, the Baptist emphasis throughout the campus community distinguishes students of LGBTQIA+ sexual orientations as sinful, immoral, godless individuals. The Sexual Identity Forum (SIF) was created by LGBTQIA+ Baylor students over ten years ago to create a positive, safe environment for students to discuss their sexual identity. Today, this organization is called Gamma Alpha Upsilon or GAY. Baylor students have tried to charter this community as a campus organization for over ten years. While there are students in this organization who feel that if they knew they would discover they were LGBTQIA+ in college they would not have come to Baylor, there are also students in this organization who like Baylor for the quality of education. For students with negative experiences, the option to transfer is not always achievable. Students who realize their sexual identity in college may often be stuck at an institution that actively rejects them – like a private Baptist institution in the South. Despite this, there are members of this organization who value Baylor and wish to feel valued by the campus community. These experiences

invalidate students and can be the most detrimental to first-generation college students

who come to college with pre-developed impostor feelings.

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Throughout my time at Baylor, I came to learn that my sexual orientation is demi-sexuality which contributed to my feelings of isolation from the majority campus culture. I feel as though I am making an admission of guilt when I share that this is my sexual orientation because of the conservative, Baptist campus culture. As a result, I did not seek mentorship or guidance in the process of discovering my sexual identity; I learned this on my own through conversations with two close friends. This is partly because when I began this journey of self-discovery, I was told by another Baylor student that the Baylor University Counseling Center refers students struggling with sexual orientation to off-campus counselors and I was afraid to experience rejection from the counseling center. The realization of my sexual orientation made me feel even more like *the other* on my college campus, but when I chose this campus at only eighteen, I could not have expected this development in my identity. My experience is not isolated, many LGBTQIA+ first-generation students have this experience at many college campuses that do not actively support and accept LGBTQIA+ students.

I recently found that the Baylor University Counseling Center facilitates a group where students can discuss their experiences navigating their sexual & gender identities (Baylor University Counseling Center). Learning of this counseling group revealed to me that there is disconnect between LGBTQIA+ students and the resources available to them on campus. This demonstrates that providing resources is not always enough. Including these resources on a web page but not making them widely known through avenues like syllabus statements leaves it up to students to discover these resources. If a student feels disconnected, they may not seek resources at all. However, this is a great resource offered by the Baylor University Counseling Center that Baylor should promote among students. Other universities should also consider providing a counseling service like this.

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Instead of marginalizing students with unique sexual orientations, campuses

should take responsibility for student experiences, hold themselves accountable, and meet

these students with appropriate support so that these students do not drop out of college.

Institutions of higher learning should validate, recognize, and include students regardless

of campus values. Students develop their identities in their time at college, and

institutions should not exclude students who develop identities that are not *the norm*.

Even in cases where a university boasts LGBT friendly practices, the campus climate was

still described as hostile because the members of the campus community did not actively

practice acceptance and inclusion (Rankin et al., 2010).

While LGBTQIA+ campus climate studies that have been published are limited,

only few consider the varied experiences of LGBTQIA+ students of color and first-

generation LGBTQIA+ students (Sanlo, 2005; Rodriguez, 2014). Students who develop

insecurity and depression through marginalization on their college campus, like

LGBTQIA+ students, are less likely to find a sense of belonging and are less likely to

complete their degree (Schlossberg, 1989; Astin, 1984; Evans et al., 2010).

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"Starting Baylor, I knew there would be a largely conservative community. I was prepared for this having come from a conservative town. What I was not prepared for was how much I would have to validate LGBTQ+ identities. Back home we were taught that even though homosexuality is a sin, it is one that could be forgiven. Even though I don't agree with that statement, I feel that it comes out of a place of misguidedness rather than hate. During my freshman year, I gained the nickname among my social group as the "Lorax of the Oppressed" because I was always calling friends out on homophobic and transphobic rhetoric. While this started out as something I could brush off, I started to realize their way of justifying their "humor". What still disturbs me to this day is that when I tried to tell my friend's boyfriend that transgender people are valid in their identity. He got on his hands and knees, started barking like a dog and said, "So I identify as a dog now, and you have to treat me as such", while the rest of my friends laughed along. This all happened in the lobby of Earle Hall. And this is just one instance out of many I've experienced and heard. I've had acquaintances and former friends, not knowing I'm bisexual, drop f-slurs, "joke" about how "gays don't deserve rights" and minimize my feelings as me being "too sensitive" when I tell them I'm uncomfortable. Even though institutions like Baylor have not

encouraged these kinds of behavior, students like the ones I used to associate with are more than comfortable acting like this because they haven't been told it's wrong and they don't think they'll face any consequences. Organizations like GAY can help to uplift LGBTQIA+ students, but there is definitely an issue when it comes to enforcing tolerance among the student population. Not being understood by my friends that were not first-gen, knowing that I had another battle to fight in advocating for me and other queer students, made me feel disconnected from the prevalent mentality on campus."

- Anonymous
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LGBTQIA+ students have described their experiences finding a community of queer and trans students at their college campuses as a "burden" placed on the students themselves because of limited institutional support (Pitcher & Simmons, 2020, p. 487). As college campuses work to promote mental health, degree completion, and persistence, it is important that students are not left to find like-minded communities on their own. The practice of leaving LGBTQIA+ students to build their own communities is mostly discouraging and can drastically affect first-generation college students who struggle disproportionately to connect with college environments (Maietta, 2016; McCabe, 2016). The survey for the current study addresses LGBTQIA+ experiences through collecting each respondent's sexual orientation and allowing students to share their campus experiences in an open-ended question (Appendix A). Many of these open-ended responses demanded more support for LGBTQIA+ students on the Baylor campus.

Data Analysis & Results

Relationship to Gender

Gender can be a factor that affects experiences in higher education because of phenomena like gender-based discrimination and gendered experiences across society. Since a smaller portion of first-generation student respondents have a nonbinary gender identity (i.e., agender, bigender, gender fluid, gender queer, intersex, gender variant, third gender, transgender, and two-spirit) than generational student respondents, it was interesting to assess whether gender had a significant relationship with student status. A 2-sample test for equality of proportions with continuity correction was conducted in RStudio to compare the gender identities of first-generation college students to generational college students. This Chi-Square test of Independence found, $X^2(1, N = 57,95) = 0.187$, $p = .6656$, meaning that there is no significant difference in the gender identities of first-generation and generational college students.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * What gender do you identify as? – Selected Choice * Are you a fir generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			Male	Female	Transgender male	Transgender female	Gender fluid	Questioning/ Unsure	Other	Total
Yes	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0				1	0	0	1
		Asian	0	4				0	0	0	4
		Black or African American	0	2				0	0	0	2
		Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0				0	0	0	1
		White	1	22				0	0	0	23
		Hispanic or Latino	7	18				0	1	0	26
		Other	0	2				0	0	1	3
	Total		9	48				1	1	1	60
No	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	Asian	0	2	0	0			0	2
		Black or African American	1	11	1	0			0	13
		White	10	53	0	1			1	65
		Hispanic or Latino	8	5	0	0			0	13
		Other	0	5	0	0			0	5
	Total		19	76	1	1			1	98

Table 8: A cross-tabulation between race/ethnicity, gender, and student status

Relationship to Sexuality

Because a greater portion of first-generation student respondents (14/60) identify as a sexual orientation that is not Straight/Heterosexual than generational student respondents (22/98) the relationship between student status and sexuality was estimated. Fisher's test was applied to the survey data in Table 9 to determine the nature of the relationship between a students' sexuality and their status. The test resulted in $p = .081$ or $.10 > p > .05$ which reveals a marginally significant relationship between student sexuality and student status. A second Fisher's test was applied to data of sexual orientation and race/ethnicity in Table 7 with a result of $p = 1$. This result indicates that there is no relationship between sexual orientation and race/ethnicity within the survey responses.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * What is your sexual identification? – Selected Choice Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			Straight/Heterosexual	Gay	Lesbian	Bisexual	Prefer to Self Describe	Prefer not to say	Total
Yes	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
		Asian	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
		Black or African American	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
		Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
		White	18	0	1	3	1	0	23
		Hispanic or Latino	22	3	0	1	0	0	26
		Other	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
	Total		46	3	1	6	2	2	60
No	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	Asian	2		0	0	0		2
		Black or African American	7		1	4	1		13
		White	53		4	6	2		65
		Hispanic or Latino	11		0	2	0		13
		Other	3		0	2	0		5
	Total		76		5	14	3		98

Table 9: A cross-tabulation of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and student status

Implications & Discussion

Survey results demonstrated a significant relationship between student status and sexual orientation. A possible implication of the associations between these variables is first-generation college students experiencing multiple marginalities at Baylor. For an open-ended survey question, most respondents of both student groups expressed frustration toward Baylor's treatment of LGBTQIA+ students. I believe this trend in survey responses may have been caused by growing frustration within students toward administrative resistance to chartering Gamma Alpha Upsilon, the unofficial LGBTQIA+ student organization. The university has used religious, conservative, and traditional rhetoric that centers Baptist values as *the norm* for campus organizations, but there is a campus organization that does not represent the Baptist faith and promotes acceptance of diverse faith cultures called Better Together BU. Baylor has even created an Interfaith Reading Room in Poage Library as a safe space for students of all religions to feel safe while they reflect upon their valued religious texts or gather for Better Together BU meetings (*Resources for Religiously Diverse Students*). Because of the existence of non-Baptist student organizations, I believe that administrative resistance to chartering GAY is discriminatory in nature. The religious rhetoric used to define LGBTQIA+ students as *the other* on campus only further marginalizes, invalidates, and discourages these students in their college experience.

The survey results relevant to the population of first-generation LGBTQIA+ students are important because both first-generation college students and LGBTQIA+

college students are less likely to complete their degrees as a result of social isolation and marginalization (Schlossberg, 1989; Astin, 1984; Evans, et al., 2010; Maietta 2016; McCabe 2016; Pitcher & Simmons, 2020). While institutions of higher learning promote equity, the experiences of *all* students should be considered and improved so that dropout rates of marginalized student populations do not continue to increase. This is an area of first-generation student experiences that Baylor University can improve. I have heard many LGBTQIA+ students and allies express regret toward attending Baylor. These students feel that if they had known they were LGBTQIA+ and that religion would be used to validate the discrimination they face on campus, they would have been more successful academically at another college. For equity to exist within higher learning, the campus community should be actively inclusive of all students regardless of sexual orientation, religion, race/ethnicity, etc. Universities can be inclusive of students without invalidating their core beliefs, so there is no excuse for discrimination in the name of religion or any other system of values. It is beyond overdue that Baylor charters GAY and provides this student organization with a safe, private space on campus to meet. This would be a step toward redefining *the norm* for Baylor's campus as it currently marginalizes LGBTQIA+ students.

CHAPTER SIX

Mental Health

Literature Review

The three previous study components of minority status, income inequality,

sexual orientation & gender identity along with Impostor Syndrome all worsen student

mental health whether they are independent of one another or intersecting. Many of these

factors intersect at the first-generation college student's experience, so support for first-

generation college students must acknowledge the unmet mental health needs of this

student population. Mental health is defined as one's "emotional, psychological and

social well-being," (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Mental

health is a significant issue for college students, but especially first-generation students as

they are majority underrepresented, low-income, racial minorities (Ishitani, 2006;

Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). The mental health of a college student is most often assessed

through the students' adaptability to campus norms after leaving the home (Hartley,

2011; Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Kundu, 2019). However, adaptation in college has

developed into a trickier challenge as the college experience grows increasingly

complicated through progression in societal notions of coursework, health, social

networking, dating, employment, and after college plans (Hammer et al., 1998; Byrd and

McKinney, 2012; Fried and Irwin 2016). As a result, mental health for college students

has become a complex issue. The seriousness of mental health for college students is

illustrated in the strong relationship that studies found between the amount of stress

students experience in college, long-term development of anxiety and depression during

college, and adverse immune system responses (Brody et al., 2016; Fried and Irwin, 2016).

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Throughout my time at Baylor, my mental health has been quite a roller coaster ride. The first year, I was prescribed antidepressants which negatively impacted my emotional regulation and academic performance. The second year, I went through a Title IX investigation which augmented the negative effects of the new anti-depressants I was prescribed. The summer after my second year, I went through my first break up, attempted suicide multiple times, and discontinued the use of anti-depressants all while completing my first research project with the McNair Program. I struggled this summer in particular because I felt confused and hopeless about the college experience that I had worked so hard in high school to earn. I also felt a great amount of guilt related to the financial burden that my college education placed on my father. The third year of my college experience came with counseling at the Baylor Counseling Center and psychiatry appointments. I could only afford two appointments with the psychiatrist, but they were great for my mental health. The psychiatrist validated my experiences and explained why my thought processes often led to catastrophizing through impostor feelings. In the fourth year of my college experience, I have seen mental and emotional stability that I wish I experienced in all four years. My academics have noticeably improved, and I have felt less disconnected from campus because I now have meaningful relationships with several peers and faculty members. This has been a tumultuous journey, and I am grateful for the learning experiences I gained, but it was not until my second year in the McNair Program that I had community that uplifted me and validated my experiences. I feel that if I had been met with a like-minded community in my first year on campus, I may not have suffered such poor mental health from feeling like *the other* across campus.

I was criticized by peers, professors, department chairs, and even the office of accessibility staff members because of the terrible state that my mental health reached, and I had to make sense of these experiences mostly on my own. When I look back on the email exchanges where I faced criticism for being defensive, I can see that my defensive tone resulted from impostor feelings that made me fear my education would be revoked at any second. Because I felt like I did not belong at Baylor, I feared that these adults I trusted would also realize I did not belong at Baylor. This fear was irrational, but due to my high-stress levels I was unable to distinguish these feelings as impostor feelings and not reality. My father struggled to rationalize these experiences when I came to him support because he also did not understand mental health issues like impostor feelings that contributed to isolating experiences for first-generation college students.

Once I was educated on the mental health obstacles common in first-generation college students as a junior, I was able to understand my experiences and take better care of myself.

While first-generation student families and parents cannot understand the student's college experiences and cannot always afford professional services, these students seek support from trusted faculty members and like-minded communities who can help them make sense of their college experience. First-generation students' mental health struggles can sometimes be misunderstood, minimized, and dismissed by faculty members and peers which enhances imposter feelings and feelings of isolation. When Impostor Syndrome exacerbates mental health issues over multiple years, students can suffer hopelessness that results in falling behind on schoolwork, dropping out of college, or even dying by suicide. The National Network of Depression Centers found that research on first-generation student suicide is sparse which even further demonstrates that critical mental health issues in this disadvantaged population remain unaddressed (Iarovici, 2015).

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First-generation college students are more susceptible to feelings of isolation. First-generation college students frequently feel isolated from key networks such as other students in their major or, most importantly, networks that provide crucial resources like career opportunities and networking experience (Maietta, 2016; McCabe, 2016). This isolation from significant networks can be present for the entirety of their college experience. First-generation college students can also experience this isolation as a result of difficulty integrating socially and/or academically on a college campus while also lacking meaningful relationships with peers and/or faculty. Examples of these relationships are friendships among classmates or mentorship from a faculty member. The absence of these connections ultimately reduces any sense of belonging within the student (Raley, 2007; DeWitz et al., 2009). This phenomenon is explained by research that shows students with financial constraints and financial stress, like first-generation college students, often hold multiple responsibilities like jobs at the expense of their best

interests which may lead to dropping out of school to manage financial stress (Rumberger, 2011). As the student grows inattentive toward school and no longer cultivates their genuine interests in class, they can develop an absence of purpose in college and into their career (Kundu, 2019). If the student does not drop out but continues to feel that they do not belong, their self-confidence can decline while making them increasingly vulnerable to physical/mental illnesses that result from burnout (Jacobs and Dodd, 2003).

When a college campus destigmatizes issues of mental health, they invest in the health of underrepresented students, like first-generation college students, for their entire lifespan (Kundu, 2019). Because the achievement gap shapes life outcomes after college, less-privileged, underrepresented students face poorer life outcomes that affect health and income expectancy (Boykin and Noguera, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ransaw and Majors, 2016; Reardon, 2013). However, improvements in mental health resources on college campuses for less-privileged students can allow for students to overcome unprosperous life outcomes. Research on the mental health of first-generation college students can demonstrate what mental health resources would best serve that student population. Increased visibility of mental health struggles specific to first-generation students can lead to campuses increasing the quality of life for this student population through improved mental health resources. Improved mental health resources should consider an expansion of resources offered to students in addition to representation of all students. Students should meet with mental health care providers that look like them. The representation of racially and ethnically diverse students within the counseling staff can

make minority students feel valued and understood in a way that encourages them to utilize mental health resources more.

Data & Results

Relationship to Mental and Physical Well-Being

A majority of first-generation responses rated their mental well-being as "Healthy, but less than average." A Fisher's test was applied to Table 10 to measure the relationship between a first-generation college student's race/ethnicity and their mental well-being to find that $p = .654$ or $p > .10$ which means there is not a significant relationship between first-generation respondents' mental well-being and race/ethnicity.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * How would you describe your mental well-being? * A you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			How would you describe your mental well-being?					
			Healthy, above average	Healthy, not above average	Healthy, but less than average	Unhealthy, but still functioning	Unhealthy, barely functioning	Total
Yes	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0	0	0	0	1
		Asian	1	0	1	2	0	4
		Black or African American	0	0	1	1	0	2
		Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0	1	0	0	1
		White	3	5	10	5	0	23
		Hispanic or Latino	5	6	10	5	0	26
		Other	0	1	1	0	1	3
Total			10	12	24	13	1	60

Table 10: A cross-tabulation of first-generation students' mental well-being with race/ethnicity

A Fisher's test was applied to Table 11 to measure the relationship between a first-generation college student's home's annual income and their mental well-being to find that $p = .555$ or $p > .10$ which indicates no significant relationship.

What is your home's annual income? * How would you describe your mental well-being? * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			Healthy, above average	Healthy, not above average	Healthy, but less than average	Unhealthy, but still functioning	Unhealthy, barely functioning	Total
Yes	What is your home's annual income?	Less than $25,750	2	2	8	3	0	15
		Between $25,750 and $42,500	0	1	6	3	1	11
		Between $42,500 and $89,500	4	2	6	3	0	15
		Between $89,500 and $135,600	3	5	3	3	0	14
		Above $135,600	1	2	1	1	0	5
	Total		10	12	24	13	1	60

Table 11: A cross-tabulation of first-generation students' mental well-being and home's annual income

A majority of first-generation respondents rated their physical well-being as "Healthy, not above average." A Fisher test was applied to data in Table 12 to determine if a first-generation college students' race/ethnicity impacts their physical well-being which found that $p = .194$ or $p > .10$ which means there is not a significant relationship.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * How would you describe your physical well-being? * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			Healthy, above average	Healthy, not above average	Healthy, but less than average	Unhealthy, but still functioning	Total
Yes	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0	0	0	1
		Asian	1	1	2	0	4
		Black or African American	0	1	1	0	2
		Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	1	0	0	1
		White	3	14	5	1	23
		Hispanic or Latino	4	11	5	6	26
		Other	0	0	1	2	3
	Total		9	28	14	9	60

Table 12: A cross-tabulation between first-generation students' race/ethnicity and physical well-being

A Fisher test applied to data in Table 13 measured the impact of a first-generation college students' home's annual income on their physical well-being. This test found that $p = .053$ or $.10 > p > .05$ which indicates that there is a marginally significant relationship between first-generation college students' household incomes and their physical well-being.

What is your home's annual income? * How would you describe your physical well-being? * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

			How would you describe your physical well-being?				
Are you a first generation student?			Healthy, above average	Healthy, not above average	Healthy, but less than average	Unhealthy, but still functioning	Total
Yes	What is your home's annual income?	Less than $25,750	2	6	4	3	15
		Between $25,750 and $42,500	0	3	4	4	11
		Between $42,500 and $89,500	2	9	3	1	15
		Between $89,500 and $135,600	1	9	3	1	14
		Above $135,600	4	1	0	0	5
	Total		9	28	14	9	60

Table 13: A cross-tabulation between first-generation students' home's annual income and physical well-being

A majority of generational students rated their mental well-being as "Healthy, but less than average." A Fisher's test was applied to Table 14 to measure the relationship between a generational college student's race/ethnicity and their mental well-being to find that $p = .779$ or $p > .10$ which means there is not a significant relationship between a generational student's race/ethnicity and their mental well-being based on the survey responses.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * How would you describe your mental well–being? * A
you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			How would you describe your mental well–being?					Total
			Healthy, above average	Healthy, not above average	Healthy, but less than average	Unhealthy, but still functioning	Unhealthy, barely functioning	
No	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	Asian	1	1	0	0	0	2
		Black or African American	0	4	6	3	0	13
		White	12	18	19	15	1	65
		Hispanic or Latino	2	3	6	2	0	13
		Other	0	2	1	2	0	5
	Total		15	28	32	22	1	98

Table 14: A cross-tabulation between generational students' race/ethnicity and mental well-being

A Fisher's test was applied to Table 15 to measure the relationship between a generational college student's home's annual income and their mental well-being to find that $p = .470$ or $p > .10$. This p-value means there is not a significant relationship between a generational student's home's annual income and their mental health based on the survey responses.

What is your home's annual income? * How would you describe your mental well–being? * Are you a first generatio
student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			How would you describe your mental well–being?					Total
			Healthy, above average	Healthy, not above average	Healthy, but less than average	Unhealthy, but still functioning	Unhealthy, barely functioning	
No	What is your home's annual income?	Less than $25,750	0	0	0	2	0	2
		Between $25,750 and $42,500	1	2	5	2	0	10
		Between $42,500 and $89,500	1	5	6	8	0	20
		Between $89,500 and $135,600	6	10	9	4	0	29
		Above $135,600	7	11	12	6	1	37
	Total		15	28	32	22	1	98

Table 15: A cross-tabulation between generational students' home's annual income and mental well-being

A majority of generational students rated their physical well-being as "Healthy, not above average." A Fisher's test was applied to Table 16 to measure the impact of

race/ethnicity on generational student physical well-being. The result of this test was $p =$ .392 or $p > .10$ which implies no significant relationship between race/ethnicity and physical well-being for generational respondents.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice * How would you describe your physical well-being? * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			How would you describe your physical well-being?				Total
			Healthy, above average	Healthy, not above average	Healthy, but less than average	Unhealthy, but not at risk	
No	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	Asian	0	2	0	0	2
		Black or African American	0	8	4	1	13
		White	15	24	19	7	65
		Hispanic or Latino	5	4	3	1	13
		Other	0	4	1	0	5
	Total		20	42	27	9	98

Table 16: A cross-tabulation between generational students' race/ethnicity and physical well-being

A Fisher's test was applied to Table 17 to measure the impact of home's annual income on generational student physical well-being. The result of this test was $p = .487$ or $p > .10$ which implies no significant relationship between a generational student's home's annual income and physical well-being for generational respondents.

What is your home's annual income? * How would you describe your physical well–being? * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			How would you describe your physical well–being?				Total
			Healthy, above average	Healthy, not above average	Healthy, but less than average	Unhealthy, but not at risk	
No	What is your home's annual income?	Less than $25,750	1	0	0	1	2
		Between $25,750 and $42,500	3	3	3	1	10
		Between $42,500 and $89,500	2	10	5	3	20
		Between $89,500 and $135,600	6	11	9	3	29
		Above $135,600	8	18	10	1	37
	Total		20	42	27	9	98

Table 17: A cross-tabulation between generational students' home's annual income and physical well-being

After analyzing the relationships between race/ethnicity and home's annual income on each student population's mental and physical well-being, Fisher tests can be applied to each student group's respective data to compare their lives. When first-generation self-rated mental well-being scores are compared to generational self-rated mental well-being scores, the result is $p = .723$ or $p > .10$ which indicates that there is not a significant difference in the mental well-being of first-generation and generational respondents. When first-generation self-rated physical well-being scores are compared to generational self-rated physical well-being scores, the result is $p = .568$ or $p > .10$ indicating no significant difference in physical well-being.

Satisfaction at Baylor University

In Table 18, a majority of first-generation respondents rated their satisfaction with Baylor as an 8/10 while majority generational respondents rated their satisfaction with Baylor as a 7/10. When a Fisher's Exact Test of Count Data is applied to compare first-

generation and generational student satisfaction at Baylor University, the result is $p =$ .833 or $p > .10$ which indicates no significant difference in levels of satisfaction among the two student populations. When Pearson Chi-Square Test is used to estimate the relationship between first-generation respondents' race/ethnicity and their satisfaction with Baylor University, the result is $p = .838$. When this same test is used to estimate the relationship between generational respondents' race/ethnicity and their satisfaction with Baylor University, the result is $p = .232$. While the relationship between race/ethnicity and campus satisfaction is not significant for first-generation and generational respondents, the p-value for generational students is closer to marginal significance than that of first-generation student responses.

What race/ethnicity do you identify with? - Selected Choice * Please rate your satisfaction with your life at Baylor on a scale of 1-10. 0 being not satisfied at all extremely unhappy. 10 being nothing about your life at Baylor could be better, you believe your life at Baylor is the best it can get and you are happy with that. Satisfaction with Life at Baylor * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			1.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	7.00	8.00	9.00	10.00	Total
Yes	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	American Indian or Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
		Asian	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	4
		Black or African American	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
		Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
		White	0	3	1	1	4	5	6	1	2	23
		Hispanic or Latino	1	0	2	3	4	3	4	5	4	26
		Other	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	3
	Total		1	3	4	5	10	11	13	7	6	60

Are you a first generation student?			1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	7.00	8.00	9.00	10.00	Total
No	What race/ethnicity do you identify with? – Selected Choice	Asian	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
		Black or African American	1	0	0	1	1	2	5	2	1	0	13
		White	0	2	1	5	3	4	14	15	8	13	65
		Hispanic or Latino	0	0	0	1	0	5	3	2	2	0	13
		Other	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	5
	Total		1	2	2	7	4	12	25	20	12	13	98

Table 18: Student satisfaction at Baylor University with cross-tabulations of race/ethnicity and student status

Implications & Discussion

Research on first-generation college student experiences found that minority status, income inequality, and sexual orientation & gender identity can individually negatively impact mental health. These marginalities have the potential characteristic of intersecting when first-generation students are positioned in multiple marginal positions at once to facilitate a college experience detrimental to one's mental health. While mental health and quality of mental well-being were not disparities revealed within the survey results, higher institutions should be aware that factors of marginalization and social isolation that result from minority experiences, income inequality, and sexuality can cause stress that impacts mental health in first-generation college students the most. Many first-generation college students face poor mental health when they enter college with no education on mental health issues and have limited access to health care. Because of intersecting marginalities that harm mental health in first-generation college students, academic institutions should create programs and resources that can improve mental health for this student population.

Mental health significantly impacts first-generation college students through impostor feelings as well as social isolation and higher stress levels (Raley 2007; DeWitz et al. 2009). Impostor feelings, social isolation, and high stress can discourage students from their academic goals and degree completion (Rumberger, 2011; Kundu, 2019). To facilitate successful academic outcomes for first-generation college students, mental health should always be a key component in conversations that propose solutions to reach

equitable institutions of higher education (Hammer et al. 1998; Ishitani, 2006; Byrd and McKinney 2012; Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Brody et al. 2016; Fried and Irwin 2016).

For Baylor to set an example of excellence in first-generation college students' support, the university must promote mental health awareness and wellbeing. Currently, the extent of mental health issues that affect first-generation college students in comparison to the few low-cost resources available on campus allows for many of these students to become disconnected from campus and lose academic momentum as a result of their poor mental health. The free counseling services offered at Baylor University are a mental health resource in theory, but, in practice, representation within counseling center staff of all races/ethnicities and sexualities is lacking, and this representation is important for *all* students to benefit from such services. When free, accessible student counseling services refer students off campus for mental health issues that are described as long-term obstacles, these students can feel excluded, invalidated, and unwelcomed.

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In my freshman year, I established a routine of going to the counseling center weekly. After spending Christmas break away from the counseling center, I decided it would be for the benefit of my mental health if I opened up to my counselor about a traumatic event. My counselor told me that because of the seriousness and long-term obstacle that this event in my past posed to progress in our counseling appointments, it would be best for me to be referred to counseling off campus. This was really upsetting for me because I did not have a car and was not sure if I would find affordable counseling in Waco. She told me that the counseling center offered ride services and that someone would call me the next week to connect me to off campus counseling. No one ever called me and when I called the counseling center about the ride services, they said those were not available to every student. I felt as though I was being rejected and betrayed by a resource that was created to support students struggling with mental health like me. It made me feel like I was not a true Baylor student. It made me feel like I

was going through too much, and that I was a burden to campus resources. This discouraged me from utilizing the counseling center as a resource for the remainder of my freshman year.

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Exclusionary practices within mental health resources do not promote mental health improvement, but rather, they further discourage the student and deepens the disconnect that they perceive between themselves and the campus community. Because mental health issues pose the biggest barrier to first-generation college students developing feelings of belonging on their college campuses, it is important that campus mental health resources are designed in consideration of rejection sensitivity and impostor feelings.

I recommend that Baylor University hires additional counseling staff that represent all race/ethnic groups and LGBTQIA+ identities represented in the Baylor student population. I also suggest that Baylor provides mental health workshops for first-generation college students that inform this student population of ways to manage high stress levels and overcome obstacles specific to these students. There should also be workshops that educate generational students, faculty, and administrators about these serious issues that impact first-generation college students disproportionately. Empathy across the campus community and collective understanding of these student experiences can allow for their experiences to be better understood and hopefully minimize impostor feelings. In addition, Baylor should consider a program for thoughtful acts of kindness that support first-generation college students instead of dismissing the struggles of this student population and making these students feel like *the other* on campus. A practical example of a program for impactful acts of kindness would be a Baylor sponsored fund

that individuals within the Baylor community can donate to that provides first-generation college students with dinner through delivery, or even meal vouchers, as a way of saying "we see you, we understand that this is not the easiest experience, we are here to support you through your college experience, and as a way to show our support, dinner is on us tonight." A program that provides students with convenient, fresh, hot dinners by meeting them where they are can target the prevalence of food insecurity within this student population while also freeing up time that they would have spent cooking and doing dishes that night so they can study a little extra. I think personal acts of kindness can unite the Baylor campus, initiate conversations about inequalities present on campus, and promote empathy across campus. It is essential that Baylor improves mental health resources so that it can be less of a hindrance on first-generation college students' academic outcomes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Impostor Syndrome

Literature Review

An additional factor that drastically impacts first-generation college student experiences is Impostor Syndrome. I define Impostor Syndrome within this study as feelings of inadequacy, that one is a fraud on the verge of being discovered, despite having tangible success and academic achievements. This common aspect of first-generation experiences is often not discussed as a cause for this student-population's negative experiences, but rather from their negative college experiences. The distinction that could be made is that Impostor Syndrome initially results from first-generation college students' disadvantage in terms of knowledge on postsecondary institutions, allowing for Impostor Syndrome to manifest prior to college experiences rather than resulting from such experiences. Psychologists have found that Impostor Syndrome manifests as early as high school (Bravata, Watts, Keefer, et al., 2020). Impostor Syndrome causes the experiences to be more negative than they naturally would have been because students enter colleges and universities feeling like *the other*. This is important for researchers, college administrators, and professors to recognize because it should be a consideration in studies and not an unexpected finding. In other words, this influential factor should have already been a part of the conversation on first-generation college students' experiences. It is important that research no longer considers Impostor Syndrome as solely a result of negative college experiences, but recognizes it as a non-negotiable, unavoidable aspect of the first-generation college student's experience

because of their disadvantaged position in the world of higher learning. College staff, faculty, and administration should be aware that impostor feelings often develop before college, and empathy must become a new standard for interactions with students across academic institutions.

The consequences of Impostor Syndrome might include decreased diversity as a result of self-doubt hindering one's likelihood to attend college, an innate fear of being "discovered" as a fake; it can also lead to psychological distress, emotional suffering, and serious mental health disorders, including chronic dysphoric stress, anxiety, depression, and drug abuse (Clance & Imes, 1978; Sonnak & Towell, 2001; Chrousos & Mentis, 2020). For first-generation college students of racial minorities, mental health problems have more often been associated with imposter feelings rather than any stress that results from their minority status (Cokley, McClain, Enciso, Martinez, 2013). Stress related to minority status is often a cause for imposter feelings because of racial stereotypes that invalidate evident success which makes Impostor Syndrome common in minority college experiences in addition to its common presence in first-generation college student experiences. Impostor Syndrome makes first-generation college students more susceptible to self-sabotage because there is a pattern of constantly downplaying one's own accomplishments, that they ultimately may sabotage their own career (Mullangi & Jagsi, 2019). Faculty members should be trained to perceive and interrupt self-destructive thought processes if a student comes to them for academic support. We must not limit the scope of academic mentorship to academics only because the quality-of-life students experience and the struggles they face greatly influence their academics.

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"Baylor has so many first-gen friendly programs that have made me feel welcome over the past few years. However, during my freshman year and even at the beginning of my sophomore year I struggled to feel a sense of belonging on campus because I found it incredibly difficult to find like-minded students or students from similar backgrounds. It made me feel so alone to the point where it really took a toll on my mental health. It was more than a feeling of being homesick or being temporarily lonely because it was something that I felt in every setting (social environments, classrooms, study areas, and even at times in the dorms). I would find it even harder when my academic performance did not match up to some of my STEM peers who had parents who were doctors or had a large network of some sort. It would always make me feel like I wasn't as intelligent or capable. I didn't really start to feel a sense of belonging until later in college once I found strong mentors and close friends. Even though I reflect back on those circumstances both the good and the bad, I'm definitely grateful for Baylor and all of the experiences I've had here and always do my best to look for the beauty in the journey!"

- Batool Syed, senior Biology major

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Impostor Syndrome is most prevalent in high achievers, women, and underrepresented racial, ethnic, and religious minorities (Price, 2013; Cokley et al., 2017; Dickerson, 2019). At the societal level, Impostor Syndrome has the potential to explain the higher drop-out rates of women and Black, Indigenous, and people of color from science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields of higher learning (Price, 2013; Allen-Ramdial & Campbell, 2014; McGee, Robinson, Bentley, Houston, 2015). Because these populations are the most vulnerable to Impostor Syndrome, workshops relevant to their experiences in American society can equip these students to identify and combat impostor feelings throughout their time in college. Since first-generation college student experience research does not normally address Impostor Syndrome as a cause of first-generation mental health struggles, this study measured instances that first-generation and

generational college students experience feelings of not belonging. Do increased support

and resources reduce impostor feelings?

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In my experience, resources do not always reduce student impostor feelings. When I felt disconnected from campus, I felt discouraged from utilizing campus resources. After resigning from the sorority, I felt like a "fake Baylor student" because I was not having a positive social experience like I perceived in the majority of students. In my junior year, on days that I did not have a shift with Baylor Dining Services, I avoided campus because of the social isolation I felt. This avoidance developed to the extent that I struggled to attend classes and was prescribed an attendance accommodation. When I was able to afford two appointments with the psychiatry services offered by Baylor University Health Services, I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety linked to campus experiences. When I tried to explain the seriousness of my accommodation to professors, my experience was often invalidated, minimized, and dismissed.

While social and faculty interactions led me to believe I was *the other*, or an impostor, I felt that this meant campus resources would not support me in my negative experience because those who I were reaching out to support responded with judgment. This logic obviously does not come across as rational, but these feelings exist within a large number of first-generation college students without any external influence interrupting and correcting such thoughts. The McNair Scholars program educated me on Impostor Syndrome and equipped me to overcome obstacles in the first-generation experience. This program encouraged me to utilize campus resources and develop meaningful relationships with trusted faculty members to overcome my anxieties related to campus.

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Because not every first-generation college student is aware of campus resources

or finds a community to guide them through this process, significant consideration should

be given to Impostor Syndrome. Postsecondary institutions should be aware and educated

on the obstacles that first-generation students face relating to impostor feelings. As we

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consider social barriers faced by first-generation college students, it is also important to address marginalities that contribute to impostor feelings.

Data & Results

The survey used in this study asked questions to measure possible impostor feelings in respondents. These questions included: Do you feel like you belong at Baylor? Have you ever felt pressure to pretend you were not a first-generation college student? How does being a first-generation student affect your academics? Do you regret going to college? Do you think your time at Baylor has purpose? Descriptive findings from these questions include: 41.7% of first-generation respondents answered that their status as first-generation students affects their academics negatively, 48.3% of first-generation respondents have experienced pressure to pretend that they were not first-generation students, more than 50% of first-generation respondents answered that their student status has no effect on their social lives, 67% of first-generation respondents are in zero student organizations, 35% of first-generation respondents have experienced regret toward attending college, 66.7% of first-generation respondents felt like they do not belong at Baylor University, 60% said they believe their life at Baylor has purpose, 33.3% said they are unsure of their purpose at Baylor, and 6.7% said they do not believe their life at Baylor has purpose.

Since display logics within the Qualtrics platform allowed us to display different questions for first-generation and generational respondents, we asked similar questions tailored to generational students for the sake of comparison. These questions included: Do you feel like you belong at Baylor? Have you ever felt pressure to pretend you were

not a generational college student? How does being a generational student affect your academics? Do you regret going to college? Do you think your time at Baylor has purpose? Descriptive statistics from these questions are: 3.1% said being a generational student affects their academics negatively, 6.1% have experienced pressure to pretend they were not generational, over 50% said their student status has no effect on their social lives, 45.5% are in zero organizations, 36.7% have experienced regret toward attending college, 63.7% have felt that they do not belong at Baylor University, 70% said they believe their life at Baylor has purpose, 20.4% said they are unsure of their purpose at Baylor, and 9.2% said they do not believe their life at Baylor has purpose.

As we consider the potential for Baylor students to possess impostor feelings, questions can be cross analyzed to assess the influence of one's student status on their satisfaction at Baylor and their feeling of belonging at Baylor. A Fisher's test applied to the data in Table 19 to determine the influence of student status on their satisfaction with Baylor found that $p = .832$ or $p > .10$ which shows that student status does not affect how satisfied a student is at Baylor. To measure the relationship between feeling as though one belongs at Baylor and their student status, all columns that admit to feeling like they do not belong at least once were combined as "felt that I did not belong at least once" for each student population. The total of students who have felt like they do not belong for the first-generation student population is 40 and the total of students who have felt like they do not belong for the generational student population is 66. A 2-sample test of proportions in R applied to the data of Table 19 found that $p = 1$. This indicates that there is no relationship between student status and feelings of belonging at Baylor within the survey responses.

Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution because of your status as a first gen student? * Please rate your satisfaction with your life at Baylor on a scale of 1–10. 0 being not satisfied at all, extremely unhappy. 10 being nothing about your life at Baylor could be better, you believe your life at Baylor is the best it can get and you are happy with that. – Satisfaction with Life at Baylor * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			Please rate your satisfaction with your life at Baylor on a scale of 1–10. 0 being not satisfied at all, extremely unhappy. 10 being nothing about your life at Baylor could be better, you believe your life at Baylor is the best it can get and you are happy with that. – Satisfaction with Life at Baylor									Total
			1.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	7.00	8.00	9.00	10.00	
Yes	Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution because of your status as a first gen student?	Once or twice	0	0	1	1	3	4	6	3	2	20
		Often	1	3	3	2	4	4	1	1	1	20
		Never	0	0	0	2	3	3	6	3	3	20
	Total		1	3	4	5	10	11	13	7	6	60

Are you a first generation student?			Please rate your satisfaction with your life at Baylor on a scale of 1–10. 1 being not satisfied at all, extremely unhappy. 10 being nothing about your life at Baylor could be better, you believe your life at Baylor is the best it can get and you are happy with that. – Satisfaction with Life at Baylor										Total
			1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	7.00	8.00	9.00	10.00	
No	Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution?	Once or twice	0	0	0	1	0	2	3	4	4	0	14
		Sometimes	0	0	0	2	0	6	17	4	2	1	32
		Often	1	2	2	4	2	1	5	3	0	0	20
		Never	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	9	6	12	32
	Total		1	2	2	7	4	12	25	20	12	13	98

Table 19: A cross-tabulation of student satisfaction at Baylor, their feelings of belonging, and their student status.

Because I expected a relationship between student status and feelings of belonging at Baylor, I wanted to see if that relationship manifested as regret toward attending college in first-generation respondents. These results are shown in Table 20. Since there is no relationship between student status and feelings of belonging at Baylor University, the relationship between first-generation feelings of belonging and regret toward attending college may be unique to Baylor University respondents or this specific pool of survey responses. A Fisher's test applied to data in Table 20 found that $p = .045$ or $.05 > p > .01$ which means there is a significant relationship between feelings of regret and feelings of not belonging at Baylor University for first-generation student respondents however this is not related to student status given previous test results.

Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution because of your status as a first gen student? * Have you ever regretted attending college? * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			Have you ever regretted attending college?			
			Once or twice	Often	Never	Total
Yes	Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution because of your status as a first gen student?	Once or twice	3	1	16	20
		Often	6	5	9	20
		Never	6	0	14	20
	Total		15	6	39	60

Table 20: A cross-tabulation of feelings of belonging and regret toward attending college in first-generation college student respondents

I also examined potential relationships between regret toward attending college and feelings of not belonging at Baylor University in generational students. However, the results of this test are not related to student status since previous test results established that there is no relationship between feelings of not belonging at Baylor University and student status. The data in Table 21 was used in a Fisher's test to find that $p = .002$ or $p < .01$ which signifies a highly significant correlation between generational feelings of not belonging at Baylor University and regret toward attending college. Because there is a significant relationship between feelings of regret toward attending college and feelings of not belonging at Baylor University for first-generation college students, and a highly significant relationship between these two variables in generational student responses – it is possible that, because a larger proportion of generational students (.58) identified with regret toward attending college than the proportion of first-generation students feeling regret toward attending college (.53), that regret toward attending college is more prevalent in generational students.

Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution? * Have you eve regretted attending college? * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			Have you ever regretted attending college?				Total
			Once or twice	Sometimes	Often	Never	
No	Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution?	Once or twice	6	0	0	8	14
		Sometimes	8	5	1	18	32
		Often	4	6	2	8	20
		Never	2	1	1	28	32
	Total		20	12	4	62	98

Table 21: A cross-tabulation of feelings of belonging and regret toward attending college in generational student respondents

A distinct factor of the first-generation college experience is rooted in feelings of inadequacy due to obvious income inequality among college students. To measure this impact within respondents, cross analyses of feelings of belonging, student status, and home's annual income were conducted. Data in Table 22 was used to determine the relationship between these three factors in first-generation college student respondents. Fisher's test applied to this data found that $p = .137$ or $p > .10$ which means there is no significant relationship between feelings of belonging, student status, and home's annual income for first-generation respondents.

Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution because of your status as a first gen student? * What is your home's annual income? * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			What is your home's annual income?					Total
			Less than $25,750	Between $25,750 and $42,500	Between $42,500 and $89,500	Between $89,500 and $135,600	Above $135,600	
Yes	Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution because of your status as a first gen student?	Once or twice	3	3	7	7	0	20
		Often	9	4	3	3	1	20
		Never	3	4	5	4	4	20
	Total		15	11	15	14	5	60

Table 22: A cross-tabulation of feelings of belonging and home's annual income for first-generation student respondents

Survey data in Table 23 was used to determine the relationship between these three factors in first-generation college student respondents. Fisher's test applied to this data found that $p = .715$ or $p > .10$ which means there is no significant relationship between feelings of belonging, student status, and home's annual income for first-generation respondents.

Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution? * What is your home's annual income? * Are you a first generation student? Crosstabulation

Count

Are you a first generation student?			What is your home's annual income?					Total
			Less than $25,750	Between $25,750 and $42,500	Between $42,500 and $89,500	Between $89,500 and $135,600	Above $135,600	
No	Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution?	Once or twice	0	0	4	5	5	14
		Sometimes	0	5	6	10	11	32
		Often	1	1	6	6	6	20
		Never	1	4	4	8	15	32
	Total		2	10	20	29	37	98

Table 23: A cross-tabulation of feelings of belonging and home's annual income for generational student respondents

Implications & Discussion

I believe that Impostor Syndrome can result from the negative experiences that are consistent across first-generation college student experiences, especially in the areas of minority status, income inequality, sexual orientation & gender identity, and mental health. In previous literature, it has been shown that mental health was negatively impacted by marginalization experienced by students. I utilized survey questions that measure feelings of belonging, regret toward attending college, and impostor feelings to actualize the relationship between Impostor Syndrome and marginalized experiences of first-generation college students at Baylor (Appendix A). The marginalization associated

with first-generation experiences across these areas contributed to the development of impostor feelings within previous research, and the results of this study have potential implications that are similar.

Most first-generation respondents answered that their student status affects their academics negatively and that they have felt pressure to pretend they were not first-generation students at least once. These results suggest that first-generation college students at Baylor experience impostor feelings as a result of external factors within the campus climate. There was also a significant relationship found between first-generation students experiencing regret toward attending college and their feelings of not belonging at Baylor. This relationship and other results related to Impostor Syndrome can be seen in Figure 2. These results collectively reveal that first-generation college students at Baylor experience marginalization and feel like *the other*.

While there are revelations specific to first-generation college students in the results related to Impostor Syndrome, the portion of respondents who answered that they have felt regret toward attending college was larger for generational students than first-generation students. This is an unexpected result because research documents that first-generation college students commonly have a worse college experience than generational college students. A possible explanation for this result is that generational students have not had a choice in going to college because their parents went to college and may expect the same of them. Further, most of both student groups reported feelings of not belonging at Baylor. Because many respondents of both student groups do not feel they connect to Baylor specifically, these results could indicate a common presence of negative experiences for survey respondents of both student populations. Alternatively, because

this survey took place during the earliest months of the pandemic, this may have affected student feelings. This result may be unique to survey respondents at Baylor University, or may be a result of the limited first-generation college student experiences represented. It is possible that another survey, with proportional responses between first-generation and generational college students, could provide a different result. I hope that future studies have proportionality in representation of both student populations so that the relationship between first-generation and generational college student experiences with feelings of not belonging at Baylor can be tested further.

Even though survey results were not able to demonstrate the extent of impostor feelings in first-generation college students at Baylor, the way that impostor feelings affect this student population should be taken into consideration when institutions of higher learning design equitable campus policies. Impostor Syndrome can cause negative experiences distinct to first-generation college students (Clance & Imes, 1978; Sonnak & Towell, 2001; Mullangi & Jagsi, 2019; Chrousos & Mentis, 2020). Because Impostor Syndrome is most prevalent in high achievers, women, and underrepresented racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, it is crucial that equitable action plans created by college administrations address ways to minimize the effects of Impostor Syndrome (Price, 2013; Cokley et al., 2017; Dickerson, 2019). Without improved support for impostor feelings, the dropout rate for these student populations will continue to increase (Price, 2013; Allen-Ramdial & Campbell, 2014; McGee, Robinson, Bentley, Houston, 2015). I recommend that college institutions alter the rhetoric surrounding student status to redefine *the norm* for their campus as one that includes first-generation college students. I also think that encouraging professors to educate themselves on Impostor Syndrome so

that they can identify destructive thoughts, defensive behaviors, and have meaningful

conversations to validate first-generation students and interrupt their impostor feelings. If

this can become the expected standard for faculty members across campus, *the norm* for

professor expectations in student interactions will be one that includes first-generation

specific struggles. As administration and faculty members normalize conversations about

first-generation specific barriers to academic success, the entire Baylor campus should be

encouraged to join the conversation through engagement activities across Baylor social

media and Baylor publications. First-generation students at Baylor are less involved, their

academics are suffering, and they demonstrate feelings of shame toward their student

status when they pretend to not be first-generation students. If universities can work

toward validating and welcoming *all* students, this would open the minds of first-

generation college students to the idea that they belong and that they are an essential part

of their campus regardless of student status or background.

Relationship	P Value	Result
Student Status with Feelings of Not Belonging at Baylor	1	Rejected
First-Generation Students, Regret Toward Attending College with Feelings of Not Belonging at Baylor	.045	Supported
Generational Students, Regret Toward Attending College with Feelings of Not Belonging at Baylor	.002	Supported
First-Generation Students, Feelings of Not Belonging at Baylor with Annual Household Income	.137	Rejected
Generational Students, Feelings of Not Belonging at Baylor with Annual Household Income	.715	Rejected

Figure 2: Results for survey questions that relate to Impostor Syndrome

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

Throughout my analysis of survey results, I found many conclusions specific to student experiences at Baylor University that differ from trends in the literature on first-generation college experiences. I believe that this is because of the disproportionate survey pool I had. If there had been a larger number of first-generation college student respondents, I believe the results of this study could change. Hopefully, future studies will have survey pools that include more first-generation experiences and balance out the number of generational experiences represented as this study was unable to. For a study to be effective in representing experiences, it is important to have a well-represented, large sample. The findings in this study are limited and affected by the smaller amount of survey responses.

One result I found is that race/ethnicity has a highly significant relationship to whether college student participants are first-generation or not. A possible implication of this relationship could be the existence of systemic racism at Baylor. However, there is no significant difference in perceived quality of life by race/ethnicity for first-generation or generational college student respondents. There are also no significant differences in perceived quality of life by race/ethnicity demonstrated in the survey responses either. Because this contradicts studies that have found systemic racism to limit students' quality of life, this finding could suggest that, on this particular front, Baylor's efforts in supporting first-generation college students facilitate college access for minority students

that works against systemic racism. To make more certain interpretations of the data, conducting a second survey with a larger number of respondents would be beneficial.

For the survey data analysis results that relate to financial stability, there is a highly significant relationship between race/ethnicity and the socioeconomic status that each participant identifies as. It was also found that the relationship between income and student status is highly significant. Whether or not a student is first-generation has a direct relationship to their annual household income as introduced from research that explains that limited college access shaped income inequality. There is not a significant relationship between food insecurity and race/ethnicity for either student populations, but there is a highly significant relationship between student status and food insecurity. These findings are consistent with my first-generation classmates' experiences as well as my own. These findings also demonstrate consistency with previous research on income inequality as it constrains student access to food and affects the first-generation college experience.

To address the limitations that sexual orientation can place on first-generation college student experiences, I asked questions that recorded students' gender and sexual identities. I found that there are no significant differences in gender identities of first-generation and generational college students. There is also a marginally significant relationship between student sexuality and student status, but there is no relationship between sexual orientation and race/ethnicity within the survey responses. I had hoped that a relationship between these would confirm the existence of intersections between race/ethnicity and sexual orientation that constrain first-generation academic outcomes on the Baylor campus, but because the survey had few minority first-generation respondents,

it is possible that the student group on campus of minority LGBTQIA+ students did not participate in the study for their experiences to be represented.

Despite this limitation to my survey responses, when identities of marginalized populations such as racial/ethnic minority or LGBTQIA+ students exist within a campus community, concerns for mental health resources arise because these populations face frequent discrimination. It was found, however, that there is not a significant relationship between first-generation or generational student respondents' mental well-being and race/ethnicity. When looking at mental well-being in terms of student status and family household annual income, there is no significant relationship found for first-generation or generational student respondents. There is no significant difference in the mental well-being of first-generation and generational student respondents. There is not a significant relationship between race/ethnicity or physical well-being for either student population, but there is a marginally significant relationship between family household annual income and physical well-being for first-generation student respondents while there is no such relationship for generational student respondents. There is no significant difference in physical well-being of first-generation and generational student respondents when compared.

When the campus experience is addressed, there are no significant differences in levels of satisfaction among the two student populations. There is also no significant relationship between race/ethnicity and campus satisfaction for first-generation and generational student respondents. Additionally, student status does not affect student satisfaction at Baylor in either student populations. Furthermore, there is no relationship between student status and feelings of belonging within the survey responses. There is a

significant relationship between feelings of regret and feelings of not belonging at Baylor University for first-generation student respondents and a highly significant relationship for generational student respondents. Yet, in these survey responses, the relationships between feelings of belonging and regrets toward attending college are not related to student status because there is no relationship between student status and feelings of belonging. Lastly, there is no significant relationship between family annual household income, feelings of belonging, and student status for either student population. These findings similarly imply that both first-generation and generational student respondents endure negative feelings related to their college experience. These findings are unique to this study and could signify a characteristic unique to experiences at Baylor University. These findings also remind me of friendships with generational students who have not enjoyed their time at Baylor because of their awareness of marginalities that minority, first-generation, and LGBTQIA+ students experience at Baylor. In the following discussion about these findings, I will make recommendations for first-generation support that Baylor University should consider.

Relationship	P Value	Result
Student Status with Race/Ethnicity	1.409e-10	Supported
Generational Students, Quality of Life with Race/Ethnicity	.268	Rejected
First-Generation Students, Quality of Life with Race/Ethnicity	.005	Supported
Race/Ethnicity with Quality of Life for all Students	.437	Rejected
Race/Ethnicity with Socioeconomic Status	1.066e-5	Supported
Race/Ethnicity with Annual Household Income	.006	Supported
Student Status with Socioeconomic Status	1.125e-6	Supported
Student Status with Annual Household Income	4.256e-7	Supported
First-Generation Students, Race/Ethnicity with Food Insecurity	.208	Rejected
Generational Students, Race/Ethnicity with Food Insecurity	.763	Rejected
Student Status with Food Insecurity	.0002	Supported
Student Status with Gender	.6656	Rejected
Student Status with Sexual Orientation	.081	Supported
First-Generation Students, Mental Well-being with Race/Ethnicity	.654	Rejected
First-Generation Students, Mental Well-being with Annual Household Income	.555	Rejected
First-Generation Students, Physical Well-being with Race/Ethnicity	.194	Rejected
First-Generation Students, Physical Well-being with Annual Household Income	.053	Supported
Generational Students, Mental Well-being with Race/Ethnicity	.779	Rejected
Generational Students, Mental Well-being with Annual Household Income	.470	Rejected
Generational Students, Physical Well-being with Race/Ethnicity	.392	Rejected
Generational Students, Physical Well-being with Annual Household Income	.487	Rejected
Student Status with Mental Well-being	.723	Rejected
Student Status with Physical Well-being	.568	Rejected
Student Status with Satisfaction at Baylor	.833	Rejected
First-Generation Students, Race/Ethnicity with Satisfaction at Baylor	.838	Rejected
Generational Students, Race/Ethnicity with Satisfaction at Baylor	.232	Rejected

Figure 3: Results for each hypothesized relationship

Recommendations

I was lucky to gain awareness of the struggles that restricted my academic momentum throughout my time at Baylor University. I gained this awareness through a TRIO program, the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, created to provide first-generation college students with experiences and resources that prepare them for graduate school. This program enhanced my academic goals and validated my negative experiences as a first-generation college student. I felt isolated and without purpose as a student at Baylor University until my second year in the McNair Scholars Program when I developed meaningful relationships with program staff and members of my cohort.

Unfortunately, not every first-generation college student can be accepted into a TRIO program to develop a meaningful campus connectedness that facilitates academic success. Not every first-generation college student can take off work to find community in a first-generation college student society. Not every first-generation college student even knows every campus resource available to them. Because of the seriousness in the disproportion of life qualities between first-generation and generational college students, it is urgent that institutions of higher learning meet first-generation college students where they are.

It is unnecessary for institutions of higher learning to burden first-generation college students with seeking community because the campus norm marginalizes and ostracizes them for struggling financially, working, and falling behind on academics. Institutions have the resources to develop programs tailored to the first-generation experience so that these students do not have to sacrifice time at work, time for studying,

or time taking care of their mental health to seek out a community that validates their

negative college experiences. My recommendations based on the study results are:

1. Baylor must actively re-narrate *the norm* for the campus culture through inclusive policy changes.

2. If Baylor is committed to creating an equitable campus environment, it must take reports of racist faculty seriously. A procedure for investigating experiences with racism on campus that cannot be interrupted would greatly serve and improve minority student experiences on campus. Results of these investigations should include an appeal process like the Title IX investigations process to ensure fair, reasonable determinations are made for all parties involved.

3. Baylor should provide representation for minority students across campus, in every single department, office, and resource, so that *the norm* for diversity & inclusion is present in every area of campus

4. Creating an affordable program for low-income students to utilize student health services would benefit first-generation college students greatly. An example of a program like this is the Good Health Card offered to Waco residents by the Family Health Center.

5. Student workers in dining services should receive equal pay to their Aramark counterparts.

6. Baylor should address the spectrum of income inequality within the campus community through resources for low-income students. Baylor should also educate the campus community on income inequality within the campus community.

7. Provide low-income, first-generation college students with housing & utilities stipends, so their families do not spend a large portion of their household income to pay for both family housing and student housing costs.

8. Offer scholarships that first-generation college students can apply toward student organization membership dues.

9. The campus community should be actively inclusive of all students through empathy regardless of sexual orientation, religion, race/ethnicity, gender identity.

10. Baylor must charter Gamma Alpha Upsilon (GAY) and correct Baylor students that discriminate against members of this organization on campus and on social media.

11. Baylor should create programs and resources that can improve mental health for the first-generation student population.

12. Mental health issues and resources should always be a key consideration in conversations that propose solutions to achieve equity on college campuses.

13. Baylor must promote mental health awareness and wellbeing for students, staff, faculty, and administrators.

14. Baylor should hire additional counseling staff or provide free access to counselors that represent all race/ethnic groups and LGBTQIA+ identities represented in the Baylor student population.

15. Baylor should provide mental health workshops for first-generation college students that inform this student population of ways to manage high stress levels and overcome obstacles specific to these students.

16. Baylor should have workshops that educate generational students, faculty, and administrators about inequalities that impact first-generation college students disproportionately.

17. Baylor should consider a program for thoughtful acts of kindness that support first-generation college students instead of dismissing the struggles of this student population and making these students feel like *the other* on campus.

18. A Baylor sponsored fund that individuals within the Baylor community can donate to that provides first-generation college students with dinner through delivery, or even meal vouchers, as a way of saying "we see you, we understand that this is not the easiest experience, we are here to support you through your college experience, and as a way to show our support, dinner is on us tonight."

19. Equitable action plans created by Baylor administration must address ways to minimize the effects of Impostor Syndrome on first-generation college students.

20. Baylor should alter the rhetoric surrounding student status to redefine *the norm* for the campus as one that includes first-generation college students. The language in the diversity and inclusion should also be updated to express that diversity is a characteristic *of* the entire student body and not *an addition to* the student body.

21. Baylor professors should educate themselves on Impostor Syndrome so that they can identify destructive thoughts, defensive behaviors, and have meaningful conversations to validate first-generation students and interrupt impostor feelings.

22. Educators should read books that support students and address inequalities in higher education: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire, *The Hidden Curriculum* by Rachel Gable, *At the Intersection* by Robert & Hope Longwell-Grice, *Understanding Experiences of First-Generation University Students* by Amani Bell and Lorri J. Santamaría, and *First-Generation College Student Experiences of Intersecting Marginalities* by Theresa Heinz Housel.

23. The entire Baylor campus should be educated on first-generation college experiences through engagement activities across Baylor social media and Baylor publications.

24. A feature in Canvas should identify students as first-generation so that professors can be aware of the additional constraints present within these students' college experiences.

25. Baylor should continue research that compares first-generation and generational student experiences on campus to ensure active awareness and progress toward equity.

Quality of Life

Research on quality of life has found that life qualities can be measured by a sense of purpose, mental well-being, and physical well-being. This study attempted to measure sense of purpose, mental well-being, and physical well-being. Survey results revealed that most of both student populations reported experiencing all indicators of a good quality of life. However, when results that expose differences in perceived quality of life, work related stress, family support, parental financial support, food insecurity, experiences with Impostor Syndrome, and campus involvement, are considered, it is reasonable to conclude that generational students have a better college experience than first-generation students at Baylor University. The biggest difference in student experiences that survey results revealed is that generational students maintain financial security through parental financial support while first-generation students lack financial security. If Baylor can work to minimize out-of-pocket costs for first-generation students so that college is more affordable for the disadvantaged student population then equity will be more achievable for this campus.

What is impacts first-generation experiences the most?

As the biggest difference in quality of life for first-generation college students and generational college students found in survey data directly results from socioeconomic class differences, universities should be mindful and empathetic toward first-generation economic struggles. Active mindfulness within college administrations should lead to policy that reduces costs associated with college for first-generation and minority college students. While these student populations lack generational wealth, which facilitates

access to postsecondary education, the socioeconomic status of first-generation and minority students limits their quality of life in college and increases their dependency on jobs or student loans to afford college. The stress related to working in college or acquiring student debt negatively impacts first-generation student academics. This has been my experience as a first-generation college student that has gained student debt throughout my time at Baylor.

Because generational students have financial support from parents that allow them to focus singularly on academics instead of managing split attention between work and school like the majority of first-generation college students, generational students have the financial security to thrive academically while the experience of first-generation students commonly holds heavy challenges. The cost of higher education is greater for first-generation and minority college students in comparison to generational college students. As universities work to be more inclusive of all student populations, this factor should always be taken into consideration for the benefit of first-generation & minority college students' academic success.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study that should be acknowledged despite the impact of these findings. For instance, while demographic diversity is demonstrated within survey responses, these responses do not have proportional representation of each student status. If a survey pool with an equal number of first-generation and generational students was found while also ensuring a larger number of students from each racial/ethnic background, the results would be able to depict the differences more accurately in

experiences for generational and first-generation college students. Because few first-generation minority students took this survey, it is hard to guarantee that these results can be generalized for minority first-generation students at Baylor. These results may also vary between universities due to Baylor University being a high-cost, private, religious university. The range of income inequality and the prevalence of impostor feelings may not be as significant if this same study was conducted at a different university because of the distinct southern, Baptist, conservative campus climate at this institution. These limitations to the current study's survey response pool should be considered in future studies.

Future Research

Research on first-generation experiences is important to continue because of the intersecting inequalities in race, income, and education. These inequalities are also important to address in future studies because they can guide institutions of higher learning toward empathizing with students better through an improved understanding of student experiences. I believe that future research should work to reveal intersections of social inequalities so that research on first-generation experiences accurately depicts the first-generation college experience and adequately guides academic institutions in creating policies and resources that target obstacles and barriers unique to first-generation college students. My study provided information related to first-generation student experiences with racial inequality, income inequality, marginalization due to sexual orientation or gender identity, students' mental health, and Impostor Syndrome because they can all limit the academic achievements of first-generation college students.

Future studies would benefit from replicating the study with a larger, more proportional survey pool as that was a significant limitation to the results of this study. It may also be worthwhile to investigate income inequality and Impostor Syndrome on college campuses because finances and mental health impact student experiences the most. Researchers could utilize survey methods, focus groups, or even interview methods to assess the relationship between income inequality and Impostor Syndrome. In my college experience and across research, it has been observed that socioeconomic status plays the largest role in shaping students' experiences on campus in academic performance.

Future research is important because postsecondary institutions should require increased awareness of student experiences which would be made possible through continuous studies on the experiences of first-generation and generational college students. Each college could also replicate the study for their campus to investigate the relationships between student status, minority experience, income inequality, LGBTQIA+ experiences, mental health, and Impostor Syndrome that exist within their campus. Future research should also follow the same students over the span of four years similar to the Pascarella et al. (2016) study in order to see how these factors influence the quality of life for both student populations on a long-term scale. Without continued research on the disadvantaged first-generation college student population, institutions will fall behind in their awareness of the struggles specific in the first-generation college experience. I hope that this study can urge institutions toward equity through active awareness of student experiences on their campus.

Gratitude

If I did not love Baylor University, I would not have written this report with

recommendations for improvements. I am extremely grateful for the transformative

education I received, the faculty members who invested in me, the meaningful

friendships I found, and the resources that provided me amazing opportunities like the

McNair Scholars Program. The first-generation student resources at Baylor University

that positively impact first-generation experiences include:

- First in Line
- The Store
- McNair Scholars Program
- Pre-Law Society
- Transfer Student Success
- Student Financial Services
- University Advisement
- Academic Support Programs including free one-on-one tutoring
- Office of Access and Learning Accommodation
- Career and Professional Development
- Academy for Leadership Development

- Counseling Center
- Wellness Department
- Beauchamp Addiction Recovery Center
- Center for Global Engagement
- Multicultural Affairs
- Spiritual Life
- University Writing Center
- Student Success Initiatives
- Last, but *certainly not least*, the irreplaceable faculty on campus who validate, support, and empathize with the difficult experiences of first-generation college students.

APPENDIX

Baylor Students' Quality of Life

Survey Flow

Block: Default Question Block (1 Question)
Standard: Block 1 (7 Questions)
Standard: Block 2 (33 Questions)
Standard: Block 3 (35 Questions)
Standard: Block 4 (0 Questions)

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Welcome! Thank you for your interest in this study! We are interested in understanding the lives of Baylor students. You will be presented with questions that should lead to us estimating your overall quality of life. Please be assured that your anonymous responses will be kept completely confidential. The study should take you around 5 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please e-mail Morgan Koziol at Morgan_Koziol1@baylor.edu. By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, you are a student at Baylor University, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason. Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

○ I consent, begin the study (1)

○ I do not consent; I do not wish to participate. End survey (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q1 = I do not consent, I do not wish to participate. End survey

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Block 1

Q3 What gender do you identify as?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Transgender male (3)

○ Transgender female (4)

○ Gender fluid (5)

○ Questioning/Unsure (6)

○ Other (7) _____

Q18
What is your sexual identification?

○ Straight/Heterosexual (1)

○ Gay (2)

○ Lesbian (3)

○ Bisexual (4)

○ Prefer to Self Describe (5)

  _____

○ Prefer not to say (6)

Q4 What race/ethnicity do you identify with?

○ American Indian or Alaska Native (1)

○ Asian (2)

○ Black or African American (3)

○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (4)

○ White (5)

○ Hispanic or Latino (6)

○ Other (7) _____

Q5 What is your home's annual income?

○ Less than $25,750 (1)

○ Between $25,750 and $42,500 (2)

○ Between $42,500 and $89,500   (3)

○ Between $89,500 and $135,600 (4)

○ Above $135,600 (5)

Q6 Do you identify as socioeconomically

○ Below Poverty line (1)

○ Lower middle Class (2)

○ Upper Middle Class (3)

○ Higher class (4)

Q7 What is your current year in university?

○ Freshman (1)

○ Sophomore (2)

○ Junior (3)

○ Senior (4)

Q2 Are you a first generation student?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Display This Question:
If Q2 = Yes

Q8 How would you rate the quality of life you have as a first gen student?

○ Poor (1)

○ Fair (2)

○ Moderate (3)

○ Good (4)

○ Excellent (5)

Q9 How would you rate the amount of support you receive from your parents as a first gen student?

○ Poor (1)

○ Fair (2)

○ Moderate (3)

○ Good (4)

○ Excellent (5)

○ My parents are not alive (6)

○ My parents are not a part of my life (7)

Q10 How would you rate the amount of support you receive from your siblings as a first gen student?

○ Poor (1)

○ Good (2)

○ Fair (3)

○ Moderate (4)

○ Excellent (5)

○ I do not have siblings (6)

Q11 How would you rate the amount of support you receive from your grandparents as a first gen student?

○ Poor (1)

○ Good (2)

○ Fair (3)

○ Moderate (4)

○ Excellent (5)

○ My grandparents passed away before I went to college (6)

○ My grandparents are not in my life (7)

Q12 Who is your biggest emotional supporter as a first gen student? Please do not name a person but share their label. For example, a counselor, friends or aunt would be acceptable labels.

_____

Q13 Who is your biggest financial supporter as a first gen student? Please do not name a person but share their label. For example, a counselor, friends or aunt would be acceptable labels.

_____

Q14 Do you have a job?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q15 Why do you have a job?

○ Out of necessity (1)

○ For pleasure/spending money (2)

○ Other (3) _____

Q18 How does having a job affect your experience as a college student?

○ Positively (1)

○ Negatively (2)

○ Not at all (3)

Q19 Do you have a car?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q20 Is your car paid for? If no, who pays for your car? i.e. your parents, an uncle, or grandparents etc. Please only write a title, not a name.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Payments paid by: (3)

_____

Q21 Do you have a parking permit? If yes, who purchased it?

○ Myself (1)

○ My parents (2)

○ Financial aid (3)

○ Student loan (4)

○ I do not have a parking permit (5)

Q22 How does having a car affect your experience as a college student?

○ Positively (1)

○ Negatively (2)

○ Not at all (3)

Q23 Have you ever been unsure of where your next meal was coming from?

○ Once or twice (1)

○ Sometimes (2)

○ Often (3)

○ Never (4)

Q24 How do you pay for meals?

○ Parental financial support (1)

○ Personal income (2)

○ Other (3) _____

Q25 If you have a meal plan, who paid for it?

○ Myself (1)

○ My parents (2)

○ Financial aid (3)

○ Student loan (4)

○ I do not have a meal plan (5)

Q26 If you have a student loan, how much do you borrow each year? Write N/A if you do not have a student loan.

_____

Q27 Please estimate your monthly expenses as one figure. Include all bills, rent, groceries, gas, eating out, etc.

_____

Q28 Do you struggle to afford your monthly expenses?

○ Yes, greatly (1)

○ Yes, I get by, but I barely make it (2)

○ No, I struggle financially a very minor amount (3)

○ No, not at all (4)

Q29 How does being a first gen student affect your academic performance?

○ Positively (1)

○ Negatively (2)

○ Not at all (3)

Q30 How does being a first gen student affect your social life?

○ Positively (1)

○ Negatively (2)

○ Not at all (3)

Q31 How many student organizations are you a part of?

_____

Q32 Have you ever regretted attending college?

○ Once or twice (1)

○ Often (2)

○ Never (3)

Q33 Have you ever felt pressure to pretend you were not a first gen student?

○ Once or twice (1)

○ Often (2)

○ Never (3)

Q34 Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution because of your status as a first gen student?

○ Once or twice (1)

○ Often (2)

○ Never (3)

Q35 Please rate your satisfaction with your life at Baylor on a scale of 1-10.
0 being not satisfied at all, extremely unhappy. 10 being nothing about your life at Baylor could be better, you believe your life at Baylor is the best it can get, and you are happy with that.

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Satisfaction with Life at Baylor ()

Q36 Do you feel like your life at Baylor has purpose?

○ Yes (1)

○ Unsure (2)

○ No (3)

Q37 Do you feel like your life at Baylor has any fun or enjoyment in it?

○ Always (1)

○ Often, but not always (2)

○ Rarely (3)

○ Never (4)

Q38 Have you experienced any personal growth or development throughout your time at Baylor?

○ Yes, a large amount of growth (1)

○ Yes, an average amount (2)

○ Yes, a minimal amount (3)

○ No, not much (4)

○ No, none at all (5)

Q39 How would you describe your mental well-being?

○ Healthy, above average (1)

○ Healthy, not above average (2)

○ Healthy, but less than average (3)

○ Unhealthy, but still functioning (4)

○ Unhealthy, barely functioning (5)

Q40 How would you describe your physical well-being?

○ Healthy, above average (1)

○ Healthy, not above average (2)

○ Healthy, but less than average (3)

○ Unhealthy, but still functioning (4)

○ Unhealthy, barely functioning (5)

Q41 Are there any additional important factors that we should consider when estimating your quality of life? Further, is there anything that significantly impacts your experience as a college student that this survey did not address? These factors may be negative and or positive.

_____

Q78 Is there anything you wish that Baylor provided you with to support you better as a first gen student? Do you feel like your Baylor experience is lacking anything specific?

_____

End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Block 3

Q42 How would you rate the quality of life you have as a college student

○ Poor (1)

○ Fair (2)

○ Moderate (3)

○ Good (4)

○ Excellent (5)

Q44 How would you rate the amount of support you receive from your parents as a college student?

○ Poor (1)

○ Fair (2)

○ Moderate (3)

○ Good (4)

○ Excellent (5)

○ My parents are not alive (6)

○ My parents are not a part of my life at all (7)

Page Break

Q45 Did your parents attend the same university as you?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q46 How would you rate the amount of support you receive from your siblings as a college student?

○ Poor (1)

○ Fair (2)

○ Moderate (3)

○ Good (4)

○ Excellent (5)

○ I do not have siblings (6)

○ My siblings are not a part of my life at all (7)

Q47 How would you rate the amount of support you receive from your grandparents as a college student?

○ Poor (1)

○ Fair (2)

○ Moderate   (3)

○ Good (4)

○ Excellent (5)

○ My grandparents are not alive (6)

○ My grandparents are not a part of my life at all (7)

Q48 Did your grandparents graduate college?

○ Yes (1)

○ Yes, the same school that I am attending (2)

○ No (3)

○ Unknown (4)

Q49 Who is your biggest emotional supporter as a college student? Please do not name a person but share their label. For example, a counselor, friends or aunt would be acceptable labels.

_____

Q50 Who is your biggest financial supporter as a college student? Please do not name a person but share their label. For example, a counselor, friends or aunt would be acceptable labels.

_____

Q51 Do you have a job?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q52 Why do you have a job?

○ Out of necessity (1)

○ For pleasure/spending money (2)

○ Other (3) _____

Q53 How does having a job affect your experience as a college student?

○ Positively (1)

○ Negatively (2)

○ Not at all (3)

Q54 Do you have a car?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q55 Is your car paid for? If no, who pays for your car? i.e. your parents, an uncle, or grandparents etc. Please only write a title, not a name.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Payments are paid by: (3)

_____

Q56

Do you have a parking permit? If yes, who purchased it?

○ Myself (1)

○ My parents (2)

○ Financial aid (3)

○ Student loan (4)

○ I do not have a parking permit (5)

Q57 How does having a car affect your experience as a college student?

○ Positively (1)

○ Negatively (2)

○ Not at all (3)

Q58 Have you ever been unsure of where your next meal was coming from?

○ Once or twice (1)

○ Sometimes (2)

○ Often (3)

○ Never (4)

Q59 How do you pay for meals?

○ Parental financial support (1)

○ Personal income (2)

○ Other: (3) _____

Q60 If you have a meal plan, who paid for it?

○ Myself (1)

○ My parents (2)

○ Financial aid (3)

○ Student loan (4)

○ I do not have a meal plan (5)

Q61 If you have a student loan, how much do you borrow each year? Write N/A if you do not have a student loan.

_____

Q62 Please estimate your monthly expenses as one figure. Include all bills, rent, groceries, gas, eating out, etc.

_____

Q63 Do you struggle to afford your monthly expenses?

○ Yes, greatly (1)

○ Yes, I get by, but I barely make it (2)

○ No, I struggle financially a very minor amount (3)

○ No, not at all (4)

Q64 How does having parents with college degrees affect your academic performance?

○ Positively (1)

○ Negatively (2)

○ Not at all (3)

Q65 How does having parents with college degrees affect your social life?

○ Positively (1)

○ Negatively (2)

○ Not at all (3)

Q66 How many student organizations are you a part of?

_____

Q67 Have you ever regretted attending college?

○ Once or twice (1)

○ Sometimes (2)

○ Often (3)

○ Never (4)

Q77 Have you ever felt pressure to pretend that your parents did not attend college/earn a degree?

○ Once or twice (1)

○ Often (2)

○ Never (3)

Q68 Have you ever felt like you do not belong at your academic institution?

○ Once or twice (1)

○ Sometimes (2)

○ Often (3)

○ Never (4)

Q69
Please rate your satisfaction with your life at Baylor on a scale of 1-10. 1 being not satisfied at all, extremely unhappy. 10 being nothing about your life at Baylor could be better, you believe your life at Baylor is the best it can get, and you are happy with that.

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Satisfaction with Life at Baylor ()	

Q70 Do you feel like your life at Baylor has purpose?

○ Yes (1)

○ Unsure (2)

○ No (3)

Q71 Do you feel like your life at Baylor has any fun or enjoyment in it?

○ Always (1)

○ Often, but not always (2)

○ Rarely (3)

○ Never (4)

Q72 Have you experienced any personal growth or development throughout your time at Baylor?

○ Yes, a large amount of growth (1)

○ Yes, an average amount (2)

○ Yes, a minimal amount (3)

○ No, not much (4)

○ No, none at all (5)

Q73
How would you describe your mental well-being?

○ Healthy, above average (1)

○ Healthy, not above average (2)

○ Healthy, but less than average (3)

○ Unhealthy, but still functioning (4)

○ Unhealthy, barely functioning (5)

Q74 How would you describe your physical well-being?

○ Healthy, above average (1)

○ Healthy, not above average (2)

○ Healthy, but less than average (3)

○ Unhealthy, but not at risk (4)

○ Unhealthy, and at risk (5)

Display This Question:

   If Q2 = No

Q75 Are there any additional important factors that we should consider when estimating your quality of life? Further, is there anything that significantly impacts your experience as a college student that this survey did not address? These factors can be negative and or positive.

_____

Display This Question:

   If Q2 = No

Q79 Is there anything you wish that Baylor provided you with to support you better as a student? Do you feel like your Baylor experience is lacking anything specific?

_____

End of Block: Block 3

Start of Block: Block 4

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